



Trees, animals, birds, plants, forests, mountains, lakes and rivers — everything that exists in Nature are in desperate need of our kindness, of the compassionate care and protection of human beings. If we protect them, they in turn will protect us.

- Amma

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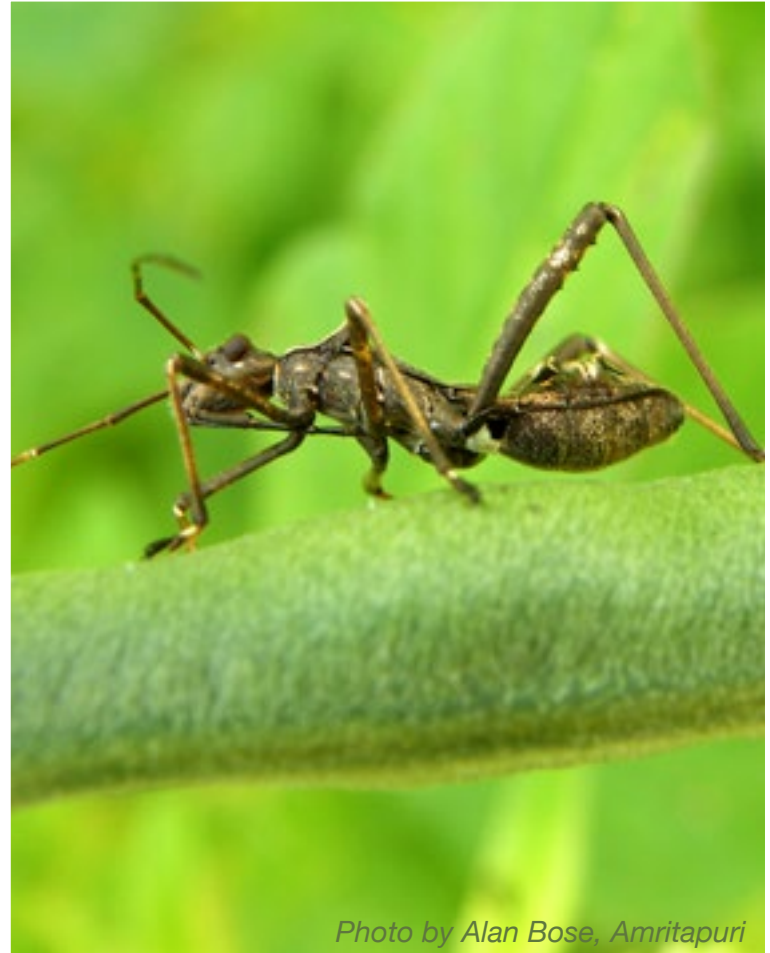


Photo by Alan Bose, Amritapuri

GreenFriends is a global grassroots environmental movement which promotes environmental awareness and local participation in conservation efforts throughout the world.

GreenFriends is one of the projects of Embracing the World, a not-for-profit international collective of charities founded by internationally known spiritual and humanitarian leader, Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma)

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Teaching the Children

The Changemaker



Hello my name is Matthew Benedict. I first began wanting and really trying to change the world when I was in the 5th grade. For the longest time I had been rejected by my schoolmates because I wasn't quite like them or I couldn't fit in. Turning into a change maker really gave me reason to understand why they treated me like an understatement.

This experience showed me that I wasn't at my full potential yet and the road they were on was definitely not the one for me. So despite their passively rude actions, I started to make change in my school playground and picking up litter! And at first I barely noticed that I was making such a big impact. Today there is a **Job Squad** recess group at Cedarhurst Elementary cleaning up and fixing up the outdoor play ground everyday ☺!

Once I landed in Sylvester Middle School my language arts teacher Mrs. Morrison gave me a book entitled "BE A CHANGEMAKER!" by Laurie Ann Thomson. This

book has helped me and many other changemakers define and become who they are today. The book inspired me to create a group at my school. It had to be about something I was passionate about, knew about, and was willing to learn more about. So I began to make an Eco Group with a science teacher Mr. McKean.

