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One woman's attempt to nudge middle America towards a lifestyle that is less wasteful and gentler on the environment

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ONE WOMAN'S ATTEMPT TO NUDGE MIDDLE AMERICA
TOWARDS A LIFESTYLE THAT IS LESS WASTEFUL
AND GENTLER ON THE ENVIRONMENT

By

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B.S., Cornell University, 1944


Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1981

Approved by:



Chairman, Board of Examiners



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Date

6-8-81

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6-11-81

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most of this material has been broadcast
on National Public Radio.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Will middle America adopt a lower-energy way of life? Necessity, by way of high fuel costs, will dictate it. But can we do it with grace? I think so, if we start ahead of time and don't let it fall on us like a bolt from the blue.

Chapter 2

GIVE AND TAKE OF CHANGING A LIFESTYLE

"How would you like a dishwasher for Christmas?" my husband asked. I did not jump up and down with joy. In fact, I was sad. Because this was only the tip of the iceberg. The iceberg was how far my husband and I had drifted apart in our way of looking at life.

No, I'm wrong. Only one of us had drifted and that was I. I was out of step, not only with my husband, but also with our friends and our respective in-laws.

My eldest sister put it in plain words when I visited her. "Look," she said, "you've been here only one day and the house is in an uproar. Mom wants to go for a ride; you want her to go for a walk. Ken turns on the heat in the attic so you'll be comfortable and you turn it off. I want to buy you a new blouse for your birthday and you want me to send the money to Common Cause. We take you out for a steak dinner and you order the salad bar. I can remember when you ate three pork chops at a sitting. Are you sick?"

I wasn't sick but I was in an unsteady state. I was changing and I didn't even know if I wanted to.

My childhood family was the usual Depression-era poor. We wore those flowered cotton dresses handed out by the government welfare agencies. I can remember when we received a large square can of corned beef and it was like a Christmas present.

So why didn't I join affluent middle America when that stage came after World War II?

I don't know. I just kept on saving string and bottles and empty boxes. Then my husband's company sent us to South America and down there we had to save string and bottles and empty boxes because those things were precious there.

We moved back to the U.S.A. and I almost drove my sister-in-law crazy grabbing "treasures" out of her garbage. "You're not throwing away that peanut butter jar, are you?" I screamed. "And here's a mayonnaise jar!" And a coffee can!" I hugged the empty jars to my bosom and glared at Marjorie.

"But what are we going to do with them?" Marjorie asked gently.

"The nuns make apricot jam and sell it at a bazaar," I said, "and the coffee cans the girl scouts cover with wallpaper and people buy them for canister sets."

"But we're not in South America," Marjorie said.

"What do people put jelly in?" I asked.

"They buy jelly jars."

"Glory be," I said. "People buy an empty jar?"

"Certainly. It makes the jelly look nice."

I had missed a whole cycle of history. I had gone from my mother's kitchen where we used flour-sack dish towels and put jelly in mustard or horse radish or peanut butter jars to South America where we didn't even have mustard or horse radish or peanut butter jars unless we had friends in the Embassy who imported things.

I tried to join the affluent society but it wasn't in me. I felt more at home in rummage-sale corduroys, attending lectures on soil erosion, protein hunger in the third world, organic gardening.

My kind, really quite understanding husband tried not to object -- at first. "Do your thing," he said. "That's okay."

Our friends and our families started out the same. If that's your thing, okay, do it.

It's not that easy. In fact, my "thing" almost caused a permanent rift between me and all my relationships -- family, friends, husband.

Naturally I started out like a crusader. It seemed so clear to me -- if people did not move toward a simpler way of life we'd all go down the drain. If the richer people and the richer countries kept on living high on the hog while other countries literally starved there'd be social upheaval, revolutions, war.

"I don't want you to feel guilty," I kept saying. "I just want you to read, think, understand. We can't keep on the way we're going." I passed out Xeroxes of articles about the dangers of insecticides and pesticides, about how much grain it takes to produce one pound of beef.

I alienated everybody. Nobody loves a crusader.

It didn't even dawn on me how far I had gone towards being a shrew until one evening my husband turned to me in the kitchen -- we both love to cook so when he retired we quite often cooked dinner together or took turns -- one evening he turned to me quite calmly and said, "You finish the stew and eat it too. I'm going to a restaurant."

"What did I do?" I asked. "What did I say?"

But Mel was gone out of the house. Maybe out of my life.

I sat down, forced back my panic and tried to think what had gone on in the kitchen.

Mel was cooking the dinner, making stew. Oh yes, he was using the oven. And I said, "I hope you didn't make that four-hour stew again. It's not necessary to cook a stew four hours."

Did I switch off the stove light? I did. Did I turn down the thermostat? I did.

And how many times had I done all this? Day in and day out.

I thought my sister was kidding when she wrote and said my nephew had a new name for me -- The Great Not Necessary.

I'd just done it again. "It's not necessary to cook a stew four hours." But maybe Mel was only following the recipe. Why did the recipe say to put the stew in the oven for four hours?

Was I out of step, not only with my husband, my mother, my sister, our friends, but even with our cookbooks? I felt so alone, so abandoned I sat down and cried. Then I got up and turned off all the lights and cried some more -- in the dark.

