Rich
Without Money
Tomi Astikainen
In loving memory of
Heidemarie Schwermer
(1942 – 2016)
Menu of Today

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It is midnight. I sit on the ground, on a Greek highway, under a bridge. Nothing in my pockets: no wallet, no keys, no phone. I sing out loud the Red Hot Chili Peppers classic, “Sometimes I feel like I don't have a partner...” I sneer to myself: “Phew, what a cliché! A homeless guy under the bridge.”

There are no cars on the road. My breath is steaming in the glimmer of the street lights. I have walked for hours on end, and eaten nothing but a piece of dry bread. It appears this is going to be yet another night outside, alone.

All of a sudden, I spot something glowing in the horizon. Headlights! A car passes me, slows down, and comes to a halt at a nearby rest area. I grab my stuff and stroll towards it in high hopes. The car is full of passengers but I can already picture myself squeezed between them in the back seat, hugging my small red rucksack, safe from the wintry frost. I proceed with hurried, yet cautious, steps. I don't want to spook them away.

I reach the car and look inside. The people look scared and suspicious, interrupted by this creepy hitchhiker. “Hi! I am Tomi from Finland. Could you by any chance drop me to the next gas station?” I ask.

“No,” the driver replies, rolls down the window and speeds off into the night.

Sigh. I slump my way back under the bridge. “It's hard to believe that there's nobody out there. It's hard to believe that I'm all alone.” I cocoon myself in the sleeping bag – one made for much warmer weather. I rub my cold hands against my thighs. “I don't ever wanna feel like I did that day. Take me to the place I love. Take me all the way.” A few drops of tears run down my cheeks. This kind of life doesn't suit everyone.

I continue hitchhiking in the morning. Two more days. 2,000 kilometers. Direction: North. Price tag: None.

A warm welcome awaits in Berlin: free lodging, dumpster-dived food and very inspiring company – not just for me but some 300 travelers who, throughout the year, get to enjoy a Nomad Base I helped start up. The fellow nomads who come to Berlin don’t have to sleep alone under the bridge.
For four years, 2010-2014, I intentionally refused to use money. I did not have a bank account, nor a credit card. I did not take money, even if offered. I did not charge for the work I did. During that time I traveled to 42 countries and got to observe ordinary people's lives, habits and behavior – myself included. Mind you, I did have a Finnish passport which makes things quite easy, and I even accepted a new passport as a gift. So I was not entirely outside of the money system. Rather I chose to be part of the society with one extraordinary principle: I don't use money in my interaction with others.

Although moneyless life is at anyone's reach, few of us wish to go to such extremes. Is it worthwhile? Is there even any point to it? That's for you to decide. This book offers alternatives to people in very different life situations. I offer tips on how to experience more with less and how to re-orient your relationship with the omnipotent and ubiquitous money.

There is no need to swallow everything at once. Chew on it. This “Starter Soup of Tears” leads you to this exotically stimulating menu. In the end you will be served “Bitter Lime Dessert” as a concluding chapter. In between you will get to enjoy tips catering to various tastes. These are organized in three levels: light (one thumb), medium (two thumbs) and hard core (three thumbs), according to the challenge they provide. Pick what you like.

I first shed light on how to obtain food, water, sanitation, clothes and other material goods for free. We then steer toward moneyless traveling. Next we examine security, well-being and human relations without money. This leads us to needs relating to self-actualization, leisure, creativity and participation.

Although I put less emphasis on helping others and focus more on explaining how to fulfill your own needs of survival, I hope the book doesn't leave you with an impression that a moneyless traveler is nothing but a bum and a freeloader. I try not to tire you with defending my wacky principles or criticizing a broken system.

My aim is to give you a chance to weigh up your own life choices and get inspired to choose your own path. Adding to my own experiences, the book includes numerous stories from people I have gotten to know over the years. This is not a travel book, per se, and the example stories are not served in chronological order. These are mere glimpses of situations on the road.

Bon appetit! I hope you will enjoy what is on the menu.
Ending Up Under the Bridge

In July 2010, after a year of deliberation and denial, I decided to start living without money. How on earth did I reach such a conclusion?

Society and my entrepreneurial upbringing had ingrained the importance of making money in my brain. I worked diligently to advance both my studies and my résumé. I aimed to maximize my own benefit like everyone else, just as I was expected to do.

After High School and a Vocational Degree in business, I started studies in Lappeenranta University of Technology in 2001. Again, I studied Economics and Business Administration. My major was in Organizations and Management. This field was less focused on finance and more about advancing interpersonal communication.

The idea was to graduate quickly and get a well-paid job. But then everything changed. I joined AIESEC – a global, student-run organization specializing in youth leadership development. Through practical, intercultural experiences, AIESEC helps young people develop into active leaders, global citizens and agents of positive change.

Volunteer work allowed me to expand my horizons. I became aware of my values. Love and friendship, freedom, personal development, change and variety, as well as making a positive impact in society became more important factors to me than having money and status.

I can still remember an activity from an AIESEC seminar that totally rocked my world-view. This happened in the gym hall of an elementary school in Kangasala, Finland:

We all stand on the same line and crack light-hearted jokes. The facilitator asks us to think of a horrific scenario that you wouldn't want to become reality at any cost.

In my mind's eye, I see an image of a post-apocalyptic world: all life – nature, animals and people – have been destroyed. There is no hope left whatsoever.

I can no longer hear laughter around me.

We are supposed to take a step forward if we'd be ready to let go of a certain something to avoid this scenario from happening. The facilitator starts by saying “a fridge”. Everyone steps forward.

“Extra clothes.” A step.

“A phone.” Uh, fine. Step forward.

1 www.aiesec.org
“Ability to read.” Some hesitate already. Step.
“A bed.” Step. Feels kind of bad, though.
“Internet connection.” I start to waver. Step.
“Money in your bank account.” Most people remain where they are. I take a step forward. It is a surprisingly easy decision.
“Health.” I am probably the last one who, after some deliberation, still moves forward.
“Freedom.” I no longer move. I am perplexed. What is this about?

We are told: “If you have food in the fridge, savings in the bank, clothes in the wardrobe and a permanent flat, you are richer than majority of world population. Hundreds of millions cannot even read. If you woke up this morning more healthy than sick, you are better off than those one million who won't make it alive until the end of this week. Thousands of children die of curable diseases, such as diarrhea, every day. If you have never faced the horrors of war, the solitude in prison, the suffering of torture or the agony of hunger you are very lucky.”

I wipe my moist eyes and wonder why I never thought of things like this before. On the other hand, I realize that it is my duty as a well-off westerner to take steps towards a more just society.

I am eternally grateful to AIESEC for challenging my view of the world. It made me rethink who I am and how I should spend my limited life time. I worked in teams and learned to motivate young volunteers to reach common goals, all without financial rewards.

I was an oddity among the business and technology students: a humanist hippie who questioned traditional values and was not afraid to voice his opinions. This kind of behavior was frowned upon. Regardless of scornful comments – or perhaps because of them – I did what my heart told me to do.

In 2006, after graduation, this conviction took me to new challenges in Sri Lanka, a country struck by the war, diseases and tsunami. Suddenly I was in an environment where I could lose my life at any given moment – due to a bomb, traffic accident, dengue fever or even a tiny poisonous centipede. I learned not to be afraid in vain. Instead, I

For up-to-date statistics see e.g. [http://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/Learn-More/What-is-Extreme-Poverty](http://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/Learn-More/What-is-Extreme-Poverty)
focused on enjoying both the new culture and work that was a perfect match with what I had studied before.

Although I was very good in leadership training and strategic consulting, I had a deep desire to do something more, to participate in changing the world for better. Through my thesis I had learned about social entrepreneurship. The more I found out about this topic the more convinced I was that our most pressing social and environmental issues could be alleviated and solved through business.

Consequently, when I returned to Finland in 2008, I started a company for social entrepreneurship advocacy. Hardly anyone in Finland knew about this new line of business so I used most of my time creating a market that did not exist yet. The global financial meltdown did not help much. Although my company failed, others continued the work. Nowadays social entrepreneurship is not only accepted, but nearly taken for granted among the younger generation of entrepreneurs.

My biggest achievement was, however, on a personal level. I reached an understanding that most of our social and environmental problems can be traced back to the contemporary debt and interest based money system. There are alternatives available, yet in mainstream thinking, no one dares to question the status quo. Any plans for designing moneyless societies are written off as utopian thinking. To me, however, incessant consumption growth and wasteful use of finite natural resources sounds less realistic. It is utopian thinking that this business-as-usual could go on forever.

I started to have conversations with my friends about how constant lack of money slows down technological progress and how a completely moneyless society would lead to more agile and rational behavior. One day my friends got sick of listening to the same old babbling and challenged me: “Why won't you do something about it?”

This led to an idea: What if I started living without money? A completely off-the-wall thought, right? After all, for the past 28 years I had been conditioned to think that money is everything that matters. Even so, returning to blissful ignorance was no longer an option.

Slowly but surely I started taking steps towards this wild vision. I became voluntarily homeless and started concentrating on things that truly excited me – writing, traveling and cooking, among others. After a year of deliberation I finally gathered my courage, packed my bags and headed to a hitchhikers' meeting in Portugal, with no money in my pocket.
This trip turned into a four-year-adventure. Regardless of occasional misfortunes and nights under the bridge I had reached one of my goals: I was free.
A moneyless traveler sits firmly on his own two feet.

*Photo: Lea Rezić*
**Next up: Food, Water and Hygiene**

How do you get food? Where do you bathe? How do you do laundry? Where do you get clothes? Where do you sleep at night? Aren't you afraid? Have you run into trouble? Don't you have an insurance policy? What if something happens? These are the most usual questions that I had to respond to 10,000 times.

Food, water, sanitation, clothes, shelter, security and safety are basic needs of any human being. The uncertainty of fulfilling these needs makes us uncomfortable, if not horrified. This is why people all over the world ask the very same questions. Regardless of our skin color, looks, size, body odor, gender, cultural background, belief system or thickness of our wallet, we are unified by certain needs common to everyone.

Diving into the blissful embrace of the universe, this utter and complete trust in the fact that the world will take care of you, is not something that develops overnight. For me it took a year – from idea to action – before I had the guts to face the music and see what destiny had in store for me. Even then, I doubted whether it would work.

It did.

By letting go of comfort, certainty and predictability, I received everything I could ever wish for. But how have I fulfilled these essential needs in practice? How could any everyday hero benefit from this wisdom?

Let's first see how one can get the essentials – food and water – without using money. How do you eat without a dime in your pocket? Is it okay to drink tap water everywhere? How about washing your laundry? Taking a shower? How might one get these drops of life for free?
THE ESSENTIALS

My friends and I organize a Buy Nothing Day in Berlin. The cozy club room is filled to the brim. Some 70 people are packed like sardines in a tin can, eating dumpster-dived food, listening to inspiring talks, watching *Taste the Waste*\(^3\) and talking about the subject matter.

One of the guest speakers promotes a new type of buying. He is an organic farmer running a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) system. This peer-to-peer network provides food for approximately 300 Berliners, all sourced from a single farm. He talks about the astounding reality of farming today. Even on a strictly organic farm it is enough to have only a few people working, to feed hundreds. The CSA ring is very popular, understandably. Vegetables from the organic farm are tastier and cheaper than those in the store.

The farmer proves to be extremely dedicated to his cause. He talks about his farm as a single interconnected ecosystem, in which he listens to the land and gives it what it needs. He cultivates a balanced mixture of plants, and enriches the land by allowing animals to graze and poop as needed. Admirable!

I have a tendency to come up with fresh ideas. Even now I start thinking how to help the farm and the CSA ring to become even better. “What if you had some online application to make it easier for people to choose what they want to order,” I suggest.

“You don't order from us,” he corrects. After an uncomfortable silence he goes on to explain: “The community members gladly receive whatever the land produces.”

My cheeks turn red as I realize how conditioned I was to think that people should be able to choose what they eat. Not in this model. The farmer delivers the vegetables once a week to distribution centers all over Berlin. These centers are maintained by the members who collect the boxes from there. They are grateful, regardless of what is in the box.

Even if we did not stop consuming entirely, perhaps this is a good time to rethink our consumption habits. Supporting local growers in their organic, seasonal

\(^3\) [http://tastethewaste.com/info/film](http://tastethewaste.com/info/film)
farming efforts is one small habitual change. It has an impact on local resilience, sustainability and social interaction.

**Tips to access water and food for free:**

**Quick Bite:**

The Elixir of Life

**Finger Food:**

Share the Abundance

**Full Feast:**

Save the Leftovers

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**Quick Bite: The Elixir of Life**

I am in the picturesque city of Lausanne, Switzerland – the mecca of capitalist bankers. I climb up the hill briskly. My throat feels dry and my travel bottle is empty.

Like so many times before, I immediately step into the closest bar – not in hopes of a free beer but the other, more important liquid. I approach the bartender, a young gentleman drying a glass with a white cloth.

“Excuse me, could I have a bit of water?” I ask and flash a smile.

“Bubbles or still?” he asks and is about to open the fridge.

“No, I mean tap water,” I specify and show my empty bottle.

“Nothing is free here,” the bartender responds bluntly.

“Oh. Why not? You have an abundance of the best quality water in the whole of Europe, right?” I suggest, still smiling politely yet a bit uneasily.

“No can do. You have to pay,” he snaps.

Momentary frustration. This is a dead-end. It seems I have nothing more to discuss with this gentleman.

This incident is a rare, in fact unique, occasion. I have asked for water thousands of times and he's the first one to block my access to this elixir of life.
I wish him all the best, get out and gallop a few hundred meters up the hill. I use a public faucet outside to fill my bottle. These are scattered all around the city, the older ones probably dating back hundreds of years.

It is true: the water is refreshingly awesome and there is plenty of it available. And no, it does not cost anything.

Let me just get this out of the way: Water is not a commodity. It is a necessity, for all life. We are accustomed to the fact that water comes from the faucet and disappears into the drain. Not so long ago, this was not the case. For most of human history water was part of nature. So were we.

Only industrialization and urbanization made us forget the natural flow of water. Today, we westerners take easy access to clean water for granted – while our industry pollutes natural water sources, as if there were no tomorrow. Whether real or imagined, a contaminated water supply is good business for the refreshments industry. Is it not outright wrong that in some parts of the world a bottle of Coke costs less than a bottle of water? I mean, really!

Bottled water is naturally off-limits for a moneyless traveler, unless given as a gift. I prefer to travel with one sturdy bottle that can be re-filled, either from the tap or from water dispensers in shops, offices and gas stations. I repeat: Water is a necessity. There is nothing shameful in asking for water from those who have it.

I go by the old “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” adage. This also applies to drinking water. No, I am not suggesting you build a network of aqueducts. It is simple: If the locals drink from the tap, it is safe for you too. If they advise against it, you can always filter or boil the water.

In many places there are faucets in public. A word of caution though: Even if the Hungarians flocked to get their canisters full of the natural, health-improving sulfur water, you might want to think twice before filling your bottle in Szeged. No matter how healthy this liquid might be, the fact of the matter is that to me it appears as warm, yucky stuff that smells like poop. Then again, if you are fine with that, go ahead! Egészségedre! No wonder this is Hungarian for “Cheers”.

In mountainous areas the water quality is usually superb. In Turkey, I once filled my travel bottle from a spring that was opened in the late 15th century. A rarity beyond
comparison! There are countries, like Finland, where you can drink straight out of the stream. Just don't do it in the city center. Some hip city folk have such fear of tap water that they prefer driving to a far away spring, in order to get their jugs full of natural freshness without nasty chemicals.

On our trip to Mexico and Central America we carried a bunch of Life Straw water filters with us. How did we get them without money? We simply asked the manufacturer, Vestergaard, if we could show the product around on our travels. No matter how limited our reach, they were happy to use us as walking billboards. And we were more than happy to engage in this form of guerrilla marketing because the product is just fantastic. Mind you, I am not getting any money for saying this. You just stick the Life Straw in any puddle, take a sip and you can be 99.99 percent sure not to get ill. No chemicals or complicated procedures needed.

Of course, the simplest solutions are always the best. That goes for water purification as well. Some slum-dwellers just throw transparent PET water bottles on the roof in the morning, let the sun work its magic during the day and get drinkable water in the evening. This simple method has a fancy name: solar water disinfection⁴. The taste might not be the best but the central star in our solar system has killed most contaminants.

At the risk of stating the obvious: Water is not only essential for quenching thirst but also to keep clean. So much so that it is referred to as the universal solvent. More particles dissolve in water than in any other liquid. And when your hands are really dirty or dishes overly greasy, sand and ash come in handy. Strong, pungent aromas – such as that of raw fish – can be wiped away with used coffee grounds.

So, do we actually need the multitude of hygiene products stocked on supermarket shelves? In his book, The Moneyless Manifesto, Mark Boyle takes a very critical stance:

"We seem to associate having no money with body odor, bad breath, dirty clothes, filthy bums and general stickiness. The extent to which we believe this to be true directly correlates to the extent our minds have been completely controlled and manipulated by the likes of Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble and Unilever, all of whom push their endless new products on us in what can only be thought of as a purely altruistic attempt

to make our lives that little bit cleaner. Apparently, until they came along with their crystal clean brands – which by the look of their adverts I assume are made up of nothing less than roses, gold dust, diamonds, the pubic hairs of virgin angels, love, freshly squeezed lemons and sodium lauryl sulphate – we all stunk to the high heavens."

Toothpaste made out of fish bones, anyone? Mark's book is a perfect read to those who wish to create their own natural, free alternatives. Because of habit and social conditioning, I use soap and shampoo when they are available but never carry them in my backpack. In warm climates, and close to natural water sources - like lakes, rivers and oceans – I rather do without them.

Shampoo is harmful to the scalp and blocks the formation of natural oils that protect your hair. If you stop using shampoo you will have to go through a period of two to six weeks during which the hair feels greasy. This is due to the fact that your scalp is working overtime after shampoo addiction. After the adjustment period things will normalize. This doesn't mean you should not wash your hair, you should! Yet the only washing liquid you truly need is water.

I am in Panama. Four days of sweaty hitchhiking are finally over. I stink and try to figure out where to bathe. After some rigorous pleading and convincing, I am given a permission to shower in one of the soiled cells of a local police station. It is nothing more than a pipe sticking out of the wall, not a shower per se. Yet in that moment it feels like luxury.

A bit later I stumble upon an American activist, Rob⁶, who has not taken a shower in a year. Surprisingly he doesn't smell much. We have one thing in common: neither uses deodorant, after-shave or other non-essential toiletries. Yet I have not even imagined the possibility of refusing a chance at taking a shower.

Now this activist brother explains to me how he always seeks out for natural water sources to take a wash. In the city, a bucket bath must suffice. On those occasions, he only uses one bucket of water per wash. Food for thought.

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Deodorant is another product of western culture. The moment I got fuzz under my armpits I have been told to use deodorant. Hence, for years, I obeyed and took it for granted that everyone uses the sticky stuff. When I let go of the habit I did notice the stink for a couple of weeks. After that my body odors somehow changed or I just got used to the smell. I hope others did too. At least I did not receive any nasty remarks. Maybe it is expected for a hitchhiker to stink a bit. Still, I reckon a wash and a change of clothes every second day is enough. This is not just a whim of a young activist. When I told my mom that I had not used deodorant for a year she replied: “So what? I have not used it for 25 years.”

Our attitudes for hygiene products are culturally dependent. Would you be ready to stop using toilet paper, for instance? A Sri Lankan friend of mine once asked: “If you are willing to wash your whole body, then why not wash the dirtiest part?” Sure, that makes sense. Yet, there is no denying it: I am a slave to my cultural conditioning. If there is toilet paper available, I gladly use it, without stopping to consider the forests that had to be felled to cater to my addiction.

Sometimes I wash laundry by hand, with whatever soapy thing available. Occasionally I let the ocean do the washing and use a beach shower meant for tourists for rinsing. Often, however, a moneyless traveler is offered easy access to a washing machine, at an old friend’s place or while surfing a new friend’s couch. Whether this form of collaborative consumption falls in the category of living without money, as opposed to just using someone else’s money, is up for debate. This debate is something I steer clear from. I value practicality over stringently sticking to my unusual principles.

If you try a similar lifestyle, it is up to you where to draw the line. As long as you decide to stay among other people, there will be times you question your dedication to this odd way of life. Should you stink just to stay true to your self-made rules? Or, even, should you move somewhere, away from civilization, where you can be completely alone and money-free? For me, becoming a no-money-hermit was never an option. I enjoy the company of my brothers and sisters too much.

Yet the reason why this chapter is nothing but a “Quick Bite” is important: You may drink water, wash yourself and do your laundry whenever and wherever you get a chance. There is no magic to it. The same applies to letting go of hygiene products you do not need. Easy-peasy!
Finger Food: Share the Abundance

It is Sunday in Friedrichshain, Berlin, Germany. An ocean of people floats around in the 52 square meter flat. Some thirty hungry mouths are watering as the guests look forward to the free food we have promised them.

A grocery store is only 200 meters away and its bins are overflowing with single-packed, clean vegetables, fruits, micro meals, meat, bread and dairy products – every single day. Even our daily guests, some 10 to 15 travelers, are not enough to eat everything we find, for free. That is why we have invited a bunch of random people from the Couchsurfing community to share the love.

Even though most people are strangers to each other, there is a vivid and joyous chatter all around. The kitchen is veiled in captivating aromas. Five young people are preparing tonight's feast. Some of them we know. Some just dropped in. There are no job descriptions here. Those who can, cook. Those who wish to help, clean up.

There is something available for everyone; delicious treats for vegetarians and also for those in favor of more traditional German cuisine. Piles of bread, pastries, cold cuts, and a variety of cheese are brought into the living room. Two refrigerators are heaving with food and more is stacked up in boxes on the floor. Even smokers on the balcony need to take great care not to step on the frozen goods. An over-heating blender gets no rest from its smoothie-making duty.

Bulging plates of food are finally served to hungry people. They dig in. We, the residents, observe this gluttony, amused and happy. Our purpose for tonight is clear: Let's get rid of all this food before it goes bad, so that we can dumpster-dive some more.

There was a time, not so long ago, when all the food that was consumed by a household was either home-grown, received as a gift or collected from surrounding nature. The modern man, however, seems to think that there is no other way but to buy food. There
is a disconnect between what we put in our mouths and the origins of the food. Less connection, less respect.

My tribe, the Finns, are no exception to the rule. Yet we still keep up some of the good old habits and hold on to a certain degree of respect for nature. Our never-ending forests are full of tasty and nutritious berries and mushrooms. Picking these is part of the so-called Everyman's Rights – a traditional set of rights, practically above the law, that preserves everyone's access to nature. To live in it and to live from it, without asking for the land owner’s permission.

There are some 200 edible mushrooms in Finnish forests – so many that most of them just rot in the ground. My then-girlfriend from Poland was excited to go and pick mushrooms in Finland because they have that same tradition. Afterward she commented: “There is one major difference, though. Here in Finland you don't have to move to fill the mushroom baskets. You just come, pick and leave.”

The cultural differences do not stop there. What is a delicacy in Italy might be ignored by the Finns. Likewise, a mushroom that others consider poisonous and avoid at all cost is the finest delicacy in Bulgaria and Finland (after parboiling and rinsing it three times before preparation).

Berries and mushrooms are, of course, not the only forms of nutrition freely available in nature. Wild vegetables are plants that can be eaten. They are at their prime, i.e. they contain most taste and nutrition, when they are still young. Consequently, it is also good to dry some and save for later use if possible.

Wild vegetables vary from one region to another so you need local understanding before you go gathering your food from the wild. There are literally thousands of them – nettle, burdock, ground elder, cattail, clover, dandelion, fireweed, green seaweed, kelp, various nuts and even prickly pear cactus, just to name a few. The internet, books and specific courses are great sources for this ancient knowledge that most of us have lost.

You might also want to use the internet to look for accessible public and private gardens where anyone can go and collect the yield. In Finland people have organized their own map to share this information. In Portugal there is a certain date after which oranges left in the trees are up for grabs for anyone.

8 [www.satokartta.net](http://www.satokartta.net)
In Mexico we learn to forage most of our food. During the mango season we collect insane amounts of this divine fruit, straight from the ground where it is left to rot. We are able to recognize eight out of sixteen varieties of Mexican mango, each with a different enticing flavor.

We even learn how to fish like locals. A specialized store gives us free fishing line, hooks and weights that we combine with an empty plastic bottle which functions as the DIY reel.

We scrape up the bait with our knives – some sort of sea snails attached to the rocks in the shore. Some of these we don’t even share with the fish but gulp them down with a twist of lime. That seafood is fresh, for sure!

After the snack we start fishing. All sorts of colorful creatures take the bait hungrily. No idea if they are even edible. There is no one around to ask for advice so we have only one way to find out: taste it.

We make a fire in the shore and roast our catch, sitting under the palm trees, watching the setting sun, and smelling the ocean breeze. Paradise!

Each region has its own rules and regulations. The easiest way to know what these are is to ask the locals. If you see people in their garden full of fruits or vegetables, it is okay to ask if you could collect some. Usually people are just happy to get rid of something they have too much of.

During the past years the western media has started paying some attention to food waste. Non-profits and public organizations are slowly waking up to the sharing economy in this sense as well. But it is mostly the people themselves who get things done. Some neighborhoods and blocks of flats organize food sharing points where one can leave extra food and where anyone can collect what they need. Some districts have a dedicated Facebook group for peer-to-peer food sharing. If nothing like this exists where you live, feel free to start one, for free!

Me and my friend are behind the super-market, peeking into the bins, ready for the treasures, our backpacks still empty. A fellow dumpster-diver suddenly shows up. He suggests we forget about the bins and come to his place instead, right next door. Perplexed, we follow.
He has organized a food sharing point in the corridor of this apartment building. It is a simple brown cardboard box that he fills daily with fresh produce. “Come here, any time, if you cannot find anything from the bins,” he instructs and shares with us the door code.

Next he invites us upstairs to his apartment. The tabletops are covered in fruits, veggies, bread and candy. He empties the contents of their freezer straight into my backpack: pork loins, blue cheese, bratwurst, cold cuts, bacon… “It's enough,” I say and make him stop. I can hardly close my backpack. It is so full.

This new acquaintance lives with his mom and the two of them have no way of consuming everything he saves from the bins. He wants to share.

For those accustomed to artificial scarcity, the culture of sharing is unheard of. This means that although nature provides everything in abundance, an artificial price tag denies access to these resources from those who do not have enough money.

In Germany food sharing is very popular already. There are some organized, guarded and cleaned up, food sharing points in public places. Foodsharing.de website has been created to be an efficient peer-to-peer food distribution channel as well as a means for the shop keepers to share the excess. Tens of thousands of kilos of perfectly edible food go to those who need it. No more hand-to-mouth living. Rather, my-hand-to-your-mouth sharing.

Various non-profit organizations and churches organize weekly “food lines” - distribution points of excess food collected from bakeries and grocery stores. These still carry a stigma of embarrassment. Some think that you have to be destitute to accept free food. Reality is different. There are people from students to pensioners and from single parents to the unemployed lining up for the food. Usually, you don't need to give any proof of your poor financial status to utilize these services.

Personally I never stood in a food line because I had other means to fill my stomach. On the contrary, I have often received so much leftover food that I have been on the giving end of the line. It takes a bit of time and is surprisingly energy-consuming to organize a pop-up food delivery point. People are suspicious of free food. The best way

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9 The platform has enabled 13,000 food-savers to rescue more than 3,000,000 kg of food. The successful project has now evolved into a world-wide network: https://project.yunity.org/
to turn cautious curiosity into acceptance is to eat the food yourself – to show there is nothing wrong with it.

If you wish to do this in a bit of a more organized manner and with more people you can participate in Food Not Bombs\textsuperscript{10}. This worldwide movement redistributes free food for the needy. I have been part of Food Not Bombs initiatives in Poland and Mexico. In Guatemala we could not find a group like this, so we took initiative and organized the event on our own.

These grassroots initiatives originated in the 1970’s to show that feeding people for free is a better way to create peace than using enormous amounts of money to sustain the arms race. I had no political agenda when participating. For me these events were a nice pastime in the name of saving food and surprising people positively.

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\draw[fill=white] (0,0) circle (0.5cm);
\draw[fill=white] (0.5,0) circle (0.5cm);
\draw[fill=white] (1,0) circle (0.5cm);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textbf{Full Feast: Save the Leftovers}

We waste insane amounts of food in this world. The supermarket dumpster is perhaps the biggest treasure chest for someone wishing to eat without money. You can forget preconceived notions of dumpsters full of rats. Usually this “junk food” in the western world is clean and wrapped in plastic.

If there is a bag of ten oranges in the store where one of the fruits has gone bad, they throw away the whole bag. Dumpster-diving is a nice way to reduce food waste and feed not just yourself but an even larger bunch of people.

My friend parks his car in the backyard of a supermarket. We sit in the car and observe the storekeeper hard at work: throwing out tons of edible goods, sweating like an athlete.

As soon as he has finished his job we sprint to the bins with three plastic bags. The gate is ajar. Easy access. In just three minutes our bags are full of vegetables, fruits, pastries, bread, juice - even rarities like coffee and pasta. We only take what we need and leave unfathomable amounts of edible food in the bin.

\begin{footnotesize}
10 www.foodnotbombs.net
\end{footnotesize}
Nowadays many of the bins are behind locked doors. A dumpster-diver needs to know the best spots or check the trash during the opening hours while the gates are still open. If you happen to meet some of the staff in the backyard you can let them know what you are doing: you are saving food.

Some employees will agree with you how insane it is to throw away perfectly good food. They might not welcome you with a red carpet but may at least turn a blind eye to your scavenging. Some will ask you to leave. In those instances it is polite to do just that. You do not want to cause them any trouble.

I have not heard of a single occasion where an employee has called the cops. The store keepers don't want this kind of publicity. It is better that most people do not know about the idiotic policies and the amount of food they waste.

