



Featuring
more than 125
ways you can
make a
difference in
our world!

The Best of

So What Can I Do

A Tenth Anniversary Celebration of Service

So What Can I Do is the public service weblog promoting ethics in action. This anniversary collection includes posts covering everything from cord blood donation to cell phone donation, socially responsible investing to socially responsible jewelry, bioethics to biofuels, service through gardening to service through gaming. Many of the suggestions are free, fast, or easy; others require a bit more effort. They all help us live in ways that make our communities and our world a better place for each of us.

Selected from the award-winning blog with new posts and commentary by the author.

The Back Cover

Listed among the top blogs for nonprofits by topnonprofits.com, winner of the Black Web Award for Most Original Blog, and featured in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, DarynKagan.com, Our Day to End Poverty, and many other print and online publications, *So What Can I Do*, the public service weblog promoting ethics in action, celebrates its tenth anniversary with the publication of this e-book.

Visit <http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com> to purchase.

Join the conversation at <http://www.facebook.com/sowhatcanido> and <http://www.twitter.com/sowhatcanido> with hashtag #SWCID.

So What Can I Do, helping make the world a better place since 2004.

"I'm just one person, what can I do to change the world? Ever feel that way? Thanks to Karama Neal, making a difference has never been easier. So What Can I Do has ideas that nearly everyone can put to good use."

- *Positive Thinking Magazine*

"12 - Read So what can I do? to find out hundreds of actions you can take to change the world."

- *BestUniversities.com, 100 Best Blogs for Those Who Want to Change the World*

"Arkansas native Karama Neal will tell you that one person can make a difference in the world. What's more she'll even offer a suggestion as to how. Built on the advice from Indian spiritual leader and statesman Mahatma Gandhi, famous for his nonviolent fight for civil rights and freedom, Neal has run a blog encouraging individual participation in social change."

- *SyncWeekly.com*

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Forward

Although blogs have been around in some form since 1983, I didn't read one until September 2004. It was written by the editors of the American Journal of Bioethics. I'd just been reading the AJOB blog a short time when I realized that the blog format would be the perfect way to collect and disseminate practical solutions to the myriad of social problems my friends and I got so frustrated about so often.

It seemed we always talked about the same things – the challenges facing public education and our health care system; widening income disparities; lack of social and environmental justice; the broken criminal justice system; national, community, and domestic violence. My friends and I could spend hours talking about these and other societal problems. We often felt overwhelmed, wondering if there was anything anyone could do to make a difference.

On occasion one of us would offer a solution, a way to create a positive change. These were the best conversations, because they gave us hope and led to action. I wondered what other steps I could take, and how I could spread the word about these opportunities to change our world for the better. And so one month after discovering that first blog, I launched "*So What Can I Do* — the public service weblog promoting ethics in action."

Each post may not be relevant for every reader. For example, a vegetarian reader would be hard pressed to eat less meat. And in some cases, the reasons for irrelevance need to be challenged. Consider that some people are prohibited from giving blood because of their sexual orientation and there do not appear to be ways to donate naturally kinky hair to children who've lost their hair for medical reasons. In these and other cases, the reader is urged to promote sound public policy and otherwise advocate for and create change. The reader should also note the text of some posts has been updated to reflect current information.

No one can do all of the suggestions, but most everyone can do something. I encourage the reader to not just do something, but to do *everything* you can. Our challenges are great, so start with the free, fast, and easy suggestions, if you like, but then quickly move on to those that are more challenging but can make a much bigger and more lasting difference.

We're in this world together. Let's make it better together, for everyone.

Karama Neal
May 2014, Little Rock

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Give the gift of learning.

Originally blogged Jan 26, 2009

Every now and then, I take a look at the archives of *So What Can I Do* to see how organizations have grown and developed since I first wrote about them. Donors Choose is a perfect example of why it's important to revisit organizations. When I first wrote about Donors Choose almost four years ago, they were only active in certain cities. But now, they are nationwide! Want to know why I'm excited?

We all know that many public schools are underfunded, particularly in low-income communities. But every child, regardless of family income, deserves a rock solid education that prepares her to take advantage of the many opportunities life brings. Even with dedicated, caring, and effective teachers, some classrooms still need help.

At Donors Choose, public school teachers from across the US, post the specific needs they have for their classroom, and then we, the donors, choose to fund them. Here in Arkansas, a teacher needs \$419 to buy "5 sets of science materials including 10 dissecting pans, a dissecting kit, blood typing kits, and two anatomy videos" for her high school biology class. A teacher in Pennsylvania needs \$230 to buy "30 glue sticks, 24 scissors, and dry erase markers" for her elementary students. And a teacher in Nevada would like to buy "8 copies of each of 3 different chapter book series - Freckle Juice, Judy Blume's Fudge Box Set, and the Ralph Mouse Collection" for \$457.

You can help these and other educators and students by making a donation a tax-deductible donation of as little as one dollar to support a child's education. Donors Choose collects the funds, buys the supplies at a negotiated best price, and then ships them to the teacher. I'm so glad this opportunity is now available to all US public school teachers. Ready to get involved?

- If you want to donate, visit donorschoose.org to get started. The teachers will even send you a thank you note!
- If you need supplies for your classroom donorschoose.org to register your class and request materials.

- If you want to help, then spread the word. Tell your friends. Forward this message to a teacher you admire. Encourage others to participate.

What a great way to give the gift of learning.

"Thank everyone who calls out your faults, your anger, your impatience, your egotism; do this consciously, voluntarily." - Jean Toomer, poet and novelist (1894-1967)



<http://www.donorschoose.org/>

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

Insist on justice. Support Innocence Projects.

Originally blogged Jan 11, 2005

Can you imagine being wrongly accused of a crime? And then convicted? And then sentenced to death? Unfortunately many people in the United States have lived (and died) just that scenario. Some, including the state of Illinois, argue that the number of innocent people sentenced to death (a punishment that is not reversible) is reason enough to outlaw the death penalty. I agree. But even if you don't, you may still prefer that your tax dollars not be used to incarcerate and kill innocent people.

With the advent of new scientific testing methods, particularly forensic DNA testing, many cases are being reevaluated. Innocent people are being discovered in prisons in every state. Here's how you can help free them:

- Get more information on the death penalty and innocence.
- Learn about and support the innocence projects in your state.
- Spread the word. Click the envelope below to e-mail this post to a friend, or compose your own letter.

Thanks to Jenrae for mentioning the Georgia Innocence Project in a comment which inspired this post.