The dawn started coming outside and slowly a dawn started coming inside of me. I had fallen into the old trap of not seeing the woods for the trees. I was trying to relate to the whole universe and in the meantime what was happening to the closest relationship a person can have?

Luckily I was given a second chance. Mel and I sat down and talked over our lifestyle -- or lifestyles -- and figured out how the two could be one.

I still save empty jars and buy "treasures" at

rummage sales. I still leave vegetarian cookbooks on people's reading tables. I sent my mother a knit cotton undershirt, frilly and pretty but with sleeves. "Wear this, mom, on cold winter days and you'll be toasty warm." I sent my sister a book on health through exercise, my house-hunting nephew a book on solar houses.

What I don't do is harangue. No more "It's not necessary." I guess it boils down to this: I have to be true to my principles but not on other people's territory.

Has my lower-key approach brought me back into the circle of family and friends? I think so.

And the surprising thing is now that I'm not hollering so much I notice that people are adopting saving ways -- little by little, as they can. Why did I think I had to do it all alone?

My husband bought a new push lawnmower instead of a powered one. "Good exercise and not so noisy," he said.

We both smile about the dishwasher. Where would we have put it when we need all our space in the kitchen? But wasn't it kind of him to offer?

My sister wrote that she took my mother for a walk to the local herb garden. My nephew wrote, "Hi, Aunt Not Necessary. A solar house might be a necessary."

Actions speak louder than words. I have to remember that.

Chapter 3

LOW-KEY RECREATION

My husband and I are camping at Pishkun Reservoir. He's out fishing in his small aluminum boat and I'm sitting beside our tent in the shade of a scrub willow about three feet tall.

This is not height-of-luxury camping but it suits us. I know, many people of our age -- my husband is 70, I am 57 -- would say, "A camper is the only way to go. You have an icebox, a toilet, running water. You sleep comfortably."

I suppose I could get used to a camper but my husband and I are in the backpacking-tenting-aluminum rowboat stage right now. Maybe we'll stay in this stage forever.

The point is one can enjoy the outdoors without thousands of dollars worth of equipment.

Our tent is a backpack tent. We bought it second-hand for \$20 and it serves us on backpack trips and on car and boat camping trips. We did buy a new fly for the tent. It cost the same as the tent but it's very necessary. Mountain rainstorms can beat their way through a thin nylon tent.

Why do people of 70 and 57 choose recreation as rugged as backpacking and tenting, you might ask.

There are two reasons: one, my husband is a Montanan, a mining engineer, a hiker, a fisherman; two, I am an amateur naturalist and I want to see and smell and touch as many plants, trees and flowers as I can -- in as close to their native habitat as possible. I might add -- and before I get too old and brokendown to do it.

Actually this backpacking stage is rather new for me. I was a stroller, a walker, until a few years ago. During our 15 years in South America I was a country-club wife.

Not a good one. I never did see much sense in lying around the swimming pool creating the perfect tan. Nor did I see much sense in all-day bridge games and afternoon tea parties that started at three and lasted until seven-thirty, while maids and cooks and gardeners did the work around our homes.

It was an artificial life and I was never really in tune with it.

I am in tune with the life I am living now. So is my husband. At 70 he is in better health than he was 20 years ago. He retired early, at 55. Too early, some people would say, considering inflation, but that's partly the pivotal point of our life. Our life is geared to a modest savings account and a monthly social security check.

You can just about live like a mole in a hole on that, many people would say.

As I sit here in my scrub patch of shade I'm watching two water skiers zoom around the lake. That's the other side of a camping life. Those people came in motor homes plus a four-wheel-drive pickup pulling a huge inboard motorboat.

Do I envy them? No. Maybe I would have once upon a time, although I don't think I ever spent much time in the envying occupation.

I can't remember if I felt terrible or not during the Great Depression. Certainly I didn't care for jam sandwiches of homemade bread. Homemade bread in those days was no badge of honor. You were some kind of immigrant.

I didn't care for the I.G. or I.G.A. or G.I. -- something like that -- government issue dresses the six girls in our family wore to school. They were a pretty cotton print and not too badly made but everyone knew they were government issue.

We girls were much happier with the missionary barrels we received from unknown church ladies. Every once in a while a neighbor or friend of a neighbor would drive up the dirt road to our LOVEHILL FARM (at 12 one of my elder sisters wanted to name our pile of rocks

LONEHILL FARM but she printed a V instead of an N and the sign stayed) and leave a carton or two of castoff clothes.

To this day I love cartons of castoff clothes. Not everyone in my family does. Genes must be different, after all, or each adventure and happening one lives through puts a mark on one.

All my family wore the missionary barrel clothes, to the extent we could. Some of the clothes wouldn't do even in Depression days. I distinctly remember some Gay Twenties charleston dresses. I wish I had them now. One was a heavenly salmon pink -- voile I think you'd call the fabric -- sleeveless, ruffled. It was a short impudent shift of a dress. If I had it now I'd wear it somewhere.

I don't know if the name missionary barrel was something we used in those days or something we added in talking about those days.

My eldest sister Froni (a Hungarian name -- first-borns are closest to ancestral ties) was 18 when I was eight so she could have brought home literary allusions, especially since she boarded with a librarian family one year during high school.