There are city-specific Facebook groups where you can learn the good spots and even get some company. Dumpster-divers have their own Trashwiki site. It contains both location-specific tips and general information. Some dumpster-divers prefer to share info only among their closest friends. This is usually due to prior experiences of bins getting locked up after gaining too much publicity.

Another great source of leftover fruits and veggies are the public markets. Approach the merchants one hour before their closing time and you could be in for a treat. On occasion these people are themselves bakers, farmers or fishermen – or their relatives. They have a healthy respect for food and would rather see it go to good use.

As long as you have access to a kitchen, and know how to behave, I encourage you to try dumpster-diving. Instead of going inside the store, see what is behind it. It is more ecological, faster and fun than comparing prices between the aisles. Plus, there is the excitement of what you will find.

It is not unheard of to retrieve overly expensive luxury items from the bins, because no one could afford paying the exuberant price. Although you will mostly bring home bread, vegetables and dairy products, on occasion these will be accompanied by five kilos of top quality French cheese and a hundred bars of chocolate. In any case, immeasurable abundance is part of a dumpster-diver's daily life.

We have been conditioned to be consumers. Along with this artificial label we have started taking the ability to choose for granted. We think it is normal – even our right – to

11 www.trashwiki.org
choose whatever we happen to desire from a selection and variety of thousands of goods.

A dumpster-dived menu is not planned a week in advance. The delicious dishes are spontaneously prepared based on the ingredients you happen to find at any given time. This kind of cooking is nearly a form of art. Even though today's finders keepers are unnatural, machine-produced ingredients wrapped in plastic, the philosophy of using what you happen to find is close to the ancient hunter-gatherer cultures.

If you are eager to go and dumpster-dive now, remember to keep the place clean. Do not cause any disturbance! I do not recommend climbing huge fences, breaking and entering or filling the locks with glue – even if it would make it easier to access the place again next time. Remember that you represent all dumpster-divers when you engage in this form of modern-day food foraging.

Of course dumpster-diving is not a sustainable or self-sufficient mode of food supply. It is only the current inefficient food distribution that enables this hobby. We produce food for the needs of ten billion people. Half is wasted.¹²

Moreover, dumpster-diving is not ideal for every situation. When you are on the move you might have no facilities to wash, cook and keep the food for later. If you just want to eat and go, then table diving is a better option. It basically means eating what others leave behind. Best places to do this are service stations, food courts and other restaurants with a lot of people coming and going. Some people have a weird habit of leaving food on their plate, often untouched. Hurry to grab it before it is collected and thrown away!

Especially if you are a modern nomad, constantly on the move, the easiest way to get food is to ask for it, from restaurants for example. I usually ask for leftovers but often receive a fresh portion. They have either thrown away the leftovers or think there is no dignity in offering “used food” for human consumption.

There is a certain irony to this: as soon as I let go of money, I started eating out, way more than before. Most of the time I eat better than medieval kings, as well as those who sustain themselves with the cheapest possible groceries. I am appalled by that bland, unhealthy stuff the shops call food. It is mostly devoid of any real nutritional value.

¹² See e.g. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-holt-gimenez/world-hunger_b_1463429.html
You should not think that there are certain high-end places, out of bounds for a moneyless traveler. The more expensive the place, the more they usually waste. And it is just humans working there. I have received food from luxury hotels as well as from stalls on the street, hamburger places and pizzerias. I eat what is on offer, both among the common people and in gourmet joints with white table cloths.

I hold my head up high and walk to greet the staff with a wide smile. I introduce myself and shake their hands, grateful for their time. I let them know I travel without money and ask for leftovers - or any food they could spare for free.

In most cases they are momentarily at a loss and then go check with the kitchen. Sometimes I am told that the manager is not present and that they are unable to make such a decision. Should that happen, I thank them and walk away. This kind of response usually means that they are afraid of losing their job if they give away food. It is understandable. As said, they are just people trying to make the ends meet.

If the manager is there I get to repeat my story. Often the manager asks me to sit down at a table or brings a box of take-away. The latter carries a hidden meaning: please step outside to enjoy your meal.

If you are unable to communicate fluently in the local language, you can ask an English-speaking local to briefly summarize on a piece of paper what it is that you are asking for and why. For me this approach worked so well that my travel buddies started calling it “the magic paper”.

For most people, asking for help is tough. At some point in life it has been planted in your brain that you need to make it on your own, that you should not be dependent on other people. However, if we see ourselves as part of nature, this is nothing but fantasy. In nature everything is interdependent. Especially if you are prone to helping those in need, there is nothing stopping you from also asking for help.

Of course it is difficult in the beginning. No learned behavior changes on its own. It needs to be unlearned and then replaced with a new behavior. I can still remember the first time I asked for free food:

It is the beginning of my journey from North Eastern Finland to Portugal. I get dropped off at a service station. I am hungry. There is a hamburger joint. I put two and two together and, after some hesitation, I gather my courage and march in. I
ask if they would have any food for a moneyless traveler. No, they do not. I backtrack out of the door and think: Oh my, this is not going to work.

If I had stopped right then and there, after the first unsuccessful attempt, I would not have experienced everything that was in store for me. Nor would you be reading this book right now.

I continued my inquiries during the following months. Often the answer was still negative but occasionally they replied “Sure, sit down. I will bring you something.” Little by little I gained more courage. I understood that my contract with the rest of the universe was very different from everyone else's – that I cannot and should not influence the answer. All I can do is ask. Those who are faced with my question are always caught off guard. They need to react to a fairly new situation. My question gives them an opportunity to help but they are by no means obliged to do so. I should be grateful to them, regardless of the end result.

Having said that, no matter what higher philosophy you apply to your dealings with others, it is very hard to remain positive if you are starving.

We have just spent a somewhat grueling night in the suburbs of Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico. Our provisional shelter was on some construction yard where we laid down in the smell of human excrement and were kept awake by the howling of stray dogs, a thunderstorm and passing traffic.

I wake up agitated. My blood sugar level is low. The gurgling sound of my bowels demands that I go get some breakfast.

We prowl the streets and ask for food, visiting one restaurant after another. No one is willing to share. Naturally, this is due to the fact that I am radiating negative energy. Do I realize that? No. I just blame others, feeling more and more cross. I fail to understand they have no obligation to help me. The more often we get “no” for an answer the more both the hunger and frustration grows. It is a catch 22: either I snap out of my silly bubble of negativity or continue starving and feeling miserable.

Only after a complete psychological breakdown and drawing deep breaths on the sidewalk, we get our stomachs filled in a local pizza place.
Ask without worry and with a smile on your face. Be humble but never think it is humiliating to ask for help. People read into your energy and attitude. You are not a beggar. If you trust the world to take good care of you, it will provide you with everything you might desire – often even without asking.
About to taste the waste.

Photo: Jemi Katko
**Next up: Material Goods**

Belly full and thirst gone, but still feeling cold? How might one, for instance, get free clothes to remain warm? How about other material goods? Where to find them without spending a penny? How much do you actually need to be content?

You might have heard of terms like downshifting, sharing economy, local exchange and collaborative consumption. Blogs, articles, magazines and whole books are dedicated to these topics. Über cool! A shift in values is on its way, right?

The systemic requirement for constant growth, fueled with mindless consumerism, has produced so much stuff that we, in the west, do not know where to put it all. This particular moneyless traveler, who only keeps what he can carry, was horrified to learn that there is an entire industry called “rental warehouses” – you pay for extra space just to lock away the crap you do not need. Witty.

We assign value to things we buy. We somehow identify with the goods. Like George Carlin so succinctly put it: You call your things *stuff* but as soon as the stuff belongs to someone else, you call it *their shit*.

So, are we moving toward saner and more moderate consumption habits, like sharing, or will we continue the old ways, eventually drowning in... stuff? Perhaps access, the ability to use certain goods, is more important than owning them, don't you think? Uh, heck, let's worry about that shit later and go shopping for free!
MIND OVER MATTER

I am at the Helsinki airport, nicely tanned and, once again, ready to face the gruesome Finnish winter. I praise Chuck Norris and other demigods for the fact that the temperature is not too far down the negative side. Witnessing the gray slosh, palm trees are nothing but a distant memory now.

I am wearing torn shoes that I found on the street, jeans that I got as a gift and, underneath, boxers that have been passed down the family tree. In my backpack there are some cherished treasures for this weather: a woolen hat found from a dumpster and knitted gift mittens. In fact, all the other clothes I have are also gifts from people whose bulging wardrobes were just happy to shed a few kilos.

Flip-flops, shorts and some t-shirts I left in a neat stack on a boulevard frequented by homeless people in Panama City who, I am sure, will put them to better use.

I don't feel like I own anything. I am just presently, temporarily, using these goods. They do not belong to me. Should someone need something I happen to have, I will be glad to give it to them. There is only so much one can carry in a backpack.

My friend sees me at the airport and brings me all sorts of things: a warm woolen jacket – that I later gift forward – and winter boots – that I later switch to lighter footwear.

During the first few days in Finland I am offered five jackets, all of them nearly brand new. Many are taken aback when I have to refuse their gifts. When your backpack is your home, you don't want to stock too much.

These gifts remind me of the fact that, even if we stopped manufacturing new clothes for a decade, we'd be well off with what we have already. That, however, would require us to organize the distribution, collaborative use, repairing and re-use. In essence, we would need a free peer-to-peer sharing system. What is stopping us from using clothes and other goods like we use books in libraries?13

I recall how, at the age of four, I dumpster-dived toys and games in the backyard of my parents' sewing machine store.

I remember all those perfectly fine clothes that I have encountered walking the streets of cities around the world.

I think back to the little kids in Nicaragua who came to sell clothes to a farm where we volunteered. They had received the clothes as donations from prized non-profit

13 http://www.young-germany.de/topic/play/art-fashion/the-kleiderei-hamburgs-lending-library-for-clothes
organizations in more affluent societies that, in turn, had received the apparel for free from idealists willing to help. I wonder how many of our fellow volunteers bought their old shirt back.

Yet mostly I reminisce about all those wonderful people who have shared what they have and fulfilled all my needs when it comes to material goods.

Alright Finland, bring it on! I am equipped for your beautiful winter.

**Tips for gaining access to material goods:**

**Nice Trinkets:**
Collaborative Consumption

**Durable Goods:**
Let Go of Useless Stuff

**Precious Treasures:**
The Law of Attraction

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**Nice Trinkets: Collaborative Consumption**

Have you encountered people to whom owning things is hugely important? How about people who hoard things for the rainy day? Are you like that? Perhaps your parents are? Or do you like to lend your things to others? What if you need a certain item; do you waltz into a store or ask around among your friends? If you would live in a shared flat, would you rather share all the food or have named compartments in the fridge?

The aptitude to share is dictated largely by one's mental paradigm. We live in a society of abundance. Those who see this natural abundance are more willing to share, whilst those who are stuck with the scarcity paradigm aim to maximize their own benefit at every turn. The latter fail to understand that sharing the abundance might actually lead to everyone's improved wellbeing – a selfish notion as such. It is not about owning things. Having access to goods and services that you need is what counts in the end.

To some extent, all of us have been conditioned to the scarcity paradigm. Even so, we are empathic to others and often feel like sharing what we have. We are social animals. As part of nature, where there is everything in abundance, it is natural for us to
be nice to each other. Still, people who live in the abundance paradigm – like the dumpster-diver who invited us home and emptied his freezer to my backpack – are bafflingly helpful and willing to share.

There are no technical limitations to ensure access to abundance to all the world’s people. It is just a matter of will. We don't really need to own things to lead fulfilling lives. On the contrary, getting rid of clutter also frees mental space. And when you really need something, rest assured, there are plenty of things to share.

We are in Barcelona, getting ready for our trip to Mexico. We have just shed our winter skins and there are hardly any summer clothes in our backpacks. I am in dire need of proper shoes. Therefore, we pay a visit to a local social center, managed by circus artists. As part of this gigantic squatted space there is a free shop. You can take whatever you need from there and leave things you do not have use for anymore.

I find nothing that catches my fancy. But my girlfriend grabs some light hippie clothes with her. As we leave, I find the shoes I was looking for on the street by chance, next to an overflowing clothes collection point. Awesome!

Later we learn that where we are staying, in a community flat of local free-thinking young people, they share everything. “Nothing here is mine or yours,” our host Albert Casals tells us. “If you need something, just take it and use it.” Of course. That was easy.

I only carry clothes I think I might need. On my way south I leave the warm clothes for those who have a better use for them. When winter approaches, I collect additional layers as the need arises.

This kind of behavior is not a sole right of alternative folks and it is not limited only to clothes. If you only wish to improve your quality of life, whilst saving money and nature, there is no need to go to extremes. There is a plethora of websites where you can sell or give useless stuff and where you can buy, borrow or get those from other people for free. In Helsinki, for instance, there is a Facebook group for this purpose. Again, if this does not exist in your city, take initiative and start one!

Whether it is books, electronics, clothes, films, sports gear or tools you are looking for, it might not be necessary to purchase and own them anymore. Consider organizing a swap shop, for example. Invite people over and ask them to bring things they want to get rid of. A fair warning, however: this might not decrease the amount of stuff you have.
We host a Swap Shop event in Berlin. Travelers have left a bunch of things behind that take up too much space in the small flat. In the evening, a stream of people flows into the nomad base. Some come empty-handed but most bring piles and piles of useful things. These are spread over the floor. In high spirits people try out the most imaginative costume combinations. They laugh and discuss cheerfully.

Although many find what they need or want, we are left with three times as much stuff as we had in the beginning. Damn it! When you give people a chance to dump their unused stuff somewhere, they take it. There is no shortage of stuff, at least in the excess material abundance of Western Europe.

Swap Shop events are not only about exchanging goods. These are a wonderful excuse to get to know your neighbors and make new friends as well. The fact that like-minded people bump into each other in these events is a welcome side-effect.

**Durable Goods: Let Go of Useless Stuff**

It is a sunny day in Ukraine. My girlfriend and I are hitching towards Odessa. Excruciating sunshine and dust clouds from the road make hitchhiking a bit challenging. After a while I get fed up with waiting and give up. As soon as I reach shade under a tree, I notice that a brand new Land Rover stops right in front of my travel companion.

I cannot believe my eyes. “Did *that* stop for us?” I think out loud. Even seeing a car like that is a miracle in traffic full of ancient Ladas and other inexpensive vehicles.

We get in cautiously, trying not to soil the shining back seat. The rich pot-bellied driver is wearing a white shirt and shorts. Next to him is his Russian supermodel wife. He drives like crazy, mainly on the left lane, making way only for trucks coming towards us. He even takes over police cars, cruising like a madman. Apparently he has settled his speeding tickets in advance.

“What do you do for living?” I ask, not for small talk but because I am genuinely interested to find out what is the source of their affluence.
“Nothing. The only thing we do is shopping,” the wife giggles and corrects her blonde hair. I am astounded by the response.

As we get closer to Odessa, they ask in which hotel are we staying. We let them know we travel without money and we are more than happy to spend a night on the beach. For them, this is unacceptable. They suggest we join them in their apartment hotel. We accept the gift gladly.

This, however, is just the beginning of an endless stream of gifts.

Once we reach the apartment, I visit the bathroom. When I return, the couple has left. There is only my stunned girlfriend, standing clueless in the living room, holding a bunch of large bank notes in her hand. She explains that, right before they left, the man had slipped the money into her short jeans, as if she was a stripper or something. Pretty arrogant, huh? After some deliberation we write it off as cultural differences.

“Hey, these people have not worked a day in their life to get that money. Let's go and spend it right away so we don't have to think about it anymore,” I suggest.

She agrees and gets a smile on her face once again.

We eat the most expensive pizza in the city and gulp down two pints of ludicrously priced beer. The rest of the money we spend on beer and cigarettes that we donate to a group of musicians who busk on the street. Money well spent. Laughing to our hearts' content we return to the hotel, happily broke.

The couple sits there, looking dull and disappointed. “We were waiting for you. Let's go eat,” they command in broken English.

We try to refuse and explain that we are not hungry anymore, that we already used their money for food. They are not willing to take “no” for an answer. We deduct it is probably polite to just follow them.

Outside the hotel the man rents an antique Mercedes convertible. He tells the driver to take the four of us sightseeing. Every so often we stop to take photos with their camera. The supermodel wife poses with my girlfriend and lifts up her skirt to reveal her long legs. The man appears to be bored.

He throws a bunch of money at the driver and directs us to a magnificently decorated horse carriage. Four white horses pull us through the beautifully lit streets of Odessa, towards the restaurant. The ambiance is unfathomably romantic but the man still does not smile.
Suddenly the horse hair gives me an allergic reaction. I have to trod around for a while, gasping for air and wiping my wet eyes before I join the others at the restaurant.

The show has continued, and it is the pot-bellied millionaire running it again. He orders expensive wines, looks discontent, bosses the waiters around and shoves money into their pockets. He orders the most expensive steak available. He does not like it. He demands the waiter to sprinkle salt and pepper on his steak - not just anywhere but on specific spots he points at. They obey politely. Still, he does not seem to enjoy the food. Half-eaten steaks and barely touched bottles of wine are left at the table that he decorates with bank notes before we leave.

We have grown accustomed to people's hospitality and willingness to give but this is just too much, over the top.

On our way back to the hotel we stop to take a few more pictures. She continues to show off her body, more and more boldly by the minute.

At the hotel I step into the bathroom. Again, as I return, my girlfriend just stands there, looking baffled. This time she is holding their camera. Not a word. She just pushes the camera to me and escapes to our room, shocked. Why was she so taken aback? It takes me a while to put two and two together.

“Foto! Foto!” the man insists and poses on the couch with his wife. She moves her body adorably and takes off her dress. I take a picture, thinking it is nothing but an innocent joke.

“Foto!” he repeats as she continues the striptease show. Hesitantly, I take another photo.

The man orders me to take one picture after another and she is soon bare-butt naked. After each photo I feel increasingly uncomfortable.

Finally she opens his fly and starts sucking him off. “Foto! Foto!” he pleads. That's it. That's enough! I throw the camera on the couch and hastily follow my girlfriend into the other room. I lock the door behind me.

A moment of WTF. Like scared rabbits we stare at the door, paralyzed, hoping and praying they don't have any more splendid ideas in store for us.

Luckily, they give up their plans on whatever group action it was they had in mind. In the morning they leave, hastily, silent and ashamed. I finally understand what the gifts were all about. They thought they could buy us, to fulfill who knows what fantasies. No way. We are not for sale.
Over the years I have got to know a few filthy rich individuals. It is quite common for them to be utterly bored. No matter where and how much they spend, the money does not seem to bring them any more happiness. On the other hand, they are afraid of losing what they have. They protect their belongings fanatically.

The most hospitable, generous and joyous people are found in the countries we label poor. There people are used to relying on each other, seeking security from the community. Although, as the western values spread over the globe, even these traditional communities are changing their ways. And not always for better.

It is typical for my parents' generation, the Baby Boomers, to hoard stuff for a rainy day. Taking into account that they still remember their destitute childhood and were later brainwashed by the mass media to be obedient workers and consumers, it is understandable that they seek security from their belongings.

More and more space is required to lock away the hoarded piles of stuff. This further increases the fixed costs of taking care of what they have. In other words, they continuously have to work more to make more money. This money can then be used to maintain, renew and discard the mountains of stuff. And, oopsy-daisy, the relentlessly running rats have made the race go faster.

To counter the ever-increasing speed of this race a so-called Slow Movement was born. It has, slowly, become more and more popular. The surrounding society, however, touts a different message: It is a dog-eat-dog world where only the fast and furious make it to the top. Fret not! Reality tells a different story. You can only appreciate the beauty and bliss of slower and simpler life if you try it.

In an ideal situation one can decide on his own what he does, when he does it and how much effort that requires. At least I need some relaxation and do-nothing-time to make sure that when the inspiration strikes I am ready to work in a creative frenzy.

It does not sound so far-fetched, now, does it? Here are some questions to ponder. Pick those that suit your life situation the best:

- Would you like to take it easy every now and then?
- Could you imagine switching your car to cycling and public transportation?
- Would moving to a smaller apartment do the trick for you?
- Could you let go of some of your stuff? Recycle it? Give it away?
- Would you like to cut down on old unnecessary habits?
● How might you learn to enjoy the small things in life?
● Could you decrease the amount of time you spend working?
● Could you change jobs or become an entrepreneur?
● Perhaps a year off as a digital nomad?\(^{14}\)
● Do you need to put more emphasis on your own wellness and development?
● Is there an artist in you? How to have time for creating something new?
● What would you do right now if you did not have other commitments?

No matter what the social norms tell you to do, or what other people expect from you, the truth is that you can do whatever the heck you want, as much as you want and as slowly as you wish.

Personally, I downshifted my life for years before jumping into the moneyless life. I gave away my car. I moved many times and always consciously reduced my belongings. I started to look inwards, to find out what really matters to me. This downshifting made it easier to make a decision that to most sounds fairly radical. I had nothing more left than a box of dishes, 300 CDs and a couple sacks of clothes. Letting go of those did not feel that hard anymore. Take baby steps. Plan for small victories. Succeed!

*Precious Treasures: The Law of Attraction*

I am in Portugal. Although I have only traveled for a few weeks, I have already learned a lot and encountered a bunch of striking revelations. Unaware of the fact that there is one lurking right behind the corner, I am about to drastically reshape my understanding of how the world works.

An odd thought appears: “Oh, it would be so nice to have a mojito – that blissful rum drink of minty freshness.” I quickly shrug it off as wishful thinking. What a silly idea for someone living without money!

After a couple of days my friend invites me to his aunt’s café. Before I even get to say hello, she asks: “Would you boys care for mojitos?” I cannot believe this is

happening. Out of all the possible drinks she suggests just that! Yes, please. Thank you auntie. Thank you universe.

I tend to get everything I need. Whatever I happen to wish for somehow appears, even silly non-essentials like the mojito. And I do not need the stuff that I don't get.

This Law of Attraction dates back to ancient religions but was named only in 1906 by William Walker Atkinson. The religious folks call this “wishing” a prayer: God provides what you pray for. A hundred years later the law of attraction was secularized, productized, americanized and capitalized in the form of The Secret – a book and a film carrying the same title. Another great way to become filthy rich, they claim. New Age people talk about visualization and manifestation. The same thing, different wrapper.

Mere baloney and fringe science, you say? Since the mojito incident I started paying attention to this phenomenon in my own life. Somehow it just seems to work. Perhaps it has something to do with collective unconsciousness – a concept suggested by Carl Jung.

All I know is that we are electric antennae, in constant interaction with the rest of the world, sending and receiving information to each other, mostly unconsciously. Or that's at least how I feel it works. Maybe one day science will be able to explain how our minds truly work together.

I have noticed that the law of attraction works surprisingly well when you make a wish, then let go of it and accept with gratitude any outcome – whether you get what you wished for or not should not matter. Letting go usually brings you what you need. But if you are obsessed with the idea that you need to get something you will not.

For me this is everyday life. At some point it started being so commonplace that it stopped feeling magical, unreal. At times, however, these situations are just unbelievably precise.

I am in a grocery store, keeping company to my friend who is on a frantic hunt for caramel sauce, to positively surprise her ice-cream hungry offspring. Rushing from one corner of the shop to another yields no results. My friend is about to give up. I don't see it on the shelves either but, in my mind's eye, I picture that small carton package. I really see it.
“Perhaps it is in the same place with the ice cream,” I suggest. We check the frozen goods section once more. There is anything and everything a gluttonous westerner might fancy, but no caramel sauce. Then I notice a lonely item sitting on top of the deep-freezer, as if someone had forgotten it there. I rub my eyes when I see what it is. “Hey, check this out,” I grab the only caramel sauce in the store and pass it to my friend. She cannot believe her eyes. Just one. Just for her. As ordered.

Who knows, maybe this was just a coincidence. This sounds nonsensical for a rational mind. Yet, after so many years of witnessing these coincidences on a daily basis it is very difficult for me to write off the law of attraction as mere hippie bullshit or religious fantasy. Perhaps time is an illusion and my mind somehow quantum-leaped its way two minutes into the future, spotted the caramel sauce and directed me to it.

Whatever the case might be, it is my first-hand experience that wishes do come true, no matter how specific they are. Then again, the most important learning point here is that the less you need, the more fulfilled your life becomes. It is easier to spot the law of attraction at work when your needs are very limited and when you are out of the frenzied rat race momentarily. Perhaps the gist of it all is to be grateful for whatever comes your way.

I used to have a very unhealthy relationship with alcohol. Somehow in Finnish culture drinking is one of the people's favorite pastimes. I was no exception. I had elevated this activity on a pedestal and King Alcohol was very tempting for me. As the moneyless lifestyle came along, something clicked. Naturally, when you don't use money, drinking becomes a rare occasion. Over the moneyless years it was just three times or so that I felt like it would be nice to have a beer in the bar. I asked and I got one. Besides, there are more than enough of parties where one is offered free drinks, moneyless or not.

As time passed, I stopped glorifying drinking. It had less and less importance. I consciously stopped drinking for half a year, just to prove myself I can live without it. The outcome was surprising: I started appreciating good beer, whiskey and wine more than ever before. Because these were given to me as gifts, the need to get drunk was replaced with healthier appreciation for these lovely liquids. Gratitude for the small things in life. Cheers!
What has made you happy today?

Photo: Lea Rezić
Next up: Transportation

What if you get the wanderlust and wish to set out for moneyless travels? How might one get from one place to another without paying anything? How to move about within cities or between them? How to travel longer distances? Is it not boring and uninteresting to be in all these extraordinary places if you are not loaded?

It is customary to think that traveling requires savings; the bigger the travel budget the more you get out of your travels, right? We have been led to equate traveling with tourism: flying to the destination, staying in hotels, fine-dining in expensive restaurants, paying for tickets, tourist attractions, costly activities, buying souvenirs, sending postcards and, most importantly, the idea that this is possible only a few weeks in a year.

Yet travelers and tourists are two different breeds altogether. A tourist goes momentarily away from home, expecting to have all the comforts of home available in the destination. If anything goes against the tourist's expectations, he is unhappy. He complains. A traveler, on the other hand, sets out for an adventure without preconceived notions of what lies ahead – ready for new challenges and unexpected situations – knowing that whatever happens, it somehow makes sense in the end.

Most people cannot fathom the fact that my travel budget was zero. Yes, it is possible to travel completely without money. Moreover, it is often a more thrilling, genuine and memorable experience. Are you ready to be a free traveler?
It is early March and I am visiting my home country Finland. I walk away from Turku, trying to hitch my way to my mom’s place in Joutsa. It is a lovely sunny day but the wintry wind makes the minus-too-much weather feel quite crisp. Passing cars raise snow and dust clouds in the air.

I seek out a perfect hitchhiking spot: a bus stop right after traffic lights. Now, this should be easy. I place my backpack in front of me, to message the drivers that I am a reliable traveler and not just any random dude thumbing up and smiling like an idiot.

My sign says nothing but 20 km. Years of traveling have made me too lazy to change it every time I head for a new destination. After all, this precious piece of cardboard has taken me more than 200,000 km throughout Europe, Turkey, Morocco, Mexico and Central America. Pretty nifty travel ticket, eh?

Regardless of all this experience, it still feels a bit odd standing by the side of the road. It is not entirely normal behavior today to try and make complete strangers to stop so you could confine yourself to a closed space with them.

One car after another swooshes by. Every third driver is speaking in the phone and pays no attention to me. Hmph. That's illegal. Some raise their hand for a greeting. Hmph. Hello. Very few flash a smile. Most just stare at the road or the back lights of the car in front of them. Hmph. Hmph. Hmph. It takes a long while before a retired taxi driver stops and takes me an outstanding five kilometers further.

The same frustrating waiting process continues on the next bus stop. The wind becomes stronger by the minute. Each passing truck almost tilts me over and raises a cloud of dust that fills my eyes and nostrils. It starts to get cold.

I take more clothes from my backpack and add layers. I get fed up with the windy spot. A friendly gas station visitor advises me to walk to a better place. I do just that.

No luck here either. Somehow it seems to be very challenging to catch a ride today. Perhaps it is too sunny. Usually hitching in the winter is easy because people know you are about to freeze your ass off. But now the empath-o-meter shows red. I continue on foot.
Finally, in the distance, there is a car that stops. I walk slowly forward because I do not believe it stopped for me. Nonetheless, the car just remains there. The driver seems to wait for something. Or someone. Who? Me? I trod my way to the car. The side window is open.

“Jump in! I can take you to Jokioinen crossroads,” a male driver hollers with a smile on his face. I get in. The man introduces himself as “kulukumulukku” which loosely translates to a *prick that moves around a lot*. In other words, he is a sales representative who basically drives to meet clients for a living. He appreciates having company on the lonely road. We engage in a lively conversation.

The crossroads where he leaves me sucks for hitching. I need to walk some five kilometers, all the way to Forssa. There I scavenge the service station bins and grab a quick lunch on-the-go: bread and smoked cheese.

Next ride I get by asking around at the service station. Finally I am properly on the move and get some mileage done: Riihimäki. Check! Lahti. Check! Heinola. Heck! I get stuck again, and it gets dark. Great.

I wear my screamingly orange hunter's vest and decorate myself in reflectors as if I was a Christmas tree. I smoke a bummed cigarette and desperation grows as the daylight vanishes quickly.

“Calm down,” I tell myself, “remember: if you are stuck it means something awesome happens soon.”

A young man from a passing car shouts some obscenities, briefly letting me know his opinions regarding hitchhiking and his assumptions about my sexual orientation. Awesome indeed.

I am about to give up and collapse in the snow. A car stops. Another young man picks me up and takes me all the way to my destination. A direct ride! Now this is the awesomeness I was waiting for.

**Tips for free transportation:**

👍 **Little Trip:**
Cycling, Bumming, Relaxing

👍👍 **Serious Stretch:**
Freedom of Free Hitchhiking
Little Trip: Cycling, Bumming, Relaxing

The unfortunate century of the combustion-engine car is slowly coming to an end. City planners everywhere have started taking a more humane approach and traffic congestion is directed away from the city centers. This is good news to those who enjoy cycling.