The name of this group for the time being is ECC which stands for ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE CREATORS. The ECC has two goals:

- 1: To get kids out into nature
- 2: To get kids to be passionate about nature and use that passion to make positive impacts on their community

Because there is not a group yet these goals may change everything that ECC shall do, will be in consensus with the whole group. The name might even change!

Getting children outside at a young age is so important, for if kids don't go out and care about the world around them then this generation will have a tough time fighting back the consequences.

Your friend,
Matthew Kenneth Benedict , P.S: Smile Always!!!! ☺

Teaching the Children

Connecting Community and the Environment by Haley



There is a growing interest these days towards community based environmental education- the idea that one can use nature as a tool for providing sustainable solutions to urban societal problems. The idea here is that these solutions not only help those living in low-income, inner-city communities but also the health of the planet (community gardens is one example of a solution commonly implemented in Seattle to address food security needs and runoff.) Many environmentalists follow the understanding that one cannot care for something if they do not love it, and cannot love it unless they know it; however there is a misunderstanding as to appropriately show the natural world to those who presumably have a lot of other pressing problems in their lives. As Carl Anthony, founder and executive director of Urban Habitat Program, said in an interview for Yes! Magazine;

“In the inner cities, the problem is that people have tended to see jobs and economic development as a social, political, and economic issue, and not as an environmental issue. And environmentalists tend to see their issues as being separate from the social and racial justice issues. But actually, they are operating in the same universe... To the extent that we can begin to see that there is a strong relationship between protecting the natural world and bringing the beauty of nature back into cities, and developing healthier racial and social institutions and attitudes, then the two interests can be aligned... We don't have the luxury of pretending we are not all connected.”

One way to show this connection is to open the eyes of children to the nature in their cities and neighborhoods. IslandWood, a “school in the woods” on Bainbridge Island, is taking this first step. Heavy awards and scholarships are applied to every school based on the percentage of free- and reduced-rate lunches so that every student gets a chance to experience nature through IslandWoods week-long overnight program for 4th graders. In addition to the main campus, IslandWood also extends its reach to Woodinville through programs at the Brightwater Wastewater

Teaching the Children (contd.)

Treatment Facility and Seattle with the Homewaters Program. While Brightwater serves schools in King and Snohomish County, Homewaters serves the Seattle School District almost exclusively.

Originally designed as the Thornton Creek Project almost 20 years ago, Homewaters' goal was to take students to a creek in their neighborhood to learn about and experience it for a day. Now we offer three programs at four different creeks, a myriad of parks, and all school properties that connect directly to the science units 4th and 5th graders are studying. We strive to make science more accessible, improve science learning, and increase environmental awareness and stewardship. Homewaters serves every school no matter what they can pay, providing a positive nature experience for students who have sometimes never even seen a creek or ground beetle.

For Homewaters' Land and Water Program, we go to creeks in neighborhoods near schools and educate students about water quality using the lens of the salmon. One day in south Seattle at Taylor Creek (Lakeridge Park), I had finished a few minutes early with one of the lessons and had time to kill before switching with another instructor. As we walked I noticed all of the big leaf maple leaves scattered on the trail. Most of these leaves showed evidence of zombie fungus- a fungi that looks like a dark, speckled area on the leaf and is usually about dime-sized. I explained to the students walking near me that it keeps the area of the leaf around it healthy (and green!) so that it can feed off the energy supplied by the chlorophyll. Simple and brief as it was, the joy expressed by one of my kiddos as he exclaimed that he didn't know that before with wide-eyes was quite fulfilling.

Later that day, I had a conversation with a young boy who was having some problems with kids making fun of him at school. He had all day been the first one with a hand up to answer my questions and seemed to be distant from the rest of the group. After talking for some time about the unit and lessons, he opened up to me about being ridiculed and I shared some of my own experiences with him. I was reminded that day of the incredible effect natural environments have on people, young children in particular. By being a supportive adult in a welcoming environment, he felt comfortable enough to have an open conversation with me.

