

The New Frontier: Re-examining the Road Less Traveled

I read about a guy in Utah who gave up consumerism, credit cards, and even money to live in a cave. His name is Daniel Suelo. He's lived, by choice, as a pauper for the last 10 years. His consumer needs are minimal. He feeds on wild herbs and vegetables, insects, and an occasional animal if he finds one recently killed. He drinks herbal tea that he prepares for himself. Outside of a few people who know him, who bring him various sundries, he scavenges for people's consumer waste in a town an hour's walk outside the cave. His recyclables consist of clothing to dress himself, and he picks up extra items like candles and cooking utensils that have been discarded. He baths in a creek pool.

At one time he was an anthropologist who lived with indigenous tribes in the Andes. The indigenous people have always had a connection to the Earth and have lived accordingly until western influences forced them into modern market economies. According to Suelo, "They sold the food from their fields—quinoa, potatoes, corn, lentils—for cash, which they used to purchase things they didn't need. They bought soda and white flour and refined sugar and noodles and big bags of MSG to flavor the starchy meals. They bought TVs. The more they spent, says Suelo, the more their health declined."

Having learned alternative health modalities and having monitored the tribes' health, he could measure the deterioration of their health the more they exposed themselves to and bought commercialized, processed foods. "It looked, he said, 'like money was impoverishing them.'" (http://men.style.com/details/features/landing?id=content_9817)

I mention this story because we are at a crossroad here in America. More and more people are losing their homes, jobs, healthcare coverage, and ability to fend for themselves. Living in a society that has systematically provided either material wealth or welfare to those without it, they are now expecting the government to provide them with their basic needs. But our government agencies, local and federal, are broken and broke. States are cutting assistance programs that are also affecting those at the local level. People are panicking. Some are pitching tents in tent cities. Others are living out of their cars (which still require gasoline to get from point A to point B).

What does this tell us about the future of our country? How will this play out in the near- and long-term? How will more and more people cope with these changes as they move from consumerism to sustenance? It wasn't long ago that our families lived off the land. Life may have been harder but people survived by doing so. During commercialization of farms, this lifestyle became less viable for many, who turned, instead, to industrialized commerce for their jobs. Little did they realize that they were going to have to pay the piper somewhere down the road and would end up "a day late and a dollar short".

But this is the exact scenario that some people were expecting and preparing for going back 40 years ago. As industry continued to grow, so did environmental, ecological, and alternative healthcare movements emerge at the same pace. These alternative movements began to break out of the "evolving" industrial system with its institutions and commercial endeavors, to take another road less traveled.

Those hippies, who dropped out of the consumer-driven lifestyle in the 60s and 70s, chose a road that led to natural and off-the-grid living. Granted, many lived at the poverty level and continue to do so, while others kept one foot in the system and one foot out as they expanded their new lifestyle base. Those at the poverty level are not much different than Suelo. They learned how to survive and deal with life's challenges. Those that expanded, now have skills that they can apply in a new survival economy. Some, with viable skills, may even prosper as the old systems crash and leave many out on the streets struggling. But for both groups, they both have basic skills that are needed and can be shared to provide the building blocks for a new frontier. The outcome, following the "devolution" and implosion of the industrial systems, will be the reinvention of sustainable models that will be born out of the hardships of some, and out of the fruits of those who planted their alternative seeds 40 years ago.

As government and corporate entities become more streamlined with less to offer the serfs of the state and the minimum-wage employed slaves, a new frontier will await those who are either forced out or who drove out of the old systems by choice. But the ultimate choice and path will be yours to make; will you continue to hang on to the crumbling system by looking for government handouts or minimum-wage work, or will you confront and master the challenges of relearning skills to survive off and live in sync with the land as your ancestors once did? The path that we confronted in the 60s, which many chose not to take at that particular time, is the same path that we are either being forced to take or given an opportunity to re-examine and master now.