

# EarthMatters

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 3

WINTER 2008/9

## NWEI News

### 100,000 Course Participants

This fall we achieved a major milestone: we've reached over 100,000 people with our courses! In the past two years a greater number of people were drawn to our courses because we prioritized two critical issues: climate change and food. In that vein, we revised *Global Warming: Changing Course* and introduced a new and wildly popular course, *Menu for the Future*. We also adjusted our outreach strategy to place more focus on businesses, organizations, and higher education.

### Sustain-A-Thon

We are happy to report that the first ever Sustain-a-Thon was a success! During the two-week environmental challenge volunteers illustrated that individuals can reduce consumption of electricity, water, car trips and conventional food, and demonstrated the cumulative power of making one small change. Participants demonstrated over a two-week period how three

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## Living Simply by Necessity and Choice

By Zoe Weil

We often hear that green living is for the rich; organic food is pricier than pesticide-sprayed conventional food; local, fresh produce is more expensive than processed junk food; solar panels and solar hot water systems are costly; and hybrid cars are significantly more money than their non-hybrid counterparts. All this is true.

But the greenest person I know, my friend and colleague at the Institute for Humane Education, Khalif Williams, isn't rich. Khalif built his 580 square foot home himself using local wood and salvaged windows. He and his family recently installed solar panels (after THREE years in an electricity-less home). They carry their water from their outdoor well and fill a container in their loft that provides it gravity-fed to their sink. They produce humanure in their composting toilet and heat their home with wood, much of which is cut from their property. They grow vegetables in their newly raised beds. Khalif's family has very little material stuff, but

a wealth of non-material possessions including an incredible community that works, trades, and plays together.

Khalif made these lifestyle choices by necessity *and* choice. His family couldn't afford a big mortgage or expensive purchases, but it was also extremely important to him to live in alignment with his values. He and his wife believed that living simply, in community, and with attention to the effects of their choices on others would be deeply gratifying. And it has been. If we all lived more like Khalif, imagine how rich our lives would be: rich in relationships, sustainability, and the joy that comes from living deeply connected to our family, friends, neighbors, and values.

In these challenging economic times, more and more people are perceiving their lives as downwardly mobile, diminished, and uncertain. Many are losing their jobs and watching their retirement income and the value of their homes plummet. They are simplifying not because they want to, but because they have to. As more people scale down

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# MESSAGE

## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As a member of NWEI, how do you know that we are delivering on our mission of “**Inspiring people to take responsibility for Earth**”? How do you know we are worthy of your support? We talk a great deal about behavior change resulting from our discussion courses, but how do we/you know it actually occurs? Given the state of Earth’s natural systems and the relatively short period of time we have to reverse course, NWEI stakeholders are demanding results.

One way we can assure you is through testimonials. Take for example our friend Bala who says, “NWEI courses have inspired me to convert my thoughts into personal action. Rather than being overwhelmed, I feel empowered to do what I can now.” Or Sarah, who shared the following, “The course has helped propel me into greater self-awareness of my choices and inspired me to do more research and make more responsible food choices. I am spreading the word with my family and friends.” And finally, John Leigh of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center states “The courses offer an opportunity to create rich dialogue among staff members on topics that are vital and pertinent to our mission as well as to our personal lifestyles. The discussions help us build community and promote understanding of the interconnections between environmental quality, public health, and our daily practices as businesses and individuals. Every

business should consider organizing a discussion course and allowing their staff the time to participate.”

While the power of these stories cannot be underestimated for their inspirational value, they offer single snapshots of the NWEI experience and might be interpreted as cherry picking the “good news.” Yet, course evaluations, letters and e-mails such as these come into our office nearly every day, further inspiring our staff and becoming a part of the NWEI success story. In 2008 we created an online survey to further understand the effects of NWEI courses on participants and the planet. The survey focused on three questions:

1. Did participants gain a better understanding of the challenges we face and our role in creating them?
2. Did the process result in a greater sense of obligation to institute healthy changes?
3. Did participants actually change?

Here is what we have learned so far from the 400 randomly chosen survey respondents. Since taking a NWEI course:

- More than 72 percent of NWEI participants take more seriously the challenges of climate change, rising personal consumption and limited natural resources.
- 80 percent of participants feel a greater sense of personal obligation for solving environmental challenges.

- Over 73 percent make reductions in household energy and water consumption more regularly.
- 79 percent buy more local and organic produce.
- Almost 60 percent more frequently volunteer for environmental causes and make alternative transportation choices.