Although most of my memorable moments are intertwined and subtle, there are a few that stand out, such as these. The days teaching can sometimes blur together to the point that I recognize only the feeling I got hearing a student's comment, so I am also lucky enough to be the one reading the post-assessments returned to us. The amount of

Teaching the Children (contd.)

exclamation points and detailed sentences recalling what they had learned is memorable enough, but after looking through them all I am proud to say that well over half of the students showed an increase in awareness- stating that if they were able to visit a creek again they would want to participate in some sort of stewardship action.

For IslandWoods' Homewaters Program, urban environmental education provided through school is one of the missing links in connecting to nature. If we can show youth the impacts humans have on their local ecosystems as well as how to help themselves we are shaping a generation that will have environmental stewardship engrained into their being. To recognize the importance of providing these experiences to more than just the students who can afford it is a great leap forward. We must continue, as stewards of this earth, to involve our community. We must put into action what Amma reminds us of constantly- that "by living in harmony with Nature one gains a healthy mind and body" and that every one of Amma's children deserves the embrace of nature.

Haley Rutherford is an AmeriCorps Member serving at IslandWood Homewaters Program after graduating from Western Washington University in Environmental Science and Environmental Education and going through IslandWood's internship program. She is passionate about children and nature and the connections between our bodies and the environment. In the future she hopes to start an organization focused on bringing nature to urban children as a preventative health and wellness measure.

For more information on IslandWood and the many programs and events facilitated throughout the year, go to islandwood.org or contact Haley at haley@islandwood.org.



Teaching the Children (contd.)

Growing Gardens: Flowers of Youth by Rachel



"Our youth are like flower buds that are meant to one day bloom and spread fragrance to the world. Today, it is as if they are being eaten away by pests. If we don't want them to be totally destroyed, we must educate (them and help them cultivate proper awareness."

— Amma's answer to a question about how to best help Western youth suffering from drugs and violence.

To cultivate flowers one must give them proper attention and care. To cultivate youth we must give them opportunities for growth, empowerment, and self-discovery. There are currently over 5.8 million youth deemed 'at-risk' in the United States. In Seattle, 14.7% of youth are 'at-risk', similar to the national average. Each

at-risk youth directly costs tax payers an average of \$14,000 per year and create a social burden of \$37,450 per year. Instead of working with remedial plans to support youth after they have committed a crime--or to drag them through a system that fails to support their needs, let alone their spirits--let's create and implement creative solutions that strengthen youth and empower them to blossom into the flowers they truly are.

Growing Gardens in Seattle, WA is creating a healing environment where youth are held and holistically supported as they transition to adulthood. The garden will be a community for multi-faceted growth: with opportunities for job skills and mentorship, paid internships, emotional counseling, and curriculum that supports well-being and self-reflection.

Youth will participate in a year-long garden program with four stages from seed to root, leaf to fruit. Each stage is a chance for youth to reflect and build on their own lives, while cultivating and growing from in-depth experience with

Teaching the Children (contd.)

the garden. In the seed stage youth will reflect on their mental and emotional patterns and self-perceptions, as well as design and plant a garden. In the root stage they will work with what builds their foundation, including wellness techniques and education, while tending to the new growth in the garden. As they progress into the leaf stage they will recreate their stories and build on specific measurable goals to attain stability and balance in their lives and in the garden's health. In the final stage of the program, the fruit stage, they develop means to tangibly manifest their goals, give back to the community through service and mentoring, gather produce, and sell or donate their harvest.

Throughout the program, youth are matched with local agencies and services that ensure their progress into healthy and balanced living, educational, and mental situations. Holistic support is the input; holistic health is the output. Love is the equation.

Growing Gardens needs your support! We are looking for people who would like to join us in this endeavor. Prayers are also deeply appreciated. We will keep GreenFriends in the loop about our project and look forward to co-creating a garden for our youth to blossom!

For more information contact Rachel at burstingjoy@gmail.com.



