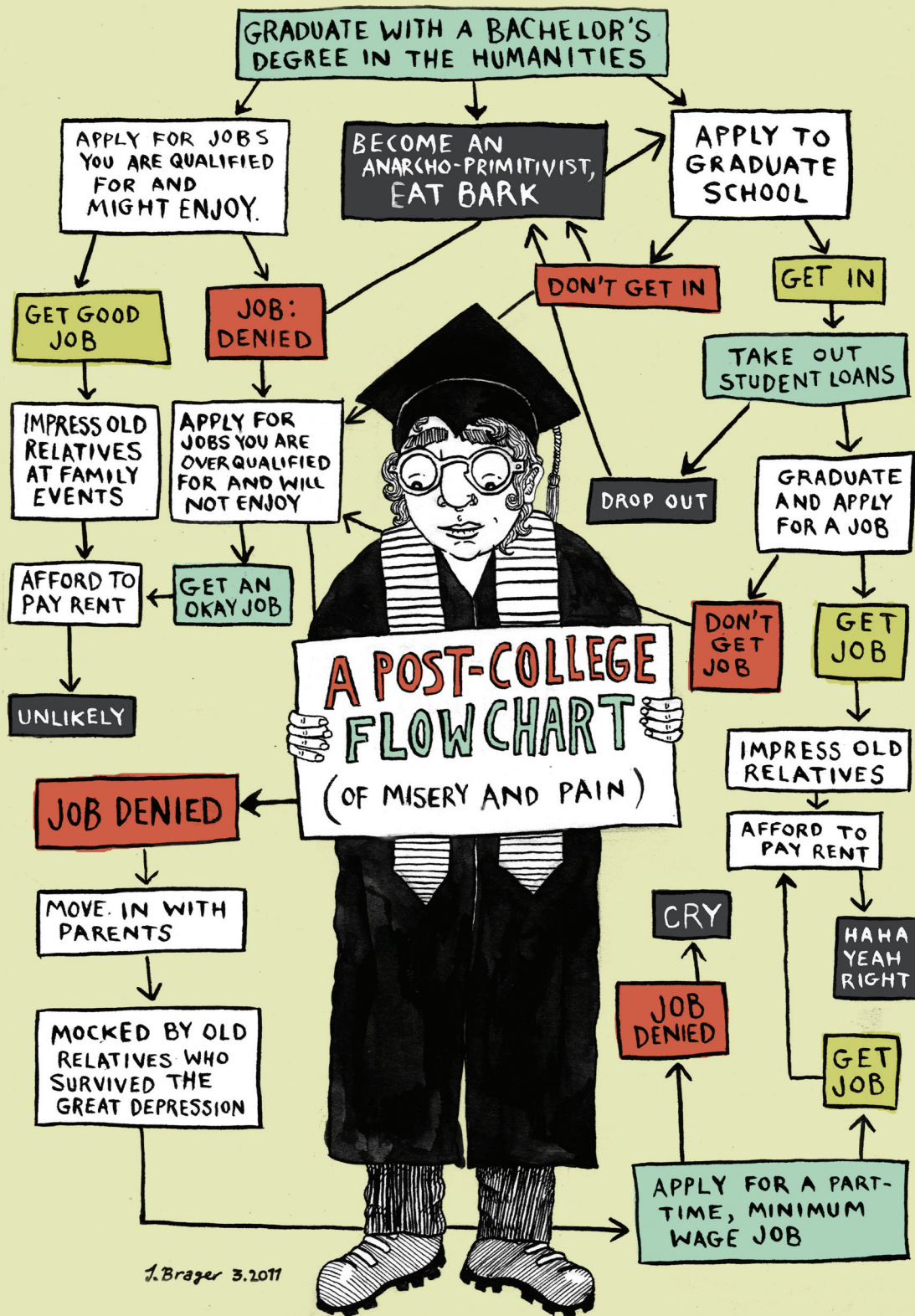


SHARE OR DIE

YOUTH IN RECESSION

a shareable.net ebook
edited by Malcolm Harris





J. Brazer 3.2011

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 edited by Malcolm Harris
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INTRODUCTION

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Editor's Preface

NEAL GORENFLO

About six months ago, a weather-beaten, middle-age man asked me for money on the platform of the Mountain View Caltrain station.

I gave him three dollars. He thanked me, and asked what I did for work. I introduced myself, learned his name (Jeff) and we shook hands. I pulled out a card from my computer bag, and handed it to him as I told him that I publish an online magazine about sharing.

Jeff lit up, “Oh I get that, when you’re homeless, it’s share or die.”

That got my attention and I asked him to explain. Jeff said that a year earlier, his girlfriend drank herself to death alone in a motel room. He said she wouldn’t have died had someone been with her. For him, isolation meant death.

Jeff explained his perspective further, that he had no problem giving his last dollar or cigarette to a friend, that it comes back when you need it. But there are those that just take. You stay away from them.

I asked him about the homeless in Mountain View, which is in the middle of prosperous Silicon Valley. Jeff said there are 800 homeless people in the city, and that each has a similar story.

That conversation got under my skin. I shared it with Malcolm Harris the next day on a call about this book. Half-joking, I suggested Jeff’s phrase, “share or die,” as a title. At the time, I thought it was over-the-top. I wasn’t serious. But, thankfully, Malcolm began using it in correspondence about the book. It stuck.

My conversation with Jeff marked a turning point in my thinking. I had thought of sharing as merely smart because it creates positive social, environmental, and economic change through one strategy.

But Jeff’s story and the directness of his phrase – share or die – broke through my intellectualization of sharing. Jeff helped me see something that I was blind to, even though I knew all the facts – that sharing is not just a smart strategy, it’s necessary for our survival as a species. This has always been so, but today our condition is especially acute – we’re using 50 percent more natural resources per year than the earth can replace. And global population and per capita consumption are growing. It’s now glaringly obvious to me that we need to learn to share on a global scale fast, or die.

But the threat is not only one of biological death. Those like me, who are in no danger of starving, face a spiritual death when we act as if well-being is a private affair and gate ourselves off from the rest of humanity with money and property. We can neither survive nor live well unless we share. It’s my outrageous hope that the young voices in this book do for a generation what Jeff did for me – wakes them to the idea that sharing can save them and the world.



Forward MALCOLM HARRIS

When *Shareable* asked me to put together this collection, I wasn't sure how to start crafting a unified narrative about young people sharing to ride out the recession. There are just too many different lives, a multiplicity of strategies and tactics that are impossible to fuse into one coherent story. Sure, there are commonalities: un- and underemployment are huge problems, and the essentials ingredients that allow humans to thrive (food, shelter, interpersonal relationships) haven't changed with the internet. But with mass-production out and customization in, individuals and communities are searching for their own particular answers.

So rather than starting with a story (or even a format), and searching out writers who would conform to that standard, we put out an open call to our young readers (and their friends and their friends) for pieces about issues that concerned them. Luckily, we have some talented readers. What we received was an avalanche of personal narratives, DIY how-to's, and detailed economic and social analyses — even cartoons. The resulting project is just as structurally incoherent as we are, but no less useful for it. It's this scattered form that best expresses a generation that not only hasn't found its place, but doesn't seem particularly eager to settle down anywhere in the existing order.

Even though it wasn't premeditated, a narrative does emerge in *Share Or Die*. There's a common anxiety in the pieces in this collection, a well-informed fear that life will be different for young people just starting to come of age. The promises of the 90's and the early 00's, that society could only be improved, that shopping was patriotic, that the earth knew no boundaries for the determined, have turned out to be worth about as much as a tranche of sub-prime mortgage-backed securities. There's a sense of generational betrayal, a

knowledge that those who came before weren't planning for a future with consequences. In the face of the unknown, these writers have come to understand they're responsible for making something new, even if they don't know what it looks like yet. Or, as Sid Vicious put it: "We don't know what we want/But we know how to get it."

"*Share Or Die*" isn't a threat, it's a reality. The title comes from a conversation between *Shareable* publisher Neal Gorenflo and a homeless man. Neal is the kind of guy who would just as well hand his business cards to panhandlers as venture capitalists, and as he started to explain the site, the man spoke up: "Oh I know about all that, it's share or die." When he told me this story we had just started working on the collection, and as I jokingly suggested the phrase would make a good title, neither of us expected it to stick. But stick it did. We couldn't manage to call it anything else, even if we had wanted to try. The title doesn't just refer to the existential state of life with resource depletion, disappearing jobs, and stagnating wages. This young generation is going to have consume less as individuals (even if our only goal is to avoid drowning ourselves in melted icecaps), that much is clear. But there are kinds of social death too, and they're forms to which we've become accustomed and for which we've been groomed. In a world where homes and education have become tools for the financial violence of debt, where to begin? We need commensal ideas and practices in order to merely survive, but also to build a place where it's worth living.

This collection isn't a map, but if it had to be, it would be the explorer's kind, with dragons and sea monsters haunting its unknown edges. It's a series of forays into uncharted territory, each writer taking a different path, equipped with different tools. Collected here, they're stories from the front lines, advice and warnings, tragedies and comedies. You can follow *Share or Die* in a few different ways: you can jump to individual pieces from the clickable tables of contents, browse the pieces organized by tags, or flip from article to article according to your own whims and chance. You can also click on the shareable logo to go to the article online, where you can discuss with other readers. Like youth, this collection has many possible paths, it's up to you which one to take.



The Get Lost Generation

MALCOLM HARRIS

Ask a headline writer at any paper of record and they'll tell you that today's young people are "The Lost Generation." They tend to use this label as if Hemingway and Fitzgerald hadn't drunk their way through half the bars in Europe under the same flag. Unfortunately, the youths of today aren't lost in a morass of sex, art, booze, and politics (not necessarily in that order), but rather can't find a path through the haze of economic insecurity and impending ecological catastrophe. The current use of the term draws less from those charmed ex-pats than from "The Lost Decade", the name given to Japan's period of economic stagnation during the 90's. But the two uses point towards different aspects of sociohistorical lostness: one is about a generation not knowing what to do with its capacity within society, the other about a society that doesn't know what to do with its capacity for generation, a world that seems to have already made too much of everything. It is unclear in which way my generation is lost, whether it refers to the seemingly misdirected lives of 20-somethings or our potential that may go unrealized due to the employment crisis and over-production - unless we open new paths. Having read the essays that follow, I think it's a bit of both.

Of course the absent jobs that could make us "productive" members of society go a long way toward answering the question of direction. Young people are semi-autonomous when it comes to our life choices, but we are subject as a population to economic and environmental conditions; one could say we are lost because we have been lost. Even so, we don't seem to be going anywhere. The new phase of "emerging adulthood" described in the now infamous *New York*

Times Magazine article on 20-somethings¹ involves a return to the parents' home, (as in *Lauren Westerfield's "Flexible Lives, Flexible Relationships"*). Nothing could be more found. There is also some irony in calling the most connected generation in the history of mankind "lost." The phone in my pocket can not only tell me where I am, but where I might want to go next and how to get there. There are ways in which we could not get lost if we tried.

Or could we? If the directions through which productive potential is traditionally realized (traditional careers, families, housing, modes of transportation) are not going to be open to many of us, as the situation indicates they will not, then we will need to produce and construct new ones. "Make it new" is an old phrase but, from one Lost Generation to another, it's still good advice. The original Lost Generation produced its enduring works of art in flophouses and dive bars, not offices or writing workshops. For the modernists, being lost was a precondition for creation, not a barrier. We have no choice but to cease to think of exploration as a bounded time in which we are to "find" ourselves before we are put to work. For many of us, that end may never come. If the roads are closed, getting lost becomes the only way to move. The alternative is stagnation and the bare-life instrumentality of the on-demand contract labor (see *Ryan Gleason's "The Janus-Faced Craigslist"*). We have better things to do with our productive capacities than depress wages for those who cling to traditional employment. Instead, we have the opportunity to create new forms of social organization and patterns of mutual support.

Instead of "finding ourselves," I think my generation would be better off losing ourselves. The selves we can hope to find ready-made and waiting are not what we've been promised, nor what we've prepared for (see *Sarah Idzik's "Unprepared."*), nor what we want. If the traditional job market fails to accommodate so many young people, then the modes of living devised by and for our parents will remain impossible for us. I mean this both in terms of living lives centered around consumption, but also the physical habitats they've

1. Henig, Robin Marantz. "What Is It About 20-Somethings?" *New York Times Magazine*. Published: August 18, 2010.

built. We will live closer to one another as we realize distance is not the same as safety. In order to survive and even have a chance to live, we will have to build communities of cooperation rather than competition. Learning to live together instead of merely in proximity to each other will be crucial (see *Annamarie Pluhar's "Screening for Gold"*). Sometimes getting lost will require us to leave some small possibility of prosperity behind and jump into the unknown (*Emi Gennis's "Quitter"* and *Jenna Braeger's "Who Needs An Ivory Tower"*) Sometimes it means leaving any sort of normal stability behind and taking only what you can carry (Nine gives her inventory in *"Take It And Leave It"*) in search of something truly desirable.

The obvious but tricky question is where can we go that is away from this dominant relationship, away from the selling of our lives and planet chunk by chunk so as not to die. Both the alienated suburbs of my childhood and the costly cities of my adolescent dreams seem unlikely sites, yet we know there are places where capital and the state move too slowly, corners they cannot assimilate: the warehouse shells of an exhausted industrialism, the foreclosed homes that hold the ghosts of a dreamed America which never came to be. During *Milicent Johnson's adventures in Detroit*, she found a city inventing with what's there, moving past what's gone into something different. There remains space and time where horizontal networks can survive and grow, where new practices can spring from the scrapheap generated by late capitalism.

Young people can organize themselves under new forms, like cooperatives (see Mira Luna's essays, *"How to Start A Worker Co-op"* and *"How to Build A Housing Co-Op"*) and nomadic communities (*Robin's "Every Guest A Host"*). We can depend on each other's living labor rather than the dead value stored in commodities. A shared future means less stuff, which means less digging for more fuel to burn. If families are those groups of people against whom we refuse to fight in the race up the ladder, then young people are going to get bigger families. Networks of collaborative consumption allow people to share goods in common without the burdens and costs of personal ownership, which means less time buying and more time living. Do-

it-yourself becomes the best option (as in *Melissa Welter's "Eating Rich, Living Poor"*) and, luckily, ever more feasible as the means of production become more accessible to individual producer/consumers (see *Jean-Yves Huwart's "The State of Gen Y"*). We must be suspicious of everything we do not build, of everything handed down from an empire in decline, and look to our own hands. Even while the lives we build are independent, they're still shared, and sharing is what we're gonna need if we're going to get out of youth alive.





WORK

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The State of Gen Y

JEAN-YVES HUWART

Victoria is 26 years old. She lives in Madrid where she regularly lines up on the sidewalk outside her local unemployment office. A college graduate in audio-visual communication, Victoria hasn't got the job of her dreams, at least not yet. After a long period of unemployment, she has been working as a receptionist for the last six months. "I will take anything," she says. "Things are very difficult right now. I hope things are going to get better"²

Half of the workers in Spain under 30 are on low-paid short term contracts with durations under six months. One in five Spaniards under 30 is still looking for a first job. The 2008 global financial crisis is not the sole cause ; in 2007, at the height of the Spanish markets bonanza, the unemployment rate was already far above the European average. Compared to the conditions in other industrialised countries, the situation of the young workforce in Spain isn't unique. It's simply the worst.

In today's economy, a college or a university degree doesn't automatically secure an interesting job for young graduates anywhere. The competition for work is much fiercer than it was 30 years ago. In the UK, for instance, the number of qualified candidates for any open job position is twice as high as it was in 1980³.

2. Younge, Gary. "Spain's unemployed: one in five under 30 still looking for that first job" The Guardian. Published March 30th, 2011

3. Mesure, Susie and McCorkell, Andy. "The lost generation: Out of work, out of luck - graduates finding it tough" The Independent. Published July 11th, 2010.

Whether in France, the US, or the UK, young professionals are increasingly ready to accept unpaid internships for long periods of their early working lives. As companies have grown leaner, they're looking for workers who can simply plug-and-play. The first hiring process will likely be long and uncertain for a large number of graduates. This is emphatically not good news, as tuition costs have increased rapidly during the last decades, putting students in record high levels of debt.

Of course, how hard it is to find a job varies greatly according to the applicant's specific field of education. A degree in engineering or nursing offers more short-term prospects than training in journalism or sociology. Having a College degree hasn't quite become a penalty for job seekers, either (except for the debt). In Spain, again, a PhD graduate is four times less likely to remain unemployed than someone without any degree⁴.

"We don't want a job. We want an exciting job!"

The divorce between the new working generation and the traditional working environment seems deep and lasting.

Today's young people don't just want jobs. They want exciting jobs.

The problem : Many employers are unable to supply their workforce with the proper challenges and autonomy they claim to offer. The corporate life is even less fulfilling than it used to be. The Conference Board, a management research firm, points out that only 51 percent of today's American workers are interested in their work, down 19 percent from 1987⁵.

In the field of worker motivation, the 20th century way of managing companies seems to have reached its end. Employer loyalty among skilled workers is dropping. Wage bonuses and exotic forms of

4. The Guardian, March 30th 2011

5. Light, Joe. "More Workers Start to Quit" Wall Street Journal. Published May 26, 2010.

compensation (expenses-paid trips, company cars) don't cure the pain of bored or disappointed staff members any longer. In desperate reaction, recruiters have tried to use new words like "technology friendliness", "creativity," or "engagement" to seduce qualified workers. Nevertheless, the turnover keeps rising among major employers, making human resources managers nervous on both sides of the Atlantic. In Belgium, for instance, the percentage of unforced resignations jumped from 6.6 to 7.8 in one year⁶.

Nowadays, a greater portion of the younger generation is clearly rejecting the classical working model, either by choice or necessity. First, aware of their parents' sacrifices - who often worked all their life in dull positions, damaging their health without much recognition - they turn their back to the retrograde career model. Second, the management culture of many traditional companies - with command and control principles, yelling managers, social-media-phobic policies, and for-profit myopia - is tragically outdated.

A new voice of protest

This gap between young people's experiences and the classical working model is just beginning to generate visible tensions.

It has taken a radical form in Japan, where tens of thousands of young adults, called "Hikikomoris," shut themselves in their bedroom for months in reaction to scholastic and economic pressure.

These days we see street protests as well.

In early 2011, in London, Madrid, and Lisbon, students and young workers demonstrated in the streets out of a collective fear of an absent future. And these protests have shown no sign of dying down.

And of course we can't forget to mention the rising anger in the Arab world. These educated youths are much more connected globally than their parents were, and their pattern of values has changed accordingly. If there was no direct connection between the events in Western Europe and the other side of the Mediterranean sea, both

were at least led by young adults fearing for an uncertain future and challenging the traditional model. In Tunisia and Egypt, uprisings started against the dictatorial, corrupted, and gerontocratic regimes ruling the countries for decades. For young people living under capitalist democratic regimes, they'll have to fight an economic system with these same qualities.

To some extent, young people's new ability to connect directly with each other via social media is reshaping the balance of power. Facebook and Twitter have helped make it possible to get rid of dictators in Egypt and Tunisia who dreamed they were safe in their palaces. The young insurgents needed no political party, no pre-existing organisation, instead they had the power of ideas and values (and anger), plus the capacity to connect and coordinate peer-to-peer without a filter.

What has worked for grassroots regime change could influence the way we do business and create value tomorrow. Do corporations really think the orthodox top-down management approaches won't be impacted by these new social communication tools, the culture of openness, and independent production?

The truth is, it's already happened.

In the last years, some of the highest share price gains on Wall Street have been made by companies like Apple, Google, and Netflix. These are very entrepreneurial organisations that implemented new management principles based on increasing employee freedom and internal innovation. These companies are also listed among the best employers in employee surveys⁷.

The older corporate organisational model is losing ground. In an over-informed world, the need for a disruptive turn is building. These antiquated structures can't cut it anymore. A growing number of corporations are shifting toward a more open model of innovation in which entrepreneurs take the primary role.

⁷ Schonfeld, Erick. "Netflix, Adobe, Google Rated Best Places To Work. AT&T, eBay, RadioShack Among the Worst." Tech Crunch. Published Dec 30, 2008.

⁶ Trends.be. "Vers une nouvelle guerre des talents" Published April 5, 2011

The young generation demands more autonomy, honesty, sustainability, and the opportunity to produce independently. Young folks should be confident that in the future (short- or long-term, it's not clear yet) the economic world will have to make room for their aspirations.

Never a better time to become an entrepreneur

Thanks in part to technology, no generation in the history has ever had as big of an opportunity to build its own future as those born after 1985, Gen Y.

Even outside the corporate world, there has never been a better time to become an entrepreneur.

The minimum threshold to start a business has never been as low as it is now for wannabe entrepreneurs. The internet brings the knowledge, skilled people can connect on social networks, and distribution is less of an issue today as the web allows sellers to reach out to customers directly.

Companies need entrepreneurs to innovate. In the last decade, they have become more and more reliant on partnerships with other companies and startups. Let's take the drug industry: a large number of the new pills put on the market are developed by biotech startups or university spinoffs. For young entrepreneurs, a new market is there.

Though 35-44 and 55+ year-old entrepreneurs fuel the pick up in businesses creation in the last few years, this seeming lack of entrepreneurial spirit within the younger generation is mainly due to a lack of financial support. It's hard to build a company on student debt, which makes it amazing the number of young entrepreneurs hasn't plummeted.

If we work these issues out, the "lost generation" will no doubt find its way.

The found generation

Here is the good news: new economic models better suited to Gen Y have arrived.

Although still a maturing form, crowdfunding platforms are channeling seed money to support the development of new ideas.

Access to prototyping is much broader than it used to be. New services can go online with a simple site in a matter of minutes. For anyone who wants to build physical prototypes, FabLabs (Fabrication Laboratory), 3D printer or Techshops⁸ offer new opportunities for independent producers. New producers can deliver tools, devices, and originally designed items unit by unit. Easier prototyping means the path from idea to production is shorter than ever. Those new processes will reduce waste and lower the risk for early stakeholders.

New online and offline ecosystems provides today's young entrepreneurs with models to emulate and collective inspiration. Online, you can find these new spaces within digital communities and social networks. Offline, they could be the coworking spaces popping up all around the world, and wherever new communities of entrepreneurs are meeting each other in person. It's never been easier to find an entrepreneur soul mate, a partner, or skilled professionals to help turn ideas into new realities.

In today's world, better-informed buyers are asking for customized products. As the new demand heads toward lower standard production volumes, "mass customization" possibilities enabled by the internet could redraw the global manufacturing map. Nimble production chains closer to users will mean advantages for buyers and small sellers. This is another opportunity for small-business owners who can focus on local or global market niches.

The economy of the future will rely on startups and small businesses. In Europe and the US, governments bet on startups to re-ignite the global economy. Mentoring programs for entrepreneurs are mushrooming in cities on both sides of the Atlantic. Some experienced executives and successful entrepreneurs are happy to share their knowledge with young upstarts⁹.

8. Wikipedia. "TechShop" Wikipedia. Published March 22, 2011.

9. Look, for instance, at the mentoring program put in place at the Plug and Play Tech Center in the Silicon Valley, an incubator for startups.

Young workers are in an uncomfortable situation: dependent on and opposed to the dominant model. However, this generation has at its disposal an amazing set of resources it brings to bear against the old guard. More connected than their parents, more familiar with an ever-shifting technological landscape, closer to the means of production than any generation before, you have to like their chances.



Things As Which I've Had to Dress: Life in The Non-profit Industrial Complex

SAM MILLER,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADRIENNE CANZOLINO

I'm an organizer, but when you tell people that, they either think you're a party hack or you rearrange people's closets. "Activist" is in most people's vocabularies, so professional activist is an easy way to explain that on and off for the last six years my job has been to build a movement to the end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I've organized protests, marches, sit-ins in Congress, dance riots in the streets, giant public art projects, speaking tours and student activist trainings. I've chained myself to an oil barrel, built a blockade out of school desks in an intersection in downtown DC, and danced in a war profiteer's lobby with a few hundred other kids. Sometimes I was being paid, sometimes I wasn't. This is my work, and most of the time it's my job.

I always had an instinct that capitalism was a dirty word and that my destiny did not involve working for a corporation. All those downtown office buildings and people in suits completely motivated by profit seemed repulsive to me from a young age. Until I turned 20, I had only vague notions of activism and radical politics, I figured my choices after college would be to get some random office job for a corporation or small business, manage a doctor's office like the two generations of women in my family before me, or become a lawyer and or teacher - I had ruled out anything involving too much math and science a long time ago. I didn't know what non-profits were, and definitely did not know I could cause trouble for a living. Then I found a women's anti-war organization with an office down the street from my college apartment, and the world of professional activism quickly opened my eyes.

To work for an activist non-profit, you have to be just idealistic enough to work way more than you're being paid for, but not so idealistic that

you're not willing to constantly compromise for funders, the media, or because your boss wants to go to the President's fundraising dinner. Adaptability is also necessary - an activist's job shifts and changes along with the political landscape. You might organize a protest one day, meet with a Congressperson the next, and be running a Facebook petition campaign the next week. It also helps if you're attractive, able to blend in a variety of settings, don't mind making a complete fool out of yourself, and just generally doing things your mother likely told you were rude or unacceptable in civil society.

"Non-profit" is a big statutory umbrella that includes churches, arts organizations, corporate foundations, schools, unions, advocacy organizations, and a variety of other tax shelters. If advocacy organizations were a big happy family, activist non-profits would be that crazy aunt you feel a sad but abiding affection for, but also secretly hope gets too stoned to remember to show up for holiday dinner. Advocacy non-profits actively try to create social change. They do this in varying degrees of scale and effectiveness, using a large array of strategies and tactics. They also spend a great deal of energy scrutinizing their own and other's scale, effectiveness, strategy, and tactics, which often results in lengthy articles, blogs, and internet flame-wars between people in these organizations who disagree with each other. Even when myopic, politics is never boring.

Advocacy non-profits and activist non-profits part ways at the border of "the system." Advocacy non-profits work inside the system, activist non-profits try to work both inside and outside of the system as it is. Activist non-profits essentially put a brand and a Tax ID number on social movements. For those of us who want to create radical change, like overthrowing capitalism and the State and creating autonomous communities based on mutual aid, this has a whole ton of horrible implications, all of which are well documented (for more on this, check out the excellent collection *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, by INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence). This story is about survival and compromise, the things I do sometimes for a paycheck, sometimes because I believe in them, and sometimes for a combination of the two.

Most professional activists, myself included, have organizing projects that we do in our free time as well, often a more radical version of the work we do at our jobs. This is what keeps me and my friends in the same industry sane. The work I want to do and the work I get paid to do sometimes intersect, but if there's a costume involved, it's pretty safe to say that action is solidly in the "paid" category.

The following is a partial list of the costumes I've worn as part of my jobs or internships:



The Spirit of Justice

A statue in the Department of Justice building in DC that happened to depict the aforementioned spirit as a woman with one exposed breast, which John Ashcroft had covered when he became the Attorney General under President Bush. The costume involved a pink peace sign nipple pasty. This was also within the first month of my first internship.



Wolf in sheep's clothing

This one involved an awful sort of headdress with a sheepskin headband and wolf ears outside of a very expensive fundraiser in Beverly Hills.



"Media whore"

There was a French maid sort-of lingerie thing along with fishnets, black spike heels, and the logos of major news corporations all over the exposed parts of my body.



"I Miss America"

Like Miss America, but with horrible messaging that implied there was a time when America was super-great and a pink sequin gown.

Pink policewoman

I don't have an excuse for this, it's just wrong under any circumstance.



Member of a pink religious choir

This was also in the halls of Congress.



Pregnant woman

I was trying to sneak helium balloons into a Congressional hearing. Let's just say Capitol Police were not too happy about me walking in looking nine months pregnant and leaving with a reasonably flat stomach.



Cow

Actually, I was the lead cow in a small herd of cows in Congress harassing some jack-ass Senator after he made an extra-special comment about Social Security, tits, and milk cows.



