

THE GOOD LIFE LAB
QUESTIONS FOR

WENDY JEHANARA TREMAYNE



Storey Publishing



Wendy Jehanara Tremayne was a creative director in a marketing firm in New York City before she and her companion Mikey Sklar moved to rural New Mexico. She writes the blog *Holy Scrap* and has written for *Craft's* webzine and *Make* magazine. Tremayne founded Swap-O-Rama-Rama, an annual textile-repurposing and skill-sharing event. Her off-the-grid desert oasis has captured the attention of such media as *The Discovery Channel*, *CNET*, and *Women's Health*. She lives in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.

How did you choose to live in Truth or Consequences?

We picked it because it was inexpensive, and it had community and natural resources.

How can I live in the middle of nowhere?

Lower your cost of living. Start making things. Notice what is free (in nature and the waste stream), learn to use it. Share.

What do you make/grow?

We grow what is indigenous first then supplement the things we desire; forage any food, medicine, or a building material available; and make what we need most first, then we make what we want.

Do your solar panels provide all the power you need?

Mostly yes. Start small and take the largest energy suckers off grid first, then add more power as you can afford to.

What do you do for heat? AC?

Most of our heat comes from opening window dressings to let the sun's heat in, then closing them before sunset. In the summer we use swamp coolers and shut the sun out with window shades.

What do you ferment?

Anything we can! Fermenting is fun. We try odd new things all the time. Cabbage and pomegranates is our latest combo.

Do you miss the city?

Yep. With the money I save living this lifestyle I can afford to go to cities and really enjoy them. I go to cultural events, buy tickets for shows, enjoy fancy restaurants, and devour their garage sales!

Is your homemade wine any good?

Yes, and it is valuable as a gift.

How long did it take to remodel the trailer?

It took three people three months.

How much did it cost?

\$10,000.00

You and Mikey start out using your savings to help you transition to a decommodified life. How different would the experience have been if you'd had less or no savings to begin with?

We maximized our savings by moving to a community that has low taxes, low utility costs, and low property values. This reduced our time spent earning money to pay for basic necessities and gave us time to make things. Making things, living out of the waste stream, and learning how to use natural and modern efficiency systems to lower energy costs was a good start.

Had Mikey and I started out with no savings we might have considered collectivizing with like-minded others and pooling resources to purchase things like land.

Your partner, Mikey, is a skilled engineer-type who is clearly stimulated by invention. If someone wanted to make this lifestyle change, but didn't have those advanced skills, what piece of advice would you offer her/him?

Mikey does things that engineers do, but he is not an engineer. The engineering skills Mikey has, he acquired on his own, not through formal training. He has a particular knack for electronics and computers. Once free of his job, he advanced those skills through trial and error and by studying online tutorials.

When we first approached the goal of creating a new building, we understood we did not have the kind of knowledge we needed, but it was easily found in books, forums on the web, blogs, YouTube, and people. All that was needed was curiosity and the courage to apply what we learned. Everyone is stimulated by invention, not just us!

Your view of money seems to suggest that money is bad on all fronts. What about money generated for good causes, the work of non-profits? Can't money also be a tool to change the world?

A culture whose priority is money gives power to those who are willing to do what it takes to amass money. Often people who wish to amass money do so because they cannot see the abundance, that they already have enough but don't know it. This is true poverty. Likewise, those who feel abundant do not need to amass money and are often generous. Their felt sense is that there is plenty. In a world in which money is the most desired thing greed will be rewarded over kindness. Decisions that affect us all will be made by the greediest. This world has no need of money.

If we behave as though our happiness and health are contingent on the happiness and health of everyone else there will be enough of everything to go around. Money clouds this view. When we understand this, paying each other will seem as silly as your foot paying your hand to pick up a package or your mouth paying your teeth to grind food.

There are nonprofits that provide needed aid. But sometimes they turn cultures away from vital knowledge passed down through generations. Schools that teach the ideas of civilization based in commerce and industrialization turn people away from nature. They are taught to rely on industry. What follows is their discovery that they are poor because the world that had once been free now comes at a cost. People forget how to live in the natural world.

What is the role of community in your life?

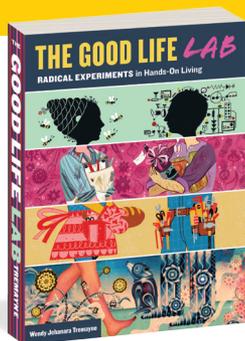
Mikey and I rely on communities near and far. We blog, and we read and comment on other blogs. Online we meet up with friends through video-conferences. We host week-long gatherings at our homestead where we can see these friends face to face, share skills and experiences.

Our community shares knowledge, advice, scrap materials, clothing, and other goods. From time to time, Mikey and I host skill-sharing parties at our home. We produce public events: music shows, informative talks, and clothing swaps. Friends supply labor, work the door, set up, and help promote. Those who pitch in are paid in gifts, CDs, or copies of an author's book. Mikey helps folks with their technology. I teach yoga and meditation. Sometimes we do these things for money, more often for barter. My events always extend the invitation with no one turned away for lack of funds.

Living in a small town gave me the view that strong communities are made up of capable people who share. The less they rely on money the freer they are to make decisions that make common sense.

You talk about changing one's perspective regarding creativity and abundance. Can you discuss how your own perspective changed?

When I became a maker of things I discovered that the world is more interesting than I had imagined. I found that it is abundant and creative. Everything in this world that is made — each widget, product, or article of clothing — comes from a single source, nature. Nature is free, our common birthright. As soon as I chose to solve problems, ideas naturally arose. I no longer viewed leisure and labor as separate. As a creator able to choose how something is made and the materials and processes used, I gained something of real value that I could not find in stores: responsibility. I use it to preserve life.



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