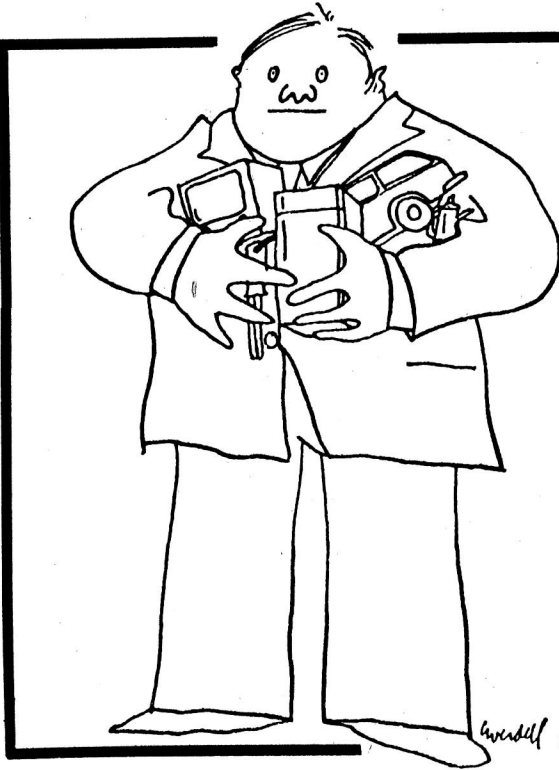


you get what you give

—Tom Bender



The whole consumer movement has always seemed off base—at best a bandaid action trying to patch up effects inherent in the irresponsibility and power we've granted to our institutions and corporations alike. And the way out that Wendell Berry suggests has more going for it than the fact that it works. It feels good.

Lane calls it a weaning process—giving up things bit by bit as you get comfortable with simpler and better ways. Many of them take more effort. Heating with a wood stove takes more of your time and energy, and is more messy. But it smells better, is a dryer, radiant heat, and gives you a fire to watch as well as a place to keep a teapot or pot of soup hot, to dry rain-soaked clothes, and to soak up a burst of heat coming in out of the weather.

Often the advantages are uncovered only with making the changes—getting away from surroundings filled with humming motors, paraphernalia that is always breaking down, and unspoken fears about what the untested contents of products are doing to your body. A TV survey finally called to ask what program we were watching and had to lower the TV audience statistics and thus advertising revenues by one more household. One by one, malingering brand names are vanishing as we track down local products that are better. We finally found a shampoo recently that both worked and didn't feel like either lye or herbal goo. Scratch one more Standard Brand Product. Aerosol shaving lather long ago joined the electric razor on the dusty pile of forgotten history, soon to be joined by my shaving brush when our Japanese bath finally happens and its hot soaks soften whiskers for shaving.

One look at what is being sold as new cars (not to mention their prices) convinced us that our truck's terminal illness maybe could be patched up and give it a run for a second hundred thousand miles. Even our contributions to recycling centers are decreasing as bulk-bought food staples cut down our bottles, cans and packaging.

A desperation-bought box of Wheaties plunged me over the line last week from the Standard American Dry Cereal Breakfast (even granola) and into homemade bread (Ya, now I remember Scandinavian breakfasts!), fruit, nuts and yogurt, and other non-habit breakfasts. Now I can avoid that horrid aisle in the grocery store—trying to figure if 15-1/2 oz. of Nature's

Own Sugar Hit is more lethal to my health and pocketbook than 435 grams of vitamin-sprayed, sugar-disguised Organ-o-Sweet.

We all have different things we hang onto and things we're glad to be rid of, and all our real changes happen slowly and stumblingly. But we definitely feel a momentum now of leaving the marketplace behind and very simply and happily taking more control and responsibility for our lives. At one time we may have done these things because of some ideology, but it's past that now. It's simple economics. It's escape from the frustrating choices among a hundred things—all alike and none of which are worth buying or having. It's a rediscovery of what really good food is. It's finding that whether it's food or shelter or friends, you get back in proportion to the amount of yourself you put in. It's having to relearn every time we head off in other directions the old maxim—*Keep It Simple*.

But more, we discover, these changes are not just to simplicity and economy. They're changes from living in a one-dimensional economic world to a multi-dimensional world. The gains in quality as well as quantity and the expansion in the breadth and depth of emotional and spiritual satisfaction give reward dimensionally greater than the time invested. Fire-lighting is a life-renewing ritual that keeps us closely and deeply aware of our capabilities our comprehension of the sources upon which we lean for our lives, and our demands upon them. A full woodshed gives greater comfort than a full bank account. And a bank account is never full. With a woodshed, you know when you have enough.

Each step we draw back from the tooth and claw of the marketplace gives a sense of space, of freedom, of peacefulness. The price of freedom is responsibility. It's also the path, and a joyful one.

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