Sometimes I get sad when I think about all these costumes and all the ridiculous, downright counter-revolutionary shit I've done working for these organizations. I hate the police, why would I wear a pink police uniform? I pushed a bed in front of the Capitol and got a bunch of people to roll around in fake money while listening to Ol' Dirty Bastard - it had something to do with government being in bed with the oil companies. Then I think about what most of my DC anarchist friends were doing, and (not that I'm judging), I am thankful that I've never done canvassing, dog walking, medical research studies, or Craigslist sex work. Sometimes I decide at least establishment activism is better than being totally complicit, but then I get sad again. Radicals go to the root of problems, and the root cause of every issue I've worked on is capitalism. Non-profits don't go there. Sometimes they talk about "corporations," but no one will name the problem, and no one will even go near trying to address it. Non-

profits deal in reform because you can't deliver revolutions in time for foundation funding cycles. The organizations that comprise the anti-war movement are an especially sad breed because they don't have any sense of strategy. They all operate on the notion that if there are enough protests and media stories, politicians will feel pressured to end the wars. Successful activist non-profits, like many in the environmental movement, identify achievable goals, target power-holders, and develop strategies to win things that make a difference in people's lives. After eight years of war in Iraq and almost ten in Afghanistan, the anti-war movement has just recently started to think about strategies and campaigns to actually end the wars.

I once found myself at an event where then-Senator Hillary Clinton was speaking to a room of college feminists on Capitol Hill, hosted by the National Organization of Women (NOW). I was working for a certain women's peace organization at the time, and knew that my boss was hosting a fundraiser for NOW at her house in LA later that week. I was also familiar with Senator Clinton's voting record, one of the most conservative Senate Democrats who frequently voted in favor of the war in Iraq and parental consent for abortion (both of which NOW was opposed to, at least according to their website). The number of contradictions in the room was already enough to make my head explode, and then Clinton proceeded to give a speech about all the wonderful things the U.S. was doing for the women of Afghanistan. And then, in this miserable, moment, the stars aligned: I turned on my video camera and stood in a doorway leading to a small foyer to the right of the stage, easily convinced a security person I was one of NOW's interns, and, as Clinton ended her speech to a flurry of applause, she was lead off stage with a small gaggle of women into the very doorway where I was standing.

I was suddenly in a small room with Hillary Clinton, the president of NOW, a few other important ladies in pant-suits, and no security. No one had noticed me, and I was still filming in the corner of the room. I couldn't just stand there and do nothing, that would go completely against what I had been taught in my previous two years as an activist, so as they were posing for pictures, I saw my opportunity. I loudly blurted out something about how they should all be ashamed of themselves

because Hillary Clinton is a warmonger and is doing nothing for the women of Iraq except voting to keep bombing their homes. Not my most eloquent moment, but it got their attention. Clinton quickly exited the room as the president of NOW and a very indignant woman with a lot of blond hair confronted me. We had a heated exchange in which I berated the women for supporting Clinton and her policies, and said they should be ashamed to call themselves feminists. They told me I should be ashamed of myself, which is when I thought it was a good idea to start dropping my boss's name. The incident ended shortly thereafter, and I went back to my office to regroup, call my boss before someone else did, and watch the footage. My boss was semi-horrified, but not totally upset, and I didn't get fired or anything. A few days later, Hillary Clinton announced her candidacy for President, NOW quickly endorsed, my boss held a lovely fundraiser for NOW which included a polite critique of Clinton's policies, and a few of us started scheming about running a spoof Presidential campaign for Condoleezza Rice.

During the Bush years, liberals were throwing money around left and right to support action organizing. It was relatively easy to get jobs or short-term contract gigs organizing random protests, street theaters, and arrestable actions - especially if you were in DC. The best job I ever had was organizing a day of coordinated direct actions in DC on the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. This was the only time I was paid to do work I completely believed in - I spent three months organizing logistics, outreach, resources, and action plans, coordinating with around 20 different organizations to pull off a dozen distinct actions in Downtown DC. We were modeling horizontal organizing structures, solidarity across tactical divides, and a creative vision of what protests can look like beyond a boring rally and permitted march. Politically, we were offering a holistic analysis of the pillars that uphold the military-industrial complex, military recruiters, taxes, oil companies and other war profiteering corporations, lobbyists, Congress, the media, and the security state. But that was early 2008, a few months before the Democratic & Republican National Conventions and subsequent protests that summer. The DNC and RNC in 2008 were the last hurrah of a fading national anti-war movement, with the onset of Obama-mania and the recession, the national coalitions fell apart and regrouped under

weaker banners. The organizations with the largest bases suffered rapid attrition and lost funding, and three years later we're still trying to figure out what happened and how to fix it.

Ever since Obama's presidential campaign, progressives and left-leaning folks are even more divided, many of them still making excuses for the President and the Democrats and refusing to oppose them in any way. These days, I find myself spending much more time behind a computer than in the streets. Like most of my peers, I've found employment in communications and social media. Now I run websites and databases instead of organizing actions. When there's no funding for organizing, everyone still needs a website, and can trick their funders into believing that online activism is a reasonable replacement for physical work. Instead of sit-ins in Congress, I create "online actions" where people can click a few buttons and email their Representatives. I hated wearing pink police uniforms, but I hate exclusively online activism even more. However ridiculous we were, being face-to-face with Karl Rove and trying to arrest him has to be better than bombarding his office with emails. Facebook and Twitter do not make revolutions; they are tools. They mean nothing without the people using them, and no matter how many friends or followers an organization has, the non-profit communications professionals of this country are not going to create an American Tahrir Square.

All this being said, I still think professional activism is a lot better than any of the alternatives I've tried. Capitalism is an awful, oppressive, broken system we are forced to exist in, and until I decide to completely drop out and start an anarchist collective permaculture farm off the grid somewhere, I have to work. Now I work with veterans and military families trying to end the wars. I make a living wage plus benefits and I choose my own hours. I generally believe in the work I'm doing, and even when I don't, at least I never have to do anything I think is completely awful. It may not be the revolution, but it'll do until we make that happen.



Unprepared: From Elite College to The Job Market

SARAH IDZIK, ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMI GENNIS

I've lived in Chicago, first as a student, then as a working resident, for six and a half years now. But I didn't vote in the pivotal mayoral race held here recently.

I still list my parents' address in Pennsylvania as my "permanent address" on anything requiring one.

I don't have health insurance through my employer, a travel company in downtown Chicago, because I'm still on my Pennsylvania plan, even though I've worked here for nearly three years.

I don't have a dentist here. Or an ophthalmologist. I've never even been to the new primary care physician I selected through my insurance.



And I still hold a Pennsylvania driver's license.

Why is this? The answer is fairly simple: I still don't consider myself a full-fledged resident of Chicago. But the reason for that is a bit more complicated.

In high school, I was smart. Really smart. I knocked out A's like I was baking cupcakes. Teachers loved that they could count on me. But I was small-town, public-school smart, the kind of girl genius who plows through her secondary education without too much resistance. Deep down, despite my excellent grades and my involvement in a bunch of extracurricular activities, I knew that I hadn't been challenged enough to be as cocky as I was. When it came to college, I had two options: I could play it safe, stay close to home and go to school in Pittsburgh where I would benefit from the "big fish in a small pond" effect. Or I could take a leap and accept my offer of admission from the University of Chicago.

The prospect thrilled and terrified me. Everything the school promised sounded utopian: the academic rigor, the immersive intellectual energy, the dense core curriculum filled with great books that sparked constant meaningful discussion. But the school also prominently promised on all of their prospecting materials to challenge me. They said they would force me to defend myself and the positions I took, that they would force me to think deeply, to see all the angles. I knew I'd been handled with kid gloves so far, and that Chicago would be an insane leap outside of my comfort zone. Not to mention the shock of being so far away from home (what was this alleged "Midwest?") in a place where I knew virtually no one.

But in the end, I decided: nothing ventured, nothing gained. I flopped like an enthusiastic mudfish out of the small pond and into the lake.

Now, like anything, school had its ups and downs. Not every class is inspiring, not every teacher is interesting, and, of course, not every assignment will take precedence over a new and interesting social life. But ultimately, it would be nearly impossible to count the ways in which I benefited from my education (much, in the end,

thanks to that social life). I was, as I suspected I would be, somewhat behind from the start, and the learning curve was steep. Most of the time those first two years it felt like just about everyone I met was a genius. My friends were brilliant. My classmates were all well-read and eloquent. I was so green and, I thought, underprepared. I had an embarrassing moment during a movie night with my new dorm-mates when I revealed I didn't know what NATO was. Despite what a guidance counselor might have thought from my high school transcript, I didn't have the natural ability or aptitude for the University's rigorous academic and intellectual life; I had to learn it. But surrounded by and in the constant presence of people as smart or smarter than me, exerting their influence in class, at dinner, hanging out in someone's dorm room, everywhere I was in contact with other people, I learned quickly. It was like taking up a foreign language through immersion.

Eventually, I got more comfortable with the rhythms of things. I learned to ask questions, to read carefully, to be inquisitive, to poke around in all of the dark corners of a text or a thought and to follow the strands of thought wherever they may lead. I felt like I was aging in dog years, absorbing more, learning and maturing more quickly than I literally could have imagined possible for myself. But that kernel of insufficiency planted there in the beginning still never goes away. It changes shape, maybe, becomes something slightly different, but it instilled in me a driving force, my *raison d'être*: to be better, and to learn more. Constantly and forever. My life's quest became and has remained the struggle for self-improvement through knowledge. Because learning, truly learning, is like cracking open the door to a universe: once you've experienced it, everything else spreads on and on right before your eyes. The more you learn, the more you find to learn. You can never know enough. I had found what people go to college to find: direction.

Unfortunately for me and my fellow classmates, the culture of learning is not necessarily compatible with the culture of the market. I was an English major, and not one who was diligent seeking internships while in school. My expertise was literary analysis. What I considered to

be probably my highest achievement was my exploration of Milorad Pavić's postmodern hypertextual novel *Dictionary of the Khazars*, for which I found myself researching and downloading examples of the obscure genre of hypertext fiction (way bigger in the 90's) and writing about the subjectivity of names and definitions, the existential crisis of reading a book without its own narrative velocity, and the futility of the self-guided attempt to achieve simultaneity of all the information in the text. Who wouldn't want an employee who could do that?

Of course, the thing I hadn't yet faced was that my literary skill would not directly translate to a job. The ideals I had internalized and learned to dedicate myself to made me the kind of University of Chicago student they let rave in the brochure, but they weren't the same skills I would need to survive in the real world.

"The real world" as an expression is apt. For all of my feverish intellectualism, I was in a charmed environment. Perhaps it was a necessary part of my education, but college functioned as a protection, a safe haven, a free pass of sorts, and it did not reflect the reality of life outside of it. For me and my classmates, the transition was destined to be particularly difficult. We had less warning than most other people; we had so much less time and energy to spend focusing on the future. The kind of education I got, priceless though it was, is tricky to spin into a proper post-college career even in the best of economic times if you don't have a sense for where you're going once you step outside. I did not have that sense. Most of my friends, largely students of the humanities and/or theater, didn't either.

Inevitably, the clock ran out on us all. Graduation rolled around and dumped us on the other side, where we were within grace periods for our student loans but not for long. A life philosophy of inquiry and a fairly elite diploma didn't protect us from the immediate exigencies of rent, jobs, and stress.

I knew I was at a disadvantage, not having the same career-boosting professional degrees some of my more technically minded peers had.

Like my friends, I had a world-class education and ambitions to be great, but only the vaguest of ideas about what I even wanted to do.

Some people, though no one I was close with, were fortunate enough to have parents who were able and willing to foot the bills for a grace-period of post-college finding oneself. The rest of us had to do it on the fly, scrambling for work in what we knew was a quickly deteriorating economy, while trying to work out what sort of path we wanted for ourselves. The word “job” was precious enough; the word “career” seemed outlandish, absurd, almost unseemly. My ambitions had shrunk alongside my options; we went from expecting greatness to expecting respectable work to hoping for something that paid.

I was naïve about the real world much in the same way that I was naïve about academic life. I searched for jobs primarily on Craigslist. I didn’t know what to do with my resume. I only had enough money from my graduation gifts to last a couple of months unemployed in Chicago; after that, it would be back to suburban Pennsylvania. Looking at job postings, I realized I had no idea what I was even looking for. Jobs were scarce, let alone appealing gigs. Furthermore, I was totally unqualified, based on the advertised requirements, for anything but clerical administrative work. All that I had learned, all that I had overcome and accomplished, and here I was scanning dozens upon dozens of ads looking for the rare few with the words “administrative assistant” in them.

Not knowing what else to do, not having any clue or any direction, feeling the hot breath of unemployment breathing down my neck, I applied to all of them.

I managed to get lucky – and despite my degree, it does feel like luck. I had a job by July, one of the applications for which I had, by this point tired and getting lazy, attached my resume to an email and just dashed off a paragraph in the body about how great and bright I was. This is the same job I still have now, almost three years later—a gig at a small travel company typing and printing travel documents for unbelievably wealthy, entitled globetrotters who won’t read any of them. This was about as far from the highbrow literature of my undergraduate years

as construction work. I was terrified to start an actual 9 to 5 job; it seemed like a myth, something surreal, something that couldn’t touch my life.

After starting, the disbelief soon gave way to misery. The day-to-day experience left me feeling utterly crushed. I wasn’t creating anything, I wasn’t even really doing anything of any consequence

at all. I got on the bus every morning, exhausted, with all the other people who worked in offices downtown. I walked into the office every day, sat at the same desk, in the same chair, did the same things. I adopted the same bubbly, pleasant attitude as my coworkers, with whom I felt no connection at all. It made no sense to see them as real people I might connect with, since after all, I felt like this was not where I belonged: an office in an industry that had nothing to do with my life, in a job in which I had no real interest. I had nothing invested in my job or my employer, I did what I had to do: hammer out the work, play nice. But I felt all day long that I was inhabiting a strange bubble, separate from where I really lived my life, removed from anything that affected me or that I cared about.

But the bubble expanded to fill such a large part of my days that I started to despair. During office lunches, when I sat at the conference table eating pizza while my coworkers talked about the best time during the week to pick up ornamental plants at Home Depot, I sometimes felt so detached that I saw myself hovering above the table, watching the me sitting below. I was an alien who had just woken up in a strange place with a broken compass. Several nights in the first few months I came home, took off my coat, sat on the couch, and starting sobbing inexplicably and inconsolably. I had crying jags in the bathroom at work. I was falling into a dark hopelessness. I hadn’t read a book or written anything new since before graduation.



I finally started to appreciate why TV is so popular: when you're working a day job who has the energy or will to do anything more at the end of the day than collapse on the couch with a bag of chips and an NCIS rerun? I gained fifteen pounds in six months.

And still, I did not leave my job.

It sounds like stupid or self-destructive behavior. I was suffering. I was miserable. For my own good, I should have left long before now.

But I stayed because I was too terrified to leave. The economical situation was bleak and not improving. All I had to do was look around at my friends, the best and the brightest, to see it. One woke every day at four in the morning for the morning shift at Starbucks, trying to get enough hours every week to make the minimum for health insurance. One interned in local government, but afterward was forced to take up his old job at the zoo. One had to move back with his parents in Iowa. Several waited tables. Two toiled miserably in low-level jobs at law firms. Out of everyone I knew, there was only one real success story—only one person who secured a job in the appropriate field that set her on the career path she wanted. More school was an option for the shell-shocked or potentially so; my boyfriend took refuge in another year. One friend defected to grad school in Austin, Texas. Everyone seemed to be in the midst of the application phase at any given time, working on getting into grad school for something or other, anywhere but here, anywhere but the real world, where there was no work, and even less fulfilling work.

My job was almost insultingly low-paying, and I was living paycheck to paycheck, as we all were, cutting it too close to quit with no other offers. When I got home, I trolled the web for hope of better



opportunities, but jobs were so few that I found just about nothing, and certainly nothing that I would want to do more than what I was already doing. I was interested in the arts, but with the economy tanking and arts funding even more constricted than in normal lean times, a paying job was a far-off dream, and I couldn't afford to do an unpaid, or even low-paid, internship.

It was jarring. Not just for me, for all of us. It seemed to make so little sense. The banal necessities of the actual struggle for survival in the world were at odds with our sense of the world as some kind of meritocracy brimming with possibilities for genuine intellectual growth, a place whose purpose is to provide those opportunities. Having been bestowed with the unquenchable need for knowledge that we all had worked hard to develop, we had also acquired a unique capability for dissatisfaction—something most of our parents had never had the luxury to experience, especially so acutely and so early in life. This dissatisfaction is a luxury, but also a curse. My peers and I, perhaps sometimes even despite ourselves, believe in the higher purposes we learned in class, the value—sacredness, even—of knowledge, inquiry, curiosity, justice, the pursuit of truth. If we can be said to have a collective moral compass, that's what's in it. My friends and I trust in the values our liberal arts education set out and succeeded to instill in us. But sitting in an office typing away meaninglessly? How were we supposed to understand that as part of the world we had imagined, or had been taught to imagine?

This disconnect made me think I might be going insane. Like my head had been metaphorically severed from my body. The realization that I had little beyond my job to fill my days and justify my existence terrified me. Was this who I was now? A stranger to myself, typing away inconsequentially in an office somewhere in the West Loop, with no bright shining future?

I felt stranded, lost, paralyzed. And I resisted dropping anchor in a place so toxic. My attitude toward my work was distanced; it was impossible to develop any feelings of loyalty or any desire to chase upward mobility or permanence when I couldn't stand the thought of actually caring about such a dull job. I remained unsettled, like

a nomad pitching a tent on fallow ground, refusing to get too comfortable. It was bad enough that I was totally rudderless, that I had no clear professional aims or goals to speak of, but add to that what had become our culture's collective recession-fueled terror—I couldn't even say how many times I heard the warning, "At least you have a job"—and you have a bona fide total inability to climb out of my rut. Unable to keep the nine-to-five levees in tact, my work situation had metastasized into a very miserable work/life situation. The expansive, freeing sense that I had once felt, seemingly lifetimes ago, that my life's possibilities were endless had shrunk down to the size of a pinhead. The area of possible movement seemed to be so very small, not just for me, but for all of us. We still wanted great things, but they seemed so impossibly distant, so indulgent, when the basic fact of work wasn't even a given.

Everything we wanted, everything we really valued, was offset by the reality of "normal," traditional work. We had no idea how to navigate this world, but our education didn't fail us—it instilled in us a dissatisfaction for this kind of life.

I didn't have the confidence to go searching for personal success. I had the momentum, the take-the-bull-by-the-horns wind, sucked right out of my sails. For almost three years the kernel of dissatisfaction has grown inside me while I allowed the things I truly valued to be subsumed by the empty immediacy of survival. I doubt we will see the full effects on this generation for decades to come, when we'll start to understand just how far-reaching the tentativeness that has developed within us these last few years really is.

But now I'm preparing to take another leap, just like I did when I went away to college. I'm going to try to marry the ideals I am so loyal to with the very same life necessities that generated my stagnancy and depression. I want to integrate the spirit of inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge into the way I make my living and create my own version of the real world—a lesson I never learned in school, and for which I have absolutely no blueprint. Again, I enter a new situation underprepared, but optimistic that my capacity for dissatisfaction will actually me well this time as a trustworthy guide.



I'm planning to leave Chicago this summer to start over. I'll move somewhere where I can finally put my feet on the ground: grow roots, get a new driver's license, get a new permanent address. I want to make friends and build a community with interests deeper than the potted plants at Home Depot. The goal is to stop feeling like such a listless wanderer in the story of my own life. Maybe I'll even find a new dentist.



Quitter

EMI GENNIS

QUITTER

a story from the RECESSION

by Emi Gennis

IN COLLEGE, MY MORE "SENSIBLE" CLASSMATES TOOK FANCY INTERNSHIPS WHILE I WAITED TABLES

BUT THEN WE GRADUATED

WE'RE NOT HIRING

BUT I'M SO QUALIFIED!

#1 BOSS

I FOUND MYSELF ONE OF THE FEW, LUCKY EMPLOYED

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

EVENTUALLY, MANY OF THEM FOUND JOBS SIMILAR TO MINE

KIDS WHO HADN'T GONE TO COLLEGE HAD MORE MONEY AND MORE WORK EXPERIENCE THAN US

HAS NICE THINGS

FACING THE TERRIBLE REALITY OF DEBT, MANY OF US WONDERED...

WHY DID WE EVER GO TO COLLEGE?

THESE JOBS ARE OK

Z

THE COLLECTION AGENCY IS CALLING FOR YOU AGAIN

TELL THEM I GOT FIRED

THEY PAY (MOST OF) THE BILLS

BUT THEY'RE NOT VERY REWARDING

WHY DON'T YOU GO TO SCHOOL SO YOU CAN HAVE A REAL CAREER?

THEN THERE WERE THESE JERKS

THIS IS A REAL CAREER, BUT IT WASN'T THE ONE I WANTED...

I HAD STARTED MAKING COMICS ALL THE TIME

COME OUT TONIGHT!

I'M BUSY, SORRY

MY GOAL SEEMED OUTLANDISH

HA HA HA I WANNA BE A CARTOONIST!

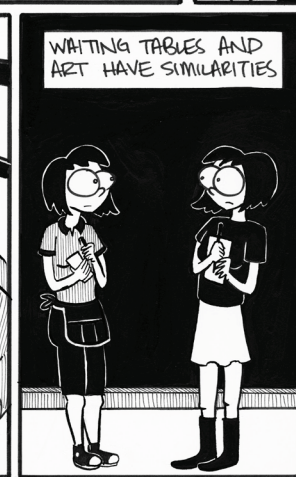
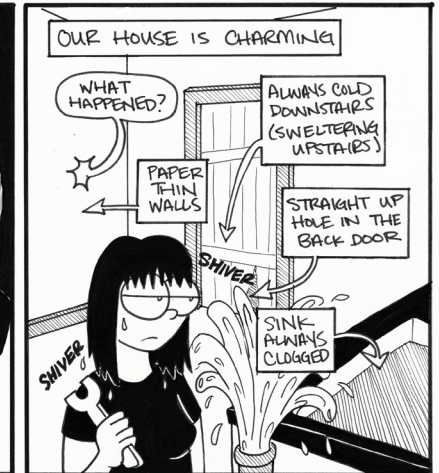
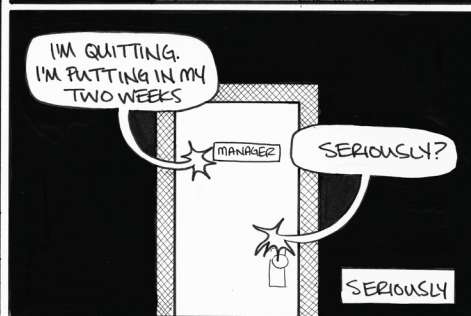
WHY NOT?

BUT A QUESTION LOOMED OVER ME

MORE TRADITIONAL GOALS SEEMED EQUALLY OUTLANDISH

I WANNA BE A LAWYER!

HA HA HA



Take It and Leave It: The Modern Nomad's Pack

NINE

A departure present from my first office job, which I left to go traveling in Canada when I was eighteen. I'm thirty-three now, and it's been around the world and back since then. This pack has been emptied by American, Australian, and Kurdish officials, left out in the rain by Norwegian baggage handlers, soaked through with sweat in Macau, and used as a seat anywhere I've been left waiting. I was going to replace it when it finally developed a tear recently, but realized it would be cheaper and more sensible to have it mended in London. Plus it felt wrong to just discard my pack after so many years of loyal service. The tailor said it was a fairly arduous process, but it looked good as new and, at £20, was far cheaper than a replacement.



Netbook

I'm a freelance writer and editor, with emphasis on the editing if you're talking about jobs that pay. I'm qualified by pedantry, rather than by my degree – sociology with gender studies was never something I expected to get me far, though I did spend several years as a staff member at a support project for sex workers. I opted for self-employment when funding was cut two years ago and I was laid off. Since then, my netbook is about the only significant thing I've had to buy, making it possible for me to work while traveling. It's small enough to fit into my shoulderbag without anyone guessing there could be a computer in there. It has introduced me to aspects of the 21st century I was slow to adopt, like Skype and wifi, which I still kind of interpret as magic air. It has a USB mouse which a stranger from the internet gave me in Edinburgh when his office was getting rid of some stuff. My business is called "Out Of This Boring Neighbourhood," which is a line from a song by the anarcho-folk-punk band Defiance, Ohio, but the name takes on additional meaning every time I gather my things and move.

Ancient mobile phone

People laugh at me because it's so old and can't do anything fancy, but I don't really care for hi-tech gadgets. I already use the internet too much; I don't need to be switched on even more. When I'm overseas, I don't bother buying local SIM cards. It's mostly there so I can tell the time, be contacted by friends, and reach help in an emergency. I only send text messages if I really have to, otherwise, I call and hang up, leaving friends "missed call" icons on their phones to signal agreement with a plan or to let them know I got home safe.

Money

I raided my childhood coin collection for currency from countries I expected to visit in the near future, which I have merged with money from places I've just left. I've got Euros, pounds sterling, American and Australian dollars, Swedish kroner, Iraqi dinar, Turkish lire, Malaysian Ringgit, and a coin from pre-handover Hong Kong which I figure I can maybe still get away with. Last year I had a bank account that didn't charge for foreign transactions, but those days are over. Now I need to withdraw large amounts of cash in one go to make the charges worth

it. Sometimes I don't get any work for a month or more, but I have enough of a safety net, plus I'm enough of a cheapskate, that I can cope without it for a while if I really have to. Because of these fluctuations, I don't keep to a strict budget, but play a fun game called "What Is The Absolute Least Amount Of Money I Can Spend Today Without Having An Utterly Miserable Existence." Greater financial stability would be nice, but a regular job would mean I couldn't keep moving so much. I weighed up the pros and cons and this is the result.

Books

I stopped buying new books after I joined the redundancy club. At the moment, I'm traveling with one book I won in a blog competition, one book I bought cheap in a second-hand bookshop, one book I was given years ago, and one book lent to me recently by a friend. At least a couple of these will be passed on to others when I'm done with them. I write this from Leipzig, where I'm cat-sitting for a month. Having a postal address here means I can look forward to receiving another book in the mail; before I headed out into the world, I listed titles on bookmooch.com that I was willing to part with, and sent them to people who requested them. Now when I hear of a good book, I add it to my bookmooch wishlist, which seems to get me over the psychological hurdle of wanting it instantly; eventually, if someone lists their copy, I'll get a notification e-mail and I can use some more of the credits I've accumulated.

Clothes

Most of my t-shirts were purchased new, but I'm no longer adding to that collection. Any clothes I acquire nowadays are hand-me-downs or the odd charity shop discovery. My stripey sweater and corduroy trousers came from a friend in Chicago last autumn. My waterproof jacket was £5 in the Leigh-on-Sea PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals) shop. My green v-neck sweater came from a free shop in Edinburgh, my khaki trousers and cloth bag from a friend in Barcelona who was clearing out his possessions in advance of a move to Copenhagen. I don't care much for shopping anyway, and these clothes hold memories of the people and places they came from.

Footwear

I bought my kung fu slippers in Barcelona for €5, when I was reconsidering my options after heartbreak caused me to leave Berlin in a hurry. Whenever I have a base camp for a while, I wear these around the house. When I'm in hot countries, I wear them out and about.

I bought my trainers for about £45 a few years ago, back when I had stable employment. At the moment they're still covered in mud from Iraq. They get leaky and I've thought about replacing them, but if they don't get a chance to dry after it's been raining, two pairs of socks will get me through.

Passport

It's obnoxious that an EU passport affords me so many privileges, but I'm not going to argue. I find cheap ways of getting around the world thanks to airport listings on Wikipedia and the painstaking notes I make as I scroll through them: Istanbul to Colombo, Colombo to Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur to Gold Coast – that's Turkey to Australia for £280, and two extra countries along the way, a few days in each. In Australia I'll visit friends and look after somebody's dog for a few weeks. After that? I don't know. Maybe New Zealand. After becoming self-employed, I had figured I couldn't leave Europe again until I had a stable income. It hadn't occurred to me yet that I could justify it if I didn't have rent to pay.