My naturalist bent started in those country childhood days. I wanted to know the names of the

flowers I saw on the way to school. Our one-room country schoolhouse had only one teacher and this same teacher was there for all my pre-high school years. Now looking back I think how amazing -- one person to be in charge of so many years of a person's life.

Was she that good? Well, I feel I learned as much as anyone else did. I even learned the names of the wildflowers in our country lane.

A person who grows up barefoot, who picks clothes out of missionary barrels, who reads fairy tales while hidden in a closet, will never be in tune with country clubs and 100-horsepower motorboats.

Chapter 4

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

When I answered Cindy Ort's letter I almost felt I was writing one of those "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" pieces. I wanted to say, "Yes, Cindy, there are people like you out there."

Cindy (from French Lick, Indiana) wrote me a three-page letter telling how she and her husband and two children were living on less than \$5,000 a year and what's more, they were living pretty high.

Cindy and her family are a perfect example of Voluntary Simplicity, which is a phrase that belongs to some sociologists out in California. It gives a name to what a lot of people are doing.

I had to tell Cindy there are many of us out there, or out here, or whatever. Our thing is being thrifty, being frugal, going around saying, Can this be saved? Can that be reused?

Once upon a time we were very much in style, then we went out of style, now it looks as if we might be edging our way back in.

Of course most of us aren't anywhere near the style

of Cindy and her family. Let me read from her letter. She started it after Thanksgiving so she's talking about the holiday dinner. "We butchered our own turkey and cooked our own pumpkin for the pies and there were pickled crabapples we had made from a neighbor's tree. We had our own sweet potatoes, steamed with maple syrup we made last January, and we had picked all our green tomatoes earlier and let them ripen under the counter so there were still tomatoes for the salad. Oh yes, the table we ate off was made from three old oak planks my husband snatched from our barn.

This family does not have electricity. They live in a "funky old log cabin on a rundown farm with five goats, two cats and a few chickens."

They have a battery-powered FM radio. They saw their wood by hand. They grow a large garden and store the produce in a root cellar.

Now this would all be very common if these people were farmers to begin with but they weren't. This is how Cindy puts it: "We're both displaced suburbanites so it's taken us a few years to adjust to this life and learn the needed skills. I'd never even seen raw spinach until we grew some. And I still have a hard time eating a raccoon or groundhog, but we get a little better at it each year. We work really hard most of the time but really love our

life here. Finding ways to make the necessary cash money each year is the hardest part. I sew a lot -- making rag dolls and other craft items."

How many of us could even imagine sewing rag dolls and craft items on top of taking care of two children, five goats, chickens, a garden, and how about washing clothes?

Let's see what else she says. Dave, her husband, usually takes an outside job for a few months a year. They have a car and that seems to use a good part of the cash. And taxes. Cindy says, "Alas, they won't take honey in trade for the property taxes."

She admits their way of life is far out. "I'm sure most of our acquaintances think we're really kooky, and at times we begin to wonder ourselves."

Don't wonder, Cindy. Hang in there! There are lots of us out here. Our number is growing. We have a name.

I signed the letter, One of those Voluntary Simplicities.

Chapter 5

THE SMALL JOYS OF GLEANING

One of the reasons my husband and I can live on such a small income is that we get a lot of fun out of silly little things. Right now we're sitting around with two pails of plums, cutting them in half to dry in the sun. Our hands are sticky; juice is dripping all over. Luckily we're out in the yard under the maple tree.

The plums didn't cost us anything. I'm a gleaner, as in the Bible, and like those groups that are springing up all over--Gleaners Incorporated, and so on. They go around picking up fruit and vegetables and grain to raise money for the poor.

I imagine they have a good time going around, maybe just as good as going off on an expensive vacation. They have friends to be with, and they have the warm feeling of using things that would go to waste.

Many of us can't stand to see things go to waste. That's why I'm a gleaner. If I see fruit on the ground I simply have to ring the doorbell and say, "Please may I pick up your fruit? I'll put it all nicely in boxes and you take what you want and may I have the rest." It's not a chore at all. It's something I look forward to.

By now I have my apricot lady, my apple lady and my plum gentleman.

My strawberries I get by trading raspberries. We grow raspberries in our back yard and I trade a gallon to a friend for a gallon of strawberries from her back yard.

I'll take a box of dried plums to my plum gentleman. He'll like that.

I don't mind doing the work. When you can sit under a maple tree in cool shade it doesn't seem like work.

I wash the fruit with the garden hose. That way the water is doing two jobs--washing the fruit and watering the grass.

Oh, how virtuous I feel: the fruit not going to waste; we not spending any money to buy it; the jars free from friends who eat more pickles and mayonnaise than we do.

This type of good feelings you can't buy on a vacation traveling from place to place. Oh, I've done my share of traveling. Maybe I wouldn't be so happy cutting plums in half in my back yard if I hadn't done some traveling. I always wanted to smell Hong Kong. That's what I said: "I want to smell Hong Kong." So I did. I went to Hong Kong and Tokyo and Singapore and Bangkok.