A bicycle is a well-suited mode of transport even for longer distances. Personally I have not yet used a bicycle for traveling but my friend Matti is an avid cyclist. He shares his experience:

“I have cycled in Finland, Estonia, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Ireland. I haven’t done lengthy journeys yet, a couple of weeks at a time, at most. I cycle some three to five thousand kilometers per year.

Cycling is the best form of travel – and it is practically free. While hitchhiking you meet people in the intimate confines of the car. When you cycle you lock eyes and share a smile with each pedestrian and fellow cyclist you encounter. A cyclist has no protecting walls around him. He openly welcomes new friendships. The bike bags arouse attention and interest in passers-by, especially in children.

The freedom a cyclist experiences is of the highest magnitude. When you are on your bicycle you are not restricted by any schedules, other people's routes or even the locations of possible lodging. When you are equipped with camping gear your home is exactly where you want it to be – today by the coastline, tomorrow in the mountains and day after with some nice new, hospitable acquaintance.

A bicycle takes you to areas where cars don't drive, and to places that are out of reach for pedestrians. Pedaling boosts your circulation; both blood flow and circulation of thoughts. A cyclist comes across small villages and scarcely populated areas. Even the major cities are freely and quickly accessible should you run into one. The choice belongs to the one at the pedals. You can act on a whim.”
On my travels I have met many people whose iron-clad behinds have adjusted to thousands of kilometers of cycling. For instance the route from Alaska to Argentina seems to be for cyclists as holy as Camino de Santiago is for pilgrims on foot.

As long as you have access to a decent two-wheeler and trust your physique, cycling is a mode of travel worth considering. It gives you fresh air and exercise. Just reserve enough time and bear in mind that it is not the destination that matters but the journey.

There are advanced municipalities like Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, who have already adopted free public transport for their citizens. If it is okay to have free-to-use libraries, then why not buses? As the green values become more important and pollution needs to decrease, these practices are most likely to become more commonplace. With dwindling oil resources and the adoption of autonomous vehicles (self-driving robot cars), private car ownership appears more and more ludicrous, dangerous and unethical. As said, it is access that matters, not ownership. Having said that, as long as the practice continuous, it might make sense to try and fill up the gas-guzzlers as much as possible.

One of the most traditional ways to share transport is carpooling. If you need to get from one place to another, ask your friends or colleagues if they could take you for free. Or, if you feel comfortable asking strangers, check out forums online. E.g. Facebook is full of region-, country- and city-specific ride-sharing groups. Note, however, that it is customary to pitch in some money for the petrol. Who knows, perhaps the driver is curious to hear your story and takes you along for free. There are even travelers who use Craigslist and Tinder to scout for rides.

As for transport within cities, the best option is to walk. Why not use your own two feet if you have no schedules limiting you? Sometimes I hitch even in the cities, mainly for fun. I can fold my 20 km sign so it becomes 2 km. Be creative! I have caught rides using nothing but an arrow sign.

Finally there is public transport. If you don't mind getting into interesting conversations with the ticket controllers, feel free to use buses, trams and subway as

well. Since I was hardly ever in a rush to get anywhere, I only used public transport when I was in company or if it would have taken me hours to walk out of the cities.

One of my moneyless friends, Daniel Suelo\textsuperscript{18}, once gave me a golden tip: If you feel that you should not use a certain service because you do not have money, you are still, in effect, limited by the money system. According to him, moneylessness should not stop one from using services that others decide to pay for. The only real obstacles are your own mental blocks. A subway still goes, with or without you boarding it.

One of the most awesome moneyless people I know, elf Pavlik\textsuperscript{19}, used a “No Ticket” ticket, a badge that explains what he is doing and why, refusing to pay and instead offering his skills and services to the city for free.

But how can a moneyless person use ferries and other transport that normally requires having a ticket? Sneak in without permission? No. There is a way to use also these services for free. I could give it a fancy name like “proactive interdependence” but let's just call it what it is: bumming for tickets.

I have hitchhiked from Turkey to Stockholm. There is still one excruciatingly long leg through Northern Sweden back to Finland, yet another 1,800 km. Although I have taken this route many times the mere idea of hitching to the arctic circle in the winter gives me goosebumps.

A ferry from Stockholm to Turku would only be 15 Euros but for me it is 15 Euros too much. Nonetheless, I decide to try my luck at the Viking Line terminal. I happen to know that some people who have done shopping at the duty free shop on the ferry, come to the shore with complimentary cruise vouchers in their pockets. So, I create a sign that says in Finnish: “Extra gift voucher anyone?”

It is six o'clock in the morning. I stand at the terminal exit and wait for people to come from the ferry. Soon hordes of people rush out and I try to hold my sign up, smiling uncomfortably among them.

To my unfortunate surprise most passengers are Russians who don't know what my makeshift sign says. Some stop to read, shake their heads and move on. Most just ignore me. I wait patiently and make sure every last one of them has come out. No luck.

\textsuperscript{18} See e.g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suelo and http://zerocurrency.blogspot.com/

\textsuperscript{19} https://moneyless.org/elf-pavlik-moneyless-2009
I don't give in. I decide to repeat the procedure in front of the check-in desks. After just five minutes or so a Finnish lady approaches me, holding a key card to her cabin. “I have a two-way cruise but I stay in Stockholm. You take this and go,” she suggests. She hands me the card.

Slightly astonished I thank her repeatedly and double-check if it really is okay to use her cabin. “Just go through that gate with this. No one checks it,” she encourages me, wishes bon voyage and walks away.

Indeed, I make it to the ferry without any trouble and get into a free cabin. I open the upper bunk bed and lay down. I switch on the television and listen to the odd language they speak in the TV program: Finnish.

I try to get some sleep. When I get hungry I drop in at the buffet. After some deliberation and discussions with the boss-man, they allow me to take a plate full of Northern delicacies for free.

At the end of the cruise there is a knock on the door. It is a cleaning lady. She glances at the two open beds. “So, you decided to use both of the beds then,” she says and scratches the back of her head looking bemused. I mumble something incomprehensible as a reply. I just don't have it in me to tell the whole story, that it is not really my cabin at all.

The journey takes the whole day and it is dark again. Yet I am sincerely thankful that I don't need to stay in the wintry frost trying to catch rides in very limited sunlight. Twenty minutes before arriving to Turku I march to the car deck. I have no plan whatsoever. No one even knows I am already back to Finland. No place to stay. But that is alright. I have been in this situation a thousand times before.

I approach a guy with a van and ask him where he is headed. He looks very suspicious and bounces the same question right back at me. “I don't care. I just need to get out of Turku,” I reply. He frowns and shakes his head.

Luckily a truck driver takes me in and drives me to Helsinki. Where are you coming from he asks. “Turkey,” I answer with a wide grin.

Even long-distance travel can be arranged with patient and polite bumming. You can, for instance, try to find people with unused air miles. These are bonus points given
to frequent flyers and can be used for purchasing flight tickets. So, ask around either among your friends and acquaintances or from total strangers at the airport.

Most likely the suits are your most promising target group. They travel for business a lot. Yet even the more common folk might be avid travelers with extra air miles to share. Especially the work-related travelers might never have time to use their bonus points before they expire. Among these folks there might be one warm-hearted individual who sponsors your flight gladly. Just note that the air miles cannot be used to cover airport taxes. Thus, there is a minor cost involved.

I have measured the streets of Panama City for more than a week and tried to get to a boat headed for Colombia. I was determined to hitch my way to Brazil but as the promising leads dry up, one by one, the determination is put to a real test.

First I had tried my luck in small country-side marinas but I could find nothing but old Swedish captains well on their way to becoming alcoholics. They had no intention to make their vessels move any time soon. I have posted numerous “Crew Available” ads on notice boards, asked for tips and networked among the seafarers. No positive replies. I start to be fed up. It is not the first time I totally suck in boat hitchhiking.

In one of the marinas in Panama City I bump into a nice ship engineer from the Netherlands. His name is Peter. Due to the nature of his work, he constantly takes flights, criss-crossing South and Central America, fixing ships. Peter is astonished to hear how long I have traveled and challenges me to consider putting a stop to this whole wanderlust. I tell him about my mishaps and admit that I am starting to get disillusioned about the whole damn trip to South America, that I would not mind returning back to Europe.

Then Peter mentions that he just found out that he has gained a lot of unused air miles. And it is his employer who paid for all those flights before. He wants to help and says he will check from the airline if they can be used to cover someone else's flight ticket. I receive the idea with mixed feelings. In a way, not making it to South America feels like a defeat. Yet I start to be tired of constant traveling. Perhaps this is a sign. What is the point in continuing if I learn anything new anymore and feel that I am unable to use my whole potential to help others? Maybe it is time to move on.
I continue roaming around the streets of Panama City, tramping aimlessly and killing time, checking my email twice a day at a hostel whose manager does not mind me using their internet connection. After two days I receive an email from Peter. It says: “Great news! I could get you to Helsinki for free if you find a way to cover the 100 € airport taxes.” Although I have that one hundred, I know this is an offer I should not refuse. I am convinced. It is time to put an end to this aimless wandering.

Using Facebook I ask my friends if anyone would care to get me back to Finland. In a matter of two hours my friends have crowdfunded my trip back home. Hello Helsinki!

**Serious Stretch: Freedom of Free Hitchhiking**

In the 1930s young Americans were encouraged to hitchhike. It was said to build their character and prepare them for later life. But twenty years later, as hitching had become a popular form of travel, the CIA and police forces joined hands to campaign against hitchhiking. In the beginning young people were scared away from hitchhiking with hideous commercials – some of them so outrageous that, if made today, the filmmakers would be sued immediately. Later Hollywood joined the battle with their horror stories. The rest is history. The image of hitchhiking was destroyed, on purpose.20

Why was this done? Who knows. Maybe the money-makers asked the law enforcement to help increase automobile sales and lobby for private car ownership instead. Or perhaps the freedom that comes with hitchhiking was ill-suited for the needs of industrial society. Whatever the case may be, according to statistics, picking up a hitchhiker or getting into someone's car does not increase the risk of becoming a crime victim. So, pack your rucksack and get that thumb ready! You are in for a ride.

When I was a kid I watched a cartoon where Nils Holgerson hitchhiked a goose and enjoyed his freedom, gliding across the skies. Perhaps that gave me the initial kick. I hitched the first time at the age of sixteen, a meager 15 kilometers in the middle of the

20 See e.g. [http://freakonomics.com/podcast/where-have-all-the-hitchhikers-gone-a-new-freakonomics-radio-podcast/]
night, back from a rock 'n' roll gig. Yet it was only later, when I picked up a hitchhiker on my way home from work, that I got the real spark. This reckless American who was thumbing around the Nordics was the first to make me realize that it is possible to travel long distances by hitchhiking.

Still, it took me years before I tried hitching again. That happened while I was working in Sri Lanka. It was another great experience. They don't even have the concept of hitchhiking on the island. The locals were happy to pick us up although they were perplexed why we were not using a bus or a rental car like the other rich white people. Later I traveled, mostly by thumb, from Croatia to Finland. But it was only in 2010 when I hit the road properly and realized that hitchhiking, for me, is the preferred form of travel.

Hitchhiking makes sense both environmentally and economically. It does not really increase fuel consumption that much if you add another 80 kilos in a car that already weighs a ton on its own. Sometimes hitchhiking is even faster than struggling with the public transport schedules. My group-hitchhiking record is five rides, with two other people, 850 kilometers in seven hours from Berlin to Freiburg. Then, of course, there are times that you wait that seven hours for just one ride. That is the beauty of hitchhiking. You never know who is going to pick you up and when.

“It is quite rare to see hitchhikers on the road these days,” the drivers often note. My humorous response is: “That is because they already got a ride.” Although hitchhiking has suffered a dip in popularity, the social media has enabled hitchhikers to get organized and start raising awareness of this mode of travel on their own. Today the hitchhikers' community meets both online and away from the keyboard.

Hippies, including some hitchhikers, have had their Rainbow Gatherings for more than 40 years. The first International Hitch-Hiking Conference was organized already in 1997, though with only 13 participants. The event was repeated five times in the coming years and the number of attendants grew a little bit. However, most hitchhikers remained unaware of the conference due to low internet usage back then.

Paris 8-8-8 (August 8, 2008) was the first time a European Hitchgathering was organized, by the hitchhikers for the hitchhikers. It clearly served an unmet need and, with the improved lines of communication, became a lasting annual event. The concept was later spread to other continents as well.

22 http://hitchgathering.org/history/
In 2011 we figured that it would be nice to keep in touch also between the annual events. So, we started a Hitchgathering-group in Facebook\textsuperscript{23}, with just 30 people initially. Now it boasts more than ten thousand members – 12,167 at the time of writing. Tips are shared and new members are encouraged to join the fun. In some countries\textsuperscript{24}, like in Lithuania and Russia, there are active hitchhiking clubs who have made it a real sport.\textsuperscript{25}

Hitchwiki\textsuperscript{26} has information of the best spots and cultural peculiarities, organized country by country, city by city. Moreover, hitchhikers gladly invite each other over – so much so that a new hospitality exchange service Trustroots\textsuperscript{27} was started by the hitchhikers. After all, we all are unified by the same recklessness and yearning for freedom. It is this unity that brings us together.

Some people love knitting and start a local club around the common interest. We love hitchhiking and started a global movement.

Hitchhiking does not really require any advanced knowledge per se, just a bit of patience and courage to step out of your comfort zone. Here are some tips anyways. First of all, hitching alone and in company are two completely different experiences. Both have pros and cons. Alone you have time to think and solve problems on your own. It provides priceless lessons in the school of life. You can go wherever, whenever, and however you want. There is no need for compromise. You don't have to take other people's mental state and physical condition into account. Moreover, vehicles that can only fit one extra passenger are now available to you.

The most amazing perk of hitching together is that you get to know your hitchhiking buddy on a deeper level, very quickly. After just a few days you know if you enjoy each other's company or if it is better to take different routes. If you do stick together you become really good friends promptly. Usually, when your personalities are a good match, traveling together is way more fun than being alone all the time. You can take care of each other and your luggage. Thumbling responsibility and resources can be shared. And most importantly, you go through the same joys and positive surprises as

\textsuperscript{23} https://www.facebook.com/groups/hitchgathering/
\textsuperscript{24} http://hitchwiki.org/en/Hitchhiking_clubs
\textsuperscript{25} http://avp.travel.ru/AFT-2002.htm
\textsuperscript{26} www.hitchwiki.org
\textsuperscript{27} www.trustroots.org
well as trials and tribulations. This creates common memories and a basis for life-long friendship.

So, who should you hitch with? Be warned: there is no equality in hitchhiking. Usually women get rides much faster. For guys it can be safer. Therefore, a girl-boy pair might be the best solution. Having said that, also two girls hitching together is a good combo. Two guys? Meh. I have tried it many times and enjoyed every bit of the experience. But it can prove to be excruciatingly slow sometimes.

It is a common misconception that all truck drivers see women as sex objects. Sure, some of them can be very lonely. However, trucks are usually the safest choice, also for women. The driver is at his work place. He cannot screw up unless he is ready to risk losing his job. Furthermore, the distance between the seats in a truck is wider than in an ordinary passenger car.

When evaluating the safety of potential drivers, one should not jump into conclusions based on appearance, cultural background or profession. It is very important to know how to read situations and use common sense. If there is anything wrong with the first impression do not accept the offered ride. Personally I tend to give the benefit of doubt. I hardly ever refuse a ride.

Once my friend from Hungary was hitchhiking in Serbia. A cop in civilian attire picked her up. He kept telling her she should not hitchhike at all because it can be very dangerous. “Yeah, right, heard that a million times,” she thought. At some point he started becoming touchy-feely. When she protested and removed his hand from her leg he said it was just a joke. Weird. After a while he took out his gun and pointed it at her. She was shocked and did not know what was going on. Seeing how scared she was, the cop burst into laughter. “You see now how dangerous it can be?” Apparently this was again some twisted Balkan humor. Needless to say, she did not laugh. She told him to pull over and left the car.

I don't want to scare you in vain. Whether you are a man or a woman, alone or in company, I wholeheartedly recommend hitchhiking. Apart from the often forgotten fact that traffic itself is dangerous when there is an error-prone human behind the wheel, hitchhiking is not any more dangerous than spending time in familiar environments. Statistically speaking, most people die at home.

Trust is your best insurance policy. This is why I recommend you to hitch with any of the so-called safety equipment. If you start swinging a knife or defending yourself with
a taser, this might easily turn against you. If you insist on carrying some kind of weapon anyways, keep pepper spray in your pocket.

You should have only one piece of luggage, a backpack or a rucksack. If you carry many small bags, a guitar case and a grandma's survival kit you might forget one of them in the car or at a service station. Some recommend keeping your bag on your lap in case you need to get out of the car quickly. I would say, however, that this is unnecessary caution. Personally I prefer shoving my backpack in the trunk, if there is space, to have more legroom and mental space. Again: use common sense and case-by-case deliberation.

Colorful clean clothes and a backpack make you stand out and give an impression of a professional traveler. For the same reason it is good to show a cardboard sign. Thick black marker or charcoal on white background makes the sign most visible. Usually hitchhikers write their destination in the sign. Even so, using humor and creativity is encouraged. “I don't have a bird flu” my friend wrote in his sign during the overblown media frenzy of that particular epidemic. If you are stuck in Mexico, where every fifth driver is likely to be religious and called Jesus, try a sign that says “What would Jesus do?” Written destinations that are ridiculously far can also work to break the ice. It was nice to observe the perplexed drivers in Northern Sweden when we used “Istanbul” sign. Some just write “Tokyo”, no matter where they are.

As said, I have become utterly lazy with signs. I just use the same 20 km sign most of the time and it gets me to places. Sometimes the rides are very short. Some even stop to say they only go ten kilometers. I jump in happily. Often, however, you don't have a very clear plan. If you just want to go wherever the driver is going, you might be in for a treat. Once in Ukraine we traveled over 1,000 kilometers in one car. A bit more than 20 km.

Some innovative hitchhikers make the signs really beautiful and practical. The most creative solution I have seen is “an accordion” of plastic covers stapled together. Inside there are ready-made letters that you can re-arrange to match your destination. A bit too much for my simple mind. Sometimes I don't have a sign at all. Mere thumbing up also works wonders.

Most vital advice to any hitchhiker is to choose a safe spot where the cars are not speeding too fast and where they can easily stop. Eye contact and a wide smile makes it easier. Playfulness is very important if you do have to wait for longer periods of time.
Activities like juggling or playing ukulele are fun and relaxing. These stunts make you stand out. Even childish behavior like balancing a water bottle on top of your head is better than being grumpy. Good mood directly correlates with the stop rate of passing vehicles. Once a car that had passed, turned around and came back for me. A middle-aged female driver opened the door and said: “I could not resist that smile. I just had to come pick you up.” The best outcome of this kind of behavior is that you actually become a happier person. Fake it till you make it, right?

Each hitchhiker has their own personal style. Some wait patiently, eyes fixed on every driver and a thumb relentlessly pointing at the sky. Others, like me, get frustrated after ten minutes and walk to a better spot, dragging the sign on the side. One of the unwritten rules of hitchhiking is that the ride appears when you least expect it.

Some combine cycling and hitchhiking. There are these nifty folding bikes that go in very small space. These can be used to move shorter distances quickly; away from the city, to the nearest service station or into the city even late at night. One of these cyclist-hitchhikers is Max from New Zealand. He is a seasoned traveler in his fifties. Max tells:

“The best way to hitchhike, that I have found, is to try hitchhiking with a bicycle. It is the ultimate way of travel. People think your bike is broken down and they pick you up.

You can use the bike to explore cities. You can also use it to ride away from tricky places and organize your next lift in a better spot. You can get ideas from images in the internet.²⁸ Nowadays there are even Solar Powered Electric Bikes where a motor assists you in pedaling.

There are now so many people cycling around this planet. They share their blogs, books, maps and information. Do you want to follow their tracks? Or do you want to discover your own path? Do not over plan. Find tools for up-to-date location information. Then, just go!”

When a car does stop, don’t leave the driver hanging. Hurry to greet him quickly. Introduce yourself and tell where you are going. If you don’t have an exact plan, just say the name of the next city. It sounds odd if you say: “I go wherever you go.” Most people think like a hitchhiker. Once you are in the car, you can explain your carefree style of

²⁸ See e.g. www.loadedtouringbikes.com
travel in detail – and go beyond the next city, wherever the driver is going. I once traveled through entire Spain like this. The driver first thought I just want to go that 20 kilometers and, after our discussion, ended up taking me 800 kilometers north.

If the front seat is free that is usually the best choice. Some drivers are wary of having total strangers seated behind them. Before you get in, ask where you should place your backpack; in the back seat, in the trunk or with you in the front. If you just open the trunk without asking it might freak out the driver.

Service stations are great places to get rides. In some countries, like Germany, these are almost the only suitable places to hitch. The curse with modern service stations is that they are insanely big areas and sometimes you need to waltz back and forth to hunt for potential drivers returning from their break. You tirelessly approach one person after another until someone invites you to hop in. If you are two or more people hitchhiking together, agree beforehand how you are going to find each other if one of you fixes a ride. Do not stay out of reach for too long.

If you get tired of constant socialization with potential drivers, you can also just sit at the exit and hold your sign. Though, if you just persist and keep talking to people it is usually a faster method. It is also a great way to encourage drivers who have never picked up a hitchhiker to even consider the possibility. Remember that you are not just selfishly trying to get a ride for yourself. You represent the reputation of all hitchhikers. Even if you failed to get a ride, act nice and the potential driver gets a good impression. Next time someone approaches them or stands by the side of the road, the driver might pick her up. Small acts of kindness make the world a little bit better.

Personally I do not want to push myself too much. I prefer the “exit strategy” because it leaves the decision for the driver. If he wants to stop and pick me up, he will. If not, I will just wave and smile.

The best spots to communicate with the drivers are by the service station doors and at the filling station. In some countries the license plate may hint where the car is headed. For instance in France a number indicates the city where the driver is from. In Germany it is letters. Knowing these lets you narrow down your options and increase your chances to catch a ride going the right direction. The same applies to country codes when you are trying to get from one nation to another. Learn a bit of small talk in many languages. That helps to break the ice.
Observe the arriving cars and when you see a plate that suits your direction, make a mental note of the person who gets out of the car. Rather than attacking him immediately, wait that he runs his errands. Only approach him when he returns to the car. Someone who is hungry for a slice of pizza or desperately needs to pee does not have patience to chat with a total stranger.

I usually travel without a map or a smart phone. Constantly changing scenery makes it pointless to have separate maps for each country and carrying a heavy Atlas is silly. If you need to check the route, there are maps available at the service station newsstand. Asking details about the roads and routes is a nice excuse to naturally start talking with drivers.

Often the hesitant ones say that they only go 50 kilometers or so. Remind them of the simple fact that it equates ten hours of walking. If you are completely stuck and you cannot find a good ride, ask for a lift to the next service station or to a smaller country road. Religiously holding on to your route might not be such a good idea if it seems that there are no cars going your way. Hitchhiking is a mix of planning, letting go of plans and enjoying the moment. Although I usually know the next destination, the route to get there does not matter so much. If the driver is going anywhere to that direction, I won't say no to a ride offered.

When the night falls and you get tired, you might be able to spend the night at some dark corner of the service station. If it rains, even the bathroom is a better choice than staying outdoors. Night time is also nice for chatting with the staff. When you share your story with the personnel, they might serve you a proper meal or agree not to throw away yesterday's sandwiches. All in all, service station restaurants are great places for both table diving and dumpster diving. If you do not feel like bothering the staff, check where they leave the dishes or see if there is a bin behind the station. Only once has a service station employee asked me to leave, quoting the anti-hitchhiker policy of Shell Corporation. In Turkey, on the other hand, an employee of the same multinational company invited us over to her place. Cultural differences, I assume.

If you decide to hitch through the night and you get tired in the car, it is polite to ask if you could try to catch some shut-eye. Especially truck drivers appreciate if you can keep them company. They are also tired. Then again, in a truck you might get to sleep at the bunk bed behind the driver. It is amazing to open your eyes in the morning and
notice that you have traveled 500 kilometers without any effort. Plus, you are well rested to continue.

Western European truck drivers rarely give you a ride because the companies have insurance policies that prohibit taking extra passengers. However, especially the Polish, Romanian and Turkish truck drivers are some of your best friends. Nothing compares to having delicious Turkish breakfast with the drivers!

You will have to answer the same questions over and over again while hitchhiking: Where do you come from? Where are you going to? Why do you travel like this? Don't you have a job? What do your parents think? It might be an idea to learn a little bit of the local language so you can be prepared to these recurring questions.

If you do share a common language you can get into very interesting conversations. The driver knows that he probably never sees you again after he has dropped you off. This makes people open up very easily and suddenly you realize they confide to you with their innermost secrets. Sometimes the driver offers you food or a place to stay for the night. With some of them I am still in touch, after years.

Learn to read the situation. If the driver turns up the radio it means you should probably shut up. If, however, he is very quiet and tired after spending hours on end behind the wheel, try to stay awake and keep chatting. Besides, it is not impolite to suggest a break. You share the space. For a short while, you are on the journey together. Enjoy that time.

If you just happen to have the right kind of passport, crossing borders in European Union and South America is fairly uncomplicated. Yet in many places it takes a costly visa to enter the country. Before we get rid of these arbitrary limits, drawn by humans, a moneyless traveler has a choice to make: Do I compromise my principles and pay to enter the country, should I find a way to enter illegally or will I just stick to countries that do not charge for a visa?

We have criss-crossed Central America for quite some time already. My dear girlfriend and travel buddy has been my external wallet, collecting coins from the ground and using those to pay the petite fees on borders. So far, she has made sure I do not have to worry about crossing borders. If I express any doubt she
writes it off saying something like “It's fine. After all, it is me who has been leeching on the moneyless guy!”

Now, however, we are at the Nicaraguan border and the ground coins are not enough. The officials demand us to pay a huge sum – two times 13 dollars – to get the stamps. We do what we do best in situations like this: sit clueless and see what happens. This goes on for like two hours.

Money changers, the greedy bastards known to cheat ignorant tourists at the border, observe our inaction with increasing curiosity. They realize we have come a long way to get here. Finally one of them approaches us. He has a solution to get us moving. They have made a collection among themselves and pay the border guards before we get to say anything. We get our precious stamps, just like that. Wow! Totally unexpected.

The money changers smile and extend humble nods in our direction, wave happily and wish us safe travels. Still cannot believe it! What unlikely allies. Another border crossed.

A word of warning for those who wish to take the option of crossing borders illegally. Personally I have never done it and I do not recommend it to anyone. In European Union it can mean some jail time if you travel without proper ID. For them hitchhiker-hippies are potential illegal immigrants who need to be locked up – out of sight, out of mind.

Now that you have been warned, it is up to you what kind of methods you use to work around the silly rules and regulations. Albert, who we got to know in Barcelona, has made crossing borders without money almost an art form:

“Crossing borders without money is always doable, with some perseverance. Believe me; I have tried almost everything imaginable. I have made friends with border guards, hidden myself among the driver's luggage or in the cargo compartment of a truck, crossed deserts and climbed mountains to get around the official border entrance.

I have developed a certain fondness for some of these particularly memorable crossings. In 2008 I tried to get to Mauritania. I had to wait in the desert for five days, with barely any food, until the officer in charge realized I was
probably going to annoy him forever if he didn't let me through. Finally he deigned to scribble some words into my passport that magically allowed me to cross to the next country.

The most important rule I have come to understand is not to expect any empathy from border officers. Perhaps the countless hours of bureaucratic hardships have hardened their hearts. The most reliable way to cross a border without money is to make the officers realize that they're doing themselves a favor by letting you through. In recent times my usual approach has been to arrive at the border precisely when my current visa is about to expire. Once I am at the border, I try to explain three facts as straightforward as possible:

A) This is not my first time. I have been travelling without any money through dozens of countries. I am perfectly fine and happy. Here, see my book. I am not going to give you trouble if you just let me cross.

B) I have literally no way of going back. My last visa has expired. They won’t let me re-enter the country I just came from, and I have no way to obtain any money whatsoever. If you don’t let me in your country, I will simply camp here at your border until you change your mind or the officer above you starts wondering why there is a helpless European kid living in the Syrian border – a place you were supposed to keep in order.

C) I am aware you could repatriate me. That’s all right. Do it if you feel like it, but we both know how much unnecessary extra attention and work that’d mean. See, all the others before you have faced the same decision, and in the end they just passed the ball to you. Why not do the same, so that next time I will be someone else’s problem?

No matter how hard you try to radiate confidence or show boredom, they might require you to camp for one or two days. That’s a standard part of the process, but, even in the worst case, by the third day their resolve should have weakened enough to let you cross. As long as you keep bugging them repeatedly, trying to speak with different officers and talking with as many people as possible about your situation, they will soon get nervous enough to let you cross, to save themselves of any more trouble.

Of course it’d be better to skip this tedious process altogether. It’s always more comfortable to solve problems through empathy and communication than to
annoy people on purpose. But it’s also good to know that borders are crossable. As a westerner you can go pretty much anywhere, as long as you have got some patience and nothing much to do for the following two or three days.”

There is one more form of hitchhiking worth mentioning, although I personally do not have much patience for it: boat hitchhiking. Getting rides on private sail and motor boats requires a lot of good nature, time and luck. Prior sailing experience is a definite plus. Finally, at the risk of sounding sexist, it helps if you happen to be a representative of the more beautiful gender. Looks matter in this sport. I do not mean that the captains are in search of sex slaves on their vessels. They just tend to be more receptive to queries coming from attractive women. And this is not just caveman psychology. Even families on boats are more prone to take single women on board.

It is good to know when the winds blow to the right direction so that you can choose a suitable time for hitting the marinas. Also, the boats might stay at the marina for weeks and then suddenly leave all at once when the window of opportunity opens. Internet can be used for advertising yourself as a crew member and to find suitable boats looking for deckhands, cooks and other help. However, most of the sites operate on a freemium model where the free bit is largely useless.

