

Is 'The Good Life' Still Possible?

Once upon a crazy time, back in the early 1970s, the first wave of hippies came here. They came here to homestead, or find whatever they sought, maybe just sex, drugs and rock & roll.

They were born in the '40s and '50s, baby boomers. They made it to 25, most of them with a fully developed, uncorrupted brain, and maybe even finished college.

They were Harvard drop outs, or prepped to be nuclear physicists, and radicals from Germany. They suffered from being at the bottom of the top, crushing to the ego. So they became Flower children, took the sunshine 25, reinvented the wheel, homeschooled their kids for better or worse, and really lived the dream.

Skip ahead, the X generation also had their influx of pioneer type, nature loving odd balls. They usually started smoking pot at 14 in public school, and took the L some time soon after.

The boomers often blamed this influx of kids from suburbia USA, on the grateful dead and rainbow gatherings. But most were just grunge or minimalist, naturalist and environmentalists when they showed up.

The previous generation didn't understand the societal context these kids grew up in. They were hidden off in their Humboldt bubble, practicing permaculture or the fiddle, or taking coke and chasing ass, whatever they did.

It was the last great frontier, the lost coast, the wild west, the triple junction, the mountain, the land, the great spirit. Lawlessness prevailed, and that kind of worked then because the community was united in a way we can't understand now.

As is still the case in many places here, there was no internet or cellular service. You had to go meet your neighbor. You couldn't be a troll hiding behind a key-

Scott and Helen Nearing's: *'Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanely and Simply in a Troubled World'* was quietly self-published in 1954 before reemerging in the 1970's as one of the most influential texts of the back-to-the-land movement.



board. You had to be real. There was some accountability and people weren't just thrown away as disposable workers -- a benefit of the anonymity of recent cannabis farming trends. (Kids have to go back to Iowa or Florida, with a dislocated knee or bulging disc. No medical benefits in our local industry.)

It all started to crumble like a Humboldt hillside, some time around the beginning of the green rush, just a few years before legalization. The influx of upstart pot farmers was really competitive -- nature and everyone else was last. Things in town changed, on the road changed, on the hill changed. Everyone was fighting.

The roads became dominated and started to crumble from the 4x4s full of purchased dirt, all driving at full speed. Someone will be offended that I mentioned it here.

My dear old friend who taught me all about the history of this county and his methods for growing the sacred herb, made it like 50 years, homesteading and caring for the land and water and trees and neighbors.

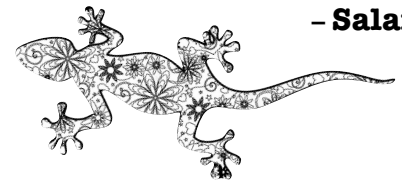
Then a few years ago, he lost it and up and ducked out of the area. He meekly comes in to check his property and leave now. The quiet country road to his house, became an interstate for a billion dollar industry. He was just trying to live a humble, simple life.

He raised his kids here and they went on to get college degrees and be successful out there in the world. He was milling wood and inventing a solar earth ship house decades ago. He built his house with boulders into the earth, with cool air circulating in the summer, and solar and greenhouse on the front.

A work of art with creative touches, tiled bathroom with hot tub and fish pond. He built the fire department, was a teacher, and contributed to the community in a positive way.

Let's remember these types.

You must know someone like this yourself. Please send stories to the Greenfuse of your history and expertise in this wonderful county.



— Salamander

THE UNLIMITED COSMOS

*When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures,
were ranged in columns before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams,
to add, divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer,
where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air,
and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.*

Walt Whitman,
from *Leaves of Grass*

With a Ph.D. in astronomy, I suppose I can be considered a "learn'd astronomer," and indeed I spend a lot of my time in front of a computer terminal, poring over "the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them." But I am not one to forget what drew me to the field in the first place; from my youngest days I have spent innumerable hours looking up "in perfect silence at the stars," and I continue to do so to this day. In my view, these two approaches to astronomy—indeed, to all sciences—are complementary; while I will always enjoy the spectacle of a star-studded night for its own sake, it is the hours, years, and decades that I and other astronomers have spent unraveling the secrets of the cosmos that give true meaning to that spectacle.