Teaching the Children

5 lessons from the Wilderness by Geoff

When I first started taking youth on wilderness trips in northern Canada, and adults sailing in the Caribbean, I knew I had a lot to learn, but I never realized how much. The youth and the wilderness became my teachers and I started saying "I get more out of these trips than the kids", because that is how it feels when I am guiding 10 adolescents through the wilderness on a rugged journey. It can be extremely challenging and rewarding - like being with Amma. Living in the wilderness can be like riding an express train to Self-awareness.

So here goes my top 5 lessons in the wilderness:

If you dont like chaos, dont take 10 teenagers out into the wilderness. Teenagers can be extremely rowdy, goofy, and disorganized. It can often feel like herding cats. Beneath their seemingly indifference to learning and resistance to going into the depths of Self -awareness, while doing everything in their power to push everyone's buttons (vasanas), they are miraculously realizing their gifts, opening their hearts and working through challenges, but they will rarely reveal any of their profound awareness until the last day. They are masters at concealing their rich inner life.

Spirit has its own agenda. My first trip I came ready with a detailed plan and agenda to teach these kids everything they needed to know for a happy life. Then it started raining and the wind started blowing our canoes backwards no matter how hard we paddled. After that we lost some of our food on a 1.5 mile portage through waist deep moose muck. God creates the perfect situations (rain, wind, hot, cold, irritating people, soggy food) for everyone to experience what they need to reveal and heal their vasanas.

We get what we need, not always what we want. One girl on the trip didn't want to carry a canoe on a portage (one person can carry a 70 lb canoe with the right technique) because she didnt think she could do it. She had been through some horrific trauma in her young life. After sitting with her for over an hour, while everyone else finished the portage, I listened to her story and then we discussed how this was an opportunity for her to get some of her power back, how she was not able to do anything when she was witnessing terrible events, but that she did not have to let that always dictate how she lived her life. She got up, picked the canoe up over her head and carried it over the portage by her self.

We cooked and ate dinner in the dark that night but it was a small price to pay for this young girl to feel empowered again. It was one of the most satisfying mac and cheese dinners I ever ate.

My job is to get out of the way. We use a lot of tools (processes and interventions) for building community, trust and safety in the group. But ultimately the wilderness does the work, which feels like magic, to create a sense of family as we journey together. As Amma says, "the creation and the creator are one", and that is why I love the wilderness and bringing people there, because without a lot of man made distraction we are living directly with the

Teaching the Children (contd.)

creation, which is the creator, in its wild state. So for me and many other people, it is a deeply profound spiritual experience. I remember one girl from Chicago crying when we saw the northern lights dancing in the sky with the Milky Way shining bright. She had never been out of the city and had only ever seen 4 stars in her life.

I learn the same lesson with Amma, my job is to have the right intention, to hold the space, but ultimately it works best when I get out of the way and allow the creator and Amma to lead my journey.

Love is the greatest healer. We teach a lot of wilderness survival skills, paddling techniques, sailing skills and other practical lessons for our trips. The greatest learning, however, on the trips happens from creating a strong community, a trusting and safe family. Often times this means learning to deal with conflict in a healthy way, which leads to authenticity, which leads to people feeling safe to reveal their true hearts. Many people have not been fortunate enough to experience a healthy family, so when it happens, especially in the wilderness, it is a powerful life changing experience. To feel loved and to love, to care for one another, to look out for each other, to listen to others and to be heard, to unburden grief carried for a life time, is to experience a loving community. This often leads to deep and profound healing.

One 16 year old boy from a gang run neighborhood in Chicago came on a canoe trip. He had been a sole survivor of a gang shoot out when he was 10 years old. He didnt think he would live to be 18. On the trip he was able to finally grieve the loss of his friends from the shooting. He also had no father and was able to unburden some of his pain around that. He went on to graduate from a prominent art school under a full ride scholarship. I felt so moved by his transformation that I have thought even if he was the only one who ever got anything out of all the trips I do, it would be worth all the effort.

For more information contact Geoff at briggs.geoff@gmail.com.



Habitat Restoration

Duwamish River Cleanup - Update! by Saroja

In the [November 2014 GreenFriends Newsletter](#), I was contemplating the Duwamish River and sharing some of the progress being made on habitat restoration. Just a few weeks later, the Environmental Protection Agency EPA announced a long-awaited, Final Decision on cleaning up this Superfund site.