In my experience boat hitchhiking is nothing but waste of time. You need to explore the marina, get to know the captains and their crew, ask for tips and be ready to receive bad news and face a lost opportunity after another. Great, huh? Of course you can try to increase your chances by pasting “crew available” ads on the notice boards and hand them out to people you meet. Just do not expect a positive response, no matter how catchy language and glossy paper you use.

Some marinas have a short wave radio channel where the crew members exchange the latest news, talk about the wind situation and gossip about Captain Jacobson's private life. Once or twice a week they might have a bit more organized transmission with an actual agenda. If you get to be part of that you can directly pitch your nautical version of the “I have a dream” speech.

Boat hitchhiking, especially in hotspots like the Canary Islands, has become insanely popular and you are not the only one hawking for a free ride. The fanciful notion

29 See e.g. www.windfinder.com
30 See e.g. www.findacrew.net
of working on freight boats in exchange for a ride is a myth that dates back to the 1970s. Nowadays, unless you are a trained professional, you need to pay dearly for such experiences. If you do have a degree, work permit and experience then it is a different story. Otherwise, forget about it.

So, you have been warned. Hitching boats is not easy. Nonetheless, after all this whining, I must admit that I have successfully managed to get a few short rides on boats. When it does work, it is a pretty cool experience. We once made it in 25 minutes from Tallinn to Helsinki on a hugely expensive motor boat. We sipped cocktails, got to chat with the crew and arrived in the beautiful Suomenlinna fortress island marina, escorted by the coast guard. Pretty neat compared to 2-3 hours on a crowded ferry, huh?

As for the long-distance boat hitchhiking, you can count me out! If you still feel like giving it a go, a good place to try and leave the approaching European winter behind is the Portuguese coast in the late summer, or Gibraltar after that. As said, Canary Islands is a definite hot spot in October-November. Go check it out! If nothing else, you get to hang out with a bunch of like-minded wannabe sailors.

Wonder Voyage: Long Distance Walkabouts
Personally I have not traveled long distances by foot. Sometimes I end up walking 10-20 kilometers a day when no one stops to pick me up. I kind of enjoy that, no matter how frustrating it is that thousands of cars just pass by. There is a certain sick attraction in pushing yourself to your limits. But I guess most hitchhikers would rather take that ride. However, if you walk voluntarily and refuse to take rides entirely, it might prove to be a great experience.

I have had the honor of getting to know many a fellow human, wiser and more courageous than me. One person who has walked hundreds of miles is Daniel Suelo. He shares his experience:

“What I like best about walking is that it brings us back to the magic of reality, to a healthy perspective of the vastness of the land. Walking lets all of our senses fully participate in the journey. By vastness of the land, I mean that walking makes the
journey feel epic, as well as imbuing it with a sense of mystery. Walking is even better than cycling in bringing us back to the magic of reality. It feels astounding, realizing that a journey of only an hour-and-a-half by car or a few days long by bicycle becomes a magical journey of weeks, like out of *The Hobbit*.

Unlike *The Hobbit*, this journey is real, directly experienced, fully satisfying to the whole person. The journey consists of all the prerequisite trials and triumphs that are absolutely necessary for life: disasters, peaceful meditations, making friends, encountering enemies, and meetings with strange wild life-forms, as well as hunger and thirst and the utter bliss and gratitude of banishing these!

Walking fully acquaints us with the land, putting us back in touch with reality, because not just your eyes, but your ears, nose, mouth, and skin come in full contact with the environment. We then understand that reality, not fantasy, is magic. Riding in a car is fantasy, out of touch with reality, because most our senses are boxed-in, literally deprived of and out of touch with our real surroundings!

In walking, all our senses not only get the opportunity to fully absorb our surroundings, but they get to do it at their own natural pace. The satisfaction of experiencing both the full pleasures and full pains is beyond description.”

When it comes to walking, there is no such thing as long distance. Another moneyless friend Ibby Okinyi walked for one and half years, 3,000 kilometers, from Oslo, Norway to Cantabria, Spain. Ibby's experiences confirm Suelo's claims:

“When I traveled with more finances, it put a buffer between me and the community. Possessions can have that influence. Now that I don't have anything, I am directly involved.

I have been received really well. I find that the world and humans are a lot better than we're made out to be.

There are many reasons why one may choose to travel by foot. By moving at your natural pace, it makes it more difficult for you to pre-select landscapes and social settings you may choose to travel through, as you cannot escape where you

31 [http://www.shareable.net/blog/walking-from-norway-to-africa-without-money-or-a-passport](http://www.shareable.net/blog/walking-from-norway-to-africa-without-money-or-a-passport)
are that easily. Also, if you walk a continent you are bound to move through wide expanses without people, and thus you are forced to meet yourself.

It could be argued that walking is the quickest form of travel, as you must adjust to the fact that you are always in your destination.”

Suelo continues:

“Walking without money even further weds us to reality. We are then at the mercy of what our environment provides us by random chance. It is a thrill not knowing what we are going to eat today or where we are going to sleep tonight. And it is a thrill seeing the power of what is gifted to us by random chance, the very force of the universe that created and continues to create us all! We get to experience the very magic of existence and the essence of life that the dominant culture deprives us of with its incessant planning and obsession with control.

Walking solo in some ways is easier than walking with others, and in some ways harder. When I walk solo, I am freer to go where I want, stop when I want, and go at my own pace. There is the peace and joy of solitude, yet there is not the joy of camaraderie, the great feeling of shared joy. It is more difficult to be stealth when walking in a group, too. In other words, there is more chance of being harassed by cops and busy-body people who have a hysterical fear and suspicion of anybody not driving a car and not having a permanent residence.

On the other hand, there is the wonderful feeling of strength in numbers and of belonging when walking in a group. I recommend both. Both feel necessary.

Make sure you are fit. It’s harder than you initially think, especially if you are older like me [50+]. Carry as little as you can. Even the smallest of packs soon feels heavy. Packs can damage the spine and joints if not worn properly. Though water is essential, obviously, it’s actually good not to carry too much of it, for the same reason. It forces you to make contact with homes. Asking for water is a great way to break down some barriers in our society.

Walking without money is not about self-sufficiency but about realizing your dependence upon all other life, including humans. Not carrying too much food is also good for this. Though I don’t ask individuals for food, I do often ask restaurants for food they are throwing away at the end of the day. I find about 70
percent are absolutely delighted to give away such food. It’s good even for the ones who are not delighted: it pushes their minds out of their box.

Feet can blister easily. Make sure you have fairly decent shoes and socks. However, I find for myself that it is even better to walk barefoot, conditioning my feet beforehand with calluses. Blisters are a symptom of shoes. Also, shoes are not self-repairing. Your feet are. Bare feet make you walk more gracefully, gently, and literally put you in touch with where you walk. You can walk for miles and miles, day after day, barefoot, when your feet are conditioned to cope with calluses. Your feet are not going to dissolve!”

Long-distance walking can also be done as a project that seeks publicity for a cause, to make the world a little bit better. Often the outcome is, however, that the world-changer ends up changing himself. Have you ever considered walking as a spiritual practice, a form of meditation?

Peace Pilgrim (aka Mildred Norman, July 18, 1908 – July 7, 1981) was one of the first people who lived without money and talked about it publicly. Her pilgrimage for peace took almost three decades. After 40,000 kilometers or so she stopped counting how much she had walked.

In her book *Steps Towards Inner Peace*[^32] she echoes Suelo's and Ibby's thoughts - simplicity is the key to traveling free and to develop oneself spiritually:

> “I own only what I wear and what I carry in my small pockets. I belong to no organization. I have said that I will walk until given shelter and fast until given food, remaining a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace. And I can truthfully tell you that without ever asking I have been supplied with everything needed for my journey, which shows you how good people really are.”

Peace Pilgrim tells how simplification of life can help balance the inner and outer wellbeing. To her it was very easy to simplify her life and let go of useless things:

“Just after I dedicated my life to service, I felt that I could no longer accept more than I needed while others in the world have less than they need. This moved me to bring my life down to need-level.

I thought it would be difficult. I thought it would entail a great many hardships, but I was quite wrong. Now that I own only what I wear and what I carry in my pockets, I don't feel deprived of anything.

For me, what I want and what I need are exactly the same, and you couldn't give me anything I don't need.”

To set out for a walking journey, material goods are not the only thing to let go of. One might be attached to more than just things. Peace Pilgrim shares her thoughts regarding freedom and attachment:

“No one is truly free who is still attached to material things, or to places, or to people. We must be able to use things when we need them and then relinquish them without regret when they have outlived their usefulness.”

One of my friends who keeps Peace Pilgrim in high regard is a hitchhiker and walker Thomas Francine. His *Go Greater Good*[^33] is a good example of an inspirational project one can do while walking. Thomas shares his story and practical tips for aspiring walkers:

“In 2013 I did a 1,000 mile walk, from Portland, Maine, to Indianapolis, Indiana. I was promoting faith in humanity and acts of kindness along the way. I completed a different act each week and encouraged others to follow along through my site. I walked on all kinds of roads, from beautiful trails to busy highways. My style was to save up some money before I left, and to spend very minimally as I went. I did not ever pay for a place to sleep, preferring to camp. Also, many offered me lodging and food. I also used the Couchsurfing website as I was able to. I walked 15-30 miles each day, of course with some days off to rest.

Walking is the slowest method of travel. It is good for developing patience and discipline. You really get to know each and every place along your way. I have hitchhiked 26,000 miles as well. Each has pros and cons. One benefit about

[^33]: www.gogreatergood.com
walking, and this would apply to cycling as well, is that you seem legit to more people. This was important to me because I was trying to spread a message and wanted to interact with as many people as I could.

If you are going to do a long walk, you should consider having a sign or two that state what you are doing. Mine said 'Walking America' with my website address. Many people will be happy to meet you, so you might as well let them know that you are not just an ordinary walker. Make the signs look professional. I used waterproof sticker lettering.

I also recommend having a baby jogger, a type of stroller with all-terrain wheels. Walking many miles is hard enough without a heavy backpack. Of course, you could always do it in the style of Peace Pilgrim, and carry only a comb, toothbrush and pen! Always wear a reflective vest and walk against traffic. Roads can be dangerous. And if you find yourself zoning out too much, take a short break.

I planned my route about two weeks ahead via Google Maps, after which I would find a computer to plan the next stretch. Make sure you always have some water as well as electrolytes handy. Never be afraid to ask for help, even if you were not desperate at the moment. You may soon find yourself in the middle of nowhere unexpectedly. Walking is a huge challenge. Listen to your body. Do lots of stretching and do not hesitate to take a day or two off whenever you may need it. After all, walking is all about traveling slow.”
Moving forward.

Photo: Anna Szutenberg
**Next up: Shelter**

I have mentioned various online services and mobile applications here and there. The digitalization trend challenges existing norms and creates unforeseen opportunities for peer-to-peer production and distribution of goods and services.

Could these next generation services be one of the reasons for the shift we are starting to see in societal values, interpersonal communication and human behavior? Or are these technologies – new ways to do things differently – only a symptom of a larger change in the works?

A Polish friend of mine – who, by the way, I would have never met if there was no internet – once said: “Humanity developed the internet because we were not quite ready yet for full-scale adoption of telepathic communication.”

Perhaps one day in the future we look back to these days and say: “That is where the shift happened, in early 2000s. Those are the people who made it happen.” When we are toiling in our daily lives, amidst the change process, it is very difficult to notice the change happening.

Could it be that these new technological enablers bring us closer together and fulfill our unmet need to get back the long-lost sense of community? How this shows in the choices we make regarding our living spaces? Could free living be a key for us to become more empathic, tolerant and accepting of each other? What else can we learn from shared living and temporary living arrangements? How might one stay with friends you have not even met yet?

The next chapter suggests moneyless ways to have a good night's sleep. I wish this does not make you feel sleepy but rather excited!
HAVE A GOOD NIGHT

I arrive in the City of London. Somehow they have managed to register this plot of land as a private corporation, an entity legally separated from the surrounding United Kingdom. This is a paradise for the filthy rich.

Streets are filled with miserable-looking business men who hurry from one place to another, biting into their lunch sandwiches. They have no time to stop, not even to eat. Money needs to be made, at whatever cost.

In the very heart of this financial capital, among all the luxury, stands a derelict red block of flats. It has four floors and the windows are covered with old newspapers. This house belongs to some shady shell corporation, registered in a far-away country that I never knew even exists.

Fittingly, the place is called The Shell. The residents are squatters: anarchists, artists, activists, students and other low-lifes who could never afford paying for the exuberant rents in this neighborhood.


I am about to knock for the third time. A curly haired German guy opens the door. He looks very familiar. I have, in fact, met him before in the Portuguese Hitchgathering, but my brain does not make the connection yet. Someone else recommended The Shell. I was not expecting to know anyone here. He does not remember me either.

He welcomes me in nevertheless and shows me around. People are nice and they are happy to let me stay there for free. One guy, prone to paranoia, asks me a plethora of questions, probably thinking I am an undercover cop. Apart from a couple of weirdos, the place is filled with highly educated, smart and well-aware young adults from all corners of Europe.

I take part in dumpster-diving, cooking, doing dishes and other cleaning. They like me and I like them. Little by little the dots connect and the past friendship with the German guy is renewed. Originally I was supposed to stay here only for one night. I end up staying for two weeks.

This is by no means my first stay in a squat. I am used to the fact that sometimes arguments arise in any mode of shared living. Usually these are one-
on-one quarrels or mundane disagreements like whose turn it is to do the dishes. In
the previous squat, where I stayed for a few days, a nicely “Londonized” Lithuanian
fellow even suggested that we should install CCTV cameras in the kitchen.
Needless to say, this was not well-received among the anarchists.

The biggest problem in The Shell seems to be the fact that some tend to
invite guests prone to misbehavior and there is no way to control the incessant
flow of people coming and going. This topic makes me feel uncomfortable. Soon,
however, I realize that they are not talking about me. Apparently there is a group
of guys who have a habit of inviting themselves over and partying a tad too hard.

This and other issues are discussed together, quite frantically. Somehow the
more experienced squatters manage to turn even vile personal insults into
constructive discussion. In the end, decisions are made together, at peace. I prise
their moderation skills.

I receive constructive-in-your-face feedback only once. The reason: bumming
tobacco. One of the squatters does not like the fact that I am smoking other
people's treasures. I understand his frustration. This lovely source of lung cancer is
insanely priced in London and, quite frankly, it is not exactly a basic necessity that
my life depends on.

As I return from a short trip to Scotland I bring a big pouch of tobacco to
share with everyone. I got it as a gift and gift it for common use. Everyone is
happy.

During my stay I get to experience amazing dance shows, concerts,
performance art, stage poetry, deep discussions, laughter, joy, friendship, drama,
arguments, house meetings, a bicycle tour of the city, free visits to some of the
best art galleries in the world, even the opening of a squatted fire station. These
inspiring get-togethers are the salt of a squatter's life.

The Shell has been squatted thrice already. Presently the squatters are
fighting a court case. They have drawn a schedule according to which people share
the responsibility of attending the weekly court sessions.

I admire the dedication, support, friendship, trust and determination they
show, while living with this sense of uncertainty. The squatters need to accept the
fact that any day, when coming home from work, they might not have a home
anymore. Eviction is a real possibility. When it happens, all their efforts are flushed
down the drain. They have worked so much to refurbish the tumble-down building, to create a community, not just for them but for the whole neighborhood. Then, overnight, all that can be lost.

They will be evicted soon, no matter what they say in the court. Yet they are prepared. They have escape plans for the police attack. They know where they spend the first night when the eviction happens. They are even prepared to re-open the place after the dust has settled. And they have other buildings in mind if this one cannot be reclaimed.

Most importantly, they have secured the support of friends and the neighbors. There will be a massive resistance party, a couple of days full of free workshops, discussions, legal counseling, catering and performances.

Unfortunately I have other plans and cannot stay for the party. Still, I am grateful for the time that I had with these amazing people. I know that I will stay in touch with some of them.

And, one day, I might knock on another door that is opened by an old friend from The Shell. I might not remember him at once but, rest assured, old friendships can be rejuvenated in the most unlikely places.

**Tips for finding shelter:**

**Short Nap:**

Hospex and House Sitting

**Proper Siesta:**

Sleeping Outdoors

**Deep Slumber:**

Squatting

**Short Nap: Hospex and House Sitting**

Sometimes it is nice to sleep indoors on a mattress, a couch or a real bed. This is where friends come in handy - not just to have a place to stay but to get to know them better through temporary shared living. How many true friends do you have? Who would you
like to get to know more? What if you would try living a month without permanent address, going from one friend to another?

For me the practice of staying with friends started already when I was just considering moneyless life as an option. I let go of my flat, did a bit of traveling over the summer, came back and found myself homeless, facing the crisp Finnish autumn.

I have no place to stay but I want to focus on two of my passions: cooking and writing. I wonder where I could make that happen. My friend from Joensuu, North Karelia, suggests that I come live with him for a while. He has a day-job and no time or energy to cook and eat well.

I accept his offer gladly because it really is a win-win deal: I get a roof over my head and can concentrate on doing research for my upcoming book whilst he gets to have warm, nutritious meals upon returning home from work. I am yet to discover the beauty of dumpster diving so he pays for the ingredients. Even so, his food costs do not really increase. Why? He gets to cut down on take away portions and home delivery. Unhealthy pizzas are replaced with home-cooked meals.

What starts out as a two-week experiment goes on for eight months. This is my safe landing pad to full-time moneyless life.

What if you do not have prior contacts in places where you would like to stay? Hospitality exchange, hospex, means that strangers offer accommodation to each other. This is by no means a new phenomenon. It has existed for decades. Yet only through internet it has gained more and more popularity. Although many hard-core travelers do not like the way Couchsurfing has been managed, it was this particular site that took hospitality exchange to the mainstream.

The idea is simple: as you register, you create a profile where you shed light on your background, travel plans, dreams and personality in as much detail as you wish. If you need a place to stay, you can search for other users who offer their couch, bed, mattress, guest room or floor space for temporary use. It is based on voluntary participation and it is entirely free. Afterward you leave each other a reference that builds up your reputation in the community. The more positive references you have, the
easier it gets. There is no expectation of reciprocity. You may only want to be a guest or a host, or do both.

Of course, your sole motivation should not be free accommodation. Only get into Couchsurfing or other hospitality exchange services if you are eager to learn about the person who offers you the accommodation. You can learn about her culture, background, thoughts, friends and daily life. Be part of her life for a while. You might take part in her hobbies, get to know her family or just cook and chat together. Although your first contact with this new person is quite short-lived, nothing stops you from meeting again. Sometimes you make friends for life.

People usually tell in their profile whether they appreciate getting requests well in advance or if you should only contact them a couple of days before your arrival. Some spam the same message to a dozen potential hosts. I do not recommend doing this. It is quite obvious for the recipient and makes you look like a jerk. I tend to read the profiles carefully and only approach people who I genuinely wish to spend time with. Once your couch request is accepted, you agree with your host when and where to come. Since internet connection on the road can be rare, it is good to take note of the address and directions beforehand. Knowing that you have a place to stay in your next destination is rare luxury for an uncertainty-prone hitchhiker.

The whole idea of systematically choosing to extend your hospitality to total strangers is just revolutionary. It breaks the boundaries and limitations set by our culture and enforced by our upbringing. At least my dad was full of great advice: “Do not trust strangers!,” “Never ask for help from anyone!,” “Be independent!” and so on. The list of warnings I have heard is endless. Luckily, I chose to do just the opposite.

But it was not easy at first. Even before I started on Couchsurfing, I happened to host a French fellow who I did not know from before:

There is a free concert in a park in Helsinki. We sit on the lawn and enjoy the last bits of summer. My friend introduces me to a guy from France who is touring Europe with his tiny car. He asks if I could put him up for the night because he has had a sudden change of plans and cannot host him after all.

I am baffled. “How do you know this guy?” I ask.

“I don't. It's called hospitality exchange,” he explains.

I agree to his request because I trust my friend. Still, I have doubts.
I give him a place to stay and leave for work in the morning while he is still fast asleep. I tell my colleagues that there is some random guy at my place. They keep joking that most likely he will steal all the valuables and I get to return to an empty flat. Somehow this kind of humor does not relieve my tension.

As I get back home in the evening nothing has been stolen. There is a note on the kitchen table praising my hospitality from earth to heavens. Next to the note there are two bottles of exquisite Latvian beer from his travels. For a fleeting moment I am embarrassed. Why did I doubt this guy? Why didn't I see more effort to get to know him? He could have had a great story to share.

Still, I am grateful to my friend who semi-accidentally showed me this unknown world of hospitality exchange.

In the beginning of my travels I was an avid Couchsurfer. I have surfed on couches around the world. I have been a guest about 100 times and hosted some thirty people. At a point I started to limit my search to like-minded people who are part of the “Hitchhikers” group. After a while I stopped using Couchsurfing altogether. There was no need for it anymore.

Today I have hundreds of great friends all over the world. For me the problem is not where to stay but how to decide who to visit. There are just so many amazing people I want to re-connect with.

Another reason why I stopped Couchsurfing is that it does not go that well together with hitchhiking. On the road you do not always know where and when you will end up. It is difficult to arrive in a certain place at a given time.

Furthermore, if you travel without a smartphone you cannot really keep your host informed of sudden changes. This leads to unnecessary gray hair and is not really respectful for someone who is expecting you.

Then again, as I already hinted, there is a Couchsurfing group dedicated only for hitchhikers. These people usually understand your mentality, changing situations and the time-related uncertainty involved with traveling by thumb. You arrive when you arrive and they are happy to host you.

As said, a new hospitality exchange service called Trustroots34 was developed to this particular need and target group. It is made by true travelers for true travelers.

34 https://www.trustroots.org/
Another option is BeWelcome\textsuperscript{35} that also has some hitchhikers using it. Moreover, there is the Hitchgathering Facebook group\textsuperscript{36} where you can ask to be hosted by fellow nomads, even on a short notice.

Finally, if you just end up in a particular city without a plan you might want to check if there are, for instance, some Couchsurfing events nearby. Meet people face-to-face and make new friends in an instant. In some countries, like Turkey, it is usually enough just to stand on the street for a while and people come to talk with you. Some of them might invite you over.

Naturally, hospitality exchange is not limited to hitchhikers and backpackers only. The cyclists have their own WarmShowers network\textsuperscript{37} When cycling you can actually have a plan and divide your route in suitable intervals. This allows you to plan your stay in chosen villages, towns and cities. Lea, who has cycled across Europe, written a Bicycle Touring Guide\textsuperscript{38} and contributed to the Manual for Cheap Travels\textsuperscript{39}, shares her Warm Showers experience:

“All Warm Showers people, both guests and hosts, are cyclists. That's why these people are different from Couchsurfing hosts. Instead of asking you a million questions, or making you go out with them, they just point in the direction of the shower, take your dirty laundry and the dinner is usually already set. They are extremely hospitable.

There are generally way less users than in Couchsurfing and some of the profiles have not been used in years. The ones that are active all respond, and usually the response is affirmative. Cyclists that host cyclists are often very kind, curious and lively, yet non-extravagant, people. With them you can have a discussion on just about anything. They listen with eyes full of wonder. These are the kind of people who make their own jams.

Those guys know a thing or two about bicycles, so they often offer their help fixing things up, even spare parts if they happen to have them. Most of them are couples. They have done crazy inter-continental tours or even trips around the

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\item \textsuperscript{35} \url{http://www.bewelcome.org/}
\item \textsuperscript{36} \url{https://www.facebook.com/groups/hitchgathering/}
\item \textsuperscript{37} \url{www.warmshowers.org}
\item \textsuperscript{38} \url{www.thetravelclub.org/articles/traveloscope/693-bicycle-touring-guide}
\item \textsuperscript{39} \url{www.thetravelclub.org/articles/traveloscope/658-manual-for-cheap-travels}
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world. Hence, they are an invaluable source of practical information and fun stories. WS rules!”

Lea's story reflects the fact that even the most seasoned traveler might sometimes get exhausted and does not want to be overly social. Those who appreciate privacy do not necessarily have to pay for AirBnB. A free option is to become a house-sitter. This means that you take care of someone's home while they are away. Depending on the arrangement you have, you might engage on small maintenance tasks like watering plants and feeding pets. In exchange you get to stay there for free and use the amenities; cook in the kitchen, wash in the bathroom and do your laundry.

Sounds like luxury, doesn't it? Some residents or apartment owners even pay for having a reliable house-sitter. Personally, I have only tried this with old friends. Let's hear from full-time global nomads Päivi and Santeri Kannisto⁴⁰ who have been on the road for more than ten years:

“You should inquire house-sitting placements from your friends and ask them to spread the word. All sorts of web-based services are mainly interested in the contents of your wallet.

We have been in both large and small homes and flats. Our tasks have varied depending on the place. At times we have been cat and dog sitting. Sometimes we have overseen the staff and paid their salaries with the house owner's money. The quality has ranged from middle class flats to luxury houses.

We have always enjoyed these arrangements. However, we don't recommend house-sitting to anyone, because we want all of these places for ourselves.”

Pretty much everyone I know who have experience of this kind of temporary shelter arrangements happen to be over forty years old. It might be that, on one hand, more experienced people appear more trustworthy and it is easier for them to get these placements. On the other hand, could it be that after a certain age even a traveler starts appreciating comfort, privacy and stability more and more? To meet these needs a few weeks or months of house-sitting can be a great opportunity.

⁴⁰ http://www.2globalnomads.info/
Proper Siesta: Sleeping Outdoors

We are winter-hitchhiking through Denmark. Somewhere on the outskirts of Copenhagen we get completely stuck. No rides in the dark whatsoever. The bitter cold starts bothering us.

To add variety to the experience, and to stay indoors for a while, we visit a nearby gas station. Out of habit, we check what they have in their bins. 15 kilos of candy! This is the biggest sweet-tooth treasure I have ever found. Since there is no way we are going to eat it all, and we have nothing better to do, we approach people visiting the gas station and offer the sweets to them. The first one is a pregnant woman who gladly accepts the gift. Others follow. Still, no matter how many boxes we donate we are left with ridiculous amounts of sugary treats.

Eventually we get tired. We need to find a place to sleep. But where? Staying outside is out of the question in this weather. We walk back to a rest stop where there are two toilets. We choose the ladies' room because it smells better and the odds are that the guys' side would be frequented by the truck drivers. Although I wear everything that I have, the freezing night gets to me. A night not so well spent. Even the candies fail to warm us up.

In decent weather sleeping under the sky can provide some of the most memorable experiences you will ever have. You feel more free when you can travel without a plan and do not have to prepare for everything in advance. No worries of booking hostels beforehand. What is more, there is nothing quite like gazing into the vastness of a star-lit sky and being lulled to sleep by the warm winds. In winter, however, it is a different story. Things get a bit more challenging.

I previously mentioned that in Finland there is something called Everyman's Rights. This includes the right to temporarily camp in the nature, without the landowner's permission. The government maintains a network of simple dwellings in the woods that
can be used by anyone⁴¹ – and these are accessible year-round. Even firewood and cooking equipment are usually provided for free.

In most countries this kind of indulgence is unheard of. Yet temporary sleeping outdoors is possible pretty much anywhere. There are just two requirements: 1) Do not disturb others, 2) Avoid being disturbed by others.

Uninterrupted sleep is something a moneyless traveler is immensely grateful for. In the cities it is best to steer clear from centrally located parks because there can be loud traffic nearby or people who wake you up from your slumber. Some cities have night guards or cops prowling around. Apparently they get paid for making sure you don't sleep. Who knows what kind of crimes you might commit if you dozed off.

For these reasons I prefer abandoned buildings, remote piers and houses under construction. Or any even and somewhat clean surface for that matter. Just make sure you wake up before anyone comes in so you don't unnecessarily cause trouble for anyone. Remember also not to leave any trash behind.

You can also inquire from fire brigade, churches and other communal places if you could stay for the night. They might suggest you ask the police station but that hardly works. At least I never succeeded in voluntary jail accommodation. If you cannot find any other spot, feel free to join the local homeless people. They do not find it weird if you sleep outside and usually pick spots that are not frequented by hungry wolves, annoying cops or organ-stealing mafia.

Sleeping outdoors is easier in rural areas. I have spent many nights by the side of the road. As weather permits I sleep out in the open, under the stars, in my sleeping bag or without it. If it rains, there are always some empty houses and make-do shacks to have a roof over your head. If no other place is available just ask a camping ground if you could rest on their lawn. Usually they agree to this, especially if you arrive late at night and promise to leave early in the morning.

When I travel alone I just have my sleeping bag. In most cases that is enough. Of course a foldable or inflatable sleeping mat would sometimes come in handy. A free and temporary alternative for that is discarded cardboard. It insulates heat and moisture pretty well. For a while I even carried a king-size hammock with a DIY rain cover and ropes. It proved to be really comfortable. However, any extra gear adds to the load considerably if you prefer traveling light like me. I tend to live in the moment and carry

⁴¹ http://outdoors.fi/
as little as possible. I never had a travel-cooker or a tent, for instance. It is not so often that you actually need them, so why carry extra weight? If I don't have something, I do not really need it.

Having said that, when you are far away from civilization you need to respect the unpredictability of Mother Nature. Be prepared.

We are in sunny Bulgaria with my girlfriend. We are headed for an overnight trek in the mountains. We have left most of our stuff at the Couchsurfing host’s place with whom we stayed last night. We only carry small rucksacks with nothing but long-sleeve shirts, trousers, sleeping bags, water and some snacks.

We have agreed to meet with two local hitchhiker-friends. They live in the city but know this mountain range like the backs of their hands. Hence we put our trust in them and do not feel a need for any extra preparation. It rains in the morning but around midday the clouds give way to blissful sunshine.

Our friends are two hours late. Hitching in the rain did not go without complications. Regardless, when we meet them, they are excited to start trekking. The plan is to reach a wilderness hut somewhere in the middle of nowhere. Since we kick off so late, I doubt if we will make it there before nightfall. But our friends' carefree attitude is contagious. So we go.

