



Living The Good Life: How One Family Changed Their World From Their Own Backyard

Linda Cockburn

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Inspiring and challenging, this chronicle of a unique household experiment takes readers inside one family's environmental test. Already mindful of the impact human activity has on the environment, the author and her family decided to take a further step towards thoughtful living by aiming for complete domestic sustainability. For six months, the Cockburns grew, bartered for, and made everything they ate; used exclusively solar power; collected rainwater for drinking, cleaning, and cooking; parked the cars and turned to bicycles; and aimed to not spend a single dollar. From just their average home on an average-sized lot, they experienced success, surprises, and challenges in their quest—all while learning about themselves as a family. Whether readers are looking for lessons on adopting some—or all—of the Cockburns' practices or are just curious about what it might take to “do it yourself” even more deeply, this story will bring them along for the ride.

Living The Good Life: How One Family Changed Their World From Their Own Backyard Details

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jess says

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself -- Leo Tolstoy

This is an inspiring story of a small family in Australia, and their six month adventure of not spending money. Everything they use and consume is grown, produced, scavenged, or bartered, although mostly everything is produced and grown by the family. They have a composting toilet, rainwater barrels, solar panels, a giant garden, a nasty goat, a bunch of chickens, and an incredible ability to look at the possibilities of the world, instead of limitations. The triumphs and failures of the holiday are here for you to celebrate or groan alongside the family. The family makes a clear case that nothing in the world will change unless that change starts with them. I wish I had that kind of motivation & accountability to a better world.

Trev & Linda have been on the path to a more sustainable lifestyle for a while, so they already have a lot of the capital invested to switch over for this experiment. It would be unsustainable for most families to just lose an income (Linda stays home to care for their homestead), bike everywhere, start homeschooling, build tremendous gardens, and move their house toward water/energy independence for six months. There is a lot of sage advice here, especially if you live in a similar climate, but it is definitely not a manual for your own six months of spending-free living.

The book is laid out brilliantly. Anecdotes from the "journal" section of the book segue into how-to sectiona, complete with recipes or building advice, followed by a fact-heavy subchapter that correlates with the larger, national issue at hand - water consumption, power consumption, factory farming, pesticides, and so on. It flows really well, and avoids common traps of books like this - superiority complexes, guilt trips, I never felt like I was reading a text book, but there was a lot of dense information available. Additionally, a memoir/journal like this can come across as very biased, but these interspersed factoid sections grounded the family's work in reality & science.

you can follow the cockburn family on linda's blog, here: <http://lintrezza.blogspot.com>

Rachel says

A Fascinating journal of how one family (in Australia) turned their backyard into a farm and lived off of what they themselves could produce (or barter) for 6 months.

This was particularly refreshing because it was from an Australian viewpoint. It wasn't all about how terrible the US is (although the US is mentioned occasionally), but specifically about their country and things people can do to make a difference.

If we lived in a better area (one that did not spray pesticides every summer), I would be most interested in trying something similar (although maybe not quite as intense!).

Damon says

I would have liked a little more instruction, but it was interesting and helpful. Now that we have land and an opportunity to grow food and animals, I'm looking for more helpful instruction. City boy wants to grow more than zucchini.

Carl Wade says

Pg 118: Exercise cycling or strolling? They both burn calories but exercise cycling burns 3 times as many calories.

Pg xii: Emissions from 1 liter of gas pollutes 10,500 liters of air. Where does she get that?

Pg 1: Her plan is to go 6 months without spending a dollar.

Pg 8: She brings Bill Mollison and permaculture in and has a brief list of ethics and principles.

Pg 10: She makes a case for getting calories from the sun. Even at low percentage of efficiency.

Pg 13: Oh dear the kid wears no clothes.

Pg 53: They got a composting toilet and it didn't smell. Published in 2006 this seems pretty cutting edge.

Laws require that this compost be buried. All this work and they say it's becoming more popular.

Pg 100: This is not a book to read to your homeschooling child.

Pg 103: Very good explanation of lactose intolerance.

Pg 7: She goes over hot water heaters but doesn't mention on demand hot water heaters. 50 degree C will eliminate harmful bacteria. What is that in f. Get only the right size unit and keep the hot water pipes short.

Pg 141: Sounds like there's a devise that flushes the first water that falls on the roof and then saves the rest.

Pg 149: A joke about a hospital birth.

Pg 161: Alright they have started homeschooling.

Pg 212: Caleb the son gets into gardening by using manly tools. Machete etc. How about using the mind to invent to solve a problem?

Pg 214 When shopping for a computer look at the energy efficiency.

Pg 241: A new term; Downshifters. I just added it to the dictionary.