The earth’s current situation demands that we **know**, not guess, surmise, or intuit the effectiveness of our work. We have to identify effective tools for change and then rally around a proven set of practices. Sure, new and even more effective strategies will come along, and we should encourage their innovation. But now is not the time to be distracted by efforts promising more than they can deliver or by sizzling hot new technologies based on flash rather than substance. We know that the NWEI process works.

I hope you have discovered that your support of NWEI is justified both in terms of the impact our work may have had on people and the planet. Please keep on supporting us as you are able and please continue to advocate for NWEI within your circle of influence! Creating a sustainable future will require even more of us being more intentional about our everyday actions.

Yours in health,  
Mike Mercer

**LIVING SIMPLY** *continued from page 1*

and buy less, more businesses struggle because few are buying their products. This is why economists and politicians tell us to shop. When we fail to shop even more people lose their jobs, and the recession cycle spirals downward even faster.

The irony is that it is the very excesses of our lives that have contributed to so many problems we see today — global warming, toxic pollution, resource depletion, desertification, deforestation, massive loss of biodiversity, even our current recession which was ignited by the excess of buying houses we couldn't afford on credit we couldn't pay back — and “downsizing” appears to be just what the earth needs. But that's little comfort to someone who has lost her job and wonders how she'll afford her mortgage.

We don't have to choose between the earth and a healthy economy. I believe that we can have a thriving economy, a joyful citizenry, and a restored environment. But we need some paradigm shifts in order to achieve this. We must turn away from an economy based on the production of disposable, toxic, unsustainable stuff toward the production of durable, sustainable products that serve real needs. Since this will still leave many people who produce excess stuff out of work, we must also shift from an economy based

primarily on the sales of material goods to an economy based more on services and experiences. And the final shift must include a dramatic commitment to a green economy in which our energy sources, our vehicles, our homes, our clothes, our cleaning products, and our food are produced in a restorative, just, sustainable manner. Thankfully, such a shift will employ millions of people — a win-win for humanity and the environment.

There is great joy to be found in living simply, sustainably, and with awareness. As people find themselves forced to live with less, it's understandable they will be afraid. We need clothes, food, and homes, and it is terrifying to be uncertain about these basics of life. But if we are relatively secure that we can meet these basics, then the task becomes embracing a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle rather than feeling deprived. This can be a difficult perceptual hurdle, but Khalif's family shows just how positive such a life can be.

Picture this: Khalif and his wife, Amy, pulling their toddler in a sturdy cart up the road to bring their neighbor warm, homemade cookies. Or this: a gathering of ten families at their neighbor's house in which they clear some land for a garden, the children helping as they are able, and then all feasting at the ensuing potluck. Or this: a weekly open mic night in a barn down the road, the crowd

spilling out into the starry evening, each person contributing a small donation for the fresh soup and bread (which funds the effort), each reveling in the talent of the community, some singing, some reciting poetry, one child juggling, all to the delight of the audience. This is a snapshot of Khalif's life, but it is a life each of us can claim for ourselves. And when we do, we feel anything but deprived.

A slowing economy may force us to simplify, but as long as we are able to afford the necessities of life we may find that we've never lived as joyfully. As financial systems recover, through the establishment of a truly green economy,

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## **A Very Big THANK YOU! To Our Sustain-A-Thon Volunteers**

Demonstrating the cumulative power of making one small change, the following people enabled our first ever Sustain-A-Thon to be a hands-down success!

<b>Bala Cadambi</b>	<b>Kim Smith</b>
<b>Betty Shelley</b>	<b>Maggie Maggio</b>
<b>Denise Dailey</b>	<b>Narada Golden</b>
<b>Elise Lind</b>	<b>Pam Vik</b>
<b>Jane Turville</b>	<b>Rick North</b>
<b>Jill Sughrue</b>	<b>Scott Richman</b>
<b>Kim Hauze</b>	<b>Wendy Usher</b>

## **Coming Soon: Curriculum for the Workplace**

The Curriculum Team at NWEI is currently working on a four-week discussion course to be used in the workplace. The goal of this course is to engage employees in shifting their organization toward

a more sustainable operation and work culture. Now more than ever, businesses and organizations are recognizing the need to integrate sustainable practices in the workplace. This course will provide organizations with an effective tool for inspiring employees to be an active part of that effort.

A volunteer committee comprised of members of higher education, businesses, municipalities and others

in the sustainability field are working to shape the course. It will be tested by several pilot groups this winter and will be available by summer of '09.

This new discussion course meets an increasing need in the broader community and gives NWEI an opportunity to expand its reach. In doing so, we hope to inspire individuals to affect much needed change at the organizational level. ■

**LIVING SIMPLY** continued from page 3

we may realize that we have enough stuff. What we may then want is to cultivate with all our energy this richer, more satisfying life.