We start up the hill and fill our water bottles in the last hotel before man-made civilization gives way to untouched nature. Up in the mountains we go skinny-dipping in a refreshingly freezing spring water pond. The route is adequately marked with red spots painted on rocks here and there. The views are breathtaking. According to the locals every single stone and bush in Bulgaria is in its right spot. Everything is perfect as it is. I finally understand why they say that. The mountains radiate magical energy. This really is close to perfection.

At nine o'clock in the evening we take a break and watch the majestically captivating sunset. Still, I cannot enjoy the moment fully. We are still far away from our goal, the hut, and we do not even have flashlights to trek through the night. I share my concerns. After some negotiation, we decide to camp right here. Why haste if the weather is nice? After all, we are all experienced hitchhikers to whom sleeping outdoors is no big deal.
We set up camp – an overstatement, really, because we do not have a tent or any other camping gear – and start collecting twigs and cones for the fire. Then, it happens: I feel a few drops of water on my skin. I look up. Dark clouds. You have got to be kidding me!

It starts raining. We borrow a few raincoats and plastic bags from our only neighbors who are better equipped and snuggle in their tent. Using what we have, we improvise a makeshift shelter under a thicket. I try to keep the collected twigs dry. Without fire to keep us warm, we would be screwed.

I fail. The wood gets wet.

When the night falls and others get into their sleeping bags, I still struggle to make a fire. Even if I manage to light it up momentarily, after ten minutes the fire dies out. I borrow a winter jacket from my Bulgarian friend but it soon gets wet too. Finally I give in, let the fire get soaked and slip into my sleeping bag.

We are only partly covered from the rain that keeps getting fiercer by the minute. I manage to get a brief shut-eye but soon I wake up shivering. My feet are wet and cold. I get back to my bonfire project, not expecting much success but just to keep moving.

Dawn marks the end of rain. I am tired and annoyed. I curse myself for not being better prepared. Once again nature gave a powerful reminder of its might and punished me for not respecting it. My Bulgarian friend rubs his eyes and complains how sweaty he is in his winter proof sleeping bag. He was prepared and slept for a good seven hours, now eager to continue trekking. I tell him about my sleepless night and admit that I have no choice but to get back to civilization. Pity.

What if you want a more permanent place outdoors? Is that even possible? Of course. Where there is a will there is a way.

In Scotland, near Edinburgh, there is a place called Bilston. A handful of activists occupy the forest. They live in tree-houses. When I saw the place it was like a small boy’s dream come true. Mark Boyle, on the other hand, used to live a couple of years in a caravan. Daniel Suelo has lived without money for years, mainly in Moab, Utah. The coldest months of the winter he lives with friends or does house-sitting but mostly he lives in caves. Yes, that is a plural. If a ranger evicts him from one place, Suelo takes his meager belongings and moves to another cave. He explains:
“In my lifestyle, I feel I have gotten the best of all worlds, house-sitting in nice conventional houses, squatting in abandoned buildings, sleeping in parks, sleeping on the side of roads and in the wilderness, sheltered under tarps, in tents, in trains, in garages, on rooftops, in treehouses and tree-sits. But my primary residence since giving up money has been in caves in a desert canyon.

What I like about caves is that they are ready-made homes, well-protected and well-insulated. And they are quiet, a good place to automatically, naturally meditate, better than any monastery or retreat center. I also get to see nocturnal wildlife, such as ring tails, that I’d never have the opportunity to see otherwise. Some of that wildlife includes pesky critters like mice, pack-rats, spiders, gnats, and kissing bugs. But pests are spice of life.”

I have intentionally left out the so-called off-the-grid lifestyle among the options. As much as people dream of ecological living - a small hut in the country, a plot of land to farm organically, windmills and solar panels, aquaponics systems and dry toilets, permaculture and spiritual practice, a nice mix of solitude and like-minded community – the truth is: today it is rarely free to live off the land.

Don't get me wrong, these are all ideas worth supporting. However, an entirely moneyless person might not have access to this kind of lifestyle in our modern money-centric society. Many who choose this path are surprised by the initial investment it takes to become self-sustaining.

What is more, life in the countryside might not even bring the carefree bliss that some alternative-minded city folks seek. On top of the time spent on building up and maintaining the eco village operations many are forced to keep their day-job to pay for all the costs involved. If you still wish to explore this option, and especially if you want to start a community from scratch, be prepared for the fact that it might take a good ten years before it is up and running.

It is already dark when we finally come to the end of this muddy road. It has taken us through the forest into an ecological Inanitah community. The place has operated for five years on the volcanic paradise island of Ometepe in Nicaragua.

42 www.inanitah.com
Due to its nutrient-rich soil and biodiversity, the island is an ideal platform for an organic farming community.

Inanitah was started by an American woman called Gaia and a German guy named Paul. We were in touch with Gaia already seven months ago when we were still in Croatia, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. She was fascinated by our chosen form of travel. “If you somehow make your way to Nicaragua, please come for a visit. We will then see how we can work together,” Gaia had said.

To Paul our arrival comes as a complete surprise. Gaia is still in Thailand and has forgotten to mention that there might be a couple of moneyless travelers on their way to Inanitah. Most of the volunteers pay for their stay and delicious vegan food some 300 dollars a month. We do not have that. It makes Paul thoughtful.

“You are welcome to join us for dinner. You can take a shower and sleep over there,” he explains with his calm voice and points at a building equipped with a couple of comfy hammocks. “Let's see tomorrow what we are going to do,” he adds. We feel welcome.

In the morning we agree to continue one day at a time and see how it goes. From breakfast to lunch we work: clean the pool, do weeding, prepare grow-beds, till the land, sow seeds and harvest what is ready. On top of that we take an active role in common tasks like cooking and cleaning. The rest of the time we swim, read and laze around in the hammocks.

We attend yoga and meditation. We talk with other volunteers and have fun. Others occasionally go for pizza and beer in the nearby restaurant. The only intoxicant we use are cocoa beans. We never leave the premises and eat only plants directly from the nature. This is heaven.

We work for three weeks, four hours a day. It does show as improvements in the garden but probably has no long-term impact. Gaia and Paul, together with the volunteers, have poured insane amounts of money, time and dedication in this place. For the whole five years of its existence there have been seven local workers who improve the place every weekday. They are paid double the average local salary, a couple of dollars an hour.

The premises have been professionally designed, with immense attention to detail. The dry toilet, for instance, was built by a German carpenter whose life's mission it is to become the world's number one dry toilet designer. And it shows.
This beautiful two-seater, made mainly of bamboo, caters both to those who prefer to squat and to those who rather sit down. Ventilation is well-arranged. There are no flies. Urine goes directly to the flourishing banana trees next to the toilet. The elevated floor makes it easy to maintain. Well done!

The most important success factor of Inanitah might well be the interpersonal communication process that guarantees both a pleasant stay and collaboration between people. Time is reserved for discussion, personal development, spiritual practice, planning, coordination and feedback. It would be easy to get stuck here for a longer while.

“Listen Paul, we should probably get going soon,” I suggest. Although he had some doubts in the beginning he has got used to having us around. We thank him for his dedication to make the world a little bit better. Inanitah is a well-functioning social enterprise that channels rich westerners' money into the development of Nicaraguan society. This is the kind of global capitalism I enjoy being part of.

How about moving to a ready-made ecological community? Sure, it is an option if you are ready to pay for your stay or to build your own housing. Many eco villages welcome visitors and volunteers for a few weeks or months at a time. One should bear in mind, nevertheless, that people who made it happen have poured buckets of sweat and tears to make their dreams come true. This is why long-term tourists are easily frowned upon. Simo Annala from Livonsaari Community Village comments on this:

“One can participate in many ways, not just financially. I think people outside the money system are welcome to the community as long as they participate in building and developing it. A community can be a great basis for a time-bank or other forms of exchange. Having said that, it might be difficult to enter the Livonsaari Community Village completely without money because the members are expected to purchase a share of the company.”

Heidi Tolvanen and her husband came to the Livonsaari Community Village without much money on them. They have built a hut for themselves. They tend to their animals and take care of their kids with minimum income. Instead of a car they have donkeys. Heidi explains:
“You can live on the countryside with very little money. There are things to do that city life cannot offer. Of course there are also many free things in the city that you cannot find in the backwoods.

There is hardly any slow life to be found in the country – busy and interesting life all the more. You might be able to find inexpensive places to live in the countryside. It depends of good luck and contacts.”

Another option is to occupy the land without buying it, although this does not fall among the legal alternatives. For example the Beneficio community, near Granada, Spain, started out and still is, after two decades, an occupied plot of land. Thousands of people have gathered there to make their dreams come true, often for free.

In many countries there are entire villages and towns without inhabitants, due to financial boom and bust cycles. They were built with high hopes but, when the economic situation suddenly changed, no one ever moved in. Should one have a good plan, great communication skills, a proficient team and loads of perseverance, it might even be able to get a permission to occupy these ghost towns legally. Even funding or some other free resources could be available for the most entrepreneurial activists. Often, however, squatting is the quickest, least bureaucratic and most straightforward way.

Deep Slumber: Squatting

Occupying unused space, also known as squatting, is a largely accepted practice in some countries like the Netherlands. The benefits are obvious: people take initiative to re-open closed down real estate, refurbish it and settle in. They get a place to stay and often create autonomous space to organize social and cultural activities that benefit the whole neighborhood. Yet during the past decade or so there has been a systematic effort to rid society of these unwelcome parasites.

The squatters come from very diverse backgrounds. Mainly they are students, ordinary working people, artists, anarchists and activists. Motives for squatting also vary.
Nonetheless, all are unified by the simple truth: it is better to keep built environments in use rather than let them remain empty and degrade.

Home is a human right, not a privilege. Depending on the point of view, squatting can be seen either as citizen participation or as civil disobedience. Both are needed.

In Finland squatting has been a visible phenomenon since the 1980s. Lepakko, “The Bat”, was a squatted youth and culture center that remained in operation for two decades. Oranssi, nowadays an association offering affordable housing for students, also has its roots in squatting.

In highly regulated societies such as ours, squatting is usually nipped in the bud and turned into reputable associations rather than allowing them to continue as free citizens' initiatives. Still, as the power concentrates in fewer and fewer hands, this kind of civil disobedience has its place in society. It questions the status quo and brings issues like homelessness into public discourse.

Although in most places squatting is nowadays illegal, I do not know anyone who would have done time for it. Especially if the neighbors, activist friends and lawyers support the squatters, it is hard to prosecute anyone.

For instance squatters in my hometown Joensuu demanded justice to protect one of the few remaining wooden houses in the city center. The police managed to break the demonstration and announced that anyone who does not leave immediately will be deemed guilty of this-and-that. One by one, hundreds of people approached the cops with the same message: “I am guilty as charged”. They just could not lock them all up. The court case would have been too expensive for the city. No one was ever prosecuted.

Would you be ready to join a group of squatters and re-open an empty building for good use? Could you handle the uncertainty, temporal nature and illegality associated with squatting? If yes, squatting is a free form of living worth considering. However, you should never go at it alone.

Squatting requires a dedicated group of people and hours of detailed planning. Start with choosing 5-7 devoted individuals, people who get along with each other really well. At least one of you should have prior squatting experience. It is a complicated process where knowledge is key. Experienced people can provide valuable insights, contacts and advice. Apart from this core group, you will need some helping hands with renovation as well as dozens, perhaps hundreds, of supporting activists who can be called for help when needed.
Choose the empty building with great care. Does it make sense to occupy this building? Is it safe for living purposes or are there health risks? Who owns it and what plans they have for it? How much work does it take to renovate it? Can the whole neighborhood benefit from the squat? Will they be supportive of your cause? How will you arrange utilities and equipment - electricity, heating, ventilation, insulation, sanitation, lighting, cooking and water? Are you able to take over the building without causing trouble or damaging the real estate?

Once the squat is open you need to be able to defend it in many ways. In most cases, you do not want to keep it as a secret. The more favorable publicity you get the better. Sometimes this means organizing a peaceful demonstration of 1,000 people. Often meaningful and communal collaboration with the neighbors will suffice. Without the neighbors’ support it is pointless to even try squatting a particular building. It is also good to have lawyers and media representatives behind the cause.

Tell a story that makes sense and source public support. Mere social media might not be enough. Get ready to inform about the progress proactively and give interviews if the media reacts. Agree together who says what and when. Avoid mixed messages. Demand corrections if the cause is falsely presented.

Yet it is not just about campaigning. Most of your time will go in renovation and making the space livable. Where do you get the needed tools and materials? Who will be ready to help in practice? What parts of the building can be taken down without the approval of the owner? What should be built? Is the indoors air quality good enough? If not, how to improve it? Is there mildew, asbestos or dust? What is the contingency plan in case of a blackout or water shortage? The list of questions is endless and more will pop up when you roll up your sleeves and get to work. A squat always needs some fixing, mending and improvement.

An anarchist environment without hierarchy might be well-equipped for shared leadership and consensual decision making. Still, it does not shield you from interpersonal schisms. Someone needs to direct and focus the discussion for common good. Usually the loudest and most expressive tend to take charge and, often unconsciously, end up creating unneeded power structures. Those who are naturally more silent, analytical and introverted might not get their voices heard. Unwanted cliques between groups might arise.
How will you handle the communication between people? What guidelines do you have for accepting new residents and taking in visitors? Who will collect the food, where and when? Who does the cleaning? Who will do the dishes? How will you solve other challenges that might arise when living together? How do you ensure an open and loving atmosphere without silencing creative dissent? What is your evacuation plan? Where will you go if you are evicted? What is the long-term purpose of the space? Will it be converted into a legalized social center? Are you ready to pay small rent or use another space if the officials suggest a compromise? Will you continue occupying other buildings after this?

Because squatting is temporary and possibly illegal, you cannot find most of the squats online. The most reliable and often only way to get to know squatters and their living spaces is personal recommendation. On the road you will get to know all sorts of people. Keep your eyes and ears open. Ask the locals if they know any squats. In some countries such as United Kingdom the squatters are very organized and they have their own info centers. These are good places to get firsthand practical information. I cannot provide it to you because I never was part of opening a squat. I just lived in them temporarily. And absolutely loved it!
One of the many options for spending a night.

Photo: Lea Rezić
Next up: Health and Security

Although the decision to live without money can sound like a huge step, it was preceded by a much greater and more influential decision. I decided not to be afraid anymore. I chose love over fear. Here I am not referring to romantic love but to a profound trust in the fact that no matter what happens the world will take care of me.

This might sound naive and idealistic but for me it was a fundamental shift in perception. Is there anything in our current mainstream society that supports a loving attitude? Or is it rather fear that is used to control people?

Most parents tend to protect their kids and constantly warn them about the dangers out there. History classes tell about the atrocities of the past. Media communicates a plethora of tragic events every day. Our fellow human beings, especially the ones who look different than the majority, are portrayed as bogey men and scapegoats for a grand variety of problems. News is filled with fear, terror and threats. Representative democracy is far away from the etymological root of the word; Rather than taking care of common issues, many party politicians concentrate on maximizing their own benefit while holding grudges with their opponents. Consumers are driven to want things by selling fear. Behind every happy-happy-joy-joy commercial there is the flip side: “If you don't use this soap, you will remain single for the rest of your life”, “If you don't take this insurance, your family will be doomed”, “If you don't drive this car, you cannot possibly be free”, “If you don't take these pills you will suffer” and so on.

So, yes, it is a big decision to ignore all this and decide not to let fear guide your life. How can one attain a feeling of security without a whole lot of money? What if something happens? Can a moneyless person get medical care for free? My trust-based thinking was, and still is, that if I die in a society where no one is willing to help if I do not pay them, I do not want to live in that kind of society. So, did something happen? Did I receive care? Find the answers in the next chapter.
LOVE OVER FEAR

After an agonizing 36 hours of freight boat hitchhiking, we finally reach Roatan, a paradise island in Honduras. We have subsisted mostly on white bread and battered chicken, food that the locals seem to eat every single day. Either I have digested something improper or my stomach just does not agree with this unhealthy diet. My belly rumbles like a tumble-dryer, as if crying for some leafy greens. No chance. As they say, beggars can't be choosers.

We hitch around the island and dream of snorkeling in the turquoise waters. But this time it remains a dream. A terrible diarrhea hits and drains me of energy. No activities for me. Just rest, rest, rest.

For a couple of days I moan in pain, drink a lot of water and try not to get too dehydrated in the heat. We spend a night at a local fire station. Dinner, shower and sleeping in an air-conditioned room are somewhat refreshing after so many nights outdoors, but the physical pain remains.

I have got used to occasional traveler's diarrhea and I know this too shall pass at some point. This time, however, it gets real bad and I need to find some solution. My lovely travel buddy asks if she could use the few dollars she has to buy some medicine. Or would that be against my principles? I am too weak to resist.

I lie on the beach, powerless, as she goes looking for pills. She finds some in the tourist info, under the counter. We do not know what they are but I just gulp them down with a few spoonfuls of oatmeal and go to sleep.

In the morning I feel a little bit better. I leave a stool sample in the bathroom of a fast-food joint. Still the same vile-smelling liquid. I am about to get up from the toilet seat when my heart literally misses a beat and my legs fail to support me. I drop on the floor, holding my chest, gasping for air. A minor heart attack, I presume.

This is bad. Alarmed, I just breathe on the floor for a good 20 minutes before I dare to get up. Tears run down my cheeks when I realize how I could have died, so far from some of the most important people in my life.

I try to rationalize what just happened. The only scapegoats I can think of are

44 Years later, I find out that I have some sort of wheat allergy or gluten-intolerance. This too shall pass.
the three decades of unhealthy living habits, not prioritizing my health, and the last night's shady drugs.

I survive but curse my weakness: why did I look for an easy way out instead of just waiting for the suffering to cease on its own?

**Tips for health and security:**

- **Some Safety:** Seek Help Without Shame
- **Protective Wall:** Trust Is Your Best Insurance
- **Total Security:** Accept Death

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**Some Safety: Seek Help Without Shame**

Like some hygiene products, many drugs that we use are far from being essential to human health. Would you be able to drop some pharmaceutical products and instead put emphasis on a balanced and happy life? How might you use natural remedies instead?

We are psycho-physical beings. Many physical symptoms spring from psychological imbalance. When I managed to replace schedules and illusion of control with freedom and gratefulness, it made me healthier. Of course the daily physical exercise - carrying a backpack and walking to places - helped substantially. Moreover, vitamin D directly from the sun worked wonders. Nevertheless, it is a proven fact that your mind has an effect in your wellbeing. That is how placebo works. If you think you are getting better, you do.

Could a mere change of environs make you feel better? How about some variety? What would be the effect if you had more time to relax or concentrate on activities that you love? Do you get enough everyday exercise?

This kind of preventative healthcare can already improve your quality of life considerably. But what if you actually need to get some medical assistance? Is there any chance to get free healthcare?

Time-banks have existed for a long time – excuse the pun. Now, in the digital age,
they are gaining just more and more popularity. These “mutual credit systems” are based on the idea that people in the neighborhood help each other, based on their skills and interests, and they use a complementary currency as the medium of exchange. No Euros or Dollars change hands. Usually time-banks value all work equally. Though if it is defined in common rules, the members are free to assign any value for their work.

Time-banks are full of health and wellness services: nutritionists, massage, pedicure, acupuncture, psychotherapy, life coaching etc. There are other services as well. Imagine Joan cuts Mike's hair and is compensated for her efforts, based on how much time it takes. She can then use the currency she got from Mike to ask Dave to fix her car. Dave then purchases home-made apple cider from Mike. No one needs to go in debt. Everyone gains something. Everyone contributes.

If, however, you cannot find specific help from your local time-bank – or among your friends and family – it is okay to be creative. Go ahead: ask around!

I am in Austria, about to leave for my friends' wedding in Croatia, when a piercing toothache starts bugging me. I am used to just ignoring pain, living through it. Eventually I feel fine again. This time, however, it just gets worse. I picture the rotten roots of my wisdom tooth. As the ache becomes intolerable I start to be convinced that probably my whole jaw bone needs to be removed.

I am thinking and thinking how on earth I could see a dentist without paying for the service. In my mind I flip through a catalog of friends and acquaintances but I cannot remember any dentist contacts nearby.

Then it hits me: perhaps there are dentists who use Couchsurfing! I enter “dentist” as a keyword and search for hosts in Salzburg, Vienna, Munich and Zagreb. In the capital of Croatia there is one. I contact him immediately.

I do not have time to wait for an answer. Next day I hitch to Zagreb. The pain just gets worse. As soon as I get to my friend's computer I check my messages. There is an encouraging reply: “I don't have my own practise but I have arranged you to meet with my friend who is also a dentist. Don't worry about the costs. Let's just get that tooth fixed.” What a relief!

Next day I am seated in a nice female dentist's chair, hopeful that the throbbing pain would soon go away. She grabs the bright light and places it in front

45 See e.g. www.community-exchange.org
of my face. This brings back unpleasant memories. I tell her that I am not the biggest fan of professional dental care; that this is my first check-up in eight years.

She promises to be careful and reaches for the sound system. She turns up the volume and lets Rock ‘n’ Roll muffle the hideous sound of the horrendous saliva-sucking vacuum cleaner that goes in my mouth. I try not to think what other instruments of torture she has in store for me.

“Have you eaten corn?” she soon asks. I shake my head baffled. She reaches out to my wisdom tooth, removes a stuck popcorn kernel and shows it to me, looking amused. Right. Apparently there is no need for jaw removal after all. I feel stupid but finally at ease.

I get up from the chair and we chat joyously. She wishes me good travels and even gives me some mouthwash and toothpaste for free. I praise her from earth to heavens and try to make her understand how much this means to me.

I smile the whole day. Why wouldn't I? My teeth are white as fresh snow and I have been helped by someone who does not work for money. She serves others and fulfills her place in society because it is her passion.

Protective Wall: Trust Is Your Best Insurance

We are in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, blissfully unaware of the fact that this is statistically the most dangerous city in the world, a murder capital.

It is dark already. We stroll in the shady suburbs with one goal in mind: We would like to watch the decisive football match in which Team Honduras could ensure their participation in the World Cup in Brazil.

We stop in front of a car mechanic's shed. There is a TV on the yard. They arrange some chairs in front of the TV set, clearly getting ready for the match. As they spot our hopeful faces, they invite us to join them.

Soon we are cheering for Honduras and drinking ice-cold beer that they offer us. Behind me there is a young black man, wearing a uniform and holding an assault rifle on his lap. Apparently he is some sort of a police officer. As the game ends and Honduras secures its place in the World Cup the man stands up, takes his
gun and starts shooting in the air wildly. Everyone cheers.

The mechanic's brother, already quite tipsy, asks us to join him for a ride. We climb in the back of his pick-up truck and he starts cruising the streets somewhat uncontrollably. We avoid a couple of close accidents and laugh at the crazy party filling the streets.

We make a stop at his girlfriend's parents' house. Suddenly a gang of a dozen armed youngsters surround the car. They do not even look in our direction but point their pistols, UZIs and other fire arms directly at our driver. We follow the unreal incident as if it was a motion picture. After some heated exchange of words the gang just leaves. No bloodbath this time.

We return to the mechanic somewhat tired already. He invites us to lay our sleeping bags on the floor of the dusty back room. Gladly we accept the offer. The drunken party outside becomes louder and louder: Rhythmic music, joyous shouting, screeching of tires and repeated gunshots. They seem to have a really good time, in their own peculiar way. It is amazing to witness this celebration. We fall asleep feeling happy and grateful. And we are not scared.

What is the opposite of love? No, the answer is not hate. The opposite of love is fear. All of our emotions derive from either love or fear. Even hate is a derivative of fear. The same goes for prejudice and intolerance, toward people who look different or behave differently than the majority. What is unfamiliar makes people afraid. It is not just the greedy advertisers, power-hungry politicians and scandal-seeking media who reinforce the message of fear in our society. It is mainly us, the people.

If you wish to become less driven by fear, tackling all the issues separately takes a long time. There is a shortcut. You can simply decide to ignore fear and focus on love. In other words, you get out of the vicious circle, where everything is dangerous and potentially harmful, into a positive feedback loop. You put your trust in the universe and good things start happening. This reinforces your trust and, voilà, more good stuff comes your way. After a while you even stop thinking along the lines of “good” and “bad” altogether. Things just happen and you consciously choose to react with love.

Peace Pilgrim encourages us to this direction:
“There's no greater block to world peace or inner peace than fear. What we fear we tend to develop an unreasoning hatred for, so we come to hate and fear. This not only injures us psychologically and aggravates world tension, but through such negative concentration we tend to attract the things we fear. If we fear nothing and radiate love, we can expect good things to come. How much this world needs the message and example of love and faith!”

For me the decision to focus on love rather than fear was clearly a prerequisite for increasing my inner peace. I had made my decision to start living without money and I became happier. Yet there were people who tried to talk me out of it. My parents, some friends, a few total strangers and even a well-read government bailiff all echoed the same sentiment: One just cannot survive without having some financial reserves to fall back on.

Yet I did. I came to realize that, in their critique, these people portrayed their own fears. Even to that, I learned to react with love. It is a matter of personal choice. Albert is able to explain this so well:

“The problem is that, since we’re born, our society presents certain invented fantasies as tangible, unquestionable truths. But, in the end, those ideas are simply a particular culture’s view of life. Ideas like money, possessions, religions, monogamous love and good manners are actually contingent, relative to a specific set of ideas that we call culture. Yet the members of that particular culture take them as unavoidable truths, instead of realizing that they’re just one of the options that you can choose, among so many others. You may choose to live with money, but you might as well choose to live without it. And if you don’t want money, if you don’t want to work eight hours every day in exchange for a certain degree of security, stability and comfort, well, then your choice is as valid as anyone else’s. But this, in a society like ours, is not believed or known by everyone.”

Ridding yourself of fear does not necessarily require massive sacrifice. Small acts of kindness that make you step out of the learned routine and increase trust between people are a good starting point. What kind of everyday anarchy could help you unlearn the conditioned thinking and take you to a new direction, without artificial boundaries?
What simple things would enable you to trust people more? Make a list right now:

1. ______________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________

What are the actions you listed? Can you start with one of them today? Are you able to make all of them happen within a week? Are you afraid to get started? Do you feel ashamed? Are you thinking of postponing these for later? No. Start now! Get them done and see what impact it has on you.

If you cannot think of anything right now, here are a few examples that have helped me and might prove to be beneficial also for you:

1. **Participate in Human Library!** The concept of human library (or living library) is simple. Readers, ordinary passers-by in a public place, go through a catalog of book titles that could range from “Amish” to “Asexual Anarchist” and from “Insane” to “Illegal Immigrant”. They can borrow the book for 20 minutes. The catch is that the book is an actual person and the title is one part of her identity – usually something she has faced prejudice for. The reader can then use the limited time to ask anything from the book, the more personal questions the better. The only rule is that the book needs to be returned in the same condition as it was when loaned. This is a great concept for facing and alleviating one's prejudice in a safe environment. Are you interested to be a book or a reader? Search online to find out if there is a human library event near you. If not, you can always start one.46

2. **Perform in public!** Are you afraid to voice out your opinions or to stand out in the crowd? Step out of your comfort zone and seek out an opportunity to face your fears. Toastmasters47 can teach you public speaking and Open Mic events are free for anyone to climb on the stage, to perform anything. Especially first-timers are

46 [www.humanlibrary.org](http://www.humanlibrary.org)
47 [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)
appreciated and encouraged. Whether you get your creative spark from music, stage poetry or break dance it does not matter. Whatever you share on stage can help you get those butterflies in your belly moving and create a unique connection with others who co-create this beautiful space with you.

3. **Invite your neighbor for a visit!** Especially in the so-called developed world we have lost the sense of community almost entirely. We moan about it in intellectual conversations yet do nothing to fix the situation. We do not even know our own neighbors. Come up with any excuse to ring your neighbor's doorbell. Offer them extra food that you cooked or ask for salt. Invite him for a cup of coffee and get to know your fellow man. Regardless of the outcome, repeat the process next week with another neighbor. These are tiny steps to increase trust, human connection, peer-to-peer support and local resilience.

But what do you really need to take care of your health and wellness? This is what my hitchhiker friend Matt has done:

“Instead of paying for health insurance in my travels, I invested in knowledge. I am a certified wilderness first responder, and have spent months learning from Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics, as well as indigenous peoples and eastern medical practitioners.

I have learned to care for my body, both to maintain health and what to do in times of illness. Western medicine is great at dealing with trauma, but is generally crap at disease without a pharmacy nearby.

I do not ascribe to the use of pharmaceuticals unless in absolute dire straits. I carry with me extremely potent antibiotics, provided by a friendly doctor, but I have never used them. I use antibiotic cream on big or infected wounds, but otherwise I rely on herbal remedies and specific diets.”

Insurance companies are in the business of selling fear. Genuine security does not come from being overly prepared for every possible “what if” scenario that might or might not happen. Being certain that all possible losses will be financially compensated has nothing to do with real sense of security. It rather comes from deep understanding
that everything happens for a reason. It is a certain trust-filled state of mind, the realization that, no matter what comes your way, you are able to adapt and live with constant changes.

I don’t suggest that you instantly get rid of your insurance policies. You may choose to prepare for financial losses if you do use money. In the end, letting go of a particular insurance policy solves nothing unless the decision is part of a bigger change process you presently undergo. I just want you to consider the underlying reasons why you took the insurance in the first place. Is the sense of security they sold you even real?

Even if you could pay for insurance you might run into trouble if you prefer to be location-independent. Insurances have been designed for sedentary people who only travel occasionally, maximum three months at a time. Here are some insights from Päivi and Santeri who are almost constantly on the move:

“We haven't had insurances ever since we left Finland in 2004. They are expensive and don't always cover what they promise. It is easier and cheaper to reside in countries where you can get inexpensive health care. Also, you should only carry things that you can afford losing.

Compared to someone staying home, it is much harder to even get an insurance if you are a nomad, because insurances are tied to the social security system of a particular country. For instance, if you are one year away from Finland, you are no longer entitled to Finnish insurances.