Don't make the innocent pay for the sins of the guilty. Insist on justice. 152 innocent people have been freed so far. Who will be next? How will you help?

~~~~~

**I wrote this post in 2005** and wrongful convictions continue to be a serious problem, not just for those unjustly serving time but also for our justice system and society as a whole. As of this writing there have been 312 post-conviction DNA exonerations. 143 people have been exonerated and freed from death row. Many others have been released from other sentences. Innocence projects across the United States and around the world and deserve our support, as do the people they serve.

<http://www.innocenceproject.org/>

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/>

<http://www.innocencenetwork.org/>

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# Clean the air with plants.

Originally blogged Jan 18, 2005

I started a new job today and the first question my mother asked me was if my office had space and light for plants. I'm pleased to report that it does. Plants are great to have around. They beautify the environment, produce oxygen and clean the air. Given the high levels of insulation in today's modern buildings, plus the fact that many buildings have windows that don't even open, indoor air quality can be quite low. Some types of carpet, furniture, plastics, plywood, varnishes, stairs, and adhesives emit toxins that may result in "Sick building syndrome". But don't worry, plants can help clean the air you breathe. Here are a few you can use:

- Boston fern - Ferns are great! I love to see them sporulate. They are easy to grow in medium to bright light. As with most plants, water them only when the soil feels dry.
- Peace lily - These have lovely white blossoms. And if they ever start drooping just give them some water and they'll perk back up again.
- Spider plant - One of my favorites! I like to clip and root the babies and give them to my friends. They are easy to grow in bright to medium light.
- Corn plant - This won't produce corn but it will clean your air. And it doesn't need much light.
- Snake plant/mother-in-law's tongue - Since I love and enjoy my mother-in-law to-be, I prefer the name "snake plant". (Of course, I like snakes, too!) These grow well in almost any type of light, and will forgive you if you forget to water them.
- English ivy - These look great as hanging plants, and are easy to grow in bright light.

- Janet Craig/Striped dracaena - I haven't grown this plant but it sure is pretty! It needs bright to medium light.

So consider adding some plants to your work or home environment. Your lungs will thank you!

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The 1989 NASA Clean Air Study done in conjunction with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America really helped advance this field. They were interested in finding ways to keep the air clean for astronauts who spend extended periods of time in space. Thankfully, their work has real relevance for those of us still on Earth.

https://archive.org/details/nasa_techdoc_19930072988

http://www.denverplants.com/Plantscape/html/cleanair_3.htm

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3230460/figure/d32e164/>

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"It is always easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them."

– Alfred Adler

Start a “foundation.”

Originally blogged Jan 8, 2009

A good friend once told me the story of how she and her relatives lost their family land in Georgia. As I remember it, there was a small subset of the family that had taken responsibility for paying the taxes, but couldn't afford to do so anymore. They made some efforts to rally the rest of the family, but it was too late and they soon sold the land. My friend got a check for her share of the sale price. It was a windfall, but not a happy one. Given what her ancestors went through to obtain, develop, and work the land, she hated to see her family gone from it so quickly. It wasn't a huge check – I'm guessing less than a thousand dollars, but given its origin she vowed to do something very special with it.

If you ever come into or accumulate a sum of money, especially one that is meaningful to you, consider starting a foundation. Here are some ways you can participate in long-term charitable giving with less money than you probably think.

- Contact your local community foundation. They may be able to help you set up a scholarship or donor advised fund that will allow you to direct your charitable giving and reduce your taxes. This is especially powerful if people pool their resources. When a dear friend and classmate passed unexpectedly a few years ago, her colleagues, friends, and family established a fund to support her favorite organizations and activities. It has been a nice way to honor her.
- Open a Calvert Giving Fund for as little as \$5,000. The principle is tax deductible and you direct your earnings to your favorite charities. Calvert says theirs is “the only 100% Socially Responsible Donor Advised Fund”. That means your principle is doing meaningful work as well.
- If the sum is a bit larger or if you are pooling it with others, you can start a foundation. The Council on Foundations has a helpful guide to get started.

Of course, these aren't the only ways you can give. You can simply make a donation to your favorite organization, or invest in microloans and let them permanently revolve. Regardless of the method you choose, make sure you use the money in a way that is as meaningful as how you received it.

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty or democracy?" - Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

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<http://www.cof.org/community-foundation-locator>

<https://www.calvert.com/sri-charitable.html>

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*"Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response  
to error that counts."*

- Nikki Giovanni

# Support your favorite nonprofit.

Originally blogged Jan 10, 2005

In my last post, I talked about working for nonprofits as a way to improve your life and the lives of others. In the comments, Steve left a wonderful suggestion, upon which I'd like to expound. He suggested that we modify our email signatures to include a link to our favorite nonprofit. Here are some reasons why this is a great idea:

- \* It's a free and effective way to spread the word about your favorite organization.
- \* Someone you email might just need to know about that particular nonprofit.
- \* You can tailor the link to specific goings-on (e.g. CARE for the Tsunami survivors or United Way for King Day service projects)

So, identify your favorite nonprofit(s) and link to them in your email signature. They'll be happy to receive the free publicity and you'd be doing a service for them and for your community. Thanks Steve!

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Nowadays, there are many more options for spreading the word about your favorite organizations of purpose. Consider posting about them on Facebook, mentioning them on Twitter, or writing about them on LinkedIn. Many organizations who do very good work have very small or no marketing budgets, so they'll really appreciate your help. Word of mouth is the most effective marketing there is!

<http://www.guidestar.org>

<http://www.CharityNavigator.org>

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Join a credit union.

Originally blogged Jan 25, 2005

I was listening to WRFG yesterday, and heard an interview with staff from a local credit union (BOND Credit Union). They told the story of a homeless man who regularly collected and sold aluminum cans and deposited the money in their credit union. So not only did he own part of the bank (like all credit union depositors), upon application, he qualified for and received a \$200 loan. He couldn't have done that at a commercial bank. I think that's a great story. And if credit unions can benefit this homeless man, think what they can do for you!

Credit unions are fully insured (like the FDIC) and operate much like commercial banks, except that member depositors *own* the bank and receive profits in the form of higher interest rates on deposits and lower interest rates on loans (as compared to commercial banks). You may well qualify to join a credit union and it may be in your best interest to do so. Learn more:

- * Use this site run by the Credit Union National Association to learn more about credit unions and to find a credit union that you can join. Federal employees may also want to consider the National Association of Federal Credit Unions.

- * "The National Credit Union Administration is the federal agency that charters and supervises federal credit unions and insures savings in federal and most state-chartered credit unions across the country through the National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund (NCUSIF), a federal fund backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government."

- * The National Credit Union Foundation is "the charitable arm of the U.S. credit union movement, having both the knowledge and resources necessary to undertake national programming, serve as the financial intermediary between credit unions and governmental agencies, and fund innovative initiatives in support of consumer savings and asset accumulation."

So make the most of your money: join a credit union!

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<http://www.cuna.org/>

<http://www.ncuf.coop/>

<http://www.ncua.gov/>

<http://www.nafcu.org/>

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*"All that you touch you change.  
All that you change, changes you."  
-Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents**

# Recycle rechargeable batteries.

Originally blogged Jan 31, 2006

A few months ago, I got rid of an old laptop that is now woefully out-of-date. Knowing how important it is to recycle rechargeable batteries, I remembered a post I'd done on Call 2 Recycle, a corporation that recycles cell phones and rechargeable batteries "to benefit the environment and charitable organizations." I need an easy and responsible way to get rid of the battery that's been in my back seat since last year, and Call 2 Recycle has it!

Here's how you can participate:

- \* **Click** [www.call2recycle.org](http://www.call2recycle.org) to find a drop-off site near you.

- \* **Call** the consumer helpline, **1-800-8-BATTERY** or **1-877-2-RECYCLE**, to find the retail collection site nearest you.

- \* **Visit** a retail collection site. This is new since my last post.

**In the US:** Alltel, Batteries Plus, Black & Decker, Cingular Wireless, The Home Depot, Lowe's, Milwaukee Electrical Tool, Office Depot, Orchard Supply, Porter Cable Service Centers, RadioShack, Remington Product Company, Sears, Target, US Cellular, and Verizon Wireless.

**In Canada:** Battery Experts, Battery Plus, Bell World, FIDO, Future Shop, The Home Depot, Home Hardware, London Drugs, Makita Factory Service Centers, Personal Edge/ Centre du Rasoir, Revy, Sears, The Sony Store, The Source by Circuit City, Telus Mobility and Zellers.

- \* **Teach** students, yourself and others about the benefits of recycling rechargeable batteries. This is new too! "The lesson plan uses batteries as the basis for developing student's math, science and history skills. By offering a series of interactive experiments and thought-provoking exercises, the program teaches students' about the merits of battery power, safety tips, and how to properly recycle batteries to keep our environment clean and livable." And it's free!

The website is available in Français, Español, Chinese, and English. So round up all your unused rechargeable batteries that may no-longer hold a charge and drop them off at a recycling site near you. It couldn't be easier!

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<http://www.call2recycle.org>

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*"In my humble opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much
a duty as cooperation with good."*

- Mahatma Gandhi

Keep your land.

Originally blogged Jan 7, 2009

I've written before about my great-great-grandfather Griffin Henry Belk. He had been enslaved and after his freedom was acknowledged, he spent several years searching in vain for his parents. Eventually, he settled on 160 acres of land in Ozan, Arkansas that he purchased for \$11 (that's right, eleven dollars). His descendants still own the land we call the Belk Estate. My mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were born there. Now that I'm back in Arkansas, I look forward to visiting this spring. I haven't been there since I was a child, though I clearly remember the pond and forests that cover much of the land. My grandmother always talked lovingly of the five acres she grew up on.

You don't have to read much of this blog to recognize that I generally think it's better that resources are spread among many people rather than being concentrated among just a few. For that reason, I am a big promoter of people keeping their family land. It can be a challenge as families grow in size and members move away and lose contact and interest in the land and the taxes associated with it. But given the history behind the land and its value, it can make even more sense to keep it and make it useful. Here are some resources to help you do just that:

- * **Get in touch with land preservation organizations** like the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Land Assistance Fund or the Arkansas Land & Farm Development Corporation that can help you keep your land. They may be able to help you use land trusts, and other legal tools to help maintain your interest in the land.

- * **Visit the Forestry Service** (or similar office) in your state. Many of them have programs designed to help people develop uses for their land (cutting timber, starting an organic farm, opening a campground, etc.) that can provide income to pay the taxes.

- * **Talk to your neighbors.** If you all are in similar straights you may be able to work together to keep your land. For example, the members of the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society were able to get zoning regulations instituted that favored them keeping their land as homesteads rather than allowing massive development on their high value (and gorgeous) land.

* **Talk to your relatives.** Some of them may not even know about the land. Others may have interesting ideas about how to use it. I know of a family in Arkansas that built several cabins on their land. They use them for family vacations and rent them out to others who want to visit or have a gathering. You may be surprised at the options. Be sure to talk about them all before you sell, because it's hard to get it back once it's gone.

Land is a limited resource, so it would probably be better if no one owned it. But since that's the model we're using, it's better that many of us have a share and that we use it wisely and sustainably.

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**The Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act** is an excellent tool, not only for protecting family land, but also for community and economic development. The Heirs Property Retention Coalition is promoting passage of this act and I am working with them and others toward passage in Arkansas. My family is very excited about the impact this act will have on our family's ability to develop the land and contribute to the local economy and community. Families and communities across our country will benefit from similar efforts to promote land retention and development.

<http://www.southerncoalition.org/hprc/>

<http://heirsofarkansas.wordpress.com>

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# Make all hands safe.

Originally blogged Jan 20, 2006

Many of you already know the sad and unacceptable statistics about domestic violence:

--> 31% of women report abuse by an intimate partner at some time in their lives.

--> In the US, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds by her husband or partner.

--> Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States; more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

So, **if you are in danger**, need help or do not feel safe in your home, dial **911** or call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-7233** or **1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**.

In response to the violence, the Allstate Foundation recently launched Safe Hands: The Allstate Network for Empowering Women. They hope to reduce the incidence of domestic violence by:

**Direct services:** Providing programming and funding support through a financial empowerment curriculum and training materials; community volunteerism by Allstate employees, agents and agency staff; and a grant program to allow service providers to address the complex, broad and often immediate range of survivors' needs.

**Thought leadership:** Supporting domestic violence advocates and service providers through national conferences and other events and cutting-edge research. The Allstate Foundation Domestic Violence Program will conduct an annual, national research poll to determine current awareness and perceptions about domestic violence in the United States. The findings of this poll, conducted among a representative sample of adults in the U.S., will be used to continue to build the program and track progress over the coming years.

**Public awareness:** Creating a national effort to raise public awareness and change societal attitudes about domestic violence. This component of the Program will be phased in beginning in 2006.

Here's how you can get involved:

- \* Spread the word about Safe Hands and other programs working to end domestic violence.
- \* Participate in the good work by donating time, money or supplies to a women's safehouse, applying for a grant to support your work against domestic violence, volunteering at a safehouse,

Join Allstate and the numerous other people and organizations around the world who are working to end domestic violence. Thanks Jessica, for the heads up on this!

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The National Network to End Domestic Violence is a leader in the effort to make all hands safe. Their work and our support is critical because the statistics haven't improved since this was posted. And remember, if you are in danger, please use a safer computer, or call 911, a local hotline, or the U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224**.

<http://nnedv.org/>

<http://www.allstatefoundation.org/domestic-violence-program>

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Rethink “race.”

Originally blogged Jan 18, 2009

“Race” is one of the most intractable and troublesome concepts we humans have ever created. Many of us use the term regularly, but it is rarely and poorly defined. The definitions, when they do exist, are fluid and arbitrary. And racial terminology is often used when we mean something else. It is perhaps no surprise that the concept of race is often considered problematic. As I see it, we have two central challenges:

→ **To recognize and live the fact that there is no biological or genetic basis for our social understanding and application of “race.”**

→ **To recognize and eventually move past our social and biological notions of race without losing or devaluing groups and group membership.**

I don’t claim to have done or even know how to do both of these, but I am working at it. I arrived at these goals through my study of genetics and through life experience, and I find them liberating. They are another way I strive to “Be the change I want to see in the world.”

This work is hard, but all the evidence I see points in that direction. The following resources offer additional insight, and should be read and critically evaluated by anyone wanting to rethink “race.”

- * Race: The power of an illusion - The companion site to the 3-part PBS documentary.
- * Understanding Race - An interactive website from the American Anthropological Society.
- * Use and Misuse of “Race” in Biomedical Research - My most recent academic work on the subject.

The last article is particularly useful if you want a thorough explanation of the first paragraph of this post. There are of course, many other useful resources on the subject. If you have a favorite, please let us know.

"Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." - W E B DuBois, 1903, in *The Souls of Black Folk*

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<http://www.pbs.org/race/>

<http://understandingrace.com/>

<http://www.karamaneal.com>

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*"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice."*

- Nelson Mandela

# Make better lives for veterans.

Originally blogged Jan 6, 2008

It was really cold here last week (at least by Atlanta standards) so during my morning commute, I traded my usual shuttle bus for a MARTA bus which reduces my outside wait substantially. The number 19 bus stops at the VA hospital (among other places) and many of the folks I rode with were on their way there. The passengers chatted about where they served, their current lives, and much more. Lots of men on canes and crutches, though I assume there were nonvisible injuries as well. So in honor of my fellow bus riders, everyone who interacts with the VA, and veterans everywhere, here are a few ideas for ways to support veterans:

- \* Disabled American Veterans Voluntary Service has numerous ways people of all ages can contribute to better lives for disabled veterans.
- \* Veterans Administration Voluntary Service offers volunteer opportunities and other ways to help veterans.
- \* For more opportunities click here for a previous post on this topic.

So take a bus, ride your bike, walk or drive to your VA hospital or other veterans service agency and see how you can help.

*"Within the soul of each Vietnam veteran there is probably something that says 'Bad war, good soldier.' [Only now are Americans beginning to] separate the war from the warrior."* - Max Cleland, former head of US Veterans Administration, at the dedication of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC

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<http://www.dav.org/>

<http://www.volunteer.va.gov/>

<http://booksforsoldiers.com/>

<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>

<https://www.hfotusa.org/>

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Impact your world.

Originally blogged Jan 2, 2008

I was trolling CNN for news items that might inspire a post when I stumbled upon Impact Your World. It seems CNN has already done the work for me! Impact Your World challenges readers to "Take action on the news you consume!" They facilitate that work in several ways:

- * **Click the links** associated with the news stories to donate to organizations that make a difference.
- * **Follow the progress** of the Be The Change volunteers. And be inspired to do your own work.
- * **Visit** the Planet in Peril page for tips on protecting our Earth.
- * **Inspire others to action** by sending your story about how you make difference in your community.
- * **Nominate** a CNN Hero and get that person and, more importantly, their cause the recognition they deserve.

Today's front page features ways you can help children in Iraq, people affected by the floods in Bangladesh, and US veterans. Often reading the newspaper or watching the evening news can seem like an exercise in futility. How can one person lessen all the suffering that is reported? Thankfully, CNN's Impact Your World shows us that indeed we *can* make a difference.

Happy new year, readers! I wish each of you every happiness, every blessing, every joy for 2008.

"Are you a politician asking what your country can do for you or a zealous one asking what you can do for your country? If you are the first, then you are a parasite; if the second, then you are an oasis in the desert." - Khalil Gibran (1883–1931)

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<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/impact.your.world/>

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# Consider burial alternatives.

Originally blogged Jan 23, 2007

The cost of funerals is rapidly approaching \$10,000, not as much as most weddings, but still pretty steep. The expense alone is enough reason to consider burial alternatives, but you may also be concerned for other reasons: land use, contamination of ground water by toxic embalming fluid, use of nonbiodegradable coffins and vaults, and the like. Thankfully there are many good alternatives for green burials that honor the deceased and comfort the bereaved. Here are a few of your choices:

- \* Natural burial "ensures the burial site remains as natural as possible in all respects. Interment of the bodies is done in a bio-degradable casket, shroud, or a favorite blanket. No embalming fluid, no concrete vaults."
- \* Donation of the body for forensic research or medical training.
- \* Memorial reefs are an option for those who have been cremated. The cremains are used to create a "permanent living legacy that memorialize the passing of a loved one." Reefs are lowered into the sea to help restore the marine environment by creating artificial reefs and fish habitats.
- \* Cremation, a low-cost, widely-available alternative for those who are interested.

Many of us find it uncomfortable to think or talk about our own deaths, but having conversations about end-of-life care, organ donation, financial issues, and the like, can make things so much easier for your loved ones.

*"It is difficult to accept death in this society because it is unfamiliar. In spite of the fact that it happens all the time, we never see it."* – Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

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<http://www.greenburialcouncil.org/>

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Help increase mobility and increase independence.

Originally blogged Jan 3, 2005

Sometimes, it doesn't take much for a person with atypical mobility to be independent, and contribute to society. Often, all it takes is a wheelchair, a walker or a cane. To learn more, read personal stories about the positive difference mobility equipment can make. Note that the need for wheelchairs and other equipment is higher because of the recent Indian Ocean Tsunami. Here are two ways you can help:

* Wheels for Humanity will recycle your donated wheelchair, deliver and personally fit it, at no cost, to children and adults in developing countries. In eight years, they've delivered over 21,000 chairs to people in over 50 countries. They also accept other ambulatory equipment. Click [here](#) to get more information and donate.

* The Wheelchair Foundation has donated or committed over 300,000 wheelchairs to people in 129 countries. If you donate \$75, they will provide matching funds and deliver a wheelchair to a child, teen or adult without mobility.

Do you have a cane, wheelchair, walker or crutches gathering dust? Put it to work! Help someone increase their mobility and increase their independence. Most contributions are tax-deductible. Donate today!

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<http://www.ucpwf.org/>

<http://www.wheelchairfoundation.org/>

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# Prevent FOG clogs.

Originally blogged Jan 7, 2008

When I was growing up there was always a container of grease on the stove. Both my mother and grandmother saved grease and oil from cooking. My grandmother would sometimes reuse clean grease for cooking. She'd use our inedible grease to make lye soap. She used it for everything and gave it away to those of us who valued it. In fact, her last set of Christmas gifts to family and friends was gift wrapped homemade lye soap. How cool!

Nowadays, there's much less grease in my and my mother's homes - healthy eating and all. But every now and again, Kwadjo makes falafel or chicken livers and we have grease. We haven't had any new lye soap since that gift wrapped bunch over ten years ago, so what do we do with the grease? It's a problem for lots of us, particularly in restaurants. **Fats, oils and greases** (FOG) clogs drains and can cause sewage back-ups and flooding, costing money for repairs and damaging the environment. So here are some tips on how to prevent a FOG clog:

Do not

- \* Pour liquefied fat, oil or grease down the drain. This causes to FOG clogs.
- \* Use hot water and soap to wash away the grease down the drain. It will harden and clog your pipes.

Instead,

--> Place cooled cooking oil, poultry and meat fats in sealed non-recyclable containers and discard with your regular garbage. FOG is food waste. Treat it as such.

--> Use paper towels to wipe residual grease or oil off of dishes, pots and pans before washing them. Discard the towels in the trash.

Bottom line - if you're not going to use your FOG waste for fuel (biodiesel or WVO) or for soap, put it in the trash not down the drain. Similar rules apply to motor oil except that it should be recycled. So now Kwadjo and I have container of grease under the sink. When it's

full we'll trash it. Maybe one day, though, we'll make soap!

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<http://www.stoptheclog.com/>

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"A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation."

- Edmund Burke

Make your good idea a reality.

Originally blogged Jan 26, 2005

A few years ago, it occurred to me that a major way people can make a difference (in their own or other's lives) is by making their ideas a reality. Most of us have brilliant, interesting, or useful ideas from time to time, but how many of us act on them? That's the key: to make your ideas, your solutions, your dreams *real*. Whether you want to clean your house, lose weight, learn another language, be more social, write a book, start a school, or something else entirely, *you can make it happen*. Here are some ways to do that:

- * Write your goals down. Put them someplace where you can see them and be reminded of them frequently. One friend used the bathroom mirror. Another used an e-mail alert service to send reminders to her inbox. (Here's a free service I found through Google.) I like my journal (paper, not online) to record thoughts and inspiration. I often flip back through it to see what progress I've made and what more I need to do.
- * Set small, quantifiable goals. It's easier to get discouraged when the goals are too big. You should be able to measure the results, so you know you're making progress. Instead of saying "I'll clean my house," try "I'll throw away or recycle at least five items each day."
- * Reward yourself when you reach your goals. After exercising as planned for a month, treat yourself to a night out or a spa day.
- * Talk with a group of like-minded friends. Tell them your goal and ask them to hold you accountable for what you say you will do. You can do the same for them. This works really well in my bookclub, the Sisters of the Yam. After we eat dinner together and discuss the book-of-the-month, we have Dream Circle. Each of us talks about our dreams and the progress (or lack thereof) we've made toward making them a reality. If one of us falls off track, our sisters are there to offer encouragement, support and suggestions to get us started again. We love it!

With the new year, the vernal equinox, and my birthday, I like the first three months of the year for making plans and setting goals. Of course, you can set goals any time. Now is the perfect time to get started. So think about what you really want to do, and do it! Make it happen!

Just FYI, I thought about starting a newsletter or website like this blog for years before I launched *So what can I do?* It's never too late!

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<http://calendar.google.com>

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*"For Justice, though she's painted blind,  
Is to the weaker side inclined."*

– Samuel Butler

# Be a virtual volunteer.

Originally blogged Feb 25, 2005

Nowadays it's easier than ever to volunteer with an organization whose cause you believe in. All you need is your computer! Here are two sites to get you started:

- \* [Onlinevolunteering.org](http://Onlinevolunteering.org) is a project of the United Nations.
- \* [Volunteermatch.org](http://Volunteermatch.org) is a US-based volunteer clearinghouse.

"But how can I help my favorite organization by sitting at my computer?" Here's how:

- \* **Grant writing** - Many organizations survive because of grants but there are always so many to apply for. You can help by writing the grant proposal for your favorite organization. My friend Nana did this and got a \$10,000 grant funded for Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers (now Forever Family). Great work, Nana!
- \* **Website or graphic design** - This can be a great way to get experience in web design. Your favorite organization gets a great new site, and you get design experience and a page to point to showcase to new clients.
- \* **E-mail pen-pal** - Some organizations are looking for e-mail pen-pals for senior citizens or servicewomen and men. The Orphan Foundation of America needs virtual mentors for current and former foster youth ages 18-23.
- \* **Raise money on E-bay** - Use your existing E-bay account to sell goods and then have the money sent to your favorite organization. Perhaps you'll choose Modest Needs, since that's where I got the idea.
- \* **Transcription/translation** - Many organizations need translation or transcription services. If you're multilingual this may be a great way for you to serve.

\* **Research** - Your favorite organization may need research done to write a grant proposal or press release. Maybe you can do that research. For example, BuyBlue.org is looking for "talented and dedicated people to prepare our initial database of corporations, and to make connections with like-minded groups."

\* **Database development or management** - Since this is usually computer based, why not use your computer to do the work.

\* **Copy editing** - Your favorite organization may need to have reports, grant proposals and other written material copy edited. If they email the draft to you, you can edit it and send it back. Service provided!

So now you can sit at home and still serve.

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<http://www.onlinevolunteering.org>

<http://www.volunteermatch.org>

<http://www.fc2success.org/>

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"Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation."

– Oscar Wilde

Make a big difference with small change.

Originally blogged Feb 2, 2005

This is such a wonderful idea; I'm so glad to see it's expanding. "In March 2002, Modest Needs was founded by Keith Taylor, who created Modest Needs as his way of repaying the many small kindnesses that others had shown to him. On the original site, he pledged to give away 10% of his gross monthly income as a teacher - \$350.00 - to help people with small, unexpected expenses and nowhere else to turn, no questions asked."

"Since May 2002, when Modest Needs became a charitable foundation, the members of this community have helped 1,384 families to afford \$261,093.87 worth of unexpected expenses ranging from the fee for a GED exam to the cost of burying a stillborn child."

And here's how you can be a partner with the folks at Modest Needs to support their good and worthy work:

- * Donate money . It can be a one-time donation, or a monthly gift. Even small change helps a lot. Consider adopting a particular request, and you'll know exactly who and how you helped.
- * Sell items on EBay to benefit Modest Needs. Not only will the selling price (your donation) be tax deductible, but 100% of the fees you incur in listing your item are tax deductible.
- * If you are a licensed skilled professional, you can volunteer your time and skills to help a person or family in need.
- * Link to Modest Needs on your e-mail signature or website.

If you are in need for short-term financial assistance to stay self-sufficient, visit <http://www.modestneeds.org/howtoapply/> to apply for temporary monetary assistance.

It's not unusual to need a little money sometimes. Here's a way you can help fill these modest needs.



In the 12 years since Modest Needs was founded, they have helped more than 12,000 working families weather times of crisis and keep from slipping into poverty. This is real evidence of the power of crowd funding. And keep this site in mind for those occasions when you meet someone who needs financial assistance you are unable to provide.

<https://www.modestneeds.org/>

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"When hope dies, what else lives?"
- Ama Ata Aidoo

Donate your baby's cord blood.

Originally blogged Feb 22, 2006

Are you pregnant? Is someone you love? If so, then check this out: **Your baby may be able to save someone's life just by being born.** When you give birth, you have three options for what to do with the placenta and umbilical cord blood:

- * Trash it. This is what usually happens. What a waste.
- * Store it for possible use by you, your child or a member of your family.
- * **Donate it for public storage so that it can be used for research or to treat or save the life of an unrelated person.**

Cord blood contains hematopoietic (blood-forming) cells. According to the National Marrow Donor Program, "Each year thousands of patients are diagnosed with life-threatening diseases that can be treated by rebuilding the patient's hematopoietic (blood cell producing) system with blood-forming cells. Umbilical cord blood is being studied as one of the sources of blood cells." So why throw cord blood away when it can be put to good use treating life-threatening disease? Consider,

- Donating cord blood is medically **safe**. The cord blood is collected from the umbilical cord after your baby is born.
- Donation does not change the birth process.
- Donating cord blood is **free** to you and completely **confidential**.

Here's how to get started:

--> Learn more about cord blood donation. The NMDP has tons of information including an FAQ, eligibility guidelines, participating cord blood banks and hospitals and more.

--> Register to donate between your 28th and 35th week of pregnancy.

Some expectant families may be considering storage for private use. There are many resources to help you consider whether private storage is a good decision for your family.

Think about it. *Talk* about it with your partner. *Pray* about it. And *consider* what a blessing your child's birth can be to some other mother's child. Regardless of your decision, remember that there are many ways you can donate life.

"The future is already here. It's just not evenly distributed yet." - William Gibson (1999)

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**I am very pleased** that we were able to donate our daughter's cord blood. Because we planned ahead, it was a simple process and Ayoka got a very nice bib that said "World's cutest blood donor." At the time of her birth, I was very surprised to find that so few people, even our obstetricians and nurses, had even heard of cord blood donation. However, now I regularly hear advertisements for our public cord blood bank on the radio. Now that's progress!

<http://www.nationalcordbloodprogram.org>

<http://www.bethematch.org>

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*"Development requires democracy, the genuine empowerment of the people."*

- Aung San Suu Kyi



# Answer the “Call 2 Recycle.”

Originally blogged Feb 2, 2005

The Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (a nonprofit public service organization) just started a new website, [www.call2recycle.org](http://www.call2recycle.org), with everything you need to know about recycling the rechargeable batteries found in cellular and cordless phones, cordless power tools, laptop computers, camcorders, digital cameras, and remote control toys. As I've mentioned before, it is very important to recycle these batteries. Here are three reasons why:

1) Coltan is a tar-like mineral found primarily in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), and is vital in cellphones, laptops, pagers and other electronics. Congo rebel armies sell it illegally to buy weapons. Illegal mining of it in Congo's eastern lowlands has decreased gorilla populations. When you decrease the need for coltan, you decrease illegal mining and the reduce finances for the civil war in Congo. You also help protect gorilla populations.

2) Between 50 and 80 percent of e-waste from North American cell phone companies ends up in China, Thailand, India and Pakistan. Workers are exposed to many toxic compounds and are paid \$1.50 a day or less to break apart and process electronic equipment. When you recycle, your waste does not make someone else sick.

3) According to a Canadian report, 4,328 tons of telephones, fax machines, and cell phones will end up in landfills this year. That's equivalent to the weight of 583 African elephants. We don't have room for that kind of waste. Recycling reduces waste.

Okay, so now are you ready to recycle? The cell phones are either refurbished for reuse or recycled in an environmentally-sound manner. The rechargeable batteries that power the cell phones and other products are recycled to reclaim reusable materials that are used in stainless steel production and to make new batteries.

Note that the website can be viewed in Spanish, Chinese, French or English, or you can call 1-877-2-RECYCLE for more information. So find a drop off site near you, and answer the call to recycle!

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While there are still a number of challenges with electronics recycling, companies are looking for safer ways to recycle and electronics recycling is key for waste reduction, environmental stewardship, and, in many cases, peace.

<http://www.call2recycle.org/>

<http://electronicsrecycling.org/>

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*"The truth does not change according to our
ability to stomach it emotionally."*

-Flannery O'Connor

Buy fresh, buy local.

Originally blogged Feb 27, 2005

My father raises longhorn cattle in Marianna, Arkansas, mostly for fun but occasionally for food. I don't usually eat beef (or any mammals, for that matter), but I'm looking forward to having some of the beef from my father's farm. Why the exception? I know how the animals are treated. They have room to roam, (even jumping the fence when they want to explore more, much to the annoyance of my father), and they're not given growth hormones, non-grain food, or other compounds that make me mistrustful of commercial meat.

Buying locally produced food is a good way to strengthen your local economy, support family farms, protect the environment and your health, and enjoy fresher, better-tasting food. Here are three sites to get you started:

- * Foodroutes.org
- * Localharvest.org
- * [USDA farmers market list and information](#)

You can find locally produced food in the following places. Just click the links to find a map of farms or markets all over the US. Enter your zip code for the ones nearest you.

- * "Farmer's markets are a very convenient way to purchase local goods. Producers from around the area will bring their produce to a centralized location on a periodic basis throughout the growing season."
- * "Community sponsored agriculture is an arrangement or partnership made between community members and a particular local farm. In a CSA farm, consumers can purchase seasonal "shares" which entitle them to weekly food allowances. Shareholders visit the farm or another pickup location at a scheduled time every week to get their food."
- * "Food cooperatives are member-owned retail businesses dedicated to serving the community by providing the highest quality grocery items at the best value." I like Sevananda in Atlanta.

* "Farm stands and on-farm markets give you the opportunity to purchase goods directly from farmers at their own independent locations."

* "U-pick farms give consumers the unique opportunity to harvest their own produce." When Kwadjo and I went to Florida last month, we picked oranges from a U-pick farm that were the best I've ever tasted.

* You may even find local food in some restaurants or supermarkets, or you can join a food-buying club to buy food with friends.

Growing up in Little Rock, my mother and grandmother regularly bought food from Mr. Bosley, who traveled through the neighborhood selling local meat and produce from his truck. It was a wonderful service that is rapidly disappearing. But thankfully, we all can still get locally produced food. Local food is better food, for everybody. Enjoy some today!

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**My dad doesn't have his longhorns anymore** but we have a garden and still aim to eat local. Now that we're in Arkansas it seems even easier. There are several farmer's markets, one of which is in walking distance from our home. Lots of folks garden and I know more people who can and preserve their homegrown veggies. There is also quite a bit of interest in sustainably raised livestock and poultry. Once, at The Root, one of our favorite neighborhood restaurants, Kwadjo enjoyed a hamburger from a cow that was eating grass that morning. Wherever you are, consider what foods you can eat locally.

<http://foodroutes.org/>

<http://www.localharvest.org/>

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/>

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# Teach tolerance.

Originally blogged Feb 24, 2005

Tolerance.org is a web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that has as its motto "Fight hate and promote tolerance." Sounds like a good plan to me! Here are some ways to participate:

- \* Get 101 tools for tolerance and use them to promote equity in your home, school, community, or workplace.
- \* Test yourself for hidden biases. "Studies show people can be consciously committed to egalitarianism, and deliberately work to behave without prejudice, and yet still possess hidden negative prejudices or stereotypes." Uncover yours and work to eliminate them.
- \* Learn how language can be used (knowingly or unknowingly) to promote biases and discrimination.
- \* Use 10 principles to fight hate because every hour someone commits a hate crime. Every day at least eight blacks, three whites, three gays, three Jews and one Latino become hate crime victims. Every week a cross is burned.
- \* Support the wonderful work at the Southern Poverty Law Center financially and otherwise.

Tolerance.org has special sections for parents, teens, children and teachers, so everyone can find something useful. Remember, one of the best ways to teach is to model. So think about what you believe in, think about what's right, and make sure your words and actions reflect your beliefs.

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<http://www.tolerance.org>

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Take the stairs.

Originally blogged Feb 3, 2005

My new office is on the fourth floor, and while waiting for a slow elevator the other day, it occurred to me that I was missing a prime opportunity for exercise. So I turned away, and took the stairs. In the days since, I've used the elevators less and less. It's a great way to get some incidental exercise, and it reduces energy costs to run the elevators. Here are some related tips:

- * Walk to a park or a more distant cafe for lunch.
- * Use the restroom on another floor and take the stairs.
- * Leave something important in your car (your lunch, your cell phone, etc.) so you have to run out to get it (and take the stairs).
- * Deliver documents or messages to co-workers in person rather than by email.
- * Volunteer to meet people in their office, then walk over.
- * Stand or walk while you talk on the phone.
- * Use a pedometer and keep track of how many steps you take. Aim for 6,000 to 10,000 steps a day.
- * Carry comfortable shoes for workday walking.
- * Go for a short walk after work (and miss some of the rush hour traffic!)

These are some great ways to get active and walk with a purpose, and remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

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[http://www.ehow.com/list\\_6009429\\_incidental-exercise-tips.html](http://www.ehow.com/list_6009429_incidental-exercise-tips.html)

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# Read, study, learn: OpenCourseWare.

Originally blogged Feb 17, 2008

I have learned so much from doing the research needed to write this blog. That's a major reason why I do it. But still, I am often interested in learning more about certain topics - globalization, business management, sustainable development (of course). But these days, I like to choose my own classes, learn on my own schedule, and ideally, not pay a lot.

OpenCourseWare is the just the answer. More than 100 universities from all over the world have agreed to put full length versions of their courses on line for anyone to study. That's right, you can use the same materials used in college and graduate level course to learn about almost any topic. Choose classes in public health, engineering, foreign language, film, economics, psychology, you name it. What an amazing resource! And it's all free, though registration may be required depending on the university. Ready to get started?

- \* Visit OpenCourseWare Finder to find a course that interests you. Follow the links to the course material.
- \* Visit the OpenCourseWare Consortium to learn more about the program, or to get your institution involved.

That's it! You're ready to go. You won't earn credit, but the knowledge is yours to keep. Whether you want to start your own nonprofit, learn a foreign language, understand complex world issues, or something else entirely, you can learn more about the topics that will help you make a difference in our world. All for free. Happy studying!

*"What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say."* - Ralph Waldo Emerson

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This area has exploded in the time since this post was written. There are now a wide variety of ways to learn for free online. The massive open online courses offer tens of thousands of people from around the world the opportunity to study and learn together and even earn a credential. These courses, and the many video courses, are worth investigating if you are looking to sharpen your skills, want to supplement classroom instruction, or get study a subject at your own pace.

<http://www.ocwconsortium.org/>
<http://edx.org>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/>
<http://www.udacity.com>

<http://www.coursera.org>
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Do right by those you love.

Originally blogged Feb 14, 2006

Love does its best. But sometimes it can be hard to do better or do your best even though we know we should, or know we can. When you get stuck in a place that is less than your best, and you know you need to do better but you can't, won't, don't know how, or are afraid to make a change, **GET HELP**. See below to find the resources to improve your life.

--> **If you are hurting or neglecting someone you love**, your spouse, your partner, your child, your parent, your friend, yourself, or someone else, physically or emotionally, [GET HELP](#). If you are being hurt, abused, or neglected by someone you love [GET HELP](#).

--> **If your emotional state or mental illness (depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, etc.) is causing you to hurt or neglect someone you love**, your friend, your child, your partner, your parent, your spouse, yourself or someone else, physically or emotionally, [GET HELP](#). If you are being hurt, abused, or neglected by someone you love, [GET HELP](#).

--> **If your addiction(s) is causing you to hurt or neglect someone you love**, your partner, your friend, your child, your parent, your spouse, yourself or someone else, physically or emotionally, [GET HELP](#). If you are being hurt, abused, or neglected by someone you love, [GET HELP](#).

Sometimes we need help to do our best. And since those you love deserve your best, do all you can to improve yourself and your relationships. If you need a little help to do so, ask for it. There's no shame in getting help to be your best. It's what love demands. Honor those you love, including yourself, by being **the best person you can be**.

"Love feels no burden, regards not labors, strives toward more than it attains, argues not of impossibility, since it believes that it may and can do all things." - Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), German monk

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**Get the help** you and your loved ones need. Now is the time. Call now. Do not wait. In addition to the hotlines listed below, there are also links to various 12-step recovery programs and support programs for family members.

*If something about your relationship with your partner scares you and you need to talk, call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or **1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**. Fax: 512-453-8541 Address: PO Box 161810, Austin, Texas 78716.*

*If you need help or suspect **child abuse**, call **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (1-800-422-4453). Professional counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 140 languages.*

*If you are suffering **elder abuse** or neglect (or know someone who is) call 911, the Eldercare Locator (**1-800-677-1116**).*

*If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, please call one of these national hotlines: **1-800-SUICIDE** (1-800-784-2433), 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or for TTY, **1-800-799-4TTY** (1-800-799-4889).*

<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/05/get-help.html>

<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/11/get-help-part-2.html>

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*"We lie the loudest when we lie to ourselves."*

**- Eric Hoffer**

# Stop making excuses.

Originally blogged Feb 23, 2008

I've been writing *So What Can I Do* for several years now and I find many people are very supportive of my efforts. There are always a few though, who are convinced I am wasting my time. These folks have so many excuses for why they don't need to become involved, be more generous, work for justice, make the world a better place. Here are the excuses I hear most often, along with a few ideas to help folks stop making excuses start making a difference.

--> **Excuse:** "       *organization is just a scam.*" Well, I'm not so naive as to think that there are no scams out there. Certainly there are. But there are many, many organizations, businesses, and people who are *not* trying to scam you. Sometimes people use this excuse because if they believe everyone who says they are trying to make a difference is really trying to scam them, then they don't have to ever do anything. It seems to relieve them of responsibility. Well the responsibility is still there. Try these ideas to stop making this excuse:

\***Solution:** Use a charity rating organization like Guidestar.org or CharityNavigator.org to determine how the organizations that interest you spend money. These services help you evaluate charitable organizations, so that your donation of time and talent does the most good.

\***Solution:** Think globally, act locally. When you give time or money to a local organization it should be easy to see the effects. You can check up on them and see the fruits of your donation, and hopefully be inspired to give again.

\***Solution:** Choose local foods, goods, and services. That way you support your local economy and everyone in your area benefits.

--> **Excuse:** "*I can't participate because I have to work on improving myself first.*" A few years ago, I read biographies and autobiographies of people I admired: Nelson Mandela, Mohandas Gandhi, Angela Davis, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King, Paul Robeson, Malcolm X, and many others. I think I was looking for perfection. Of course, I never found it. Nobody's perfect. If we all waited until we were perfect to start making a difference nothing would ever get done. We're all flawed, but we all can serve. We can *all* contribute, we just have to find the ways that work best for us. Here are a few ways to get started:

**Solution:** Click to donate or visit a charity mall. These are fast and easy ways to contribute to the causes you believe in.

**Solution:** Donate blood, organs, milk, marrow, or hair. You'll make a huge difference in someone's life and you don't have to be perfect (or even near perfect) to donate.

**Solution:** Improve yourself. Get therapy. Take a class. Learn to read. End your addictions. Do what it takes to be the person you want to be and you'll have that much more to give to others. Just search on this site for these topics and you find more resources to help you get started.

--> **Excuse:** "\_\_\_\_\_ may not be a scam, but it won't work." Do you have an idea to make the program work better? Then volunteer! Or choose to contribute or serve in ways in which the difference is local and/or immediate. Here are a few ideas:

**Solution:** Teach someone to read. It works, and you'll see a profound difference in your student's life. The literacy agency in your area has all the materials and resources you need to get started.

**Solution:** Fight hunger in your community. When you provide food for some who is hungry, they can tell you right away about the difference you've made. It works.

**Solution:** Volunteer your time. You'll see for yourself the difference you are making.

--> **Excuse:** "*What's in this for me?*" I guess we all have to be a bit self-interested, but don't let it get out of control. It helps to remember that no one can make it alone. We need help from someone, even if we pay them. So your concern and care for others can help you too. Here are some ways to wean yourself from some of that self-interest:

**Solution:** Be a social entrepreneur. Many people are discovering new and exciting ways to make money and make a difference at the same time.

**Solution:** Make interest bearing microloans or charitable investments. Not only will you receive interest on your money, but you'll also help make the world a better place.

**Solution:** Sell your cell phone, reduce e-waste, and get some cash. It make sense even if you don't care about the environment or the health of the people who process electronic waste.

--> **Excuse:** *"I'd love to help but I don't have enough time/money/etc."* Even Bill Gates probably wishes he had more of *something*. If you don't have cash, give your possessions. If you don't have time, give money. If you don't have money, give you time and talent. You get the idea. No excuses.

**Solution:** Turn off the TV, save your spare change, stop junk mail and you'll have more time and money to give. Think about what's most important.

**Solution:** Click to donate. You don't need much time or money for that. And since you're reading this, you probably already have the internet connection you need. These have got to be the fastest, easiest, most inexpensive, way ever to make a charitable contribution.

**Solution:** Try socially responsible investing, and make some money so you'll have more to donate.

--> **Excuse:** *"I'd help but I don't like working with kids/my hands/etc."* No excuses folks. There are many ways you can help make a positive difference in our world. Some don't require you leave your home. You can even help without interacting with any other people. Want some ideas?

**Solution:** Be a virtual volunteer. You'd be amazed at the ways you can help without ever leaving your home. And you can be of service to organizations all over the world!

**Solution:** Write a letter to let your elected officials, media, and other know about your priorities. The squeaky wheel gets the grease and there's power in numbers!

**Solution:** Become an everyday philanthropist. You don't have to have a lot of money to make a big difference. In fact, those with the least money often give the most. Just give thoughtfully.

Hopefully by now, you've run out of excuses and a motivated and educated about all the ways we can improve our world. Thank you, in advance, for all you do.

*"No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be."* -Isaac Asimov, scientist and writer (1920-1992)

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"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous. Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

- Marianne Williamson

Convert 'trash' to treasure.

Originally blogged Feb 10, 2005

Do you have things around the house or office that are still good but that you aren't using? Do you want to get rid of those items, but feel bad about trashing them? Conversely, do you run a nonprofit that is in need of supplies? Would you rather not spend your organization's precious dollars to get them? Excess Access may be your answer.

This site serves as a clearinghouse and bulletin board for donors who want to get rid of things, and nonprofit recipients who need just those items. Just complete their free registration and list your wish list or the items you have to donate. The folks at Excess Access will review your post and make it available to their online community. Then the matchmaking magic begins! They have an 81% success rate, so consider listing your items today. Since the items are going to a nonprofit you'll get a tax deduction. Here are some other positive statistics:

* As of May 1, 2004, \$2,008,946.15 worth of items have been donated via ExcessAccess.com.

* As of May 1, 2004, ExcessAccess.com has diverted 5,494.5 tons of useful items out of US landfills.

Excess Access serves "the US, Canada and beyond" so sign up today! Remember one person's trash is another person's treasure!

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[www.excessaccess.com](http://www.excessaccess.com)

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*"Anything will give up its secrets if you love it enough."*

- George Washington Carver

# Spay or neuter your pet.

Originally blogged Feb 18, 2005

On my way to work this morning, I saw a seemingly stray dog wandering around the neighborhood. I hoped it had a home, but where were the owners? It was 30 degrees last night, cold. But today is trash day so maybe it won't go hungry.

This is a sad state of affairs. Every day in the US 70,000 puppies and kittens are born (compared to 10,000 human children). There are not nearly enough homes for all those animals. Consequently, 10-12 million animals are euthanized in shelters every year for lack of available homes and 30 percent of those are purebreds. Spaying or neutering your pet is one way to help solve the problems of too many animals, not enough homes, animal cruelty, and overburdened shelters. Here's how:

- \* Learn more about why you should spay or neuter your pet at Human Society of the United States.
- \* Find a place to spay or neuter your pet. Spay USA is a nationwide network and referral service for affordable spay/neuter services. Call 1-800-248-SPAY (1-800-248-7729) for more information. If your pet is already spayed or neutered or if you don't have a pet, consider making a financial contribution.
- \* Spay or neuter your rabbit. Learn more at [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org/).
- \* Learn more about what happens to abandoned pets from [petrescue.com](http://petrescue.com).

Take care of your pet. Support overburdened pounds, humane societies, and rescue organizations. Get your pet neutered or spayed.

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<http://www.humanesociety.org/>

<http://www.spayusa.org/>

<http://rabbit.org/>

<http://www.petrescue.com/>

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Choose a CDFI.

New for this e-book

I saw *It's a Wonderful Life* for the first time just in the last decade. Many of you already know the story - a guardian angel shows a depressed and suicidal banker how much worse his community would have been without him and helps him value his life and the positive difference he makes in the lives of others. I remember being struck by the beneficial role the bank played in the small town. I didn't recognize it at the time, but the bank was a prototype of a community development financial institution.

CDFIs are banks, credit unions, loan funds, and venture funds that provide financial services in markets that are underserved by traditional financial institutions. They are certified by the CDFI Fund, part of the US Department of the Treasury, which notes that:

“CDFIs provide a unique range of financial products and services in economically distressed target markets, such as mortgage financing for low-income and first-time homebuyers and not-for-profit developers, flexible underwriting and risk capital for needed community facilities, and technical assistance, commercial loans and investments to small start-up or expanding businesses in low-income areas.”

At this writing, there are 831 CDFIs (including my employer, Southern Bancorp!) and they are located around the county. You can support the work of CDFIs in several ways:

- * **Open an account** at a CDFI bank or credit union.
- * **Take out a loan** from a CDFI and refer others to their lending programs.
- * **Donate to a nonprofit CDFI.** Many CDFI loan funds are nonprofit organizations that will put your donation to good use.

CDFIs provide valuable financial services to people and places that can really use them. And as the communities they serve become economically stronger, we all benefit.

“Just a minute — just a minute. Now, hold on, Mr. Potter. You're right when you say my father was no business man. I know that. Why he ever started this cheap, penny-ante Building and Loan, I'll never know. But neither you nor anybody else can say anything against his

*character, because his whole life was...Why, in the twenty-five years since he and Uncle Billy started this thing, he never once thought of himself. Isn't that right, Uncle Billy? He didn't save enough money to send Harry to school, let alone me. But he did help a few people get out of your slums, Mr. Potter. And what's wrong with that? Why...Here, you're all businessmen here. Doesn't it make them better citizens? Doesn't it make them better customers? You...you said...What'd you say just a minute ago?...They had to wait and save their money before they even ought to think of a decent home. Wait! Wait for what? Until their children grow up and leave them? Until they're so old and broken-down that they...Do you know how long it takes a working man to save five thousand dollars? Just remember this, Mr. Potter, that this rabble you're talking about...they do most of the working and paying and living and dying in this community. Well, is it too much to have them work and pay and live and die in a couple of decent rooms and a bath? Anyway, my father didn't think so. People were human beings to him, but to you, a warped frustrated old man, they're cattle. Well, in my book he died a much richer man than you'll ever be! - George Bailey, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946)*

<http://www.cdfi.gov>

<http://www.banksouthern.com>

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"Forever is composed of nows."
- Emily Dickinson

Value water.

Originally blogged Mar 22, 2005

Today, March 22, 2005, is World Water Day. Many of us take clean, accessible water for granted. But we shouldn't. Here's why:

According to the UN, more than 1.1 billion people around the world lack safe water and 2.4 billion have no access to sanitation. This contributes to over 3 million deaths every year. The Environmental Protection Agency says that risks to the US water supply "include difficult and controversial regulatory problems such as pollutant runoff from agricultural lands and stormwater flows from cities, seepage into ground water from nonpoint sources, and the loss of habitats such as wetlands. Though fisheries have come back, we cannot always eat what we catch because fish flesh is contaminated by the remaining discharges and sources of toxic substances. Microbial contamination of drinking water still presents problems in many communities."

"So what can I do?" Here are five suggestions:

- * Skip a beef meal. 18 percent of all water consumption is used to produce feed for livestock. Poultry, hog, and beef factory farms produce large amounts of agricultural waste runoff, which is a major source of water pollution.

- * If you live alone or with cooperative housemates, follow this rule: "If it's yellow, let it mellow. If it's brown, flush it down." This rule, moderately applied, can reduce household water use by 25% alone. And that means a cheaper bill. Thanks to Whitney for that one!

- * Don't waste water. Keep a container handy to collect water that would go down the drain and use it to water plants or pets.

- * Recycle motor oil. Motor oil doesn't wear out, it just gets dirty. Recycled oil can be reprocessed in to other types of fuel. Also, recycling prevents the waste that pollutes ground and drinking water, lakes, rivers, streams and the ocean, and it protects wildlife. (Remember those poor birds after the Exxon Valdez spill?) Click below to find a recycling center near you.

- * Reduce, reuse, recycle paper, in that order. Paper production is one of the top five water consuming industries, so even small efforts make a big difference.

So on this World Water Day, and on every day, take small steps (or big ones if you like) to conserve and protect our drinkable and usable water supply. We should all value water; we need it to survive.

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<http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/>

<http://earth911.com/recycling/used-motor-oil-and-filters/>

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*"A good listener helps us overhear ourselves."*

- Yahia Lababidi

# Send One Suit: Dress for Success.

Originally blogged Mar 1, 2005

March 6-12th has been declared "Send One Suit" week by Dress for Success. "Dress for Success is a not-for-profit organization that helps low-income women make tailored transitions into the workforce. Each Dress for Success client receives one suit when she has a job interview and a second suit when she gets the job. The Dress for Success Professional Women's Group program then provides ongoing support to help the client build a successful career." They accept new or nearly-new and cleaned:

- Coordinated, contemporary, interview-appropriate **skirt and pant suits**
- Beautiful, crisp **blouses**
- Gorgeous **blazers and jackets**
- Professional **shoes**
- There is a particular need for **larger-size suits**

Here are some other ways you can support Dress for Success:

- \* Donate money to Dress for Success worldwide or to a local affiliate.
- \* Volunteer at Dress for Success and do office work, fundraising, sorting and even personal shopping. Click here to find a Dress for Success affiliate near you.
- \* Organize a suit drive through your company, church, sorority, weight-loss group, bookclub or other organization. Together, you will make a bigger difference.

This is a great way to celebrate Women's History Month, which begins today. You've got a week to get ready. So take a look in your closet and find a suit you can spare. A woman in need is preparing for a job interview and she will greatly appreciate it.

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<http://www.dressforsuccess.org/>

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Play video games.

Originally blogged Mar 4, 2008

I don't think I've played a video game since Atari tennis, but they've improved dramatically since Atari and I know there are many others who really enjoy them. Some of these programmers and gamers are interested in social change as well, and they've combined their skills and interests to create games for change. Check out some of these games:

* PeaceMaker allows you to "experience the joy of bringing peace to the Middle East or the agony of plunging the region into disaster." It is available in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Asaf Lubin of Israel writes "I played the game all night last night and found it brilliant and thought-provoking. The concept is of sheer genius and the execution was professional and creative... simply out of this world" and Terry Bowers of the US adds "(My son) has learned more about the conflicts that have been plaguing the Middle East in three hours than I have been able to teach him in many years."

* A Force More Powerful – the Game of Nonviolent Strategy is "the first and only interactive teaching tool in the field of nonviolent conflict." Red Herring writes "It's like political jujitsu."

* Climate Challenge is "a game where you are president of the European Nations. You must tackle climate change and stay popular enough with the voters to remain in office."

* Darfur is Dying, from MTV, is "is a viral video game for change that provides a window into the experience of the 2.5 million refugees in the Darfur region of Sudan. Players must keep their refugee camp functioning in the face of possible attack by Janjaweed militias."

* Pax Warrior is an "interactive documentary" that "weaves the tragic story of the UN experience in Rwanda placing the user, first person, in the shoes of a UN Commander trying to maintain peace." They need beta testers!

* Food Force, from the World Food Programme, presents this scenario: "A major crisis has developed in the Indian Ocean, on the island of Sheylan. We're sending in a new team to step up the World Food Programme's presence there and help feed millions of hungry people."

* Re-Mission was developed for young people with cancer. "Players pilot a nanobot named Roxxi as she travels through the bodies of fictional cancer patients destroying cancer cells, battling bacterial infections, and managing side effects associated with cancer and cancer treatment."

* Ayiti: The Cost of Life help the player answer the question "What is it like to live in poverty, struggling every day to stay healthy, keep out of debt, and get educated?" It's a project of Microsoft and UNICEF.

Many of these games include resources to help you make a real world difference in the situations on which the games are modeled. And player can enjoy gaming while they learn skills and information that is useful away from the screen. So click over, download, and play some video games for fun and a better future. Enjoy!

"I would rather try to persuade a man to go along, because once I have persuaded him he will stick. If I scare him, he will stay just as long as he is scared, and then he is gone." -Dwight D. Eisenhower, U.S. general and 34th president (1890-1969)

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<http://www.gamesforchange.org/>

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*"Dissatisfaction is the wheel pushing progress."*

- Lu Xun

# Give HOPE.

Originally blogged Mar 24, 2005

You don't have to be a long-time reader of "So what can I do" to guess that I'm not in favor of the mass production of HUMMERS for the public. But if folks insist on driving these vehicles, here's something useful they can do with them. The HUMMER Club has teamed with the Red Cross to start HUMMER Owners Prepared for Emergencies (HOPE).

HOPE "will certify qualifying members as Red Cross volunteers who can be deployed by the local chapters of Red Cross to drive supplies and Red Cross personnel into disaster areas where other vehicles might not be able to reach." Now *that's* what the vehicles were made for!

Contact the Red Cross or the Hummer Club for information on how you can give HOPE during hurricanes, floods and other disasters.

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<https://www.thehummerclubinc.com/>

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*"If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't
have to worry about the answers."*

- Thomas Pynchon

Invest in your community foundation.

Originally blogged Mar 27, 2008

One of the sponsors of National Public Radio on KUAR is the Arkansas Community Foundation. I love their slogan - "For Good. For Arkansas. For Ever." but I didn't know much about the work of community foundations. Once I found out, I had to spread the word.

According to the Council on Foundations **community foundations** are "tax-exempt public charities serving thousands of people who share a common interest — improving the quality of life in their area." They make grants, promote charitable activities, identify current and emerging regional issues, direct resources in ways that address community needs, and help their local area prepare for the future.

Community foundations are found in every state. Just enter your zip code and use the community foundation locator below to find one near you. There are over 700 community foundations in the US, so you're sure to find one in your area. Once you do, here's how you can get involved:

- * **Donate.** You will support the work of the foundation, charitable agencies near you, and the life and development of your community.
- * **Volunteer.** Perhaps you can serve on the Board of Directors. Or maybe you can offer your services to the agencies your community foundation supports.
- * **Apply.** If you run a locally focused charitable non-profit, you may be eligible to apply for support from your community foundation. You can then use the fund to improve your community.

So learn more about community foundations and see how you can help. As they say, charity starts at home.

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<http://www.cof.org/>

<http://www.cfstandards.org/>

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# Choose Eco Palms.

Originally blogged Mar 13, 2008

For Christians, this Sunday, March 16, marks the beginning of Holy Week. It will be Palm Sunday, my friend Mawunyo's favorite Sunday. When I was growing up, my church, St. Andrew AME, always had palms for all the parishioners on Palm Sunday (Thanks Rev. Lamb!). I remember those spring days now at Mt. Zion AME where I'll wave my palm high this Sunday (Thanks Pastor Cox!) Unfortunately, those palms were not likely grown or harvested in socially and environmentally sustainable ways. Thankfully, now there are Eco-Palms!

Usually people who cut the palms are paid by volume, so harvesters gather as much as possible without paying much attention to quality. Consequently over 50% of the fronds are discarded, which is bad for the forests and the people and animals that depend on them. Eco-Palms are harvested in a more sustainable way. "Harvesters are paid on the quality of the palms they harvest rather than the quantity, which helps to limit the amount of palms taken from the forest. These communities have taken upon themselves to learn about harvesting practices that minimize impact on the natural forest where the palm grows, and ways to protect this wild species of palm." Using Eco-Palm methods only 5-7% of the harvested palms have to be discarded. The program also eliminates middlemen for sorting and packing. Instead, community members do the work themselves ensuring a higher wage, and improving their standard of living.

Ready to order? Here's the info you need:

University of MN, Eco-Palms  
1530 Cleveland Ave N  
115 Green Hall  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
Tel: 612-624-7418  
Fax: 612-625-5212  
[ecopalms@umn.edu](mailto:ecopalms@umn.edu)

Your church can even order now for Palm Sunday 2009. Just download the Eco-Palms Order Form and email or fax it in. The 2008 cost is \$47.50 for 200 fronds compared to \$21 to \$23 for common palms.

Each year 300 million palm fronds are harvested each year just for the U.S. consumption, most of them for Palm Sunday. Make sure your congregation chooses palms that reflect your faith. And of course, Eco-Palms are great for florists too.

Happy Easter to those who celebrate it, and happy spring to everyone!

*"Cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But, conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?' And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right." -Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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<http://lwr.org/getinvolved/fairtrade/eco-palms>

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“A nation that loses its memory loses its conscience.”
- Zbigniew Herbert

Design a better world.

Originally blogged Mar 3, 2006

Ever thought about how to design earthquake resistant schools? What about tsunami resistant homes? Inexpensive, but functional refugee housing? These and other design and architecture challenges are being met every day by the folks at Architecture for Humanity. If you are an architecture or design student or professional, or if you just like good design, take note:

“Architecture for Humanity is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization founded in 1999 to promote **architectural and design solutions to global, social and humanitarian crises**. Through competitions, workshops, educational forums, partnerships with aid organizations and other activities, Architecture for Humanity creates opportunities for architects and designers from around the world to help communities in need. We believe that where resources and expertise are scarce, innovative, sustainable and collaborative design can make a difference.”

If this sounds like the kind of work you like to support, check out these ways to get involved:

- * Volunteer with AFH by spreading the word, fundraising, advocating and more.
- * Donate either financially or in kind to support the work of AFH. They're non-profit so your gift will be tax-deductible.
- * Learn more about humanitarian design and architecture. They even list socially responsible design education programs around the country.
- * Buy cool stuff, and support AFH in the process.

Architecture for Humanity promotes "architectural responses to humanitarian crises". Their motto is "**Design Like You Give a Damn**". Sounds good to me!

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<http://architectureforhumanity.org/>

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# Plant a row for the hungry.

Originally blogged Mar 2, 2005

There are over 70 million gardeners in the US and about 25 million people who are chronically hungry (including 9.9 million children). Plant a Row for the Hungry encourages gardeners to plant an extra row, and donate the produce to local food banks and community service agencies. It's not much work to till, sow and garden one more row, so consider doing so and donating some of your produce to combat hunger in your community.

It's time to play in the dirt!

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Gardening has grown! Nine years after this post, there are more than 84 million gardeners in the US now. I hope all of them will plant a row for the hungry since the number of people who are food insecure has also grown - to 33 million people, 13 million of whom are children. All the more reason for gardeners to donate their surplus to local food banks.

<http://www.gardenwriters.org/>

<http://feedingamerica.org/>

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“There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness.”
- H. W. Shaw

Turn off the TV.

Originally blogged Apr 20, 2005

April 25-May 1 is National TV Turnoff Week. You may wonder why we need a screen-free week. Here's why:

- > On average, US children spend more time in front of the television (1,023 hours) than in school (900 hours).
- > On average, parents spend only 38.5 minutes per week in meaningful conversation with their children.
- > 91 percent of children feel 'upset' or 'scared' by the violence they see on TV.
- > Watching 21 hours or more of TV each week doubles your risk of type 2 diabetes.
- > Only 36 percent of 4-6 year olds in homes where the TV is always or usually on can read. 56 percent of other 4-6 year olds can read.

If you are one of the 49 percent of Americans who say they watch too much TV, prepare to enjoy a TV free week. You can:

- * Read.
- * Teach someone else to read.
- * Call or visit a grandparent or elderly person.
- * Go hiking.
- * Volunteer.
- * Garden.
- * Write a letter.
- * Study a foreign language.
- * Give blood.

Have a great TV-free week!

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**Turning off the TV frees up time** for all kinds of worthy pursuits. I've also found it helpful to for staying true to our family values – reducing exposure to and normalization of commercialism, gender and racial stereotypes, violence, problematic beauty standards and more. We find this is particularly important for our daughter. Plus it gives us more time for things that are more fun. And we use the money we don't spend on cable for more worthy pursuits.

<http://www.screenfree.org/>

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*"Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."*

-Elie Wiesel

# Give hope to a child.

Originally blogged Apr 5, 2005

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month and April 6, 2005 has been declared National Day of Hope. Consider these statistics from Childhelp USA:

- \* "More than three children die each day as a result of abuse in the home."
- \* "In the United States, approximately three million child abuse reports are made each year—on average, one report every ten seconds."
- \* "The actual incidence of abuse and neglect is estimated to be three times greater than the number reported to authorities."

Outraged? You should be. There are lots of ways you can prevent child abuse:

***\* If you need help or suspect abuse, call 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). Professional counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 140 languages.*** Spread the word about this number. It may be someone's lifeline in a time of trouble.

\* If your behavior toward your child worries you, GET HELP. Learn how to prevent child abuse and neglect. Information and resource packets on promoting safe children and healthy families are available in Spanish and English.

\* Learn more about child abuse from the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services.

\* SPEAK UP! If you are with people who are discussing and approving of abusive behavior (their own, or someone else's), present an alternative way to interact with children. You can do it in a way that is nonjudgmental and nonthreatening, but suggests that such behavior is hurtful and unacceptable. Make sure your words and behavior reflect what you believe. If a story is mean, and not funny, don't laugh. For ideas on how to do this call 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).

\* Donate time, money, or resources to national and local agencies that work to prevent child abuse through hotlines, education, counseling,

training, treatment and more. Consider Childhelp USA which sponsors the **1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)** hotline and many other services. They can direct you to local resources as well.

\* Consider being a foster parent so you can provide a loving, caring, *safe* home for a child. May is National Foster Care Month. (If you are interested in adoption, consult the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.)

Think of the eighteen children who were abused while you read this post. Think of the three children who will die today as a result of abuse in the home. Are you ready to act?