Renee says

Loaned by a friend, this enjoyable read was a mostly fascinating, and at times tediously detailed, story of a family in Gympie who set themselves a challenge to live 6 months without spending. Loved the recipes, gardening stories, innovation, and the adventures of Possum the goat. A fine read during, and post, Christmas excess.

Cass says

A family of three (Mum, Dad and son) document living for six months without spending any money. The father continues to work, riding his bike to work each day. The mother runs the house and the garden and ends up homeschooling her son. They bartered excess produce in return for some grocery items and animal feed and they occasionally found themselves having to buy something (a new laptop on one occasion, fish and chips on another) but they lived six months without spending a significant amount of money.

I found the book an interesting look into this kind of life. It is not a 'how to' guide as the family had most of the infrastructure in place prior to beginning the challenge. The vegetable garden and livestock were well established, they had a composting toilet and solar power.

The book paints a rather grey picture of the period. There is a huge focus on the difficulties and wishing for things that they have vowed not to have. I have no doubt that this is exactly what it was like for six months, but if it was so bad I do not understand why they continued. What I actually suspect, and this is back up by something the father wrote at the end of the book, is that they had a great deal to enjoy the author, mostly the mother, just fails to relay this to the reader. It is not until the challenge is over and the family splurges that the author finally reflects on how much they enjoyed the challenge.

What I didn't like was the book was really just a blog. Entries were dated and a bit all over the place. It would have benefited from being written as a book rather than daily log entries. It would have benefited from a good editor who encouraged the writer to rewrite the book in a way that is easier to read.

I want to say I feel inspired, and to some extent I am. However the bleak picture painted through the book makes it quite difficult. I am left with images of bizarre food combinations and fussy eaters and very little enjoyment. However there is a lot to be learnt from the book and I would still recommend it as a good read.

Heather Tomlinson says

I loved this book. It's the story of one family's attempt to live without cash for 6 months - to live off their land, bike and barter their way through life. It's an entertaining tour through this process, the bad weather and the crop fails, and the kid's eating troubles.

I liked the honesty, but most of all that it was very practical. It was written with inspiration and ideas for anyone wanting to do the same. Definitely one of the best books of this type I've read.

Alexis says

This book tells the story of a family who decided to live off their land for six months. They try not to spend any money, and live as sustainably as possible.

This book is Australian, and there was a lot of Aussie slang in the writing, which was interesting. I also learned a lot about water and power conservation. Unfortunately, I also found this book to be a bit dull. I'm not quite sure why.

Wendy says

Very interesting read about a family who lives off what they already have, can grow or barter for 6 months.

Natasha says

Linda and her family set out to live from their suburban Australian yard/farm for 6 months and not spend any money. It was an interesting stunt, there seem to be a lot of "stunt" books out there now (Julie & Julia, Farewell my Subaru etc.). It was a great glimpse at how a family can eat from their garden, chickens, goat and a few bartered items. Occasionally they would crave beer and pizza or chocolate, but they ate well and both lost weight, improved their nutritional profile (higher iron count) and felt stronger. Their six-year-old boy didn't enjoy it quite as much as his parents. At one point they went to the grocery store and bought him some Vegemite and chicken to keep him happy.

It is amazing how much food we can grow on a small plot of land. A great glimpse of a life with a low environmental impact.

Shannon says

Unfinished. The ideas were familiar, and although it's cool to read about living in a place where free-range kangaroo is an acceptable steak substitute, it was difficult to imagine applying their methods to my location.

Abby says

Memoir of a family who attempted to live entirely self-sufficiently for six months. It's an intriguing subject, but I had a hard time getting into it because of the writing style. It wasn't very accessible. Contains recipes and tips.

Emma Cooper says

Living the Good Life is the story of an Australian family who try to spend 6 months without spending any money. They grow their own food (given that they're in Australia, it's a bit more exotic fare than spuds and kale), keep a goat and chickens and barter for things they can't make. They use solar energy and rain water and cycle everywhere (until they need to take their son to the hospital).

It's written in the form of a diary, but there's also inserts on various environmental issues such as waste and water use (a critical issue in Australia) as well as recipes and some lovely colour pictures. The crops they grow might be beyond people in a cooler climate, but there's still plenty here of use as well as the inspiration value. I read the first half in one sitting, it's a good read :)

Yassy says

A really great account of one family's attempt to reduce their ecological footprint by simplifying their lives. Inspiring, challenging, informative and very readable. Linda Cockburn gives an honest account of the joys

and pitfalls of their experiment: a commitment to producing their own food and electricity, riding bikes for transport & not spending any money for 6 months. A must read for anyone interested in the environment, sustainability, simplicity or minimalism.

Poppy says

Possibly my favourite book; so inspiring