Guiding principle

When I figured out where I didn't want to be, but didn't know where I did want to be, I decided to remain open to any opportunities that came my way. This means that at times I don't know where I'll be in two weeks or a month, but if I hold on long enough, something will turn up. The basic set-up is this: I seek out cheap routes and accept detours, I visit friends, couchsurf with strangers, and enjoy space to myself by taking care of people's homes and pets while they're on holiday. After a while, you get used to the short-term nature of everything.

Keys

Eventually, some day, I'll return to my flat in Edinburgh. Till then, my best friend is living in it, paying most of the mortgage, and forwarding mail once in a while, when I have an address to give her. I have no idea how long I'll keep on traveling, I just know I'm not ready to go back.



Once in a while, I feel really kind of lost. Sometimes I'm sad for no good reason, but that's something that would equally happen were I to stay home. I remember when I had more security, be it work, a routine, a partner, or some kind of stable social space. But I also remember that there were reasons behind my decision to leave. Before I left Edinburgh, I was bored and frustrated, drinking too much and behaving badly, and I think it's better to see the world and go home only when I can be certain I won't return to more of the same. Meantime, I'm happy most of the time with what I'm doing and where I am, and appreciate the connections I get to forge along the way.

There isn't much of a script for what I'm doing. I'm not one of those people who saves up, quits their office job and travels around the world in the appropriate order for exactly one year. I'm not a smug freelancer whose office is a beach hut in Thailand. And I'm not daring enough to hitch across a continent by myself and camp by the side of the road.

And still, others tell me that they could never live the way I'm living, that they're not brave enough. But I don't think it takes much, really. You need to be resourceful and confident; reasonably streetwise but also open to the prospect that most people are basically good. The kindness of the people I meet on the road continues to overwhelm me, and I aim to both repay it and pass it on as far as possible.

I feel like I'm cheating slightly, with my passport and financial reserves, and I always want to stress that those financial reserves are finite, but two facts remain: one, I'm still in a better position than many, so I'm not going to moan about how broke I supposedly am, and two, these are strange times, and nothing is guaranteed any more – if it ever was. So you make the best of what you've got. I fell into what I'm doing now thanks to the choices that were taken away from me, and with them went the reason to stay home.



Heartbeats and Hashtags: Youth in Service

HANNAH BRENCHER

“You’re a what?!” He screams into my ear, combating the bass of the speaker propped between us.

“A vol-un-teer,” I repeat, this time louder.

“So, you like . . . make no money?!”

“Nope, no salary for an entire year!” The guitar cuts off midway through my sentence and I am left screaming in the middle of the bar.

This is the point in every one of my “a volunteer walks into a bar” stories where little blue antennae suddenly sprout up through my curls and the person across from me seemingly forgets how to form coherent sentences.

Yes, I know we are in a recession. Yes, I get that a \$25 weekly stipend is hardly enough to buy a Metrocard, never mind spend a night out in New York City. No, you don’t have to worry about me affording this drink. Yes, I actually chose to do this for a year.

I am answering every one of his questions in my head. He doesn’t actually ask them but I can tell they are practically bullying his tongue, begging to pop out of his mouth. Instead, he keeps them tucked in his cheek and asks a single question instead, enveloping them all into one neat pile: “Why would you ever do a thing like that?”

It is a good question but encounters like this keep me fumbling for a good answer to pair with it.

Society has already forcibly stamped “Generation Y” on my forehead, at the sight of which older generations stop and scour the floors in

search of my pacifier. My generation is (supposedly) the innovative but the impatient, the smart but the selfish. So, in an attempt to avoid talking about the massive “Y” on my face, I find it easier to talk about my second indelible mark: “volunteer.”

I am 22 years old dedicating my first year out of college to a service program in the Bronx, New York. And while it is not always easy to keep it simple in New York City, I am either getting quite creative when it comes to making twenty-five dollars stretch across an entire week, or getting quite diligent at keeping the whole stipend intact until the weekend so as not to be the charity case in a sequined skirt come Friday night.

Though my major living expenses are covered, the recession isn’t exactly taking it easy on me. I still get daily wake-up calls from the sixty-thousand dollars in college debt that have taken up permanent residence at my heels. I am still knee-deep in the slush of a muddied economy right beside my peers, feeling the cold shun of a job market that has shown itself to be quite stingy with the young and hopeful.

When people hear “volunteer,” they picture a girl with empty pockets and a full heart resting her head on newly fluffed pillows of Hope and Change every night. I won’t argue against the full heart, and while I do make wishes for world peace from time to time, I usually just find room to hope that my peers and I will emerge from this recession having learned something valuable, having taken it as a chance to be innovative, motivated, and out-of-the-box with what we can offer to the world, whether the job market has its arms wide open for us or (more likely) not.

“Can you get us into that book everyone is talking about?” She looks up at me with hope that I might understand.

“The book?”

“Yes, that book on the computer.” She wipes a child’s nose, reaching between the peeling plastic cereal box lids on the food cart. “You are good with computers, right?”

“Do you mean Facebook?” I ask.

“Yes! That’s the one! Everyone keeps saying we need that.”

Two weeks into my volunteer year, I found myself itching for more opportunities to serve in the surrounding neighborhood.

While my three other roommates work in the Bronx teaching English to immigrants and coordinating daily activities for homeless women and their children, my volunteer work takes place in an office on 43rd street, working for my program’s non-governmental organization. On a daily basis, my work would be far removed from the borough that I longed to get to know beyond the week or two I spent on alternative spring break trips in college.

The urge to get more familiar with the borough led me to Sister Margaret and her community life center just one street away from my apartment in the Bronx, a place I could easily give spare hours to when my work in Manhattan wasn’t demanding a solid eight hours from my day.

Sister Margaret is the Executive Director of a community life center that doubles as a nervous system connecting people throughout the Fordham neighborhood. I met her in person after, for the first time since I was 12, a Google search failed me and produced no results, no number to call, no email to contact. The search engine spat back a blog that had not been updated since 2008 but was meant to suffice for a center that serves over 2000 people daily with everything from immigration services to housing.

We spoke for a while about the time I could give her and the roles I could play. She offered me a spot as an assistant teacher, I would spend my time guiding children to the bathroom and pumping hand sanitizer into a pinwheel of little hands.

“I can sing songs. I can dance. I can color. I can do whatever you need of me,” I told her. “But,” I continued, swallowing hard. “Do you need some help with your website?”

And that was the moment, the very first moment since arriving in the Bronx where I no longer felt like a helpless volunteer who would leave in 12 months without having made an impact. For once I was not burying myself in a pile of social problems with no foreseeable

answers, or sulking over the fact that it would take me the whole year to unearth just the questions I had about poverty in the Bronx. I had begun quilting my own purpose: to build a new website for her life center, to get her “into that book,” to lace together the strings of social media with the cords of social good.

If my generation knows one thing extremely well, it is social media. We know the utility of Facebook and how to put up a Wordpress site in ten minutes flat. We get the impact of Twitter and we can tag like we were back in elementary school and the streetlights hadn’t gone on yet. We were raised with our fingers click clacking on several surfaces at the same time, and although the adult media depicts us as motivated self-starters swinging around some serious entitlement issues in this bad economy, I tend to believe we are getting pretty good at this whole “pushing forward” motion, turning our resumes from white flags into paper airplanes.

“What do you want people to know when they look at the website?” I ask her between doodling notes and potential color schemes onto a fresh pad of yellow paper. “Beyond a theme or layout, what do you want them to see?”

We are cramped into a tiny office space she has made for me, officially embarking on a branding and identity process for her life center, but I’ve already noticed how this small, cluttered desk and old computer greet me much better than my desk in Manhattan. The space she has made is welcoming and warm; the wood surface is replenished daily with pictures, brochures, and documents from throughout the years to help me understand the history of Sister Margaret’s labor in the Bronx.

“That we don’t help people here,” she says, running her fingers along the front cover of an annual review created ten years prior, before picking it up to thumb through the pages. “I want them to know that we help people to help themselves. We may give them the services but they do the rest.”

She goes on to tell me how the center began thirty years ago with a single cup of soup and a roll, how helping one individual through

a soup kitchen led to six organizations sprawling and giving throughout the Bronx.

Even with all the relentless cuts in social services, Sister Margaret still keeps her vision for the center in pristine condition as if she opened her doors just yesterday with chicken noodle soup and a roll in hand.

“I’d like to see us open up a nursery in the future. That’s one of my dreams, to be able to extend childcare for newborns.” I am scribbling her words furiously onto the yellow pad of paper, my fingers aching to jot down every dream she digs up before me, every plan she still has for the center even in an aching economy.

Throughout the weeks of collaboration and planning, plotting a whole new look and an interactive site, I learned that Sister Margaret is an expert on beating hearts. She understands the slow, symphonic beat of a woman who has just lost her job and cannot afford to pay her rent or feed her children. She tunes into the quick, strident beats of a stampede of four year olds as they pour out into the playground after naptime. And the awe of it all is how she manages to translate every single beat, fast or slow, into a social service for someone in need. The woman is a master when it comes to matching heartbeats with social services but she knows nothing of online social networking. This is where the recession is hitting the life center the hardest. Sister Margaret struggles with money, grants, and cuts in funding, all while trying to keep up in a world that updates its status every five minutes. She deals with hundreds of flesh and blood individuals every day, but falls victim to a society that thinks she needs a better website.

But in the name of service and what I now know to be compassion, the two of us, spanning a forty-year gap, take time every day to teach one another. She teaches me to stay fixated on heartbeats even in an economy that hypnotizes with dollars signs. I teach her the sounds of social media cooing in the ear, the Zen beauty of a minimalist setup on a website, the pulsating potential of a blank Tumblr page. Together we show one another what is inside the box and teach how to use it to work outside. We work to close a generational and economic gap with heartbeats and hash tags, every single day.

“Can you change this job description for me?” She hands me the piece of computer paper. “Tell them that I want you. Everything that you did, I want that again.”

She needs to update the job description of the position I have held in the past six months and send it back to my supervisors for next year’s volunteer. I’ve done nothing listed in the first description and so I draft a new one, packed to the brim with my own added hope that the next volunteer will be as competent enough with keyboard shortcuts to keep the online networking of this life center afloat.

A knot ties in my stomach as I think about leaving this place, of another someone coming into my spot and learning to tie whatever I leave undone, but I think of all the progress that has emerged from this one year, a year that I thought would just be a waiting period. I thought I would wait out the storm of the recession as I stalled until the job market chose to embrace me and my generation. But that wasn’t the way it worked out.



The Janus-Faced Craigslist: Comedy, Tragedy, and Video Games

RYAN GLEASON

This is a story for the young and aimless. Well, scratch that; this is a story for certain people who consider themselves young and aimless. This is for young Americans itching themselves in the wake of college, or for the ingénues out there who threw themselves into a new city, desperate to paint or sing or scribble their way out of anonymity. If this story is going to work on any level you have to know a bit about me; don't worry, there really isn't much to know. I can spell myself out as such: a twenty-something (the lower half), degree-holding former English major, gratefully liberal, open-minded, and excited ... or just na ve. That's what this story is about: me, the sap, and the class mobility that let me jump from highbrow humanities to lowbrow (physically speaking) scrubbing of toilets with a few stops in between.

About two years ago, after managing to earn a humanities degree from a public university, a feat that requires some attendance, some manual bullshitting, and some heart, I decided I'd move from the DC area to Seattle. Sure there were reasons; I had a friend out here (something I've since learned we in fact all have), we had co-written a comic book, and we were going to make it all happen. I dragged some fellow grads along with me and off we went, road trip style. The road trip was uneventful: beautiful landscapes, subsequent pictures, drinking, smoking, and the occasional hijinks. We made it to Seattle, go figure. Days ticked off like seconds and before we knew it my friends and I had a place to stay, complete with rooms and mattresses of our own. This is when the economic pressures made themselves abundantly clear.

First, the credit card. I had busted most of that on the way over. My early swipes of invincibility with the card marked my road trip attitude, but like any good vanishing point, by the time I had to settle down and act like I lived in Seattle, my financial outlook was nonexistent. And second, the unemployment. It's not like I expected that by becoming a comic writer I would just stumble upon all the stacks of money eagerly waiting for me underneath my new doormat. You know, I just thought, well, I thought I wouldn't plop myself down and say, "now what?". The comic was a trickle, we needed a new, unpaid illustrator, needed to shop it around, needed to care, and I needed some money; but really I guess I was just dazed, crammed into a corner of the nation I knew nothing about. Where was my scholastic spine? My reassuring professors? My indispensable skills of interpretation? I needed to shut the fuck up and get a job.

So we needed internet. The sentiment became an empty drone amongst me and my roommates. We were headless job hunters if we didn't have our netz, more specifically, our Craigslist. Oh Craigslist, where would I be without your endless stream of hand-me-downs or your vast stacks of scams, gigs, and jobs? I have turned the Craigslist free section into material mounds and then into kingdoms. Are its seedy networks ushering in an era of digital agoras? I won't say, but I can attest that my bare Seattle home was transformed by Craigslist for the mere cost of the gas and the sweat it took to haul people's unwanted stuff. If I were someone who hadn't directly benefited from all this free nonsense, I might be concerned. I mean it's a perpetual loop of shedding things, they really do become mere things. Pictures you upload to an ad, just screaming neglect, begging to be whisked away by another owner. I don't like the attitude, but it has blessed me with plenty, which was just what my friends and I needed to jumpstart our life-building efforts. Furniture of every shape and size, ping pong tables, bad art, televisions, blenders, organs (musical or otherwise), and most most most importantly: most of the jobs I've ever landed.

But for a while we just didn't get the internet installed at our new place. The details behind this are fuzzy. I think it was a mixture of laziness, indecision, and maybe some identity verification. Whatever

the reason, we were hitting up the public access...a lot. This is trying for any young fuck who just assumes a browser is built into his arm. Unsurprisingly, cyber cafes (a term as outdated as “modem”) were scarce. We went to the libraries and waited for our turns to “surf” (cue now ancient poster of kids marveling over a screen glowing digital green). Every day a member of Seattle Public Library is entitled to 75 minutes of access. The clock starts as soon as you sign in. For the jobless this means a manic rush to update resumes, scan Craigslist – or as we’ve affectionately dubbed it: “the crag” – prepare letters, get ‘em out, rinse, repeat. If you can’t reflexively alt-tab between pages, you are dead in the water. We would each average 20 to 30 applications a session. From there you just have to wait. Landing an interview in the seas of the crag is tricky. There are things you can do to game it, little tweaks I refuse to go into, but at the end of the day it’s a crapshoot. Is an employer going to open your email amidst hundreds of applications? Are they really going to like what they see? Whatever, keep applying. This went on for about three weeks. And then Nintendo called me. Well, sort of.

It wasn’t Nintendo, it was a contractor they were using to edit games, and they wanted me to review grammar. Compared to the no job that I had, this seemed like an easy call. Nintendo! I like(d) video games! They made Smash Bros! I wanted to be a bro! Of course I’ll take the interview! I’ll gulp system-clearing potions to weasel past your drug tests! I’ll sign a piece of paper that says I get nothing but my meager money and that I understand that one day, possibly very soon, you will simply call to inform me I no longer work for you. I will not even think the words “union,” “401K” or “dental.” I’ll do it all, and more, with a smile.

None of this is really shocking, Craigslist job pages are plagued by an overpowering number of ads for limited-engagement, project-oriented work. You’ll usually find said ads saddled right beside listings by temp agencies clamoring for your attention and assuring you of the brilliance of your many qualifications. Agree, and like part of a demented collection, your name will become yet another row in their massive archive of the area’s technically employable. This all speaks to the mindfuck that is searching for jobs in such a gaping

crag. Being an at-will employee means that your relationship with the company can be ended by either side at anytime, no liability, no hard feelings, no severance pay. No union, nor worker protections, no vacation time. In all likelihood, if you’re a recent college grad, you’ve never felt so disposable. But for a video game company that needs to put in a quota of hours of review before their products hit international shelves, this sort of contracted work is standard operating procedure. Logic and destitution were licking the spindly hairs on the back of my neck, so I took the job. No further deliberation? Nah, I just wrote off the toil and doubt; a paid job meant my life in the city could continue.

What did I do exactly? I fixed in-game grammar. The translators turned the original Japanese into choppy English and I fixed the holes. If this sounds fun, then I’m writing it wrong. I’d work on one project at a time, for weeks and weeks until my thumbs ached and eyeballs burned. There wasn’t much accountability. I had to: A. not fall asleep and B. move my hands, press controller buttons, and keep my eyes on the screen. Aside from all that, I could be utterly empty. I was just a numerical contribution to a mandatory inspection, the reassuring (English-fluent) human presence that Nintendo needs to make everything check out. That reality, at times, was oppressively dull. Video games often have endings or just well worn tracks, and once they run their course, you can move on. That is, unless you’re getting paid to do just the opposite. Going through the same motions Monday through Friday allegedly looking for subtle in-game flaws simply stunned me, dismissing the “if you fall asleep, you’re fired” risk was no longer an option.

Most of my coworkers didn’t have a problem. Detailing them won’t do me any good, but let’s just say there are plenty of folk who can never turn off when it comes to video games. If they had breaks, these folks would bust out portable systems or video game magazines or their patented fanboy babble. I remembered what it felt like when I left my gaming machine on for too long and it got red hot, a sure signal that it was time to pick myself up and do something, anything that didn’t require a TV screen; well that’s what these people feel

like all the time, like a red hot box of fried wires, burned in pixels. I should also mention some of the awful diets I witnessed, including a horrifying breakfast combo of chips and Mountain Dew, a sight that is sadly becoming more and more common. Nintendo wants you stay healthy (isn't that why they built the Wii?), but they are also more than fine indulging contracted workers with strategically situated vending machines.

Even if it wasn't back-breaking labor (more on that soon), it was frustrating to see my creative dreams mashed into controller grime as I cycled through text screen after text screen. I was depressed over my contribution to the entertainment industry, often wondering how society had arrived at the point where customers found joy in what was, for me, drudgery. Are kids so restless that getting bombarded with a constant stream of novel games really is the pinnacle of fun? Probably, but I didn't have the energy to address the issues that were keeping me employed. I was resigned to keep working until they pulled the rug out from under me.

Why didn't I just leave? I could have kept applying, interviewing, etc. until something better stuck. I could attribute it to the outrageous attendance expectations of contracted workers or I could say it was the soul-fucking length of my commute (Seattle to Redmond is nothing, unless you jam it with every car, everywhere, all at 5 PM). The reality probably has more to do with my contract and my lack of money. The contract has a fatalistic draw to it; I think I wanted to see how long I would hold up before they axed me. There was something painfully fun about the idea of getting hurled to the curb by Nintendo, told to fend for myself. The scramble to see what's next for the old sap. Interestingly enough, plenty of the contractors I knew loved Nintendo so much that they would get canned, get in line for unemployment, and then just wait until Nintendo's contractors offered them another gig. This cycle gave them ample time to simulate their former jobs within the comfort of their very own parents' homes.

I lasted four months before they cast me aside. My historic inability to save whilst working a wage job continued, my last paycheck going

straight to my credit card and rent. Based on my ATM statement I had about 10 days to find something new, so I renewed my Craigslist frenzy, resolved to take whatever came first. The winner was house cleaning, and let me assure you that house cleaning remained the winner as it proceeded to whip my ass. I had worked my share of physical jobs, had done the restaurant thing and wasn't keen to do it again, so I thought house cleaning would be a great break. I quickly learned I am terrible at cleaning anyone's house, let alone the houses of people whose standards and wages are high enough for them to regularly pay cleaners. My childhood chores meant nothing. I left streaks on everything, couldn't get the hair off of toilets, and missed dust and spots constantly. When I discovered the existence of my lower back through a surge of toppling pain as I vacuumed yet another stairwell, I knew I was officially broken. If I hadn't quit when I did, they surely would have fired me a few days later.

That's pretty much the story, plenty of new work happened after that, and despite all the credit evaporating out of my card, I didn't have to crawl back to the parents. Of course it wasn't all that bad all the time. My work week was a drag, but I was living somewhere brand new. Seattle life was swirling all around me, it was my respite, my justification. They have lots and lots of water here, big trees, smatterings of culture everywhere! And on a regular weekend, I would get hammered and commiserate with the similarly precarious. When it really comes down to it though, my life has always been a far cry from any sort of real misery, there are padded buffers all over this place. I came with the education, I came with the internet, the credit card, the car that got us here. Way more people simply can't say the same. I am one of the fortunate ones, this tale being my first foray in making it in whatever urban job climate you want to call Seattle.

Take away what you will, be it the reality that more and more people are going to get contracted with no benefits, no guarantees, and numbing conditions, or that Craigslist is some sort of virtual thrift store deity, or that cleaning people, not me, I mean the ones who have been at it for years, deserve immense respect. But understand that survival in whatever environment you choose means unpredictability.

One day you're playing video games for a living, the next you're back at the library. You won't always have to spin the at-will employment wheel and take whatever new gig comes your way, but these days when jobs are tough to find but easy to lose and careers aren't hiring, sometimes you have to sit down on your Craigslist couch and figure out what's next.



The Shareable Job Search

REGAN McMAHON

I was a posting like so many others I'd seen on my screen during this past, long year of unemployment. I checked out the job description and nodded at each bullet point. Yes, I had done that. Yeah, I could do that. But there was something about the nature of the job that fit somebody else slightly better: my former colleague and fellow jobseeker, Alice. Suddenly I started to sweat.

The question was: Do I share?

In a competitive job market in a terrible economy, with hundreds of applicants vying for each job, one would think it's so dog-eat-dog out there that every jobseeker would guard each posting as closely as a treasure map. And in a struggling industry like mine—journalism—where layoffs and buyouts have been rampant during the past year, each job stands out like an island in a sea of qualified writers and editors.

But despite the intense competition, job listings are flying back and forth between friends, on virtual message boards and in professional groups formed on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, sparking headlines like “As the Economy Sours, LinkedIn’s Popularity Grows.” Online professional groups are popping up like '90s start-ups, luring people who work in the same field, often former colleagues, to check in every day for job listings posted by people who do what you do and know who's hiring.

It's not only helpful in a practical sense, it's comforting. As a comment posted to a Wisconsin Public Relations blog put it, “Not only did social media help me in my recent job search, but it also helped me know that I wasn't alone, which in many cases was the much-needed therapy I needed to get me on my feet again.”

When someone contacted me asking if I'd liked to join a group formed on LinkedIn called Bay Area Newspaper Workers Network, I thought what the heck, I'll give it a try. It's turned out to be an incredible free service, with strangers sending me daily alerts of job postings that fit my skills and experience.

Anyone can share a post, but the woman who manages the group works tirelessly to sift through Craigslist and other job sites to separate the wheat from the chaff and post only really substantial jobs in my field. I feel like she's my guardian angel, yet I've never met her.

Even more intimate are the daily emails among unemployed friends and former colleagues. “Just wanted to make sure you saw this,” reads the subject line of an emailed job posting. “You'd be perfect for this one,” writes another friend as he passes along a listing. “I'm sure you know about this job, but just in case...” reads another.

Even Craigslist offers a prompt on each posting that you can fill out to “send this listing to a friend.” All of the senders are as desperate for a paycheck as I am, but for some reason, they don't mind sharing information about jobs for which we might be in direct competition.

And then there are the personal contacts. People are passing out phone numbers like appetizers at a company Christmas party (remember those?). The smart kids are setting up informational interviews and walking away from a meeting, a lunch, or a coffee date clutching a handful of names and contact info they can use to reach out to that person's network of colleagues. Those still employed seem to have their compassion meter turned up and are opening their Rolodexes and email Contacts lists to their unemployed inquisitors when they have no job to offer but can at least share information.

The ghosts of all those sharing moments swirled around me as I stared at the job listing on my screen, contemplating whether to click “Forward” to my equally jobless friend Alice. There was no alternative marked, “Hog for Yourself.”

I tried to ignore those ghosts and started to think about who needed this job more. Her husband makes more money than mine ... she took the buyout more recently than I did, so she hasn't been out of

work as long... she had a higher salary than I did so she must have a better cushion... she's younger than I am so her chances of getting hired are better than mine.

Clearly I was more deserving. And besides, she'd never know. I promised myself I'd invite her to a celebration lunch after I got the job and when she said, "Gee, I'm surprised I never saw that listing," I'd say, "Me too."

But then I pictured my heart as puny as the Grinch's in his cartoon X-ray. I remembered all the job postings, company urls, phone numbers and emails of potential employers Alice had shared with me over the months, and I realized this was no time to be stingy. And since there was no guarantee I'd be called for an interview anyway, why shouldn't she have an equal shot? I took a deep breath and pushed the button: "Forward."

Neither of us got that job. And since that moment, her quest has veered in a different direction from the kinds of jobs I'm applying for, which is a relief. But if we each catch wind of a plumb job that really does suit both of us (which is entirely possible, since we are so similarly qualified), we'll just have to line up for the interview and see what happens.



Emergent by Design

VENESSA MIEMIS

It's October 2010, and I'm reclined in an all-expenses paid seat in business class on a flight to Berlin. I'm going there for two weeks to collaborate on a video project with a couple of artists I met online, then flying to Amsterdam to present the video to a room full of bankers at the largest financial services conference on the planet. I'm not a media producer, nor do I work in the financial industry. All I can think to myself is "How the hell did I get here?"

Rewind about a year and a half, and I've just started an MA in Media Studies at the New School in NYC. I have a vague sense that the Web is the future, and I want to understand what that means. I make the commitment to do the program full-time for two years. My husband thinks this might be my way of avoiding "getting a real job" for a while.

The thing is, I had a high paying corporate job. Between salary, benefits, and the free car, it was paying me well over six figures. Though rather soul-deadening, I had no idea what the alternative would be, and I was scared to lose the sense of security the job afforded me. I figured I'd just keep doing it until I had a nervous breakdown or they fired me - whichever came first.

Turns out it was the breakdown, but not the way I imagined.

I got a call from my father one afternoon telling me my mother, a vision of health at the age of 49, was in the hospital because of some stomach pain. Hours later she was diagnosed with stage four terminal ovarian cancer. It was completely out of the blue, and we were shocked. For her own reasons, she chose not to do the surgery or heavy chemo, and instead tried to rely on natural and alternative therapies. She fought bravely, but ultimately passed away shortly after her 50th birthday.

This was a pivotal moment for me, and at 25 years old I was asking myself "What the fuck am I doing with my life?" I realized how quickly everything can change, and I refused to waste any more time doing a job that left me empty. Why bother being unhappy when I could be dead tomorrow?

So I quit.

I was determined to find a calling that brought meaning and purpose to my life, and spent time trying several different things. Finally, after being involved with a web startup and feeling invigorated by the pace of change and innovation in the area, I made the decision to go to grad school.

Though I didn't have a vision of where my studies would take me, I was constantly inspired by how social media was being used to affect positive change in the world. So I started a blog (*Emergent by Design*) of observations about what was going on. I got on Twitter too - not to amass followers, but to discover information faster and from curated sources.

Without really paying attention to what was happening, my blog started getting more and more readers, and my network on Twitter continued to grow. My strategy was pretty simple: respond to each and every comment left on the blog in a respectful, well thought out manner. Reply to every tweet and retweet. Invite generative dialogue.

By doing this, I started building actual relationships and trust with people, even if it was only in 140 character bursts or short comment replies. I found that the web can be an effective medium for building community by being honest, expressing authenticity and vulnerability, and leading by example when it comes to the kind of interaction and engagement one expects to receive. Curiosity and playfulness help too.

The more ideas and explorations I put out there in my posts, the more it attracted like minded individuals from around the world to respond, give me feedback on my thoughts, and offer amazingly helpful links and resources I would not have found otherwise. People wanted to help me, and seemed vested in my success and eager to share in my victories. What an amazing feeling.

As energy and momentum gathered, it seemed like people were waiting for us to do something together. But I didn't know what to suggest. The idea of open distributed collaboration and co-creation sounded great, but how did you go about it?

