

I don't really know how it started. When the comfort of home became inessential, and the warm showers became cold scrubs. When the stovetop and fridge became slaves to the propane tank living under the counter, and when my dad went as far off the grid as you can in a city.

My father lives in a machine shop. A camping stove and a propane tank create the kitchen. A pot of boiled water becomes a shower and a landline phone must be used for all communications. He is encompassed by his thoughts and lives purely. Whether my father choose the simple life or it happened upon him is unclear; I believe it is a little of both. I think he fell in love with the routine, control, and simplicity that his home brought him. Oxygen, water, food, shelter, and sleep: that is all you need to live and thrive. Nothing more is needed to satisfy, and nothing less can sustain you.

“Love your life, poor as it is... Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage... Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.” (Thoreau, 1908) My father, like Henry David Thoreau, lives plainly; austerity keeps him living. A 9 to 5 job is not required for satisfaction. Society runs off the notion that consumerism is a reflection of status and stability and that one's life may only be valuable when their achievements are met with a paycheck. Why have we lost connection with the land and replaced our homesteads with the ideal suburban dream. A life of poverty is not always imposed, yet can be chosen, for the benefits of self-reliance surpass those of consumerism. Living disconnected from society is confining yet liberating. Being disconnected allows connection; connection with the land, and one's surroundings. It creates a space for inquiry, self-reflection and self-reliance; space where new ideas and radical thinking can be formed.

Sustainable homes and simple living in 2015 are the start of something greater. Society is finally realizing our actions toward the environment are ruining the chances of survival for our kin. Whether past generations understood that our mass consumption of fossil fuels, electricity and water were affecting the planet is unknown, but through sustainable homes and a dedication to simple living we can connect back to our roots; to the life of balance and reflection that self-reliance brought.

Leaving society and striving to reap the benefits of self-sufficiency and isolation; Henry David Thoreau left the comfort of the city to pursue a secluded life supported by only himself. “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau, 1908) Curating your own life with each action backed by intent and thought creates a purpose. By stripping oneself of all exterior implements and distraction, every moment lasts longer, every thought can be formulated, and with distance and space comes creativity and inspiration. A deliberate life and experience comes with more value than the monotonous life of a one-track mind of making money and surrounding oneself in inessential material possessions. Society has taught us this is the only way to measure achievement and self worth. Yet isolating oneself from the confines of society comes with the notion that the risks are higher than the gain. Sixteen years of my own life have passed, and are the memories I hold dearest those of me experiencing the world and what it has to offer or have they been those monotonous hours behind a screen like the one I am at now? Typing into oblivion just for a grade, just for that good college, just for that “successful life”.

I am just barely staying sane in this hectic life. “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life,” says Henry David Thoreau (1908) as he moved away from society to a sequestered plot of land he could finally call home. His actions were the same as those moving

away from civilization and trading a car and 9 to 5 job for an off the grid experience; to gain more from life and to mend the holes we have created in our own environment

I live in a home that is connected to the grid and the flaws that come with that. As much as my family tries to do our part in the sustainable movement through solar panels and saving water, we are not off the grid - in fact we are nowhere close. And though my dad lives as off the grid as one can while still living in a city, neither compare to the deep immersion that full off griders and homesteaders engage themselves in. Being fully sustainable is creating balance in your life and not consuming more natural resources than necessary. It is a conscious decision to move towards self-sufficiency. In 2015, the need for a stable living environment is crucial to the generations to come. With the California drought being the worst the world has ever seen, steps toward simple and deliberate lives are needed. As able civilians, making change to support a more balanced environment is essential and can begin in our own homes and lifestyles.

In recent years the design of “Tiny Houses” are becoming rapidly widespread. The mobility and endless possibilities for shape and structure are creating a closer relationship between the owner and the home. Due to the small size of tiny homes, usually under 150 square feet, the homes are often designed and built by the owner. Knowing what one needs in their own home allows the owner to eliminate the unnecessary, and truly get back to the basics of home building and self sufficiency. The tiny house movement is in response to not only consumerism but also the economic decline; although in both instances tiny homes are a step closer to sustainable living, “It's not about the tiny house, it's about the life you're going to lead in it” (Abrams, 2015).



(High-end micro home: source - 2015, Mother Earth News)

Homesteading and urban homesteading are two variants of self-sufficient living. Homesteading is creating a system of survival based entirely on the land where one lives. From water to food, homesteading is creating a home and living space sustained by only the natural resources available. Homesteading is not contemporary; rather, homesteading is an antiquity that is only recently being reincorporated into modern living styles (Holland, 2015).



The home has always been a key component for survival in history. The home stood as a versatile space in which you could work, raise a family and provide safety for generations of your kin. Homes were not sold yearly; rather they stayed within a family for decades, holding the history of those within. Within nomadic communities, homes were adaptable and mobile (Friedman, 2). Homesteading in America became increasingly popular in 1862 when the Homestead Act was passed issuing 160 acres of land to all willing to dwell there for five years (History, 2015). Through constructing homes and providing for their families through trade and agriculture, the western unsettled land in America became “civilized.” The idea of homesteading is creating a fully stable living condition with no ties to the resources of a city or town. When a homesteader was miles from their closest neighbor they had to gain everything needed to survive from their land themselves. Agriculture was key to survival. Yet as Industrial Revolution swept the east coast and Midwest, agriculture began to decline and many people moved to the cities to work in factories or in an urban community. The permanent home where once families raised their kids and their grandkids became obsolete. People moved to where the work was, rather than taking their work and skills with them (2002, Friedman, 2002). Homes became a place for immediate family only and moving became regular. Separation from the land was in full swing and the “American dream” of consumption and wealth became the norm. As World War II ended, automobiles became more conventional which allowed families to commute to work (Friedman, 2002). We worked so we could be payed, and buy the things our families “needed”. We worked so that we could tap into the commercial industries and consume. As years passed, our society forgot that the earth could feed, clothe and shelter us. We have overlooked that our changes in housing and location have caused an undeniable disconnect from the land.