It was natural, if perhaps slightly egotistical, for the earliest human beings to believe that the universe consisted of their own immediate surroundings, and that the various happenings in nature occurred at the whims of various supernatural entities; elaborate belief systems were constructed for the purpose of trying to convince these entities to produce one series of actions in lieu of others. Each scientific discovery, beginning with the fact that another tribe of humans lived on the other side of the mountains, has tended to remove this egocentrism from our collective belief. As Carl Sagan so eloquently stated in his book

Pale Blue Dot, "modern science has been a voyage into the unknown, with a lesson in humility waiting at every stop." While we've been engaged in removing ourselves from the center of the universe, we've also studied the processes of nature; and, while we're a long way from understanding every-thing

that goes on around us, we've learned that there is no need to invoke supernatural forces as an explanation for the phenomena we see. Although all the sciences have played a major role in this de-centralization, it is perhaps astronomy more any other that has brought this "lesson in humility" down upon us.

During the past two thousand years we've progressed from the idea that the Earth—as it was known at the time—was the center of all creation, to the realization that the Earth is only one of a set of nine planets, together with several smaller objects, orbiting a rather obscure star that is only one of several hundred billion similar stars contained within the Milky Way galaxy, itself only one of several hundred billion other galaxies scattered throughout the universe. With this view,

"The idea that we on the Earth hold some type of privileged position within the universe, or that one particular group of individuals on this planet holds a supernaturally ordained privileged position over its other inhabitants, is recognized for the absurdity that it must be."

However much we may not like it, our Earth, and we, its inhabitants, are trivially insignificant compared to the universe as a whole, and thus our personal interactions, our collective morality and, by consequence, our progress beyond where we are today, can only be derived from our own collective conscience. This view of the cosmos tells us that there is no universe-spanning entity that is going to take the trouble to visit this tiny remote dot in space and tell us how to live; we have to figure that out for ourselves.

As our science progresses and our techniques improve, it is reasonable to expect that at some point in the not-too-distant future we will find that, indeed, most of the stars around us have their own system of planets accompanying them. Although our experience with the recent discoveries suggests that this will not be true everywhere, it is certainly possible that around some of these stars we will find planets somewhat similar to our own Earth and, perhaps on these other "Earths" or perhaps even in what we might consider a less likely environment, we will find some indications that life has sprouted elsewhere. One thing seems almost certain: whatever we find will contain numerous surprises, and each discovery will serve to show that

*we are even less unique than
we ever thought we were.*

Seeing is believing

While we've been saying for some time that there are about as many galaxies throughout the universe as there are stars within our galaxy, it's nice to have real observational evidence to back this up.

And now we have it; the so-called Hubble Deep Field (HDF), taken with the Hubble Space Telescope over a ten-day period in December 1995, shows galaxies upon galaxies upon galaxies stretching as far out in the universe, and as far back in time, as we can imagine. The HDF was exposed in a seemingly "blank" region of the sky slightly to the north of the Big Dipper's handle, and represents an area of sky smaller than can be resolved with the unaided human eye. At least 1,500 individual galaxies—many of which are far beyond the grasp of any Earthbound telescope—have been counted within this tiny slice of sky, and if we assume that this is representative of the universe as a whole—and we have every reason for believing so—then indeed the universe contains the unaccountable billions of galaxies that we have been postulating all along. I urge readers to examine the HDF image and to pick out one of those tiny dim smudges for a closer look. That tiny, unremarkable patch of light is in actuality a galaxy, more or less the same size as our own, containing up to several hundred billion individual stars. It is far enough away that the light we see on this image took several billion years to get here. When we consider that this scene would be repeated almost ad infinitum throughout the entire vault of the heavens, we begin to realize just how large the universe really is, and how insignificant is our own little corner of it. If there is any recent discovery in astronomy that serves to give us our "lesson in humility," the Hubble Deep Field is it.

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