No more draft plans; this is the real deal and it is monumental in scope. \$342 million has been committed to address 177 acres through dredging, capping, and natural sedimentation. This cleanup is expected to get underway within the next two years and is projected to take 17 years to complete. Additionally, six Early Action Areas were identified early on as being the most contaminated sites. To date, more than \$100 million has been spent on these areas alone (the String of Pearls mentioned in our November Newsletter), and this work will be ongoing, as well.

EPA regional administrator Dennis McLerran said in an interview that the final plan is going to make the river "over 90 percent cleaner than previously."* Numerous individuals, neighborhood groups and associations have submitted comments in response to the announcement and these can be found on the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition web-site,** a great place to start if you want to be more informed about this historic cleanup. Note their links to "Superfund Info," "News/Media," and "Resources," all of which contain a wealth of information.

DRCC has announced an EPA-hosted Community Open House for discussion of this final plan. It will be held on January 21, 2015, at Concord Elementary School, time to be announced. Questions can be referred to Julie Congdon at congdon.julie@epa.gov. I hope to see you there.

*<http://earthfix.info/communities/article/epa-releases-long-awaited-final-cleanup-plan-for-s/>

**<http://duwamishcleanup.org>



Saving the Earth's Resources

Recycling in Amritapuri by Karuna



There have been recycling efforts of one kind or another at Amma's Amritapuri ashram since 1999. Over the years, the program has enlarged and become more refined. The Recycling Center moved to its current location in 2011 and is a model for all of India and the world.

There are about 4000 ashram residents that live here ongoing, plus thousands of Indian visitors who may come for the day or who may stay for several days. There are also many visitors from the West, some of who stay for months. The number of visitors on a public darshan day may range from 2,000 to 10,000. On special holidays tens of thousands of visitors may

come to the ashram. Needless to say, this many people produce a lot of trash.

The residents and visitors are asked to separate all of their trash. There are 16 recycling stations set up throughout the ashram.

The separation process is much more involved than what we do in the Pacific Northwest. Ashram residents divide their trash into 10 different bins.

The bins:

1. Cardboard
2. Paper
3. Soft Plastic
4. Hard Items
5. Dust and Hair
6. Sanitary Items
7. Food Waste
8. Garden Waste
9. Sharp Items
10. Cloth



Saving the Earth's Resources (contd.)

Once a day the trash is picked up and taken to the recycling center. Since people often throw trash in the wrong bins, all of the trash is re-sorted in front of the recycling center.



Next, next the trash goes through a more detailed sorting. For example, the paper is divided into 10 different types.



Saving the Earth's Resources (contd.)



Soft plastic no longer has to be sorted into various types. It is all sent to a pyrolysis center where it is turned into oil.

[Pyrolysis - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

“Pyrolysis is a thermochemical decomposition of organic material at elevated temperatures in the absence of oxygen (or any halogen). It involves the simultaneous change of chemical composition and physical phase, and is irreversible.”

Hard plastic must still be sorted.

This is just a brief overview of the recycling process in Amritapuri, but hopefully enough for you to get an idea of what it is like. Next month I will share information about food composting and vermicomposting processes in Amritapuri.



Saving the Earth's Resources (contd.)

7 Food Resolutions for 2015

by Anna Marie at <http://zerowastechef.com> on [January 1, 2015](#) Used with permission.

Did you make New Year's resolutions? What do they entail? Weight loss? Better money management? Improved? A reduced carbon footprint? The following 7 food resolutions have you covered.

1. Eat real food you cook yourself and avoid fad diets.

If you cook everything from scratch, you can pretty much eat whatever you like (unless you make only cookie dough ice cream and homemade plum wine). With all the ferments I eat, my diet may seem like a fad to some. Sixty or 70 years ago however, when organic food was simply called food, my diet would have been considered normal. I eat pretty traditional fare, including sourdough bread, fermented vegetables, pastured butter, raw milk (but not exclusively raw) and so on.

