

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING

Peter Schwartzman

I confess, I am a hypocrite

For those of you who have been reading my monthly contributions for the past three years, there is something I must confess. I am a hypocrite. It seems that I've published these columns for all this time and no one has called my bluff—despite the fact that I repeatedly ask the readership to respond to anything spouted, ranted, or argued between the margins. So why do I come forth this month with such an admission? Well, as any alcoholic can attest, admittance is the first step in one's recovery. Perhaps if more of us (and I am definitely a late bloomer) admitted to some of the hypocrisies that we all live the more quickly our planet will recover from its ecological crisis.

I talk the talk but do I walk the walk? I say by and large the answer is "No." I live in much too large a house for my family and me. I own two cars even though I work less than 2 miles from home. Neither of my cars is a hybrid or gets at least 30 miles per gallon on the highway, a minimum environmental standard for any modern automobile. I rarely bike or walk to work even when the weather is conducive for doing so. My yard is big enough for an impressive putt-putt golf course and the majority of it is mowed lawn. I never donate more than five percent of my net (i.e., post-tax) income to progressive and environmentally-conscientious organizations; however, I easily spend this fixing my oversized house each year. I eat too much as demonstrated by the National Institute of Health's website which informs me that I am about 25 pounds overweight. I also purchase and eat many foods that are grown on distant continents. I spend way too much time on the computer wasting precious opportunities to spend with family, friends, neighbors, and community folk. I write too few letters to politicians and other

people of influence informing them of the environmental realities and challenges that we face. I own two dogs and, to no fault of their own, have spent more \$ on them and their care than I care to admit. My friends are too often from the higher material and educational classes and too seldom do I venture out into my community at large. As far as I know, most of the clothing and shoes that I wear was made in sweatshops in foreign lands. Worse, my closet is full of clothes that I don't even wear. Worse yet, rarely do I accede to my wife's suggestion that we give the extra garments to local charities. (I guess I like to do laundry, not.) And lastly, in order that I don't have to think too much about any of the above, I fall asleep to monotonous talk shows on a bedside clock radio.

Do this largely qualitative analysis suggest that I am a glutton? Perhaps not, but a qualitative one does, at least when compared to most of my countrymen. My ecological footprint (EF) is larger than the average citizen of the United States by 25 percent or so. (An EF simple represents the amount of land required to sustain a person's lifestyle; the concept is given an extensive review in my Dec. 26, 2002 *Zephyr* essay.) According to this calculation (which can be performed by any of you at www.myfootprint.org), my lifestyle requires about 30 acres of land per year. How is this gluttonous? Well, if every one of the 6.2+ billion people on the planet lived like me, we would need 6.7 planet Earth's to do so! Clearly, my lifestyle isn't sustainable, and neither is the lifestyle of most of Americans; hence, the need for a bit of reflection.

Enough of the self-deprecation, even I can't take too much of it. Why did I go to all this trouble? Pure and simply, every so often

it is imperative that we take an honest and objective look at ourselves in the mirror and ask, "Am I satisfied with who I am?" While many of us do this, I suspect rarely do we do this where the focus is on our relationship to the environment or the planet as a whole. Though I could mention another hundred ways in which my behavior and activities are not conducive to a healthy planet, the above list highlights the ones that I am ready to acknowledge. In doing so, I hope to tackle these shortfalls and attempt to improve on them. In time, I can grapple with others.

Where might I start? Perhaps this isn't the most useful follow up question. Rather than describe what specific changes could be made in my life to bring my lifestyle into greater harmony with the environment that sustains me, I find it more purposeful to suggest questions that may enable all of us to partake in such an examination. The questions that I pose might serve as a starting point for us to reconsider how we live and whether our ecological principles and aspirations are reflected in our life choices. The categories that follow are chosen based on the recommendation of several environmental texts which examine similar issues. I present the questions in the first person so as to avoid appearing dogmatic; readers can change the pronouns as they see fit.

Shelter. Is the house/apartment in which I live sufficiently large for my family's needs? Is the mortgage/rent indicative of what I can afford or, rather, what I deem necessary for a satisfactory life? Do I keep moving to larger and more expensive homes though my family's composition and needs may not be changing? Indications that a place of residence is too large for its inhabitants include: rooms/floors that get little use (i.e., rooms that collect dust and not much else); rooms that have only one function (must one have a room for exercise, one for television viewing, and a different one to display/store collectibles?); and, an inability to get to the front door in time when someone rings the doorbell. Does my home have any of these characteristics?

Transport/Travel. Do I walk or bike most of the time when I am traveling within my hometown? Does the car that I drive get 30 miles per gallon (or greater) in the city? Do I live in a one vehicle home or, rather, does everyone in my household have their own individual motorized conveyors? When I travel long distances, do I go by train, bus, or plane? (Planes are much more inefficient in terms of gasoline burned per passenger mile.) Do I travel transcontinentally or internationally on a fairly regular basis?