I saw all that and now I'm cutting plums in half in my back yard, barefoot. That's the way you can do things these days--you can live different lives. You can be a poet, a peasant and a philosopher. You can travel the world one day and patch socks the next. Don't laugh. I actually put a patch in a pair of white socks the other day. They're white cotton socks and I love them but they

don't last the way nylon ones do so I patch them.

If I ever go to Hong Kong again I might wear these patched socks. My husband will wear his plaid jacket I bought in a rummage sale for 50 cents.

Chapter 6

MOTHER-DAUGHTER CHURCH BANQUET

This was a church lady who called me. "Could you speak at our mother-daughter banquet?" she asked. "We want the topic to be How To Simplify Your Lifestyle and Feel Good About It."

Now that makes me feel good. Might it be that the churches will be our leaders in learning to cope with this new future that's coming whether we like it or not? That was the point this church lady made. Her church wants to meet the crisis voluntarily, before it falls on their head through our famous inflation.

What I'm going to talk about at the banquet is what I've done about my lifestyle and what other people have done, people who are neighbors, who live in the same community, or who live in communities like ours.

I'll take along an article I found that points out how much money a family can save by cutting down on processed food and choosing what health food people call natural food or whole food. In other words, you buy whole potatoes instead of frozen hashed brown or potato chips; you buy beans and rice in brown paper bags instead of a frozen Mexican dinner; you make homemade puddings instead of buying cake,

pie and ice cream.

I know this is all a bit scary and some people absolutely can't do it. Time is the factor. If everyone in the family is working no one wants to start dinner from scratch at five-thirty.

On the other hand, maybe we have more time than we think we do. Look at the amount of time we spend looking at TV.

And cooking is fun for many people. Making home-made bread is a big thing today. Maybe if the whole family pitched in, preparing dinner could be a good family occasion. It could be a share-it occasion, not only sharing the work but also sharing talk--what happened to everyone during the day.

I think we'd be amazed to find out how much children can contribute to the cooking. I have a friend who hates cooking. Her daughter took it up at age ten and never stopped.

This church occasion is a mother-daughter banquet. I like that. I think it's very important that children are in on family discussions about changing a lifestyle. Children are getting away from the gimmee-gimmee idea. They're aware of what's going on in the world.

The church lady said to me her group is trying to emphasize the good that could come out of the energy crisis. For instance, members of a family will depend on each other. There might not be a car for each person. When Friday night

comes the family won't take off in ten different directions.

Neighbors will start doing things together. Communities will be communities. Churches will think about the nuts and bolts of living -- living together in a community.

I'll mention the church near Glacier Park that owns a flour grinder as a community project. One family borrows it, grinds the flour and breakfast cereal for a week's supply, then another family borrows it. This same principle could apply to a canning project or a food drying project, maybe even winterizing a house.

I'm going to leave plenty of time for discussion after my talk. I bet I come home with more ideas than I go with.

Chapter 7

BOWLING SHOES AT CITY SPIRIT MEETING

"Nice bowling shoes you're wearing," Abe said to me at the City Spirit meeting.

"Thank you," I said.

Why was I wearing bowling shoes to the City Spirit meeting when it was a dressed-up meeting in a downtown motel? During intermission I told Abe the truth. The meeting was a mile and a half from my house but I wanted to walk. I couldn't wear heels but neither could I wear hiking boots or jogging shoes or tennis sneakers. A person doesn't want to look counterculture at a Chamber of Commerce type meeting.

I was not in corduroy or blue jeans. I was wearing polyester pants and a polyester shirt. This is the shirt my sister Froni insisted on buying for me. For \$12. I told her not to do it. I can buy all the polyester shirts I want for 50 cents in a church sale, I said. Send that \$12 to Friends of the Earth or the Center for Science in the Public Interest or one of those Alliances that are fighting nuclear power.

That's fine, my sister said, but she bought the shirt anyway. So I have this navy blue polyester shirt which I wear on certain occasions along with polyester

pants that are offwhite--not from choice but from years of service. Polyester never wears out but the white does get offwhite. I don't mind.

Anyway, I have this blue and white outfit and I thought the bowling shoes went very well with it. They're tan color, soft leather, very comfortable.

And I paid only 25 cents at the Senior Citizens rummage sale.

I know we don't go around today saying things like a penny saved is a penny earned, because with inflation can you save anything?

And I know if everyone bought shoes for 25 cents and blouses for 50 cents something terrible would happen to the state of the economy in this country. A businessman said that to me. I remember it very well. It made a great impression on me. "Kim Williams," he said, "you are economically inactive." He said it as though I might as well be dead. I was of no use whatsoever in this whole wide world. I was not buying. I was not making the wheels of progress go around.

That was 15 years ago. I'm still economically inactive. But I wonder. If I send the 11 dollars and 50 cents that I'm not spending on the blouse and the 29 dollars and 95 cents that I'm not spending on the shoes to The League of Women Voters or Save the Children-- doesn't it end up in the gears of the economy? I'll have

to think about that.

I suppose I should also think about fashion. What would happen to fashion if people wore bowling shoes to go shopping? Or to teach school? The world might fly apart.

Chapter 8

HUMAN STRENGTH AS SOURCE OF ENERGY

I thought I had the energy problem of the world solved. It was after I took up backpacking and didn't drop dead. It was such a shock to me--the fact that I didn't drop dead.