~~~~~

<http://www.childhelpusa.org/>

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"Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place."

- Zora Neale Hurston

Donate your timeshare.

Originally blogged Apr 18, 2005

Vacation timeshares usually sound like a good deal in the beginning, but often the shine wears off after a while. They can be costly, with maintenance fees, taxes, and the like, and if you want to try a different timeshare or week, it can be difficult to switch with someone else. Adding insult to injury, once you decide to sell, you may find the process expensive and time-consuming. If any of this sounds familiar, you may want to donate your timeshare to your favorite charity.

Donateforacause.org will sell your timeshare and donate the profits to your favorite charity. It costs nothing for the charity, and you get a simple, fast, and socially-responsible way to get rid of your timeshare. You may be surprised to learn that often, donation makes the most financial sense.

So if your timeshare is more trouble than it's worth, consider donating it to your favorite charitable cause. You'll support work that you admire and get a tax write-off to boot!

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<http://www.donateforacause.org/>

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*"You don't get to choose how you're going to die. Or when. You can only decide how you're going to live. Now."*

-Joan Baez

# Join the Doe Network.

Originally blogged Apr 18, 2009

I cannot imagine the horror of someone I love going missing. Hopefully, you can't imagine it either, and never will. But for some of us, that horror is all too real. And the longer a person is missing, the harder it is to find them. That's why there are so many unsolved missing persons cases. That's where the Doe Network comes in.

The Doe Network is "a volunteer organization devoted to assisting Law Enforcement in solving cold cases concerning Unexplained Disappearances and Unidentified Victims from North America, Australia and Europe. It is our mission to give the nameless back their names and return the missing to their families." They work in three ways:

- using their website to give the cases exposure
- organizing volunteers search for clues on these cases and making possible matches between missing and unidentified persons
- soliciting media exposure for these cases that need it

This process has been used to close numerous cases through finding the missing person and naming or finding an unidentified person. You can help solve more cases by volunteering with the Doe Network or its sister agency North American Missing Persons Network. Many states and other organizations have their own networks which can use support.

So if you are good at solving mysteries, if you never forget a face, if you want to reunite loved ones, consider joining the Doe Network. Someone will be very grateful for the closure your efforts can help bring.

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<http://www.doenetwork.org/>

<http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/kidnap>

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Say no to plastic grocery bags.

Originally blogged Apr 4, 2005

For several months this fall and winter, a tall pine tree in my yard was plagued with a plastic grocery store bag that was tangled in its topmost branches. It was quite unsightly. But my 8 foot ladder wouldn't help me get it down and for those many weeks, the wind and rain didn't help either. I asked one the rogue yard squirrels to climb the tree and bring it down but it wouldn't comply. Finally, about two weeks ago, I noticed it was gone. Perhaps the wind finally worked its magic and the bag is off to 'decorate' someone else's tree.

Apparently, I'm not the only one who is bothered by the excess of plastic bags that take up space in landfills, and escape proper storage to clutter up the landscape. Consider this:

* Plastic bags can entangle and harm marine life and other animals. According to the World Wildlife Fund, "more than 100,000 whales, seals, turtles, and birds die every year as a result of plastic bags." The Australian government reports that "on 24 August 2000, a Bryde's whale died in Trinity Bay, 2 km from central Cairns. An autopsy found that the whale's stomach was tightly packed with plastic, including supermarket bags, food packages, bait bags, three large sheets of plastic, and fragments of garbage bags. There was no food in its stomach."

* San Francisco government is reviewing a proposed law that would levy a 17 cent tax on each grocery store plastic bag. Many countries including Malta, Papua New Guinea and other are taking similar measures. They're serious about getting rid of these bags!

* The small state of Rhode Island spends about one million dollars each year to pick up "these bags that blow all over the place from trash being delivered to the Central Landfill." Imagine how much larger states must spend. And if they don't, their landscapes must be a mess. It seems a shame to have to spend all that money just to pick up plastic bags.

* Plastic takes an extremely long time to degrade. We can burn it, but that pollutes the air. Getting rid of plastic is a no win situation. We need some plastics, but should monitor how much we use since it's so costly to dispose of.

"So what can I do?"

* Most everyone I know has a drawer or shelf full of plastic grocery store bags. If you are not using them, **recycle them**. Publix and Wal-Mart both have plastic bag recycling centers outside their stores. Please leave a comment if you know of other stores that offer plastic bag recycling.

* Ask the person who bags your groceries to **use just one bag** instead of two for lighter items. I always compliment the baggers that single bag my groceries, and some of them are beginning to know that I don't need "all those extra bags."

* **Bring your own reusable cloth bags** to the store to carry home your groceries. If you're like me, you have lots of cloth bags at home that mostly sit around unused.

* **Buy a few cloth bags** for grocery shopping. Try reusablebags.com or badlani.com/bags

So get yourself some handy cloth bags, and next time someone asks you, "Paper or plastic?" you can answer, "Neither!"

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<http://www.plasticbaglaws.org>

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx>

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# Learn Hands-Only CPR.

Originally blogged Apr 5, 2008

I've written before about learning CPR. You can take a class at the American Red Cross or the American Heart Association, or learn at home with a kit you can use on your own schedule. But what if you haven't taken those classes? Or if it's been a while and you're not confident in your CPR Skills. For those of us who are a bit nervous about using conventional CPR, the American Heart Association now gives another simpler way to save someone's life: hands-only CPR.

Hands-only CPR calls for just two steps:

- 1. Call 911.** Call yourself or better yet, send someone else to call.
- 2. Push hard and fast in the center of the chest.** Center your palm between the breast line. Place your other hand on top with your shoulder directly above so you push straight down. The goal is about 100 beats per minute. Sing the song "Stayin' Alive" to keep time.

A few notes:

- \* **Don't be afraid.** A person who has collapsed from a heart attack is dying, so your actions can only help.
- \* **Don't use this technique with infants, children, victims of drowning, those who collapse due to breathing problems.** These people have less oxygen in their blood and so need conventional CPR with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Check out the hands-only CPR FAQ if you have questions and check out the hands-only CPR video demo. It may be all you need to save someone's life, perhaps the life of someone you know and love.

Less than one third of people who have a heart attack at home, work or in a public space get the immediate CPR they need. Hands-only CPR can change that. **Call 911. Press hard and fast on the center of the chest.** Got it? Good.

*"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."* - Martin Luther King, Jr.

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According to the CDC, each year 720,000 Americans have a heart attack. For two thirds of those people, it's their first heart attack so it's important to know the signs. According to the Mayo Clinic, common signs include chest discomfort or pain, upper body or stomach pain, shortness of breath, nausea, and a cold sweat. Watch for those signs, and if the person has collapse from a heart attack is, call 911 and then use hands only CPR. It's key to "Stayin' Alive."

<http://www.heart.org/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/heart-attack/in-depth/heart-attack-symptoms/art-20047744>

<http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm>

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*"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders,
but they have never failed to imitate them."*

- James Baldwin

Start a library.

New for this e-book

At the back of the headquarters for Arkansas's daily newspaper, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, stand dozens of newspaper vending machines. Because of the decline of the newspaper industry, they have apparently been decommissioned. My dream for them? Turn them into give one, take one minilibraries for use across the state.

Now I haven't yet gotten my hands on one of the vending machines to see if I can manage the transformation, but the mini-libraries are definitely feasible. A Little Free Library is a "gathering place where neighbors share their favorite literature and stories. In its most basic form, a Little Free Library is a box full of books where anyone may stop by and pick up a book (or two) and bring back another book to share."

A visit to [littlefreelibrary.org](http://www.littlefreelibrary.org) will reveal lots of resources for starting your library and sharing the gift of reading. When I get my boxes set up they'll include nonfiction and lots of children's books in addition to other literature. What will you put in your Little Free Library? What will your neighbors share?

<http://www.littlefreelibrary.org>

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East less meat or none at all.

Originally blogged May 24, 2008

In my last post I promised to share a small change my family has made to improve our health - we limit our meat consumption. Although meat can be part of a healthy diet, there are many reasons to eat less meat. Here are just a few:

* Health - This was the primary reason I stopped eating mammals since I have a family history of colon cancer. Heavy meat diets are correlated in increased incidence of cancer, stroke, heart disease, and other ailments. On the other hand, plant-based diets are protective and help prevent many of these same ailments. And when you eat lower on the food chain, you're less likely to accumulate environmental toxins in your body.

* Cost - Meat can be expensive, especially when compared to plant-based protein sources like beans. And often meat isn't even necessary - try a loaded vegetarian pizza and you won't even miss the meat. And when you really want to have meat, don't make it the main attraction. Instead incorporate it into soups, stir-frys or casseroles. It's a great way to stretch your meat purchase and save some money.

* Environment - Did you know that livestock are responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions? That's more than cars, trucks, planes, and other forms of transportation combined. And consider the resources it takes to get meat to your table. For example, it takes 2,400 gallons of water and 7 pounds of grain to produces 1 pound of feedlot beef. The average American consumes 97 pounds of beef per year (273 pounds of meat overall per year), so that's a big impact. The numbers are similar for other kinds of meat. And we haven't yet considered the pollution caused by animal waste, processing and transporting meat, etc.

* Animals - I must say, I'd be likely to eat more meat if it were raised in a healthy and sustainable way. Industrial farming practices leave a lot to be desired not only for the people who consume the animal but for the animals themselves. And we have to wonder why most of us wouldn't dream of eating some animals (cats, dogs, parrots, etc.) but are happy to eat others (cows, pigs, chickens). What's the difference? Also, a move from industrial farming which uses loads of antibiotics may help reduce antibiotic resistance.

Now I'm the first to admit that I still eat meat, but it's a lot less than I used to eat. I also recognize that because of supermarket redlining not everyone has access to healthy, fresh foods. That said, one of the easiest things to do is just reduce your meat intake. Instead of two

servings of meat, just have one (or none) and an extra helping of veggies, beans, or other nonmeat items. Increase the amount of fiber you eat for a full feeling and better digestion. Whole grains are a great way to do that. You may want to check out some of the many vegetarian recipes that are out there. Many of them are so good, you won't miss the meat at all.

Here's to healthy living, for us, for the animals, and for the planet!

"The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress." - Frederick Douglass (1817? - 1895)

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<http://www.meatlessmonday.com>

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*"You cannot be a leader and ask other people to follow you,  
unless you know how to follow, too."*

- Sam Rayburn

# Publish in and read open access journals.

Originally blogged May 12, 2008

I spend a good deal of my life reading and writing academic papers. In the olden days (which weren't so long ago), that meant going to the university library, sometimes to the basement or archives to search for particular volumes among shelves and shelves of books and journals. But school libraries can't carry all scholarly journals. Interlibrary loan eased the problem in the past, but the internet offers an opportunity to really solve the problem. Enter open access journals.

Open access journals are scholarly academic journals that are freely and openly available on the internet. The reader is able to access these journals without restrictions, though some journals charge authors a fee to publish. These journals are developing the same levels of quality, prestige, and copyright protection as more traditional journals, and there is evidence to suggest that publishing in open access journals can increase impact and citation rates. Great news for any academic!

I recognize that not everyone has access to university libraries, and that not all libraries have the financial resources to grant access to expensive and numerous scholarly journals. For those reasons, I have decided to prioritize publication in open access journals. I like to think that my writing is of value to many kinds of people, not just those who have easy access to wealthy academic libraries. It really makes sense when you consider that taxpayers fund so much research. I'm not the only one who thinks so. In 2002, George Soros' Open Society Institute launched the Budapest Open Access Initiative to promote open access journals and publication.

With thousands of peer reviewed open access journals available around the world, there is bound to be a journal in your field and language. And if you see a need for a new open journal, here's a guide to starting your own open access journal.

So are you all jazzed about open access journals? Ready to publish? Check out these resources to find the publication and information you need:

\* Directory of Open Access Journals aims to "increase the visibility and ease of use of open access scientific and scholarly journals thereby promoting their increased usage and impact. The Directory aims to be comprehensive and cover all open access scientific and scholarly journals that use a quality control system to guarantee the content." They cover 3353 journals in all languages all over the world. Journals

must use peer or editorial review.

\* Open J-Gate is "an electronic gateway to global journal literature in open access domain." The database indexes "4375 open access journals, with links to full text at Publisher sites." They include both peer-reviewed journals and industry and professional journals in English.