2. Cut the processed food.

When I went (nearly) plastic-free in 2011, I quickly realized that I had stopped eating processed food. By cutting the plastic, I inadvertently cleaned up my diet. My older daughter lost her extra pounds (I am naturally scrawny, so I'm not sure if I lost weight or not), we started eating better and, although I haven't done the math, I'm pretty sure I spend less on food than I used to, even though I buy quite expensive food.

3. Eat at mealtimes.

By cutting the processed food, I also inadvertently stopped snacking. If you're like me, you don't have time to make from scratch all the snacks you used to buy at the store (although I do bake [sourdough crackers](#) at least once a week). Your cupboards don't burst with snacks. You snack less.

4. Shop at the farmer's market.

The food tastes better and you support your community. Because your local small farmer has recently picked the food, it retains more nutritional value than the produce that travels 1000 miles on a truck (after being picked unripe and gassed), sits in a warehouse and then ships to your supermarket. Okay, farmer's market

My idea for a kids' app: Spot the food



Saving the Earth's Resources (contd.)

produce will generally cost more money than food from, say, Walmart. These resolutions are a package deal (i.e., you'll save money overall). However, when you buy produce in season (that's all you'll find at the farmer's market), it does cost less than out-of-season produce.

5. Take all you want, but eat all you take. In the United States, [we waste 40 percent of the food we grow](#). That wastes precious resources, such as the water to grow the food, the oil to run the tractors and the labor to plant and harvest the food. When all that wasted food starts to rot, it releases [methane gas, a greenhouse gas much more potent than carbon dioxide](#). When I have excess vegetables, I make soup or [vegetable broth](#), or I ferment them (see #7).



This past Sunday at the farmer's market in Palo Alto

6. Eat ugly fruit and vegetables. Some of the 40 percent of the food we waste in this country never actually makes it to the store. Why? Because most grocery stores reject ugly produce—kinky carrots, oblong apples, misshapen potatoes. But people have begun to rediscover that produce that doesn't fit into the supermarket image of ideal beauty tastes just fine—and costs less. [EndFoodWaste.org](#) has recently compiled an international [list of stores that offer ugly fruit and vegetables](#).



7. Learn to ferment food. Since I cleaned up my diet in 2011 and started eating more fermented food (I eat at least one fermented food every day), I simply do not get sick. I last had the sniffles in 2011. Filled with gut-friendly probiotics, fermented foods (sauerkraut, kimchee, pickles, kombucha, yogurt, kefir, etc.) boost your immunity. They aid in digestion. They make nutrients more bioavailable for your body. By fermenting foods myself, I save a ton of money. If you have never tried fermentation and don't know where to start, I still have room in my free online fermentation workshop, January 10th at 10am Pacific time.

[Click here to read more about it and to register.](#)

The last time I made New Year's resolutions, I broke at least one by 10am on January 1st. They were all "don'ts": don't do this, cut out that, deprive myself of whatever. These resolutions focus more on gains rather than sacrifices. I don't feel I have denied myself anything by adopting these habits. In fact, they have enriched my life.

I wish you a happy, healthy, fulfilling 2015.

PNW Litter Project

Small Victories Make a Difference by Vandita (Halfmoon Bay, B.C.)



A ground breaking new survey of the world's oceans has turned up a disturbing amount of plastics – more than five trillion pieces.

Researchers from Chile, France, Australia, the U.S. and New Zealand teamed up to gather information during a six-year period ending in 2013. The 24 expeditions uncovered about 269,000 tonnes of plastic waste. ([CBS News. Posted: Dec 11, 2014 12:51 PM ET](#))



Photo by Robert Pittman [Public domain], via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Last month, my heart sank when I went to the nearby small beach. The swirling tide was a mass of white garbage, which looked like Styrofoam. I couldn't reach it and hoped that it would wash up on the beach. When I next went with my 2 year old daughter, we saw a beach covered in white debris. It wasn't Styrofoam, it was insulation foam, fragmented into inch long pieces all over the beach. I found a washed up bag and had one of my own to use to collect it in. My daughter helped and we cleaned up the beach. Walking back she insisted on carrying a bag full of the water logged foam insulation, almost as big as she was, all the way up the steep trail!