Some of us may look at Khalif's example as unattainable or undesirable. Yet Khalif didn't grow up living the way he lives now. He grew up with as many material possessions as the average kid in the U.S. He watched lots of TV, and no one in his family paid attention to the impact of the food they ate or the products they used. But during his twenties, Khalif discovered that living simply, sustainably, and humanely was deeply rewarding and satisfying — not to mention more affordable. Although many may consider Khalif's lifestyle unusual or even extreme, it demonstrates that we don't need an excess of money to lead a green, joyful life. His is just one example that allows us to see the extent to which conscious, simple living can be lived.

How can you take your own steps to reframe your life, embrace simplicity and community, and thrive with less? I've included many suggestions in my book, *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life*, and here are just a few:

- **Write down and then live your epitaph.** When you die, what would you like to have achieved? What will matter most to you? If you can live your life with your desired epitaph in mind, you will likely find your life deeply enriched right now.
- **Find and create community.** There are many ways to become involved in your community and build meaningful relationships while also solving economic challenges. Visit [meetup.com](http://meetup.com) and [conversationcafe.org](http://conversationcafe.org) for finding like-minded friends and neighbors; then visit [neighborrow.com](http://neighborrow.com) and [timebanks.org](http://timebanks.org) to find people in your community with whom to share and trade.
- **Pursue joy through service.** Chances are that if you're reading this, even if you're facing serious economic challenges, you have something to give. Giving is the quickest route to joy. Visit [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org), get engaged with a local non-profit that's working to create positive, systemic change, or join a service club like Rotary International or Lions Club. Often, our volunteer efforts also lead to new connections and even rewarding paid work.
- **Make gifts to express your gratitude.** It's enlivening to create, and delightful for both receiver and giver when you make and give gifts. Whether food, crafts, flowers you've grown in your garden or window box, songs or drawings — such creations are often more deeply appreciated and cherished than anything store bought.
- **Revel in nature, sing, dance, and love.** It really is true that the best things in life are free. Find a tree to admire and a sunset to soothe your soul. Sing a song of praise, dance your heart out, and love with all your might. ■

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Zoe Weil is president of the Institute for Humane Education (IHE) which trains people to be humane educators and promotes humane living through an M.Ed. degree affiliated with Cambridge College, a certificate program, workshops and online courses. She is author of *Most Good, Least Harm, Above All, Be Kind*, and the Moonbeam gold medal award winner for juvenile fiction, *Claude and Medea*. [www.ZoeWeil.com](http://www.ZoeWeil.com), [www.HumaneEducation.org](http://www.HumaneEducation.org).

## NWEI News

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people can reduce water consumption by 300 gallons, how one individual can route 21 pounds of waste to a worm composting bin rather than a trash can, and how one individual can reduce electricity usage by 42 percent. These are just a few examples of the difference we can make as individuals! If participants continued to reduce their consumption for an entire year the results would be staggering! For example, our three water conservationists would save 7,800 gallons of water in a year — enough

water to fill a small swimming pool. The volunteers collected pledges while "sustaining" in the area of their choice. Together we raised almost \$5,000! We look forward to future challenges and will keep you posted on how you can be involved!

### Welcome to Our New Staff

This fall was a time of change for NWEI. Our outreach team has two new members, Kate Rinder and Dani Dennenberg, who were both interns at NWEI this summer. Prior to joining us, Kate fulfilled two long held dreams by working as a naturalist on a ranch in Colorado,

and backpacking around Europe for several months. Dani brings 10 years of teaching and non-profit work, primarily with young people, student leaders, adults and educators. Kerry Brown has taken over as Development Director. Kerry comes to us with 8 years of nonprofit experience, including working for the United Way of Santa Cruz County, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council and the National Environmental Trust. All of our new staff members look forward to working with our network of members and volunteers; please join us in welcoming them to the NWEI community! ■



# Just Add Water

By Scott Lynch

I just had a visit from a neighbor kid selling over-priced popcorn to raise money for his Cub Scout troop. Before that it was candy bars, and before that magazines I didn't want to read. Wouldn't it be great if groups could raise funds for worthy causes by providing something *useful* and, better yet, something good for the planet?

At Sustain Dane in Madison, Wisconsin, we have just such a program. RainReserve™ is a community-based rain barrel program that has it all. We've developed an innovative product that makes extensive use of renewable, re-used and recyclable materials; we've mobilized a broad swath of our community to take action on an

important environmental issue; we've created a revenue stream to help support our group's sustainability initiatives. From humble beginnings, we've built a program that now has two fulltime staff and has generated over \$235,000 in revenue and \$21,500 in grants.