\* Open Access Directory is "a compendium of simple factual lists about open access (OA) to science and scholarship, maintained by the OA community at large." It's a wiki so everyone can contribute.

So you can see, there are lots of ways to promote open access. Here's my first OA paper. I look forward to reading yours!

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<http://www.doaj.org/>

<http://oad.simmons.edu/>

<http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/>

<http://www.karamaneal.com>

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*"Truth is not only violated by falsehood;
it may be equally outraged by silence."*

-Henri Frederic Amiel

End abuse.

Originally blogged May 13, 2005

According to some sources, the vast majority of violent criminal offenders have abused animals as well. And a 1997 survey of "50 of the largest shelters for battered women in the United States found that 85% of women and 63% of children entering shelters discussed incidents of pet abuse in the family." There's a connection between pet abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, and domestic violence. The Dekalb County Police Department and many other public service organizations have recognized this link and now see animal abuse as a possible sign of other forms of abuse. Learn to recognize these signs. Report abuse.

--> *If something about your relationship with your partner scares you and you need to talk, call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or **1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**. Fax: 512-453-8541 Address: PO Box 161810, Austin, Texas 78716.*

--> *If you need help or suspect **child abuse**, call **1-800-4-A-CHILD** (1-800-422-4453). Professional counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 140 languages.*

--> *If you are suffering **elder abuse** or neglect (or know someone who is) call 911, the Eldercare Locator (**1-800-677-1116**) or your state elder abuse hotline.*

Learn more about animal cruelty so that you are prepared if you witness pet or animal abuse. Laws vary by state and are summarized in the links below. Or if you prefer, visit the sites to get a list of shelters in your area.

Prevent violence before it starts. Stop the abuse cycle. No person or animal deserves such treatment.

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<http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/>

<http://www.americanhumane.org/>

<http://www.rainn.org/>

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# Be a geek.

Originally blogged May 26, 2005

I believe that everyone can serve. Geeks too! Geekcorps is "a US-based, non-profit organization that places international technical volunteers in developing nations to contribute to ICT projects while transferring the technical skills required to achieve long-term stability. Ultimately we strive to cross-pollinate developing nations with the skills needed to maximize the benefits of modern telecommunications." They work in several countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa. Here are a few ways you can support their great work:

- \* Be a Geekcorps volunteer. You'll get to travel and use your IT skills in a community that will value and appreciate them.
- \* Donate money or computer equipment to Geekcorps. Your contribution will be put to good use!
- \* Learn about other organizations working to bridge the digital divide.

You can also read their site en Français. See! It's pretty cool to be a geek! I'm proud to call myself one. I bet there are a few more geeks out there reading this. So check out Geekcorps. Be of service. Be a geek!

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<http://www.iesc.org/geekcorps>

<http://www.pewinternet.org/topics/digital-divide/>

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Get help.

Originally blogged May 8, 2005

Many people have had very good success using 12-step recovery programs to conquer addiction. If you suffer from addiction(s), get the help you need. Consider these resources:

* Alcoholics Anonymous "is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking."

* Gamblers Anonymous "is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. Our primary purpose is to stop gambling and to help other compulsive gamblers do the same."

* Debtors Anonymous "is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from compulsive debting."

* Cocaine Anonymous "is open to all persons who state a desire to stop using cocaine, including "crack" cocaine, as well as all other mind-altering substances."

* Sex Addicts Anonymous "is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so they may overcome their sexual addiction and help others recover from sexual addiction or dependency."

* Crystal Meth Anonymous "a 12 step fellowship for those in recovery from addiction to crystal meth. There are no dues or fees for membership. Membership in CMA is open to anyone with a desire to stop using drugs."

* Sexual Compulsives Anonymous "is a 12-Step fellowship, inclusive of all sexual orientations, open to anyone with a desire to recover from sexual compulsion. We are not group therapy, but a spiritual program that provides a safe environment for working on problems of sexual addiction and sexual sobriety."

* Overeaters Anonymous "is not just about weight loss, obesity or diets; it addresses physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. It is not a religious organization and does not promote any particular diet."

* Nicotine Anonymous "welcomes all those seeking freedom from nicotine addiction, including those using cessation programs and nicotine withdrawal aids."

* Food Addicts in Recovery Anonymous "has proven to be an effective, long-term solution to food addiction for many food addicts, whether they be anorexics, bulimics, overeaters, or otherwise food-obsessed."

* Narcotics Anonymous "is an international, community-based association of recovering drug addicts with more than 31,000 weekly meetings in over 100 countries worldwide."

There are also meetings for Cleptomaniacs and Shoplifters Anonymous, Online Gamers Anonymous, and internet addiction recovery groups.

Find a meeting. Get the help you need. Life is too short and too long not to.

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/05/get-help.html>

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# Take care of yourself: MIND, body, and soul.

Originally blogged May 12, 2006

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. The Sisters of the Yam (best bookclub ever!) is commemorating the occasion by reading and discussing Bebe Moore Campbell's book 72 Hour Hold in which a major character has bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness). Here are some ways you may want to take note of National Mental Health Awareness Month and mind your health:

--> If you or someone you know is contemplating or attempting suicide, please call one of these national hotlines: **1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433), 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or for TTY, 1-800-799-4TTY (1-800-799-4889).**

\* Visit the National Mental Health Information Center to find mental health services in your area, look up mental health terms, consult the list of toll-free national hotlines and more. Resources are also available in Spanish.

\* If you are suffering from addiction, perhaps in a conscious or subconscious effort to self-treat your own mental illness, GET HELP.

\* If someone you love is suffering from addiction, perhaps in a conscious or subconscious effort to self-treat her or his own mental illness, GET HELP.

\* If your emotional or mental state doesn't allow you to treat those you love in a way that honors them, GET HELP to stop the abuse.

\* Peruse the online resources available from the National Mental Health Association. Many of them are available in English and Spanish.

Every month is a good month to MIND your health!

*"One thing at a time, all things in succession. That which grows fast withers as rapidly. That which grows slowly endures."* - J.G. Holland

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<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

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Try transit.

Originally blogged May 17, 2005

Amazingly enough, given Atlanta's long commute times, I actually enjoy my commute. Why, you might ask? Because I ride MARTA! MARTA is the public transportation system in the Atlanta area. I grew up riding Central Arkansas Transit with my grandmother (she always let me ring the bell!), and SEPTA was handy when I was at Swarthmore, so I know that transit can be a convenient, affordable, and less polluting way to get around. Are you ready to ride?

- * Find your local transit agency and get information on fares, routes, and more. Check with your employer since many will offer discounts on transit to their employees. Emory, for example, gives free MARTA transit passes to employees who are committed to a "clean commute."

I was so excited that I made a list of things I could do on the bus and train (read, write, talk, etc.). Talk about multitasking! But if for some reason, transit won't work for you, consider these options:

- * Join a carpool. You'll save money, endure less stress, and may even make some new friends!

- * Walk to work. I often walk to the MARTA bus and get to say good morning to the schoolchildren waiting for the bus. Last week I saw a goose family on my walk. It's such a peaceful way to start and end the day. You can even get a pedometer to keep track of your exercise and progress.

- * Ride your bike to work. You'll get some exercise while you're at it!

- * Telework. This is the easiest commute of all! I teleworked for five years and I know that it can be a very productive way to do business.