This month the King tide, which is an especially high tide, helped to wash up a lot of garbage onto the beaches. A friend posted on Facebook about discovering a very large amount washed up, literally an old rowing boat filled with garbage and tires filled with Styrofoam. This was at a beach that's close to us. It was great to hear how my friend and her family cleaned up that beach.

PNW Litter Project (contd.)



Today on New Year's Day we went to a nearby beach which is harder to access and is very long. We noticed a

washed up tire full of Styrofoam and also large pieces of Styrofoam amongst the rocks and driftwood. We cleared up as much as we could and about one full garbage bag of Styrofoam and the tire.

What brings a smile to my face is seeing our nearby beach clean. My family and I made a difference. There is always some small garbage to pick up that is washed into

the bushes and rocks but it looks so much cleaner. It's easy to want to blame, but the garbage in the sea seems to be there through carelessness and not always intention.

There are some very interesting and relevant articles in the media right now, this is about Doctor Gabor Maté's latest book.

*I'm intending to write a book tentatively called [Toxic Culture: How Capitalism Makes us Sick](#). That's the working title. My contention is that the very nature of the system in which people live their lives is a significant source of illness. Now there are obvious factors like environmental pollution, toxins, and then of course there are the social determinants of health [that you write about](#) in *A Healthy Society: the impact of poverty, the impact of inequality, the impact of history and continued racism*. There's [an article](#) in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* today about sentencing practices in the courts of Saskatchewan. People who are identified as Aboriginal are likely to get double the sentences of people who are not identified as Aboriginal. That's going to have a health impact. ([Ryan Meili's interview with Gabor Maté, Briarpatch Magazine, Nov 13, 2014.](#))*

Swami Paramatmananda in his latest biographical book, *Dust of Her Feet*, writes about how when he went home he lost his devotion, just from being in a worldly environment. It's not easy in the capitalistic world of ours, especially when we are being bombarded by media, in every direction, by advertising, being watched and analyzed by tracking cookies.

The Holidays can be challenging for many. What happened for me, is I let some good habits slip, it's Christmas after all so I let myself indulge in TV, late nights and food. Suddenly the recycling bin was filling up really fast with chocolate wrappers and packaging. It wasn't the only effect, the other was distraction and tiredness. On a positive note I made mostly organic fair trade candies to give out to friends and made all the deserts for Christmas from scratch.

PNW Litter Project (contd.)



Photo by Sophie Smith. Garden Carrots.

Re-used old wrapping paper and gift bags. What we do is reuse gift bags and tissue paper and just try and keep them in a good condition. Many of the gifts we bought were from the Thrift Stores. Also I had a big clear out of things to donate to charity before Christmas to make some space.

We donated some food to the food banks. We had around 5lbs of carrots from our veggie patch this fall and saved the largest carrot for the roast meal.

A few things became really clear, which is that doing a good deed is really the only way to have peace inside. There's no happiness in indulgence, well perhaps a few seconds but then they are gone and unless you are very conscious, you might miss them anyway. I've often been anxiously munching through a chocolate bar reading Facebook posts and not even tasted it. Having said that, habits are hard to break but I'm planning to go back to cutting out bought snacks again now.

This woman is a great example of what is possible. Her name is Lauren and she hasn't made any trash in 2 years:

How did I go from zero plastic to zero waste?

First, I stopped buying packaged products and began bringing my own bags and jars to fill with bulk products at the supermarket. I stopped buying new clothing, and shopped only second hand. I continued making all of my own personal care and cleaning products. I downsized significantly by selling, donating, or giving away superfluous things in my life, such as all but one of my six identical spatulas, 10 pairs of jeans that I hadn't worn since high school, and a trillion decorative items that had no significance to me at all.

Most importantly, I started planning potentially wasteful situations; I began saying "NO" to things like straws in my cocktails at a bars, to plastic or paper bags at stores, and to receipts.

Of course, this transition didn't happen overnight.

