

## **Combat Global Warming by Building Community**

©2007 Cecile Andrews

One of the ways to combat global warming is to build community, something that, for me, is central to a life of simplicity. Simplicity has never involved "self deprivation," as so many assume; rather, it's a search for fulfilling activities that combat the emptiness that leads to consumerism. When people have community, they are less likely to go to the shopping mall and consume. Of course, any reduction in consumption is a reduction in the use of oil (the primary contributor to global warming) since oil is used in the production of things at every step of the way, from powering the machines that make products to powering the car that drives you to the mall.

Community reduces consumerism in many ways: One, if people are involved with others, they have less time to go shopping because they're already occupied! They don't have the spare time for a trip to the mall. Two, when people have friends, they're less likely to be influenced by advertising, since advertising plays on people's loneliness and sense of emptiness. Next, when you're involved in community, you need less stuff, in part because you can share among yourselves. Borrow someone's lawn mower instead of getting your own, for instance. It's so much easier to share when you know your neighbors! And further, we learn from each other. How many people have learned about compact fluorescent light bulbs because they saw them in a friend's house when they were visiting. And finally, it's talking about the big issues with others that really motivates us to change. We need the enlivenment of other people's energy as well as the enlightenment of information.

Most of all, though, when we participate in community, we learn to care for the common good. We learn to care for life outside of our own narrow circle. And maybe, if we learn to care for our own species, we'll learn to care for other species. Maybe learning to care is at the root of so many of our problems, not the least of which is global warming.

These days, building community needs to be a very conscious effort. In the old days, we encountered people in the course of our daily business. We talked to people as we waited in lines and chatted with the cashiers and shop keepers. We bumped into neighbors on the way to the post office or stopped to gossip when we walked to the store. But today, we interact with machines for most of the day, from computers, to cars, to televisions. We stare into screens instead of gazing into people's faces.

There are a variety of conscious efforts to create community, like co housing or farmers markets. One that I've been working on for the last few years is an urban ecovillage. It's not an intentional community in the usual sense of an ecovillage; rather, it's an unintentional community, a collection of people who find themselves living in the same neighborhood. But why shouldn't we have some of the benefits of a "real" ecovillage where people live in consciously sustainable ways.

In our Phinney EcoVillage (Phinney is the name of my North Seattle neighborhood), we focus on bringing people together into small groups to encourage them to live simpler, slower, and smaller; to build community and sustainability. We have a global warming group, a "think tank"

## **Building Community as a Simple Response to Global Warming**

(a weekly gathering at a local cafe for those who work at home), a monthly salon at a local independent book store, and most important.... we have a "stop and chat" campaign, encouraging people to get out onto the streets and talk with their neighbors. We also work with all the local "official" groups: the neighborhood association, the neighborhood council, the local peace group, etc.

All these efforts certainly cut down my family's impact on global warming! Since most of our activities occur in our neighborhood, we spend much less time driving places! When you're out most evenings attending a community event, you use less energy for heat and lights at home. (Like the old days when Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir wrote in cafes so they could have some heat and light, which they couldn't afford in their own apartments.) Most of all, the ecovillage roots us in our own place, reducing the desire to travel. So many of us committed liberals still fly all over the place, and flying is, of course, one of the biggest contributors to global warming.

Simplicity is the examined life, asking ourselves about how our actions contribute to the well being of people and the planet. Searching for community may be one of the most effective answers.

Cecile Andrews is the author of *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life and Slow is Beautiful: New Visions of Community, Leisure, and Joie de Vivre*.