Our program was born of a Natural Step Study Circle during which the participants keyed in on water resource issues and were motivated to take action. The Study Circle hatched a plan to build and install rain barrels in the community. The first year saw 15 rain barrels installed, the next saw 400, then 700, and this year, over 1,500 of our systems were deployed. Along the way, the system has evolved into a DIY kit that most

homeowners can install themselves using common hand tools.

When we think about this program, we think about impact—not only the impact it has when the systems are used, but the impact we have in every product decision we make. We've continued to refine both the design and manufacture, eliminating toxics like PVC and epoxy where we can, making use of recycled/recyclable and renewable materials wherever possible, and even using renewable plant-based plastic. To help combat climate change, we decided to use only products made in the United States.

As this program has matured, we realized that this project could be easily reproduced in other communities. The kits are self-contained, and the 55 gallon plastic barrels are already found worldwide, so there is no need to ship them. The next phase of the RainReserve™ program will be to connect with both private groups and public agencies who want to take advantage of our experience and implement a proven rain barrel program without a steep (and potentially expensive) learning curve. We can provide assistance with event design, marketing, and sourcing of barrels locally while providing our award winning RainReserve kits. We call it our "Just add water" Rain Barrel Program™ and we encourage you to contact us for information on implementing this program in your community. ■

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Scott Lynch is the Customer and Community Relations Coordinator for Sustain Dane's RainReserve™ program. To learn how to bring the RainReserve™ program to your community, contact him at [scott@sustaindane.org](mailto:scott@sustaindane.org) or 608-316-6844. If you'd like to purchase a RainReserve kit for yourself, go to [www.rainreserve.com](http://www.rainreserve.com).



## Knowing Your Place: Hiking the C2C Trail

By Maureen Beezhold

Walking from Corvallis to the coast had intrigued me since reading a newspaper article about the proposed trail in the 1970s. Now thirty years older, I found myself on such a walk thanks to the work of Gary Chapman, Denise Nervik and others dedicated to this project.

Mentioning my interest to Denise early this summer I was soon committed to the expedition. Would I be up for the 10 to 14 mile days planned? Could I keep up with 75 year old Denise? Had I known just how difficult it would be, I might not have gone!

Gary, Denise, Linda Hunn, Janet Throop and I began our hike in mid-August on a sunny cloudless day in Philomath, on the proposed C2C Trail. We hiked up Old Peak Road for our first 10½ mile day with the goal of camping on the north flank of Mary's Peak, the highest peak in the Oregon Coast Range. We enjoyed lunch in the lovely forest of the Corvallis Watershed and reached camp by 3:30 p.m. I felt far from home — walking had already put me more in touch with a sense of distance.

On day two we hiked 11 miles, mostly downhill on good roads with little traffic, passing creeks, curious dogs and goats. During a rest stop, Linda discovered a three-foot painted plaster statue of Jesus off the road. Where had that come from?

Luxury in form of a gourmet dinner awaited us at Big Elk Campground. Gary's partner Kathi had driven in with shish kebabs, baked beans, wine, garlic bread, and a chocolate cake in honor of Gary's 71st birthday. Despite the rain we were cozy, well-fed and warm, thanks to a large fir tree, great food, and a campfire. Locals stopped by to encourage us to check out a herd of elk across Big Elk Creek who were enjoying the fruits of an old apple tree.

Packing up wet gear the next morning, we hiked through Grant Creek Valley enjoying the cloud fluffs and bucolic beauty of the little valley until Gary turned abruptly and herded us up a steep slope along an ambiguous elk trail. Crawling on all fours, I noticed rattlesnake plantain and orchid blooms; we munched on sweet salal berries as we worked our way through the brush. After a 10.5 mile day of challenging

hiking, we happily arrived at Gopher Creek Road and camped in a meadow. Hitting the sack between 7:30 and 8:00 p.m., our days had become in sync with the cycles of light and dark!

Day four was a challenging 12.2 miles (we averaged one mile per hour!) as we traversed more water bars, culvert removals, and bushwhacked near the beautiful Flynn Creek Research Area where even the elk had given up on the trail. We had amazing views of the west side of Mary's Peak. We camped by a tributary of Beaver Creek. It was my turn to cook dinner for the three vegetarians in the group and the first time I had cooked, eaten and cleaned up a meal sitting down!

Our last and longest day (14.5 miles) began in the rain through coastal forest, downed trees and clouds. The sun broke through and, with the scent of the ocean beckoning us, we arrived at Ona Beach around 6:30 p.m.