The first project that manifested itself was Junto, an idea for an open discussion platform. The concept was to combine video conferencing with the intention of being publicly accessible and for the purpose of sharing knowledge and resources. The post I wrote explaining it was well received, and over 100 comments streamed in, offering encouragement and resources. A professor from Parsons reached out and offered to host the prototype on the New School server, a designer from Australia offered to put together a logo and UI mockups, and other collaborators around the world jumped in to experiment with it together. In less than a month, Junto was born.

The next project that came about was a video called *The Future of Money*. It started with an email I received from the Innovation Leader at SWIFT, a global financial messaging network for banks and financial institutions. He was inspired by some things I had written about the true meaning of wealth and value, and the ideas I'd been laying out about the future of money and currency. He wanted me to come speak at SIBOS, a huge financial services conferences that was to convene in Amsterdam.

<enter panic attack and *imposter syndrome*>

"You have nothing to offer. Your ideas are silly. What do you know about finance? They're going to think you're a joke. You will fail."

My mind paralyzed me and I almost turned down the offer. But my friends, family and online community said, "Go for it!" So I thought, what better way to express the emerging paradigm of a peer to peer, collaborative economy, than to show how it works by example?

I reached out to a video musician/designer team in Berlin, and asked if they'd be interested in co-creating a video for the conference. They were stoked, and even helped me find a great room to rent in their neighborhood, at a fraction of the price of a hotel room. They told me we could get interviews, editing and post-production done within 2 weeks.

I was both exhilarated and terrified.

Here I was, about to make a huge leap of faith: Traveling to a foreign country to work on a time-sensitive project with people who were essentially strangers.

But this is how the new economy works, where trust can be built in a networked environment with peers around the planet. Through blogs, Twitter, and video chats on Skype, we assessed each others' caliber and decided it was worth a shot to collaborate.

When that business flight landed in Berlin, I was greeted by Gabriel and Pati, an amazing couple and gracious hosts who immediately made me feel at home. Though I had the rented room they arranged for me, I ended up crashing many a night on their living room futon after intensive workdays on the project. We documented our activity for the public to follow those two weeks via videoblogs and tweets.

We launched an online crowdfunding campaign to garner support from the public while we completed a project we had already committed to doing for free. We managed to raise around \$6,000 in just a few weeks.

The presentation of the video at SIBOS went well, and raised some awareness about how our generation views money and wealth. It even got mentions in the Huffington Post and Fast Company, and has received over 20K views on *vimeo* to date.

That entire experience was a testament to the potential of this new emerging economy, where we can create new opportunities for ourselves and partnerships with people around the globe.

Finally, a few months ago, I completed my graduate degree. I've since teamed up with a group of collaborators on a new video series, *The Future of Facebook Project*. We're pushing the distributed collaboration meme further by framing this project under the banner of "*Open Foresight*." It's a methodology mashing up futures studies frameworks with open participation and media creation, with the intention of producing videos to raise awareness, spark dialogue, and move us towards shared understanding and meaning.

We've already had a successful crowdfunding campaign for the project on *Kickstarter*, and also received funding from our first Corporate Patron, *Innotribe*. We've done close to 30 interviews with incredible technologists, authors, futurists, and business leaders. The videos are already set to be presented at three conferences later this year.

And now here I am, in April 2011, with a career that is emerging from a simple blog and the genuine desire to connect communities and amplify the work of change agents and mission-driven organizations. I wouldn't have believed this was possible a year ago.

Now it seems I've built a brand, and can actually build off that foundation to generate an income for myself while also promoting this new paradigm of collaborative work and peer-to-peer culture. I've recently started writing a blog on *Forbes.com*, and was asked to contribute on *CNN.com* as well, giving me an outlet to spread the word to the mainstream. Businesses and organizations are starting to reach out to me for assistance with online community building, brand development, and how to communicate a message.

Now I see this life as an Epic Adventure, with each of us in control of being the hero of our own personal mission. Here are three big insights I've had these past few years that make me confident in this belief:

Your community already exists, and is waiting for you.

Your vision already exists - it is a shared one.

The tools of empowerment already exist, and are ready to be wielded.

The pieces you need really are there, they're just often hard to recognize. I went through a long phase of utter despair and hopelessness, and had no idea how to move forward. Only after putting myself out there with authenticity and a beginner's mind did I see I was surrounded by a community of change agents with the heart, the vision, and the capacity to act.

As we all move forward in building the kind of society we want to see and the lives we want to lead, we realize more and more that

everything is interconnected and we can go further by connecting, collaborating, and amplifying each other's efforts than by stubbornly trying to reinvent the wheel.

We're all in this together. Find your tribe and go change the world.



Organizing The Precariat

TOM JUDD

In the summer of 2009, I joined the approximately 4.4 million¹⁰ young people who were out of work and seeking a job during the Great Recession. Laid off from a paid organizing position working with renters and homeowners struggling with foreclosure, I was lucky enough to have an unemployment check to pay my student loans while I searched for work. During the fall I came into some luck - my friends who worked for a major Washington, D.C. nonprofit call center said they could get me a job. I would once again have the chance to do meaningful work while being able to pay the bills. They told me there were some issues at the job around pay and treatment of workers, but I was ready for the challenge. As an anarchist, I believe in fighting where I stand - be it in the workplace, my home or my neighborhood - and I would be entering a hot workplace with a number of like-minded people.

What I encountered at the call center was similar to other nonprofits - an office filled with dedicated, capable young people who put up with low pay and nonexistent benefits in the name of making a difference. Most of the people I worked with were women in college or who had recently graduated. A high-stress job with much second-hand emotional trauma from intense counseling with callers, low compensation, and lack of respect had led to high turnover in the past. Like a number of nonprofits I have worked for or observed, the supposedly social justice-oriented call center made a name for itself by providing a service to people in need while throwing workers under the bus and in the process exploiting both the needy and the employee. Important work was provided on the cheap

by committed people willing to forgo things like good pay and benefits, which led quickly to burnout. The dismal condition of the job market had led more workers to retain their jobs, however, which in turn led to a stronger sense of community in the office. I became involved in the incipient organizing effort, mostly observing as several strong, amazing women put much time and effort into laying the groundwork for a union campaign - researching, making contacts, mapping the office for who might be interested, and setting up meetings among those people. I would spend the next year alongside these inspiring women fighting for better wages, better working conditions, and dignity on the job.

Our preliminary organizing efforts - ranging from clandestine e-mails to workplace meetings - was initially met with indifference by the bosses. However, when workplace discontent was detected by management and did not rapidly disappear on its own, our demands were strangled by a massive management counteroffensive. The anti-union backlash took a number of forms; ultimately unhappy workers were sidelined or promoted, and part-timers crowded out in favor of salaried replacements. The previous sense of community was destroyed as workers were isolated with anonymous but highly sophisticated surveys followed by the disruption of their hours by new, full-time hires. Strong organizers were lured to accept coveted promotions to positions which gave them higher wages and kept them busy with new responsibilities. In the face of this restructuring, part-timers were left scrambling to keep their jobs.

There was a lot to be unhappy about for the staff at our call center. Wages for operators averaged between \$9 and \$10 an hour, and working forty hours a week was prohibited. These low wages and limited hours left many, including myself, qualifying for food stamps and Medicaid and contending with D.C.'s extremely high-rent housing market. Recent college graduates often have the added burden of paying student loans. All of these costs, combined with low pay, led more than a few to make the call center a second job while they worked elsewhere. Benefits were limited to case managers and others working full-time, and periodic 6-month raises had recently been eliminated. Contrary to D.C. law, we were not receiving sick leave.

10. Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Youth unemployment and employment in July 2009" The United States Department of Labor. Published August 28, 2009

In a very unpopular move which further angered workers, management removed internet access from operators' computers as collective punishment for one person's supposed misuse. At the same time, case managers retained internet access, a clear double-standard in trust and respect for everyone working there. A threat was then issued that "too much" talking with fellow workers on the job (call-related or otherwise) would be punished - an action which further proved that management was out of touch with the realities of working at a crisis call center. Other staff positions in the organization were well-compensated, and many of the people who held them were often dismissive or disrespectful towards operators.

Hierarchy was just as much present in the call center as any private organization, and there was a strong inequality between those who managed and those who worked. Changes on the hotline, big or small, were implemented with little or no consultation with employees. The manager of the hotline would waste staff time by using them as a sounding board for her personal issues, and case managers would have to fill in for her during frequent absences. The executive director ruled by decree - no matter how bad or petty her decisions were, she was accountable only to herself. She bragged about the hotline in public, but didn't know the names of anyone who worked there, including the person who had worked there the longest. When discontent was voiced, management responded with either threats or pleas to cheer up.

Frustration levels for staff at the hotline continued to rise. Meetings among staff operators were held outside of work to talk about how to respond to the internet situation. Where workers felt unappreciated, we held get-togethers. Monthly trainings became accountability sessions for management. As our efforts gained momentum, pressure continued to build. After several months of organizing, our little impromptu committee was weighing whether to formalize and start a union drive in earnest. The decision to reach out to a union was not a simple one. Supporters of the decision argued that it would be the best way for us to have resources and support for our struggle. However, we encountered and experienced a certain amount of

skepticism, pessimism, and most frequently ignorance about what a union would mean for the hotline. There was also hesitance to risk unionizing, understanding that we could lose our jobs if that word was connected with us. While these discussions were happening, however, we did not anticipate the coming reaction from management.

Faced with an office infected by "low morale," the executive director and her cronies were now determined to kill the sickness through a form of management kindness. An official but anonymous survey was issued with the declared intent to figure out what workers were so unhappy about. Plenty of room was allowed for us to voice our concerns, with the eventual promise that the executive director would read them all. Action on some of the grievances was also implied, instilling some hopefulness in previously disgruntled staffers. After a few weeks, management rolled out a laundry-list of changes culled from their survey. Some, such as restoring the internet and modest raises for operators, were intended to appease unhappy workers and smother discontent. Along with these incentives, however, was a restructuring plan which would replace most daytime hours for operators with salaried, full-time positions. Unhappy workers could either buy in or be squeezed out.

The organizing effort was effectively killed-off with this sort of "kindness". Most of the organizing committee applied for and received promotions further up the hierarchy in the office. Operators who had remained after months of mistreatment began quitting or scaling back their hours. Now daytime hours are almost filled with full-time operators, all but two of whom have never worked there before. We now know that this is a common tactic in the anti-union industry - with analogies comparing organizers to mosquitoes, they suggest "draining the swamp" of workplace grievances and issues generating the organizing to kill the disease. It was bitterly ironic to those who knew that the same executive director who was using these tactics had been employed as a high level union organizer herself in her earlier career.

In spite of its failure, our effort to organize our workplace was worthwhile. The conditions on the hotline, combined with what we

perceived as a critical mass of people interested in changing them, demanded we do something, and we responded to the call. While the failure of these efforts was due in large part to the boss and her actions, our own mistakes are important to note as well. One major issue we contended with was the high turnover in who was doing the organizing. What originated as regular 6-10 person meetings of people who had worked in the office for a year or more became 3-4 person meetings of newer folks, including myself, as other people either left their jobs or, more often, fell away because they felt self-conscious about organizing while they were not in the worst positions at work. Case managers and assistant case managers wanted to step aside for operators to be in charge, but most made little effort to make that happen beyond not coming to meetings anymore. In addition, valid issues raised early on in the process around its lack of inclusiveness and leadership from people of color on the hotline were never fully addressed, and when they were raised many people reacted by pulling back from organizing altogether.

Furthermore, I don't think we as a committee armed ourselves with enough knowledge or strategized enough about how to organize our workplace. The idea of an 'organizer training' had been discussed very early on, but for a number of reasons never came together. The people most involved in the organizing, myself included, were also slow and more than a little hesitant to expand that circle, in part because we didn't know how and also because of the risk involved. Some of the basic organizing practices that we were encouraged to use - such as creating a formal list of e-mails and phone numbers - were done but not shared with our contact in the labor movement, thus creating difficulty in moving the process forward. I would also argue that we didn't have enough guidance from the people we contacted in the labor movement. None of us had organized a workplace before, and while we were provided with a fair amount of knowledge about unions in general, more solid ideas of what organizing could have looked like as well as best practices used by successful campaigns would have been very helpful. A full or part-time organizer working with us on a regular basis may also have helped - not to do the organizing for us, but to check in with us and throw around ideas, make suggestions, etc.

Young workers get a rough deal in this economy. The skyrocketing cost of college has left many like myself deeply in debt, and the well-paying jobs with which to pay it off are few and far between, demanding years of work experience or higher (and more expensive) degrees. Benefits are often shoddy or out of reach for entry-level positions such as those on the hotline, and job security is weak or nonexistent (I've worked three entry-level jobs in the three years since I graduated). This leaves many young people bouncing from job to job, and often either not invested enough in the job to want to change it for the better or so concerned about the idea of losing it that they don't want to risk standing up against unfair conditions.

The non-profit industrial complex is also at fault in many ways. In an economy where the remnants of the US welfare state are shrinking, nonprofits have increased both in number and size. They claim the responsibility of aiding the people who are losing in the economy, yet at the same time, funding to these organizations remains limited and the conditions for money are dictated by powerful foundations. An unfortunate reality of limited funding may mean limited wages and benefits for those working at an organization. However, as the situation on the hotline illustrates, nonprofits will often be just as unfair to their workers as their private sector counterparts. Caring, socially-minded young people attracted with the promise that their jobs will make a difference and be meaningful may put up with poor working conditions for years because they prioritize the work over themselves, and management uses this to its advantage. Meanwhile, executive directors and staff higher in the hierarchy will pull in hundreds of thousands of dollars, with full benefits packages on top.

How long will these temporary changes, rearrangements, and concessions that defeated organizing at the call center last? Part-time operators are still underpaid and lack benefits. There is now a greater presence of inequality, as people doing the same work get treated very differently. The culture of the hotline has been uprooted for the most part, and management remains unaccountable and free to do as they please. However, the restructured hotline is already deteriorating, as three full-timers have left in the past few months.

Full-timer operator pay is higher than part-time, but not high enough for much retention of workers, and they feel the stress of unfair overtime rules. Even as many people have left and some of the more rebellious workers have advanced in the hierarchy, there are still workers there who participated in the struggle. The seeds of discontent remain, it's a question of when they will surface again.

Ultimately, I'm proud of the effort we made to organize, and I hope that other young workers can take some lessons from our experiences.



How to Start a Worker Co-Op

MIRA LUNA

In the age of unemployment, downsizing, and outsourcing, where can a poor soul find a job? Well, maybe it's time we create our own. Self-employment is an option and can seem freeing, but it's hard to do everything yourself and find time for a non-work life. The worker coop is an alternative to the isolation of self-employment and the exploitation of traditional jobs.

Worker coops can be more satisfying than working for the man. Worker-owners aren't forced into a hierarchy, and they have more say over what the business does than traditional employees. You still have to be responsible managing a coop, maybe more so, but your coworker-owners will likely be nicer and more understanding of personal needs and quirks than middle-management at any corporation. You will probably make more money by cutting out the investors and managers, unless you were one of them, in which case: welcome to egalitarianism! In typical low-paying industries, worker-owners can make several times what they were pulling in as employees. For example, in Petaluma, California, Alvarado Street Bakery worker-owners take home around sixty-thousand dollars a year – a Hell of a lot better than working for minimum wage. As a worker-owner, you are less likely to get laid off, both because coops prioritize steady employment over short-term profits, and because they are more sustainable than their conventional counterparts.

So what is a worker coop? It's an enterprise owned and democratically controlled by its workers. There are endless variations on coops, which means there are many questions to consider before forming your own unique venture. Remember you are starting a real business, not a hippie commune! If you've never started a business before, you will need support – read up on how to start a firm, get advice from coop development organizations (listed below), and talk to coop-

friendly lawyers and accountants. You will need a business plan, coop-specific legal incorporation documents, and capital to finance you in the beginning. Additionally, you will want an organization plan detailing how you will run your coop cooperatively.

One of the first barriers to starting a worker cooperative is finding others willing to be part of the initiating group. If you are working at a business that wants to be converted to a coop (whether the managers know it or not), you may already have your members. To find new folks, it may be helpful to send an announcement to any work-related listservs (like for groups interested in food justice, hackers, and even hippie communes) and post flyers at related businesses or job assistance centers in your area. Invite people to a meeting for your new enterprise or better yet, hold a general coop matchmaker start-up fair where people can meet, get to know each other and discuss first steps. Invite pre-existing coops to offer initial advice, then set up a listserv or wiki that helps people find each other by posting new coop opportunities on an ongoing basis. Some worker cooperative development organizations listed below can help with this.

Once you've gathered your initiating group, here are some questions to consider when forming a worker coop:

- What is your common goal and purpose? Fair employment for people of color, access to healthy food, sustainability, independent media, selling locally produced goods? This will make decision-making easier and get you through the tough times.
- Are you forming a new business or converting an old one? If it's new, is there a market for your service or product, do you have a niche, what is your expertise? Being a coop gives you a leg up, but you still must provide a needed product or service that competes in the greater, cutthroat capitalist marketplace ... until it collapses. If it's a drowning business, is the owner willing to sell and how will you save it? You may need to make major changes to make it sustainable.
- Who will be on your team? It helps to have people in your crew with experience in your product or service, skills in running the different parts of a business (management, accounting, marketing, etc.) or

at least friendly consultants on hand to do these things, as well as people skills (communication, meeting facilitation, decision-making). Your team needs to really be into the coop model, even if they learn the details later. Remember you will be making a long-term commitment to spending 40+ hours weekly together, depending on each other for survival, making major decisions together, and caring for each other (that sounds like marriage!).

- How will new worker-owners join? Trial periods are highly recommended – think dating, engagement, then marriage – no need to rush. Some coops have a buy-in requirement to become an official owner. This can be in an initial lump sum investment, periodic deductions from paychecks, or sweat equity contribution to demonstrate serious long-term commitment and give equal power. Training new worker-owners how to run the business as a cooperative is crucial – people are often trained in the business world to compete, control, and manipulate, not cooperate or communicate. On the other hand, people who are into cooperation often don't have business skills or work-specific expertise. Your team really needs both.
- How will you manage your coop? Collectively, with rotating representative managers, professional hired managers? Usually big coops have more hierarchy and job divisions. Small coops tend to collectively manage and pitch in to run the different parts of a business. There is no one way, but democracy rules. Disguised and non-consensual hierarchies though can be particularly damaging to morale.
- How, when, and who will make decisions? Consensus, super-majority, majority? It helps to clarify the process in detail and delegate minor or certain types of decisions to individuals or committees so you don't spend too much time in meetings. Believe me, long indecisive meetings have killed more coops than the financial crisis. On the other hand, transparency, inclusion and frequent communication maintain the cohesiveness and trust of the group. Consensus works in small groups that get along and have a lot in common. In bigger, more diverse groups, it can create enough inertia and conflict to stifle a business. I like using modified

consensus (try to get everyone's enthusiastic agreement if possible) and super-majorities as a good middle path. The key here is not voting-rule dogma but developing a communication process that allows everyone to be heard and resolve disputes fairly.

- How much money will you need and where will you get funding? From your new worker-owners, a loan from the former owner, a loan from a bank (try one that has loaned to coops successfully), or a grant for worker-coop start-ups? Be realistic about your budget – people may be leaving their lifeline paycheck and you need to make sure you have enough funds for everyone to make it until the business becomes profitable – or non-profitable if that's your bag. One failed coop can give them all a bad rap.

Whew! That sounds like a lot of work. But worker-owners I've talked to say in the long run it's totally worth it. There are resources listed below to help you get started, including worker-coop development organizations. Starting a new coop can create jobs, not just for you, but also for people who may have never had the opportunity to own a business or earn a living wage. Worker coops are part of a larger movement to create an economy that is democratic, just, and takes care of everyone. And it can start with you and your coworkers.

Reading Resources:

The Worker Cooperative Toolbox

Steps to Starting a Worker Coop

A Technology Freelancer's Guide to Starting a Worker Cooperative:

Worker Coop Development Organizations:

The US Federation of Worker Cooperatives

The California Center for Cooperative Development

The National Cooperative Business Association

The Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives (if in the SF Bay Area)



INTERMEZZO

Get on The Lattice - Astri von Arbin Ahlander and Yelizavetta Kofman ➤



Get on The Lattice

ASTRI VON ARBIN AHLANDER AND YELIZAVETTA KOFMAN

The Bubbles Burst

When the Class of 2011 throw their caps in the air, most won't have job offers waiting for them. Instead, many graduates will prepare to move back home with their parents, to take yet another unpaid internship, or to accept any old job that will help pay off their student loans.

It was an entirely different scene when we graduated from Middlebury College on May 27, 2007. On that day, the Dow Jones was at a high of 13,507 points, and climbing. Bill Clinton, the commencement speaker, gently reminded us to be mindful of people in our society and around the world who haven't been blessed with the many gifts we had been given ("The gift of a fine mind, the gift of a chance to be here, the gift of all the choices you have when you leave."). We tried our best at humility while taking in Mr. Clinton's grave, important words, but it was hard to contain the aura of invincibility and optimism in the air. The world was ours for the conquering. And in just a short while, many of our classmates were going to cash in their college credentials for real world currency: entry-level jobs.

The most praised of our peers were heading into lucrative corporate jobs as management consultants, bankers, analysts, and paralegals. They were going to work for prestigious firms in exciting cities: McKinsey in Boston, Sullivan & Cromwell in New York, JP Morgan in London. Quite a few of our classmates signed on with Lehman Brothers (Dick Fuld, the company's CEO, was also listening to Bill Clinton speak on that intermittently rainy day in May—his son was graduating too.) As at most selective institutions that year, post-college chatter centered around signing bonuses and apartment hunting plans.

And then there was the two of us. We were despondent. Neither of us had jobs. This was over a year and a half before the sudden collapse of Lehman Brothers and the financial meltdown, so there were plenty of jobs out there. We had opportunities, we just hadn't signed on any dotted line. So why the graduation-day sulking?

For starters, we were grossly underwhelmed by what we thought were our post-college choices: under-stimulating corporate jobs, leading to law or business school, and many billable hours and first-class red-eyes later, financial success. Or some other kind of job, in the arts or at a non-profit, perhaps, which would be poorly paid and probably administrative anyway. Going corporate was the sure bet – and the difference between the sure thing and anything else felt huge in terms of future earnings and respect. Besides, corporate was pretty much the only thing on the menu at our career services office, whose posted job openings read like a list of the Fortune 500. The jobs our families and our schools pointed us toward struck us as homeogenous and lifeless, and we wondered why that was.

The other reason for our despondency was that we inadvertently stumbled onto uncharted territory for college students, openly questioning how our future careers would fit in with our future family lives. It started out innocently enough: We were lounging in the sunshine with some girlfriends who, like us, were only days away from graduation. Apropos the future, a popular topic, we asked our friends what they thought they would do when they had children. At first, they seemed confused. Could we clarify? We guessed that we could, though our question had been spontaneous; at this point we weren't yet armed with questionnaires. What would they do about their jobs when they had children, how would they make it work? We had expected answers involving words like "sharing," and "flexibility," or maybe even "sheer force of will." Instead, our friends' nearly uniform response was a fumbling explanation that they guessed they would take a couple of years off working. As in quitting? As in being a stay-at-home mom? *What?*

These friends of ours were intelligent, educated, and ambitious young women. None of them spoke about quitting with unequivocal

enthusiasm, but rather with a reluctant sense of necessity. Never would we have thought our peers considered their options so limited. The crux seemed to be that most of these women (all of them middle or upper-middle class, in their early twenties) had been raised with stay-at-home mothers, and all of them believed that a parent staying home full time was the ideal childcare arrangement for young children. But why didn't a single one of them mention the father of these future children when they talked about finding a way to balance their professional and personal lives? Why did they seem to think it was their burden to bear alone?

Riled up after our alarming lawn conversation, we tracked down some of our male friends and posed the same question to them: how did they expect to balance work and kids? Their responses were comically vague. The most common reference was to Little League, whatever that had to do with anything.

Then we asked some established professionals—mostly friends of our parents and older alumni—what would happen to an employee who took a few years of leave, and they told us such a move would likely stop a high-level career in its tracks. We poked around on the Internet and discovered that no American employer was going to grant a few years of parental leave anyway—they weren't required to provide any at all, and the very best offered at most a couple of months, often to women only.

What started with a few questions about combining parenthood with a career, snowballed into more and more questions about the day-to-day of corporate work culture in America—about flexibility (mostly rhetoric), about face-time (ubiquitous) about sick leave (not guaranteed) and vacation (an average of 10 days for the first 5 years).

As we contemplated our first post-undergraduate step, we suddenly felt like all the air had been let out of our balloon—our inflated collegiate egos a fine metaphor for the nation's economy, we would soon discover. The new picture of working life that emerged was nothing like the one we had imagined. We thought we were going

to have rocket careers, happy children, and passionate, supportive partners with stellar careers of their own. But when we tried to break all this down, it just didn't add up. When, exactly, were we supposed to have children if 25-40 was when we had to prove ourselves at work? How were you supposed to bring kids up, if you and your spouse both work 50 hours a week?

We tried tinkering with various scenarios. What if you and your spouse work part-time while your kids are young, and then ratchet back up a few years later (you'll have decades to catch up, after all)? No, we were told that scaling back, even for a short time, signals to employers that you're not serious about your career, that you're not interested in making partner, for example. Part-time wasn't even an option in many jobs. But we do want to make partner! So do our friends, guys and gals alike! This work system was all *wrong*! As we prepared to receive our diplomas, we couldn't shake the feeling that the game was rigged from the start.

Of course, our initial rock-star-by-30 outlook was incredibly naïve – but, admit it, you had similarly rosy expectations. Which leads us to another major realization we had: Our generation has a very poor sense of the options and limitations we're likely to face, and how best to prepare for the work-life gauntlet. This is shocking considering how easily and routinely we research every other aspect of our lives (closest Thursday night happy hour, cheapest flight to Kuala Lumpur, best hairdresser in a five-mile radius, etc.).

We found our collective cluelessness so surprising, and so disturbing, that we decided to do some research about how our generation, the so-called Generation Y, really sees the challenging dance move that is the work-life balance. We spent the year after graduation asking other college students and recent grads about what they were hoping for, professionally and personally, in their own lives and how they planned to achieve their goals. We traveled to New York, Madrid, Paris, Stockholm, and Moscow. We found interview subjects in bars and parks and online. We drank coffee in every café in Paris and beer in smoky underground members' clubs in Moscow.

That's right, it was a pretty tough life. We told our sponsors that this Grand Tour was about giving other young people the information we wish we'd had before graduating college, but really it was about blind self-interest. We were terrified. We figured we could at least learn from other people's mistakes before we messed up our own lives. Maybe we could even help other Gen Yers in the process.

What we didn't anticipate was that less than a year after we ditched our first job offers for tape recorders, a global financial crisis would spark a level of debate beyond our wildest dreams. We now live in a critical times. The financial crisis in America and the consequent fall-out constitute a potential paradigm shift. Suddenly, everything is up for debate. With men bearing the brunt of the lay-offs, and taking it very hard, society at large is starting to question whether it's healthy for one person to shoulder the financial well-being of an entire family. With women becoming the sole-breadwinners in more and more families, the question of why women earn less than men—and what can be done about it—has new urgency. With people losing their jobs, and the benefits that comes with those jobs, we're starting to question whether an employer-based benefit system makes sense when a rapidly growing fraction of the workforce are freelancers and independent contractors. With finance disgraced, young people are wondering what careers will bring them respect and fulfillment. Tighter budgets have forced us, as individuals and as a nation, to think about what is really important. We're at a point of transition. The question is: which direction should we go?

Our answer is simple: get on the lattice or die.

The corporate ladder

What the hell is a lattice? Bear with us for a bit. Surely, you've heard the term "the corporate ladder." To succeed in a career you have to climb up the well-defined rungs of a ladder: Up, up, up, until – nope, just up.