Try some of these ideas. You might like them more than you think, and you'll be doing good for yourself and your community. Enjoy your commute!

~~~~~

**Now that we live in Little Rock**, we don't have as many transit options as we did in Atlanta. However, we chose to live downtown so we can easily walk to the park to school, museums, restaurants, festivals, and other activities and places we enjoy. And we're excited that nearby Main Street just got a bike lane and that there are lots of Central Arkansas Transit bus stops nearby.

<http://www.google.com/transit>

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*"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

# MIND your health.

Originally blogged May 20, 2005

May is National Mental Health Month, a designated time to pay attention to mental and psychological health concerns that so often go ignored. I'm often amazed at how often we ignore mental health. If our tooth or our stomach made us cry every night or engage in destructive behavior or withdraw from those we love, most of us wouldn't hesitate to go to the doctor and get help. But if our emotions or our mind causes those same painful symptoms, we often ignore them. **Now** is the time to end the stigma. **Now** is the time to stop ignoring and undertreating mental health and take proactive steps to protect and improve our mental health. Here are some ways to get started:

- \* If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, please call one of these national hotlines: **1-800-SUICIDE** (1-800-784-2433), 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or for TTY, **1-800-799-4TTY** (1-800-799-4889).
- \* Learn more about mental health and mental illness.
- \* If you are someone you know is in a crisis situation, consult this state-by-state list of crisis lines that you can call for help.
- \* Click below to find counseling and mental health services in your area.
- \* If you suffer addiction, consider a 12 step program (like Alcoholics Anonymous) to get help in recovery.
- \* If you are in an abusive relationship (either as the abuser, the abused, or as a witness), get information on how to get help and end abuse.
- \* Consult the link below for a list of hotlines to get information on a range of topics including substance abuse, suicide prevention, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and Alzheimer Disease.
- \* Read these resources for information on mental health in children.

\* Peruse these resources on coping with war, terrorism and other natural and human-made disasters.

Now is the time. Today. Right now. Take good care of yourself: mind, body and soul.



<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>

<https://www.samhs.gov>

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*“That which is not good for the bee-hive cannot be good for  
the bees.”*

-Marcus Aurelius

# Each one teach one.

Originally blogged May 3, 2005

I expect that each of us has at least one teacher who made a positive impact on our lives. I fondly remember learning from Bruce Marbin, Sharon Brooks, Billy Watson, Annice Steadman, Matilda James (Buchanan), and Caroline Lucille Holmes, to name just a few. And though I didn't know her, I am grateful to my grandmother, Willie Beatrice Jones Neal, who was also teacher (and taught my dad in the classroom and at home.) My mother too, Janet Cobb, was a teacher. And so was I.

Today is National Teacher Day, "a day for honoring teachers and recognizing the lasting contributions they make to our lives." As a former Arkansas teacher myself and as the beneficiary of the work of numerous Arkansas teachers (including my mother and grandmother), I am pleased to note that the first work to initiate National Teacher Day was done by an Arkansas teacher in 1944.

On this day, take the time to thank a teacher who helped you. Maybe she taught a class, maybe he was a mentor, maybe she taught you a life lesson. None of us makes it alone; someone taught us what we know and, in addition to being grateful, we have a responsibility to teach those around us. Consider these ways you can do this:

- \* Model the behavior you expect from others. As Mahatma Gandhi said "Be the change you want to see in the world." We can *all* do this.
- \* Share what you know. We all are blessed with talents. Identify yours and teach someone else.
- \* Remember that we're all lifelong learners (or we should be). Perhaps you can teach an adult to read or be a mentor.

To all the teachers out there, I salute you! Thank you for the good and valuable work you do!

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Some months after writing this, I was in Helena, Arkansas, (for our honeymoon) and picked up a copy of *African-American Life in the Arkansas Delta* through the lens of Rogerline Johnson (1952-1971) published by the UAPB Printing Service. It's reads in part:

"Mattie May Whyte Woodridge, Principal, North End Elementary School (1955). Mrs. Woodridge (1909-1999) founded National Teacher Day. In the course of establishing this national event, she corresponded with Eleanor Roosevelt."

The previous statement appeared above a picture of Mrs. Woodridge in her office. (And the book also has a picture of my uncle, Prentiss Neal.)

<http://www.nea.org/>

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"Influence shared is influence expanded."
- Olly Neal

Compost.

Originally blogged Jun 8, 2005

For many years, my mother has had a compost bin in her backyard. She saves eggshells, yard clippings, produce waste and more and uses it to amend her soil. My grandmother loved to contribute the clippings from when she shelled peas or cleaned greens or canned fruit or vegetables.

Composting is the natural method of recycling that transforms "organic material (plant matter) through decomposition into a soil-like material called compost. Invertebrates (insects, earthworms, et al.), and microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, et al.) help in transforming the material into compost." It doesn't take much space and it's a great way to reduce waste and to create nutrient-rich soil. This is important because food and yard waste make up 30% of the waste in the US.

Here's how to get started:

- * Click the link below for a list of the materials you can compost.
- * Click the link below for information on the materials you'll need to compost.
- * Visit the link below for tips on composting techniques.

Now is a great time to start your own compost pile. Have fun!

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**We've had wonderful success** with our compost pile. Not only do we generate fabulously rich fertilizer for our garden but the seeds from the fruits, vegetables, and flowers we've tossed on the pile, have yielded amazingly productive volunteer tomatoes, squash, flowers, and other plants. One season, we harvested as much from the compost pile as we did from the garden! And when we need more mature

compost than we can create ourselves, we can get some from my mother's large stash. Compost is a wonderful way to re-envision and reuse "trash."

<http://www.howtocompost.org/>

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*"I don't know the key to success but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."*

– Bill Cosby



# Free your mind.

Originally blogged Jun 19, 2007

Happy Juneteenth! My favorite holiday, Juneteenth, celebrates the 19th of June, 1965, when enslaved black folks in Arkansas and Texas finally found out about the Emancipation Proclamation, even though the document had theoretically taken effect more than two years earlier on January 1, 1863. I wrote before about my great-great-granddaddy, Griffin Henry Belk, and how he responded to the news of his freedom. His actions - immediately walking off the plantation, freeing the mule, and going to search for his parents - suggest he was, in fact, already free. He needed no official Proclamation to free his mind. Neither do we. We too can live our lives striving to be free.

- \* Free yourself from fear.
- \* Free yourself from guilt.
- \* Free yourself from anger.
- \* Free yourself from worry.
- \* Free yourself from shame.
- \* Free yourself from blame.
- \* Free yourself from jealousy.
- \* Free yourself from insecurity.
- \* Free yourself from frustration.
- \* Free yourself from oppression.
- \* Free yourself from judgmentalism.
- \* Free yourself from other people's expectations.
- \* Free yourself from other people's issues and baggage.

On this Juneteenth, **free your mind**. Who knows what wonderful things you'll be able to accomplish! **Happy Juneteenth!**

*"None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."* - Johann Wolfgang van Goethe

*"Free your mind, and the rest will follow."* - En Vogue, paraphrasing George Clinton of Funkadelic

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<http://www.juneteenth.com>

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Get smart about antibiotics.

Originally blogged Jun 26, 2006

Anyone who's worked with bacteria in the lab knows that antibiotic resistance occurs regularly. In the lab, this can be a good thing, depending on your experiment, but in public health and medicine, it is a very big problem:

Over the last decade, almost every type of bacteria has become more resistant and less responsive to antibiotic treatment when it is really needed. These antibiotic-resistant bacteria can quickly spread to family members, schoolmates, and co-workers - threatening the community with a new strain of infectious disease that is more difficult to cure and more expensive to treat.

Perhaps you can see why antibiotic resistance has been called one of the world's major public health concerns. For that reason, in 1995, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) started a National Campaign for Appropriate Antibiotic Use in the Community that "promotes four strategies that clinicians can use to prevent antimicrobial resistance among different groups of patients.

1. Prevent infection.
2. Diagnose and treat infection effectively.
3. Use antimicrobials wisely.
4. Prevent transmission.

This post focuses on responsible public use of antibiotics. Here are five things you can do to reduce the growth and spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria (microbes):

--> **Do not take an antibiotic for a viral infection** like a cold or the flu. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses.

--> **Do not save some of your antibiotic for the next time you get sick.** Discard any leftover medication once you have completed your prescribed course of treatment. Don't share your antibiotic with others.

--> **Take an antibiotic exactly as the healthcare provider tells you.** Do not skip doses. Complete the prescribed course of treatment even if you are feeling better. If treatment stops too soon, some bacteria may survive and re-infect you or another.

--> **Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else.** The antibiotic may not be appropriate for your illness. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment, increase resistance, and allow bacteria to multiply.

--> **Do not pressure your healthcare provider to prescribe an antibiotic.** If your provider determines that you do not have a bacterial infection, ask about ways to help relieve your symptoms.

So if you are going to take antibiotics, take them as directed. Get smart. Take antibiotics responsibly, not only for your own health, but for that of those in your family and community.

"The misuse of penicillin could be the propagation of mutant forms of bacteria that would resist the new miracle drug." - Alexander Fleming, discoverer of penicillin, as quoted in a 1945 New York Times interview

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<http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/>

<http://www.who.int/drugresistance/>

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*"The life of a nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful, and virtuous."*

-Frederick Douglass

# Celebrate Juneteenth, end slavery.

Originally blogged Jun 19, 2012

Today is Juneteenth, my favorite holiday. It marks the "end" of slavery in the United States in 1865 and feels particularly relevant because it is linked, at least peripherally, to my great-great-granddaddy, Griffin Henry Belk.

But one cannot honestly celebrate Juneteenth these days without recognizing the slavery is not over in the United States or elsewhere. Today there are **more people enslaved than at any time in human history**. Many of those enslaved are women and girls; many are in the United States.

I often wonder why so many people sat idly by while people enslaved other people like my great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents. Many of those people knew slavery wasn't right, knew it wasn't just, but they did nothing. How will history look at us during *this* time? What are we doing to end slavery?

Here are some things you can do:

- **Learn more about human trafficking (slavery).** There are numerous websites where you can get reliable information. Try the FBI, DHHS, or the New York Times.
- Learn the indicators of modern slavery and **report suspected trafficking**. The Department of Homeland Security tells you how to do this.
- **Get involved.** There are numerous organizations dedicated to ending slavery in the US and around the world.
- **Spread the word.** Post on Facebook. Tweet. Blog. Talk with those you know about what you've learned. Encourage them to get involved.

If you do, perhaps history will look kindly upon us.

*"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free - honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just - a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."* Abraham Lincoln's Second Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862.

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Human trafficking (slavery) has become more prominent in the public discourse recently. In just the two years since this post was written, the US Department of Human Services has combined their efforts against human trafficking through the Blue Campaign and 39 states have passed new laws to against human trafficking. I am also pleased to report that the Polaris Project listed Arkansas as one of the four most improved states for 2013.

The National Human Trafficking Hotline is 1-888-373-7888. Or text HELP or INFO to BeFree (233733).

On a related note, during this writing, my daughter and I somehow got on the topic of camel racing. We looked up some videos on YouTube and were surprised to see little robot jockeys riding all the camels. It was very odd, so we googled camel racing and learned that since being invented in 2004, the robot jockeys have slowly replacing human jockeys. The people used were children, enslaved boys as young as four, often starved so that they would be as light as possible. Thankfully, use of the robots is spreading, steadily putting an end to this form of slavery. Let's all work together to end *all* forms of slavery. Let's be on the right side of history.

<http://www.polarisproject.org/>

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<http://www.dhs.gov/end-human-trafficking/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CNNFreedom/>

http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/tech/news/robotics/2005-04-19-qatar-camabots_x.htm

Envy not the oppressor and choose none of his ways.
- Proverbs 3:31

Build a home.

Originally blogged Jun 22, 2005

Habitat for Humanity builds homes all over the world (including the US and Canada) for those who might not otherwise be able to afford a home of their own. Since 1976, Habitat has built over 125,000 "simple, decent, affordable houses in partnership with those who lack adequate shelter." Habitat volunteers have provided shelter for more than 1,000,000 people in over 100 countries worldwide. There's a Habitat house built *every 26 minutes*! Think of the difference that makes!

Habitat houses are sold to partner families at no profit, financed with affordable, no-interest loans. The homeowners' monthly mortgage payments are used to build still more Habitat houses. Habitat is not a giveaway program. In addition to a down payment and the monthly mortgage payments, homeowners invest hundreds of hours of their own labor -- sweat equity -- into building their Habitat house and the houses of others.

Volunteering with Habitat is a great way to develop and refine construction and other skills, all while providing a wonderful service. Here are some of the many ways you can get involved:

- * Apply for a home for yourself, or pass this information on to someone in need. Homeowners are chosen based on the applicants' level of need, their willingness to become partners in the program, and their ability to repay the no-profit, no-interest loan. Call 1-800-422-4828, ext. 2551 or 2552 for more information.
- * Volunteer with Habitat on or off the construction site. There are international opportunities and opportunities in Americus, Georgia (the headquarters); short-term and long-term opportunities, and opportunities for students, seniors, women, prisoners, and everyone else.
- * Donate to Habitat. Financial and in-kind donations are welcomed. Don't forget to ask if your employer will match your donation.

* Shop the Habitat store. Proceeds benefit Habitat's good works. And when you need items that aren't available from the Habitat store, find them by shopping with a purpose.

* Learn more about how Habitat works so that you can speak intelligently about it to others. Who knows, you just might encourage someone else to volunteer!

"All the average human being asks is something he can call a home; a family that is fed and warm; and now and then a little happiness; once in a long while an extravagance." - Mother Jones (1830–1930), U.S. labor organizer

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**In 1999, a tornado hit Little Rock** and devastated parts of the South End, Pettaway, and other neighborhoods. Thankfully my home church, St. Andrew AME, was not affected though housed on the same block were demolished. In response to the destruction in the neighborhood and as part of their faith, the members, including my mom, worked together to build a Habitat home for a family in the neighborhood. Habitat service can be a great way for groups to work together in service.

<http://www.habitat.org/>

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*"The opposite of love is not hate. It's indifference."*

- Elie Wiesel

# Take someone with you.

Originally blogged Jun 19, 2005

Spring 1865, Southwest Arkansas (Hempstead County?)

Griffin Henry Belk wiped his brow as he looked up at the hot Arkansas sun. That stubborn mule he's driving (or trying to drive) simply refuses to pull the plow. Finally, the mule decided to move. "Good," Griffin thought. "Maybe I'll be able to finish up before sundown." Just then, a white man on horseback approached. The man slowed and Griffin stopped the mule. The stranger spoke, "You know, you don't have to plow like that." Griffin looked at the man with confusion. "You're free," he said, "All y'all are free!" Ahh. The words Griffin had always wanted to hear. As the white man rode off, Griffin unleashed the mule and told the mule, "You go your way, and I'll go mine". And with that, he and the mule went free.

On this, the 19th of June, I remember, among others, Griffin Henry Belk, my great-great-granddaddy. This day is Juneteenth, my favorite holiday. Juneteenth started in Galveston, Texas in 1865, and is the African American Emancipation Day, commemorating the end of legalized enslavement in the US. My grandmother, Fanilla Suttles Cobb (Griffin's granddaughter) told this story often, but my father, Olly Neal, pointed out an important fact: not only did Griffin Belk free himself, *he freed the mule*! He went above the call of duty and took someone (albeit a mule) with him on his road to freedom. On this Juneteenth consider the ways you can take someone with you as you work to improve your life.

Today is an excellent day to consider the ways you can improve your life and help others:

- \* Be a volunteer.
- \* Live ethically.
- \* Work for economic justice.

Celebrate Juneteenth and the end of enslavement in this country. And as you rise, don't forget to take someone with you. Happy Juneteenth!



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Here are two comments I wrote in follow up to this post.

My grandmother simply called the holiday the 19th of June. She celebrated it regularly while growing up. The families would work only half a day, and then head to a nearby field where folks would eat a lunch prepared by the women. The men would play baseball, and singing groups would come by to entertain everyone. A good time would be had by all. By the time I was around, celebration consisted of a marade (combination march - parade) through Little Rock.

My grandmother, Fanilla Cobb, and mother, Janet Cobb, are now deceased, but they live on through their stories. Here's one about my mom:

The year was 1960 and my mother was 19 years old and had just finished her second year of college. The buses in Little Rock were only recently desegregated. My mother sat on a row of three seats near the front of the bus. A large white man shared the bench, but took up more than his share of the seats as he spread himself out comfortably. The bus was packed. At the corner of Van Buren and Kavanaugh a black woman who'd just gotten off work as a domestic boarded the bus. She was carrying several packages and looked around without success for a seat. The only possible available seat was on the bench my mother shared. My mother could have simply offered her seat to the new passenger, particularly since she was struggling with the packages. But instead, she gave her bench mate the eye in hopes that he would pull his legs together and sit up straight so the new passenger could sit down. He ignored her. So my mother gathered all her 122 pounds of strength and bumped the man with her hips to move him over. The startled man got hint and moved over. My mother pointed to the now-empty seat and told the woman "Sit down!" She did and replied "Thank you, honey." The three of them then rode the rest of the way in silence.

And then a reader named Steve posted a comment:

....and as the great great great grandson of a Mississippi slave holder, I want to say it's great to share the future with you, and interesting to know about your perspective....

I'm happy to share the world with you too, Steve.

<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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Participate in research.

Originally blogged Jun 28, 2005

I and several of my friends are participants in the Black Women's Health Study. Every two years or so, we answer questions on diet, environment, physical and mental health issues, exercise, and more. Together we are helping physicians and researchers understand and improve the health of black women in the US.

You too may be able to participate in a research trial. All kinds are available. Your local university's psychology department may be conducting behavior research. I have a friend who is participating in a HIV vaccine trial. And there are trials to test all kinds of drugs, devices, and other treatments for particular conditions. Get more information from these sources:

- * Learn more about the purpose of clinical trials, who may participate, and important questions you should ask before you decide to participate.
- * Clinicaltrials.gov "provides regularly updated information about federally and privately supported clinical research in human volunteers. ClinicalTrials.gov gives you information about a trial's purpose, who may participate, locations, and phone numbers for more details."
- * Clinicalstudies.info.nih.gov provides information on National Institutes of Health sponsored clinical trials.

If you are so inclined, this is an excellent way to contribute to medicine, science, and society.

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and that they dwell therein." - Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), writer, folklorist, playwright and anthropologist.

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<http://clinicalstudies.info.nih.gov>

<http://clinicaltrials.gov>

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# End slavery.

Originally blogged Jun 29, 2005

Less than two weeks ago, we celebrated Juneteenth. Unfortunately, June 19, 1865, was not the end of slavery in the US. Slavery continues in many forms throughout the US and the world. Nowadays it's often called 'human trafficking', but it's still slavery. And it is a betrayal of human rights. Here's what you can do to help end slavery once and for all:

**\* If you believe someone you know may be a trafficking victim (enslaved person), contact the Department of Health and Human Services' Human Trafficking Hotline at 1 (888) 373-7888.**

**\* Also report trafficking crimes or get help by calling the toll-free hotline 1-888-428-7581 (voice and TTY).**

**\* Para registrar su queja o obtener ayuda, llame gratis a 1-888-428-7581 (línea directa y de TTY para personas con incapacidad auditiva).**

**\* Learn how to identify enslaved people in our present society. Ask the following:**

Is the person free to leave the work site?

Is the person physically, sexually or psychologically abused?

Does the person have a passport or valid I.D. card and is he/she in possession of such documents?

What is the pay and conditions of employment?

Does the person live at home or at/near the work site?

How did the individual arrive to this destination if the suspected victim is a foreign national?

Has the person or a family member of this person been threatened?

Does the person fear that something bad will happen to him or her, or to a family member, if he/she leaves the job?

\* Understand the link between human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. "We estimate that of the 600,000-800,000 people trafficked across country borders every year, almost 70% are forced into the commercial sex industry. Half of all victims are children. Many are forced to work in brothels, illegitimate massage parlors, as "escorts," or in pornography. When people support such industries they are fueling the demand for commercial sexual services that fuel the demand for trafficking victims."

\* Support state laws against human trafficking and slavery. "It is helpful for states to pass laws of their own to further educate and involve local law enforcement officials."

*"No slavery can be abolished without a double emancipation, and the master will benefit by freedom more than the freed-man."* - Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), British biologist and educator.

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<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/>

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"The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists who are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Practice random acts of kindness.

Originally blogged Jun 22, 2006

I love random acts of kindness. They are such a simple way to brighten someone's day. And I smile along the way too. Hopefully, you don't have too much trouble thinking of and acting on ways to be kind, but just in case, here are two sites devoted to spreading random acts of kindness:

* Random Acts of Kindness Foundation "inspires people to practice kindness and to "pass it on" to others. We provide free educational and community ideas, guidance, and other resources to kindness participants through our website at www.actsofkindness.org.

* HelpOthers.org works to "encourage 'small acts with great love'" because "kindness is contagious."

Visit these sites and find:

--> Ideas for kind acts.

--> E-cards and smile cards to spread kindness.

--> Newsletters, inspirational stories, quotes and much more.

Inspired? Motivated to act? Let us know about your random act of kindness (given or received). And remember to spread the love.

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<http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>

<http://www.kindspring.org/>

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# Donate platelets.

Originally blogged Jun 11, 2005

Regular readers know that I do a post on donating blood every two months. That's because many folks are eligible to donate blood every 56 days. It only takes an hour, it's only a pint, and it may be the simplest way to save a life.

Last time I donated, I sat next to a woman who was donating platelets for the first time. Platelets are required for blood clotting and are used in surgeries, transplants, and during cancer therapy, for example. According to the Red Cross:

A single apheresis donation of platelets can provide as many platelets as 5 whole blood donations. In addition, a platelet transfusion from a single donor greatly reduces the chances of an immune system reaction to the transfusion. Bone marrow transplant, cancer and leukemia patients whose immune systems are already compromised, benefit particularly from single donor platelet transfusions.

Those who are eligible to donate blood are usually able to donate platelets. And get this: you can donate platelets every three days! What a way to make a difference! It takes about 2.5 hours, and you must make an appointment. It's a great way to serve.

To make an appointment to donate platelets, call the Red Cross at 1-800-GIVE-LIFE (1-800-448-3543) or visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org). By donating platelets, you donate life.



**I continue to be a regular whole blood donor** and encourage all those who are eligible to do the same. Because so many people are not eligible to donate (sometimes for reasons, like sexual orientation, that are difficult to understand given current science) it is all the more important for those of us who can donate to donate regularly and spread the word. Whole blood donations can be made every 56 days.

<http://www.redcross.org>

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# Celebrate World Free Your Mind Day – June 19<sup>th</sup>.

Originally blogged Jun 19, 2009

I spent this Juneteenth thinking about what my family would have been like if my great-great-granddaddy Griffin Henry Belk hadn't walked off that plantation when he did. I expect it would have made a huge difference, because when Griffin Henry Belk left, he was able to travel (searching for his parents), purchase land (160 acres for \$11 in Ozan, Arkansas), and generally prepare to provide for his wife and five children to come.

So I woke up Juneteenth morning and told my daughter about her great-great-great-granddaddy. Even though she's only two, I expect it resonated with her, or will soon. But when I wished Kwadjo a Happy Juneteenth, I thought, "How is this holiday - my favorite one - relevant to him?" But thinking about Griffin Henry Belk made me realize how Juneteenth is relevant to each of us.

See, Griffin Henry Belk was enslaved, but he didn't need the Emancipation Proclamation to know that he was free. He was already free in his mind. And since it's most important to *recognize and cultivate your own freedom*, in honor of all those everywhere who struggle to be free, I declare **June 19th World Free Your Mind Day!** Now that's something we can all celebrate with pride!

O happy day!

*"There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."* - Edith Wharton

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Juneteenth continues to be one of my favorite days of celebration. The land he bought in Southwest Arkansas is still in our family. But because of the challenges of owning and effectively managing family land or heir property, many families like ours have lost their land. The Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act is designed to provide protections for all owners of family land, regardless of whether or not they want to remain owners. I am working with others to get the Act passed in Arkansas so that families and communities can recognize the full value of family land and the positive impact it can have when effectively and productively managed and developed.

<http://www.juneteenth.com/>

<http://www.uniformlaws.org/>

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Use cloth napkins.

Originally blogged Jul 15, 2006.

Several years ago, when I was in college, some friends and I drove from Swarthmore to Little Rock to spend spring break in the South. We had a great time, and my mom enjoyed getting to know my friends better. One of them was an environmentalist; he recycled, was a vegetarian, chose reusable mugs over paper or Styrofoam, used handkerchiefs, you get the idea. After we used paper napkins for a few meals, he asked my mother if she had ever considered using cloth napkins instead of paper ones. Well, my mother's frugal person and a seamstress, and she always has extra fabric around the house, so we had cloth napkins by the end of the week!

Here are some reasons you may want to use cloth napkins too:

- * Cloth napkins are less expensive, even with washing. Just throw them in with your regular load. That's what we do.
- * Cloth napkins are easy to make. You can use almost any spare or scrap fabric, reducing the cost even further.
- * Cloth napkins last forever or pretty close to it. This dramatically cuts down paper waste.

Some folks think cloth napkins are a little too fancy for everyday use. But remember, you can make them out of anything (prints, colors, cottons, not just white or black linen), and once you use your cloth napkins with some buffalo fish or some barbecue, you'll forget you ever thought they were 'too fancy.' They can be keepsakes too! My mother made the napkins for our wedding, and after laundering them, gave sets to family members (including us) to mark the occasion. We love using our wedding napkins for everyday meals, as it reminds us of our wonderful day.

My mother still uses cloth napkins exclusively, and she gave me my first batch just after I got my first apartment. So give cloth napkins a try. You may never go back to paper. Thanks Aaron! Thanks Mommy!

"Paper napkins never return from a laundry - nor love from a trip to the law courts." - John Barrymore, American stage and film Actor. 1882-1942

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**Cloth napkins make wonderful sustainable gifts.** I still have the ones my mom gave me for my first apartment. And now we also use the ones she made for our weddings. Having such special napkins around for everyday use make every meal special.

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*"Next to knowing when to seize an opportunity, the most important thing in life is to know when to forego an advantage."*

- Beaconsfield

# Be a scientist. Play games.

New for this e-book

On Christmas Day when I was six, I awoke to find that my mom had gotten me a microscope. I was thrilled and spent the day raiding the refrigerator for things I could use to make slides. Ten years later, I was working part time in a lab and twelve years after that I had my PhD in genetics. While I've worked and taught in that field, I am no longer in the lab, but I'll always be a scientist. And now there's an easy way for everyone with a computer to be a scientist too.

A number of investigators have recognized the power of harnessing masses of brainpower to solve some tough problems in the lab. This crowd-sourced research is facilitated by the use of video games and is applied to help solve problems of how molecules fold. Depending of the molecule in question, the results can impact our understanding of basic science and human disease. And you don't have to have a doctorate to play! Ready to get started?

- Foldit focuses on how proteins fold and is compiling evidence that human folders can be more effected the computer-generated folding models.
- EteRNA focuses on how RNA (molecules similar to DNA) folds. Players even get feedback on how their designs function.

If you want to refresher before you get started, try some of the many games that teach science. These are all great tools to allow us all to participate in the discovery of science.

And you can always give your daughter a microscope for Christmas when she's six. That's what I did!

<https://fold.it/>

<http://eterna.cmu.edu/web/>

<http://www.sciencegamecenter.org/>

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# Be an idealist.

Originally blogged Jul 22, 2005

Can you envision a better neighborhood, nation or world? Are you working to make changes in your society? Do you believe that your efforts will have positive results? If so, you may be an idealist, and Idealist.org is the place for you. Their mission is to connect "people, organizations and resources to help build a world where all people can live free and dignified lives."

You can visit Idealist.org in English, en Español, or en Français. Here are some of the ways you can use the site:

- \* Search their database of over 46,000 nonprofits to identify volunteer opportunities in your town and around the world. Don't forget to add your organization if it's not already listed. It's free.
- \* Search their database to find nonprofit job opportunities.
- \* Read about news and other issues relevant to the nonprofit world.

Some people may think that being an idealist means being naive or looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. But idealists are those who have a clear vision of the world they want and work to make it a reality. I'm count myself as an idealist. How about you?

*"Man is born a predestined idealist, for he is born to act. To act is to affirm the worth of an end, and to persist in affirming the worth of an end is to make an ideal."* - Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935), US Supreme Court Justice

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<http://www.idealism.org/>

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Run for political office.

Originally blogged Jul 14, 2008

Tomorrow is Election Day where I live. This isn't one of the so-called "major" elections - we're not choosing between Clinton and Obama, or between Obama and McCain. Instead this election focuses on local offices. And I suggest that these elections may be the biggest of all. That's because local elected officials have a lot to do with the quality of your life. Most importantly, because they represent a relatively small number of people, you have a reasonably good opportunity to meet them, tell them your concerns, and influence their position. That's a lot of power for people who are chosen in an election that lots of folks ignore.

I've been educating myself on the candidates in tomorrow's election, and unfortunately, I've not been impressed with many of my options. If you can't file your fundraising reporting paperwork on time, why should I trust you to run my county? If you Photoshop yourself and a popular presidential candidate into a picture for your flyers to imply endorsement where there is none, why should I trust you to be my senator? What's a concerned person to do?

Here are just a few ideas:

- * Vote responsibly.
- * Education yourself and others about the issues and candidates.
- * **Run for political office.**

Yes, I suggested running for office. People who care, really care, and are honest, ethical, discerning, and thoughtful (all qualities of readers of *So What Can I Do!*) are needed to govern our society. It may seem a strange suggestion, but think about the improvements you could make by bringing a fresh perspective to government. Just running a collaborative, honest, positive campaign could make a big difference in your community, even if you don't win. Have I got you thinking? Now check out these resources:

- * Monitor your local paper for seminars and workshops designed to teach people how to run for political office. For example, Scientists and

Engineers for America holds workshops to train scientists to run for office. And the League of Women Voters offers workshops for women interested in running for office. Contact the League in your area.

* Download the manual "How To Run For Office" from the Committee of Seventy. They wrote it for Pennsylvania, but it's useful for the rest of us too.

* Want to read more? Check out some of the books on the topic. Here are just a few:

--> How to Run for Local Office : A Complete, Step-By-Step Guide that Will Take You Through the Entire Process of Running and Winning a Local Election

--> So You Want to Run for Political Office: A Practical Guide for Aspiring Politicians

--> Winning Local and State Elections

--> The Newcomer's Guide to Winning Local Elections: Trials of Balance, Chapter Three

Be sure to talk it over with your family before you begin. Then learn all you can about the process so that you can run a campaign you can be proud. Remember that if you are trying to change the way your government currently works, you may have to do some things differently than the way they've always been done. The serve your community proudly when you win!



<http://www.lwv.org>

<http://www.seventy.org>

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Use your computer for good.

New for this e-book

Many of us have computers and mobile devices that are much more powerful than we need. What to do with all that extra capacity? Use your computer for good! By participating in a distributed computing research project, your computer's excess computing power will be used to solve complex and meaningful problems in biology, health, poverty and sustainability. Here are some ways you can get started:

- Join the World Community Grid. More than 650,000 people have contributed to peer-reviewed published research in under ten years. Fight AIDS @ Home, the first distributed computing research project is housed on the World Community Grid.
- Participated in BOINC research projects. There are dozens of these in mathematics, biology, physics, earth sciences, computing and more.

So now there is no need to let your computer just sit there, idle. It too, can help make the world a better place.

P.S.: Want another really easy way to use your internet-connected computer for good? Check out [greatergood.com](http://www.greatergood.com)'s click to donate sites. It's probably the easiest thing ever posted on *So What Can I Do*. All you have to do is click the big button and advertisers make a donation to hunger relief, Alzheimer's or diabetes research, mammograms, autism therapy, animal rescue, wildlife protection, or books for children. Yes, it really is that easy. Just click to give.

<http://www.worldcommunitygrid.org/>

<http://boinc.berkeley.edu/>

<http://www.greatergood.com>

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Promote sound public policy.

New for this e-book.

Long time readers and thorough readers of this e-book know that in the late 1880's my two-greats grandfather, Griffin Henry Belk, bought some land in southwest Arkansas after he claimed his freedom. He and his wife, Anna White Belk, wanted his children and descendants to always have a place to call home and he was told that if he died without a will, the land would always be in the family and could never be sold. That was not true but thankfully the land has stayed in the family. There are now over 100 heirs to his estate and one can imagine the challenges of managing property in this situation.

Because of these challenges, I and other are promoting passage of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act in Arkansas. This act would not only protect the owners of heir property but because the protections would facilitate productive property management, it would facilitate community development so that everyone benefits. We're working for passage in the 2015 session of the Arkansas legislature.

If you see a challenge, problem, or opportunity for your community, consider using a public policy approach to address it. While such changes can be challenging to implement, they often last longer and have a much larger impact than some other approaches. Consider the following two sources for information on sound public policy:

- The **National Conference of State Legislators** operates with a "mission is to improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures, promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures, and ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system."
- The **Uniform Law Commission** "provides states with non-partisan, well-conceived and well-drafted legislation that brings clarity and stability to critical areas of state statutory law."

Check out these sources and others for sustainable scalable solutions that can really make a difference for your state. You may find some ideas in this e-book. And for more local solutions, get involved with your municipal government. Democracy works best when we are *all* involved.

<http://www.uniformlaws.org>

<http://heirsofarkansas.wordpress.com>

<http://www.ncsl.org>

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*"The most important political office is that of
the private citizen."
- Louis Brandeis*

Use cloth diapers.

Originally blogged Jul 1, 2006

During the first few years of life, most babies go through **6,000-7,000 diaper changes**. That's a lot a diapers, particularly when they're going into landfills. Thankfully there's a better option: cloth diapers. Here are just a few reasons why:

- * Cloth diapers are less expensive than disposables when you wash them yourself. And the laundry burden isn't that great: just two extra loads a week. Remember, if you have more than one child, your cost per change is even less since you can reuse the diapers.
- * Cloth diapers make potty training easier since they don't mask the feel of wetness like disposables. Some studies show cloth diapered children potty train 6 months earlier than those wearing disposables.
- * Cloth diapers are more 'breathable'. This may help prevent diaper rash, and the diapers keep your baby cooler in hot weather.

"But aren't cloth diapers too much trouble?"

Not anymore. Today's cloth diapers are MUCH BETTER than they used to be! They come in various styles, many of which are as easy to use as disposables. They're already folded, require no dunking in the toilet, or boiling; and forget about pins. Today's diapers have Velcro or multiple snaps enabling you to continue to use the diapers as your baby grows. If you hated those plastic pants from before, try today's diaper covers and all-in-one diapers. And the absorbent liners make cloth diapers perfect for nighttime.

So before you nix the idea of cloth diapers, do a little research and consider cloth diapers. They may well be the very best option for your baby, your wallet, and our earth.

"Man is born a predestined idealist, for he is born to act. To act is to affirm the worth of an end, and to persist in affirming the worth of an end is to make an ideal." - Oliver Wendell Holmes

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<http://www.realdiaperassociation.org>

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*"It's wonderful how much may be done if we are always  
doing."*

- Thomas Jefferson

# Barter.

Originally blogged Aug 18, 2005

Have you ever wondered what folks did before dollars, naira, euros, cedis, yen, pounds, and pesos made us bound to money? Likely they bartered, that is, they traded things they had for things they needed. The invention of money, which can be much more efficient, caused bartering to die down substantially. But there are still many good reasons to barter:

- > You can conserve your cash for when you really need it.
- > You will support the local economy.
- > You can get rid of surplus inventory (read: junk. Remember, one woman's trash is another woman's treasure.)
- > You will prevent waste and encourage recycling.

Here are some sites that will provide information you can use to successfully use bartering in your business and personal life:

- \* The International Reciprocal Trade Association "is a non-profit organization of companies committed to promoting just and equitable standards of reciprocal trade and raising the value of reciprocal trade to businesses and communities worldwide by educating, self-regulating and leading by example."
- \* Barter News "is the official journal of the reciprocal trade industry."
- \* Barter Consultants International is a for-profit organization that can help your business reduce cash spending.
- \* In 2000, Inc. Magazine reviewed and ranked several barter websites including [bartertrust.com](http://bartertrust.com), [isolve.com](http://isolve.com), and [targetbarter.com](http://targetbarter.com).
- \* And of course, you can organize a clothes swap (or tool swap, or plant/seed swap, or . . .)

Once you start bartering, you'll have more cash on hand to send to your favorite nonprofit organizations! It's win-win for everyone!

*"All government -- indeed, every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act -- is founded on compromise and barter."* - Edmund Burke (1729 - 1797)



<http://www.irta.com/>

<http://www.barternews.com/>

<http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc420.html>

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*"The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our  
doubts of today."*

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

# Spread the love.

Originally blogged Aug 27, 2005

Regular readers know that Kwadjo and I are getting married in a few days. (Woo hoo!!) Nowadays the average cost of a wedding is about \$25,000. That's a bunch! Seems like there ought to be a way to spread some of that around to folks who can really use it. Thankfully, there are lots of ways to do just that and still have a joyous, beautiful, fun, and meaningful marriage celebration. Here some ideas you and your partner may want to consider:

--> **Donate leftover food** to a food rescue agency. There's sure to be one in your area. We're working with Potluck Food Rescue in Central Arkansas. Also, locally- or organically-grown food is a good idea.

--> **Choose environmentally-responsible rings** that use metals and gems that are recycled and conflict-free.

--> **Use recycled paper** for your invitations, programs, thank you cards and the like. You can find beautiful recycled paper products at many locations, including office and wedding supply stores.

--> **Donate the flowers** to a nursing home or assisted living facility. The folks there will really appreciate your kindness. Organically- or locally-grown flowers are also a good choice.

--> **Donate your dress** after the big day. Are you really going to wear it again? Your daughter may not want to wear it either. (Do *you* want to wear *your* mom's?). Instead the resale of the dress can benefit a good cause.

--> **Make a donation** to your favorite charity in honor of your guests instead of (or in addition to) more traditional favors. If you don't have a favorite charity, scroll through the archives of *So what can I do?* to get some ideas.

--> **Plan a socially-conscious wedding** with help from the I Do Foundation. It's run by Swarthmore alums and has great ideas, including

making charitable contributions through your registry. Also check out Organic Weddings and Green Weddings for more ways to make a difference on your big day.

Hopefully, you can incorporate one or more of these ideas into your celebration. From the registry, to the honeymoon, make your celebration even more meaningful. Spread the love you share with your sweetheart, and let your commitment or wedding celebration be a vehicle for love *and* service.

*"Remember that happiness is a way of travel, not a destination."* - Roy Goodman

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/08/spread-love.html>

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“Always do what you are afraid to do.”
- Mary Moody Emerson

Re-envision your 'trash.'

Originally blogged Aug 20, 2006

They say one person's trash is another person's treasure, and when you consider what you put into the trash, you'll find that's the truth. We throw away so much that can be reused, refashioned, and recycled; it's a shame to waste so much when there are other alternatives. Here are some ways you can re-envision your 'trash' and reduce your waste:

- * Don't waste your newborn's umbilical cord blood. Donate it for use in biomedical research or life-saving medical treatment.
- * Don't waste napkins or diapers. Use cloth ones that can be washed and reused over and over again.
- * Don't waste your body or organs after death. Donate them for medical treatment or for medical or forensic training.
- * Don't waste your hair. When you cut it, donate it to Locks of Love.
- * Don't waste fruit and vegetable peelings and other plant matter. Compost it instead.
- * Don't waste the bounty from your garden. Donate it to a local food bank or food rescue organization.
- * Don't waste things that can be reused or recycled. They still have life left.
- * Don't waste gas. Drive gently.
- * Don't waste time. If you ever begin to think you're bored, check out *So what can I do* for some productive and meaningful ways to spend your time.

"Waste not, want not;" that's how the old saying goes. Words to live by!

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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# Go to the source.

Originally blogged Aug 2, 2005

Have you noticed that only 13% of the expert commentary on the three major US networks is provided by women? Ever watch the Sunday news talk shows? On those broadcasts, men outnumber women nine to one. Thankfully, SheSource.org is working to change that.

SheSource.org, which launches in Fall 2005, is "an online resource of expert women ready and available to enrich the public debate. SheSource is designed to include spokeswomen from a variety of backgrounds, representing demographic and ethnic diversity as well as work in a variety of issue areas – particularly ones that are traditionally male-dominated."

There are at least three ways you can help SheSource meet their goal "to ensure that women are recognized as stakeholders and called upon as experts in all fields:"

- \* **Recommend a spokesperson.** Submit the names of credible, dynamic, well-spoken women who are experts in their fields (see comments) to SheSource so that media sources can contact them for commentary.
- \* **Reference women in your reporting.** If you are a reporter, journalist, or writer, in print, broadcast or online media, sign-up with SheSource to receive the names of expert spokeswomen in your area.
- \* **Spread the word about SheSource.** Tell your friends and colleagues, and make sure your local media know about and use SheSource.

Who knows what the news would look like and sound like if more women participated? I'm sure it would be a change for the better!



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Thanks to organizations like **SheSource**, things have improved for women in the media since this was written. Now 26 percent of NPR guests are women and 22 percent of Sunday talk show hosts are women. But given that women make up more than half of the US population, we still have a long ways to go. That's why it is so important to go to the source – SheSource.

<http://www.shesource.org/>

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"Our country, right or wrong. When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right."

-Carl Schurz

Never mine.

Originally blogged Aug 13, 2005

Kwadjo and I were excited to get our wedding rings the other day. We love them! We chose them from greenKarat.com, makers of "ecologically responsible jewelry." Their goal is to end destructive diamond and gold mining. And to do so they "provide an ecologically and socially responsible jewelry alternative to those who seek change."

Gold is a very versatile metal. It is malleable and ductile. It's a good conductor of heat and electricity, immune to tarnish, and resistant to acids. Although these properties make it very useful in industrial applications, 80% of the gold used each year nonetheless goes into jewelry.

While gold is valuable enough to provide an incentive to recycle, significant amounts of gold sit idle, while mining continues at a pace of 2,500 tons a year. In fact, there is enough gold above ground (already mined) to satisfy all demands of the jewelry industry for the next 50 years. Much of it sits in bank vaults and in the form of old and unused jewelry.

So our beautiful gold rings (which we can't wait to put on next month) are recycled. Your next jewelry purchase can be too. GreenKarat sells rings for weddings and commitments and jewelry that is a "responsible indulgence."

Check out their standards and catalog. And once you get your jewelry, verify the content on greenassay.com. You'll love your jewelry even more by knowing that the gold and gems were obtained in an ecologically responsible manner and are conflict free.

Thanks greenKarat!

"We therefore call on Newmont [Ghana Gold Limited] to stop its disastrous forays into the forest reserve, provide the people of Yayaaso with alternate drinking water, pay prompt adequate and reasonable compensation for destroyed farms and also build the same number of rooms for the affected landlords in order to avoid the break up of families. Newmont should avoid undertaking activities that would destroy sacred burial grounds and respect the traditional cultures of affected communities."

In conclusion, we are concerned about the fact that the community problems and the attitude of Newmont even at the construction stage in Ghana, would produce the same negative impacts on affected communities and the environment as had occurred in Indonesia, Peru, Romania and Nevada." - Daniel Owusu-Koranteng of Wassa Association of Communities Affected By Mining and Mike Anane of League of Environmental Journalists. (2005) Accra, Ghana

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<http://www.greenkarat.com/>

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*"Truth never damages a cause that is just."*  
-Mahatma Gandhi

# Cut your hair.

Originally blogged Aug 17, 2005

So many grown-folks fight hair loss. Men (and women!) spend lots of their money and time trying to "fix" their hair. Now imagine that you are a child with hair loss. What will the other children think? Will they make fun of me? It must be difficult. Thankfully, there may be help available.

Locks of Love "is a non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children 18 years and younger suffering from long-term medical hair loss." If you're interested in donating your hair for this worthy cause, here are the guidelines:

1. We accept 10" minimum hair length (tip to tip), not wigs, falls, or synthetic hair.
2. Please bundle hair in ponytail or braid.
3. Hair needs to be clean, dry, placed in a plastic bag, and then in a padded envelope.
4. We need hair from men and women, young and old, all colors and races.
5. Hair may be colored or permed, but not bleached or chemically damaged (if unsure, ask your stylist).
6. Hair swept off the floor is not usable.
7. Hair cut years ago is usable if it has been stored in a ponytail or braid.
8. Hair that is short, gray, or unsuitable for children will be separated from the ponytails and sold at fair market value to offset the cost of manufacturing.
9. You may pull curly hair straight to measure the minimum 10".
10. The majority of all hair donated comes from children who wish to help other children.
11. Layered hair may be divided into multiple ponytails for donation.
12. Please note: Anyone can cut your hair as long as the above guidelines are followed.

Remember, it's just hair. Yours will grow back. If you don't want to cut your hair, don't have enough hair to cut, or if you hair will not be accepted you may want to volunteer or make a financial contribution.

Two more things:

\* I wrote Locks of Love to ask if they accept hair donations from people with kinky hair so that black children who want to wear natural hair styles have the option to do so. I did not receive a response, but if anyone has information on natural hair wigs for children, please leave a comment.

\* Given that treatment for blood cell cancers (leukemia, lymphoma, etc.) causes many, many children to lose their hair, please consider joining the bone marrow registry so that you can help cure these diseases and save a life.

So comb your hair, braid it up, and go get the scissors. A child will thank you.

*"It's all good hair."* - Michelle N-K Collison

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<http://www.locksoflove.org/>

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"The dread of censure is the death of genius."

-William Gilmore Simms

Think globally, act locally.

Originally blogged Aug 15, 2005

Just the other day, a colleague and I were discussing the fact that large, global problems like war, hunger, racism, poverty, environmental degradation, and the like can seem so overwhelming and unmanageable that some folks give up trying to solve them. That's a shame. Especially since readers of *So what can I do* know that *we all can make contributions to solving the world's problems*. Part of the key is to start small. Make micromovements by taking small steps in the right direction, focusing on your community, your network, yourself, realizing that your actions impact all of us and have ramifications for our world. Collectively, our small steps make a big difference. You choose whether that is a positive or negative impact.

Here are a few steps you can take locally to address and correct the big global problems we face:

--> Take steps against **WAR**:

- * Wage peace. Remember, peace is not the absence of war.
- * Hold your media and elected officials accountable. If you don't like what they're doing, TELL THEM!
- * Live ethically even when it's unpopular, uncommon, unexpected or inconvenient. Consider not only what you do, but also *what you don't do*.
- * Strive to behave justly. Remember, No justice, no peace.

--> Take steps against **CLASSISM, SEXISM, HOMOPHOPIA, and other unjust forms of DISCRIMINATION**:

- * Teach and model tolerance of those who are different from (or the same as!) you.
- * Consider the role of class in your society. If you don't like it, model something better.
- * Make sure your actions reflect your beliefs.
