

Sustainable Living – A Real Life, Bertschi Family, Example

Donna, parent of a Bertschi 3rd grader, graciously agreed to write a short vignette on a day in their life. Donna and her family have made a real effort to live sustainably as you can see described below. The description of her day gives a number of example of things that we can do in our every day life to be more waste-free and sustainable. Just trying a few of these things would have a positive impact on the environment!

A day in the life of an almost waste-free family

The day starts with the usual grumblings about getting up, but soon organic oatmeal (with apples from our pesticide-free garden) is cooking. My husband is mixing up dough for tonight's flatbread pizza, which takes 15 minutes of hands on work in the morning. The organic flour comes from Fairhaven, a co-op flourmill in Bellingham. It is September; we are trying to get as much of our food as locally as we can. We are focusing on using Northwest grown & produced rather than the more rigid 100 miles, encouraged by locavores (www.locavores.com). Most Americans eat food that travels about 1500 miles from its source. This month, given the bounty from our garden supplemented by our local farmer's markets, we figure eating local is worth a try (beats trying to do that in December).

My daughter comes downstairs dressed in clothes that have been passed down from our neighbors. We are extremely lucky to have a child who has the fashion sense of her mother (that is, none) and is thrilled to wear clothes previously worn by our two neighbor girls. When she outgrows them, assuming no serious wear and tear, they will be passed on to the 5-year-old girl next door, and so on. When possible, we try to reuse and repair, rather than buy new. It helps to have a husband who is an engineer and loves to fix things. And, yes, we can afford new, but I am beginning to agree that the planet cannot.

I pack my daughter's waste-free lunch in a reusable lunchbox. It is a Wednesday, but it would be waste-free any other day of the week. See The Bertschi Parent News dated September 12, 2007, and Kim Armstrong's suggestions for packing a waste-free lunch. I run out into our veggie patch and grab a few carrots. I also pack an Italian plum from a neighbor's bounty, along with last night's leftovers (re-heatable in the microwave). I throw the carrot tops into our worm bucket under the sink, which when full will be transferred to the bigger bin outside—and no, it doesn't smell (much). I pour my coffee (not local, but it IS fair trade, organic and locally roasted) into a stainless steel traveling mug and we run to the car, late as usual. We pick up kids from two other Bertschi families who live within a two-mile radius of our

house. I learn more about what is happening at school from these conversations than I do from attempting to extract information from my tight-lipped daughter. This arrangement allows me the exquisite luxury of not driving 5 times to school each week. We drop my husband off at his bus stop before I swing by Bertschi. His employer pays for his metro pass as we have only one (gas guzzling) car. Guilt, guilt. On the way home I group my errands so I am not wasting gas. More gas is consumed to start up a cold car than to keep using one that is warmed up.

I come home and do a few hours work by telecommuting to my job. I then log onto my bank's web site to pay some e-bills. No stamps, no envelopes, no lost in the mail, no resources consumed transporting those bills. Priceless!

I go outside to harvest green beans and tomatoes for dinner. I love to have kids help me harvest so they know where their food comes from, but they tend to eat more than they gather. My daughter loves nothing more than to eat tomatoes right off the plant—not that I am complaining, but as summer ends, I begining to fight her for them. Despite the cool and wet summer, the garden is dry. I use water from our rain barrels to water my perennial garden. I do some dead heading and toss the clippings into our 3-bin composter. Any diseased clippings go into the City yard waste barrel, along with compostable paper waste such as pizza boxes (but not this month!). Next year, we will have rich, crumbly soil for the garden, along with worm castings from the worm bin. Yes, it is dirty work to harvest the compost, but I get my husband to do it.

During soccer season, I share car-pooling to practices with other parents. Today is my day off (three hours of personal time gained). I hop on my bike, outfitted with travel bags, and go to one of the five weekly farmer's market within two miles of my house. I feel extremely lucky to have so many options to buy what I can't grow, plus I get to exercise.

I come home, and my husband is finishing his pizza making. He uses sauce made during a canning party the previous weekend. My daughter comes home, grabs a snack (fruit, as she is a budding fruitarian). After a locally grown/made dinner, we argue about doing homework, waste lots of valuable time and realize there is no time for a bath. Well, off to bed a little dirty, but think of all the water we saved!

Resources: www.sustainableballard; Barbara Kingsolver's, "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle", "Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally", Alisa Smith and J. B. MacKinnon; www.100milediet.org)