The modern homestead and adaptable tiny homes are catering to the needs of those who are willing to work the land and disconnect from society. While sustainable living is becoming more conventional, there is still a lack of awareness in many households surrounding the idea of sustainability. One does not have to leave everything behind as Thoreau did to pursue a life of self-reliance rather within your own living space. Adapting your own living space to accommodate new living habits not only saves resources, but time as well. The addition of a

compost pile in one's backyard to help nurture plant life benefits not only your garden and home but removes food product from the trash. From recycling to solar, to buying second hand and local products, the appeal of the homeowner is choosing the life they want to lead. Modeled after homesteading, constructing an adaptable living space allows for hands on "DIY." Creating an adaptable home is catering to the specific needs of the dweller (Holland, 2015) Journalist Eva Holland compares adaptable housing and partially sustainable homes to "la carte homesteading" which is accurate. To create a sustainable space does not mean leaving all belongings behind to pursue a life in the woods rather you can choose to integrate aspects of homesteading you enjoy into your home life. Land may not be as plentiful as it was back in 1862 during the Homestead Act yet that does not mean aspects of homesteading can be woven into your daily life (Holland, 2015).

Homesteading was once the framework of the western settlement movement. Land was given freely and used by the government as a tool to create new towns and industry. Though recently the roles have reversed. The last few decades have brought regulations and strict codes taking land and money from the people. In recent years, the government has been prosecuting civilians due to permits and building codes within the off the grid communities. After years of homesteading in The Antelope Valley, an area outside Los Angeles, locals are being stripped of their homes and belongings due to permits and zoning. Basic rights are being violated as they lose the choice to reduce their carbon footprint. New laws state that each household must be connected to a water and energy source. While once homesteaders could collect clean drinking water from rainwater or wells, new laws are costing locals thousands of dollars to connect to their local power strip and water source. State legislature of Florida and recently California argue that although connected, no one is forced to use power or water - yet then what is the objective (Jeremy Stulberg, 2015)? Why is legislation not advocating for self-sufficient living, and assisting the growth of the sustainable movement?

Oscar Castaneda, an Antelope Valley local has built a fully sustainable home with his wife, only to be recently harassed by law enforcement and now forced to destroy his home and move off the land. Oscar, a seventh day Adventist, owns a small church and powers his home from solar panels, rainwater, and a well. His beliefs are rooted in life away from the city. County officials have illegally entered his home four times while lacking permits but Castaneda says, "If you don't know the laws, you ain't got no protection" (Castaneda, 2015).

Another Antelope Valley local, Kim Fahey, created a home and art piece using old telephone pole lumber, and named his home "Phonehenge" (Jeremy Stulberg, 2015). Kim was recently forced to demolish his home for zoning and permit issues, and was also charged with twelve misdemeanors. This art home brought the outrageous stories of injustice towards homesteaders in California to the media and the general public. Despite the positive benefits Kim was producing through his fully sustainable home, local officials argues that the building was unappealing and that the neighbors had been complaining, yet Kim has no neighbors in a ten mile radius. Some say the officials are finally cracking down with the agenda of a new airport or freeways running through the Antelope Valley, showing ulterior motives for the injustice.

Arbitrary laws put in place to restrict sustainability are outrageous and it appears as though our legislature has taken a step back 30 years in time, to a time when Styrofoam and not composting were still legal. Although many choose to live off the grid for sustainable reasons, many people still choose to live off the grid for cost issues and to separate from society and the bills and burdens that come hand in hand. Yet new laws forcing homesteaders to connect to a power source and water could cost upward \$50,000 which would be extremely unreasonable

(Jeremy Stulberg, 2015). The addition of power to a micro home or homestead completely contradicts the purpose of “off the grid” and seems incredibly invasive to our right of “the pursuit of happiness.” Codes and zoning completely go against the ideal of sustainable living. (Richardson, 2015) When once a family could move to the frontier and create a home and a life, current off griders are restricted with pointless rules. Living in a home whether it be 1 square foot or 10,000 requires a permit to settle in. Even building on a trailer bed, which is commonly used to slip through the loopholes that come with a home with foundations, can come with the same repercussions as living off the grid on a tiny home.

As the regulations around sustainable living are growing, so is the urgency with which we must be focusing on simple ways we can make a change to benefit the environment and our futures. Adapting to foster change is crucial and as tiny home living may be too extreme for many there are aspects that can be integrated into any home, connected to the grid or not. From compostable in-home toilets to a solar oven, there is innovation pushing for sustainability; society is moving back towards self-reliance. Simple living brings conscious choices and a connection to the land and people surrounding you.

I don't really know why my dad chose to live the way he does, I don't think he even knows. Whether it was for financial stability or for sustainable reasons does not really matter. My father lives simply; he lives with intent backing every action and with intent comes a sense of control. My dad has the essentials, oxygen, water, food, shelter, and sleep. He has my sister and I and his hot cup of tea in the morning. He is happy and he knows living any other way would not sustain and satisfy him. Simple, contained; my father's life is sincere.

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