The corporate ladder is a wonderfully clear visual—it's also the epitome of inflexibility. There are really only two directions you can go on a ladder: up or down. There's little room for sidesteps or pauses, let alone for backtracks. Consider a Harvard study that surveyed alumni

15 years after graduation. They estimated the average financial penalty for someone who took a year and a half off and then returned to work. In medicine, that person earned 16 percent less than a similar doctor who had not taken time off, and that's actually the lowest penalty – so keep at it pre-meds. Among graduates that didn't get a graduate degree, the gap was 25 percent. For both lawyers and Ph.D.'s it was about 29 percent. And for people who work in finance and consulting, it was a whopping 41 percent. And that's for taking 1.5 years off. Not the 2 or 3 that our smart, ambitious girlfriends were talking about. Fifty-nine percent of an average finance salary is still a large chunk of change, even today, but what it means is that taking 1.5 years off puts you on a completely different track than the worker who managed, somehow, to stay on the ladder.

We might be okay with the inflexibility of the ladder model if we were guaranteed stability in exchange. That was the deal in past decades: Workers were often rewarded with a stable career and a gold watch at the end of a lifetime of loyal employment. But the working world we enter now looks very different from the one our parents entered then. The rungs of the ladder are not given; the ladder may in fact end, abruptly, after years of dedicated investment.

The reasons for the demise of the corporate ladder model are complex, but at the most basic level it comes down to flexibility. Our globalized, competitive world demands flexibility. Employers want to be fluid, hiring and firing with the markets increasingly fickle whims. For all the benefits of ladder careers in terms of stability and institutionalized knowledge, it's just not flexible. So in the long run, it's out.

What's more, ladder careers only work for a tiny fraction of the workforce—the ever elusive "ideal worker." The ideal worker can work all the time, year-round, and has few responsibilities outside of work. Guess what? The ideal worker is a man – a man with a stay-at-home wife to take care of everything else. Perhaps our readers snicker at such a dated idea, but when you look at the corporate ladder world, it's not set up to for individuals to deal with family and personal responsibilities. Things like taking care of a sick parent or picking up your kids from school or even having kids for that

matter! Nevermind that the ideal worker model is a recipe for a heart attack. Nevermind that in the past 30 years there has been a momentous increase in dual-earner households and single-parent families. Never mind that today, the majority of college graduates are women. Companies still expect that a man with a stay at home wife will show up at the office.

Even if men still wanted to shoulder the financial burden of their family alone and women were dying to give up their careers to tend the hearth and all that, the *Mad Men* set up just isn't a possibility for 98 percent of us anymore. Most families *need* two breadwinners to pay the bills these days. That's the twenty-first century reality.

So, what is life like for dual-earner families in a corporate ladder world? First of all, get ready to put in a whole lot of hours. Over the past twenty-five years, the combined weekly work hours of dual-earner couples with children under eighteen at home has increased by an average ten hours per week, from 81 to 91 hours. At the same time, with anxiety about the future and getting into college at an all time high, parenting has actually become more intensive. But the majority of employers still expect their employees to act as though they have no other responsibilities outside the office. It's downright taboo to use a family commitment as an excuse in a work setting – it may be superficially accepted, but it'll “mommy-track” you faster than you can say “Baby Björn.”

The U.S. government has been pathetically slow to respond to the changes in our society. Here's a shocker: the U.S. is one of only four countries in the world – and we're talking about the whole world, not just developed countries – that doesn't guarantee some form of paid parental leave. The other three countries are Papa New Guinea, Lesotho, and Swaziland. Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, employers in the United States have to offer 12 weeks of unpaid parental leave, but that only applies to employers with over 50 employees. More importantly, who can afford to take unpaid leave? Workers aren't even guaranteed any paid sick leave or vacation. In the 2011 study, *“Failing its Families: Lack of Paid Leave and Work-Family Supports in the US,”* Human Rights Watch

calls a spade a spade: the situation for American families today is a human rights violation.

To give you some perspective, out of the top 20 economies in the world, 18 guarantee their workers at least 30 days of paid vacation. In Sweden, new parents have 18 months of paid parental leave, which they can split as they see fit and with 2 months reserved for the father. Sweden also guarantees unlimited days to take care of sick children. Yes, Sweden's family policies are exceptional, but America's stand out as being exceptionally bad.

Are we freaking you out? Don't panic. We're not going to lie to you: it is scary out there. And despite reading countless books and reports and articles on these issues, we haven't come across one magic cure-all. The best antidote to the inflexible ladder culture we've found is embracing and pushing for a whole new culture: A lattice culture.

What is a lattice culture?

A lattice looks like several ladders combined into a sort of web. On a lattice, the possible path is not simply up or down like it is on a ladder. You can choose to move up, down, diagonal, to the side. A lattice allows you to pause, to slow down, to switch jobs and fields more freely than a ladder does. The lattice is the model for a career track characterized by flexibility. And, ultimately, it is a model that takes into account the reality of modern workers. It means you wouldn't have to completely get off track to fulfill your personal commitments or adventures.

Sounds great. But how do we get there?

The truth is that it's going to take serious changes to our current ladder culture, especially to the way we as a society think about work and career building, for a lattice lifestyle to be possible for a significant chunk of people. We're not there yet. Not even close. That said, there is hope. There are people out there in the U.S. who, despite all odds, are successfully leading a lattice-like lifestyle. For example, bloggers Amy and Mark Vachon have recently come out with a book, *Equally Shared Parenting*, that is full of couples who

rearranged their lives to make a lattice lifestyle work. Often this involves both people in a couple asking employers to go part-time or to flextime. Flextime means you work the same amount of hours, but you choose your own start and end times. It enables you to work 4-day weeks, for example.

We have to be honest with you. These kind of arrangements are not possible for everyone. We talked to a computer programmer in Moscow who told his employer he would like to work from 7 to 3, instead of 9 to 5. His services were highly valued, the company had an accommodating outlook, and his employer agreed. On the other hand, a TV producer we talked to in New York asked his employer for extra vacation days instead of a raise and the employer flat out said, “Nope, against company policy.” Not all employers are going to be agreeable.

Switching to a lattice lifestyle, even if your employer is willing, also means readjusting your expectations. You really can’t have it all, all the time. A flexible lattice lifestyle will probably mean that you earn less money, at least for a time. If you want to be the CEO of Coca Cola by the time you’re 35, you can stop reading right now. It’s not going to happen. We realize that someone *has* to be the CEO of Coca Cola. For now, that person is probably going to be a man with a stay at home wife. It’s true: 97 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are men. Of the women CEOs, only 30 percent have children. But this doesn’t have to be the case in the future. There are alternatives, even at the very top.

Take job-sharing, which we learned about while talking to a newspaper editor in Sweden. He shares his position with another person. When he went on paternity leave, the newspaper wasn’t left scrambling because the top position wasn’t in the hands of just one person. They were prepared. Another alternative we heard about was hiring temporary workers to fill in for those on leave; this way younger workers can cut their teeth in a position with real responsibilities and the company can have a test run to see if they are worth hiring full time.

In Europe, and especially in Scandinavia, whole societies are

increasingly working together to make a lattice culture possible. The government guarantees generous leaves and employers support these leaves with their own, internal policies. In France, freelancers pay into an unemployment fund, so that when they experience gaps in employment they too have a safety net.

In the U.S., we’re still scrambling. We still live in a ladder world. But in a society where golden watches and forty-years in one company are rarities rather than norms, where female labor force participation and changing masculine expectations break down the model of the ideal worker, where people jump from job to job, and perhaps from field to field, where innovation and risk-taking are key to success, the ladder is outdated. The lattice is the present and future.

It would be nice if all of society recognized this. Because we can achieve so much more together than we can as mere individuals. It’s asking a lot for you alone to make demands of an indifferent employer, as opposed to if new national policies were backing you up. Without a doubt, America needs employment reform: Universal health care, paid parental leave, sick leave and, vacation policies would be a good start.

But until our society gets its act together and offers workers and families those basic building blocks of a lattice lifestyle, individuals are going to have to make it work themselves. There is no blueprint for this. But after researching the hell out of these questions, and interviewing students as well as young and seasoned professionals for hours upon hours, we’ve come up with some basic advice.

How to Get on the Lattice

Number one: Become educated about the realities of the workplace and the career you would like for yourself. You should do this early, preferably when you’re still in college, but it’s never too late. Research the hours and conditions required of the particular career you’re interested in and weigh that against what you want for your personal life. As work-life balance crusader Nigel Marsh said in his *2011 TED talk*, “Certain jobs and career paths are fundamentally incompatible with being meaningfully engaged on a day to day basis with a young

family.” Think corporate law, management consulting, investment banking, CEOdom. Be realistic. Talk to people you admire. Don’t just ask them about what graduate school they went to and how they got their first job, ask them about the challenges, ask them about how they balance their work and family lives practically and emotionally. You may not love what you hear, but you’ll learn.

Number two: Decide what is really important to you. Whether it’s being geographically mobile, or working in the outdoors, or having control over your time, or being in a position of power, or being a very present part of your children’s lives, or living lavishly. Be honest with yourself. Make sure you know what it is you want so that you don’t find yourself, ten years down the line, with a life that doesn’t fit you. Again, be realistic. If having a flexible schedule is high on your list, for example, come to terms with the fact that you may not be able to have a professional career that gives you great deal of managerial power. If you want to be a very hands-on parent, don’t count on being able to balance that with a 60-hours-a-week gig.

Number three: Talk openly with your partner about all the tricky stuff early on-- what you expect from one another, who’s going to do what and earn what. It can be a pretty awkward conversation to have, but it’s necessary if you’re going to be serious about somebody. Love works in mysterious ways, but love may not be enough if you find out, too far down the line, that your spouse has wildly different expectations when it comes to division of responsibilities at home.


Number four: Don’t be afraid to ask. Do your research, make a good case, and you may be surprised how much your employer will be willing to accommodate. You create value and employers really are loathe to lose a solid worker. Workplace culture *can* change. But it will take a critical mass of employees demanding more flexibility. Let’s each take one for the team, Gen Y.

To conclude: Know what you want. Find out what a certain career will demand of you and how that weighs against your personal goals. Make sure you and your future partner are on the same page as soon as possible. Most of all, pause in the rush to excel that you’re caught

up in, and ask yourself the important questions: What kinds of hours and working conditions come with the particular career I’m thinking of pursuing? What kind of standard of living do I want to have? What do I expect from a partner? What does he or she expect from me?

It’s a mistake we all tend to make, skipping over the tough questions, because, well, they’re *hard*. But, remember, articulating the question is the first important step toward finding the answer.





LIFE

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How to Build a Housing Co-op - [Mira Luna](#) >

The Gen Y Guide to Collaborative Consumption

BETH BUCZYNSKI

When our parents graduated from college, the bachelor's degree was a coveted badge of honor. It gave applicants instant cred (and usually a larger paycheck) no matter what the job. Now, having a bachelor's degree does nothing to make an applicant stand out from the masses. And if you're applying for a job well below your skill level because you're *desperate for a paycheck*, that B.S. degree will probably get your carefully crafted resume tossed in the trash.

American youth are slowly realizing that the old system is broken, and no longer holds the answer to all their dreams and desires. We're discovering that stable, satisfying careers can be found outside the offices and factories around which our parents and grandparents built their lives. We're acknowledging that the pursuit of bigger, better, and faster things have plunged our country into a time of despair and difficulty. We're convinced that business as usual isn't an option any longer--but what's the alternative?

Together, we're learning that instead of waiting for politicians and corporations to fix the system, it's possible to create a better one of our own, right under their noses. A new way of living, in which access is valued over ownership¹¹, experience is valued over material possessions, and "mine" becomes "ours" so everyone's needs are met without waste.

11. Florida, Richard. "The Case for Access Over Ownership in Housing" The Atlantic. Published: June 4, 2010.

If these ideas get your blood pumping, there's good news: young people all over the world are already making them a reality. It's called collaborative consumption¹², (or the sharing economy¹³) and it's changing the way we work, play, and interact with each other. It's fueled by the instant connection and communication of the internet, yet it's manifesting itself in interesting ways offline too¹⁴.

If you're ready to connect with people who can help you save money, pursue your passions, and reduce waste, here's a quick-start guide to your sharing experience:

1. Remove all items from the box and assess

Sit down with yourself (or some friends) and talk about what you've got, what you need, and what you could live without. Take stock of what you'd be willing to share¹⁵, rent, or give away. Write down all the things you really need to be productive/happy/connected. Then, cross out all the things that you want just to have them, and highlight all the things that involve a valuable experience. Now you have a list you can tackle through sharing.

2. Connect to the power source

The collaborative consumption movement¹⁶ empowers people to thrive despite economic climate. Instead of looking to the government or corporations to tell us what we want or create a solution for our problems, we take action to meet our own needs in a creative fashion. This is our power source. Start looking for ways to share at school, on community billboards, by asking friends, or use the resources below:

12. Botsman, Rachel. "Collaborative Consumption Explained" TED. Published: June 1, 2010.

13. "The New Sharing Economy" Latitude, Shareable Magazine. Published: December 25, 2010.

14. Gorenflo, Neal "Is Social Media Catalyzing an Offline Sharing Economy?" Shareable.net. Published: October 5, 2010.

15. "How to Share" Shareable.net.

16. "The Movement" CollaborativeConsumption.com

Housing

- [Roomates.com](#) - A roommate finder and roomates search service which covers thousands of cities nationwide.
- [How to Start a Housing Co-op](#) - one of the best affordable housing options around, and shared food expenses and cooking can increase your savings.
- [Guide to Sharing a House](#) - buying a home by yourself may be out of reach in high cost areas, but shared ownership might be the ticket.
- [Cohousing Directory](#) - Cohousing is homeownership in a neighborhood that shares.
- [Craigslist](#) - find almost anything including a house or housemate on Craigslist.

Social Food

- [Eat With Me](#) and [Grubly](#) are the [AirBnB](#) for meals. Use them to find or host a meal in your neighborhood. Never eat alone!
- [MamaBake](#) - Large batch group cooking saves time and money, not to mention it's fun!
- [Local Harvest](#) - A massive directory that helps you find farmers' markets, CSA's, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area.
- [Neighborhood Fruit](#) - find and offer free fruit to your neighbors with this site and iPhone app.
- [How to Share a Vegetable Garden](#)
- [How to Start A Farmers' Market](#)
- [Host a Baby Food Swap](#)

Personal Finance

- [Lending Club](#) - An online financial community that brings together creditworthy borrowers and savvy investors so that both can benefit financially.

- [Zopa](#) - Where people get together to lend and borrow money directly with each other, sidestepping the banks for a better deal.
- [Prosper](#) - A peer-to-peer lending site that allows people to invest in each other in a way that is financially and socially rewarding.
- [SmartyPig](#) - social savings bank that enables you to save for specific goals and engage friends and family to contribute.
- [How To Save Money Through Sharing](#)

Entrepreneurship / Work

- [Kickstarter](#) - A crowd-funding site powered by a unique all-or-nothing funding method where projects must be fully-funded or no money changes hands.
- [Profunder](#) - A site that makes it easy for your community to contribute financially to your business, so they're literally invested in your success.
- [BetterMeans](#) - Use open-source decision-making rules, and self-organizing principles to run your real-world projects.
- [Task Rabbit](#) - A service that enables you to outsource your tasks and deliveries (Boston and San Francisco Bay area only...for now).
- Use the [coworking wiki](#), [Loosecubes](#) or [Liquidspace](#) to find a friendly place to cowork. Coworking is a flexible and community-oriented workspace option for business travelers, independent workers, and entrepreneurs.
- [How to Find a Job Using Social Media](#)
- [The Shareable Job Search Search](#)
- [How to Start a Coworking Space](#)
- [A Guide to Casual Coworking](#) - Why not cowork anywhere? Here's the definitive guide.
- [How to Create Your Own Green Job](#)
- [How to Make A Franchise Shareable](#)

Travel

- [CouchSurfing](#) - An international non-profit network that connects travelers with locals in over 230 countries and territories around the world.
- [AirBnB](#) - Connects people who have space to spare with those who are looking for a place to stay, all over the world.
- [iStopOver](#) - Homeowners worldwide rent out space in their homes to travelers looking for unique accommodations.
- [Park at myHouse](#) - Provides affordable and fine-free parking by enabling property-owners to rent out their empty driveways, garages, car parks etc. to drivers needing somewhere to park.
- [Roomorama](#) - An online marketplace for short term rentals all over the world.
- [Tripping](#) - Tripping enables you to connect safely with locals who will introduce you to their towns, their cultures, their lives and their friends.
- [How To Swap Cities](#) - a guide on how to swap offices with someone from another city inspired by [SwapYourShop](#).
- [Submate](#) - a Parisian startup that helps you discover new people and things to do as defined by your regular train and subway commutes.

Land / Gardening

- [HyperLocavore](#) - Share yards, seeds, tools and good times growing food!
- [Shared Earth](#) - Get free access to land and grow what you love, share some of the produce with the land owner and keep the rest.
- [Tool libraries](#) - check out this handy directory of tool libraries.
- [Landshare](#) - UK-based service that connects those who have land to share with those who need land for cultivating food.
- [How to Create Your Own Seed-Lending Library](#)
- [How to start a Crop Mob](#) - Crop mobs allow you to get and give gardening help.

Transportation

- [Carsharing directory](#) - find carsharing service providers in your area with this international list.
- [Zimride](#), [GoLoco](#), [eRideShare](#) - Find a ride or offer a ride on these top ridesharing platforms.
- [ZipCar](#) - the largest fleet-based carsharing service in the world.
- [RelayRides](#), [Getaround](#), and [Spride](#) - Rent cars to or from neighbors using the leaders of the peer to peer carsharing movement.
- [Weeels](#) - order cabs and share rides with this smartphone app.
- [Avego](#) - Avego matches drivers and riders in real time as they travel.
- [Taxi2](#) - Matches travelers who are going from the airport to the same or nearby final destination.
- [How To Share a Car With A Stranger](#)
- [How To Be a Carfree Family](#)

Media (Books, Movies, Games, Music)

- [BookMooch](#) - Lets you give away books you no longer need in exchange for books you really want.
- [Swap.com](#) - An online swap marketplace for books, movies, music and games.
- [Goozex](#) - A unique trading platform for video games and movies.
- [SwapaDVD](#) - Trade DVDs for free.
- [Paperback Swap](#) - Trade paperback books for free.
- [SwapaCD](#) - Trade CDs for free.

Clothing

- Check [The S.W.A.P. Team](#), [ClothingSwap.com](#), [Swap for Good](#), and [The Swapaholics](#) for clothing swaps near you.
- Or host your own swap using this guide, [How to Throw a Community Swap Meet](#).

- Use *Wear Today Gone Tomorrow* or *Renttherunway* to rent authentic designer clothing for up to 90 percent off retail prices.
- *Swapstyle.com* - An interactive fashion website where members can swap, rather than buy, unlimited designer clothes with each other.
- Try *Bag Borrow & Steal* and *Fashionhire* - to rent designer handbags and accessories at affordable prices.
- And when the time comes to start a family, use *ThredUp* to swap children's clothing and toys with other parents.

Redistribution Sites (where unneeded stuff finds a loving home)

- *Freecycle* - The original grassroots organization for giving and getting free stuff in your town.
- *craigslist* - The ultimate free classifieds site with categories for free stuff, barter, and shares.
- *eBay* - International online auction that allows you to buy from and sell to other individuals.
- *ecoSharing* - The first sharing website that lets us share what we own with people we know and trust: our friends on facebook.
- *SpiltStuff* - A new site that organizes local communities to buy in bulk and "split" the goods and the cost, thus reducing waste and unnecessary consumerism.

Renting and sharing of general goods where you live

- *Rentalic*, *Neighborgoods*, *Keepio*, and *SnapGoods* are leading peer to peer rental and sharing marketplaces.

Campus

- *Chegg* - Rent expensive textbooks on the cheap.
- *Better World Books* - Save big on used textbooks.
- *Textbookflix*, - A system that lets you rent text books in the same way that you rent movies from Netflix.

- *Students for Free Culture* - An international, chapter-based student organization that promotes the public interest in intellectual property and telecommunications policy.
- *Bloomsbury College* - Crowdsourced learning for the entrepreneurial student.
- *CafeScribe* - A new service that lets you download electronic copies of your textbook, add friends, and share your notes.
- *Notely* - A collection of online tools (including a Facebook app) designed to help busy students organize their hectic lives.
- *Class Notes* - A Facebook app that enables students to share handwritten or printed notes from class.
- *Free Technology Academy* - free college classes on open source technology and standards.
- *Open Courseware* - free college course materials offered by scores of top universities from around the world.

If you don't see the sharing solution you need, check out our huge list of *how to share guides on Shareable*. Or add resources you know about in comments.

3. Press the power button

Once you discover local opportunities for sharing and collaborating, it's time to add the power: you. Get involved. Create a profile on sharing/renting/bartering site and actually list some stuff you could trade. Contact the moderator of a *local offline sharing group* and offer up your goods or services. Collaborative consumption requires a venture into a social world, even if it's only online; you need to get out there.

4. Sync with other devices and enjoy

Ideas like eBay, Netflix, and GameFly are pretty well-known examples of sharing, but it's important to remember that options exist offline as well. Sure, the internet makes it safe for us to share with strangers, but that doesn't mean you should forget about

the satisfaction of sharing face-to-face. Coworking¹⁷ brings collaboration into your professional life; a local food co-op¹⁸ brings sharing into your pantry, and skill-sharing communities¹⁹ bring comraderie to your weekend hobbies.

Don't be afraid to let sharing/bartering/collaborating go viral in other areas of your life as well. You'll discover, as Rachel Botsman does in *What's Mine is Yours*, that “over time, these experiences create a deep shift in consumer mindset. Consumption is no longer an asymmetrical activity of endless acquisition but a dynamic push and pull of giving and collaborating in order to get what you want. Along the way, the acts of collaboration and giving become an end in itself.”



17. Buczynski, Beth. “What Coworking Brings To The Community Table” Shareable.net. Published January 17, 2011

18. Smith, Jeremy Adam. “Scaling Up From Backyard Farm to Community Co-Op” Shareable.net. Published May 6, 2010

19. Wachter, Meg “How to Start Your Own Skillshare” Shareable.net. Published November 19, 2009

Stranger Dinners

ARIANNA DAVOLOS

don't know why I started the Stranger Dinners. Maybe it was out of loneliness. I was living in a new town with my two best friends, having just graduated from college where hundreds of familiar and interesting faces would greet me as soon as I walked out my door. I had been so excited to finally be free of the isolated bubble of school. I thought it was holding me back, with its assignments and requirements and obligatory hoops to jump through. I was ready to be set free so I could finally do what I wanted: make art.

I often likened concentrating in sculpture to majoring in possibilities. As I learned more and more about contemporary art practice and theory, my definition of what art was and what it could be expanded until there were no limits. A sculpture could be anything from an idea to an action, a crafted situation, a social experiment, a conspiracy, a business venture, an anecdote told at a party. I spent my last semester trying to walk on the edge of what art could be. I planned field trips, elaborate parties, chance meetings, experiential devices, and rumors. I was a little misunderstood but very happy, and I was excited for the day when I would graduate and have the freedom to do even more.

It soon hit me that school hadn't prepared me for the reality that lay beyond. In the real world, people didn't have time to make art. Work that actually earned money took over life. I longed for the creative collaboration between people who had time to philosophize, to create, to experiment, to discuss, to learn and to teach. In school, I had been isolated, but at least I was with hundreds of fellow students and faculty. In the real world, I felt, everyone lives in their own little world, working to pay their rent and provide for themselves.

Working part time in a frame shop, and spending my free time working on projects alone at my house, I felt a very basic, almost laughable question begin to surface.

What is everyone doing?

I felt like I missed something. Is this it? You have a few friends, you wake up, go to work, pay rent, and get some fun in when you can? I would make a painting and look at it, thinking, "What is this for?" I wondered how other people were spending their time. How were people figuring out how to balance their obligations with their pleasures? How did they make decisions? How do we all decide what is right for us—what to sacrifice and what to invest? What city to live in? What jobs to apply for? What to do with our lives?

I asked everyone I came across what their life was like. Did they like what they were doing? How did they do it? Why did they like it? How did they get to that point? What did they do before? What were the obstacles? What were the perks? What were the downfalls?

I felt like I was lost in this big labyrinth and the whole world was at a party in the center of it.

Slowly it dawned on me: no one had the answer. There was no right path. Everyone stumbles their way through. Some people get lucky breaks, some people have lower expectations, some people are unhappy, some people are happy. It is always changing and evolving. Everyone just works with what they have, and from their own perspective.

So what if we all started collaborating? What if we shared our perspectives? Not just with our family and friends, but with everyone? I wanted to know what a real life was like, and movies weren't really helping.

The internet has been a huge tool for doing just this. We can share the most intimate details of our lives with strangers, from vacations pictures to opinions, to skin infections and the latest fashions. People type out their greatest fears, aspirations, confessions, and successes for the vast unknown sea of people to read and comment on. This gives access to a seemingly infinite amount of information without having to even get out of bed.

But there's something isolating about the internet. This screen we use as a portal to connect ourselves to each other creates an invisible barrier between ourselves and others. The voyeuristic nature of Facebook allows us to keep up with our acquaintances and friends without them even knowing, and without the exchange that let's them know we care, and without actually having any kind of substantial relationship with these people.

I just clicked over to someone's Twitter page. I don't know this girl, but I've been following her life for almost a year. The background on her twitter page says, "I thought I was a narcissist. That is, until I met the rest of the internet." It's true, we are all broadcasting the stories of our lives (some more than others). We are posturing as ourselves in order to make superficial connections with as many people as possible. Social capital is suffering from inflation. It's not enough to have 50 people in real life you really care about, you have to have 500 facebook friends too. What? You don't have 1000 followers on Twitter? You might as well be shouting into the void, because no one hears what you say.

Communication has been one-sided too long. We are starting to learn how to make all this technology work for us. It's starting to occur to people that these amazing networks we are building can help us improve the communities where we actually exist. With the internet, I can now find all the garage sales in my neighborhood, order takeout, find a date, join a pillow fight, and locate my favorite food cart when I get that special craving.

In response to all these ideas and questions, I started inviting strangers to my house for a potluck. With the Stranger Dinners, I seek to bridge the gap between personal and impersonal, between the mass communication and face to face interaction. I want to bring what is good about the internet and relocate it from the ephemeral everywhere and nowhere plane and bring it closer. I want to create the opportunity for people to find something they might not think to look for. I want to take the idea of StumbleUpon and bring it to the dinner table. Let us cultivate an open flow of information without the anonymity. That way, the value placed on the information or opportunities we come across are tied to real people who live in our physical communities. I want the humanity back. Instead of going to the library and researching on the internet, I want to stroll through the stacks, smell the pages of old books, pick a random book off the shelf, and let some serendipity into my life.

Most of all, I want to keep myself open to the physical world around me, and all the people who live there. I want us to act as though we have the world in common. If we're all in this together, we'll have all the support we need to get us through. Through my art practice, I seek to create situations outside of our everyday expectations of the world. I strive to actively create what I find lacking from my everyday

experience. And I want to explore the possibilities that can come from encouraging people to talk to each other without reason, motivation, agenda, self-selection, or presumption. They're not telling what we will find if we look just outside of our everyday experience.



How to host your own stranger dinner:

Think about why you want to have a Stranger Dinner.

Imagine what you'd like to get out of this experience. What is your motivation for the dinner? What makes a night with strangers so appealing to you? Write down your intention for the dinner, and what you hope to experience. Include this in your invitation, and you will attract people who want the same thing, and who are open to letting this experience happen.

Invite Strangers.

Depending on your comfort level, there are different ways to do this. For the first stranger dinners, I found strangers by giving invitations to friends and asking them to invite people they knew. If you go this route, make sure you leave plenty of time for invitation delivery and for people to RSVP. This is probably the safest way to organize a stranger dinner, since your friends will have vouched for each guest that attends. If you want to start a dinner series, you can ask the guests to invite the next round of strangers. In this way, the dinner becomes a kind of chain letter.

Another way to invite people is through the internet. Though I wouldn't necessarily post Stranger Dinner invitations on Craigslist,



I do send the invitation to a mailing list or two that I trust, as well as to my own personal contacts. It's easy to find a niche mailing list that speaks to a community you may be comfortable inviting without getting that icky stranger-danger feeling in your stomach. Having said that, posting it on a site like Craigslist might turn up great people, and you may have no problem at all. Follow your gut. Diverse sources of strangers help the dinners stay strange.