I actually thought I might. After all, I'd never hiked 12 miles up a mountain in my life and here I was not only climbing the mountain but climbing it with 30 pounds on my back.

At age 55. Of course I know why I did it. I'd never be any younger; if I was ever going to see the top of any mountains I had to do it now.

So I did it. I climbed to the top with my 30 pounds in a backpack, feeling like a mule in harness. I fell into bed--into my sleeping bag, that is--and I said "Oh, I feel fine, thank you very much," to my husband, but actually I was quite apprehensive.

The thought went through my mind--maybe I'll be done in tomorrow; maybe I'll be stiff as a board or my ankles won't work or my back won't bend. How will I get down the mountain? They'll have to send a helicopter up after me.

But I woke up perfectly all right. My husband and I climbed another peak in the area, then went down to a lake and spent the second night on the shore of the lake.

We ate freshly caught fish for supper--after we caught a second batch. The first batch we left for just five minutes on a tussock of beargrass and ffsst they were gone. A hawk must have swooped down and carried them off right behind our back.

Don't think we were in paradise. The mosquitoes and gnats and horseflies were in clouds. I swallowed two mosquitoes right along with the fish. But I didn't die of that either.

The third day we climbed back up to the ridge then hiked down the mountain 12 miles.

So there I was home thinking about this tremendous strength I never knew I had. Well, I said, if I have all this strength then don't we all have it, and isn't that the solution to the whole energy problem?

I sat right down and wrote a poem--to be set to music--to set human hearts and souls afire.

THE ECOLOGY RAG

Ecology has had it
if we keep on with these gadgets.
Everything is electricity
instead of human energy.

We've got the strength,
we're all too fat,
so why do we wire the house
like an automat?

I'll wash dishes in a pan
if you mow the grass by hand.
I'll use gloves of rubber
and you will shed your blubber.

Out with the clothes drier,
there's a line in the yard;
out with the blender,
bananas aren't hard.

Instead of spraying dandelions in spring
we'll make a salad for the table.
If you dig, I'll cut.
I think we still are able.

You don't need a plugged-in thing
to sharpen a little knife.
Grandpa used a whetstone
and lived a good long life.

Grandma sewed on a treadle machine,
it had a comfortable sound.
It's still in the attic,
I'll bring it down.

Darling, do you mind a shirt
that's not the whitest in town?
Do you care if we go back
to a towel on a rack?

Ecology has had it
if we keep on with these gadgets.
We've got to live a simpler way
and we've got to start today.

I sent the poem to a publisher. It came back with a rejection slip--"Don't preach."

And the very next week I stopped by a friend's house on my way home from the university and she gave me a sack of plums. "Thank you," I said. "May I use your phone?"

I called my husband to come and pick me up, along with my plums. I put the phone down, then suddenly it dawned on me what I was doing. "Good heavens," I said to my friend, "is this the same person who hiked 12 miles up a mountain with 30 pounds on her back?" That sack of plums weighed at most 25 pounds and it was one mile door to door.

I called my husband back and said hold everything. But you can see I am no longer under any illusion that the energy problem of the world is solved.

Chapter 9

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: SENIOR CITIZEN STYLE

"I'm glad dancing is back," a senior citizen friend said to me, "because my New Year's resolution this year is to turn the thermostat down and warm myself up by dancing."

It's true--dancing is back, and for all ages. The senior citizens' center had a dance the other day and it was packed. The center has a picture window and there, framed like a Christmas card, were the senior citizens twirling and swinging. The bright colors of the women's dresses melted together like a kaleidoscope.

"My New Year's resolution is in three parts," my senior citizen friend went on. "Now I'm not going to jog. I'm 72 years old. But I go along with the idea that you have to get your heart beating faster once a day, and your lungs working faster, and your muscles working faster."

"I used to jump rope," she said, "right in my basement in the wintertime because I couldn't go out walking. Oh, I walk to the store when the streets aren't icy. But on stormy days I do something in my own house. I don't jump rope any more but I dance. I put the radio on and I dance. I also do exercises. I have a folder full of exercises I clipped from newspapers and magazines."

"You don't get bored?" I asked.

"At first I did," my friend said, "but after a while it gets to be a habit and you feel so good after you've finished. I figure it's like brushing your teeth or cutting your toenails. There are things you do because you have to."

"What's the second and third part of your resolution?" I asked.

"The second is to go out once a day, to leave my house. Now, I love my house, but I'm a widow and I live alone. I know that a great many people do all their errands one day a week but I don't. I divide up my errands so I have something to do every day of the week. I walk if I can. Maybe I visit some one. Once in a while I have lunch with some one. I go to the library. I go to a lecture. Sometimes I think half of the reason I go out is that it's so nice to come home: to take off your hat and coat and boots, look at the plants, have a cup of tea. If you stay home all day you don't have that pleasure of coming home."

"Glory be," I said. "That's just what I'm going to do when I'm 72. And what's part three of your New Year's resolution?"

"To wear underwear. You know for years, summer or winter, I wore a nylon slip as my underwear. Everyone did. We kept our houses at 75 and we wore sleeveless dresses in

the middle of winter. Now I have nice soft warm underwear."

"Next thing you'll be wearing a T-shirt as I do," I said.