- * Learn to communicate precisely so that you can avoid misinterpretation and say what you mean and mean what you say to whomever you want.

--> Take steps against **HUNGER, FAMINE and HOMELESSNESS**:

- * Build a home for someone who needs one.
- * Donate food from your pantry, party or garden to a shelter, food rescue agency or food bank near you.
- * Make free donations to agencies working in these areas.
- * Become a social entrepreneur and find creative ways to solve your community's problems.

--> Take steps against **POVERTY**:

- * Insist on economic justice buy purchasing fair trade products.
- * Invest responsibly in socially-conscious businesses.
- * Support sustainable development which is one of many ways to actually END POVERTY.
- * Fund microloans and help a family take care of itself in the long term.

--> Take steps against **VIOLENCE**:

- * Report abuse and assault of all kinds.
- * Consider how you may unknowingly support violence.
- * Get the help you need to deal with being a survivor of violence.
- * Support agencies that work to end violence.

--> Take steps against **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**:

- * Reduce, reuse, recycle, restore *everything*, in that order.
- * Insist on environmental justice. Whose neighborhoods are the dumps in?
- * Conserve water and make sure it is clean, and physically and financially accessible to everyone.
- * Choose heirloom or recycled jewelry to avoid the damage to earth and communities that mining can cause.

--> Take steps against **SICKNESS**:

- * Donate platelets blood, organs or tissues to save or improve someone's life.
- * Make good choices about your personal physical and mental health.
- * Donate stethoscopes and other medical equipment to clinics and hospitals around the world.
- * Support health initiatives at Carter Center and Clinton Center.

You'll find many more ideas in the archives of *So what can I do*. Now let's get started! Thanks, Pat, for this suggestion!

"I am only one, but still I am one; I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; And just because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." – Edward Everett Hale

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/08/think-globally-act-locally.html>

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*“Be great in act as you have been in thought.”*  
– William Shakespeare



# Change the margins.

Originally blogged Sep 6, 2007

I just heard about this on NPR and wanted to spread the word. Ever wonder why the margins on most word processing programs are set to 1.25 inches? There's no good reason. It's completely arbitrary and a waste of paper. For years I've changed the margins for printed documents to .75 inches. Now I know I'm not alone. Enter Tamara Krinsky and Change the Margins.

**Change the Margins** is a website and movement dedicated to reducing paper waste by reducing the margins used when printing. It's a simple concept really, but it can make a big difference. Consider:

- \* Penn State University research showed that the University could save 72 acres of forest and over \$120,000/year by reducing the default margin settings across campus.
- \* "Each person in an office on average uses 2.5 pounds of paper each week. In the U.S., a ton equals 2000 pounds, so that means every 2 years and 70 days, each person in an office on average uses a ton of paper."
- \* "Americans discard 4 million tons of office paper every year -- enough to build a 12 foot high wall of paper from New York to California."
- \* Paper production is one of the top five water consuming industries.

Change the Margins is working to eliminate some of this waste. Visit **changethemargins.com** to begin convincing your organization to reduce the margins, sign a petition to Microsoft asking them to reduce the default margins, and much more. So before you print your next document, try the following:

- > **Send an email** instead. Do you really need a hard copy or will a digital version do?
- > **Use the back** of preprinted paper for drafts.
- > **Change the margins to .75 inches**. This leaves plenty of room for hole punchers, staples, etc. Don't forget to reduce the top and bottom margins too.
- > **Single space or 1.5 space** rather than double space the document.

--> **Choose a smaller font.** Times is much smaller than Courier or Bookman.  
--> **Reduce the font size.** Do you really need 12 point or will 10 or 11 point suffice?

You'll save paper and save money. It's a small step, but it's a start. Today change the margins, tomorrow change the world! Happy printing!

*"I beg for criticism. You can't learn anything from a compliment."* – Kanye West

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<http://www.changethemargins.com/>

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*"The greatest pleasure I have known, is to do a good action
by stealth, and to have it found out by accident."*

- Charles Lamb

Go, go, go with WVO.

Originally blogged Sep 22, 2005

"Huh? What's WVO?"

WVO stands for Waste Vegetable Oil, which is an energy efficient, sustainable, cheaper alternative to diesel fuel. It's sometimes called straight vegetable oil (SVO). I've written about biodiesel before, but WVO/SVO isn't quite the same, since, compared to biodiesel, WVO requires less processing and only minimal filtering (a blue jeans pant leg will work just fine) before use in your engine. On the other hand, biodiesel requires no engine conversion.

Many of the reasons for using WVO are the same as for using biodiesel:

- * It supports the national economy.
- * It improves national security.
- * It improves engine life.
- * It is sustainable and nontoxic.
- * It produces fewer emissions.
- * It's cheaper than diesel.

With a simple conversion, any diesel engine can run on WVO (or on biodiesel, with no conversion). Think of your truck, your tractor, your car. With so many restaurants willing to literally give away WVO, how can you go wrong? Here's how you can get started:

--> **Learn more about WVO** at the links below.

--> **Plan your engine conversion** with information from greasecar.com, greasel.com, and journeytoforever.org.

Now load up on fuel and you'll be ready to drive vegetarian. Enjoy!

"The use of vegetable oils for engine fuels may seem insignificant today. But such oils may become in the course of time as important as petroleum and the coal tar products of the present time." - Rudolf Diesel (1911)

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<http://www.greasecar.com>

<http://www.journeytoforever.org>

<http://www.goldenfuelsystems.com>

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*"We can have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."*

- Louis Brandeis

# Succeed in school and serve.

Originally blogged Sep 4, 2008

Now that school is in session, it definitely feels like fall, even though we haven't reached the equinox yet. There's so much to do to get ready for school and do well once you're there. Here are a few ways to help you succeed in school and serve others at the same time:

\* Learn words and more. Freerice.com is a great way to improve your vocabulary and give rice to those who need food. Now they've expanded and users can be quizzed on a wide variety of topics, including world capitals (my favorite), famous paintings, words in French, German, Italian, Spanish, and English (with pronunciation), multiplication tables, English grammar, and chemical symbols. There's something for everyone, including the people who will eat because of your efforts.

\* Change the margins. When you print out documents for your teacher, professor, or students, consider reducing the margins to .75 inches. This is just one of many ways to save paper, and money!

\* Change the menu. It's hard to learn and perform well in school when you're hungry. So Stonyfield Farms has a great site on ways to improve school lunches - from recipes for you or your children to model legislation for healthier food in school vending machines.

\* Publish. Graduate students and others know the importance of publishing their work. When you finished your thesis, capstone, dissertation, experiments, or paper, consider publishing your work in an open access journal. Your work will be available to anyone who can get online increasing readership, exposure, and citations.

\* Pay back, give back. So you're finally out of school. Congratulations! Now it's time to pay back your student loans. Consider ways to reduce your student loan debt while being of service to society. It's a win-win situation!

Have a great school year! Study hard, it's worth it.

*"A mind is a terrible thing to waste."* - United Negro College Fund motto

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<http://www.changethemargins.org>

<http://www.freerice.com>

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End redlining.

Originally blogged Sep 20, 2005

Redlining is "practice of denying or increasing the cost of services [or goods] to residents of certain areas. The term "redlining" comes from the practice of marking red lines on a map, which banks would do in order to delineate areas they did not want to lend to." You've probably noticed redlining if your driven or walked through neighborhoods different from your own. How do the gas prices compare to those you pay? What about food prices? There are lots of different types of redlining:

- * Food redlining happens when "large-scale supermarkets abandon lower-income communities for their more affluent counterparts, leaving entire communities little or no access to affordable, quality food." This contributes to health problems as well: correlations have been found between access to supermarkets and diet-related illnesses (e.g. diabetes).

- * Financial redlining restricts access to mortgages, loans, insurance and other financial services. This contributes to housing segregation and discrimination. Predatory lending is also part of this problem.

- * Advertising redlining happens when certain products are primarily advertised in certain neighborhoods, regardless of the neighborhood's relative use of the products. Ever notice where tobacco and liquor billboards are located?

- * Housing redlining. In this illegal practice, real estate agents often steer "white homebuyers away from [racially] diverse neighborhoods and lead black and Hispanic homebuyers to lower-income areas." Why do we so often assume that folks of difference class, race, or ethnicity cannot live together?

"So what can I do?"

--> **Request full disclosure.** If financial and other institutions are forced to disclose discriminatory practices, public or legal pressure may

force them to change.

--> **Demand just treatment.** If you or someone you know is being treated unfairly, demand a change. I learned this early. When I was young, my mother was often dissatisfied at the quality and freshness of the produce in our neighborhood. Instead of driving to another (wealthier, white) community to shop (an option many of our neighbors did not have), she repeatedly talked to managers and supervisors to demand better quality food. If we don't ask for changes, how can we expect them?

--> **Press for legislative changes** that outlaw redlining. Click here for information on how to communicate with your elected officials, media and community leaders.

--> **Boycott** business that continue unjust, unfair, or unethical practices.

--> **Be inspired to action** by the successes of folks who've fought: food, financial and other forms of redlining. You can make a difference for yourself, your family, and your community!



<http://www.hud.gov/fairhousing>

<http://foodfirst.org/>

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Tell your municipality about RecycleBank.

Originally blogged Sep 15, 2008

My last post focused on incentives for individuals to recycle. But what about community recycling programs? There are only three homes on our street that use the curbside recycling service. My mother's street has a similar issue - only she and one of her neighbors uses curbside recycling, and their curbside pickup is free! So what can we do to encourage recycling in our communities? The incentive program from Recycle Bank may provide the answer.

Recycle Bank forms partnerships with municipalities who want to encourage recycling in their communities. Recycling reduces landfill and waste disposal costs, in addition to providing a cleaner environment for residents to live in. Residents in the community put all their recyclable items in a single bin and when it is picked up the bin is weighed. Residents get rewards in the form of Recycle Bank Points. These points can be redeemed for coupons for various goods and services, including shopping at CVS, Bed Bath and Beyond, and 1-800-FLOWERS. Residents can also use their points to get coupons for food and other household items. Basically, **the more you recycle, the more rewards you earn.**

But what if you're at a college or university, or an apartment complex which doesn't have curbside waste pickup? In these cases, Recycle Bank Kiosks may provide the answer. After your organization signs up, you can recycle your materials, and then redeem the rewards points you earn.

If you think this is as great as I do, tell your municipal, school, organization leaders about Recycle Bank and encourage them establish a partnership. Forward this post to your officials, write them a letter, give them a call, or speak at an open meeting. It's a win for you, for your town, and for our world. Happy recycling!

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**I shared this original post** the City of Little Rock and, coincidence or not, Little Rock has started using Recycle Bank! My family recycles regularly and we're excited about using the points for fun rewards. It's a great way to incentivize recycling. Now if we could only figure out a similar system for workplaces.



*“Whenever two people meet, there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is.”*

-William James

# Sankofa: Learn from the past to build the future.

Originally blogged Sep 24, 2007

Sankofa is an Akan symbol that represents the concept: "**Remember the past to build for the future.**" For me, Sankofa is particularly relevant this month because this is the 50th Anniversary of the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, my alma mater. I had such a good experience at Central but it would not have been possible without the work and sacrifice of many brave and dedicated people, including the Little Rock Nine:

- \* Carlotta Walls LaNier
- \* Elizabeth Eckford
- \* Ernest Green
- \* Gloria Cecelia Ray Karlmark
- \* Jefferson Thomas
- \* Melba Pattillo Beals
- \* Minnijean Brown Trickey
- \* Terrence Roberts
- \* Thelma Mothershed Wair

There are many others, of course, including Daisy Gatson Bates who served as organizer for the integration effort. To all of those who worked and continue to work to ensure that all children have access to good public education, **THANK YOU**. I will do my best to give to others what you all have so generously given to me.

*"In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute."* - Thurgood Marshall

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<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/>

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Choose brown.

Originally blogged Sep 20, 2007

I've never been a coffee drinker so I don't pay much attention to the coffee-related accoutrements that Kwadjo has around the kitchen. But I did notice the unbleached coffee filters he recently bought. The filters are brown because they haven't been bleached with toxic and polluting chlorine products. There are unbleached versions of many paper products, in a range of shades from brown to white. Choose them whenever you can!

"God has a brown voice, as soft and full as beer." - Anne Sexton, American Poet and Writer, 1928-1974.

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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*"A wise man will make haste to forgive, because he knows the true value of time, and will not suffer it to pass away in unnecessary pain."*

-Samuel Johnson

# Sell your old electronics for recycling.

Originally blogged Sep 11, 2008

Right now on our kitchen table is an old modem. It doesn't work anymore, but I refuse to throw it away and create more e-waste. I already know how to recycle cell phones and rechargeable batteries, but what about MP3 players, digital cameras, laptops, GPS devices, gaming consoles, portable hard drives, and, of course, my old modem? Gazelle will buy these items and more from you and recycle them. That's right, you GET PAID for your old gadgets.

Are you making a list of all the stuff you'd like to get rid of? Good! Every item gets an offer, and they'll even send you a box and pay for shipping. It's a win for you and for the environment. Here are three ways you can get started:

- \* [Visit Gazelle.com](#) to set up your free account. You'll be ready to sell in no time.
- \* [Donate](#) your electronics to raise money for one of over two dozen nonprofits. This is a great way to get your civic or religious group involved.
- \* [Sell in bulk](#). This is a great option for schools, businesses, and others who have large numbers of recyclable electronics. Gazelle will make a personalized offer for your gadgets.

Electronic waste can cause real problems for the environment, and it reduces availability of valuable resources used in manufacturing. Recycling helps solve both of those problem and pays you for your efforts. Go Gazelle!

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<http://www.gazelle.com/>

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Lead with experience.

Originally blogged Sep 8, 2006

Recently the first five winners of The Purpose Prize were announced. This award provides "\$100,000 each to people over 60 who are taking on society's biggest challenges. It's for those with the passion and experience to discover new opportunities, create new programs, and make lasting change." Ten more people won \$10,000 prizes, and 55 others were named Purpose Prize Fellows. Importantly, this is not a 'lifetime achievement' award, but is intended to fund the excellent work these folks will do *next*. Here's how you can get involved:

- * Spread the word about the Prize. Materials and support are available to organizations and people who want to help publicize this award.
- * Nominate someone whose work you believe is worthy of the Purpose Prize.
- * Be inspired by the work of the Purpose Prize Fellows. They are making a positive difference in our world and so can you. Start small, because every little bit helps. Need some ideas? Peruse the archives of *So What Can I Do*.

As the Purpose Prize Fellows show us, it's never too early to consider and live your purpose. And it's never too late to make a difference.

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<http://www.encore.org>

<http://www.purposeprize.org>

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# Stay the course.

Originally blogged Sep 27, 2005

As you may know, I was out of town and away from my blog during the first stages of the recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Since I wasn't able to offer suggestions immediately, here are a few of my thoughts now. Unfortunately, natural and human-made disasters happen all the time. To give our best response we need to prepare now and keep a high level of preparation all the time. Here's how:

- \* Fight hunger *regularly* so that food banks are well stocked *before* an emergency and fewer are hungry to begin with.
- \* Practice tolerance *regularly* so that when a crisis occurs, you'll know how to treat people with justice, equality and fairness, regardless of their class, age, or ethnicity.
- \* Conserve fuel *regularly*. That way you'll be better prepared when (not if) there is a shortage or the cost becomes prohibitive.
- \* Give blood *regularly*. You can do it every 56 days. 38% of Americans can give but only 5% do. Guess what that means in an emergency.
- \* Demand accountability *regularly*. If there is fraud in your organization, consider reporting it. You may not think it matters much now (even though it does), but in a time of crisis fraudulent activity can cause suffering and death.
- \* Be prepared *regularly*. Take Red Cross health and safety courses. Learn first aid, CPR, emergency response, and more so that you can be helpful in a time of crisis.
- \* Do the right thing *regularly*. Your contribution will help us all be better prepared for the next disaster.

Good works are not just for emergencies; they are needed all the time. Get prepared, stay prepared, then stay the course.

*"This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man." - William Shakespeare*

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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*"Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place,
but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at
the tempting moment."*

- Benjamin Franklin

Choose recycled products.

Originally blogged Sep 11, 2006

I've written a lot about the merits of recycling. But what happens to all those goods you've been so dutifully recycling? There are numerous companies that offer useful and creative products made from recycled goods. Here are some ideas and resources you may want to explore

- * Paper - Recycled paper products are widely available, not only for offices but also for invitations, stationary, and more. Remember to choose products with the highest percentage of post-consumer waste.
- * Biodiesel - What a great way to reuse grease! Emory University will soon use biodiesel to fuel most of its shuttle fleet.
- * Jewelry - Gold, jewels and other metals are turned into beautiful, wearable art by companies like greenKarat.
- * Compost - Turn your kitchen waste into a rich source of nutrients for your garden, yard, and other plants.
- * Trees - Let no fallen tree go to waste. CitiLogs to the rescue!
- * Clothes - Shop at resale and consignment shops. Host a clothes swap. Visit garage sales. You'll be amazed at the high quality items you'll find, and the bargain prices you'll pay. Do it because you want to, even if you don't have to.
- * Printer cartridges - When you recycle printer cartridges, they are bought by companies who refill them with ink and sell them for less than brand-new cartridges. What a way to save money and reduce waste!

Remember, **reduce, reuse, recycle, restore**, in that order. And choose the products that make recycling work.

"Action indeed is the sole medium of expression for ethics." -- Jane Addams (1860 - 1935)

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<http://www.citilogs.com>

<http://www.greenkarat.com>

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# Make yourself useful.

Originally blogged Sep 12, 2006

Some of my favorite ways to give have nothing to do with how much money one has, little to do with how much time one can spare, aren't related to how much education one has. We all have a body and can use it to be of service, perhaps in ways we haven't considered. In addition to volunteering your time, contributing financially, and donating resources, consider these **seven ways to make yourself useful**:

- \* Donate blood. - Every two seconds someone needs blood. Donation of one pint takes about one hour, and 38% of people can donate every 56 days. Consider making regular blood donation a way of life.
- \* Donate platelets. - Platelets are required for blood clotting and are used in surgeries, transplants, and during cancer therapy. Donation takes about 2.5 hours and require an appointment. Most folks can donate every three days.
- \* Donate organs. - Every day, 18 people die while waiting for an organ transplant. Consider donating your organs after your death, and be sure to share your decision with your family members.
- \* Donate umbilical cord blood. - Pregnant women and their partners may want to donate their child's umbilical cord blood. It can be used in biomedical research or to cure sickle cell anemia, lymphoma, leukemia, and some other blood diseases.
- \* Donate marrow. - Bone marrow can be used in biomedical research or to cure sickle cell anemia, lymphoma, leukemia, and some other blood diseases. Consider joining the marrow registry. You'll only be called if someone in need matches your marrow. And you can always say no.
- \* Donate milk. Your excess breast milk can improve the health or save the life of a baby. Not all babies can thrive off formula, and not all mothers can provide the breast milk their baby needs. Your milk can help.

\* Donate your body. - Donating your body to science is a great way to support medical and forensic training and research and make a truly lasting contribution. Make sure to share your wishes with your family.

\* Donate hair. - Your long hair can be used to make hairpieces for financially disadvantaged children who have long-term hair loss for medical reasons. Go get the scissors. It's just hair; it'll grow back.

Click the links to get information on how to make these donations. These are some great ways to share your body with others, and save or improve a life while you're at it! And remember, if you are unable to donate in these ways, you can always **donate money, time, or other resources, and spread the word** to others who may want to help.

*"Aim above morality. Be not simply good, be good for something."* -- Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862)

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2006/09/make-yourself-useful.html>

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"Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures; peace is our gift to each other."

- Elie Wiesel

Eradicate Guinea worm.

Originally blogged Oct 20, 2004

Guinea worm disease is a painful, crippling parasitic infection that has caused suffering around the world for millennia. Thankfully, it will soon be the next disease eradicated from the earth and the first to be overcome without a vaccine or treatment. You can support the Carter Center in their work to eliminate the last one percent of this awful disease.

Just \$10 buys 200 portable, reusable pipe filters to enable people to filter their drinking water and help eliminate Guinea worm disease. Click below to donate now and support this work and the Carter Center's mission to "Wage Peace, Fight Disease, and Build Hope."

Imagine the difference you will make!

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**There's no need to imagine the difference;** it's here! In 1986, there were 3.1 million cases of Guinea worm in 21 counties. There were more than 12,900 cases in October of 2004 when this post was written. But as of December 31, 2013, there were only 148 cases in just four countries. The Carter Center fully expects Guinea worm to be the second human disease (after smallpox) to be eradicated. Thank you for helping make that happen!

<http://www.cartercenter.org/>

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# Claim unclaimed money.

Originally blogged Oct 10, 2004

There is great site that allows you to check for unclaimed money and other assets that may belong to you or your family. On my first visit there, I put in a family surname and found that the children of two of my deceased cousins have money waiting for them. I got in touch with them immediately to let them know.

To start your free search, visit the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators, a nonprofit organization. You never know what you might find! And if you happen upon a windfall, there are many worthy organizations that would be happy to receive a donation.

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Our ever more mobile society makes it easier than one might expect to lose track of assets. But our electronic society also makes it easier to find them. The National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators has a long list of other sources of unclaimed assets. The list includes undeliverable tax refunds, unclaimed pension and veteran's benefits, missing deposits from closed financial institutions, and more. There's even a list of international unclaimed property sources.

<https://www.unclaimed.org>

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"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

- Elie Wiesel

Do business with a B Corporation.

Originally blogged Oct 21, 2008

Because of the focus and audience of *So What Can I Do*, I get a number of announcements from companies who are involved in "cause" or "green" marketing. All other things being equal, I certainly choose products associated with a cause I support over those that do not. However, I am much more impressed with companies who focus their mission, not just their marketing campaign, on more than just the bottom line. That's why I like the idea of B Corporations.

"B Corporations are a new type of corporation that are purpose-driven and create benefit for all stakeholders, not just shareholders." Certified B Corporations adhere to a set of transparent social and environmental standards and they make the interests of all stakeholders part of their business model. There are now 134 Certified B Corporations in 31 industries. If this sounds like a business model you can support, consider these ways of getting involved:

* Become a B Corporation. Follow the three step plan to become a certified B Corporation. Once the process is complete, your company will have access to best practices for social and environmental performance. Your business will be promoted through the nonprofit B lab. And your (potential) customers will know that you are committed to being a good company, not just good marketing.

* Do business with a B Corporation. When you need goods or services, consult the list of Certified B Corporations to see if one fits your needs. You'll get what you need and support socially and environmentally responsible business practices. I am pleased that *So What Can I Do* has already directly or indirectly profiled several B corporations, like Better World Books and Shore Bank.

The transparent policies of B Corporations are a great way to combat greenwashing and good-coating. So consider becoming or supporting a B Corporation. And by the way, B stands for Benefits - for everyone.

Benefit corporations and Certified B Corporations are becoming more popular. In fact, 22 states have now passed legislation that establishes benefit corporations as a legal status; 15 other states are considering such legislation. If you live or do business in one of the 28

states without benefit corporation legislation, ask your representatives to sponsor such legislation. And if you are starting a business or if you own a business consider making it a benefit corporation. It will be good for both you and our society.

The 23 benefit corporation laws are in Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC.

<http://www.bcorporation.net/>

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"There is no greater gift to an insecure leader that quite matches a vague 'enemy' who can be used to whip up fear and hatred among the population."

- Paul Rusesabagina

Trick or Treat for good.

Originally blogged Oct 14, 2008

Halloween is almost here - time flies! If you are looking for something meaningful to do this holiday, consider these suggestions. The kids will have a good time while making a positive difference in the world.

* Sight Night - Trick-or-Treaters collect used eyeglasses that will be cleaned, repaired and hand-delivered to people in developing countries who couldn't otherwise afford them. If you wear corrective lenses, you know what a difference they can make and how much better your life can be because of them.

* Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF - You or your children can raise money for children everywhere by collecting donation for UNICEF. Order a box online or download a canister wrapper. You can also help UNICEF by raising money online, with your mobile phone, through your Facebook or Myspace page, or by sending Halloween ecards.

* Trick-or-Treat for canned goods - Kids can support their local food bank by collecting canned goods while trick-or treating. Visit feedingamerica.org (formerly Second Harvest) to find a service agency near you. And be sure to tell your neighbors about the organization their donations will support.

* Party with a purpose. If you host a Halloween Party or Haunted House, ask your guests to bring canned goods, gently used coats or clothes, eyeglasses, or monetary donations for your favorite charity.

Start planning and order your materials now, so that you'll have them in time for Halloween. Enjoy!

"If you wait for tomorrow, tomorrow comes. If you don't wait for tomorrow, tomorrow comes." - Nigerian proverb

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<http://www.trickortreatforunicef.org/>

<https://onesight.org/>

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# Take back the night.

Originally blogged Oct 4, 2005

In the US, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds by her husband or partner. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the United States; more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men in the United States has experienced an attempted or completed rape at some time in their lives. That means you or someone you know.

Even before the first Take Back the Night gatherings, women and men have marched, rallied, and protested to increase women's safety in and out their homes, during the day and at night. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a perfect time take back the night.

Here's how you can help make the world safer for your mothers, daughters, sisters, cousins, aunts, friends, neighbors and fellow human beings:

--> ***If you are a survivor of sexual assault and need help, call the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) at 1-800-656-HOPE (1-800-656-4673). You can call from anywhere in the US, and free and confidential counseling is available 24 hours a day.***

--> ***If something about your relationship with your partner scares you and you need to talk, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or 1-800-787-3224 (TTY). Fax: 512-453-8541 Address: PO Box 161810, Austin, Texas 78716.***

\* **Do the personal work** of examining your own belief systems and behavior to learn how you may contribute to social and institutional practices that condone sexual violence. Consider the words you use, the music you listen to, the 'jokes' you laugh at. If you are uncomfortable with the answers you find, GET HELP.

\* **Donate financially** to your local women's safehouse (shelter) or men's support group. The National Domestic Violence Hotline website lists domestic violence agencies in each state, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.



\* **Volunteer your time** to an organization that seeks to end domestic violence. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 512/453-8117 or [ndvh@ndvh.org](mailto:ndvh@ndvh.org) to find a volunteer opportunity in your area.

\* **Donate supplies** to your local safehouse. These homes away from home are always in need of things like towels, toiletries, sheets, kitchen supplies, and the like. Children's necessities for home and school are also needed.

\* **Donate a phone.** "Through the collection of deactivated cell and wireless phones, an important tool has been provided for victims of domestic violence who may encounter emergency situations. The lifeline provided by donated phones has literally saved lives." Donations are tax deductible. Send your phone, charger, and battery to

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
P.O. Box 18749  
Denver, CO 80218  
303-839-1852, x105

For more ideas, check out NCADV. ***You CAN make a difference.*** Please, act now.

*"The voice of conscience is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it; but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it."* -Madame De Stael, writer (1766-1817)

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Two (not so) small things: men's sleeveless undershirts are called A-shirts (similar to T-shirts); and when it raining while the sun is shining, that's called a sunshower. One has to look these kinds of things up when one is raising a child. Our language (and actions!) make a difference in their lives, in the lives of others and in our own lives.

<http://www.rainn.org/>

<http://www.thehotline.org/>

<http://www.ncadv.org/>

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Get a free car seat inspection.

Originally blogged Oct 2, 2006

Just this weekend, my mother saw a woman riding with two children under the age of two who were not buckled in their child safety seats. She tried to talk to the woman about ways to ensure her children's safety, but unfortunately, the woman seemed unreceptive. She should have listened: **car crashes are the number one killer of children** and **70% of car seats are installed incorrectly**.

Child safety seats save lives, but they must be correctly installed. Thankfully, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Transportation Safety Board, and the National Safety Council have joined with others to form SeatCheck.org. They'll help you make sure your car seat is installed correctly. Here's how you can use this wonderful resource:

- * Call **1-866-SEAT CHECK** (1-866-732-8243) to get information on **free child safety seat inspections**. Information is available in Spanish and English.

- * Visit SeatCheck.org to find a **free child safety seat inspection** site near you. The site is also available in Spanish.

Remember, this is important not only for parents of infants and small children, but also for **anyone who transports a child in a motor vehicle**. (Good call, Dawn!) Also, if the cost of a car seat is prohibitive, call your local department of motor vehicles. Your state may have a program that provides free or reduced price car seats to those who qualify.

So do something good for your child or the child you carry in your car. Get your child safety seat inspected, and keep children safe. Call or visit SeatCheck.org today!

"History teaches that grave threats to liberty often come in times of urgency, when constitutional rights seem too extravagant to endure." - Thurgood Marshall, US Supreme Court Justice (1908-1993)

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<http://www.seatcheck.org>

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# Be bioethical.

Originally blogged Oct 18, 2005

Later this week, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities will hold its annual meeting. Bioethicists ask and try to answer or solve the often difficult moral and ethical questions and dilemmas arising from the practice of medicine and life sciences research. When I ask people about bioethics, they often think of the hot button issues like human cloning, stem cells, and euthanasia/physician-assisted suicide. But there are lots of other issues that bioethicists study. Consider health care access, research priorities, health disparities, suffering, and justice (this year's ASBH theme).

Here are a few issues bioethicists are tackling, and some ways you may choose to respond:

**\*\*\*Issue:** The shortage of donated organs leads to long transplant waiting lists and difficulty deciding who will receive scarce organs.

**Response:** Donate life. You may be able to donate blood (every 56 days), platelets (every 3 days), bone marrow, organs, or umbilical cord blood. Talk with your family about your decisions and call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE or 1-888-USBLOOD to find a blood donation center near you.

**\*\*\*Issue:** Development and testing of new drugs, medical equipment and medical treatments requires voluntary participation in research and clinical trials.

**Response:** Support and participate in research programs. Learn more about the purpose of biomedical research, and clinical trials, and decide whether you want to be a subject. You may or may not receive direct medical benefits but you will help improve medical care. If you choose not to participate, you may want to support research programs financially.

**\*\*\*Issue:** End-of-life care and decision-making can be difficult and contentious given complicated medical, familial and legal environments.

**Response:** Get a living will. This legal document makes clear your wishes about certain aspects of your own end-of-life care, and will help your family, your physicians (and the courts) make decisions about your care that, ideally, respect your wishes. Make sure you talk with your family about your decisions.

**\*\*\*Issue:** Health care workers need to respect the privacy of their patients while protecting public health, but doing both is not always possible.

**Response:** Get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and other communicable diseases for which you are at risk. Get counseling so that you understand how the results will impact you, your family, your loved-ones, and others. Act responsibly.

If these topics pique your interest, you may want to learn more about bioethics, moral reasoning and decision-making in health care and research in today's world. To start, check out the Women's Bioethics Project, the Tuskegee National Center for Bioethics, the Center for American Progress' discussion on progressive bioethics, and the American Journal of Bioethics.

And remember that many other issues, like violence, hunger, homelessness, environmental damage, economic injustice, prejudice and more, are involved in health care and biomedical research decision-making. So consider the ethical and bioethical implications of your actions, then revise them as necessary. It's the right thing to do.

*"Old bioethicists never die, they just lose autonomy."* - Karama Neal, generalist

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<http://www.asbh.org>

<http://www.tuskegee.edu>

<http://www.bioethics.net>

<http://www.thehastingscenter.org>

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Reduce unwanted bulk mail.

Originally blogged Oct 12, 2004

Tired of all the unwanted bulk mail? Put a stop to it! Add your name to the Direct Marketing Association's Mail Preference list and eliminate up to 80 percent of bulk mail. The service is free.

Just send a card with your name, address, and signature to:

Mail Preference Service
DMA, Box 643
Carmel, NY 10512

"But I like bulk mail!" That's fine, just recycle it when you're done!

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<https://www.dmachoice.org>

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*“Action will remove the doubt that theory cannot solve.”*  
— Tehyi Hsieh

# End poverty.

Originally blogged Oct 15, 2008

Today is Blog Action Day 2008 and this year's focus is on poverty. Poverty can be defined as lack of the common necessities that determine quality of life - lack of safe food, shelter, and clothing, lack of opportunities presented by education, health care, and community and personal agency.

Many of us do things to combat poverty in the short term. We donate food to our local food rescue agency for those who need to fill their belly. We donate furniture to the local furniture bank to give to those who need a place to lay their head. We donate coats for kids who need to stay warm in the winter.

These activities are critically important because they meet a pressing and immediate need. However it is also important to consider ways we can eliminate these needs completely. Many people argue that it is actually possible to **END POVERTY**. I suggest that that should be our goal. Here are some ways you can ensure that everyone has the common necessities we all need to have a decent quality of life.

\* Consider class. Consider how tolerant you are of people who have a different (or the same) amount of or access to money and opportunity as you. Think honestly, carefully, and critically about what you believe in. Think about what is right. And make sure your words and actions reflect your beliefs. We may demonstrate class or other biases without being conscious of it. So be honest with yourself and when you see or hear inappropriate unjust behavior, do something about it.

\* Think globally, act locally. The current financial crises emphasizes that we live in a highly integrated world. By practicing consciously connected living, we acknowledge how intertwined our lives are and make choices that maximize benefit for everyone.

\* Stop making excuses. Instead of focusing on what won't work, develop something that will. Instead of saying you have no time to contribute, use the time you have more wisely. Instead of saying you have no money to contribute, look for other valuable skills, items, and resources that you can use for good.

\* "Be the change you want to see in the world." - Mohandas Gandhi reminds us that who we are, how we act, what we care about influences the world we live in. If making the world a better place for all of us who live in it is important to you, browse this site to find ways to make sure your lifestyle reflects your values and priorities.

*"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."* - Frederick Douglass (c. 1817–1895), U.S. abolitionist. Speech, April 1886

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2008/08/end-poverty.html>

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“It seems to me important for a country, for a nation to certainly know about its glorious achievements but also to know where its ideals failed, in order to keep that from happening again.”

-George Takei

Donate your organs.

Originally blogged Oct 26, 2005

As I write this, there are 89,879 people on the national transplant waiting list. Thankfully, as of mid-October, 8,487 people have generously donated their organs to 16,447 people. But we have a long way to go before all 89,879 people get the organs and tissues they need. But you can help meet that need. Here's how:

- * **Donate your organs.** Learn how to become a donor and make sure that your wishes will be upheld. Make sure you tell to your family about your decision, and encourage them and others to become donors as well. Your organs and tissues can save and improve the lives of over 80 people!
- * **Promote organ donation** in your community through speakers, brochures and other promotional materials. "Despite continuing advances in medicine and technology, the demand for organs drastically exceeds the number of organ donors. You can make the difference in someone's life by helping to increase organ donation."
- * **Donate time or money** to the United Network for Organ Sharing, the National Donor Memorial, or the National Transplantation Resource Center. "Your gifts of money and time help save lives by supporting UNOS in educating the public about the critical need for organ and tissue donation. Every dollar of your tax-deductible contribution goes directly to programs aimed at increasing donation."
- * **Read donor stories** at the National Donor Memorial. "Organ and tissue donors leave a miraculous legacy. They are living proof that death can bring life, that sorrow can turn to hope, and that a terrible loss can become the greatest gift of all. Every day they lead us on a journey of hope, renewal, and transformation."

Thoughtfully, prayerfully, consider all the ways you can donate life: blood (every 56 days), platelets (every 3 days), bone marrow, and organs. It is such a meaningful way to make a difference.

"The main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand." - Thomas Carlyle

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<http://www.organdonor.gov>

<http://www.unos.org>

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*"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."*

-Desmond Tutu

# Fight fires.

Originally blogged Oct 13, 2005

Candle fires. Chimney fires. Heating fires. Arson. Wildfires. All of these can cause damage to life, health and property. Fire kills more Americans than all natural disasters combined. 83% of civilian fire-related deaths occurred in the home. And civilians aren't the only ones who bear the burden. In 2004, 117 firefighters were killed while on duty.

October 9-15 is National Fire Prevention Week. You already know many of the things you can do to practice fire safety. Here are a few:

- \* Make sure **smoke detectors** are properly installed and maintained. (Check the batteries when we fall back, October 30th.)
- \* Develop and practice a home fire escape plan.
- \* Use candles safely. (That's this year's theme.)
- \* Practice safe smoking (DON'T SMOKE!), safe cooking, and safe heating.

That will help *you*. But what about everyone else? Consider becoming a volunteer firefighter. Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, has a volunteer fire department and several of my collegemates were firefighters. Whether it was day or night, whether they were in class, at a party, or asleep in their dorm rooms, when the siren sounded, these dedicated and brave students (male and female, large and petite, of all ethnicities) would rush down the hill to the headquarters to risk their lives while serving their community, all without pay. I have the utmost respect for them.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter, consider these resources:

--> The National Volunteer Fire Council is "a non-profit membership association representing the interests of the volunteer fire, EMS and rescue services. The NVFC serves as the information source regarding legislation, standards and regulatory issues." They operate a national recruitment campaign. **Call 1-800-FIRE-LINE** to learn more.

--> The US Fire Administration provides "training and educational opportunities for the Fire Service and allied organizations. Also available are fire statistics, public fire education campaign materials, and information on funding opportunities." They also offer a Volunteer Incentive Program, maintain a list of fire-safe hotels and provide information on home fire safety.

--> VolunteerFD.org provides "a place for volunteer firefighters to come and share information with their fellow 'unpaid professionals'. VolunteerFD.org is strictly for volunteer and combination departments and is built to address the unique issues that all volunteer departments share."

Thank you to all the firefighters and other emergency personnel that help keep us safe, paid and volunteer. Be careful.

*"People are tested by wealth, just as gold is tested by fire."* - Chinese proverb

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<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/>

<http://www.volunteerfd.org>

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Collect and use grey water.

Originally blogged Oct 5, 2007

Georgia is in the midst of an historic drought and almost all outdoor water use has been banned. Given these restrictions, there is new interest in the collection and use of grey water. Grey (or gray) water is the wastewater resulting from washing dishes, doing laundry, bathing, and the like. Grey water comprises 50-80% of residential wastewater. So why let all that water go to waste? Here are a few ways to **collect grey water**:

- * Shower with a bucket to collect grey water.
- * Save the water used to boil vegetables, pasta, eggs and the like.
- * Keep buckets in the kitchen and bathroom to collect water before it goes down the sink drain.
- * Collect the dripping water from your air conditioning unit.
- * Install collection equipment to harvest the water.

Clearly grey water is not for drinking (except for potlikker), but there many other great ways to **use grey water**:

- * Water your grass and landscaping.
- * Flush your toilet - you certainly don't need potable water for *that!*
- * Hydrate your compost pile.
- * Water your house plants.
- * Treat your greywater and use it to nourish your garden.

Clean potable water is a valuable resource. Use it wisely, whether or not there's a drought.

"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." - Steve Bantu Biko

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<http://www.greywater.com/>

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# Stop buying, stop drinking bottled water.

Originally blogged Oct 9, 2007

There is a growing movement against bottled water. All kinds of folks from newspaper columnists to religious groups to city governments are eschewing bottled water.

Here's why:

- \* 86% of plastic water bottles used in the United States become garbage or litter. That means less than 15% are recycled.
- \* Transporting heavy bottled water uses lots of oil for shipping. More oil is used to make the plastic for the bottles. That means more air and water pollution, and increased dependence on petroleum products.
- \* 40% of the bottled water is just overpriced, high-falutin' tap water. Read the label.

What a waste of money and resources! Not to mention the increased pollution. "So what can I do?"

- \* **Stop** using bottled water. Pick up a glass and turn on the tap. Ahh! Good water!
- \* **Order** "still water from the tap" at restaurants. Environmental stewardship is nothing to be ashamed of.
- \* **Provide** cold quenching tap water at your parties, events and home.
- \* **Promote** the passage of a bottle bill in your community. These provide an incentive to recycle and increase recycling rates.

Okay, okay. I know bottled water is convenient. So if you must carry around the plastic, do the following:

- \* **Purchase** a heavy duty plastic or metal bottle that will last for years.
- \* **Refill it** so you can use it multiple times.
- \* **Recycle it** so someone else can use it multiple times.

We need not succumb to the advertising and marketing that would have us believe that there is no good alternative to bottled water. We know that tap water is the better choice for us and in the environment in which we live.

*"The night whose sable breast relieves the stark,  
White stars, is no less lovely being dark."* — Countee Cullen (1903–1946)



As if **you need any more reasons** to choose tap water - it's also less expensive. And you can always run it through a filter if you like.

<http://thewaterproject.org/>

<https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/>

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*"People don't ever seem to realize that doing what's right's  
no guarantee against misfortune."*

- William McFee

# Make and keep a blood donation appointment.

Originally blogged Nov 19, 2007

I just came from my regular bimonthly blood donation. Making the donation appointment was on my to do list today and when I registered online I found a drive very nearby. How convenient! Here are a few ways for you to make a blood donation appointment.

- \* Call the Red Cross at **1-800-RED-CROSS** (733-2767) to find a blood drive near you.
- \* Call **1-888-USBLOOD** (872-5663) to find a community blood center near you.
- \* Visit [www.redcrossblood.org](http://www.redcrossblood.org) to make an appointment with the Red Cross online.
- \* Visit [www.americasblood.org](http://www.americasblood.org) to make an appointment at a community donation center.

Once you have your appointment, remember to drink lots of water in the days before and once you've given, pat yourself on the back for saving up to three lives. What a nice way to spend an hour of your time. See you in 56 days!

*"Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures; peace is our gift to each other." - Elie Wiesel*

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Only 38 percent of people are eligible to give blood, but only a small portion of those actually donate. Fewer still donate every 56 days. But more should donate since in the US someone needs a transfusions about every two seconds. I hope that soon, one's sexual orientation will not prevent one from giving blood. As the Red Cross says, "The need it constant."

<http://www.redcrossblood.org>

<http://www.americasblood.org>

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Give a child a family.

New for this e-book

On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, the US celebrates National Adoption Day, “a collective national effort to raise awareness of the more than 100,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families.” To date, National Adoption Day has helped almost 50,000 children move permanently from foster care. Just as importantly, tens of thousands of eager parents have been blessed with new loving additions to their families.

Whether or not you are considering adoption, you can help honor adoptive families, raise awareness about children in foster care who want a forever family, and facilitate collaboration between organizations, courts, advocates, and others involved in the adoption process. Want more information?

- * Visit www.nationaladoptionday.org in the US (and www.nationaladoptionweek.org.uk in the UK)
- * Call 1-800-TO-ADOPT or 1-888-200-4005
- * Write info@adoptuskids.org

If you are waiting for a child there may be a child waiting for you. You can change a child's life and your life for the better. Won't you consider being an adoptive parent or foster parent?

"Every child begins the world again." ~Henry David Thoreau

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<http://www.nationaladoptionday.org/>

<http://www.adoptuskids.org>

<http://www.nfpaonline.org>

<http://www.nationaladoptionweek.org.uk>

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# Do your duty.

Originally blogged Nov 11, 2005

My grandmother always wanted to serve on a jury. Perhaps that was because, as a black American, for most of her life, she was barred from serving. Unfortunately, even after black folks were allowed to serve, she was never called. She would have been a good juror. She understood the value and purpose of juries and would have taken her duty and responsibility seriously. I will strive to do the same when I have jury duty in February. I know Kwadjo took his responsibility seriously when he served a few months ago.

If you are called to serve, think carefully about your activities and limitations, and the jury obligation and its role in our judicial system before trying to defer. Consider these resources:

- \* Consider the various types of justice and how they may apply in the case at hand.
- \* Use the tips at the link below to prepare for deliberation.
- \* Make sure you understand your employer's policy on leave for jury duty.
- \* Remember to respect your fellow jurors.
- \* Be sure to dress appropriately for jury duty. You'll want to be comfortable.

Participation in a jury is one of the ways you can contribute to a more just society. The duty is not to be ignored or taken lightly. So next time you are summoned for jury duty, do your best as you serve and work toward a just verdict.

Today would have been Fanilla Suttles Cobb's 95th birthday. Happy birthday, Mom!

*"Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough."* - Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd US President (1882-1945)

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http://www.ehow.com/how_13927_deliberate-jury.html

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Get help – part two.

Originally blogged Nov 16, 2005

A few months ago, I wrote about thirteen 12-step programs that people with various addictions can use to get help in recovery. But, as anyone with addiction in the family knows, addiction affects family members, friends and all those who love or interact with the person who is addicted. Thankfully there is help available. If you love a person with an addiction and are concerned about that person and *yourself*, use these resources and Family Groups to "share experiences, strength, and hope in order to solve common problems":

- * Debt-Anon Family Groups "consist of relatives and friends of money and **debt** addicts who realize that by banding together they can better solve their common problems."
- * Al-Anon/AlaTeen - "No matter what relationship you have with an **alcoholic**, whether they are still drinking or not, all who have been affected by someone else's drinking can find solutions that lead to serenity in the Al-Anon/Alateen fellowship." The site is available in Español and Français.
- * Co-Anon Family Groups "are a fellowship of men and women who are husbands, wives, parents, relatives or close friends of someone who is chemically dependent. If you are seeking a solution to the problems that come from living with a practicing or recovering **cocaine** addict, we at Co-Anon can help you."
- * Gam-Anon is a self-help organization and "a life-saving instrument for the spouse, family or close friends of **compulsive gamblers**."
- * COSA "An anonymous 12-Step fellowship open to those whose lives have been affected by **compulsive sexual behavior**."
- * Adult Children of Alcoholics "is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition program of women and men who grew up in **alcoholic** or otherwise dysfunctional homes. We meet with each other in a mutually respectful, safe environment and acknowledge our common experiences. We discover how childhood affected us in the past and influences us in the present ("The Problem"). We take positive action. By practicing the Twelve Steps, focusing on "The Solution", and accepting a loving Higher Power of our understanding, we find freedom from the past and a

way to improve our lives today."

* Nar-Anon "is a twelve-step program designed to help relatives and friends of [**narcotics**] addicts recover from the effects of living with an addicted relative or friend."

* S-Anon Family Groups "are a fellowship of the relatives and friends of **sexually addicted** people who share their experience, strength and hope in order to solve their common problems."

* OLGAnon Family Groups "are a fellowship for relatives and friends of **on-line gaming** addicts, who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to resolve their problems."

* Sober-24 is "a virtual fellowship for recovery. If you are recovering from **alcohol or drug addiction**, or are a loved one of someone in recovery (or who needs recovery) you are welcome at Sober24.com."

Find a meeting. Get the help you need *for yourself*. Life is too short and too long not to.

"Change not the mass but change the fabric of your own soul and your own visions, and you change all." - Vachel Lindsay