Stranger Dinners are best planned on a Sunday or a weeknight. Fridays and Saturdays, people have lots of options and plans that come up last minute. Planning on the right day minimizes being stood up by flaky strangers.

Send a Reminder.

People have a lot of stuff going on. It's easy to forget something you signed up for, especially if it was more than a week ago. A couple days before the dinner, send your guests a reminder email. Restate the time, day, intentions, and location of the dinner, as well as any special instructions. I ask my guests for a question they would like to ask a stranger. These questions serve as confirmation that they have read the email and are still planning to come to the dinner, and work as great conversation starters to get people talking at the actual dinner.

The Day of the Dinner.

It's fun to get excited about the Stranger Dinner. Get your space ready for guests. Make it cozy. Make it easy for people to come in, put down their stuff, and relax. Candles, flowers, tablecloth, music—whatever mood you want to set, ambiance is the key!

Make something yummy.

I don't like to tell people what to bring for the potluck. I like to be surprised, and I've never been disappointed with the meal. However, I do make sure I have some wine or beer on hand. Alcohol, though not necessary, definitely works as a social lubricant and gets people relaxed and talking. There is no need to spend all day slaving over a hot stove. Depending on my mood, my budget, and my schedule, I make sure my potluck item is stress free and delicious. Stranger Dinners, unlike other dinner parties, are great places to try out new recipes. If it turns out bad, there will be plenty of other things to eat, and you never have to see these people again!



Enjoy!

Now all that's left is to sit back, relax, and let a bunch of people bring you food and entertain you for the evening. You're in for a treat! Don't forget to be a courteous host. Make sure everyone feels safe, comfortable, and is never without something to drink. Help people do their final preparations for their dish if they need it, help them serve it up, and don't be afraid to use some ice-breakers if things aren't flowing naturally. People are there to hang out, and after a while you'll be talking like old friends.

When it's time to leave, thank everyone for coming. Make sure they get any dishes or leftovers they brought to take home, and if they would like to exchange contact information, send a group email to everyone so they can stay in touch!



Eating Rich, Living Poor

MELISSA WELTER

Tomato Soup

- 1 yellow onion
- 2 cans of cannellini beans
- 6 tomatoes
- ½ cup of white wine or apple juice
- ½ tsp each of salt, pepper, and oregano

Dice the onion and caramelize with olive oil in a medium frying pan.

Cut up the tomatoes and add to the pan. Stir.

After about five minutes, pour the wine or juice into the pan.

Put the bean in a food processor and blend.

Once the liquid has reduced by a third, add the beans to the pan.

Add the spices. Taste. Let simmer for another five minutes. Serve.

First, gather your fruits.

(Lowest monthly food bill June 2008 to December 2008: \$177)

I started disastrously. Three bare months before my partner and I moved, at the start of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, I was diagnosed with celiac disease. There was no cure, only a strict diet to be followed. No more gluten, which meant wheat, rye, or barley. Those three ingredients seemed to be in everything.

No cookies, no crackers, no soups, no bread, no pasta, no potpies. Nothing. I couldn't even add soy sauce to my stir fry. It was winter and the cold was already taking a toll on me. Long, cloudy months lowered my spirits. Winter cut through my jacket and bit at my bones.

It felt like starvation.

Those last months before moving are a blur, a struggle with rice and tepid 'tamale' pies, food tasting like ash under the weight of despair. I struggled saying goodbyes to friends, the comfort of a meal out or a potluck at someone's house denied to me. I eked out what I could from a job I hated, trying desperately to balance need against meaning. It was snowing when we left.

The difference between March in Washington and April in California was a season. Spring was in full-throated bloom when we arrived, flowers and bird song permeating my mom's home. Even as we scrambled to find a new place to live, being surrounded by family soothed something in me. The sunlight helped. My mother, who also had celiac disease, helped. The edge of terror that had been sleeping at the edge of my vision faded, melting into hope.

I wish that was the last of it. I wish I learned food again with my mother and then life went smoothly forward. But the spring we moved was the beginning of the economic crash. It took eight increasingly desperate months to find work.

That summer, my tomato sprouts died and we discovered that there wasn't a single store in town that had enough gluten free food for me to survive on. We took long drives to San Francisco and the co-op there, stocking up a month's worth of food at a time. I gritted my teeth at liquefying spinach and soft apples, furious at the waste as I bent to beg my family for help. I sweated my way through interview after interview as temperatures topped one hundred. Frustration kept my stomach in knots but still, my body healed.

The obsessive heat crushed me. It stole my determined optimism, sucked the heartiness from my spirit. It left me limp sometimes, trying to cover dizziness in interviews for jobs I wasn't qualified for or had no interest in. I made myself fake it, pulling a mask of perkiness on and dropping it when I left the interview.

Some days, I didn't want to get up. Some days, I sat at my computer and couldn't make myself look at one more job site or send off another resume. Do it, I told myself, just do it. I fought the heat with bottles

of water and the depression with a teeth-grinding stubbornness. If I didn't have an interview, I would exercise or meditate or write. I forced myself to do something productive every single day.

I didn't always make it. Some days, I curled up small and miserable. I gave up. I didn't deny myself those moments; I acknowledged the weight of pain I was carrying. But the next day, I started over again.

Sometimes at the end of a day, all that kept me from crying was a small bowl of ice cream, the taste creamier than anything else I had tried in the years when dairy made me sick. Without gluten, every other food I hadn't been able to eat was suddenly possible again. The first time I ate goat cheese, it smeared over my tongue and left me blissful with its sharpness. After seven years when a single piece of cheese left me sweating and sick, it broke something open in me to be able to eat again.

As the heat retreated and the first hints of the coming rain teased at the sky, I found work I loved as a tutor.

Measure out the spices.

(Lowest monthly food bill January 2009 to June 2009: \$168)

The first Thanksgiving after giving up gluten filled me with gratitude. Living in the same state as my family meant a shared Thanksgiving dinner for the first time in years. I had learned, over the last ten months, to dread going out. Potlucks no longer meant pleasure but deprivation. While friends feasted, I was forced to be content with carrot sticks. Even the dip on vegetable trays was a dubious mystery that I was unwilling to risk my health on. It's fine, I told everyone. No problem. I like carrot sticks. Sometimes, I even convinced myself. Determination to make this time different pushed me to try my hand at some baking. I didn't want to settle.

My apple pie was a two-part affair: the apples, which smelled perfectly like my childhood, and the crust, which flaked disappointingly. It fell apart as it was served, leaving me chagrined but resolved to do better. The gravy was made in a last-minute hurry as the table was set. I stirred the drained juices from the turkey into butter and rice

flour; it thickened deliciously. Around the table, relatives blinked in surprise as they took bites of mashed potatoes and turkey. Across from me, my aunt smiled and pointed out the basket of gluten free rolls, the turkey, the green beans and salad, my sister's butternut squash soup. Mashed potatoes and garlic mashed potatoes and cranberry and three separate pies that I could eat. I almost cried and felt rich again for the first time in months.

That winter was better.

Remove the tops. Chop.

(Lowest monthly food bill July 2009 to December 2009: \$139)

Buoyed by my success, I learned how to make vegetable stock from scratch. I filled the house with the smells of onion, carrots, and bay leaves for long days at a time. I read up on cold weather plants and grew sugar snap peas and radishes in the small patch I was cultivating in our front yard. That first taste as I picked them off the vine echoed the air around me: crisp and fresh, but unexpectedly sweet. By the time I pulled the radishes from the ground, I was living less desperately paycheck to paycheck. I poured myself into my work as I did into my garden, tending to struggles with math with the same attention I spent on freeing my geranium from weeds. The care I spent opened a space for something new to grow. My heart filled with young spouts and the sound of a child learning how to read. I was learning to sustain myself.

Growing food from seed was a magical experience. I tested the air and worried over weather reports before picking a day. I pressed seeds carefully into the ground, covering them and marking the spot in my mind. Each day, I pressed a finger into the soil to check for dampness, eagerly observing my cultivated patch. Were there sprouts yet? Was that a weed or the first sign of radishes? The leaves, when they came, were green ovals, easily distinguished from the long strings of creeping grass. I watched with happiness lightening my heart as they grew bigger, daring to pull one after two weeks to check their size. I carried my prize inside, washed it in the sink, and ate the radish raw right there in four quick bites. It left me glowing and accomplished.

The year warmed again and I cooked. I taught myself to make bread without wheat or rye, to roast potatoes with onions and vinaigrette, to marinate tofu in spices and sauce. I nibbled cautiously on fresh beets and brought bundles of sweet peas to potlucks. My heart lifted each time someone bit into food I had made or grown and stopped in delight. Spearmint covered my garden and I brought handfuls inside and hung them up to dry. I took a deep breath every time I came home from work for a week solid, and then crumbled the leaves into a jar to keep for loose tea. Fumbling along, I taught myself what foods were in season in the spring and tried arugula for the first time. I tossed fingerling potatoes with a little butter and garlic.

Egg and Potato Salad

- *1 ½ lbs yellow potatoes, cooked and cubed*
- *3 hard-boiled eggs, chopped*
- *1 small red onion, chopped*
- *¾ cup mayonnaise*
- *2 tbs. spicy mustard*
- *Salt to taste*

Combine, cool, and serve.

I grew warm-weather food, too. I bought a six pack of tomatoes and planted them. I watched them like a hawk, lingering over the soil, checking for dryness or too much dampness. The sprinkler combated the heavy summer sun. I looked at the tomato leaves and rejoiced at the first small yellow flowers. Then, in June, green tomatoes began appearing in clumps. It astonished me that six plants could produce so much food. For months, I picked two or three tomatoes every week. I ate them on sandwiches and shared them with friends. I stir-fried them, sautéed them into sauce, froze them, roasted them slowly in the oven.

How to Roast Tomatoes

- *Preheat the oven to 425*
- *Cut off the tops and cut the tomatoes in half*
- *Brush the cut side with olive oil Sprinkle a little salt or pepper on them*
- *Put the tomatoes face down on a cooking sheet and sprinkle on a little more olive oil*
- *Roast for 25-30 minutes until sweet*

This, I knew instinctively, was food done right.

Simmer together, slowly.

(Lowest monthly food bill January 2010 to June 2010: \$110)

After that, the gains came in a flurry. I discovered that the cooperative where I shopped offered a ten percent discount on any food bought as a case. I turned our unused laundry nook into a pantry and moved food in. Chili and rice cakes and refried beans filled the shelves. Even as gas prices spiked, bringing transportation costs to move food up as well, my food bill dropped. In July, I filled bell peppers with quinoa and roasted them in the oven. I made apple pie in September, and yam fries, sprinkled with parsley fresh from the garden, in November.

I got inspired about local food. Farmer's markets, a staple before I moved, entered my life again. I learned that I could walk to our small town market on Saturdays and get food from two towns over. I discovered that there were U-pick farms for berries and peaches, apples and pears, tomatoes and pumpkins, right where I lived. Buying these foods felt like a gift, like an affirmation that food was life. I began to check the labels to find out where food came from, sticking mostly to food grown nearby. California, warm and geographically diverse, kept me fed locally year-round.

Buoyed by my successes, I turned the money I was saving back into my food shopping, the same way I turned compost into the garden and inspiration into the children's lessons. Bulk foods became a

sturdy cast-iron skillet. Ten percent discounts became a case of mason jars. I tried my hand at making strawberry jam and blueberry cobbler and watched with pleasure as it disappeared off the table at potlucks. I asked for a pressure canner and this year, when the harvest ripens, I will put away spaghetti sauce and green beans and anything else I please.

Eat

(Lowest food monthly bill June 2010 to December 2010: \$118)

It is winter again, everything cold around me, but I am content. Poverty didn't starve me; it fed me. Soon, I will go outside and prune my apple trees and hope they bear fruit for the first time this year. Soon, I will take the pesto made from rich bunches of this summer's basil out of the freezer and add them to corn pasta. Soon, I will open the seed catalogue and plan for radishes and spinach, carrots and tomatoes, dill and thyme. Soon, I will give thanks: for the diagnosis and the poverty that led to my DIY eating adventures. The taste of these years explodes on my tongue.



Flexible Lives, Flexible Relationships

LAUREN WESTERFIELD

Trying to seem as nonchalant and low-maintenance as possible, I remember declining his offer to use the single pair of rubber dishwashing gloves that hung beside the open-air sink. It was evening, and mid-winter; yet the Baja sunset glowed warm as we took our first stab at partnership over after-dinner cleanup duty.



In a manner I imagined both ironic and cute, I reversed the offer.

“I’m good, thanks...why, did you want to wear them?”

He neither hesitated nor seemed to detect my arch tone.

“Of course I’ll take them, if you’re sure,” he said. “I like to keep my hands soft.”

Still gazing down at the mountain of soiled plates and tumblers piled precariously before me, I laughed at his little joke before looking up. What I found was a young, recently separated Air Force captain in flip flops and gym shorts, matter-of-factly scrubbing away, bright pink rubber-clad fingers illuminated against his deeply tanned and (I suddenly noticed) visibly smooth skin. There was something so sweetly incongruous about his appearance at that moment – meticulous hands at work under a high-and-tight service haircut just beginning to grow free, his swarthy dark beard making such earnest domesticity all the more unexpected – that I couldn’t help but smile. All my thoughts of a snappy retort vanished. He hadn’t been joking; and I, almost exclusively accustomed to smart-ass one-liners and layers of innuendo when it came to conversations with men my age, was instantly disarmed.

Over the course of the next three weeks, I would come to learn that the Air Force captain-turned-yogi hated washing dishes. He infinitely preferred ironing or vacuuming, any of the tidier and more meditative chores (while I had always loved to get my hands dirty). I would discover that he did indeed strive to keep his hands and feet and face soft and healthy, though he’d only admit it to other men if he was asked; and that despite a history of wretched communication skills and gang violence, video games and ministerial aspirations, military service and a mess of perspectives with which I would never have imagined myself able to reconcile, he and I could connect in the deepest and most honest way. We could create the kind of exploded, innovative, vulnerable and yet resilient relationship that I never thought possible until I broke from the pressure-laden bounds of a heavily constructed social grid.

Looking back – shit, even as it was happening – I knew that my experience was atypical. That sun-drenched yoga camp created an extreme version of the broader cultural moment, an unforeseeable crash course in the obliteration of social norms. Neither love nor revolution nor the imminent recession could have been further from my mind when I quit my office job and took off for Mexico, but the fact that they found me there, beyond the scope of traditional social patterns, might give us a model for millennial-style romance. Something more flexible (if you’ll pardon the pun) than the old standards we all know by heart.

That said, living with unstructured love isn't easy. Abandoning the relationship roadmap handed down from our parents' generation may sound liberating, but it comes with a host of uncertainties, a bunch of nagging questions about money and autonomy, biology and gender roles, expectations and stability and longevity and ego-displacement that are more than enough to drive even the happiest couple all kinds of crazy. But hidden within that crazy is a ripe opportunity to make something new. And thanks to rampant unemployment, requisite shared housing, and other necessities of our recession-flavored existence, falling back on old norms is no longer an option. In short? Most of us have no choice but to innovate.

Actually, I take that back. We have two choices: innovation or stagnation.

Fast-forward a year or so from the moment my now-boyfriend first donned those pink dish gloves and flipped my world so wonderfully sideways, and you'll find us leaning precipitously toward the latter. A post-yoga camp interlude of nomadic wandering and seasonal work experiments soon played itself out, and we found ourselves reduced to an increasingly common living situation. That's right -- I, along with my expensive liberal arts degree, distressingly patchy resume, once high-powered boyfriend and our \$10 couch, moved back in with my parents.

There was one scenario particular to those homebound days that I especially came to loathe. Whenever my mother's friends or our neighbors popped up at my side in the grocery store (always as I was sifting through produce, hair unkempt, in sweatpants on a Tuesday afternoon) I'd groan inwardly and get ready for the barrage.

"What are you doing these days?" they'd always ask, all smiles, expecting to be impressed.

Did they not notice the sweatpants? The glasses? The grocery shopping in our wee tiny town on a weekday? All signs pointed to unemployment.

"Oh, I'm staying with my family right now," I'd say calmly, feigning confidence and an implied visit rather than permanent residence. "I'm in-between things and taking a break to help mom out around the house."

"In between what kind of things?" my interlocutor would inevitably press me, hungry for gossipy details.

"Well, I'm sort of writing..." I'd say, trailing off. "Actually, my boyfriend and I are looking at maybe teaching English overseas." A vague truth surfaces, providing distraction, giving me something to say, no matter how irrelevant, that might satisfy.

"How exciting! And are you two planning on getting married?"

"No no, not yet," I'd say, forcing a smile while suppressing exaggerated eye-rolls and a variety of panicked expletives.

"So you're just...living at your parents' house? Together? And not really doing much of anything?"

Most folks were too polite to draw this conclusion out loud; but I always heard it anyway, their judgment ringing clear over supermarket jingles and wailing, unruly children as if pronounced through a bullhorn. Because this exchange, no matter how well-meaning or innocently intentioned, was a booby trap, a socio-cultural snare the likes of which entangle any of us who fail to conform to the supposed status quo. It's nonsense -- and yet a notion so deeply ingrained as to confuse even the most sure-footed twenty-something seeking an authentic way in the world.

Pinned on the edge of a produce bin, under pressure to say something acceptable, I always found it difficult to tell the straight truth: that we were not aimless degenerates, only stuck in an extended state of flux. We knew, after countless hours of raw and honest conversation, that we needed time to figure out the most sustainable way in which to nurture our relationship and respective goals while still making enough cash to fly the coop. We weren't alone in this dilemma, and yet somehow it always sounded strange when I said it out loud.

Perhaps this is because, as times have changed, so too has youthful non-conformity. Not everyone feels the need to disappoint their parents on purpose; and some of us, grateful for the comfort they've provided, still hope to impress. Yet the very notion of success today is under construction. So many of us have observed the grown-ups, detected their patterns, and watched them fail. If our lives don't fit

their mold anymore, we've got to break it; but how do we tell them that? And how the hell are we to start?

For us, the answer came crashing down in the form of my parent's divorce. What began as a string of sitcom-worthy inconveniences, (like our top-secret sex-life and my mother's skeptical analysis of days spent "on the Google") soon became a perilous onslaught. We found ourselves in the crosshairs of a dissolving marriage, and took shelter from the emotional shrapnel by vowing never to repeat their mistakes. It was a silver lining of the strangest variety; and yet without that unforeseen return to the parental nest, we might never have realized how necessary it was to do something different, something more fluid and malleable to suit hearts fated for change.

By this stage in your life, someone - your mother, father or high-school counselor -- has undoubtedly urged you to put your career at the forefront, to never let a sweetheart tie you down. But what if today's economy, job market and social culture have mutated and conspired to change all that, to encourage us to put partnership first? With cash growing scarce and jobs even scarcer, human connection is the biggest asset we have. Knocked swiftly off the adult hierarchy, we suddenly have the chance to find inspiration in the most unexpected people, places and ideas.

This is probably for the best. Because frankly, the old maps just don't work anymore when it comes to charting a twentysomething's way in the world. This doesn't mean plenty of us won't at some point find steady work, get married, have kids, or purchase the greenwashed version of a mini-van, but it does mean that most of us will do it in our own way, maybe skipping some steps or performing them in an unorthodox fashion. These behaviors are sure to dismay sweet old aunties and grannies who want only to find us the ephemerally-defined "good husbands," "great jobs" and "perfect weddings" of days gone by.

Take me, for instance. Now, at 26, after three years of pitifully part-time or completely unpaid employment, I've finally landed a "real" job writing copy for a social media marketing company. Ironic, right? That my first adult paycheck is completely dependent on a purely millennial

innovation many grown-ups are still tacitly afraid of? I don't think it's a coincidence. On the contrary, I consider it sharpest evidence of our altered world -- one in which now more than ever communication is key. My boyfriend and I are still learning how to navigate this world, living as free of old constructs as possible, and sometimes finding it utterly strange. I'm reminded of this every day as I get up, get dressed, brush my hair like a real grown-up and go to work while my boyfriend sits, reads, contemplates and otherwise absorbs the universe as he searches for his niche in our new life. (I should note that he also does the laundry and vacuuming, which is delightful, while I pull my weight on weekends, wash the dishes and wear pink gloves now, every time.)

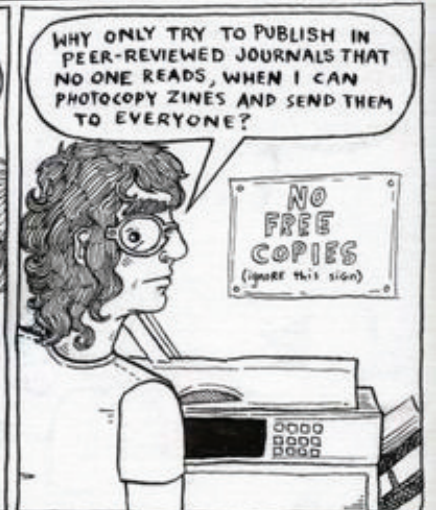
Maybe we'll get married one day; maybe we won't. Great things may lie ahead for us - and then again, perhaps we'll opt for scraping by and simple pleasures, a life with lots of time for cheap wine and sandy feet and purring cats. I'll be the first to admit that I don't know where we're headed; that unemployment put our relationship to the test more than once and made us grow up faster than we may have liked. But with communication on our side, somehow, everything seems possible. And the wider net we cast, the more friends and couples we find to connect and share ideas with over box wine on our \$10 couch, the stronger our optimism grows. I like to think of us as floating rather than climbing, hands clasped and stretching outward to receive the future as it comes.

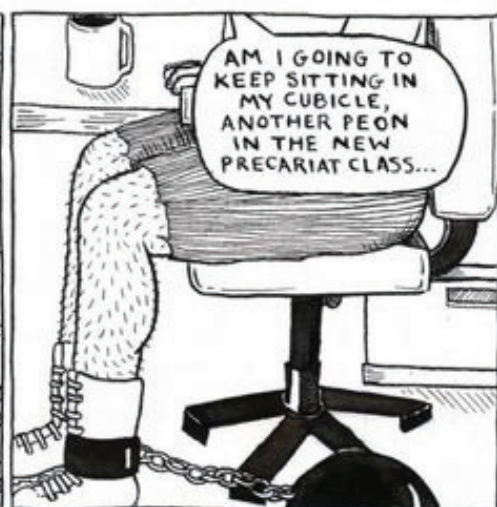


Who Needs an Ivory Tower

JENNA BRAGER







Detroit, Community Resilience, and The American Dream

MILICENT JOHNSON

When I told my friends and family I would be traveling to Detroit to write about community resilience, I got the same reaction from everyone: Silence. Then, slowly, as if not to offend me, people would look at me very seriously and say “Be very careful—you never hear anything good about Detroit. Remember, you’re a woman, you have more to lose from an attack than just your wallet.” Frequently the conversation would trail to the murder rate or economic devastation and that “desperate times make people do crazy things.” My surprise at this reaction was compounded by the fact that those words weren’t just coming from my parents, they were coming from born and bred city folks who know that the greatest cities always get a bad rap from people who have never been there.

This series of odd reactions made me more determined to go see the city for myself. I had a sneaking suspicion that Detroit was just like my beloved New York City: gritty, homey, and real in all the right places, with a community spirit missed by those just passing through.

But the voices of my friends and family warning me of the potential of physical harm did get to me. Despite being a New York City kid who has little fear of traveling alone, I have an embarrassing confession to make: I bought pepper spray. If anything dangerous really did happen I would probably clumsily spray myself in the face, so I knew that it was more about silencing the voices of concerned family and friends than it was about actual protection.

So, with my pepper spray and intuition in tow I took a trip to see what the fuss was all about.

I wasn’t sure what to expect when I got off the plane and left the airport. Would I walk out to a Spartan city that, as pictures of Detroit would lead one to believe, looked like a war zone?

The moment I got into a cab I knew everything was going to be fine. I was delighted to find that just like every great city, everything you could possibly want to know can be learned from a cab driver. My cab driver, who moved to Detroit from Yemen some 10 years ago, told me that while Detroit can be a dangerous place full of racial tensions, it has become home because of the friends he’s met here and the community that has welcomed him.

After a few minutes of typical highway driving, we arrived at the Inn on Ferry Street, a collection of Victorian houses preserved by the historical society. The entire block was a magical collection of houses that took me back to a time in which barons would build 17 bedroom houses just because they could. It was a preserved snapshot of the regality of America in its heyday.



While fidgeting with my key, I met a woman named Rachel Lutz and my magical journey began. She asked me what I was doing in town. I said, with some apprehension, “writing about community resilience” She responded, “Well you’ll have to meet all of my friends.” Within 15 minutes I had the numbers of young entrepreneurs and people starting their own non profits, as well as established nonprofit and foundation types. When I expressed how overwhelming her kind gesture to a complete stranger was she said, “It’s my pleasure. So many people come here for ‘devastation porn.’ They come here to look at the abandoned buildings and devastation, but there’s something even greater here that people should be paying attention to. Right now, Detroit, and particularly this neighborhood, Midtown, is where the rebirth is being fostered by twenty-somethings who are quitting their jobs, cashing in their savings or pulling together a little capital, and going for their dreams. This is one of the few places left where if you are willing to put up a little capital, you can make your dream, whatever it is, come true. We live in the biggest small town you’ll ever experience and everyone’s ready to pick up a shovel and work with you to build the future.”

I couldn’t agree more. And for the record, I threw out my pepper spray the very next day.

So, what does this have to do with community resilience? Let me tell you.

Detroit, in a lot of ways, parallels the track we are on as a nation. After an industrial boom in the late 19th century, Detroit became a hub of commerce and a place where people could come to find opportunity. At the turn of the 20th century Detroit became synonymous with the automobile industry. As the industry branched out to become involved in city planning around car dependency, suburbanization and sprawl became a way of life.. Suburban isolation and dependence on industry are legacies we tend not to talk about in this country, but as the economy collapses, they become hard to ignore. Unresolved racial tensions and the abandonment of cities are facts of life here in the states. Let’s be clear, Detroit is not alone in this. It may be more pronounced here, but if we stay on the current track of trying to house ourselves in single family homes, consuming without regard

for practicality or sustainability, and looking to a single source for our well being--in our case straight-up consumer-driven capitalism, there is no need to look into a crystal ball, the snapshot of our future is staring us in the face in the stereotypical shots of Detroit.

But, I believe Detroit also holds the key to the future of this great nation. We must evolve to a more sustainable way of living if we are to survive, and I think we all innately sense it. We know that two-income-dependent housing prices, while unemployment and underemployment approaches the double digits, does not add up. We know that a growing world population is not going to be able to support a group of people that consumes three times as many resources as the rest of the world. Within our lifetimes, many of us will have to find new ways to get our needs met, and pioneer a new meaning of what “the good life” really is. Those who have stayed in Detroit are pioneers. It’s like what happens to a forest after a great fire. At first glance, it looks like everything is dead. But, if you look closer you’ll find that the rich soil is fertile and ready for planting. Detroit’s ground is fertile and being seeded as you read this.



During my time there, I met with people in their 20's and 30's who had bought storefronts, started art collectives, started their own non-profits, and frankly, were living the dream. From the Delicious "Good Girls Go To Paris"--whose crepes are so good I wake up every morning craving them...



...to Rachel's Place, a vintage store that fills an entire house in Corktown, that is owned by Rachel Leggs.



The whole city is filled with local, frequently organic or locally made and grown things to eat, see, and enjoy. And the best part is that everyone is really into supporting these businesses. There is a dual pride that comes from supporting your friends and neighbors, and also supporting the people who, like you, want to see Detroit thrive. The local pride is as palpable as it is at a Red Sox game but it lasts much longer than a season. It made everything taste better, worth the price, and left me with a joy that box stores like H&M or Barnes and Noble never do. All the products I bought and food I ate were true quality, priced reasonably, made locally, and super cute! Imagine that.