This process took more than a year and required a lot of effort. The most difficult part was taking a hard look at

PNW Litter Project (contd.)

myself, the environmental studies major, the shining beacon of sustainability, and realizing that I didn't live in a way that aligned with my values. (By [Lauren Singer](#)) To read more [click here](#).

Not living in a way that aligns with her values, this probably rings true for a lot of us. It's easy to talk, less easy to make sacrifices. [Tapas](#) is needed. I listened to a fascinating interview recently with a physicist, Claude Poncelet, PhD, who practices shamanism. He talked about the need for impeccability. I think this means living with acute awareness and being totally true to the inner guide/conscience. He talked about his work campaigning for the environment and how there may be corporations who have not acted well and you may have anger towards them. Anger just sends negativity to them and that doesn't change anything and might make it worse. He said to tune in to the spirit of the corporation and send positive regards, you may not condone the behaviour but you send positive energy. It's helpful to think of corporations as just being people, with the same desire for happiness and peace, the same inner demons. You can [listen to the interviews here](#):

[Claude Poncelet, PhD](#), is a physicist who is passionate about astrophysics and cosmology. He has spent his professional life teaching as a university professor and working in the corporate world to protect the environment. He has worked at the state and federal levels on environmental policy and has served as chief liaison on two presidential commissions on sustainable development and environmental quality. He has taught shamanism in Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and North America for about twenty-five years and is driven to help develop a shamanic tradition for the modern world in the twenty-first century. With his wife, Noelle, he volunteers for the Pachamama Alliance and leads trips to the Ecuadorian Amazon for the Alliance. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Photo by Sophie Smith.

I'll leave you now with a photo of my 2 year old daughter who wanted to help today with picking up the Styrofoam, she's holding two full bags

.

May you have an abundant and peace filled New Year!

PNW Litter Project

PNW Litter Project Stats:

As of November 30, 2014 we had **371** members. **36** members and their guests reported picking up **104** hours of litter in December 2014. The average pick up time was: **2.9** hours; the range was **2 minutes to 30 hours** and the median was **1** hour.

Members of the project have picked up litter for **6025** hours since the project began in July 2011. TerraCycle credited us with turning in **139,534** cigarette butts in 2013.

We have turned in **55,200** butts so far this year for a total of **203,724** butts since we started sending them to TerraCycle in January 2013. (We also collected the 5 gallon jar of cigarette butts we use for the litter project display.)



Interesting Information from Our Readers

From Kothai in Bellevue:

My late grandfather was a water diviner. People from his village and the neighboring village/district in Souther India would invite him to search for water before they dug a well for irrigation. He would set out early in the morning with his modest dowsing tools, the spine of a coconut leaf and some pebbles. He would walk the length and breadth of the farm where they needed a well with the coconut sticks crossed out in his hand. I remember walking with him and watch in amazement when the stick's suddenly becomes electric and start twirling/jumping in his hands. Yes, that is the spot where there is water under the ground. He then uses pebbles to calculate how far down the water is under ground. His predicions were almost always spot on.

I also remember him regularly healing the village folks of scorpion/snake bites. He life was devoid of material possessions. His toothbrush/paste was the humble neem stick. When he travels his bag has only one other pair of clothes and a small bar of soap.



Interesting Information from Our Readers (contd.)

From Arati in California (now in Amritapuri):

I think orchids are magical. At times they appear surreal, other worldly, hovering somewhere between flora and fauna, and they can morph into any shape we want to see.

There is a vast number of orchid species. Apparently it equals about four times the amount of mammal species, and they grow in all kinds of climates, not just the tropics. I always thought they were delicate until we lived on Maui and had some growing in different areas of the garden. Much to my surprise, along with being beautiful, these orchids were very hardy and resilient. On the side of the main entrance road leading to the temple gate in Amritapuri there are some orchids that look just like the first ones I had on Maui.

If you happen to be flying from the West Coast of the US to India and you go through Singapore the Changi airport has amazing orchid gardens. Well worth stopping there!

Wikipedia has a lot of info on orchids <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchidaceae>

Take a look at these amazing orchids: [These 17 Flowers Look Like Something Else](#)

