

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

The Neighborhood--Can We Get It Back? Is Yardsharing One Way? (and, What Else Will Work?)

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on March 24, 2010 - 6:01pm in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

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Tonight's campfire is by Liz McLellan who has put together <http://hyperlocavore.com> - "Hyperlocavore is a yardsharing community. We match people in sharing groups in their neighborhoods. New friends are made here. A hyperlocavore is a person who tries to eat as much food as locally as possible. Growing your own is as local as it gets! We build resilience block by block with our neighbors, friends and family."

The Neighborhood

I grew up in a suburban neighborhood about 20 minutes from San Francisco. It was one of those picture perfect communities with many group amenities--tennis courts, a swimming pool, even a meeting house. The meeting house was rarely used. Maybe the home owners association (HOA) met there to compose their demands upon the people that lived near them. I don't know.

When we were younger the neighborhood kids traveled in packs. It was a safe place. Idyllic even as it could only have been through a child's eyes. We roamed and battled. We built a half pipe out of plywood and spent three summers wrecking ourselves on it. But, as we got older it changed. Families seemed to move inside. The personal computer came along. We stopped hanging out all day. Concerns about going to college took over ... and most of us got a hand-me-down car. We were Californians after all. Driving was our birthright and we were all keen to hit the open road.

Since then a lot of things have changed. What are the parts of 'back then' we want back? And how do we get them back? Can we redevelop community?

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My memories of the neighborhood later were of letters of complaint from the HOA or a neighbor over this violation or that kvetch. Home prices in CA at that time were going nowhere but up and people had their minds on their money. It seemed to be piling up - if only everyone could keep their homes perfect we'd all be rich!

Money changes everything. Or maybe cars change everything. Either way - when our happy band of little savages grew up all the magic of that place disappeared.

It wasn't until I moved to a predominately Caribbean American neighborhood in Brooklyn, thirty years later that I felt what a real neighborhood felt like again. Maybe younger families are key and families that stay close to grandparents... This neighborhood was coming up and being gentrified. This dynamic pissed some people off but others saw it as an opportunity to finally sell and move to a sunny place. I hoped they wouldn't. That sunny place was empty and cold in spite of all the sun.

In that neighborhood there are folks that have live in the same apartment for generations. If you have a good rent situation in New York, you find a way to keep it in the family. So on that block people had known each other for a very long time. Just like a small town if you were not careful about it everyone on the block knew what was up with you.

I don't want to idealize the situation because folks were poor. But people had networks of mutual trust and help. Folks knew who was good and who was not to be trusted with anything.

The streets in the summer were full of kids playing, people barbecuing on the steps of their apartment buildings, people asking after each other's mothers. There were sometimes gunshots, but I felt safer there in a way than I had ever felt in my life, even though I was mostly, an outsider looking in. I was treated as a neighbor, once folks got to know me and I miss it every day.

I now live in a tiny town in the wild west of Eastern Oregon. We are less than 300 here. Mutuality thrives through informal networks of assistance that also go back generations. My mother has been here 10 years and has so many stories of people just doing for her without request. People here know how to take care of each other. It is what makes life worth living.

It gives me buoyancy. It dulls all fears. I am learning every day what it means to be a neighbor.

As we all walk towards the future I think we need to understand that there is no way to thrive under a peak everything scenario without building communities and real neighborhoods. There is no escape to the hills, no thriving without mutuality. Look to your left and look to your right.

These are the people that will make you or break you. There is no escape from that. And who would want to?

The fantasy of the solo hero is just that. It is based on ideology not reality. It's based on a

psychological need of the person who engages in it. To me it screams a need for therapy to address some deep parental drama that is unresolved. Your mileage may vary. And I do not intend to insult the rugged individualists among you. I am one and I am learning that it is an internally impoverished way of being.

We are primates, and therefore social creatures. Our gene line is not the baboon but the bonobo. That fact alone should give you some hope. It's our nature to soothe and to cooperate. But even baboon culture, which was thought to be permanently hierarchical, alpha male dominated and warlike has been shown to develop new communal behaviors which profit and protect all in the band. The key is getting the alpha males to calm down and it's possible.

For a little more on this - take a look at Robert Sapolsky's work. [A Primate's Memoir - Robert M. Sapolsky](#)

We cannot separate easily into tiny roving bands. It would be disastrous for us and for the planet if we did. There are simply too many of us. Our thinking has the potential to evolve. We are rapidly waking up to our nature as a primate with an ability to fly out into space and look back at our home, the pale blue dot. Us monkeys have gone to space. Think about that. Just sit with it for a while.

These changes may be a gift if seen as such.
Our task is to look up the block and down the block and see only us.
More of us.
Our ability to thrive depends on it.
The future is a choice.

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What choices are you making to make where you live a neighborhood?
Are you focused on your ability to aide others or only to profit in the future?
Do you plan to evolve your thinking or play out atavistic scenario?
Do you feel responsibility to grow or simply to survive?
Are you thinking ideologically or practically?

Do you have good memories of where you grew up?
Examples of neighborly behavior?

Some sharing resources:
<http://swapmamas.com>
<http://sharable.net>

and my site: <http://hyperlocavore.com> - a yard sharing community is currently crowd funding our next phase of growth. We are happy to report that this model is working very well. We have just three days to cover the last 27% of our pledge drive but we are happy to report mutuality works! If you feel like supporting our project (even with just a \$5 donation, it will help!), here is a link: <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/hyperlocavore/hyperlocavorecom-a-fre...>



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