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Yours frugally

By Jo Immig

Frugal (froo-guhl) adj – 1. characterised by thriftiness and avoidance of waste. 2. involving very little expense.

As the global credit culture crumbles around us, and we face unprecedented environmental challenges, it seems there's never been a better time to re-embrace frugality as a way of life. It's a choice that can have profound effects and it's surprisingly empowering.

Being a frugal person was considered an enviable skill back in the days when most people had to find creative ways of making do with less and saving up for what they wanted. Our grandparents were probably really good at it.

Of course, many people do lead frugal lives today, not always by choice. But for the rest of us, it's only been in the last 50 years or so that we've been sold the lie that we can have it all, and more.

'Stuff will never run out' and 'technology will triumph', were the take-home messages from my seventies childhood. While Mum was busy turning yesterday's spaghetti bolognese into chilli con carne, the television was blaring commercials convincing us that branded processed foods were staples for an exciting new life of convenience and leisure.

Clearly something has gone terribly wrong in the intervening years. It's not surprising we feel confused and powerless amid the contradictory calls to keep the global economy growing by spending up big on the one hand, while on the other we're told to switch off unnecessary lights, water our lawns with buckets and separate our waste.

It's from this contradictory place, coupled with a creeping feeling of uncertainty, that a rebirth of frugality seems to be taking place. Whether you call it 'voluntary simplicity' or 'downsizing', people are finding ways to take back their lives, living within the limits of the biosphere and they are taking a more personal approach to the products they consume.

The 'freeconomy' is burgeoning with people finding ways to swap using local trading systems (LETS) and also hosting swap parties where you can go 'shwapping'. The Clothing Exchange (see below) is an excellent example of the 'shwaps' of the future.

'Freegans' are people who aspire to live by alternative strategies, based on minimal participation in the global economy and minimal consumption of resources. According to the freegan creed, it's all about embracing community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation, and sharing, in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity, and greed.

Sounds like the moral code and vision for the kind of society that is sorely needed at this juncture. Think Nanna—Act Frugal! may even become the catch-cry for this post-consumer culture.

Frugal living tips:

- Support the local economy. Keeping the money local is a win, win, win for the environment, community and producers.
- Go 'shwapping', 'op-shopping' or 'freecycle' instead of shopping.
- Teach the whole family to cook and eat out less.
- Grow some of your own food like fruit, herbs, lettuce and tomatoes. Buy only fresh food, local and organic if possible.
- Use less and waste nothing. Squeeze half the toothpaste you usually use, half the clothes detergent and shampoo less often.
- Save petrol, drive less and slower. Try walking or cycling; it's great for your health.
- Learn a skill to make something—knitting, sewing, pottery, mud bricks etc.
- Make your own preserves, jams, sauces, biscuits and cakes and swap with friends.

For more information

Freecycle www.freecycle.org

The Simple Living Network www.simpleliving.net/main/

Freegans www.freegan.info

LETS in Australia www.lets.org.au

The Clothing Exchange www.clothingexchange.com.au

Jo Immig is an ecologist, freelance writer and researcher. She is currently the coordinator of the National Toxics Network, Australia's only NGO dedicated to creating a toxic-free future. www.ntn.org.au

Feeling frugal?

If you live in the Northern Rivers of NSW and you're keen to apply your creative skills to an exciting new project which will showcase recycled, upcycled and frugal living objects, please contact Jo Immig, email evolve@joimmig.com



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