My friend laughed. "I have sweaters again," she said. "Wool sweaters. I wear a long-sleeved blouse under them so they don't itch. And I wear pants. Around the house and on my walks and to the library I wear pants. They're so sensible. You can't turn the thermostat down and sit around in a dress."

"But dancing you can," she went on. "You can wear a silk dress and you're warm because you're dancing."

"You're going to dance the new year in," I said.

"And I'm going to dance it out," she said.

Chapter 10

WEARING LONGJOHNS

Can you imagine being happy to see the thermometer at one below zero? That's the way it is when you've been at 20 or 30 below for a month. Well, it seems like a month anyway.

It's amazing how well you survive in such cold. If some one had told me while I was living in South America that I would walk to the university in 20 below zero, I would have said, never never. But here I'm doing it.

I wear thermal underwear, warm pants on top, wool socks, lace-up boots, sweaters, wool coat, thick fuzzy cap, and then a scarf wrapped around my face.

The scarf is an absolute must. You have to wrap your face or it will turn white, and when it turns white, it's frostbitten and you don't want that. So you wrap a scarf around your face with only two eyes peering out so you can see where you're going.

You breathe through the scarf; you warm up the icy air before it hits your lungs. Probably nothing drastic would happen to your lungs breathing air that is 20 or 30 below zero but there's no point in doing it if you can simply warm up the air by breathing through the scarf.

I haven't worn long underwear since childhood days on our old farm in upstate New York. I hated it then. Not so much in grade school, because all the kids wore it there. We walked to school, a one-room school on a little hill. My family had two miles to walk so long underwear was indispensable, especially when we did not have the custom of wearing pants. Girls did not wear pants to school. We had to wear dresses and long cotton stockings.

My father ordered our long underwear from Montgomery Ward. We weren't happy to see it. The legs were lumpy under our stockings. The sleeves showed under our dresses.

And then when we were in high school--oh, what a disgrace. What a shame. We were outcasts. It wasn't until my senior year that the Lord intervened. Or was it the man who invented skiing? Anyway, ski suits appeared in the Montgomery Ward catalog. And suddenly it was accepted for girls to wear ski pants to school--over their dresses.

What a marvelous creation those ski pants were. Oh, they were nothing like the sleek contour-fitting ones we have today. No. They were made of something called melton cloth. Naturally they weren't stretchable like all our clothes today.

Melton cloth was a thick wool material rather like a Hudson Bay blanket. It didn't give at all. You had to buy it big enough to go over your dress or skirt. Naturally

it bagged in the rear. All skiers had baggy rears.

But to us farm kids ski pants were a gift from heaven. We could put aside the long underwear, leave it for weekend use at home on the farm to feed the chickens, water the horses, fork hay for the cows.

Now here I am, 40 years later, wearing long underwear again. And I'm so happy about it that I'm jumping up and down. I sit in classes at the university and my long underwear sticks out at my ankles and wrists and it's like a badge of courage.

But today the thermometer says only one degree below zero. I'll have to leave my long underwear at home. It'll be too hot walking to the university.

Can you imagine? It goes to show how tough the human body is.

Chapter 11

EXTENDED FAMILY: THE GRANNY ROOM

"That's not the guest room. That's the granny room," my friend Dotty said.

"What's a granny room?" I asked as my husband and I put our suitcases in what I thought was the guest room. I'll admit it wasn't an ordinary guest room. This one had a bedroom, sitting room and bath, and it was in the garden, not in the main house.

"A granny room," Dotty said, "is where the grandmother lives when she gets old."

"Well, glory be," I said. I knew that extended families were a regular part of life in Latin America, but what a lovely name for the accommodations--the granny room. It makes you feel sort of welcome. I mean if I were a grandmother and I visited my daughter and she talked about a granny room, I'd feel pretty good.

Well, you might say, it's easy to have a granny room if you have a big house. Of course that's true. This house and garden where we stayed in Chile had enough space so there was an apricot tree between the granny house and the main house. I reached right up and picked

apricots off the tree and ate them bursting with ripeness. Well, it was March; that's summer in South America.

But then I went out with a social worker and the poor people had the extended family also. It's your family but it includes aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins--ah, always cousins. The idea is if you don't get along too well with your father and mother you get "invited" to live with an aunt or uncle.

I think that's a marvelous idea. Teenagers don't have to run away. They just go live with some other part of the family. I know families are bigger in South America so there are more choices.

But don't think there's always a huge house. I visited a family I knew from the university. They had seven people living at home and only three bedrooms. The eldest daughter was 29 but she was still living at home. She was a librarian and she was saving her money for a car. She was single but even if she were married she might live at home.

My friend Dotty's son is going to do exactly that. His wife is going to be part of Dotty's extended family. David and Consuelo are going to live in the little garden house where my husband and I were guests. They will sleep there but they will eat with the family at the family table.

Will that work? you'll say. Two women in one kitchen! Well, it's a way of life that's been going on for centuries in Latin America. Other places too.

Who knows -- it might become a way of life right here in the U.S.A. -- with the cost of houses going up all the time. And how about the cost of running a furnace?

If you're going to keep a house warm you might as well keep it warm for three or four people rather than just one. That's what my friend Dotty said.