There are some international insurance policies but they are expensive and limit your travels. For example, they have clauses of countries in which no cover is provided.”

Then again, if you choose not to use money at all, having insurance is not necessary. Benjamin Lesage48 hitchhiked his way from Europe to Africa, then on a boat to South America, and from there to Central and North America, almost completely without money. His story shows how trust can be your best insurance:

“While traveling without money I learned, first and foremost, to trust in my future, in what was coming up, without fear or doubts. I had no other choice really. If it

48 http://en.forwardtherevolution.net/
wasn't for faith I would have stayed in Europe, I think, not able to cross the first threshold, my doorstep.

Somehow, I had trust from the beginning and it grew on the way as I witnessed the magic of life, the truth of the universe: you are what you give. In practice, traveling without money requires a good smiling face, aptitude to serve people, a good health, strong legs and a lack of fear. Yet it is faith that makes all this possible.

Faith, or trust, was my health insurance and I can say I could never have found a better one. It is universal, applicable in all countries. It is limitless and free. Thanks to faith, I didn't have to cure myself. I just didn't really feel sick. If I sometimes got tired or nauseous, I would just rest, eat fruits and drink water and life flowed back into me.”

So, where did my trust for the universe take me? Was I helped when help was needed? Or was money required to get help? No, all the healthcare I ever required was somehow arranged: stitches, pills and other remedies for free. Usually I did not even have to search for help but people helped when help was needed.

We are on the Pacific coast in Mexico, walking on the beach, warm sand caressing our toes. Shades of pink, purple and orange dance around the setting sun. Waves splash wildly in the shore and warm ocean breeze sends salty greetings from the sea.

It is off-season and there are hardly any tourists here. A short local guy passes us, a wide smile and pleasant gaze on his face. He greets us happily. Still, I cannot help but think that he has ulterior motives, that he would soon come to sell us something, not knowing we are nothing but moneyless tramps. Instead, he joins two gringas who sit on the beach. Good. Go bother them. They have money.

The ocean is quite rough but we gather our courage and jump into the waves. We play in the water like mischievous rascals, laughing and splashing water on each other, enjoying every moment of it. This is heaven.

But then, something unexpected happens. A treacherous ocean current pulls me away from the shore. I cannot reach the bottom anymore. It is too deep. I swim like crazy but the shoreline keeps retreating. I just cannot get back to safety.
Shit. This is serious.
The more I struggle against the current the more strength I lose. I try to catch the attention of my girlfriend. She cannot hear me over the roaming waves.

“Dude, take it easy,” I try to calm myself down. I realize it is pointless to fight against Mother Nature. The only thing I can do right now is to dive under the waves that keep getting bigger and bigger.

Finally, she hears me. I plea: “Can you help me? I am tired!”
She does not realize that I am in trouble, struggling to stay afloat. The waves seem to grow by the minute. I am literally out of my depth.

“I cannot swim anymore!” I repeat and somehow foolishly trust her to save me, not taking into account the fact that I am almost twice the size of her. Eventually, she comes to me and understands my plight. There is nothing much she can do though. She is a better swimmer than me but there is no way she could pull me back to the shore.

A massive wave hits us unexpected. We tumble around uncontrollably. When I surface I see her gasping for air. Great, now we are both screwed.

We continue diving through the waves but each stroke takes its toll on us. Not much energy left.

Another giant wave slaps me, out of the blue, and pulls me under. I lose the sense of direction completely. I don't know which way is up and which way is down. There is nothing I can do but try to get some oxygen. Somehow I get to the surface again.

We call for help, in English, in Spanish, even in Finnish. I don't think anyone can hear us, or see us. The amount of daylight is diminishing rapidly. Yet we shout, shout and shout – as loud as we can: “Help! Ayuda! Apua!”

A hefty wave puts an end to our commotion. I go under. This time I accidentally swallow salty water. It goes in my nose, in my ears. Water fills my every orifice.

No more struggle. Powerless. Helpless. Hopeless. Nothing I can do, but go with the force of nature and float in awe.

I let go of the illusion of control and admit that this could be it, the last
moment before death. For a fleeting moment I am filled with love. So peaceful, beautiful, blissful. Happy memories stream into my consciousness. I feel grateful for the beauty I have had the chance to witness over the course of my life.

Unable to resist anymore, I make my peace with death. Caress of the waves would not be such an awful final resting place after all, I reckon. I feel a connection between the water around me and the water I mostly consist of. Everything is okay. I accept any outcome. Yet I do not give in. Somehow, I still trust the universe to take care of me – perhaps more than ever before. Utter and complete trust.

Then, on the spur of the moment, I re-surface.

Wait.

What is this? I can feel the sand in my feet.

Miraculously the current has taken me back towards the shore. Totally beaten, yet happy, I take a few steps forward. I am safe. I am alive. I am.

I look around, searching for my girlfriend. She is still struggling in the waves, further away. Shit. I have absolutely no power left to go and save her. What to do?

Luckily, I see two men run from the shore towards me. One of them looks very familiar. It is the short guy we passed earlier. “Help her!” I yell to him and point at my girlfriend. “I am fine. Help her,” I repeat when he comes closer.

They get it and run past me, towards her. I drag myself in the shore, hoping she would be okay. Feebly, I fall in the sand.

Relieved, I watch how the men carry her out of the water. One of them leaves as soon as he has made sure she is safe. She comes to hug me.

We then turn to our savior. It is hard to find the words. What can you say to someone who has just saved you, someone to whom you owe every moment that follows, each new experience for the rest of your life?

“Gracias!” we manage to utter.

He nods, smiles and walks away.

He did not want anything from us after all. When he saw that we needed help, he arrived, saved our lives and left. Gracias, indeed.
**Total Security: Accept Death**

As said, most negative habits and emotions dawn from fear. And the most paralyzing fear we have is the fear of death. The more we let fear guide our life the less free we become. Fear prevents us from experiencing life, seeing it for what it is, a joyous adventure. Albert tells how he came into this realization on his first trip abroad at the age of 15:

“As I ran out of money I learned to hitchhike and started sleeping in parks and on beaches. I discovered that I didn’t need any money to travel. I understood deep in my soul that I would be able to spend the rest of my life traveling and that I would never need any money to do so, that my life could be an endless adventure if I so wished. That was one of the happiest moments in my entire life.”

Twenty-something Albert has now written two books, made a documentary film and visited some 80+ countries. There is no end in sight. He aims to maximize his happiness. The key to that seems to be acceptance of uncertainty and being grateful for what you have, fearlessly experiencing life as it is:

“I love not knowing where I am going to sleep, if I am gonna be cold or not, and where I am going to eat. After five days sleeping in the street, I find that I am genuinely happy simply because tonight I get to sleep in a bed. If I slept in that same bed every day, after a month I would take it for granted and it wouldn’t make me happy anymore. It would simply be ordinary.

The goal that really rules my life is to experience the maximum possible happiness before my time runs out and I die. Because of that, I could never feel satisfied if I just tried to adapt and get by in a certain society. I feel the urge to explore and investigate, to think and reason, to understand and discover as many ways to live as I can, in order to find in every aspect of my existence the best way that suits me and that makes me most happy, given my own particular characteristics.”

I hope this doesn't sound egoistic or selfish. It’s quite the opposite! Standard life proposed by our society seems to me much more individual and egoistic, much less collective than the one I have found optimal for my own happiness.

Search for the greatest possible happiness has led me to love the whole world, to give away all my money to charity, to live in a collective and to share everything with my companions – everything from my greatest pleasures to the most meaningless trivialities like clothes or the sparse belongings I happen to have.

I believe that, for most people, consciously seeking their maximum happiness would not lead to a self-centered life but, quite the opposite, to better understand and appreciate the world and the people around them, to experience the beauty of the Earth, of reality, and of all the beings that are part of it.”

This kind of thinking is not reserved only for a few lucky nomads and hitchhikers. Anyone can approach life with curious and trust-filled attitude. This does not mean that you should be a gullible, blue-eyed idiot who is easy to take advantage of. No. You should defend both your own rights and the rights of others. Yet the best way to get trust is to give trust. And the best way to regain and retain your childlike curiosity is to be curious, to go out there and see what the world has on offer for you.

Do you still feel that there is something holding you back? Is there a list of excuses that prevents you from going after your dreams? Do you have kids? Are you born in the wrong country? Do you have debt? Is there a disease that keeps you stuck? Is your body too weak?

Let it all come out! List your top three excuses:

1. __________________________________________

2. __________________________________________

3. __________________________________________

Now, there is a little something I have not told you about Albert Casals. He has gone through jungles, mountains, deserts, beaches, snow and forests. On Santorini
island, for instance, he climbed 588 steps on his own, although he is in a wheelchair. That is right. He is not afraid to travel, even without money and even though he has been unable to use his legs since the chemotherapy he received in his childhood. Albert is the happiest, most warm-hearted and inspirational person I know. He refuses to use his partial disability as an excuse and does not want people to pity him:

“I have traveled on the back of trucks, I have climbed cranes and abandoned buildings. My case is not really representative, as far as disabled mobility is concerned, because I have full strength above waist and I have had the chance to learn how to climb and do all sorts of tricks to carry my wheelchair around.”

Indeed, it is wrong to say that Albert is in a wheelchair. No, the wheelchair just goes with him. Albert has been close to death many times.

He has been trapped in an abandoned castle in Scotland in the winter.
He has woken up to a hurricane during the monsoon season in Thailand.
He has fallen in stormy water when he hitched the police-avoiding smugglers' motorboat to cross the Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama.
An insect bit him in Indonesia and he almost died because of an allergic reaction.
He has fallen from the top of a moving truck and slid down a forty meter hill.
After all this, was he afraid? What does Albert think about death? He sums it up:

“The only thing I would really dislike is to die. Usually when I realize I might die it is too late to be afraid, or I am just too busy trying to avoid death.”

As grim as it might sound, it is a deeply spiritual practice to contemplate death every day. What would you like people to say about you in your funeral? How would you like to be remembered? What is your attitude towards death? Have you become the person you always wanted to be? Have you ensured that your relationships are free of unnecessary grudges, so much so that you would not regret anything on your death bed? What are you grateful for?

Discuss these things with your loved ones or write your thoughts down if you want. If you find something to improve, perhaps now is the best time to fix things. Waiting does no good to anyone.
I once watched a documentary film where they interviewed people who are 100 years or older. Out of the dozen or so elderly all except one were just waiting to die. The one fellow who had no haste to get out of here was still living life to the fullest, playing music and enjoying women and wine. To him life was an adventure. Make sure you remember to live before you die.

Is it better to hold on to your childlike curiosity and excitement or avoid risks at all cost and struggle to postpone death that eventually arrives anyway? There is nothing extraordinary about death. It happens to everyone. The process called death starts the very moment you are born. It means the gradual degrading of your body and it has nothing to do with your higher self, your soul and spirit. Death is as natural as birth and in some cultures we still celebrate both.

But what happens after death? Pure bliss or eternal damnation? Your memories are blurry and, to an extent, the past is nothing but mere figments of your imagination, a story you have constructed for your own amusement. The future, on the other hand, has not yet happened. Except now. And now. And now. So, does it matter what happens after death if the only moment we are able to call reality happens right now?

Nothing in this universe dies. Energy just transforms, changes shape. Mind you, there is nothing metaphysical about these thoughts. It is pure science. If you do prefer a more metaphysical approach, could it even be that while your physical body travels “down here” your higher self is already “up there”? Either way, is there any reason to be afraid of death if it does not exist in the first place?
No fear!

Photo: Lea Rezić
Next up: Sense of Belonging

Throughout my travels people kept asking me: “Have you seen the movie Into the Wild? You remind me of that guy, Alexander Supertramp.” Before I saw the film I had no idea what they were talking about. It is based on a true story of Christopher McCandless, a former business student who retreats into the wilderness to figure out what life is all about. “Happiness is only real when shared,” he says. That quote still resonates with me.

We are social animals who should not escape from the rest of humanity, no matter how twisted it might appear to us at times. We need each other, the sense of belonging, as much as we need food, water, warmth and shelter to keep us alive.

I never wanted to isolate myself from others and become a disgruntled hermit. As I let go of money, my silly principles did lead me to a somewhat lonely place, emotionally. It was sometimes difficult to feel as part of the rest of society. Other people seemed to operate from a very different standpoint and often it was tiresome having to explain myself over and over again.

How do other people view your moneyless lifestyle? How did your parents react? What do your friends think? What about your own future family; don't you ever want kids? I have heard these questions countless times. Oddly enough, new acquaintances hardly ever ask what other sides there are to my identity than the petite fact that I refuse to use money.

People often love to assign labels to themselves and each other, and subsequently get boxed into a certain narrow and limiting category. Most likely I am no exception. Regardless of how much I tried to self-reflect and avoid making the moneyless journey an ego trip, I probably got some weird satisfaction of feeling different, even unique.

In early 2014 I started feeling that I am not getting any new life lessons from the road and that I am unable to use my full potential for the benefit of others. I stopped calling myself a moneyless traveler. Yet only later that year, after giving life on the road one more chance and screwing up yet another promising relationship, I realized that I seriously have to put an end to this sprint on my life journey.

Even so, through moneyless life I managed to re-connect with the true nature of humanity. When there is no medium of exchange between us, the person behind the counter stops being a mere service-robot and you are no longer labeled a passive customer. You are both just people. Suddenly, there is a chance to be connected as such, as people who share similar hopes, dreams, needs, aspirations, even fears – no matter
what your life story or background is. This is true empathy. This is what connects us. This creates the true sense of belonging.

In the next chapter we explore relationships of a moneyless person and try to understand things on even a deeper level. What prejudice a moneyless being might face? How to deal with other people? How to manage the conflicting norms and expectations? What effects can the decision to go moneyless have on romantic relationships, sex and affection? What kind of pitfalls can you expect? How might you continue to develop yourself and connect with others?

Let's get together and feel alright!
We arrange a weekend trip to a cottage in Nuuksio forest in Southern Finland. It is the same place and mostly the same group of friends as so many times before. I know it is going to be a lot of fun because these people are just amazing. We all tend to travel quite a bit so we do not always get to see each other that frequently. That is why these annual trips to the same cottage are all the more fulfilling occasions. Furthermore, the weekend's menu is mouthwatering. We tend to eat and drink in style.

This time, however, I am unable to participate in sharing the costs. I kind of know the answer already but feel like I should ask if anyone has anything against me being there, leeching on common servings. They just laugh and joke, making sure I understand what a stupid question that was. They do not care what kind of life choices I make or what my financial situation is. They want me to tag along because we are friends, true friends.

At the cottage we talk about our wild thirty-year-vision. Already in 2008 we decided that one day we will work together. Our plan is to open a restaurant in 2038 that offers a seven-sense-experience, in space.

We sit on the rocks, next to the barbecue place and sip beer as we talk. We estimate that the serious discussion probably takes less than an hour and there will be plenty of time for more light-hearted partying. To this end, we let our most silent and analytical friend start.

He tells how everything in his life has kind of automatically gone towards our common vision: “I know it's a crazy plan but, after all, I don't have any other long-term vision. So, I guess this is it.” We ask questions and let him elaborate. The first round of sharing takes five hours. Oops.

As expected, it becomes a high-spirited and joyous evening. It is great to have people in your life with whom, you can be certain, the friendship lasts for decades. When interpersonal relationships are not motivated by money and there is no way to benefit from you financially, you can rest assured that the people in your life truly care about you.

The envisioned restaurant business is not motivated by money either. Having a shared long-term vision helps us stick together. After all, it does not really matter
what the vision is as long as it enables our collaboration over the years. Therefore, a restaurant in space will do just fine.

Besides, I told you: we tend to eat and drink in style.

**Tips for connecting with others:**

- **Bit of Belonging:**
  - Dare to Stand Out
- **Truly Together:**
  - The Real Extended Family
- **Complete Cohesion:**
  - Love Your Aloneness

**Bit of Belonging: Dare to Stand Out**

As long as you do not pretend to be anything else than who you are, you will be accepted, regardless of the fact how far-out your lifestyle might be. Walk the talk. Be congruent. Dare to stand out. If someone does not accept the choices that you make based on what your heart tells you to do, then you might not need that person's company. It is okay to choose who you want to have in your peer-group.

Peace Pilgrim's voyage on foot was pioneering work. She chose her path and did not care what others thought about her. She tells how it feels to be different:

“In the poorer section I am tolerated. In the wealthier sections some glances seem a bit startled, and some are disdainful. On both sides of us as we walk are displayed the things which we can buy if we are willing to stay in the orderly lines, day after day, year after year. Some of the things are more or less useful, many are utter trash – some have a claim to beauty, many are garishly ugly. Thousands of things are displayed – and yet the most valuable things are missing. Freedom is not displayed, nor health, nor happiness, nor peace of mind. To obtain these, my friends, you too may need to escape from the orderly lines and risk being looked upon disdainfully.”
A free human being cannot be tied to a mold, to a certain way of living. There is no written contract, no website, where you could check what the prevailing social norm is. We figure it out based on our observations. We then can decide if we wish to follow the norm or take another path.

In many western societies the protestant work ethic still prevails. The norm there appears to be this: Grow up, obey your parents, go to school, obey your teachers, go to the army, obey your masters, get a job, obey your boss, consume, obey your desires, vote, obey the government, take a mortgage, obey the bank, watch TV, obey the media, get married, obey your spouse, make obedient children, buy them stuff, get a credit card, buy insurance, buy a car, buy a bigger TV, buy a beach holiday, buy a bigger house, pay the interest, pay taxes, drown your sorrows, get a divorce, work more, pay more taxes, retire, buy medicine, move to an old people's home, be obedient, stop whining, don't be a burden, don't be sick, buy the coffin, die, pay the inheritance tax, pay the lawyer, pay the funeral, pay your debts. Hey! Your payments have delayed. What do you mean you are dead already? Grow up! Obey.

This model is built for the needs of an industrial society. We are not considered human beings. We are tax payers, employees, consumers, cogs in the machine. If this model suits you, go ahead, continue. Do not change anything. Do not rock the boat. It is fairly easy to act according to the manual. Besides, if it occasionally feels tiresome, just remember: God loves you. Right?

Or would you rather toss the manual? If so, then you need to write your own rules, your own manual, your own social contract. Should you decide to take the roads less traveled, you need to face the consequences. Rocking the boat makes waves. And waves are frowned upon. Pretty soon someone somewhere tries to get you back in line. We are masters at reinforcing the rules set by our masters. Even the slightest form of disobedience is a threat to the status quo.

When I stopped using a mobile phone, letting go of it was a relief for me. No more expectation to be reachable at all times, like in the good old days before cell phones. This tiny bit of freedom was like a breeze of fresh air.

Yet this decision made others, especially my family, angry and shocked: “There is no way to contact you. Everyone needs to have a phone!”

These instant yelps of disagreement might dawn from the fact that, deep inside,
we know that the unwritten rules and norms are outdated or rotten to begin with. Yet the fear of uncertainty causes a reaction when someone makes even the tiniest crack in the wall of illusion. Even if I thought that my actions and inactions are solely my business, others feel threatened – as if their blissful, never-changing existence was somehow put under scrutiny.

I have noticed this same pattern repeat over and over again. There is a person in my life who instantly reacts based on what I do or don't do; my own father.

When I stopped eating meat he repeatedly told me that one cannot survive without meat. Not true.

Furthermore, I decided not to vote in elections. That pushed his buttons again; the boy does not participate in democracy!

Then I stopped watching TV. The boy who does not follow the news must be ignorant!

How do you think he felt when I told him I had stopped using money?
You cannot, and should not, please everyone. It is enough that you are clear on your underlying motivations, the reasoning behind the choices you make. You can try to explain and reason with others but remember that they are governed by their own beliefs, habits, values and social conditioning – even fears.

You can decide to change yourself.

You can even create conditions for others to change themselves if they so wish.

Ever heard of that guy who lived without money and wrote a book about it?

But you cannot directly change anyone else.

You and the people closest to you are often your worst critics. Even if others would not understand your wacky decisions immediately, they have no choice but to accept them eventually, when they see how beneficial the new direction is for you. And, finally, there will be those who never get you. With this kind of people you can at least agree to disagree. There needs to be no winners and losers, no matter how heated the arguments are.

It is more than likely that my father will never understand the choices I make. I do not agree with most of my father's opinions either. Yet I love him. And that goes both ways. Can you see the beauty in that?

As said, by letting go of the phone I finally got to decide when I am in touch with my friends and family – over email, Skype or Facebook. There was no need to carry a
laptop or tablet either. The world is full of computers that you can temporarily access, either at a friend's place or by asking around in Cyber Cafés. Important files are easy to upload in Google Drive or Dropbox.

The biggest relief is to realize that you don't really need to be connected to these services at all times. Having no internet connection means that there is plenty of time to be connected with nature and other people, away from the keyboard.

A moneyless traveler who is, to an extent, dependent on other's generosity, automatically talks to a lot of people and makes new friends. Sometimes these relationships only last as long as the person feels they get something from you. This non-financial exchange may take a form of an interesting conversation in a car. Or it could mean that you help them make their farm flourish. Yet when the exchange is done, they do not need your company anymore. And that is fine. Some, on the other hand, turn to life-long friendships. These people accept you as you are and truly connect with you.

The best and worst side of living on the road is the very fact that you make so many amazing friends that you cannot possibly hang out with all of them all the time. Nonetheless, true friendship does not require correspondence. Even after a decade of non-communication you may feel as if no time has passed. The loving connection is still as real as it was before.

Friendship is important for anyone. Taking care of it requires no money. Even so, going moneyless poses a certain danger to the existing friendships. If your friend remains in a day job whilst you stop using money, and you still wish to continue activities that you are used to, say conversations in a pub, this might develop into one-sided dependency. That is, if the issue is not discussed openly and early enough.

My old friends did not seem to mind buying me beers as long as they got to spend some time with me, whenever I happened to be around. Still, at times I could not help but wonder if, deep down, this one-sidedness actually bothers them. I did not want to be a burden, to make them feel that I am a taker who does not contribute anything. To lose an important friendship over something like this would be stupid.

We do not operate in a vacuum, as separate individuals. Human connections are always in a certain context, and some of your friends choose to follow the set social norms. That is okay. If you push your lifestyle too much or if they wish to make you snap out of your silly principles, this creates unnecessary friction.
Questioning the ubiquitous power of money can feel to some as if you questioned their religion, their God. For these people you become a heretic who needs to be either dealt with or ignored. Are you strong enough to face these tensions? Or would you rather just please everyone? How to behave when your heart screams for freedom whilst other people's expectations pull you back to the old ways? That is for you to decide. There is no guidebook. Dare to stand out.

Truly Together: The Real Extended Family

Usually it is our own parents who are the first to question our life choices. They have learned that sticking to the “normal” way of life is the easiest way. They do not mean anything bad when they question you. They just want their kids to have an easy life without trouble. Ignorance is bliss.

At least in the more traditional cultures, children are expected to do what parents tell them to. Questioning parents' advice is often frowned upon. Even grown up children aim to please their parents, either consciously or unconsciously. If you just wish to fulfill your parents’ expectations you end up ignoring your own needs and risk losing your direction, your true self.

It is one thing to honor your father and mother – as the Bible suggests – and a whole another thing to blindly obey them. As a matter of fact, “cutting the emotional umbilical cord” is often a prerequisite for one's personal growth. Naturally, this is easier said than done.

When I switched to a moneyless lifestyle it was a real shock to my parents. I am the first one in our entire family who has ever graduated from university. They felt that my decision to hit the road equaled to throwing away my hard-earned degree. They would have rather seen their son securing a well-paid job. In a way, their disappointment was understandable. Of course they also worried for my safety – what if something happens and I never return? They just could not fathom how someone could survive, let alone thrive, without money.

Especially for my entrepreneurial father, who himself hails from a very poor rural background and has worked hard to make money all his life, the idea of his son not
having any money was a shameful experience. Money, for him, is a matter of honor.

Little by little they had to admit that I was doing just fine without money: I enjoyed life more than ever, I became healthier and I appeared to be useful for others as well. My relationship with my parents improved. I am now good friends with them. I enjoy visiting them and spending time with them. Snapping the emotional umbilical cord was key to all this.

But is it possible to be moneyless and have a family? Is it possible to take care of the offspring in a modern society without using money?

I pay a visit to my friend Raphael Fellmer. He is a dedicated vegan, active member of the community, tireless volunteer, eager media figure and a moneyless father.

Raphael lives with his wife Nieves and daughter Alma Lucia in the garage floor of a private home in Berlin suburbs. They do not pay rent but Raphael takes care of the yard and does some maintenance work. Their home is simple but it has everything Alma Lucia needs: food, warmth, water, clothes and love. Toys are not required for playing when you have imagination.

Raphael always puts Alma Lucia's needs before his own principles. He does not let his moneylessness have an effect on her. Still, because he is a passionate change-maker and a hard worker, Nieves sometimes has to remind him to work less and spend more time with the family. Raphael listens, understands and shapes his schedule to fit the needs of the family. He radiates love and always smiles. It feels amazingly nice to enter a home with such kind ambiance.

We sit down for dinner. The tasty vegan food is either dumpster-dived or given directly from the store. Raphael has even negotiated deals with the shopkeepers and goes for rescue before they throw food away. He then distributes the surplus to those who need it. He has also started a food sharing platform that functions in the whole Berlin area.

“Do you use any money?” I ask Nieves.

“I have a 20-Euro note somewhere. I got it as a present. But I don't know where I put it,” she replies smilingly. Nieves is not limited by Raphael's lifestyle. She does use the German social security system to pay for some of their daughter's healthcare costs, for instance. Even so, it is obvious that money does not mean much to her either.
This is a wonderful family.

Raphael and Nieves currently have two kids. Their example shows, on one hand, that it might be possible to raise a family with very little money – or even completely without it. On the other hand, this goes to show that parents are individuals who do decide some things together but who are free to stick to their personal principles, too.

The tips in this book apply also to children's needs. There are many ways to live for free. Clothes can be swapped. Food is available with a bit of creativity. Many essential goods have free alternatives and some of the things, like diapers, are not really needed at all.

I know a fairly young hitchhiker, nicknamed Petit Bibi. He does not use diapers but practices the so-called elimination communication, letting his caregiver know when it is time for kaka-kaka.

A British woman called Hattie Garlick made an experiment and spent a year without buying anything for her son. She says that little John did not notice any difference in his daily life.

Giving time, love and limits to your child is not a matter of money. In strict western societies, however, where pretty much everything is regulated or illegal, dumpster-diving squatter-parents might be frowned upon nonetheless.

Would it be time for us to update our definition of family altogether? If you are constantly on the move, there is one thing that you will miss: spending time with the same great friends, week after week. With old friends there is no need to start over every time you meet and spend time getting to know each other. You can instantly dive into deep intellectual, emotional and spiritual exploration – or just crack foolishly offensive jokes without anyone getting hurt.

It is this quality of close human relationships that many modern day nomads miss. When two or more of these explorers meet, there is a certain sense of urgency. They know that soon this great new friend might not be there anymore. Thus, they do not

50 http://en.bibiontheroad.net/
51 http://www.diaperfreebaby.org/
waste time in pleasantries but dig deep and connect super quickly. That is why, for instance, the hitchhikers' family has such an intensely loving atmosphere. For many, this temporary family can offer more profound and significant sense of belonging than the family they were born into.

It might not even matter who the people you interact with are, as long as they are the kind of people you feel closely connected to. After all, we are one people. Individuality means that we observe the experience of humanity from various angles, yet in the end it is just one experience. Taking the spiritual bird's eye view, we truly are one family. This is how elf Pavlik sees it:

“Most people would, in what they consider a family, blood relations, help each other, do each other favors. Often it’s not welcome to offer or ask money for favors. At some point the whole humanity can function as sort of a big borderless family. We are all humans here, we are all related. Poverty isn’t a lack of money. It’s a lack of network."

How can it be that people like Pavlik are able to extend the concept of family outside their blood relatives? What has shaped their world view? How is it even possible to view everyone as part of your family although the surrounding society assumes that we are separate individuals?

Throughout ages people have used different methods to directly experience the oneness between us, to see reality as it is. Vipassana meditation works for some. Others prefer prolonged solitude in nature. Some use entheogens or shamanic rituals to reach the same transcendental state. In this place of love we are all One. There is no room for words like me and you. It is just us.

If you wish to rationalize this, you only need to understand that we consist of the same atoms as everything around us. Look at it this way: everything consists of molecules. These are formed of atoms that, in turn, consist of particles. Atoms are, in fact, 99.9999 percent empty space. The particles are vibrating energy. So, even what appears to be matter is not that solid to begin with.

Could we momentarily look beyond matter? Could it be that, while we experience this physical level of reality, we are at the same time connected in the place of love? Is

53 Adapted from http://www.shareable.net/blog/hacker-elf-pavlik-connects-the-moneyless-world
the notion of oneness such a crazy idea after all?

I try not to believe in anything but, rather, form my understanding based on direct experience. Nature has been my teacher in developing this certain view of reality. I have used Psilocybe cubensis (magic mushrooms) and mescaline (Peyote and San Pedro cacti) – each of them only once. That was enough. Also cannabis is an entheogen that I use very rarely, as part of meditation, to see and feel from new angles.

These substances have helped me to visualize the nature of reality, to briefly shift my focus from the physical level of reality to other levels. These, to me, are as real as what we experience in the daily life. Note, however, that you don't need to search for these natural guides. They come to you if you need them and if you are ready for them. They are not party drugs and you should never use them with the intention to “get high”. Approach them with respect, aiming for comprehension and clarity instead.

Having said that, if you have any problems with your psyche I do not recommend using any substances. Potent entheogens might trigger a panic attack, a psychosis or even schizophrenia. That is, if you have a troubled mind. Fearful and insecure people should not touch entheogens at all. What lies in your subconscious is not always such a pretty sight. Better let it be.