How did my five days in Coast Range affect me? My sense of time became like that of a child. The unscheduled days stretched out with no goals other than to get to camp in time to set up and eat dinner. I tried to hold onto that sense of time upon my return, but soon the distractions of modern society made their way into my psyche.

I developed a deep respect for the variety of thickets we encountered, from salmonberry and stinging nettles, to alder thickets six feet tall that made me feel like a giant walking through an alder forest. I felt the ups and downs, experienced the diverse flora and fauna and enjoyed a sense of place not available to me in a car. We had proven that the trail could be backpacked, even by hikers in 50s to their 70s. And I kept up with Denise! ■

**NOTE:** The C2C route is not yet open to the public. It crosses private land and much of the way is not clearly marked. For more information check out [www.c2ctrail.org](http://www.c2ctrail.org). Questions and comments can be directed to [info@c2ctrail.org](mailto:info@c2ctrail.org).

# NWEI Establishes Connections in Higher Education

In April of this year, we began outreaching to faculty, staff and students on university and college campuses to offer our discussion courses. Their response has been overwhelmingly positive, and as a result NWEI courses have begun in more than 25 colleges and universities. Courses have started through green teams, as pilot courses, through a range of academic disciplines, as part of service learning models and as part of well-established sustainability initiatives and those just gaining momentum.

Down the road, we will be working with residential and student life offices, living and learning communities and student clubs — avenues that

lend themselves well to small, intimate discussion and community-building capacities.

Our success stories started soon after our outreach efforts began. Staff member and Hall Director, Mickey Fitch from Iowa State University contacted us over the summer with incredible enthusiasm for using our *Menu for the Future* course to supplement her honors level course, "The (Sustainable) Clean Plate Club."

"This was the first time many of them critically thought about food production, consumption, and personal values, and some meaningful results were produced. For example, several of the students started investigating community supported agriculture (CSAs) and eco-minded roommates. Some students became more conscious about the decisions they were making with respect to food purchases. And others began to grapple with and

question assumptions they make about food costs." A few of the colleges and universities participating in NWEI courses include: Virginia Tech, Marquette University, University of Colorado, University of Oregon, University of Vermont, Iowa State University, Naropa University, Portland Community College, University of Montana, Western Michigan University and University of Pittsburgh. ■

**How you can help:** If you know a faculty member or someone else who knows of one, please help connect us by copying us in an email introduction at [contact@nwei.org](mailto:contact@nwei.org). You can also send us the names of your alma mater, any faculty members, staff and/or students you think would be interested. We'll follow up with them to see if NWEI courses will fit into their campus or courses!

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Many thanks to all of our donors and members who contributed to NWEI this summer and fall!

**The following individuals donated at the Earth Steward (\$100) level or higher:**

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- Changing Co<sub>2</sub>course
- Healthy Children – Healthy Planet
- Exploring Deep Ecology
- Voluntary Simplicity
- Discovering a Sense of Place
- Menu for the Future
- Choices for Sustainable Living

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## BOOK REVIEW

### Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life

By Dani Dennenberg

If you are reading this newsletter, whether a concerned citizen, a parent, educator, or activist (or if you consider yourself in all of these ways), I can say with certainty that you will appreciate the wisdom and heart of *Most Good, Least Harm: A Simple Principle for a Better World and Meaningful Life* (aka *MOGO*, short for “most good”). *MOGO* is a thoughtful, brave and visionary work of art and author, Zoe Weil is a beacon of light and hope.

Filled with hands-on practical tools including questionnaires, step-by-step action plans, facts and statistics and a plethora of intriguing

personal stories, *MOGO* sets the novice environmental steward on a profound path and the old-timer on an equally thoughtful path.

*MOGO* is a guiding principle that reflects acting peacefully and living with compassion and respect for everyone—people, animals, and the earth—with the premise that when we make that commitment and live it fully, we will experience greater inner peace.

Weil explores the specifics of what we buy, eat and wear; what we do for work; how we participate in creating positive change; how we take care of ourselves, and yet doesn't dictate an exact formula for

how that will look. She invites us to take on the committed, honest and integrity-filled path to create a compassionate reality for ourselves. The ultimate hope being that our daily choices, acts of citizenship, communities, work, volunteerism and interactions reflect inner and outer peace.

For the sake of the planet, I hope *MOGO* finds its way into your hands and into the hands of those you love. ■

For more information and to order a copy, please visit [www.zoeweil.com](http://www.zoeweil.com) or [www.HumaneEducation.org](http://www.HumaneEducation.org).