Diet. Do I eat more than I should? Do I eat high up on the food chain (i.e., meats, especially tuna and other carnivores)? Does my diet consist of foods that are locally grown? Do local grocers or restaurants sell such foods? Do I ever request that sellers sell such foods? Do I eat certain foods only when they are in season or, rather, whenever I have the urge? Does nearly all the food that I buy get eaten, or does a good portion of it get discarded (due to spoilage, expiration or satiation)?

Surplus Income. Once I pay for my necessities (i.e., rent/mortgage, food, vehicles, insurance, student loans and child care), what do I do with the "extra" money that I may have? Unfortunately, more and more members of our communities are just trying to "get by" and many forgo health insurance and "healthy" foods/alternatives because unhealthy ones are often cheaper (just compare the price of iceberg lettuce to romaine lettuce or Kool-Aid to milk or orange juice). Yet, compared to the majority of the people in the world, most

Americans are "well-to-do." This implies they have some disposable income. So what do I do with mine? Do I try to support non-governmental civic organizations that are rebuilding communities and ecosystems; or do I spend my extra dough on non-essentials such as gambling (including bingo and lotteries), drugs, alcohol, tobacco, pornography, antiques or collectibles? Do I even know which organizations are working to protect, conserve, clean up, expand or beautify local and regional environments? If not, have I made any effort to find out? Perhaps these groups could benefit from my time as well as my money.

Free Time. Despite the fact that most of us are working more hours on our job(s), most of us still have time away from work. How do I use this time? Do I use it to wallow in personal pleasure or do I set aside some of it to improve environmental quality? Do I spend it in front of the corporate soap box we call television/cable or do I spend it building strong family and community bonds and connections? Clearly, everyone needs some down time but I spend too much of it entertaining myself over a game of Scrabble®. This is usually "down" time that I could spend more productively with my wife and child or with community members socializing and strengthening relationships. Consider what we all could accomplish if we set aside one hour each day to make our environment a better place. Whether we spend this time writing our political representatives, picking up street trash, calling radio talk shows, educating ourselves about the issues, growing our own vegetables, organizing fundraisers for an environmental organization, walking to work, watching documentaries, or sitting peacefully peering into the night sky with friends and family, we would be making a positive difference.

What does this all amount to? Well, next time you think your local environmental "expert" deserves to be mimicked or idolized, think again. We are all subject to forces that compel us to want, consume and pollute too much. Hopefully all of us are on a road toward reducing the negative impacts on this planet and augmenting our positive contributions. Thus, I am no better or worse than any of you, and, in fact, that isn't the point. All of us must dig deep within ourselves and try to match our principles with our actions. We have much to learn from one another. Educating myself and others about the environment over the past ten or so years has definitely had its impact on how I live. And while I have a long way to go yet, my diet, viewing habits and organizational contributions have definitely improved over time. The often repeated cliché, "Either you are part of the problem or your part of the solution," is only partly right. We (through our unsustainable lifestyles) are all part of the problem **and** we'd better begin become part of the solution sooner rather than later. Perhaps a moment of honest introspection might spark us in this direction. Recognizing that many of the behaviors/activities that we engage in are choices that we have control over will empower us to seek healthier solutions for ourselves as well as for our environments. Good luck.

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Recent Area Deaths

Name	Age	Address (Galesburg unless noted)	Date	Funeral
Bradford, Ronald E., Sr.	68	121 W. Simmons St.	7/25	WFH
Chivers, Marie "Sally" Celeste	78	1384 N. Henderson St.	7/25	WFH
Crump, Mrs. Mary H.	85	KCNH, formerly 433 Phillips St.	7/24	HPW
Erwin, William A.	62	Valparaiso, Ind., formerly Galesburg	7/20	HPW
Hawkins, Cecil Elizabeth	94	KCNH, formerly 1366 Rona Dr.	7/20	HPW
Howard, Mrs. Lilly M.	85	KCNH, formerly 442 E. Third St.	7/24	HPW
McCormick, Velda M.	76	768 Knox Road 150 E, Maquon	7/25	HHD
McCoy, Donna Lucille	74	1013 Washington Ave.	7/27	WFH
Nelson, Carol G.	70	945 Sunset View Dr.	7/22	HHD
Perez, Adam Justin	28	703 W. Berrien St.	7/26	WFH
Swartz, Howard Conrad	95	1503 Williams St.	7/27	HPW

Local Funeral Homes

HPWA — Hinchliff-Pearson-West, Abingdon (309) 462-2325

HPW — Hinchliff-Pearson-West Funeral Home (309) 343-2101

HHD — Hurd-Hendricks Funeral Home, Knoxville (309) 289-4121

WFH — Watson Funeral Home (309) 342-1913