Avalon Bakery: They hire locally, pay a livable wage, and provide health benefits to their employees. They also have amazing pumpkin whoopie pies.

Every business owner I talked to echoed the sentiment that their dream of owning a business could not have been fulfilled as successfully as it has been here in Detroit. One of my favorite stops during my week was to the Spiral Collective. Co-Owners Janet Jones, Dell Pryor, and Sharon Pryor (Dell's daughter) have a shop that has gifts and house treats, a book store, and an art gallery in it. The building was once a barn in the formerly notorious Cass Corridor (Avalon Bakery is their neighbor), that was reworked by Dell into a comfortable, warm, and beautiful space. I popped in to get out of the rain and was immediately greeted, warmed, hugged, and embraced by these sweet fabulous ladies.



Mother and Daughter Dell and Sharon Pryor with longtime friend and co owner Janet Jones

Not only did I get local art, gifts, and books at great prices, they also spoke with me about their experiences as women business owners and artists in Detroit. I felt like I got a wonderful dose of history, culture, and mentoring every time I went in. It oddly felt like home. This is the shopping experience I've never known I always wanted.

Projects That are Changing Detroit

Giving Young People a Voice in Defining Their City

Later in the week I met with Mike Han - Community Development Director of "*I AM YOUNG DETROIT*" I met Mike while at an event

on the soul of the Detroit community. While stealing a couple of the gratis muffins for lunch I overheard him explain that a city wide conversation on Detroit's young people, their potential, and what the city has to offer them was necessary.

"*I AM YOUNG DETROIT*" is an effort to dispel the myths about Detroit, and highlight the cool, progressive, creative work being done by the under 40 set in the city. It not only highlights events, news, and culture of the city, it also puts the spotlight on the emerging creative class, artists, designers, musicians, and entrepreneurs who are hustling to great success in the city.

Mike is a young entrepreneur himself, with his blog and brand called *Street Culture Mash* which is a lifestyle brand that is meant to compliment a more sustainable and creative lifestyle. SCM offers sustainable art in tangible goods with everything from organic apparel to furniture to fixed gear bikes. I had already drank the "I love Detroit" cool-aid by the time I got to sit down with him, but talking about the challenges and potential of this great city was like getting an IV of love for this city that is refillable any time I visit either of his sites. Mainly we spoke about what a great city Detroit is for young folks, artists, and creative types, and the spirit of helping each other. "Basically, people are excited if you're excited in Detroit. If you want to do something good, people are like, "I can help with that" or "Do you know so and so?" Because we're like a small town, people are well connected and willing to use those connections to help you pursue your dream."

We also talked about local city government. The city has been rocked with a history of political corruption and there are very real suburban vs. urban issues which have their roots in racial tensions. 8 mile road continues to be the physical barrier between the largely African American city and mostly white suburbs. White flight which contributed to the city's loss of jobs and tax revenue, and the well documented discrimination that kept blacks from moving into the suburbs has led to resentment on both sides with regards to planned revitalization of the city. On the one hand, the city and the suburbs need each other. They need the ideas, people power, and investment of industries that moved their operations to the suburbs. On the other

hand, it makes sense that some Detroit residents find it insulting that suburban people who have chosen to abandon the city, send their kids to private schools, and live in communities protected by police forces, would want to have a hand in deciding what the future of the city should be. There is also a palpable fear in Detroit that once revitalization does happen, gentrification will follow, and once again those who rebuilt the city will have to leave once white, upper class people deem it a posh place to live. As someone who has worked in community development, I hesitated to share this story because I worry that Detroit will become synonymous with places like San Francisco or Williamsburg - places in which “redevelopment” and “revitalization” really means pushing out low to moderate income people and people of color. But my hope is that there are enough citizens within Detroit committed to the re-envisioning process early on that will fight with the same fervor they have for years, to keep the city theirs. With the introduction of Mayor Bing (who has both supporters and opponents, naturally) and the “Detroit Works Project”, which has invited citizens to actively be involved in the city’s re-envisioning process, civic engagement, while heated, is also clearly a priority. Almost 1,000 people turned out for the first public meeting to discuss strategies from the consolidation of neighborhoods to the possibility of more public transportation in this historically car driven city. As Mike said: “We may have a shortage of some things, but one thing there isn’t a shortage of is passion for this city”.

Putting Community Development in the Hands of the Community

Later that night some new friends invited me to *Soup at Spaulding* in North Corktown. A creative funding initiative started by local community members. The community meets every Thursday to eat a simple, beautiful, and delicious meal of soup (made from ingredients from the community garden Spirit Farm and donations from Avalon Bakery), buy local produce (fresh eggs, jams, and beautiful produce), and learn about two community projects that need funding. The 5 dollar admission covers the cost of your meal and goes to whatever project the group votes on. The projects then go up on KickStarter

to get more funding. That night, a woman named *Danielle “Doxie” Kaltz*, who started the Detroit chapter of a service arm of Burning Man called Burners Without Borders, presented about a project she created after seeing homeless folks living under bridges. She has been packing backpacks full of blankets, toiletries, food, and anything else people might need, and driving around and giving them out to those experiencing homelessness. She won the pot that night. The room was electrified with the brave and humble efforts of Doxie, who simply saw a need and decided to have the audacity to fill it. But hey, clearly, that’s the Detroit way.



Building Healthier more Connected Community, One Seed at a Time

On one of my last days in the city I met Mark Covington, founder of the *Georgia Street community collective* who after getting laid off from his job as an environmental engineer and moving back into his family’s home, noticed that people were dumping in the empty lots across from his house. “I knew no one else was going to clean those lots, so I decided I would” he says with a shrug, as if it were simply the logical thing to do. After cleaning the lots only to have them dumped at again, he decided to plant a garden to prevent re-dumping. Not only did it work, but community members began to

come out of their houses to see what he was up to. Neighborhood kids began to help with the planting and become interested in gardening, and people, who sensed a connectedness with Mark, began to share their difficulties with affording food while paying for heating and electricity. This spurred Mark to begin to grow more and involve the community. In time he developed an outdoor movie night, a “read to your kids” night, and community celebration nights.



Mark and the woman I consider the mayor of midtown - Rachel Lutz at one of the plots that has a playground and greenhouse.



He bought the building next to his grandmother’s house for next to nothing and he and his brother are doing all the renovations. They hope to have a space to have more community dinners and celebrations, a computer lab for the kids, a clothing and food donation drop off space, and an emergency fund for community members experiencing tough times. The whole collective now consists of 5 lots on Georgia Street, including a fruit orchard. Talk about community resilience. Detroit is the embodiment of the DIY movement.

Giving Students a Chance to Design the Future

And the institutions of the town, the College for Creative Studies (CCS) and Wayne State University, as well as both community and global foundations are taking notice and picking up a shovel as well. Amazing strides are taking place with University/Foundation partnerships that are funding business incubators, light rail development projects, partnership development, and grants that allow entrepreneurs, researchers, scientists, tech industry folks, and artists to live in the city while connecting them to communities in need. The College for Creative Studies has even sent its students out into Detroit to think creatively about how art and design can foster community development. One project in particular, CCS student Veronika Scott’s “Element Survival Coat” has garnered national attention. After spending time in homeless shelters Veronika designed of a stylish coat, lined with house insulation that is water proof and self heated that can be turned into a sleeping bag at night. It can be sown by someone with no prior experience and will hopefully be given at no cost to those who need it. The hope is to empower those experiencing homelessness by employing them to sew the coats and providing them with free housing and meals in addition to a paid job²⁰.

“I really think it’s a blessing that we’ve been deconstructed. We just have to build it right this time. If we do, we can show the world how to live in a sustainable way, with a city that can move quickly to adapt to whatever changes comes its way” said Mike. I couldn’t agree more.

So, here’s my final confession: I want to move to Detroit. Having lived in New York City, D.C, Boston, and now, San Francisco, I’m

²⁰. Learn more about [The Empowerment Plan](#).

used to comfortable city life that caters to the young. But never have I experienced a place thriving with talent, energy, passion, and determination to make their city, and by association, the world, a better place. If you are looking for a place to develop your dream, whatever it may be, consider trying to do so in Detroit, in the place I am now dubbing the birthplace of our collective new American destiny. See you there.



The author, milking a goat.



Every Guest a Host: Inside a Nomad Base

ROBIN

The doorbell rings. “Password please?” buzzes the intercom inside. “Helicopter” they answer outside.

Real passwords don’t belong to this place, this game is just another way to check if the person is actually coming for the house, and to see how the new visitor might respond. If people say they don’t

know the password they are asked to make one up. “But how do you track people,” someone asked once.

We don’t.



(photo courtesy of John Thackwray)

Welcome to casarobino, or as most people simply call it ‘casa’, a small apartment in a central neighborhood of Amsterdam that has hosted more than a thousand people over the past three years. They came to “be a host” and share the place, to join in for the weekly vegan open dinner or for some tea. A map of the world on the wall is filled with pins, people leave them to mark their places of birth.

The house is an apartment I rent that, as long as I’ve lived here, I’ve shared with people who are lifestyle travelers – nomads. When I began, I described it as a hospitality-house, then a shared travelers’ home and later as a (perhaps edgier) nomad-base. The house is a shared space in the truest sense, visitors are encouraged to see it as their shared place, and hence to care for it as if it were not just their own, but one that belongs to everyone present, as well as to the people yet to come.

They make it a better place by offering small acts of kindness, by receiving and giving hospitality. They choose to be part of the growing community of people who have visited already, and experienced the type of sharing and hospitality the house offers. Visitors come and contribute what they have and who they are, the space changing with every opening of the door.

But not everyone who comes also has to give; some just come to receive. Maybe they need a place to sleep, are tired from a trip, or just need to be taken care of – for at least a little while. The group cares for as many people as it can, and things come together best when nobody tries to enforce an arbitrary reciprocity. Every visitor brings a new presence, something it’s impossible to measure on any chore wheel.

Tonight, the living-room is full with people from many places, chattering away. Some are local, while others come from the United States, England, Finland, Argentina, and France. Many are travelers, some experienced hitchhikers, sailors, or cyclists, and others are people of the first generation of digital nomads, all sharing in some degree a desire for togetherness and an uncharted life.

They celebrate that one of the long-stayers, a young woman from Canada, is parting to continue on a trip that has been her life for five years now, traveling over-land from Australia to here, working

in a few countries as a chef, fruit-picker, or waitress. Now she's going further to as-yet undetermined places.

The person who rang the door-bell comes in, we share hugs and pass around some glasses of wine. The smell in the kitchen where others prepare food is great, the atmosphere even better.

The house is small, but shared space always expands. "Where can I sleep tonight," a returning friend asks, and someone answers: "I have some space in the room I'm using." People adapt to the space they are in, and the house, although small, is made for adapting.

An example is the living room, which is called "The Zula." Two couches, one low to the ground and the other a bit higher, a chair in a corner, a mattress, and some pillows fill up the sides of the living-room. In the middle, there's a low round table that seemingly appears out of nowhere when food is ready.

People bring in the pots, pans, plates and cutlery, and move around to wedge everyone in. If someone arrives late for dinner, everyone moves a bit closer together.

The cooks introduce the food, where it came from (dumpsters), who fetched it and how it was prepared. A plate goes around, and different people add food from the pans. Amazingly, no one starts before the food is passed and all are served.

Dinner-serving doesn't always go this smoothly, but somehow it works out like this most of the time, even though (or maybe because) there are no fixed protocols or practices. With walls full of different art, a toilet-door with brainstorm-papers on sharing, and randomly left notes and postcards in the kitchen, the space breathes community and lends itself to giving. It's a place for passing plates around, for offering food to others before starting to eat yourself.

"Think of others, before you think of yourself," is one of the guidelines of the house. It compliments "Share what you want, take what you need," and "As a guest, be a host".

The latter is the most groundbreaking aspect of the house and the major reason why people love it so much and want to set up similar

spaces. Here, every guest is both captain and sailor. Both consumer and producer. Tutor and pupil. Not one role or the other, but equal and together. Everyone is the host of everyone.

For the traveler who goes from host to host, from house to farm, or from community to the road, life is lived almost always as a guest. Hosts tend to expect the traveler to perform or to entertain them, to listen or tell stories.

For people who live like this, after traveling for years and years, or even only for a couple of months, it is a wonderful thing to finally feel you are home and share with people who live like a family of friends. They get to enjoy the freedom to go further, to stay until needed and, if it fits, to return when they want.



(photo courtesy of the author)

When these new hosts arrive here, I encourage them to take what we might consider "ownership," but not to own. A room doesn't belong to one person, neither does the bread belong to any individual. Everything is shared, except the things people don't want to share — obvious enough in practice, but sometimes hard to make known and understood.

It's a shocking change for some; most people are not used to give for the sake of giving. Folks are used to having other people working for them, for example, especially the ones who just left the traditional family structure. But for the ones who have been traveling for quite some time, it can equally be a challenge to think of everybody's food-needs, instead of having to secure their own first, or to clean everyone's dishes and not just their own.

And things do not always work out so fantastically. The bike-sharing project is mostly non-operational, and sometimes people would rather chill and hang out than make things happen. Being in Amsterdam, where people often come to get legally stoned, doesn't always help in that respect either.

But all goes mostly very well; I've found it's the attitude that matters. The bigger problem is often how you deal with things, not the dishes that haven't been done. It is the frustration that costs you energy, not the cleaning. It helps if people understand that if they don't feel they're enjoying doing something in particular, it may be better to leave it for the person who will, and move on to something else.

It is equally important to make people understand how the house functions so well. The things needed (material and immaterial alike) to make the house what it is come from people. You are able to ride this bike because someone who came before you worked his or her butt off. You can eat because someone has cooked and another has cleaned or collected the food. And you can be here free of charge, because someone else does pay the rent, and because people before you left donations to support this way of life.

It is these acts of giving that make 'casa' happen, which is also the essential understanding for community, of how to do this all together. If you want to be parasitic — to put it bluntly — another will have to work harder to make that possible. It's not about what you think other people owe you, but what you receive back from the continuous cycle of giving. The earth, just a nest of ants on a big scale; society at large and a society in small. This house, one planet, so to speak.

The house teaches more lessons: If you want to stay longer, others may not be able to come. If you take this book, you decide it serves you better than the person who comes after you. That it's great to have ideals, but being practical and flexible is what allows you to put them into practice.

And of course there are little secrets that make this life work, and mistakes that can make it collapse. If one person or a couple of people take on too big a burden, you know they will eventually fall down — no matter how much love and dedication they put in.

A cycle of people is essential to keeping the house going. The turnover of people avoids entrenching problems in people's relationships with each other, and it keeps the place dynamic. Therefore not all people can stay for long, but hopefully at least long enough to understand the culture of being a host while being guested, and to make sure that they pass this culture on to the next arrival, and maybe even further into their lives.

An important question is how to filter people, in other words, who to accept. Hospitality exchange networks such as *Bewelcome* and *Couchsurfing* can help to get the right people in, but the number of requests can easily flood the space's capacity. So instead of relying on these systems, we now have *our own website* thanks to one visitor who build that.

First it was just for fun, but later we started using the site to handle the requests, to keep parts of the community together, and to be our online presence. As a result, this website has also become a meta-community in itself; people share their stories and it enables them to meet up with other 'casa-people'.

But regardless the technology, nothing actually works better than word-of-mouth and people sending more of the "right people" — the independent traveler who doesn't need much explanation how these communities function and who loves to meet similar people.

In terms of diversity, the house needs more than nomads; it also needs the student who just took a vacation, the person who works in an office, the activist who fights for social justice, the tech-nomad

who loves to hack, the artist who travels as a way of life, as well as the traveler who has just left home for the first time. It's in this type of environment that we can make and find mutual inspiration.

I've also learned that you can't ignore stress and feeling burned-out. It happens, at times there is simply too much on someone's back and they lack the space to express their emotions. Dealing with this can take time and it can also be a kind of sharing to get out of somebody's way or to let them have their private space.

But the real key to avoiding burnout, the kind of depression that can corrode the foundation for any collective venture, is the mutual care and friendship that provide people a sustainable basis. A community is not simply the sum of its people, it is the connections between us all, the intimacy, the love, and the space to express our individuality that serves as fuel for our capability and willingness to share with each other.

The night has come to an end. Dinner has been served, we've taken turns toasting our departing friend, we play musical instruments, and others are eating desert. When the last visitor leaves, people go to sleep, and the house comes to rest, I play a bit with the cat, walk around and listen to the (uncommon) emptiness and silence of the place.

This time no one did the dishes, and they're still laying dirty in the sink. I leave them be, to discover the next day that they have vanished. "Why did you do the dishes," I ask the guy who cleaned the kitchen in the morning, even though he was too tired to join the dinner. "Because they were here," he says.



Screening for Gold: How to Find And Keep Your Good Housemate

ANNAMARIE PLUHAR

Mary was scared. Her elation at getting the job she wanted was dampened by her fear of finding a place to live. She knew exactly one person in the city where she would be moving and her salary wasn't going to be enough to rent an apartment alone. She had to find a housemate, a prospect that seemed daunting and frightening. She would be living with a stranger.

Not everyone feels as uneasy as Mary at the idea of looking for a housemate. Some simply choose a new living situation based on the available room, location, rent and a good gut feeling about their future roomie. They do start out living with a stranger, but it rarely ends that way.

You don't have to move in with a stranger. Ever. While you may start the process looking for a person you don't yet know, by the time he moves in, the new housemate should be a known entity, someone suited to you, no longer a stranger. You are looking for your good housemate. Not just someone who also needs a place to live or has a room to spare. While complete unknowns might be okay for stopgap or temporary arrangements, you should select your housemate according to criteria you have established.

A good housemate is someone with whom you can live comfortably. You smile at each other, you chat, you engage and disengage freely with no tension. You have minimal tension because before you consented to live together you discussed how you want to share housing. You made agreements about how you would live together and are living up to them. This is key—you make these agreements before you move in.

The evolution from stranger to potential housemate should be a careful process. Each step in the process filters potential partners, weeding out those who are not a good fit until you're left with someone who suits you. Your first step is getting clear on what (and whom) you're looking for.

Most people pay attention to the physical aspects of a new home, for instance: closets, light, availability of the internet, public transportation, bathrooms, etc. In addition to thinking about the space you must also think about how you want to live day-to-day. Make a list of what you must have in a home and what you can't live with. Whether you don't want a television or never turn off ESPN, be self-aware about it. This is a personal inventory of your non-negotiable requirements. It's a good idea to write it down. You may think you already know what these are, but there is something helpful about seeing it in black and white. You can use this worksheet. This is your first step in the screening process.

Once you have a list of essential requirements you can start looking. In your first contact, most likely by email, find out if your applicant meets your requirements. If not, cut 'em loose. If they do, have a telephone interview. By telephone you get a better feel for the person. If it doesn't seem right, don't continue. If you like what you're hearing, agree to meet in the home.

Meeting in person is the third screening step. Now you talk about the nuts and bolts of sharing housing. This should be a wide-ranging conversation in which you discuss money, kitchen use, cleanliness, neatness, noise, routines, and guests. You ask every question that occurs to you. You answer the other person's questions about you and the house honestly. As you talk, you build agreements about how you would live together. Listen to your instincts and hunches. If it doesn't feel right, walk away. If it does, you may have met your new housemate. But you have one more screen: references.

Talk to references. Most likely, the references will validate your feelings. As you do this step you have time to consider the interview and the agreements made. If all is good, you have found your good housemate.

This process may not feel as linear as presented here. There will be disappointments and narrow escapes. But stick to your guns and expect that there is a good housemate also looking for you. When you need someone to help you move a bureau or just leave you alone once in a while, it will all have been worth it.

But your work isn't done yet! Your good housemate is a treasure, and the care that you took in finding her cost you time and energy. You want the relationship to work, to be comfortable and easy, mutually beneficial, and unstressed. A key to this is to live up to the agreements you made about how you would live when you moved in together. What follows are the most common sticking points for housemates and some harmonious practices worth following.

Money

You pay all bills on time and hold up your end of the financial responsibilities as promised. There are no surprises here.

Kitchen Use

You keep your food items separate, combine them, or share certain supplies as was agreed on as part of the interviewing process. If your food is separate, do not eat or drink what is not yours. Nothing can be more irritating to a housemate than to find something gone. If you share food, make sure one person isn't doing all the cooking or shopping. Make sure housemates are reimbursed for collective purchases in a timely fashion. Clean up after you cook so that the next person doesn't have to deal with your mess.

Cleanliness

People have different ideas of what clean is and whose responsibility it is to do the cleaning. In your interview you agreed on the basics, now you should follow through. There should have a system whereby all housemates know how cleaning happens and can make a note of when they have done their bit. Some households have a chore wheel, others a chart. Some have permanently assigned tasks, while others rotate the tasks. Sometimes a home owner does all the cleaning of common rooms. Whatever your situation, do your bit cheerfully and on time.

Neatness

While you certainly talked about neatness during the interview, this usually requires some fine-tuning. How much stuff left lying around in common rooms is acceptable? In general the other person's stuff will seem messier than your own, but they may see it the same way.

Noise

Television, radio, video games, internet videos, and music are all ways that sound can travel in a home. Housemates don't have to like the same sounds to live well together, but they do need to agree on what sounds they are willing to hear in common spaces and at what times. Someone who loves to blast hip-hop music while cooking probably shouldn't live with someone who requires silence. A night owl with a love for death metal should probably invest in some headphones. As you live together you may discover new ways that sound is both good and annoying. Talk about it often.

Routines

You and your housemate have a set of expectations about the daily routines. While not so much a negotiated agreement, you agreed to live together in part because your daily routines were complementary. Maybe your housemate has a regular job and is out of the house all day, or is always home for dinner, or leaves every weekend to see a significant other. But life happens and routines can change. A new job, a break-up, or a close friend moving in next door will affect how you or your housemate uses the home. Sometimes the transition happens without any tension, but sometimes the new patterns of home use are significantly different and housemates become unsettled and upset. To keep your good housemate, discuss these changes and how they affect the household. Create a new agreement to make sure that the new routines are satisfactory and comfortable for all.

Guests

Some homes have friends who drop in all the time. Other homes never have visitors. You should have a basic understanding about visitors as part of the agreement you created. Since guests who visit

from afar and stay overnight disturb routines, it is essential that your housemates know in advance about the guest(s). Whether you need to ask permission or simply inform depends on your agreement. A new lover who starts living in the house can be a major source of irritation, after four days you need to have a conversation about it (and it might be worth consulting the noise section above).

Agreements, not Rules

Be true to the agreements you made before you moved in. Many stories of housemate problems stem from a perceived or actual transgression of spoken and/or unspoken agreements, whether these have to do with completing chores, paying bills, or sharing food. Talk to your housemates and do it in person, not by text or email. Text and email can make a small issue much bigger through misunderstandings endemic to the media.

An agreement is not a rule and should not become one. Rules have hard edges, while agreements have soft edges. Adaptability and flexibility might be called for if an agreement needs to be changed due to changing circumstances. If so, do it consciously and in a spirit of cooperation and generosity. You want your home to be comfortable.

Your agreements are as good as gold. Guard them well.



Generation Open

CHRIS MESSINA

Back in March, I spent the weekend in DC at *TransparencyCamp*, an unconference focused on government transparency and open access to sources of federal data. Down the street, a social-media savvy conference called *PowerShift* convened over 12,000 of the nation's youth to march on Congress to have their concerns about the environment heard. They were largely brought together on social networks like Facebook.

Earlier that week, after an imbroglio about a change²¹ to their terms of service, Facebook published two plain-language documents setting the course for “*governing Facebook in an Open and Transparent way*”: a Statement of Rights and Responsibilities coupled with a list of ten guiding principles.

The week before that, the *Association for Computing Machinery* (ACM) released a set of recommendations for open government²² that, among other things, called for government data to be available in formats that promote reuse and are available via public APIs (application programming interfaces).

WTF is Going On?

Clearly something has happened since I worked on the *Spread Firefox* project in 2004, a community-lead initiative tasked with marketing Firefox, the open-source web browser. At the time, the open source was

21. Obasanjo, Dare. “Some thoughts on retroactive deletion of shared content on Facebook and other social media sites” 25hoursaday.com. Published February 18, 2009

22. Association for Computing Machinery. “ACM U.S. Public Policy Committee (USACM) Recommendations on Open Government”

easily dismissed as an outpost for “modern communists” and hippies (since meritocracy and sharing equals Communism, apparently).

Today, even Microsoft is slathering “open” over several of their projects — heralding the “heros of open source” and sponsoring their own open source repository called CodePlex. Perhaps the pinnacle of progress was candidate Obama’s embrace of open source to help him win the election²³, and his subsequent push of similar solutions once in office.

From Microsoft to Obama, the culture of “open” is being embraced by even the most conservative and blood-thirsty organizations, each falling over the other to claim the mantle of being the most open of them all. Steve Ballmer once called Linux a “cancer”; now Ray Ozzie, assumed successor to Bill Gates, claims that “open source is a more disruptive competitor than Google.”

So we “communists” won, right?

I wouldn’t say that. In fact, I think it’s now when the hard work begins. Though the strides that the open source community has made cannot be underestimated, the real change lies in the changed expectations of the forthcoming generation. From work to personal life; from school to friends and family; from shopping and sharing, Generation Open’s behaviors, ideas, and new norms will reshape the world. The old school has little left to defend its crown; the change is upon us.

Our Web

Let’s start with Facebook, just because 300 million users can’t be wrong.

The people who create Facebook not only believe in what they’re doing but are on the leading edge of Generation Open. It’s not merely about age; it’s a mindset. It’s about having all your references come from the land of the internet rather than TV and becoming accustomed to — and taking for granted — bilateral communications in place of unidirectional broadcast forms. Where authority figures used to be able to get away with telling you not to talk back,

23. “Obama and McCain website technology” Published June 6th, 2008.

Generation Open just turns to Twitter and lets the whole world know what they think.

But it's not just that the means of publishing have been democratized and the new medium is being mastered; change is flowing from the events that have shaped my generation's understanding of economics, identity, and freedom.

Maybe it started with Pearl Jam and grunge and the era that screamed "*drop the leash*."

Or perhaps it was more subconscious — like witnessing AOL incinerate Netscape²⁴, only to see a vast and distributed network emerge to champion the rise of Firefox from its ashes.

Maybe being bombarded by stinking piles of Flash and Real Player one too many times lead to a realization that, "Yeah, those advertisers ain't so cool. They're fuckin' up my web!" Of course watching Google become a residue on the web itself, imbuing its colorful primaries on HTTP, the native protocol of the web (as a lichen seduces a redwood, becoming inseparable from the host) also suggests a more organic approach to business as usual.

Talking to people who hack on Drupal or Mozilla, I'm not surprised when they presume openness as matter of course. They thrive on the work of those who have come before and in turn, pay it forward. Why wouldn't their work be open?

Considering that many of Facebook's critics have chided them for being "closed" (in spite of the arc of their brief history), you might not expect openness to be a part of their culture. Similarly, talking to Microsoft you might presume the same. In the latter case, you'd be right; in the former, I'm not so sure.

See, the people who populate Facebook, from CEO Mark Zuckerberg on down, are largely from Generation Open. They grew up in an era where open source wasn't just a bygone conclusion — it was innate to learning to code!

24. O'Malley, Gavin. "AOL Retires Netscape Browser" MediaPost.com. Published January 2, 2008

The kids who aced computer science class — learning how to code for Windows and Java environments — they ended up at Arthur Anderson, Accenture, or Oracle (and probably became equally boring). Instead, it was the hobbyist kids who cut their teeth writing WordPress plugins, Firefox extensions, or Greasemonkey scripts that found success because of openness²⁵ who are leading the development of Facebook's massive platform effort.

That people like Zuckerberg talk about making the web a more "open and social place" where it's easy to "share and connect"²⁶ is no surprise: it's the open, social nature of the web that has brought them such success, and will be the domain in which they achieve their magnum opus. They are the original progeny of the open web: its natural heirs.

But it is surprising that people in organization from Best Buy to Comcast are also embracing these values — though haltingly at best.