Besides, in some parts of the world these natural medicines are deemed illegal. However, although I am easily addicted to more harmful substances – like alcohol and nicotine – I never felt the need to use entheogens repeatedly. Perhaps it is better to just hug trees, stare at the fire, enjoy the full moon or go for a long swim. These natural activities should still be legal in most places.

The worst adverse effect for me was the difficulty to re-adjust myself to this somewhat crazy society. It took me years to come in terms with the fact that there is no need to rush to get back to the place of love, that I am already there, at all times, and that I should enjoy every moment I get to spend on this physical level of reality. Now I do. It just took a while.

Entheogens have also helped me to “see the other me” in my fellow human beings. If we really are connected, there is no point in harming anyone. If the higher self is One, hurting others would just hurt me. Approaching life from this angle makes you realize how much unnecessary dualism we have managed to create. There is no us and them. From this standpoint it is easier to treat others with loving warmth. You can forgive yourself, others and the world.
Complete Cohesion: Love Your Aloneness

I am in Poland, crying. My girlfriend has just informed me that she does not want to continue the relationship. Without realizing it, I have become a needy bastard. I have driven her into a corner with my demands. She has no choice but to dump me. I beg her to stay with me but she does not want to postpone the decision. She says that she loves me too much: “Later it would hurt you even more and I don't want that.”

She loves me so much that she dumps me? It sounds nonsensical at first. Tears run down my cheeks and I feel miserable. Right now it is very easy to assign all the blame on her new Italian boyfriend.

We have lived in an open relationship that I have falsely called polyamory. We both have had other partners but I always thought of her as my girlfriend. That is where the problem lies. She is not mine.

I have been incongruent: saying one thing and doing another. I vouch for freedom and non-possessiveness yet I want to own her. Isn't that just fantastic? A moneyless guy, who criticizes possessions, thinks he can have someone, own another person, and then blames everything on competition.

Later I realize that by leaving me she enabled me to start changing my ways, to learn what is real freedom and love without having to be needy. Now I know that she really did leave me out of love.

Still, it takes me many more unsuccessful relationships to learn what romantic love is all about. Many more disappointments and unnecessary struggle. Always the same reasons. Eventually I do learn to be loving and to feel loved, even without being in a relationship.

Love, sex and affection are important to all of us, whether we use money or not. Sure, if you have decided not to use money and share your life with someone who has not gone through the same thinking process, it might lead to some frustrating conflicts. Nevertheless, I do not feel that I missed out on anything because of the choices I made.
There have been candle light dinners, common hobbies, proximity, mutual care and deep conversations – perhaps more than ever before. And, no, I did not have to pay for sex either.

In retrospect, perhaps life without money was a perfect way to appear unique, to get attention. Due to my adventurous lifestyle I was somewhat popular among the free-thinking 20-somethings, including the opposite sex.

A certain pattern kept recurring in my romantic relationships: I had a tendency to fall in love very quickly. In the beginning it was all about freely enjoying each other's company, without restrictions or expectations. After a while, however, I somehow unconsciously manipulated the situation so that I would become the center of her attention. We would go traveling together and I would impose my lifestyle on her.

Of course our shared life on the road was full of happy moments and she was grateful for all those amazing experiences we had together. Yet life on the road meant that we are together 24/7. I got some sick satisfaction of being so close to another person. We shared everything, whether she wanted it or not. Needless to say, this quickly became the opposite of freedom, a certain prison really. Over time, she got more and more frustrated with the situation and felt the need to escape. I became needy and manipulative. I did everything so that she would not leave me, even blamed her for the arguments we had. In the end she had no choice but to flee or tell me to leave her alone.

As said, I repeated these same mistakes in every relationship, with at least five different people. The fact that they all felt suffocated with me can mean only one thing: it was not their fault. It was me who was in search of unconditional love, for someone who would accept me with all my quirks, without realizing that I am the only person who can love me unconditionally. You know the cliché: “To genuinely love someone else, you first need to love yourself”. Those, like me, who have lacked unconditional love in childhood, spend the rest of their lives trying to get it from other people, turning into needy assholes while doing so.  

We might not even realize that we have not received unconditional love when we were kids. We might falsely pretend that we had a nice childhood, that our parents genuinely loved us, no strings attached. But that might not be the case. In fact, many parents are unable to give unconditional love to their kids, because they never received it from their parents. It is up to each and every one of us to break this cross-generational

54 Explanation I read from Alice Miller's book “The Drama of the Gifted Child”
vicious cycle.

Yet there I was, locked in a prison of my own making, repeating the mistakes of my parents. The love I had learned from my father was the manipulative kind. And the overflowing, drama-filled love from my mother's side was, in fact, nothing but neediness in steroids. What a combo!

When I realized what sick behavior I had called love, I became certain that I was some sort of narcissist whose only salvation would be years of intensive psychotherapy. I was ready for it. I wanted to change. But, after all, I did not attend therapy. I did not have to. Luckily, I stumbled upon a book about “Lifetraps”, written by a schema-therapist Kimmo Takanen. He explains:

“Lifetrap is a negative life pattern which begins when we’re children or adolescents. It repeats itself throughout our lives and is difficult to change. When a lifetrap is activated today, we tune in to the feelings of childhood and operate unconsciously according to the coping styles learned in the childhood. Our emotions are not the actual problem, but the way they 'lock us' in the harmful behavior. Lifetraps make us avoid or escape, surrender or attack in our life situations. These methods are harmful in adulthood and they work against us.”

This book made me understand that my problems are by no means unique, that others have them too, that I am not crazy after all. It is okay to have freaky emotions. The Lifetrap test allowed me to name my recurring behaviors, to understand where they come from and to recognize what triggers these unwanted and unconscious actions. Finally I could see my past relationships in a new light. Of course, my problems had nothing to do with using or not using money. Nonetheless, it was this intense era that allowed me to make the needed mistakes. Fortunately, I was mature enough to learn from these failures. It happened through stages of serious self-reflection, both during the journey and after it.

I am not proud of my faults and screw-ups in the past. It would be easier not to share these embarrassing facts with you. But I hope that these findings and tips help you in your own life journey, wherever it might take you.

55 Unfortunately there is no English translation of the book but, if you are interested, you can take the test online in English http://lifetraptest.com/
Today, I am forever grateful for those people who shared the journey with me. I am thankful to friends who pointed me to the right books. And, most importantly, I am happy I had the guts to look within. I know I am connected to everyone else on this planet already. I do not need to search for unconditional love anymore. I finally love myself unconditionally. At last, the neediness is gone. I have learned to be alone without feeling lonely. Moreover, I now realize that I am not the only person who has arrived at these same conclusions. So many other people have reached similar understanding. Here is Daniel Suelo’s experience:

“It’s funny how folks think living in a cave in the wilderness makes a person somehow more isolated than living alone in a frame house in suburbia. One of the reasons I chose to live without money was to get away from the pathological loneliness of conventional society.

Loneliness in our society is epidemic. Look around. You can be surrounded by hundreds or thousands of people every day, all day long, and be utterly lonely. You can be married with a family and be horribly lonely. Paradoxically, many people do not know how to be alone, which is why they are lonely!

I do not feel alone in the wilderness where there are no distractions to make you forget your aloneness. You must face your aloneness. And when you face your aloneness, you overcome being lonely. Why? Because you find fulfillment in yourself, you discover you are a full, complete human being. When you are able to be fulfilled in yourself, you are no longer needy, no longer addicted to people. Then, when you encounter people, you can have friends, not addictions. Yes, when you are around people, your interactions with others are fulfilling, because you are not needy. Most of us do not like being around needy people. Learning to live by yourself, without distractions of civilization, is the secret to overcoming loneliness, and the secret to having fulfilling relationships with others. Of course, it’s also not healthy to be alone in a cave all the time, just as it is not healthy to be with people all the time. There must be balance.”
Family re-defined.

Photo: Jason Gastaldo
Next up: Contributing to Society

People often asked me “Aren't you ever going to work again?” They use the word work although they refer to a paid job. These are two entirely different things. There is more than enough work to be done in this world but only a limited number of jobs.

What other motives can one have for work than mere salary? Should the amount in the paycheck dictate how you choose to use your time productively? Should work even be paid? What if it was entirely voluntary contributions to develop society? Would you do what you currently do for living if you were not paid for it?

“It is not work if it feels good,” my friend once said. Even though he said it with a blink in his eye, it echoes a real sentiment. Some people tend to think that work should be hard and unpleasant, an entirely separate part of life, after which you can relax, enjoy leisure time and have fun. What if your whole life was like that?

I no longer draw the line between work and hobbies. How does one even make that separation? If I travel and collect experiences that I later turn into a book, which part of that is actual work? Pretty much all the work that I have ever engaged in has at that moment felt right and meaningful. If my work does not appeal to me anymore I quit and switch to something that is more interesting, challenging, fulfilling or purposeful.

This kind of thinking led me to be a writer as well. I had always been gifted, writing just for myself, but I realized that it is not a gift at all if I do not focus on it so much that I am able give the gift to others. Mere talent is not enough. You need time and concentration to turn that talent into something that creates value for others.

That was one of the key reasons why I packed my sparse belongings and became voluntarily homeless in the first place: to make time available for writing – even if it meant letting go of so many other things. Only when you take time away from the rat race it becomes possible to focus on your passion.

Do you already know your passion? Are your ready to put your talent into full use and gift it to others? What if you don't want to work for money? Is there any point to even consider working for free? What kind of opportunities are there to work without financial motives? Could volunteering bring new meaning in your life? How do you find these opportunities? And what if there is an artist within, screaming to be released? How might one become free to develop that inner creator? Let's find out!
PAY IT FORWARD

I am in Panama, practicing my nearly non-existent woodworking skills. I have agreed to renovate the walls, porch and floor of a small termite-eaten hut, made out of fragile plywood and some moldy planks. On top of this I clean and re-decorate the room they have provided for lodging. Spider webs out. A makeshift kitchen in. Done!

While working alone I somehow start thinking of the poems I used to jot down a couple of years ago. Since then they have just gathered specks of virtual dust in my online drawer. I reminisce back to the The Shell squat in London where I got such a powerful introduction to the captivating art form of spoken word. The stage poets were so full of energy, oozing passion and relentless dedication.

I check YouTube for Finnish stage poets. These acts are light years away from what I have experienced. Most of them read from the cue paper, performing with a boring monotonous voice. The bright side is that there already is a scene for stage poetry in Finland, a boom really. I wouldn't have to introduce something completely new there. I then look at my own poems. I don't know if they are any better than what I have just witnessed. I doubt. Are these worth performing? Would anyone care?

The mere idea of doing stage poetry in front of an audience awakens the butterflies in my belly. This is something I have never done before. Are my poems good enough? Do I know how to perform them? I am not a real poet, for crying out loud! My inner critic hollers.

Yet there is no turning back now. I know I could bring some fresh energy to the stage poetry scene in my home country, if I ever get there. I gather my courage and make the decision: I will become a stage poet!

I start practicing my poems, alone, in my cozy spider-web free zone. I stammer my tormented rhymes to the empty walls and wish that no one outside would hear me. I am a bit ashamed, yet excited.

I soon learn it is one thing to read existing poems and a whole another thing to write them for the stage. I practice, practice and practice. When I finally reach Helsinki, I attend an Open Mic evening. I squeeze the microphone. My legs tremble. I try not to faint on stage. But I do it! My first performance does not go perfectly.
Still, the audience cheers and I get encouraging feedback. I am on the right path. I continue practicing and tire my friends with repeated test runs in their living rooms.

I sign up for the Finnish Championships in stage poetry. In this light-hearted competition the venues are bars and the judges picked from the audience. Qualifying rounds are organized all over the country and only the winners go to the finals. The only rules are that the poems should be your own and cannot take more than three minutes. Easy, I can do that.

In the first qualifiers I don't make it to the second round. There is a contestant called Jere who has an amazing ability to play with his words and facial expressions. He becomes my favorite. “Fantastic performance! I hope you win,” I whisper in his ear. Unfortunately he only makes it to the second place.

I try again in another city and end up being third. I still don't give in but try once more. Also Jere is there, even better than before. To my surprise, I win! I make it to the finals. Unbelievable. Guess who is second? Jere. He does not stop but takes part in seven qualifiers before he makes it to the finals. Now that is the commitment I wanted to see in this scene.

My looming success tells me that I have managed to create something unique, a bit more international and energetic approach that appeals to a certain kind of audience. Still on the right path. Making it to the finals is beyond any of my cautious expectations. Yet I wish to become even better in this exciting new hobby. So I continue to practice, a lot. I write new poems in the night and practice them during the day, for a full month.

At last it is the day of the finals. I know some of the other finalists already. Even the new friends prove to be really nice. I still hope Jere would win. That is right: I am here to participate, not to win. I have already learned how much fun spoken word can be – therapeutic too! No pressure. I know I cannot be any more ready than this. Now it is only up to the judges whether they appreciate my approach or not.

The judges are quite old this time. I wonder if I should just skip my English poems altogether. Perhaps they don't understand the language. No, I decide to stick to the plan nonetheless and start out with “Grim Reaper” – a nice little rant about facing death, in English. I roar out my heart-broken verses to a handful of
audience. People stare at me, eyes wide open.

Then, a couple of judges in the front row start fidgeting. “What is he saying?” one of them asks in Finnish. The other one shrugs. Great. They don't understand a word I am saying, or shouting really. I continue with increasing rage and up the ante. Last syllable goes out at 2:59. Perfect timing. Lots of energy. I put down the microphone and get down from the stage. People applaud but they seem somehow intimidated by what they have just experienced.

A fellow poet congratulates me and points out that my arm is bleeding. He asks if that was an intentional part of the act. No. It was not. Apparently, in my nervous state, I had scratched away some old scar tissue that started bleeding without me noticing. Well, that certainly goes with the grim theme. I finally understand the shocked faces in the audience.

I have done my best but don't make it to the second round. A very close margin of 0.1 points separates me from those who continue. Yet losing does not let me down. I can now concentrate on cheering for everyone else, especially for my favorite poet. It is a tight battle but, in the end, Jere takes the championship! He is awesomely energetic and deserves his victory after everything he had to go through to make it to the finals. What a great day!

Mission accomplished. The Finnish stage poetry scene has become more interesting. This was more about collaboration than competition. We made each other better.

**Tips for leisure, self-development and work:**

👍 **Good Job:**
Free Time for You

👍 👍 **Labor of Love:**
Volunteer to Work for Free

👍 👍 👍 **Ultimate Usefulness:**
Become a Creator
Good Job: Free Time for You

We are accustomed to work for money, to put a whole lot of energy in our jobs, so that later we would have money to enjoy the spare time. Unfortunately, we do not have much of that spare time left. We then spend our time making more money. This has created a certain *then-when culture*. We postpone things that would bring meaning in our lives. The list of then-when excuses is endless: I start playing violin when I am done with my studies. We go to Africa when we are married. We spend more time with each other when the kids fly out from the nest. I paint the boat when I retire. I run away from the old people's home when...

Life does not have to be a mere series of achievements. Whether you work for money or for free, it is always a good idea to relax for a while. But how might one have more time for leisure? Where to cut if everything in the schedule sounds important? And how to spend that free time that suddenly becomes available?

In his book, *The Four-Hour Work-Week*, Timothy Ferriss says that the first challenge for someone who re-designs his life is to find ways to fill all that extra time. As I suddenly had a zero-hour work-week, this was an acute issue for me. And I am sure that many who have recently retired can relate to this. So, what to do when you do have spare time? What kind of free activities are there?

One of the first things that comes to mind is to learn new things, to add variety to one's knowledge and skills. Albert learned how to read at the age of five. When he was admitted to the hospital he had a lot of time for studying:

“My main interests back then were astronomy, quantum physics and Egyptology. You should see the crazy [videotaped] conversation where I am five years old and my father thirty-five and we discuss string theory. I really learned about everything I wanted to know: neurology, biology, psychology, physics, literature, pedagogy, art and a lot of philosophy.

This foundation was supposed to, according to my father's plans, allow me to think by myself. My father's idea was, basically, to get me ready to face the enormous influence of our society, to make me as free as possible, in order for me
to think autonomously. Now, what was I supposed to do with that freedom or autonomy, that was none of his business.”

From age five to nine, Albert spent most of his time in the hospital. Losing his ability to walk did not bring him down. On the contrary, instead of participating in the official system where everyone is given the same education, he was free to feed his curiosity in whichever ways he liked. And his father supported him in this.

It sounds unfathomable that still in the late 1990s people formed their world view based on what media told them. Luckily today we are no longer tied only to published books, television, newspapers, radio and Encyclopædia Britannica as the only sources of information.

Although media still sells terrorism, unemployment, catastrophic events, political theater, economic booms and busts, celebrity baloney and other irrelevant stuff, we can choose not to follow that. Citizen journalism has taken its place alongside big media conglomerates. The internet is full of interesting blogs, podcasts, documentary films, TED Talks, discussion forums and alternative news sources. This open access puts more responsibility on us. We need to double and triple check the sources before we can trust anything. Yet now it is possible to form a more holistic world view and have access to all sources of information.

Would you like to learn a language? See what Lingvist, Duolingo, Busuu and LiveMocha have on offer, for free. Would you rather dig deeper into some topic of interest? Some universities like MIT and Stanford offer courses for free online. And, of course, you can check what your nearest public universities have in their curricula. Massively Open Online Courses, MOOCs, are another option. See, for example, Coursera, edX and Udacity for those. Perhaps you are rather more interested in skill sharing, learning practical skills directly from and with other people? Check DIY videos from YouTube, browse online or find out if there are some free workshops in your neighborhood. Timebanks could prove useful if you need a private teacher but do not want to pay in mainstream currency.

56 www.coursera.org
57 www.edx.org
58 www.udacity.com
59 See e.g. www.skillshare.com

One way to break the daily routine is to attend all sorts of curious events that people organize to spread good vibes, to express themselves or to reclaim the streets. A flash mob, for instance, is merely a group of people who agrees to assemble in a public place, performs some bizarre act and then quickly disperses. It might seem that there is no point whatsoever but the flash mob method can also be used to raise awareness of a certain issue, to take a stand for something. Need some inspiration? Check Improv Everywhere!60

Another cool citizen-led initiative is the Free Hugs Campaign. What was started by one man, Juan Mann,61 out of a whim has now spread all over the world. You need no permission to hug people on the streets. Just gather a bunch of friends, create signs that say “Free Hugs” and go hugging total strangers. Be warned though: it is kind of exhausting to hug hundreds of people. Please do not ask what is the point in all this. Do random acts of kindness need a reason? Well, fine. It does take you out of your comfort zone and makes you and others smile, if nothing else. If that sounds like your cup of tea, Write More Love Letters62 or #FeedTheDeed!63


1. _____________________________
2. _____________________________

60 http://improveeverywhere.com/
61 http://www.freehugscampaign.org/
62 www.moreloveletters.com
63 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feed_the_Deed
Compare this list with your current life situation. What do you have already? What should you stop doing? What do you lack? Examine your situation critically and see where your time goes. Would simple things, like giving your TV away, free up enough time or are more drastic measures needed? Make those decisions now and head for the kind of life you deserve. Now! Make sure that there are enough unplanned slots in your calendar or toss the schedules altogether. Treat every day as an adventure. Guarantee yourself that the things that you do want to spend time on are the kind of things that make you excited. Do them out of love!

When you know exactly what you need, you might not even have to know what the steps are to take you there. Write a letter to yourself from the point of view of your future self. Then bury the letter or ask your friend to give it to you in one year's time. Or, if you are a bit older, you could take Sir Richard Branson’s approach and write a letter to your past self. Either way, you can describe where you are at, what your goals are and what are you grateful for. You don't need to consciously think of these things every day. If you truly wish for something to happen, the universe buddies up with your subconscious and what you wished for becomes reality.

Note, however, that the road to this new kind of life situation might be a bit bumpy. You grow through challenges. There is no need to try and avoid any of the experiences that come your way. Try not to label them good or bad. You have welcomed this state of affairs and it is all part of the bigger plan to take you where you need to be.

Also, if you do engage on some conscious self-improvement, such as further studies, remember that you will have to go through some unpleasant work as well. But it pays off in the end. Even this becomes easier when you see all the small tasks as part of the bigger whole.

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64 If you prefer sending yourself an email you can use www.dreaminder.com
65 See e.g. www.virgin.com/richard-branson/my-letter-to-10-year-old-me
Labor of Love: Volunteer to Work for Free

Back in the day I fell in love with the idea of gift economy, without even knowing the term. I saw a film called *Pay It Forward* where a little boy got an idea to fix the world. He decided to assist three people who needed a helping hand and did not expect anything in return. Instead he asked each of them to help three other people. This would create a snowball effect: good deeds kept multiplying and the world did, in fact, become a slightly better place.

That little boy wanted to help because he had received help. This also applies to a little boy called Tomi Astikainen. I have received so much help and support from other people that I have no choice but to pay it forward. With this attitude, good deeds do multiply.

Second day in Costa Rica. Knowing that the country is pretty much occupied by retired Americans, it does not interest us that much. The plan is just to hitch through and try to find a farm where we could put everything we learned to good use, to have real impact.

One of the aforementioned Americans picks us up. She demands to buy us lunch. Gladly, we accept the offer. We tell her what we have done lately, volunteering on organic farms in Mexico, El Salvador and Nicaragua. It takes her a while to comprehend the fact that we truly work without pay. She sees an opportunity here: “I have a friend who would need help with her farm. Would you like to go and see her?”

Seriously? Let's go! Could this be our chance to put everything we have learned to good use?

Vicki, the owner, is alone at her farm. Her boyfriend has taken off and she is left to her own devices. She tries to make money online and has no time to take care of the farm. Dreams of a self-sustaining off-the-grid lifestyle have started to crumble. Vicki is in a desperate situation. She has decided to let go of the land that was supposed to set her free.

We tell her about our experience. First, she hesitates: “There are no facilities
for volunteers here. I mean, where would you sleep?” We tell her that we are not after luxury and explain our modest lifestyle. We can sleep anywhere. She then shows us a hut which is covered in trash and spider webs. “It's perfect. We can fix this,” I assure her.

Finally Vicki agrees. She gives us free hands to do anything. We are surprised to hear that. Free hands? To do anything? Awesome! Perhaps this is exactly the opportunity we were looking for.

We get to work. We prepare grow-beds for veggies and herbs. We plant seeds and handle the irrigation. We take care of the animals: pigs, ducks, chicken, goats and the Doberman dogs. We fix things that are in need of maintenance. We make a simple website.

We create a strategy for the next few years and clarify the vision together with Vicki: the place will become a volunteer-driven wildlife rescue center and an organic farm. Since the area is natural habitat for the howler monkeys, we name it The Monkey Farm.66

Vicki is perplexed by all the progress. Her biggest obstacle is being okay with asking for help. In that vein, we start a campaign that secures support from the media and the local community. People get behind the idea and bring us everything the place requires: a water pump, a toilet seat, food, tools, anything we need really. The retired Americans are not too bad folks after all. Ultimately Vicki learns that it is totally fine to ask for help when it is needed.

We turn the meager hut and another simple shed to accommodation that can house about ten volunteers fairly comfortably. We scrub every last corner and decorate the spaces to feel like home. We open online profiles to lure in volunteers. Soon we have a pipeline of them for the next six months. The best part: most of them are more experienced than us! Some have very useful special skills ranging from woodworking to organic farming. One guy is a specialist in setting up fences. Just what we needed!

We coach Vicki to focus on right things and to look for people who can help her to both manage the place and to lead the volunteers. To counter the knowledge work, there is more than enough physical work to be done. I love all of it. Whatever we do, we do it with passion. We hardly notice that we work 10-16

66 http://themonkeyfarm.org/
Of course everything does not go like in Hollywood films: we have our fair share of arguments. After a couple of months of hard work I screw up a yet another relationship and leave the place, alone.

Yet The Monkey Farm finally has a direction, a future. New volunteers take over what we started. As said, they are even smarter and more skilled than us. I am not needed there anymore.

We have a natural need to be active, to do something that makes a contribution to society or at least helps someone. Fine, it can be argued that many people at present only contribute to their own survival. Yet there comes a time for everyone to at least consider the opportunity: Perhaps I should make myself more useful. After all, doing things together adds value to one's life and facilitates social interaction.

The world gets more and more connected every day. New generations tend to think differently. We take baby steps towards global consciousness. In this new emerging world view the ability to collaborate becomes priceless. Yet in western societies, where most work is either automated or outsourced to China, there just are not enough paid jobs for everyone. Those who are fortunate enough to have a job use one third of their lives among people they did not choose to work with in the first place.

Workplaces of today are governed by conflicting unwritten rules. On one hand, we are expected to pull towards the same direction. On the other hand, the fear of losing one's job caters to our self-interest and leads to unfortunate side effects: brown nosing, lack of transparency, poor collaboration, even teasing and harassment. Young guns are stressed and overworked. The experienced may feel sidelined.

Many consider their job as their identity, so much so that it limits one's choices and guides one's behavior. However, we are not police officers, plumbers or psychologists. We are people with diverse identities. Only a fraction of this identity is defined by what we happen to do for living at a given point in time.

“So, you are a farmer then,” one of The Monkey Farm visitors deduced when he saw me the first time. I had never heard that before. Me? A farmer. No way! I refuse to call myself a writer, a hitchhiker, a dumpster-diver, a poet, a chef, an activist, a designer, a coach, a facilitator, a strategist, a futurist, a space-age restaurant manager or any other title only. I am all of these and more.
My work history is littered with all sorts of professions: a packaging factory worker, an inventory helper, a radio reporter, a bookstore customer servant, a clerk in a video rental store, an office worker in a landscaping company, an editor in chief, a graphic designer, a team leader, a consultant, a trainer, a social entrepreneur, a chief executive officer... I am none of this alone! I am human.

The one-profession-identity dates back to childhood. When adults ask “What are you going to be when you grow up?” it implies that the kid should pick just one profession and stick to that. A career? Yuck. What a disgusting word. My answer to the aforementioned question was “I am going to be a multi-purpose man.” Who knows where I had picked that line, yet, that is exactly what I have become: a generalist.

In a society that has placed so much emphasis on specialization, since Adam Smith introduced the division of labor concept, there might not be that much demand for multi-purpose men and women. What use could someone with very little knowledge of various seemingly unrelated topics have? Seriously, who cares if I am curious of both dust mites and space exploration if I am not an expert in either subject matter?

The truth is: I don't really care if anyone is willing to pay for my contributions, as long as I get to focus on a variety of inspiring ideas, tasks, projects and initiatives that balance each other out. Shoveling shit is awesome as long as it happens for a good reason and goes hand-in-hand with the more demanding and brainy tasks that I also enjoy doing. Besides, dust mites can survive in space! How cool is that?

Please excuse the slight tangent. The point was: perhaps it is harmful to limit the vast range of future possibilities at a very early age. A better question for the parents to pose would be “What will you not be when you grow up?” This would direct the kids to weigh their values instead of binding their thinking to a certain career path.

What all did you want to become when you were little? Are you currently spending your days doing at least some of those things? Does your work have meaning? If not, luckily there are options. Those who value innovation, autonomy, mastery and meaning over big salary, may want to join small teams in start-up companies. Some become freelancers, scientists, artists, inventors or entrepreneurs. You can even decide to do many different things; some for salary, others for free.

My Finnish friend Mikael is an avid coder who lives in Lithuania most of the time. This helps him cut his fixed costs into a mere fraction of what they would be in Finland. Mikael knows he is good in what he does. He knows the value of his contributions. So he
charges accordingly. A few paid jobs in a year help finance his semi-nomadic lifestyle. The rest of the time he travels and works location-independently in voluntary projects – such as Hitchwiki, Nomadwiki, Trashwiki and Trustroots – that provide him with more meaning than paid work.

Mikael lives the “Pay It Forward” ideology, too. He gets a ride from someone and does not pay for it. Instead he puts up someone in his flat, for free. That person, hopefully, will then help someone else in the future. Mikael seems to be very satisfied with his lifestyle. Even if he has not completely dropped out of the money society, it could be argued that he lives by the tenets of gift economy.

Would you like to gift your contributions to the world? Could volunteer work help you towards more genuine interaction with others? Do you know how to create win-win-win situations: something for you, something for your peers and something for the society?

Volunteering is not rocket science. Moreover, there does not have to be any conflict between self-interest and benefiting others, as long as selfish reasons are not the only underlying motives to help others. Voluntary work does add value to people's lives, including your own. Just try not to automatically expect reciprocity in every situation. Pay it forward instead. Help because your help is needed.

Bear in mind, however, that we have been taught to be independent and survive on our own. For many of us it is not easy to ask for help, or even receive help when it is offered. But if you do wish to volunteer, just take initiative. The opportunities are out there:

- Do you have aging relatives or busy neighbors that could use some assistance in their day-to-day life?
- Could one of your hobbies or interests add value to others and therefore be considered volunteer work?
- Are there non-profits in vicinity who could use volunteer help with the elderly, the youth, the immigrants, the disabled, the single parents or any other group to whom the mere presence of a volunteer can be priceless?
- What social and environmental topics get you going? Are there movements where you could be useful and advance ideas and practices that you feel passionate

67 http://nomadwiki.org/en/Main_Page
about?

- What languages do you speak and write fluently? Do you have graphic design or IT skills? Which online communities could benefit from those?
- Are there events coming up that you could help organize?

I am part of a small group of hitchhikers who organize The Hitchgathering 2011 in Bulgaria. The budget is, naturally, zero. We spend three days in Vilna, touring local businesses and collecting in-kind donations: toilet paper, knives, cups, cutting boards, plates and other useful stuff.

We then hitch our way to Kara Dere, a beautiful untouched beach by the Black Sea, and set up the camp. A handful of other hitchhikers arrive early, from all corners of the world. We agree to have a horse-shoe shaped common area where everything is shared and private tents around it, marking the perimeter.

During the first night a sudden rainfall destroys everything we have prepared. Little by little more hitchhikers arrive and they help re-do the camp from scratch. The sun greets some 150 people who are ready to spend a week or so together on the beach. Little by little the camp starts taking shape. Even dolphins arrive to welcome us.

