**Some Thoughts on Juicy Puritanism**

*“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach along all sorts of people, and to them, then you will walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone”* **George Fox, 1656.**

We live in a culture where people have been cut off from the land and the changing seasons. We have been tied into a money system and become dependent on transport, electricity and a mechanised food production system. Communities have scattered, neighbourhoods are criss-crossed by roads, our social fabric is disintegrating. We have been indoctrinated into an ethos of unthinking consumption and instant gratification. Trying to be “green” within such a society is a journey that shakes us to the roots.

The structural violence of the whole set-up hit home to me several years ago, when I wrote a book on climate change – the industrialised countries are the prime culprits in carbon emissions, yet people living in vulnerable areas of the world, like Bangladesh, the Sahel areas of Northern Africa, and the Carribean and Pacific islands will be the first to suffer, from floods, drought, increasing storm intensity, rising sea levels and food insecurity. The weather system has a “delaying mechanism” of some thirty years, so we are now experiencing the effects of the very much lower levels of emissions in the 1960’s. Stabilising atmospheric carbon dioxide at today’s levels would require emissions cutbacks of roughly 85% in the industrial world. At some stage during writing the book I began to read the statistics with my heart more than my head, and went through a very dark night of the soul (in common, I imagine, with most earthQuakers).

Of course it is just as possible to have the skin peeled off one’s eyes by issues like the arms trade and weapons of mass destruction, hideous abuse of animals, extinctions, the military-industrial complex and the cynicism of our foreign policy, multinationals etc., etc… the list is depressingly long. But there is one thing that marks out climate change from many other issues – we have to take responsibility for our own involvement. We cannot pass the blame.

Since then, I’ve made a modest start in re-inventing the way I live. I try to keep my life as local as possible – travelling rarely, and spending most of my time within a one-mile radius. I avoid the Sainsbury’s and Tesco’s of this world like the plague, trying instead to support small shops and local food producers and my local LETScheme. I have no insurance and don’t lock my doors (yes, I have been burgled, but it seems a price worth paying). I’ve learned that life is better without a fridge (less snacks and “factory food”, more home-cooked meals). I have a (slowly realising) dream of making a sustainable living from local woodland. But, but but… as I become more aware of my lifestyle, and its impact, I find that I have only just begun the journey. There is much further to go. I might seem to be becoming a fully blown puritan. But puritanism can so easily degenerate into pious martyrdom, dry and humourless. (This may have been a fault of early Quakers. One particularly shocking passage in George Fox’s journal tells of his meeting with “the fattest, merriest man, the most cheerful and the most given to laughter, that I ever met with”, and of how he admonished him. “The power of the Lord so struck him that before he got home he was serious enough, and had discontinued his laughing”). As someone once said, “If I can’t dance, its not my revolution”.

So this year, I’ve decided to embark on a creative adventure. My project will be to become more and more frugal AND to have more and more fun. If I’m going to be a puritan, I want to be a juicy one! I hope to minimise my dependence on the monetary system by cutting my necessities to the bone and relying on Calderdale’s excellent LETScheme for luxuries. Our recently formed credit union will provide a safety net for emergencies. I’m looking forward to more communal bulk-buying, and more shared meals with friends. I’m on the waiting list for an allotment, and crossing my fingers that I’ll get hold of one before planting time. I plan to home brew for the major Celtic festivals (and be more abstemious in my alcohol consumption the rest of the time!). I want to spend my evenings making music, making things of beauty and making love!

I’m giving up my cleaning jobs, which will give me more time to devote to the things which are most important to me – developing our coppicing business, supporting Billy Frugal with earthQuaker and putting energy into various whacky projects. And finally, I’m thinking of putting together another book, together with friends – it’ll be kind of Mrs Beeton for the Millennium, but, unlike Mrs B., the ingredients will include politics and religion, and personal experiences. Above all it will make the point that we don’t just live in households, we live in neighbourhoods and that our real wealth lies in our communities.

**Penny Eastwood [1992?]**

*“Have all things common, or else the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have”* – **Abiezer Coppe, 1649**