Chapter 12

UNDERGROUND HOUSE

I won't say there is nothing new under the sun because I think there probably are many new things. But I had to tell my friend John who lives in an underground house--pardon me--an earth-sheltered house--that's the modern term--that I ate the best chicken and dumplings in the whole world in an underground house so long ago I was only eight years old and the Great Depression was going on.

This house was built into a hill. It was backed against a hill just like a truck that unloads snowmobiles, and there were trees on that hill--all around. The house was in the woods.

I regret to say that the local name for this family and the other families who lived in this area was bushwhackers. I don't know how we had the nerve to call anybody names. We were all poor as church mice. We went barefoot in summer, owned one pair of shoes.

But these people back in the woods kept to themselves, made baskets for a living. They were a kind of hillbilly, I guess.

My father would visit them once in a while and I would go along.

There were two things I remember about this underground house built into a hill. Well, of course I remember the chicken and dumplings. Those dumplings were light as a feather. And how did these people raise chickens back there in the woods? Wouldn't a fox have eaten them, or a hawk? Maybe the people had an underground chicken house too.

Anyway, what I remember about the actual house is that it was warmer than our house. The family had only an ordinary wood-burning stove, the same kind we had, but their house was cosy.

Now I know why, now that I know the principles of an earth-sheltered home. The ground is warmer than the air in winter. No use going around saying cold in a cave, as people do who want to knock the underground house idea. A cave can be a cosy place.

One part of the chicken dumpling house was dark and one part had windows in it. The windows were small but they faced the sun. How this family got so smart living back there in the woods I don't know.

The wind and snow blew right over the top of the house. I think that house had some of the

principles of an igloo. I remember you had to stoop to enter and you walked along a kind of entranceway. I imagine in a blizzard you'd be snug as a bug in a rug. You'd be down here and the wind and snow would be up there, level with the top of the hill.

We should have given that family a grant to study their house instead of calling them bushwhackers.

Chapter 13

EDGAR BROOKS' GARBAGE GARDEN

They almost ran him out of town. "Your garden's an eyesore," the city fathers said. "It's a garbage garden."

But Edgar Brooks stayed right there until the day he died. What can you do with a man who is 77 years old and makes jump-ropes out of old baling twine for the school children?

Besides, the garden worked. Edgar walked around town with pictures of enormous cabbages, a Hubbard squash sitting like a buddha on a stone fence, gladiolas as beautiful as those in a florist's window.

Some of the local people, those who believe in mulch and compost, called Edgar the Mulch King of Hamilton. Soil around the small western Montana town is good but Edgar's property was on top of a cinder bed left over from an abandoned railroad.

Instead of digging up the cinder bed and bringing in topsoil Edgar chose to build soil on top of the cinder bed. "Bring me your cornstalks and grass clippings and potato vines," he said to his friends.

What caused the uproar in the town was the suspicion that Edgar's friends brought not only grass clippings and straw but also plain ordinary garbage.

I will admit the day I was there I saw a ballpoint pen sticking out of the soil. But the soil was a foot thick--black, rich-looking, spongy. I could see where Edgar's vegetables and flowers would be well protected against summer drought.

Edgar had been building soil on top of his cinder bed for 12 years. He did not turn the compost under. "Nature doesn't turn its leaves and dried grass under," he argued.

Edgar also used manure and sludge. The sludge came from the town's sewage treatment plant.

Potatoes were always the first crop after a load of new mulch was added to the garden. This was because potato plants can anchor themselves in loose material. Edgar had a photograph of a little girl holding a four and a half pound potato. The caption on the picture read, "This potato grew in 15 inches of leaves."

Of course that was exactly the sore point with the neighbors. They were not accustomed to seeing potatoes growing out of a pile of leaves. And how about the straw blowing in the wind? How about the fire hazard?

Luckily by the time the city fathers were at the

height of their campaign to oust Edgar he didn't have so much loose material blowing in the wind. He had enough soil to anchor the new loads of straw and hay and yes, potato peelings, old cabbages, coffee grounds.

And he had friends. The garden club ladies were asking him to give talks. Edgar scolded them for keeping their lawns too neat, for sweeping up all the leaves and putting them in the trash can. "That library lawn has been kept so clean for so many years," he wrote in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, "I will bet those two earthworms the school children dropped in the soil by the rose bush will have a hard time surviving."

"Bring me your leaves if you won't make compost out of them," Edgar said to the ladies.

Edgar sent a letter to Appalachia, to the coal-mining companies. "You can build soil on top of those slag piles," he wrote. "Save all your cornstalks and rotted hay and dried leaves."

And garbage? Will one day trains haul coal one way from Appalachia and garbage the other?

Chapter 14

"EKO-KOMPOST IS COMPOSTED SLUDGE"

He's a mad Hungarian but he actually turns sewage into something you and I can put on our raspberries and get a big fat harvest.

Of course the ultimate recycling of sewage would be the composting toilet, which is already designed and in use in many places. Some day people will look back and laugh at the idea of using pristine mountain water to flush a toilet.

I say that myself every time I hike up the Rattlesnake Canyon where we get our drinking water from. We ought to bottle this water, I say, and send it out as a national treasure. Instead, we're flushing our toilets with it.