~~~~~

<http://http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/11/get-help-part-2.html>

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# Organize a “clothes swap.”

Originally blogged Nov 16, 2004

I had such a good time at my first clothes swap. My friends and I enjoyed snacks, wine and good conversation, and I got some great new outfits in the process. It was a ball!

"What's a clothes swap?" you ask. Participants are asked to survey their wardrobe for clothes that are in good condition but were no longer being worn. Perhaps the clothes no longer fit, or maybe the person is just tired of wearing them, or maybe they're just getting rid of excess clutter. The hostess/organizer provides a place to try on and view the clothes, along with snacks and good background tunes. The guests take turns showing and describing the pieces they brought, and when another guest sees something she likes, she grabs it! Any clothes that are not claimed by the end of the swap are donated to a local community service organization.

It's a great way to hang out with your friends (and maybe make some new ones), shop for "new" clothes, and do some good at the same time. Now's a great time to organize a clothes swap! Have fun!

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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"All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

- Arthur Schopenhauer

Improve your vocabulary.

Originally blogged Nov 29, 2007

I was on the Clinton School of Public Service blog yesterday and found the neatest thing: freerice.com.

FreeRice.com is a click to donate or CTD site with twist: vocabulary lessons. Each time you correctly select the meaning of the given word, 20 grains of rice are donated to the World Food Programme. When you get the definition right you get a harder word (and the WFP gets rice). Get it wrong and you get an easier word. It's addictive, so be careful. As with other CTD sites, advertisers donate money for rice based on how many visitors test and improve their vocabulary. Yesterday 369,007,280 grains of rice were donated.

Every little bit helps. So visit freerice.com and learn a little to give a little. It's a win-win! Have fun!

"Today the man who is the real risk-taker is anonymous and nonheroic. He is the one trying to make institutions work." - John William Ward

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When I wrote this post in 2007, one month after launch, freerice.com only offered English vocabulary questions. But now, one can donate food aid by learning in 19 different areas including human anatomy, literature, chemistry, SAT preparation, Latin, world capitals, and many more. And what a difference it has made! Through their partnership with the United Nations World Food Programme, more than a million people have benefited from food donations and many others have learn a bit of German, famous quotations, English grammar, and more.

And if you don't want to learn anything but still want to donate, click the big orange button at <http://thehungersite.greatergood.com>.

One more thing, for more great ideas like this, check out the Clinton School of Public Service blogs and speaker series. The speaker videos are a wonderful resource.

<http://www.freerice.com>

<http://www.thehungersite.greatergood.com>

<http://www.clintonschool.uasys.edu>

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# Repay your student loans.

Originally blogged Nov 6, 2005

Just last week, I received my last diploma in the mail. Now that I'm finally done with school (though I'm never done with learning!), it's time to pay back my student loans. If you are in a similar position, you may want to consider a loan repayment program. In exchange for service to the community, many federal agencies will repay portions of your student loans. Your community gets a well-educated and dedicated servant, and you get your loans repaid. It's win-win! Ready to learn more? Here are several programs you may want to consider:

- \* The National Institutes of Health has an intramural and extramural loan repayment programs for people with doctoral level degrees in health and biomedical sciences. Eligibility depends, in part, on the type of research you do. I hope to qualify for this at some point.
- \* The AmeriCorps Education Award can be used "to pay educational expenses at qualified institutions of higher education, for educational training, or to repay qualified student loans." As an AmeriCorps volunteer, Kwadjo received this award. Good work!
- \* The Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program "offers registered nurses substantial assistance to repay educational loans in exchange for service in critical shortage facilities."
- \* Peace Corps volunteers "with Perkins loans are eligible for a 15 percent cancellation of their outstanding balance for each year of Peace Corps service."
- \* The Indian Health Service has a loan repayment program that is aimed at "obtain[ing] health professionals to meet the staffing needs of the IHS in Indian health programs."
- \* The Federal student loan repayment program "permits agencies to repay federally insured student loans as a recruitment or retention incentive for candidates or current employees of the agency."

\* The Association of American Medical Colleges maintains a list of U.S. programs that "offer financial assistance, in the form of loan repayments, for a commitment to service (generally in an area of need). Information regarding each program has been provided by state health departments and other agencies, medical and health professions schools, federal programs, and military agencies."

These are some great ways to get rid of your debt. And they are wonderful ways to make a difference.



**Many states governments and local organizations** have their own loan repayment programs designed to encourage people with needed skills to remain in their communities. So look for local opportunities as well.

<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com/2005/11/repay-your-student-loans.html>

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*"Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth."*

- Pablo Picasso

# Keep the party going.

Originally blogged Nov 26, 2005

Another holiday season is upon us, and many social organizations, businesses, families and other groups will soon have holiday parties to celebrate. But after the party is over, what will you do with all that leftover food? Keep the party going by donating leftovers to a food rescue agency. I became sold on food rescue when I worked with Potluck Food Rescue to donate food from my wedding. Remember, you can donate leftovers from all kinds of celebrations, throughout the year.

Americans throw away 27% of all food available in the country. That's one pound every day, for every child, women, and man in the US. Do your part to reduce this waste and feed those who are hungry. Food rescue is so much better than throwing good food in the trash. Contact your local food rescue agency or food bank today to arrange a donation. Or click the envelope below to forward this post to the organizers of your celebration. Party on!

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Last summer, my daughter and I joined other Arkansas Food Bank volunteers on a watermelon gleaning mission. Gleaning is the removal of valuable foodstuffs from the fields after the majority of the crop has been harvest. The book of Ruth in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles include a story of gleaning. We had a ball riding in the backs of truck through fields and harvesting watermelons for people who may not have access to fresh fruit. According to some estimate 96 billion pounds of food are left on the fields and that's increasing. Gleaning is a great form of food rescue in that it reduces food waste at the earliest moment and brings it to people who need it. And it's also fun!

<http://feedingamerica.org/>

<http://www.endhunger.org>

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Sponsor a business.

Originally blogged Nov 30, 2005

Last year's post on microloans is one of my most popular. Now Kiva offers a new way to make a microloan. When you fund a microloan through Kiva, *you get your money back*:

"Kiva lets you connect with and loan money to unique small businesses in the developing world. By choosing a business on our website and then lending money online to that enterprise, you can 'sponsor a business' and help the world's working poor make great strides towards economic independence. Throughout the course of the loan (usually 6-12 months), you can receive monthly email updates that let you know about the progress being made by the small business you've sponsored. These updates include reports on loan repayment progress, photos of new capital equipment, narratives on business growth and standard of living improvements, and more. As loans are repaid, you will get your original loan money back."

Your money will go far in the countries where Kiva works, so it's easy to make a big difference in a family's life with a relatively small amount of money. You can start with as little as \$25. The money is used to start a small business, like a barber shop, vegetable stand, restaurant, or cell phone rental. Such business create a sustainable change in the family economy and allow the family be economically independent. Funding a microloan is just one more step toward economic justice.

The International Year of Microcredit is almost over. So check out Kiva or another microcredit agency today!

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<http://www.kiva.org>

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# Support science-based development initiatives.

Originally blogged Nov 9, 2004

Many thanks to my friend and colleague for passing these sites along. He suggests that these are for "the biosci technogeeks in the crowd." I am proud to count myself among that group, but we can all use these sites. If we can't support this work in the lab or in the field, we can support it financially. So take a look at these sites that connect science, scientists and development, and spread the word to all the "biosci technogeeks" and other folks you know.

\* The Sustainable Science Institute is "a non-profit organization dedicated to improving public health worldwide, by helping scientists in developing countries gain access to the resources needed to address local problems related to infectious diseases." They offer training and consulting services, low-cost diagnostics developments and policy research.

\* One World Health is a nonprofit pharmaceutical company. (I didn't know that was possible!) Interested people can donate research or intellectual property, or can volunteer their time, and expertise in bench research, bioethics, epidemiology, manufacturing, etc.

\* The Science & Development Network is an online community dedicated to "news, views and information about science, technology and the developing world."

\* The African Crop Improvement Network is a project of the Rockefeller Foundation dedicated to implementing a program on genetic improvement and dissemination of new varieties of African food crops.

\* The Seattle Biomedical Research Institute is a nonprofit research organization that focuses on infectious diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis.

My dream is to have the work that I do to pay the bills, be the work that I would do for free. These organizations provide a way for service-minded life scientists to live that dream. Now let's get to work! Thanks Myron!

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<http://www.sbri.org>

<http://www.ssilink.org/>

<http://www.scidev.net/>

<http://www.path.org/>

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“In difficult situations when hope seems feeble the boldest plans are safest.”

- Livy

Recycle your carpet.

Originally blogged Nov 17, 2008

Now that our move to Little Rock is getting closer (woo hoo!), Kwadjo and I are preparing to sell our home near Atlanta. We're doing all we can to make the home more inviting for potential buyers including replacing the carpet. But what to do with our old carpet? Recycle it, of course!

The Carpet America Recovery Effort "is a joint industry-government effort to increase the amount of recycling and reuse of post-consumer carpet and reduce the amount of waste carpet going to landfills." What a great idea! You may be surprised at the innovative ways people are reusing carpet. Did you know it can be reprocessed and used to make lumber, soundproofing barriers, plastic, and other items?

So if you are planning to replace your carpet, visit carpetrecovery.org and download a list of carpet reclamation centers. They are located all over the country. But if there's not one in your area, there is information on how to start one.

Keep your carpet out of the landfill - recycle it!

"This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in."
-Theodore Roosevelt, 26th US President (1858-1919)

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<http://www.carpetrecovery.org/>

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# Use your hands.

Originally blogged Nov 22, 2005

After finishing grad school five years ago, I decided that I needed to get involved in the Atlanta community and meet some new people. I'd lived here six years but most of that time had been spent in the lab. I wasn't sure how to start or where to volunteer so I contacted Hands On Atlanta, "a non-profit organization that helps individuals, families and corporate and community groups find flexible volunteer opportunities at more than 400 service organizations and schools." I did my first workday at MedShare International, and later joined TeamWorks to meet more people and try more projects (including MedShare again). The new folks eased my transition out of school and the relationship with MedShare has been a lasting and fruitful one.

You too can find volunteer opportunities in your area. Hands On Atlanta is an affiliate of the Hands On Network which works with organizations throughout the US and in several countries around the world, including South Africa, China, The Philippines, and Brazil. Here are just a few of the ways they'll help you use your hands:

- \* **Serve** your community by joining and participating in the Hands On affiliate in your area. For example, Hands on Atlanta lists over 200 service projects each month, so you're sure to find one that you enjoy and helps others in your community.
- \* **Study** at the Citizen Academy, a site "designed for people to learn more about community issues, to explore frequently asked questions, find ways to take action [and] test your knowledge on an issue." Subjects include literacy, environment, animal support, housing, youth, technology, and more.
- \* **Join** the Hands On Network. This is a great way for your nonprofit organization to get dedicated and exited volunteers. The Network "supports a growing international membership that offers resources to a variety of organizations engaging communities in service."
- \* **Build** your business presence by participating in corporate volunteerism. "Many companies support and promote employee volunteering because of its perceived benefits to communities, employees, and companies themselves."