While the C-level brass continue their capitalist march towards profit, individuals within the bellies of these beasts are discovering social media, and the satisfaction of connecting with and actually serving customers directly. It's almost as though the employees — through their engagement with the wider community — are turning their companies into massive open source projects — patching the woefully efficient and sterile customer service systems (often run by robots!) with care and attention, and then documenting their good works on the company wiki and through Twitter.

Giving it All Away

Back to this weekend in DC.

You put TransparencyCamp in context — and think about all the abuses that have been perpetrated by humans against humans throughout time — and you have to stop and wonder: "Geez, what on earth will make this generation any different than the ones that have come before? Who can say that Zuckerberg (once he assembles a mass of personal information

25. Messina, Chris. "Because of open source" FactoryJoe.com. Published March 18, 2006.

26. Zuckerberg, Mark. "Improving Your Ability to Share and Connect" Facebook.com. Published March 4, 2009.

on his peers at an order of magnitude never achieved since humans started counting time!) won't turn into Stalin?"

This fear is justified. If you want to know why privacy is important — look to the power of aggregate knowledge in the hands of racists and xenophobes 70 years ago, in fascist Europe and imperial Japan. Consider the Vietnam era and the recent genocides in Rwanda and Darfur. Information imbalance is power; and in the hands of the greedy and hateful, it becomes irrepressible — something that our parents' generation experienced, if not perpetrated.

So it's no wonder that the Facebook newsfeed (now the “stream”²⁷) and Twitter make folks of previous generations so uneasy: the potential for abuse is so great and our generation — our open, open generation — is so beautifully naive.

What we don't know can't hurt us — yet — and already our attitude and behaviors are infecting culture and spreading widely. It wasn't so long ago that major publishers derided our tweeting as “trivial” — now *rely on it* and the network we've built up for traffic and raising visibility of their content²⁸. I can still remember how awkward and offensive candidate McCain's “*McCainSpace*” site looked compared with Obama's sophisticated and deliberate use of social media — branching off barackobama.com and into Facebook. He got it, and embraced the network, and won the presidency.

Certainly the threat of hegemony and authoritarianism hasn't been diminished in our modern era — but it's much harder to conceal, as evidenced by the worldwide reaction to the Iranian election fiasco. One only needs to consider that the US State Department asked Twitter to postpone a scheduled service outage²⁹ during the Iranian

protests to realize how critical these services have come to global policy and discourse.

Our work, however, is just beginning. We do not yet know what the future will look like, or how these vast networks and technologies will ultimately be put to use, but keeping track of the pulse of the planet³⁰ sets us considerable apart from the information flows of past generations.

If we are Generation Open, then we are the optimistic generation. Ours only comes around every several generations with the resurgence of pure human spirit coupled with the resplendent realization of intent.

There are, however, still plenty who reject this attitude and approach, suffering from the combined malaise of “proprietaryness,” “materialism,” and “consumerism.”

But — I shit you not — as the world turns, things are changing. Sharing and giving away all that you can³¹ are the best defenses against fear, obsolescence, growing old, and, even, wrinkles. It isn't always easy, but it's how we outlive the shackles of biology and transcend the physicality of gravity.

To transcend is to become transparent, clear, open.



27. Elman, Josh. “More Sharing through The Stream” Facebook.com. Published March 4, 2009.

28. Warren, Christina. “The New York Times Syncs its Social Network With Twitter” Mashable.com. Published September 9, 2009.

29. Fleming, Sue. “U.S. State Department speaks to Twitter over Iran” Reuters.com. Published June 16, 2009.

30. Schonfeld, Erick. “Twitter's Internal Strategy Laid Bare: To Be “The Pulse Of The Planet”” TechCrunch.com. Published July 16, 2009.

31. Kulikauskas, Andrius and Ellison-Bey, David. “An Economy for Giving Everything Away” Worknets.org. Published October 17, 2002.

When Your Community Lets You Down

CORBYN HIGHTOWER

Since my family has gone from rich and corporate to poor and communal, one of the most amazing things has been how embraced and supported we feel by our friends, neighbors, and surrounding community. We share our gardens' harvests with each other and pass lawn tools back and forth. We borrow friends' vehicles on rare occasions, and impose upon others' Costco memberships. Our household has gotten by with no Internet connection thanks to the generosity of neighbors and their Wifi, and the availability of free-floating signals from the library that we can catch on occasion. It seems, here, that if we raise our hand and say, "I need this. Can you help?" that our community collectively answers "yes."

That's why it has been so surprising on the rare occasion that we've been betrayed by that same community. Theft is one way your neighborhood can betray you, one I've been unlucky enough to experience a couple of times.

Stolen Wheels

A couple months ago, we got our new bicycle trailer stolen from in front of our house. We don't have a garage, and during the dry California summer it is tempting to park our bicycles outside sometimes, versus leaning them against each other in a tangled mass of metal in the dining room. It is hard to lock both a bicycle and a trailer; you need a really long cable. On the day in question, my cruiser was locked to the front porch post, but the trailer was only attached to my bike frame and was not secured in any other way. It got stolen. We had bought it new from the local bike store when we sold our car. Our younger children were kept safe and comfortable

in it, and it was so hard to explain to them that someone saw fit to steal their carriage from the safety of our front yard.

That night, and for virtually all nights since, I've closed and locked all our windows, although it makes our un-air-conditioned house hot and stuffy. Suddenly it seemed like our community didn't have our best interests at heart after all. People often complain that this is the worst part of being victimized by crime: the new awareness that anyone around you can have malicious intentions. We live in a triangle of downtown that includes a soup kitchen, a gorgeous hiking trail with shady spots and well-concealed homeless encampments, and a large park that draws what I affectionately think of as old-school hoboes. It's not unusual for a leathery old dude to stop by and pull a few apples off our tree, and of course we think nothing of it. A minivan packed with a large Russian family actually parked in front of our house the other day and partook of the apples as well as the neighboring pears. It didn't feel like thievery. They were not stealthy—in fact, their good-natured casualness was deeply satisfying to my inner hippie. We actually opened the front door and greeted them, offered our extension ladder. The trees belong to all of us. On this one block of residential downtown, we have the following fruiting trees: cherry, apple, pear, Asian pear, orange, almond, apricot, and lemon. When you need rosemary to season your dinner, you wander over to the nearest neighbor who has it growing in front of their house.

I got mugged at knifepoint when I lived in New York City in the early nineties. It was a bitter betrayal, because I felt my hairs raise on the back of my neck when I saw the men who were waiting to attack me, but decided to ignore what I thought was elitist alarmism. In reward for this I got a cherished cheap Walk-Man stolen, along with an even more cherished mix tape made by my a very close friend—I still miss it and mourn its loss. They took all my money, which was sixteen dearly-needed dollars. The most vivid memory I have of the night is sitting in the back of the black-and-white cruising the neighborhood with the cops and tasting the salt from the sweat of the perpetrator where he had held my mouth closed. Thievery is intimate. Someone decides that you own something that they need more than you do, even if it belongs to your young children.

This community trust extends to the business choices we make. Our family boycotts the big-box stores that are making political

choices that contradict our values. Whenever we can, we buy things at locally-owned shops, especially for big and important purchases. When we made the major decision to switch to a car-free lifestyle, we also made a conscientious choice to spend all the money needed to outfit ourselves with bikes, trailers, helmets, locks, and other accoutrements at a locally-owned cycle shop. We needed them to be our pit crew for our new way of doing things, and understood the merit of establishing a relationship with a small retailer that understood our needs and valued our business.

Sadly, that was a good intention that has caused endless frustration. Since March, the cycle store that we so carefully chose has failed us at absolutely every turn. From the very beginning, when I placed my special order for my Electra Super-Deluxe Cruiser, it took four or five unreturned phone calls and vague answers before I finally had to go retrieve it myself, ten miles away at a warehouse, and ride it home in a torrential downpour.

I've never been That Kind of Customer. You know: the one who purses her lips and asks for her coffee "from the fresh pot," as if good service is always being dangled just out of reach. I'm easy. I don't make greed-driven requests. I didn't ask for a discount when we bought our entire fleet of pedal-powered car replacements from their store. I have spent many years tending to the entitled customers at fancy retailers as both a sales-floor grunt and an ambitious brand representative. It is part of my self-identity to keep my demands low and my demeanor humble when doing business. This is part of what I consider to be the currency of this sort of relationship, and (I assumed) would lead to us having a reliable port in this uncharted storm of living sans car.

When I am very angry, I cry. I'm afraid it's something a lot of women do. I have to steel myself to call them—usually for the fifth or sixth time about the same unresolved issue—because I keep fighting tears and a lump in my throat. It's embarrassing to feel so hurt and frustrated over something as seemingly inconsequential as a broken bike seat or malfunctioning brakes, but this is the thread that keeps me hanging on to the notion that I haven't failed my family by losing so many luxuries. We rely on this little cycle store for so much of our comfort and safety now.

Well, really, my family relies on me. My children need me to keep things in order, and to make sure they are ferried where they need to go with reasonable ease. Having a handsome, new, fuel-efficient, ultra-safe car waiting like a sturdy and reliable friend was a comfort as a parent; it was visible reassurance of our success and well-being. Now I rely on others to keep the illusions of this humble life sparkling and serene by simply allowing us to keep what we have, and to keep it in running order. I'll trade apples for that.

The Sting Operation

I was without my phone for twenty-four hours, and it was horrible. What I've learned is that I've learned nothing about doing without, in spite of all outward efforts.

The other day, my two youngest and I took the bus to the WIC office. You can't get there by bicycle without riding on part of the freeway on-ramp (seriously,) and then on a segment of lightly-industrial, busy two-lane road without a shoulder to speak of. So we took the bus, which we're doing more and more as the weather is getting worse. Usually, it's just faster and more convenient to load up the bike trailer and speed off somewhere, and if the weather isn't too miserable, it's always my first choice.

Here are things to know: "miserable weather" is, in this family, defined as brutally cold AND raining AND windy, and if even one of those factors is missing, it's not miserable, and you will find us pedaling with stoic determination. The other thing: WIC is an agency that gives poor families vouchers for, well, mostly for pretty unhealthy food. But it bridges the gap between the end of food stamps and the end of the month.

On the day in question, I was surrounded by my usual bubble of chaos, which, this time, included empty bags for toting home WIC food, my big orange messenger bag full of necessary paperwork to prove program eligibility, as well as the standard stockpile of sippy cups and bananas for long waiting room stays. Nothing out of the ordinary, except that we were on the bus. And I don't use the bus very well. I was taken immediately and suddenly by total surprise when our needed stop appeared out of nowhere! and I needed to dismantle our bivouac and offload in record time.

We had barely reassembled curbside when I felt a disturbance in The Force. My iPhone. I could picture it on the empty seat beside us. I've gone on and on in past blogs about my guilt regarding my phone, and about how I rationalize holding onto such a ridiculous indulgence. Some people keep their car, and I decided instead to keep the phone I got when they first started discounting them. I hang my head in shame; please feel free to bombard me with well-deserved admonishments and criticisms. I deserve all of them, and more.

In a panic I dashed into the nearest building, which happened to be a nursing home. After many phone calls to various offices, I was finally able to discern that no phone had turned up on the bus in question. By this time, I was pouring sweat, we were late for our meeting, and I was integrating the growing realization that I was probably going to lose my phone forever.

The ensuing hours proved to me that I am an addict. I can give up so much, and I have. I can preach the glories of downsizing, of simplifying, about getting back-to-basics, but I'm full of crap because I was devastated without my phone. I was bitterly disappointed in myself, and having a hard time calming down. The caseworker at WIC was talking me off the ledge, telling me to breathe, telling me to be "in the moment." (Sometimes I love/hate California.)

We made our way home after a few hours of bureaucratic paper-shuffling, toting a rolling cart with cartons of apple juice and crappy cheese strapped down with bungee cords. I had a mental script now, that I was repeating to myself and out loud to anyone else who would listen: I would have a sizeable gap left in my life, and I knew I would not be able to replace it with another fancy phone. I'd acquire something cheaper, maybe—someday. But I would fill that gap with ways to be a better member of the community, a better mother, and a better person. I'd fill it with activities and moments that I otherwise wouldn't think to have, moments of silence where I don't play online Scrabble, times of reading an actual, physical newspaper versus scanning headlines on a digital screen. I'd stop taking photos of the kids at the park, and instead just be present with them.

All of this sounds really great, doesn't it? Doesn't it sound like a wonderful opportunity for self-improvement? A fantastic blog post,

wherein I take on the role of beatific martyr for the Great Recession cause? I'm sure there were all sorts of lessons to be learned, and I probably would have benefited from learning them if the following hadn't happened: someone finally answered my phone when I called the number, after at least two dozen failed attempts.

Her voice was a monotone. She didn't seem surprised or happy to be hearing from the phone's owner. And she said she was sorry, she couldn't return my phone to me because she was in "south Sacramento." Oh. Already? Wow. Why didn't she just hand it over to the bus driver when she found it, like Good People Do? Another odd thing: she kept hanging up mid-conversation, like she was reconsidering all relevant information. Then she turned the phone off completely, so that I had to keep dialing again and again using my husband's cell, only to hear it go straight to voicemail, until one time, it didn't.

Again, someone answered. This time, it was The Guy. (During our dealings, they became known as The Woman and The Guy, as we never did learn their names.) The Guy said he'd give my phone back if I gave them a hundred dollars in reward money the next day at noon, at a major bus transfer point. I was afraid to say no. I felt like the situation was so fragile. They could turn around and sell the phone on craigslist for much more, and I knew that. I tried to be noncommittal but encouraging. I attempted to get their contact phone numbers and their names, but they were too savvy for that. So we arranged for our rendezvous, and then I paced and thought. I decided it might be a good idea to call the police, not because I really thought any crime had been committed (I wasn't sure about that,) but because I was starting to get a little freaked out about meeting with these people alone with the kids, not sure if there was the potential for a mishap of a sort that would end up with me phoneless and bloodied.

A detective called me back the next morning, and told me that they'd have an unmarked car there during the arranged meeting time. We had to take a bus to the predetermined spot of course, which felt like peril. There were nefarious characters on the bus, we now knew. People who were doing something slightly wrong! People who dared not give a found phone to the bus driver! The detective told me that it was actually a thing, a law that they broke: "Misappropriation of Found Property."

So we arrived at the predetermined meeting spot, and hilariously, unbelievably, there was a Ford sedan parked nearby with two guys slouched in the front seat trying not to look conspicuous. I had my daughter's cell phone with me, and the detective called when he saw us arrive. "You need to give me a signal when he asks for money. Touch your head. No, don't do that, that's too obvious. What should you do?"

"Open up my bag?" I offered.

"Yeah, that'll work. But I don't know how we'll get to you in time from over here in the car."

"Why doesn't one of you come over and sit at the bus stop like you're waiting for the bus?" It seemed the obvious solution.

"Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I'll do that."

The Guy was an hour late. It was a gray day, and the kids and I sat under a bare tree, counting how many red leaves we could find on the ground, and drawing simple pictures with sticks in the solid and unyielding earth. I was trying to hide my anticipation, and trying to prepare myself for the possibility that The Guy wouldn't show, and I'd step off this emotional rollercoaster at a low place on the ride, and start my new ways of doing things without my phone. And the detective kept calling me and texting me, basically just to say hi, from twenty feet away. We had to pretend not to know each other, but I think he was really bored and wanted to chat to while away the time on grueling stakeout.

After an hour passed, The Guy called my daughter's cell to tell me he would be there soon, and lo! He used his own cell phone! So we had the number, which excited the detective, and he started doing some research while he sat there on the bench. After a few minutes he texted me and told me the owner of the phone was a black man, six-foot-four and two hundred sixty pounds. So basically I could take him in a brawl. But before that could happen, I had to tend to my youngest child. Molly had been doing the desperate "I need to pee" dance for a dangerous amount of time, and I finally had no choice but to cave and help her out. With the detective's blessing, we scurried across the street to the gas station bathroom. After dealing with all the tiny clothing and four wee hands needing to be washed, we came out and everything happened very quickly. A couple approached us,

I stammered and reached for my bag, and then The Guy handed me my phone just as the detectives circled and announced themselves.

I don't know what possessed me in the next moments, but I shoved the phone in my pocket and grabbed the tiny hands and ran. Well, maybe not ran, but speed-walked away, ducked behind the gas station convenience store, crossed over in a half-crouch to the intersection, and high-tailed it to the K-Mart parking lot. I didn't know where I was going or why I was in such a hurry. I felt relief to be holding a phone I never thought I would see again, but my face was burning with another unpleasant realization. I was embarrassed at involving the police in something that would've probably been no big deal, and sheepish about being poor and still having this fancy phone, when these people from South Sac surely didn't enjoy such a luxury. And regret for not having sacrificed the hundred dollars in reward money as penance for all the crimes of character that I commit on a daily basis.

We didn't even go in the K-Mart, just stood there while I figured out what to do next. Everything pointed to getting on another bus and heading for home, as it was too far to walk without a stroller for the children. How could I get to the bus stop without disrupting the concluding scene of our sting operation? The detective answered my ambivalence with a phone call. "What do you want to do?" he asked. "Press charges?"

"No," I said, "I just wanted my phone back. We're safe. It's not a problem. You've been so helpful, thank you so much."

And that was it. After some discussion, the detectives ended up scooping us up and driving us straight to the phone store so we could change all the family phone numbers, in case a crime syndicate craved revenge. When we loaded up into the detective's car, I smelled something familiar. After a couple blocks, they silently pulled the car over. The helper detective went to throw something in a trashcan outside a Jack-in-the-Box. It was The Guy's pot, he'd lost that. And that's when I really felt bad.



How to Build A Housing Co-Op

MIRA LUNA

During college, I lived at a 32-member student housing cooperative where I had more fun there than I did in all my other years of college combined and met lifelong friends. I saved money by living there so I didn't need to work through school, as the coop was owned by a nonprofit (consequently rent would get cheaper relative to inflation). The activists, artists and thinkers who lived there brewed new ideas which planted seeds in me that sprouted years later. We seized the opportunity to use common spaces for political and arts events that as regular tenants we would have never been able to host. The house created a vessel for whatever passion we wanted to manifest.



The Comunidad Cambria Coop (photo by Allan Heskin).

On the downside, I found it incredibly difficult to study there. The work of being a contributing coop member was a drain on my work time and there was too much drama to focus on school. The coop had structure and rules but with little follow through, meaning chores and maintenance didn't get done and conflict was common. We had an application process, but let everyone in regardless of their ability to cooperate, as well as people with drug and other mental health problems that needed more support than we could offer. New members weren't trained in consensus decision-making, creating heated and way-too-long meetings over trivial issues. I learned a lot about what not to do.

Years later, volunteering for a nonprofit that develops cooperative (coop) housing, I discovered that when done properly, resident-owned coops can offer an affordable and more convivial alternative to single family housing. Coops save money by cutting out landlords' profits, sharing common spaces, lowering operating costs, and receiving public subsidies for affordable housing. Studies show that coops provide other benefits, like greater social cohesion and support, reduced crime, increased civic engagement & sustainability, better quality and maintenance of housing, and resident stability.

Housing cooperatives are defined primarily by their legal structure: coop members own the housing collectively through shares in an organization, rather than individually, as with a condo. Residents also govern the housing democratically, either directly or through elected representatives. Not just for students, coops can be home to support groups of low income families, artists, elderly, disabled, and people with a common purpose. Over 1.5 million homes in the US are part of a cooperative housing organization.

There are several different kinds of coops:

- *Rental or leasehold coops* are democratically run organizations of tenants that equitably share costs of renting or leasing a building owned by someone else. Rental coops may share part of the management responsibility and often have more power collectively than single renters leasing from a conventional landlord. Nonprofits

can also buy a building and rent it out to lower income folks who might not be able to afford shares. Sharing a house can offer big savings and can help people avoid foreclosure.

- *Market rate coops* are houses, apartment buildings or other groups of housing units that are organized under a democratically managed corporation in which residents purchase shares at a market rate. Shares cover the costs of a blanket mortgage, rainy day reserves, maintenance and other operating costs, insurance, tax, etc. Units are resold at market rate.
- *Limited- or zero-equity affordable housing coops* receive grants and government subsidies to make coop shares more affordable to low-income people. They keep the housing permanently affordable through legal restrictions on the amount of gain on a future sale of the coop share. Often these are organized groups of low-income tenants that agree to collectively buy the building they already rent through a nonprofit, usually a land trust that holds title to the land and takes it off the speculative market. It's a great way to make permanent gains in the fight against gentrification.



The Columbus United Cooperative (photo by SF Community Land Trust)

A successful limited-equity model is Columbus United Cooperative, a 21-unit apartment building in San Francisco. The *San Francisco Community Land Trust* (SFCLT) worked closely with the low-income, Chinese-American family tenants who were fighting eviction and demolition. With public subsidy, tenants purchased their units as part of a coop for little more than their controlled rent in an area where home ownership is half the national average due to cost. In Los Angeles, Comunidad Cambria went from a gang war zone and drug supermarket slum to a model of peaceful, affordable cooperative housing with the help of coop housing activist Allan Heskin and several Latina women in the complex. The community rallied to protect its new coop against threats from gangs and drug dealers to burn the building down, remediated a toxic dump in its basement, and created a vibrant community center. Sunwise Coop is a rental cooperative, owned by Solar Community Housing Association, with a mission to provide eco-friendly, low-income housing in Davis, CA. The house uses solar water heating, photovoltaic panels, passive solar design, and composting to reduce their ecological footprint. They also grow their own veggies for shared vegetarian/vegan dinners and raise chickens and bees. Monthly shares or rental costs at affordable housing coops are often half or less of the market cost.

Coop housing rentals are a relatively easy first step to implement. Coop ownership can sometimes be a long, difficult process, but with much more substantial and long-term benefits. If you are thinking about starting your own housing cooperative, here is a basic plan for coop ownership, much of which applies to rentals as well:

- Find a potentially willing community of people who want to live together long-term. Some community cohesion and individual social skills are very helpful. If there isn't already a community, holding dinners or other regular bonding events can lay a good foundation.
- Find a mentor through another successful coop, a nonprofit that helps develop housing coops (like a *local land trust* or the *California Center for Coop Development*), and/or a coop-friendly lawyer. Read the *Coop Housing Toolkit*.

- Educate community members about the entire process. Do an assessment to see if your community has the motivation, finances and skills needed to follow through. (If they don't, you may want to recruit or train people that can help, especially with accounting, legal, organizing and maintenance tasks.) Make a decision whether or not to move forward.
- Work with a nonprofit or form an independent housing corporation. Form a Board of Directors from the residents' community with membership, finance, maintenance and operations/management committees. Create bylaws for organizational procedure, including new member selection, orientations, decision-making, Board and committee elections, regular communication/meetings and conflict resolution processes. You can use another coop's bylaws as a model.

Develop a realistic budget with reserves, then research financing options. If your community is low income, it may be eligible for foundation grants, public subsidies from *HUD* or municipal affordable housing programs, and loans from *Community Development Financial Institutions*. Try working with banks that have already funded coops, it will be a much easier pitch and process.

- Select the dwelling that you want to buy, convert or construct and make sure the seller is willing to sell to a coop.
- Secure a loan and buy the building with the community through a blanket mortgage. This is much easier to secure when working with a nonprofit that has a track record of successful coop development.
- Complete any rehabilitation or upgrades that are needed in advance of moving in. This can be a fun way to build group cohesion in advance of all living under the same roof.
- Find ways to build community feeling through shared common space, childcare, dinners, group projects or other regular events. Develop relationships with the surrounding community through volunteering programs.

Although problems can come up as in any housing situation, the issue most likely to destroy the coop is internal conflict. Finding the right people and teaching others willing to learn how to get along is key.

For more info on how to share housing and other stuff as part of a cooperative, see *The Sharing Solution*, a book by Janelle Orsi and Emily Doskow, visit the *National Association of Housing Cooperatives* website and any of the linked websites above.

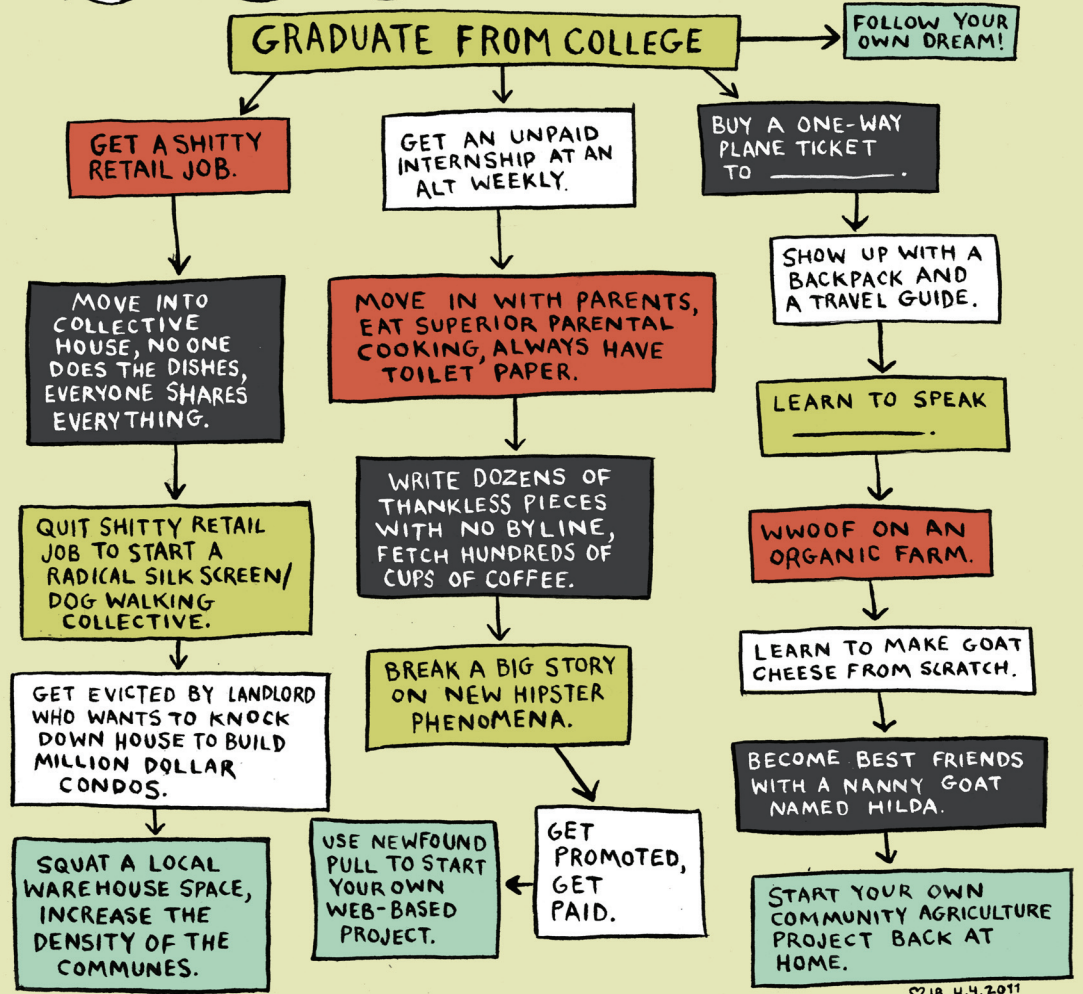


The Sunwise Coop family (photo courtesy by Sunwise)





a Post-Graduation Flow Chart of Limitless Potential



When an old world is dying and unsustainable, the new world can only be born through the imagination, resistance and constructive efforts of the newly emerging generations, as yet untainted by institutional restrictions imposed by decaying structures. The evidence is in that this new generation broadly rejects the atomistic individualism of neoliberal 'economic man' and instead opts for relating and sharing, and that it is not just critiquing, but very actively building alternatives for living. Shareable Magazine, without a doubt one of the more globally important initiatives to make this new world accessible to a broader public, has assembled a collection of voices from this new generation, that will allow the rest of us to discern the patterns of the future, whose seed forms are already visible today. A new system is being born and this book is an important record of it. This is nothing else than a book of active prophecy for our times.

**—Michel Bauwens,
Founder of The Foundation
for P2P Alternatives**