At first people run around on the beach, cover each other in natural clay, swim in the warm water and enjoy the perfect location, as if they were kids again. As a matter of fact, one of the participants is a kid, just five years old. The eldest have passed the half a century mark already. We come from very different backgrounds but are unified by the same hitchhiking spirit. In the evening we sit around a campfire, sing and play various instruments. Super cheap wine-like beverage – that the locals refuse to touch – is openly shared and enjoyed.

On the second day people are done with solely lazing around. They start creating activities for each other. Workshop topics vary from laughing yoga and juggling to dance choreography and a Krav Maga self-defense course. We organize a human library and get to know each other at a deeper level. People take responsibility of improving the camp, digging and decorating shit-pits, collecting firewood, sourcing for food and cooking together. Instead of just bathing in the sun, these people prefer to be active and help co-organize this memorable event.

After one week of life on the beach I leave, tears in my eyes. This place is
fantastic. These people are family. A yet another showcase of what volunteer spirit makes possible.

You don't need any special skills to be a useful volunteer. Helpful attitude and ability to take initiative will suffice. Start with a time investment of 2-4 hours a week. If your chosen form of volunteering seems like your thing, take more responsibility as time goes by. If not, try something else.

Sometimes people challenged my moneyless lifestyle, hinting at the very possibility that perhaps I did nothing but leched on others' hard-earned money: “How do you think it would work if everyone behaved like you?”

I had no choice but to answer with a litany of questions: “And what is my behavior then? What is it that I do, really? I focus on doing things that I am good at, things that I love to do, things that somehow contribute to others' wellbeing. How do you think a world would look like if everyone behaved like this? What if everyone had the chance to live like this, without having to focus on mere survival? What kind of world would that create?”

This nipped the unnecessary criticism in the bud. The questions got people thinking: Wait, what am I doing to help others? Do I focus on my passions? Am I clear on what strengths I have? How might I shift from mere money-making for daily survival to actually developing myself, others and the society at large?

If you feel that what you do, day in and day out, is really not that useful for others and it does not offer you chances to develop, don't worry. You are not doing anything wrong. No one blames you. This awakening is already the first step on a path to a more fulfilling life. Perhaps the next step is to call a timeout. What if you took a year off? How would you use that time? Are you not entirely sure?

Volunteering abroad is one possibility to use your time effectively while exploring new environments and work that might be very different from what you are used to. There are several work exchange websites that you can use to look for volunteering opportunities abroad. Volunteers Base is a moneyless alternative to the more

68 www.volunteersbase.com
established Ecoteer, Workaway, HelpX and WWOOF sites. These usually charge a little bit for the contact details of volunteering places. If none of these options serve you, check Kindmankind or Travel With a Mission instead. Whichever site you pick, you can use it to look for opportunities in various parts of the world.

Note, however, that for instance in Central and South America it is surprisingly difficult to work for free. As outlandish as it may sound, there are many places that expect you to pay for volunteering. In some cases, like Inanitah, it is kind of justified and transparent. But certain places are completely dependent on funding from wealthy volunteers who just come there to add a line to their CV.

 Luckily there are also places that value voluntary contributions. In exchange for your efforts, they offer food and lodging for free. Apparently in Europe and Australia there are vineyards and farms that even give you a weekly allowance on top of covering your stay. So, pay attention when you search for the best opportunity for you. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

 Finally, if you are still young – under 30 years old – you can check if the love of my life, AIESEC, would have something in store for you. The challenging experiences AIESEC provides are all geared towards addressing some of the most pressing issues in the world. But most importantly, the AIESEC experience allows you to become more self-aware and solution-oriented world citizen who is capable to empower others for action. It is not always easy but it can be very rewarding. The more you give, the more you get.

Ultimate Usefulness: Become a Creator

Look within. Feel it. Listen. Can you hear the voice of your inner artist, a creator? When you take time away from ordinary life you free up space for creativity. Everyone has some talent, some capacity to create something unique.

69 http://ecoteer.com
70 http://www.workaway.info
71 http://www.helpx.net
72 http://www.woof.net
73 http://kindmankind.net
74 www.travelwithamission.org
Whether you wish to make clay pots, paintings, films or music – no matter what your preferred instrument is: a laptop, your body, a sound system, a drum, a brush, a camera – re-awakening your creativity brings joy and meaning to life, for yourself and others.

So, when you have made time available, feel free to try new things: dance, improvisation theater, stand up comedy, circus, writing, storytelling, handicrafts, stage poetry, drawing with chalks on asphalt or whatever catches your fancy. One might prefer capoeira, another making sculptures out of play-dough. Both are as valuable methods for self-expression. If the inspiration does not strike instantly, fortify yourself in the basement and listen to old vinyl records. Have a sip of wine. Or go for a week-long trek in the wilderness. Allow time for yourself. But be ready! When the inspiration comes, nothing can stop you. Answer the call of the creator within.

It is nice if you can turn your hobby into your life's work. Getting paid should not be your sole motivation to be creative, however. Keep in mind that very few make a living out of art. Median income of an author in Finland, for instance, is something like 2,000 Euros a year! Yes, in a year.

I can warmly recommend free sharing of your creations. The more people have access to the fruits of your labor the better, right? Sometimes the best way to do that is through traditional channels of distribution but often in today's world internet is the platform of choice.

When I started writing I mainly wrote for myself. I still do. Art is always a form of therapy, too. It allows us to see the world in a new light and understand ourselves as part of it. If others also enjoy my gifts to the world, that is just amazing. I have shared my earlier works online, for free. When I started the habit of sharing, I would have never imagined that thousands of people would download and read my books. I now know that I have inspired many others through my writing. This warms my heart. Nevertheless, for me the most important thing is that I am satisfied with the end results myself.

I have come to realize that the best way to reach great quality is to do as the coders do: “release early, release often.” In other words, be open for both input and feedback. Collect opinions in different stages of the process, from as diverse group of people as possible. This allows you to work out the kinks during the process. It ensures

75 http://astikainen.wordpress.com
that you do not unnecessarily cross cultural boundaries or piss off people who think differently. It paints a realistic picture of what your strengths are.

Mind you, this is what I recommend for other writers. I have no idea how this approach would work in other forms of art. Well, try and be creative!
Helpful attitude takes you far.

Photo: Lea Rezić
There. That was the seven course meal I wanted to share with you. It does not matter which level of tips you enjoyed most, how inspired you got or how deeply you wish to explore these possibilities in your own life. I just hope you enjoyed what was on the menu. If you did, don't keep it a secret. Share the thoughts with your friends, too!

Would you still care for some dessert? The last chapter is an epilogue where I draw up some conclusions and share a few points of interest regarding the time after my moneyless life. Let's just say it was not that easy to take on the responsibilities of a startup CEO after years of moneyless traveling.

What did I have to sacrifice to get back into the so-called ordinary life? Did I regress to my old ways or did I manage to move forward? What learning points from the road I could preserve and take with me? And, most importantly, what might you learn from all this? What is your role in the chain of events we call the history of humanity?
BITTER LIME DESSERT

I am eight years old, blissfully unaware that the Soviet Union, Berlin Wall and my parents' marriage are all about to come crumbling down. The same downward demise awaits the Finnish economy.

The importance of money and savings has already been imprinted in my brain. While my friends gladly spend their meager weekly allowances, I slip mine into the piggy bank. Once more, I am blissfully unaware that those savings will disappear either in the aftermath of the tumultuous divorce or later when I listen to the experts and place my “long-term investment” in the IT bubble. Right now, I am just happy to feed the smiling porcelain pig.

My imagination runs wild. I see dreams of being a passenger in a self-driving car. I play and pretend to be a secret agent who uses a “vision phone” to call my imaginary associates. Of course no one knows anything about Skype or the Google Car yet. Video conferencing and autonomous vehicles become reality only decades later.

My curiosity is insatiable. I ask my teacher why wouldn't we create a belt of photovoltaic collectors around the Equator, where there is most solar radiation, and distribute the resulting power to the whole world. He ignores the suggestion. I feel ridiculous. What a childish idea, right?

Twenty years later a mega-project called Desertec\(^\text{76}\) is started, not at the Equator but in Sahara, closer to Tropic of Cancer. Otherwise it follows the same logic: "Within 6 hours deserts receive more energy from the sun than humankind consumes within a year."\(^\text{77}\) But then, adults' projects are not child's play. Economic and political pressures make them down-scale the initiative considerably.

Another childish idea I get is this recurring day-dream: I go in a grocery store, fill the shopping cart with what I need and leave – as if walking out without paying was the most ordinary thing to do. After this vision I feel gratitude and a strong sense of being able to focus my energies to fulfill my place in society. Naturally, at that age I cannot verbalize the repercussions but intuitively I feel that if everyone had the chance to act like this, we could get out of the individual survival mode.

\(^{76}\) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desertec

\(^{77}\) www.desertec.org
and focus on common development instead. This, for me, becomes the definition of freedom. I cannot feel entirely free if others are not also free. All of us.

I snap out of it. By now I have learned that I should not share this kind of silly ideas with adults. They would anyways look down on me, belittle me, ridicule me or – on a good day – ignore me. I am able to suppress the vision for a good twenty years and become that rational adult everyone expects me to be. Little do I know, one day the immature ideas will resurface.


Should we continue to restrict some people's access to these building blocks of good life because they do not have enough of that artificial construct that we call money? Or should we do our utmost to truly get everyone out of poverty? What kind of future do we envision? Should we stick to our old dog-eat-dog ways of existence or move on as one people to a more sane society? What are the answers if you ask adults who are already prisoners of their culture? And what if you ask from kids who are yet to be properly conditioned? Do they give different answers?

The future belongs to the young and to those who are even younger. What can we adults do right now to make sure that the children born today have the best chances, not only to survive, but to develop, enjoy and fulfill their place in society?

Everyone has to find their own path, their own answers. I have shown you what moneyless life did to me – with all its ups and downs – but I do not recommend moneyless life to anyone! It is not a solution to anything. I have intentionally avoided painting an overly rosy picture of life without money.

It might well be, however, that many of the examples have echoed the same promising sentiment: the universe loves you, love it back. This was my first-hand experience; no matter what happens, it somehow makes sense in the end. The universe does take care of you. I am still alive, still breathing. My body is fine. Mind works. Spirit is uplifted. The sun did not turn into a white dwarf. In fact, everything became more clear and straightforward: When you don't have money, you cannot run out of it. So, there is no need to worry.

This care-free position does not come from the fact that moneyless life is somehow
better than other life choices. No, it was not all sunshine, smiles and dandelions. The loving and trusting perspective comes from the changing attitude. I no longer label events as *good* or *bad*. Things just happen. I can then choose my reaction.

After the initial craze, day-to-day moneyless life becomes quite ordinary, nothing special. So, think twice before making hasty decisions.

**Why Avoid Moneyless Life?**

“Has anything bad happened to you?” people commonly ask in this sensation-seeking society we have. Here are a few horrible things you should be aware of if you even consider life without money:

**Letting go:** No matter what kind of new lifestyle you decide to switch to, the change does take a bit of courage in the beginning. If you let go of money you also need to let go of the certain sense of security the numbers on your bank account brought you before. You also need to let go of possessions so that they would not tie you down. In London I saw this homeless lady who was guarding her seven suitcases full of stuff. Day in and day out, she just stood there by river Thames, unable to move anywhere. Clearly, she had lost most of what she had had. Yet she could not let go of the material things that still tied her to her past. Should you wish to put your trust in the universe, you have no choice but to let go of all certainty and predictability, not just stuff. Sometimes even particular relationships need to end if they hold you back. These decisions are hard.

**Being labeled:** If you choose your own path and go against the social norm you instantly get a reputation of being somehow weird or special, even crazy. Glamour of the new lifestyle quickly wanes as the initial learning curve comes to an end. As said, for you it becomes ordinary life. But others still see you as special. You still carry the label. You still need to answer the same questions, over and over again. Some try to fit you a superhero's cape. Others loathe you for being different. At some point you will think: Gosh, why cannot I just be normal? You will be your worst critic. At least I was contemplating nearly every day: Is this what I am supposed to do? Why do I behave like this? Is there any point to what I am doing? The hardest part is letting others think what they think without caring about their opinions. It is natural for us to try to fit in.
Changing comfort: In moneyless life you also need to let go of things that previously made you feel comfortable. Yet the thirst for comfort does not go anywhere. You just quench it in different ways. Suddenly the feeling of comfort arises from simple things like uninterrupted sleep, an opportunity to take a shower, momentary access to internet or a bag of warm churros that someone has forgotten on the street. If you are constantly on the move, and cannot rely on buying stuff, it can at some point start to be mentally and physically demanding. What you took for granted before is now luxury.

Forced trust: One of the luxuries that a moneyless being rarely gets access to is privacy. Of course you can seek temporary solitude in nature. But if you wish to remain active in society and do not have a permanent place to stay, it is difficult just to close the door behind you and be on your own. There is no door to close. You do rely a lot on other people and there is no way but to trust them. It is okay that 10,000 cars pass you and do not pick you up. The drivers don't owe you anything. But if you put your trust in someone who you think is genuinely helping you and who you think is your new-found friend, yet in the end he lets you down or wants something from you, that puts a dent to your trust in humanity. Who to trust and when? Continuous uncertainty can become taxing.

Difficult return: Coming back to the roots – to friends, family and familiar surroundings – can be a pleasant experience after some absence. However, if you are used to the freedom of movement and changing scenery, being stuck in one place can suddenly feel suffocating. Furthermore, operating in today's society and functioning with all sorts of bureaucratic institutions without permanent address, without phone and without online banking identification can be next to impossible. Yet the hardest part is to accept the peculiar every-day life people around you are used to. After years of language barriers and blissful ignorance you suddenly get bombarded with all sorts of useless information that you would rather not understand. Somehow the political scandals, continuous bad news, sports results and idiotic lines from popular TV programs, that seem to be on everyone's lips, do not appear that important to you. Accepting that your perception is very different from the surrounding society can be a really frustrating process.

Why Try Moneyless Life?
Dealing with uncertainty, being content with less, solving problems on a daily basis,
connecting with people as they are, learning to love my aloneness, getting rid of my neediness and trusting the universe were priceless lessons from the road. Here is another take on the very same issues just discussed, the flip side of the coin, five reasons to give it a try:

**Increased trust:** When you understand that you are part of nature, and that the norm in nature is mutual interdependence, the relentless need to survive on your own disappears. You are able to collaborate with people more naturally. When interaction between you and others is direct, without the medium of exchange twisting our social relationships, it is easier to trust each other. You figure out best ways to help and support others, asking nothing in return. You get rid of your egocentricity. It is easier for others to put their trust in you. They respect you for the kind of person you are, not for what you do. And, finally, once you have experienced it in your daily life, your ability to trust in the universe remains for the rest of your life. Everything that happens after this experience feels like an integral part of your life's path. You can trust the universe to lay exactly the right experiences on your way. Life starts making sense.

**Awareness:** If you go around the world and meet a lot of people from different backgrounds you notice that, in the end, we are all very similar. We are not consumers, competitors, wage slaves or tax payers. We are human, one people, brother and sisters. We have very similar fears, doubts and disbeliefs. The same goes for our hopes, dreams and needs. When you realize this simplicity of humanity it is easy to connect with anyone, anywhere. Moneyless life allows you to learn what kind of behavior is natural for us and which part of it might actually dawn from cultural conditioning and upbringing in a certain kind of system. Through all the trials and tribulations you become more self-aware. You observe yourself critically and deeply. The more you open up to others and welcome people to give you feedback, the more you learn about yourself. You start understanding your own preconceived notions, habits and behavior. You come in terms with your weaknesses, accept what you cannot change in yourself and learn to focus on your strengths. You know what kind of people should be around you, to complement your good sides. Finally, you feel that the whole planet is your home, our home.

**Gratitude:** As you let go of the ability to fall back on money to fulfill your needs, you
begin to appreciate everything more than before. If you receive everything you need as a gift, either from nature or from fellow humans, your respect for people and the natural abundance grows many times over. Also, when you genuinely give your gifts to the world, you receive gratitude from others. Things that you used to take for granted are now positive surprises. If, after this experience, you get to sleep in the same bed (or even on a simple mattress) you feel grateful for it every night when you go to sleep. An interesting job, meetings with old friends, a roof over your head, clean tap water, solid poop, being able to do sports, having recurring weekly activities, spending time with your family – all these previously mundane things now appear priceless.

**Fearlessness:** The more you try out new things and challenge yourself, the larger your comfort zone becomes. You soon find yourself stretching your boundaries habitually. Through these out of the ordinary experiences you get to the bottom of your fears. When you can name your fears it is easier to spot what triggers them. Then you can accept the fears, if not make them go away, and choose not to be guided by them. Focusing on love rather than fear steers you clear from monotonous routine life. Soon everything you do, you do out of love. You realize that anything is possible – that only your own mental limits can hold you back from going after your dreams. You are okay with not knowing what happens next. And you learn to seize the opportunities that speak to your heart.

**Life of passion and meaning:** As you wake up every morning, not knowing what lies ahead, life turns into a thrilling adventure. Getting out of the rat race frees up your time to focus on whatever you decide to do each day. When you find your true calling and focus on living your passion, the division between work and hobbies dissolves. You cannot force clarity into existence. One day your calling will just come to you. I had spent years trying to figure out what am I here for. Then it just came to me naturally, while walking: “Connecting and Kickstarting through Storytelling.” That's it! That is what I have done so far and that is what I am to focus on for the rest of my life. Your passions may lie in science, arts, sports, philosophy, social work, education, healthcare, technology, business, journalism or any other area. Whatever your passion is does not matter. As long as you lead your life with high integrity, congruence and passion your efforts will be noticed one day and people will back you up. Work that previously required a lot of exertion will eventually happen effortlessly.
Before I left for my moneyless voyage, a friend recommended me to read Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*. I did not, back then. After writing this book, I finally took a look at it. I was surprised to see that he had covered these same themes already in the 1940s. Had I read it before making hasty decisions, I might have avoided a few pitfalls. Then again, the road – direct experience – turned out to be my most important teacher. And as I read Fromm's book now, equipped with that experience, it made a lot of sense.

I recommend the same for you. Don't just blindly believe what it says in this book but go find your way and let the experience be your teacher. It is up to you to act and make positive change in your own environment. As the ice hockey legend Wayne Gretzky put it: "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take." Whichever road you choose, it is the right one for you. There will be many interesting surprises ahead.

Nothing that you decide to do guarantees lasting joy. Deeper happiness does not come from what you do but from what you are, how you choose to be. Continuous struggle away from unhappiness leaves you with just that: struggling, unhappy. If you learn to accept whatever outcome, nothing can hurt you. Through acceptance you are able to develop yourself in the right direction and approach yourself, and everything that comes your way, with a sense of humor.

And I am not saying that you should become this serene all-accepting monk who just smiles at the silly world. It is okay to be pissed off at times. Yet when you even accept the agitation you can leave it be and see what the next moment brings.

Also, there is no point in being at odds with this sometimes insane society, to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders. You cannot instantly change the world to be in line with your expectations. You can, however, change your own attitude towards the society that often seems to be so full of suffering.

Easier said than done? I know. Peace Pilgrim sums this up nicely:

> “What we dwell upon we help to bring into manifestation. One little person, giving all of her time to peace, makes news. Many people, giving some of their time, can make history.”

As said before, I am driven by freedom. And I cannot feel entirely free before everyone else is free. “Peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential” is the vision of
AIESEC, the world's largest leadership movement, driven entirely by young people. That is what guides my life, too. The good news is that peace is not some steady state in the far-off future. It is the steps that we take towards peace that matter – the journey rather than the destination.

The naysayers easily write off our childishly inspired ideas as naiveté. Many seem to think that we are headed for a full-blown police state where fewer and fewer people hold the strings and where the rest of us are nothing but puppets. That can be true.

Even so, while in this particular system power tends to centralize, at the same time, other decentralized peer-to-peer systems are being developed and popularized. Perhaps a global network of interdependent societies is already in the making. Perhaps that system will allow people to become free to develop, not just to survive. Maybe that system will be in balance with the carrying capacity of our home, Planet Earth. And perhaps that system is not a system at all, but a new kind of mindset altogether.

As Jeremy Rifkin puts it, every revolution that we have witnessed has been a simultaneous revolution in communications and energy. Printing press and steam engine. Telephone and electricity. The internet and... You see what needs to be done?

Distributed collection and sharing of renewable energy is the missing part of this particular revolution. The internet is just waiting to have some company, so that together these technologies can tip the scales to our favor. This peer-to-peer revolution is what is going to bring power back to the people, quite literally.

Vision phones and solar collectors, right? Perhaps it is time to start listening to the young people, to allow them to co-design the kind of future society they deserve, with or without money.

Moneyless Life in Retrospect

As said, it took me a year, from idea to action, to dive into the moneyless life. Likewise, I spent a year trying to figure out how to get back "among the ordinary". I felt the need to go forward, without letting go of the learning points from the road. I did not want to sacrifice the glimpse of freedom that I had attained. I wanted to remain rich, even with money back in the picture.

Fortunately a human being is quite an adaptable creature. I sent some job applications, not pretending to be anything else than I was. I could rest assured that if someone is willing to hire a former moneyless bum, it probably is the right place for me.
After five rounds of interviews I was chosen to become a startup CEO. The adaptation continued, this time with the big gear.

On the road I had learned to deal with all kinds of people, to live in uncertainty, to constantly solve problems and to understand myself as part of the same species as everybody else. I was able to hold on to this wisdom, for the most part. There was no mask, no roles. CEO Tomi was exactly the same as Friend Tomi, Flatmate Tomi, Son Tomi, Brother Tomi and any other role you could imagine. It was just me, Tomi. I still am.

My attitude towards money could now be described as indifferent. When I suddenly had a job I did not know what to do with all that salary. I was still leading a very simplistic life. I did not do shopping. I did not own more than what could fit in my backpack. I did not even have a bed. I slept on a simple mattress on the floor, in a tiny room in a shared community flat. I gave away money to those who needed it. I invested in African entrepreneurs through peer-to-peer micro-loans. I treated my friends with food and beverages. I happily paid my study loans in one go. Finally, a good friend of mine made me snap out of it: "Dude, it's okay not to spend everything right now. You will find use for it later."

Working long hours from home office, as the only employee in a fresh company, the old habits of dumpster diving and hitchhiking faded away. There was no time for anything extra. It was easier to go and eat in a restaurant, even if it now meant paying dearly for this luxury. I was sliding back to the rat race, yet I felt quite unlike the other rats. I still understand that money is not real. As they say, it does not grow in trees. It is magically created into existence by commercial banks, as debt. And if something is not real, you don't really need to stress about having or not having it, right?

I know there are no successes or failures. There are only moments when you reach certain goals and then there are opportunities for learning. Still I felt bad when I could not meet the expectations others had for my capacity to make something out of nothing in just eight months, and to make that something a profitable venture. In their eyes, I failed.

During my three-month resignation period I was utterly alone and lost. I gritted my teeth and tried to come up with an idea of what to do next. I needed to know that I am taking the logical next step. After about two months I finally remembered the learning

78 [http://zidisha.org](http://zidisha.org)

79 See e.g. [http://positivemoney.org/how-money-works/how-banks-create-money/](http://positivemoney.org/how-money-works/how-banks-create-money/)
points from the road. It is okay to be lost. I don't need to be in control. Come December, what am I going to do? Let the universe handle it.

Relaxing into "just being" and, once again, letting go of a permanent address made me hugely energetic, excited and ready for anything that might come my way. This time I knew better. I did not send job applications. I just welcomed the opportunities that came my way naturally, examined them in peace and weighted where I could spend my time in the most meaningful way.

That's how I ended up in an artist residency in Benin to write this book. It was a welcome break, three months away from everything else to focus on creative work. After this, anything can happen. Anything can change. Nothing is permanent. Only one thing is for certain: Life is an adventure! I love it. Even if I am back to playing the game with the imaginary ones and zeros, this time I don't take the rules so seriously. I have no need to be against anything or anyone. I prefer to focus on co-creating a better future today, with love and joy rather than gritting my teeth and going against the grind.

**Compliments for the Chefs**

In 2014 I was asked by my friends at Into Kustannus, an alternative publishing house in Finland, to write the book “Miten elää ilman rahaa” (How to live without money). I had my doubts. Why, after all these years of sharing the fruits of my labor for free, would I suddenly choose the path of traditional publishing? How could I justify the fact that people would have to pay for a book carrying that title? And what should I do with the royalties then?

The answer to the last question is easy. Into Kustannus managed to sell about one thousand copies in Finland during the first year. My share? Some 2 euros per book. You do the math. Rest assured, I will find a good use for these riches. It still does not dictate my decisions but I am finally okay with using money again.

The other two questions were trickier. I agreed to play ball with Into Kustannus because they had a valid point: to reach the common people in Finland, with this quite marginal message, it is best to be available in book stores and libraries. They can spot the book there more easily than at some obscure site in the hidden corners of the web. A book is worthless without the reader.

I am happy that I made that decision. One thousand people does not sound like much but it is a fair reach in a country of only 5.3 million citizens. So, thank you Tatu,
Jaana, Joni, Milla, Mika, Sami and other awesome Into-friends for serving these nuggets of wisdom to our perspective-hungry nation. And thank you for allowing me to go on my own with the English version.

I was repeatedly asked to translate the book in English but, frankly, I did not know if there would be enough interest – if it would be worth all the effort to re-write the entire story. See, Finnish and English are completely different languages. It is not just word-for-word translation but takes some serious re-thinking. And I can be quite lazy at times. Moreover, many of the culture-specific things in the Finnish version would not make sense to the global audience. So, I did not want to just blindly throw it out there and hope someone would take a catch. To reach You, the English-speaking reader, a new kind of channel was required.

So, to see if there was demand, I opted to pre-sell the book online with “Pay What You Want” pricing. The reader could decide how much they want to pitch in, if anything. Our small online campaign resulted in one thousand pre-orders from readers like You. One thousand! In a matter of three months. Considering that the book was not even written yet, the demand was clearly there. I decided to keep people engaged and updated during the writing process. That guaranteed a better end product.

People helped in many ways: corrected the language, gave valuable insights, provided feedback and spread the word. Thank you so much Bart, Bodhi, Carlos, Dario, Gabriela, Giulia, Ilana, Jaakko, Jemi, Jukka, Julia, Kelly, Kim, Korry, Mar, Nicoleta, Pare, Sam, Tal, Valtteri and Véronique for your contributions.

Thank you also Albert Casals, Benjamin Lesage, Daniel Suelo, elf Pavlik, Heidi Tolvanen, Ibby Okinyi, Lea Rezić, Mark Boyle, Matt Stone, Matti Koistinen, Max Neumegen, Päivi and Santeri Kannisto, Raphael Fellmer, Simo Annala and Thomas Francine for sharing your valuable insights. Your participation goes to show that this is not just my journey but a shared experience.

Huge gratitude also to Dorit, Jason, Julien, Kamiel, Randi, Reese, Samantha and Thomas for your priceless help in proofreading. I also want to salute a talented graphic designer and my great friend Ghassan Nassar. You rock!

As for the price, the majority opted for zero. I emphasized the fact that a moneyless pre-order is as precious as any other sum, a show of interest valuable in its own right. Yet there were some who insisted on supporting also financially. I wanted to know why would they pay for something that they could also get for free. The responses
were so full of love that I was moved to tears. Clearly, a new kind of attitude is bubbling under. Here are a few anonymous quotes so you can see what I mean:

- “Paying for something free is a supercharged Facebook Like. It's for when you really really like something.”
- “I feel as if that part of me that wouldn't contribute to something valuable, that would only take and not give, is fear. It's what hides love from view. I give because I see how stinginess, wanting to hold onto ‘my stuff’, is a symptom of a sick society.”
- “For me it's easier to pay for something knowing I don't have to. It simply feels different.”
- “Since you are going to do this for free, I have no fear that you are going to waste the money I trusted you with.”
- “I paid for the same reason why I will buy stuff from shop around the corner and I won't order it somewhere else and cheaper – I want the shop to be there and I want to support it somehow.”
- “Giving money for your book felt like waving to you from the distance and if there are many of those who wave from all parts of the world, you will feel the network of love that supports making the difference.”
- “A purchase is always a sort of agreement where both parties are happy enough with the conditions. If one side starts this process with an unconditional offer, it's like an invitation to do something together, like pulling from the same end of the rope instead of from the other end. Contributing nothing from my side would feel wrong and simply take the magic away.”

I wish to thank the thousands who gifted me with rides, clothes, shelter, food, drinks and other nice things over the years. With your actions, you proved that a human being is a helpful, generous and empathetic creature.

My somewhat screwed up but ever-so-loving family that has played its part in what I have become. Because of you, I have dared to show my emotions, dared to be me, dared to live. Thank you! Apart from my parents and siblings, this family also consists of a multitude of amazing friends. You know who you are. Without your support and shoulders to cry on I could have not continued on the challenging path I chose to take.
Jukka, you are the epitome of this friendship. Special thanks to Kristina, Ania, Saara, Lisa, Lea and Rita with whom I shared the roads less traveled. Thank you for your patience. You helped me to become a better person.

Finally, I would like you to join me for a moment of silence, to honor the legacy of our dear moneyless friend Heidemarie Schwermer\(^{80}\) who recently came to the end of her road and passed on in peace. Seek what she sought. Perhaps, by paying it forward, we can create a positive snowball effect together.

“Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the wise; seek what they sought.”

– Matsuo Basho

\(^{80}\) [http://livingbigonless.tumblr.com/livingwithoutmoney](http://livingbigonless.tumblr.com/livingwithoutmoney)
What is your next step?

Photo: Anna Szutenberg
About the Author
Tomi Astikainen spent four years, 2010-2014, completely without money. During that time he traveled to 42 countries, hitchhiking more than 200,000 kilometers. He is the author of several ebooks, including *The Sunhitcher - an intriguing story based on the first one and half years of his travels*.

Photo: Jaakko Lukumaa
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