By volunteering in your community, you can "be the change" you want to see in the world. Join today!



**The Hands On Network** now has 250 volunteer centers around the world and help volunteers from all walks of life be of service. There are opportunities to help with disaster relief, military initiatives, and skills-based volunteering, in addition options to serve your local nonprofit.

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/>

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*“It is better to prevent crimes than to punish them.”*  
-Cesare Beccaria

# Hold your representatives accountable.

Originally blogged Nov 15, 2004

One of the most important things we can do is hold our elected officials accountable for their words, promises and actions. Let them know what's important to you, what you would like done. Tell them what you need and what concerns you. Ask them for the services and support your community needs.

Many officials are truly concerned about their constituents and want to know what they need and want so that they can make it happen. Most officials want to be elected again so they will respond to you and to your concerns so that you will re-elect them. Do not hesitate to write, call, or e-mail your representatives. Here's some information on how to do that:

- \* Write the President at [president@whitehouse.gov](mailto:president@whitehouse.gov) or visit [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov) for mailing and telephone information.
- \* Visit [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) to find out who your US senators are and how to contact them.
- \* Visit [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to find out who your US representatives are and how to contact them.
- \* For state legislators and other officials, and for local offices, click below to find names and contact information.

Call them! Write them! Let them know what's on your mind. Their job is to listen to you. And if they don't do so, you have the power to fire them.

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<http://www.whitehouse.gov>

<http://www.senate.gov>

<http://www.house.gov>

<http://www.votesmart.org>

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Invest responsibly.

Originally blogged Nov 6, 2004

Many mutual funds will allow you invest your money in socially responsible businesses. Your money can grow (ideally) and do good at the same time. Here are some examples:

- * Pax World offers funds in socially- and environmentally-responsible ethical companies and offers a low \$250 minimum investment. Invest
- * Shore Bank invests your CDs, money markets, and IRAs in business that work in development and help create economic equity.
- * RSF Community Investment Fund IRAs support socially-constructive projects in education, health, and sustainable development.
- * Green Century Funds offers environmentally-responsible mutual funds.

Please note that this is not an endorsement of any particular investment, nor are specific returns guaranteed on these or any other investment unless insured by the FDIC.

Choose wisely. Choose with you head and your heart, and let your money work for you and for others.

~~~~~

**When I wrote this in 2004, I had no expectation** that I would eventually study impact investing at the University of Oxford and work for a community development bank, Southern Bancorp, which was modeled after ShoreBank. While ShoreBank has closed, the field of socially responsible investing has grown tremendously and there are now numerous opportunities for investors at all levels to earn both a financial and social return on their investments. Such investments are critical for delivering life-changing capital to meaningful projects and worthy communities around the world.

<http://www.socialfunds.com/>

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# Redefine the holidays.

Originally blogged Nov 22, 2007

I opened Monday's New York Times and found the following full-page ad:

Let's redefine Christmas. By putting more Thanksgiving in it.

No sooner does Thanksgiving end, than the loathsome shopping season begins - a month-long compulsion to buy something, anything, for everyone. We're pressed. We're stressed. And our money is wasted. But we can change all that by focusing on the giving. And redefining Christmas.

**Give people donations to their favorite charities.**

**And request that they give donations to your favorite charities.**

A lot more money would go to people who need it. Shopping would be easier and tax-deductible. And our giving would be more in keeping with the Christmas spirit.

The Dalio Family Foundation, which paid for the ad and accepts no donations from the public, ends by saying "The sole purpose of this message is to facilitate charitable giving. Please pass it on." So that's what I'm doing. Consider it: Less hassle. More good. Less taxes. It's win-win.

So this year, instead of or in addition to materials gifts, try giving and requesting charitable gifts. They are gifts that keep on giving. Happy Thanksgiving!

*"History is a vast early warning system."* - Norman Cousins

~~~~~

<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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Listen.

Originally blogged Nov 28, 2008

I was blessed to grow up in a household in which holiday gatherings meant story time. My parents and grandparents taught all who would listen about their lives and those who came before them: Griffin Henry Belk, Sarah Suttles, Andy Suttles, Joe “Man” Suttles, David Maclin, Mose Neal, Jim Neal, Willie Beatrice Jones Neal, and many others. They shared the triumphs and horrors of the past and their hopes for our future. I treasure those memories, those stories, and those expectations for my own life. Over the years, I learned to value the experiences and lessons of the past, in part because of the relevance they have for the present and future.

That's why I am excited that today is the First Annual National Day of Listening. StoryCorps suggests: "This holiday season, ask the people around you about their lives — it could be your grandmother, a teacher, or someone from the neighborhood. By listening to their stories, you will be telling them that they matter and they won't ever be forgotten. It may be the most meaningful time you spend this year."

Visit NationalDayofListening.org to

- * Download the free **Do It Yourself Guide** to selecting your questions, recording your conversations, and more.
- * Upload your interview to **share your conversation** with others.
- * Request NPR's **StoryCorps visit** your community.
- * Sign up for free weekly **stories by email**.

Now is the perfect opportunity to give the gift of listening. So take time today, and every day, to listen, and learn.

"Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero. Seize the day, trust not to the morrow." - Horace

~~~~~

**Less than one year after this post, StoryCorps came to Little Rock, Arkansas,** and I was able to interview my mother and father in separate sessions. They were wonderful conversations and I cherish those recordings especially since my dear mother, Janet Marie Cobb, passed away less than one year later. I was also very pleased that the first story I asked my father, Olly Neal, to tell was shared on the national NPR show, Morning Edition.

The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide is a good place to start for those wanting to interview loved ones. And once you have recorded the stories, be sure to tell them widely and often so they'll live forever.

<http://nationaldayoflistening.org/>

<http://storycorps.org/>

<http://www.folklife.si.edu/>

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*“The idealists and visionaries, foolish enough to throw caution to the winds and express their ardor and faith in some supreme deed, have advanced mankind and have enriched the world.”*

**-Emma Goldman**

# Spend two years in service.

Originally blogged Dec 28, 2004

I went to my college reunion last year and briefly met an alum who graduated in the 1940's. When he found out I was at my tenth reunion, he asked, "So what have you been doing with the last ten years of your life?" Some might think his question presumptuous, but I kind of like it. It was a good reminder that we should be able to look back on our lives with pride, and without regrets. Plan now so you can do that in the future. Consider spending the next two years in service to others.

Here are three programs that will help you do it:

\* Teach for America calls "upon our country's most promising future leaders to commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and to become lifelong advocates for change."

\* AmeriCorps "is a network of national service programs that engage more than 50,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment."

\* Peace Corps volunteers work all over the world in areas like education, youth outreach and community development, the environment, and information technology.

Each of these programs pays a stipend and helps with student loans, among many other benefits. Is your life fulfilling? Think about how it could be. Now make it happen!

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<http://www.teachforamerica.org/>

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/>

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/>

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Donate milk.

Originally blogged Dec 28, 2006

I've learned a lot about breastfeeding in the last few months. I know how good it is for my baby, so I was pleased to see that there are milk banks that provide milk for babies who cannot tolerate formula and whose parents cannot provide breast milk.

There are several milk banks in the US which will collect milk from donors across the country and ship it to recipients who need it. They are regulated by Human Milk Bank Association of North America. So if you have or can generate excess milk, consider donating it to improve the health or save the life of a baby.

Just this Christmas, my mother told me about how my great-aunt was a wet nurse for her niece. Since wet nurses aren't so readily available these days, consider donating milk to **improve or save the life of a baby**. And even if you don't have milk to give, you can still donate life.

"Resistance is the secret of joy." Alice Walker in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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<https://www.hmbana.org/>

<http://www.donatelife.net>

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# Put people first.

Originally blogged Dec 18, 2007

Since I commute by train and bus, I run into many of the same people every day. Yesterday, on my way home I rode the train with a woman I see frequently. She's blind, and when we moved to exit at the same stop I asked if she needed assistance. We chatted on the way to her bus and were pleased to note that her first name is the same as my middle name. My conversation with Carol inspired this post on putting *people* not disability first.

Here are some resources that will help you interact with all people regardless of their (dis)abilities. It's not surprising that these guidelines apply to everyone because species atypical people (like blonde people, blind people, and any other group that is not in the majority) have many of the same needs, desires, concerns, hopes, etc. as everyone else. Considering that most people will be disabled at some point in their lives, this is especially true. Consider these suggestions:

--> Recognize that people are individuals. Give them respect and treat them the way you would want to be treated.

--> Treat adults as adults. Do not patronize people with disabilities by telling them how courageous they are, talking to them like they are children, or talking down to them.

--> Speak directly to the person not their companion (if they have one).

--> Offer assistance but only give it if your offer is accepted. Wait for any instructions the person may give you.

--> Don't focus on the disability, but don't pretend it doesn't exist.

--> Be willing to adjust your pace of walking or talking as necessary.

You may think that this will be easy, but take this [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org) test for bias first. If the results surprise or disappoint you, consider a visit to [Tolerance.org](http://Tolerance.org) to learn how you can promote tolerance in yourself, your home and your community.

Remember that perspectives may differ because all people with disabilities don't agree on everything. Neither do all women. Or all wealthy people. Or all black people. You get the idea. When we recognize the value that all people possess we're well on the way to putting people first.

It was great meeting you, Carol! See you on MARTA!

*"I freed thousands of slaves. I could have freed thousands more if they had known they were slaves."* -- Harriet Tubman

~~~~~

I find it very helpful to think of difference as simply *species atypical*. The human species has a wide variety of variation. Recognizing that some of those variations are just less common than others can take away value judgments. For example, people who are born deaf, people who are blond, people with achondroplasia (a form of dwarfism), people with lactose tolerance, people with dyslexia, and people with dimples are all atypical for the human species. Many thanks to the late, Adrienne Asch, fellow Swarthmore alumna, for guiding so many people's thinking and action on disability.

<http://www.dralegal.org/>

<http://www.ncil.org/>

www.lincinc.org

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Take care of yourself, take care of others: World AIDS Day.

Originally blogged Dec 1, 2004

December 1 is World AIDS Day. The goal is to focus on existing challenges while celebrating the progress that has been made. The theme for World AIDS Day 2004 is "Have You Heard Me Today? Women, girls, and HIV and AIDS". Here are some things you can do today and later to acknowledge this occasion:

- * Learn more about HIV and AIDS. Click below for more information.
- * Approximately one-third of the people in the US infected with HIV don't know it. GET TESTED. Visit www.hivtest.org (a CDC site) to learn more and find a place to get tested in your area.
- * Learn more about HIV vaccine trials. Many people are needed to enroll in trials that test the vaccines and various stages of development. Perhaps you'll want to join a trial and help make an HIV vaccine a reality.
- * Donate time, money or other resources to HIV/AIDS service organizations. Just do a Google search with the terms HIV, AIDS and the city, state or country of interest. You are sure to find an organization and group of people that would really appreciate your contribution.

If you have questions or need more information, call the CDC National AIDS Hotline toll-free at **1-800-342-AIDS (1-800-342-2437)**. Here's hoping that future generations don't have to mark World AIDS Day.

~~~~~

**While HIV infection has become much more manageable** with treatment, not everyone has access to, often expensive, medicines. And the virus is still spreading. Because of these continuing challenges, there are a number of awareness events that build up to World AIDS Day on December 1 each year. These include:



- National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day – February 7
- National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day – March 10
- National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day- March 20
- HIV Vaccine Awareness Day – May 18
- National Asian and Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day – May 19

<http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/>

<http://hivtest.cdc.gov/>

<http://www.hvtn.org/>

<http://aids.gov/>

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*"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."*

- Frederick Douglass

# Help clear minefields, help save lives.

Originally blogged Dec 20, 2004

There are about 60 - 70 million landmines in more than 90 countries, killing or injuring about 26,000 civilians every year. That's one every 27 minutes. One third of the dead are children. You can help remove landmines, save lives, and improve the lives of those injured by landmines. Here's how:

- \* Donate money to help clear minefields. It costs as much as \$4,000 to remove just one mine, but less than 50 cents to put one in the ground. Contribute to Adopt-a-Minefield or Adopt-a-Minefield UK.
- \* Donate a used prosthesis to Limbs for Life. They operate the World Limb Bank which collects used prostheses, and distributes them free to amputees all over the world.
- \* Contact your elected officials and ask them to ratify the Mine Ban Treaty before 2006. Learn more at Unicef. See the November 15 post for more information on writing your elected representatives.

Let's get to work!

~~~~~

While there are still landmines, the work against them has been largely successful. Adopt-A-Minefield concluded its campaign five years after this post was written having cleared more than 1,000 minefields in 14 counties on four continents. According to a June 2013 report in *The Economist*, only two governments still lay landmines – Myanmar and Syria. The International Campaign to Ban Land Mines writes that 161 countries have signed and ratified the International Mine Ban Treaty. The United States is one of 36 nations that have not.

<http://limbsforlife.org/>

<http://www.adoptaminefield.org/>

<http://www.icbl.org/>

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Improve literacy.

Originally blogged Dec 8, 2004

Did you know that at least 50% of the unemployed are functionally illiterate? That an estimated \$5 billion a year in taxes goes to support people receiving public assistance who are unemployable due to illiteracy? That the average kindergarten student has seen more than 5,000 hours of television, having spent more time in front of the TV than it takes to earn a bachelor's degree? That 44% of all American adults do not read one book in the course of a year? Are you as saddened by these statistics as I am?

"So what can I do?"

- * Learn more by visiting the National Institute for Literacy or Proliteracy Worldwide.
- * Donate books to children by clicking the bright red button on The Literacy Site. **Do this now!** It takes less than 10 seconds. And don't forget to click tomorrow.
- * Volunteer to teach someone to read. Find an organization near you at www.literacydirectory.org. This is important since adult reading scores improve approximately one grade level with just 35-45 hours of tutoring. Use the directory to identify tutoring services for people in need of help, and to learn more about learning disabilities. I am very proud that my mother, Janet Cobb, once served as a literacy tutor.
- * Join with Heifer International and use their Read to Feed curriculum to teach children reading skills and sustainable development.
- * Volunteer at your local library.
- * Read to your children. Read as a couple. Read as a family. Join a bookclub.
- * Give books as presents.

I imagine you know how valuable it is to be able to read. Help someone else experience that joy. (Did you click that bright red button?)

~~~~~

**Now that we have an elementary-aged daughter**, I have a whole new perspective on reading. It is so critical that children learn to read well especially by third grade when then emphasis switched from learning to read to reading to learn. We read together just about every night. Right now, we're reading March: Book One by US Representative John Lewis. About a year ago, read all Beverly Cleary's Ramona Quimby books. As a result, we now have occasional family DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time. And we're thinking about doing the Heifer Read to Feed program this summer. What will you do to promote literacy among those in and around your community?

<http://www.proliteracy.org/>

<https://www.literacydirectory.org>

<http://theliteracysite.greatergood.com/>

<http://www.heifer.org/readtofeed>

<http://www.dropeverythingandread.com>

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# Designate a sober driver.

Originally blogged Dec 11, 2005

December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month. During 2003, more than 17,000 people died in alcohol-related highway crashes in the US. Every 30 minutes someone in the US dies in an alcohol-related crash. Now think of all the folks who are injured because of drunk or drugged driving. You can help stop these needless and preventable deaths and injuries. Who knows, you may even save a life, perhaps your own or that of someone you love. Here's how:

## ***If you are a party-goer:***

- > Never get behind the wheel of a vehicle if you've been drinking.
- > If you are drunk, high, tipsy, buzzed, drugged or otherwise impaired, call a taxi, use mass transit, or call a sober friend or family member to come get you.
- > Or, just stay where you are and sleep it off until you are sober.

## ***If you are a party host:***

- > Remind your guests to plan ahead to designate a sober driver.
- > Collect keys upon entry to your party and give them back only if the driver is sober.
- > Always offer alcohol-free beverages during the event.
- > Make sure all of your guests leave with a sober driver.

We all can contribute to awareness. Click the links to learn more, spread the word, and take action.

Remember, ***friends don't let friends drive drunk***. Do not hesitate to take the keys from a friend who is about to drive while buzzed, drunk, drugged, or high. Be safe out there, and have fun.

*"It is easier to stay out than get out."* - Mark Twain

~~~~~

We're making progress in this area. Thankfully, drunk driving fatalities are down 35% since 1991. However, there are still more than 10,000 deaths per year from drunk driving and that's more than 10,000 too many. About one third of traffic fatalities are due to drunk driving so there's still a lot of work to do. Given that, don't drive in an altered state and don't let others do so either.

<http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/>

<http://responsibility.org/>

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“It is error only, and not truth, that shrinks from inquiry.”

-Thomas Paine

Respect workers and their work.

Originally blogged Dec 22, 2005

The Transit Workers Union (Local 100) of New York City are "On strike for fair wages, hard-earned benefits, respect and dignity." I don't know all the details of the labor negotiations but I do know that all honest workers are worthy of respect and dignity. As the world becomes effectively smaller, we become more interdependent. If for no other reason than that (self-interest), we should acknowledge all good work, whether it is manual or intellectual, done outside or indoors, done in an office, office, or cubicle, makes you sweat or gives you a headache, pays well or pays poorly.

As an example, consider all the folks who were involved in the last meal you ate:

- * **Who planted and tended** the grains, fruits, vegetables, and nuts?
- * **Who harvested** the grains, fruits, vegetables and nuts?
- * **Who developed** the seeds that ensured a bountiful harvest?
- * **Who tended** the livestock before slaughter?
- * **Who slaughtered** the animals for meat?
- * **Who stocked** the grocery store shelves?
- * **Who cleaned** the grocery store floors?
- * **Who bagged** your groceries?
- * **Who inspected** the food for quality and safety?
- * **Who managed** the grocery store?
- * **Who drilled** for the natural gas to cook the food?
- * **Who drilled** for the oil to fuel the vehicle that got you to the store?
- * **Who drove** the truck, or steered the ship to bring the food to your community?
- * **Who cooked** the food?
- * **Who made** sure you had clean dishes from which to eat?

Now consider the folks in your own work environment. Make sure to acknowledge their valuable contributions *throughout* the year. *We all* deserve dignity and respect, as workers and contributors, and as fellow human beings.

"Work is only part of a man's life; play, family, church, individual and group contacts, educational opportunities, the intelligent exercise of citizenship, all play a part in a well-rounded life. Workers are men and women with potentialities for mental and spiritual development as well as for physical health. We are paying the price today of having too long sidestepped all that this means to the mental, moral, and spiritual health of our nation. " - Mary Barnett Gilson (1877–?), U.S. factory personnel manager, economist

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<http://sowhatcanido.blogspot.com>

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*"Truth never damages a cause that is just."*  
- Mahatma Gandhi



# Wear fair-trade union-made clothing.

Originally blogged Dec 7, 2004

Check out No Sweat Apparel (as in no sweatshop) for their wonderful line of 100% union made clothing. They have the only fair-trade 100% union-made athletic shoes in the world. In the world! They're nice too! I want the Red MoJo's! :)

So browse No Sweat's catalog. It's a great place to do some holiday or birthday shopping for your socially-minded friends and relatives. Or even for yourself. There are a wide variety of styles available, and you'll look great and feel great wearing them.

~~~~~

<http://www.nosweatapparel.com/>

<http://www.sweatfree.org>

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*"If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends.
You talk to your enemies."
-Moshe Dayan*

Help train service dogs.

Originally blogged Dec 16, 2004

My dog, Ebony, was a wonderful companion, but she never worked as hard as a service dog. Service dogs are vitally important to people with disabilities, and include guide dogs for the blind; hearing dogs, that alert their owners to sounds; mobility assistance dogs, which may pull a wheelchair or physically support a person; and seizure alert dogs. But these dogs must be trained to do their job. Help make that happen by supporting the organizations here, either financially or by becoming a volunteer or handler.

- * Canine Companions for Independence trains hearing dogs, service dogs, and assistance dogs to help people with disabilities. Support them by raising a puppy, or donating time or other resources.

- * Search Dog Foundation trains dogs to search for people who are buried alive in disaster situations. You can donate, become a handler, or become a volunteer. It costs ~\$10,000 to train a FEMA-certified search dog.

- * The International Association of Assistance Dog Partners is a non-profit organization that represents people paired with hearing, guide or service dogs.

- * Therapy Dogs International is an organization that "provides comfort and companionship by sharing the therapy dog with the patients in hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions. This is done in a way that increases emotional well-being, promotes healing, and improves the quality of life for the people being visited and the staff that cares for these people."

So if you're a dog-lover, or if you're a person-lover, consider the work of service and therapy dogs. And do what you can to support them and the people that train and depend on them for a more independent life.

~~~~~

**At the time of this post,** Denna, a childhood and family friend, had her first seeing-eye dog, Denver. Denver and Denna were a great team, but Denver eventually retired, became a pet, and later passed away. She is now matched with her second seeing-eye dog, Angie. These two service animals have enabled Denna to lead a rich and independent life. All the more reason to invest in training and placing service dogs.

<http://www.cci.org/>

<http://www.searchdogfoundation.org/>

<http://www.iaadp.org/>

<http://www.tdi-dog.org/>

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*“The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and  
to preserve change amid order.”*

**-Alfred North Whitehead**

# Know the SCORE.

Originally blogged Dec 21, 2005

I'm a big fan of small business and microenterprise. In the US, small businesses employ 52% of workers, and they are important for growing a growing economies, and for personal self-sufficiency around the world.

"SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" is the best source of free and confidential small business advice to help you build your business—from idea to start-up to success." Here are a few ways you can get involved.

- \* Volunteer and join SCORE's corps of "10,500 men and women, retired and working" who "donate their time and talent to assist America's entrepreneurs."

- \* Receive free e-newsletters to learn more about SCORE activities.

- \* Ask one of SCORE's 1,200 email counselors for free, fast, and confidential business advice.

- \* Support SCORE, a non-profit organization.

- \* Find the SCORE office nearest you to register for workshops or offer your services. There are 389 chapters nationwide.

And don't forget to support the small businesses in your area. Also, by funding microloans, you can help others, here and abroad, start their own businesses. These businesses will help the proprietor, her family and her country.

~~~~~

As *So What Can I Do* celebrates ten years, SCORE is marking their 50th anniversary! They continue to provide good advice and service. Kwadjo has consulted with them and really appreciated their information. He said they were “phenomenal.” They are a real resource for business owners.

<http://www.score.org/>

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“It is impossible to live pleasurable without living prudently, honorably, and justly; or to live prudently, honorably, and justly, without living pleasurable.”

-Epicurus

Vote smart.

Originally blogged Dec 13, 2007

The candidate for whom I am most likely to vote for in November's presidential election is one which many call "unelectable". That's okay. The candidate is the one I think is best for me, my country, and my world. Although I initially worried about "unelectability" I put those concerns aside when I remembered my favorite Gandhi quote: **"Be the change you want to see in the world."** Everyone should vote for the person they believe will do the best job. If we just vote the person who is most "electable" we could end up with a president everyone voted for, but who no one really likes. That's *not* a recipe for success. So in the spirit of choosing the person who is best for you, your country, and your world, I present VoteSmart.org.

Project Vote Smart is a political research organization that gathers information on candidates to help you make the very best decision you can on Election Day. Visit Votesmart.org to learn about the candidates. You'll find:

- * Biographical Information
- * Campaign Finances
- * Issue Positions
- * Interest Group Ratings
- * Voting Records
- * Public Statements

It's all collected and assembled by people from both major political parties. It can help you make your decision both for the primary or caucus and in the November general election. It is indeed our responsibility to vote responsibly. VoteSmart.org helps make that possible.

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<http://www.votesmart.org>

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# Recycle Christmas cards and more.

Originally blogged Dec 15, 2005

Ready for another reader-inspired post? Janice writes: "What I would like to know is how to recycle those Christmas cards after Christmas. It seems like such a waste to throw them out. I have two years' worth of Christmas cards piling up on me." Good question, Janice! Your concern is justified. In the UK alone, about 1 *billion* Christmas cards are thrown away every season. Imagine how many are trashed in the US and rest of the world! That make for a lot of waste. Here are a few ways to reduce, reuse and recycle during the holidays:

- \* **Cards** - Your community may allow you to recycle them with other paper waste. Check to be sure. If not, consider using them for crafts. (I particularly like the idea of using them for holiday postcards or gift tags.)

- \* **Trees** - Your community may offer curbside or neighborhood recycling or use in wildlife habitats. If not, you may want to chip it and use it for mulch or compost. Next year, consider decorating a plantable or artificial tree.

- \* **Gifts** - No one wants to talk about regifting, but many of us do it. If you have items you would like to "regift", make sure you follow these regifting etiquette suggestions.

- \* **Food** - Leftover food from holiday or other functions can often be given to a food rescue agency. They'll use it to feed the hungry in your community. Remember to donate extra food (or money) to your local food bank.

- \* **Reduce, reuse, and recycle** the glass, plastic, paper, and aluminum that you use during the holidays and all year long. Happy solstice, happy new year, and keep the great suggestions coming!

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<http://www.regiftable.com>

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Keep hope alive.

Originally blogged Dec 25, 2005

One of the best sermons I ever heard was on hope. The minister (whose name, unfortunately, I cannot remember) spoke about how hope is critical for survival and for thriving. The climax of her sermon went something like:

"One can live without friendship, but one can't live without the *hope* of friendship. One can live without justice, but one can't live without the *hope* of justice. One can live without peace, but one can't live without the *hope* of peace. One can live without joy, but one can't live without the *hope* of joy."

It was such a moving and meaningful message, and, to me, it represents the true meaning of Christmas: hope for a better life, now and forever. I think of that Sunday sermon often, am reminded that we have both hope, and the means to achieve what we hope for.

May this day and each day bring you closer to being the best person you can be! Peace and blessings to you all.

"Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." - Václav Havel (b. 1936), Czech playwright, president.

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# Celebrate Kwanzaa: Nia.

Originally blogged Dec 30, 2005

On this, the fifth day of Kwanzaa, we focus on nia (purpose) and "make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness." A few years ago, I attended a festival at a local masjid with my Uncle Agin. As we walked around, enjoying the food, booths, lectures, and other activities, my uncle introduced me to several folks, one of whom asked me, "**Karama, what is your purpose?**" She was quite serious. And even though I had thought extensively about my career path, I knew immediately that she wasn't asking about those plans.

It bothered me that I didn't have an answer to her important question. So after I got home from the festival, I sat down to do some serious thinking, journaling, praying, and listening about what my purpose is; why God put me, in my particular uniqueness, on this planet. Over several weeks, I thought about my talents, listed my skills, considered my values, and realized that I am here:

"To promote an understanding of the inherent value and equality of all human beings, and serve my community with a focus on equal access to health care and education, particularly for communities and people of color in the southern US and throughout the world."

Today is a perfect day to begin to understand and define *your purpose*. As my friend Ayanna says, "We're here to do more than suck up air." **What are you here to do? Are you doing it?** Think about how much better and more meaningful your life will be when you are doing exactly what you were made and meant to do. I am so happy that my Uncle's friend asked me that question, and even more pleased to now know the answer. As I understand more about my purpose and how to live it, I have become a happier, healthier person. It's a blessing I wish for all of us.

As humans, we are all members of that first African Diaspora. And accordingly, the principles of Kwanzaa apply to us all. Manifest the Kwanzaa principles today, this week, and all year long.

*"Let the refining and improving of your own life keep you so busy that you have little time to criticize others."* - H. Jackson Brown

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<https://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org>

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About the blogger

Karama Neal works to promote equal access to health, education, and opportunity for all people through teaching, research, practice, advocacy, and service. A proud native of Arkansas, Karama speaks on a variety of social justice issues and has written for numerous print and online publications.

She is a graduate of Little Rock Central High School and Swarthmore College and holds a PhD in genetics from Emory University and an MA in bioethics from Loyola University Chicago. She has completed executive education coursework in impact investing at the University of Oxford. More information is available at <http://www.karamaneal.com>.