Then we have to have secondary and tertiary and who knows how many more sewage treatment plants. Some cities and towns simply can't afford them.

Luckily scientists are working on the problem. I've no doubt at all we can learn to take care of sewage without using whole rivers to do it.

In the meantime, there are people like our local Joe Horvath, the Eko-Kompost man, who have the gumption to set up a business next to the sewage treatment plant and take the sludge--that's the treated sewage--and turn it into an organic fertilizer that is sanitized, deodorized and ready for gardens, lawns, farmers' fields.

Last summer I was in Denver for a meeting on what is being done about all the waste our civilization is generating. The meeting was called Waste Alert. During one of the sessions we were taken to the city dump, which of course is no longer a dump. It's a very fancy waste disposal site. It cost millions of dollars to build.

But the sludge from the sewage plant had no fancy disposal site. It was simply dumped on an outlying field. "Good heavens," I said. "This is only growing tumbleweeds. Why aren't you growing corn?"

"Heavy metals," was the answer. "We're different from your home town. You don't have the mix we do."

"You need a mad Hungarian," I said, "but you can't have ours. We need him."

Our state legislature just gave the sludge man a boost. All the sludge compost we citizens buy and put on our land we can take off our state income tax.

So even though a composting toilet is our real future, at least for now we can have the end result of our civilization back on the land growing crops.

Chapter 15

WANTED: APPLES WITH WORMS IN THEM

"Thank you," I said to my neighbors when I saw the sign on their back fence. The sign was near their apple tree. Now a back fence apple tree is a temptation to all the children in the neighborhood. Apples fall off the tree into the alley, children walk home from school through the alley and they pick up the apples and eat them. It's expected.

But the sign on this fence said in big clear lettering: "Apples sprayed with insecticide. Wash before eating or do not eat."

I said thank you to my neighbors not because they used insecticide--not at all. I thanked them because they issued a warning--do not eat these apples.

But I wasn't happy. Because it underlines what we all know but do we want to know it?

It was so easy in the old days. A person would ask, "Where can I pick rose hips?" "Anywhere you find them," was the answer. Now we have to say, pick them only where you are sure the roadsides have not been sprayed. But how do you know?

My husband and I were camping out and I was walking along a country road and I came upon a lovely patch of

wild strawberries. Here's our dessert, I said. I went back to camp for a dish. But then I started thinking. There was a suspicious lack of weeds around these strawberries. What did away with the weeds? Had the strawberries survived when the weeds didn't? Did they come up later? How long would the effects of the spray remain in the ground? The result of my wondering was I didn't pick the strawberries.

Now I have to worry about all my wild berries-- and the watercress and the herbs I gather for tea.

And I have to worry about the children. Children will eat wild berries if they find them.

And how many people who spray apple trees put out a sign as my neighbors did? Probably children shouldn't even walk barefoot where people spray.

There's an old saw about a person asking what is worse than an apple with a worm in it and the answer is an apple with half a worm in it. Well, until the scientists come up with an answer to this spray-spray business, I'd say an apple with a worm in it or half a worm or quarter of a worm is a marvelous thing.

From here on I'm looking for that kind.

Chapter 16

SEND A SCIENTIST A SOLAR-BAKED COOKIE

I ate a cookie baked with solar energy and it was even burned around the edges.

The experiment was in a park in the middle of Missoula. An energy fair was going on and there was a solar oven. It was a very simple thing, a box with mirrors focusing the sun's rays. The oatmeal cookies were on a cookie sheet in the bottom of the oven.

It was not a hot day. We all had sweaters on. Yet those cookies baked. That box sitting out in the middle of a grassy field got hot enough to bake--even burn--the cookies.

School children know how to do this experiment. They also know how to heat water using the sun. It's the same principle that heats a child's wading pool or the top layer of a lake. I swam in Flathead Lake last summer and I was trying to skim across the top of the water like a waterbug to keep myself in the layer of warm water on top.

In some summer camps--oh, how primitive--the shower is a canvas bag hung on a post. The top of the bag is open to the sun and the sun warms the water. Of course the water isn't boiling hot and you can't take

a twenty-minute shower but you could get clean.

In our modern houses with instant hot water and instant heat and instant light, all coming from invisible sources, we sometimes forget that the sun is up there. There are many days when I don't think about the sun from morning to night.

Isn't it possible that our scientists are beguiled into that same predicament? They could go for days or weeks or years without looking at the sun. They've got their heads under the ground looking for coal or uranium or oil.

Well, you might say, coal and oil are products of the sun. Once they were green plants soaking up sunlight.

But aren't we smart enough now to go to the source of the coal and oil? The power of the sun has not diminished. It will burn cookies in the middle of a field. It will burn your back red as fire. It will fry an egg on a sidewalk in New York. I'm sure school children have done that experiment too.

Maybe scientists are by nature the kind of people who stay out of the sun. They're in laboratories, using microscopes under artificial light, surrounded by air-conditioning. Close the doors, close the windows-- keep out noise and dust. And yes, the sun. No sunlight wanted here.

I think we have to coax the scientists out into the

sunlight, even if--like moles--their eyes blink and water.

School children could do it. They could bake cookies and send one to each energy-studying scientist. With a note: "This cookie was baked by the sun." When you eat it please go outside and look up."