

# Making Ripples

## Smart Sustainability

by Amanda Bancroft

If my dog bit me in 1990, it doesn't necessarily mean your dog will bite you in 2015. And no matter how high you got as a youth, it's quite possible I'm drug-free. Yet this logic is seldom applied to sustainable living. People connect their past experiences in a general field with specific modern situations, often coming to humorous conclusions.

For example, some have tried organic farming using certain methods which failed, and then declared organic farming impossible – for every organic farm that will exist in the world, ever. Others attempted to live in off-grid communities during the 1960's and 70's in very experimental ways, and found the lifestyle uncomfortable, dangerous, or too difficult – returning to cities and dooming to failure anyone who even thinks about attaching a solar panel to their home. My favorite example, although tragic, is a couple who tried to scare us away from living off-grid by explaining that their home was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, so naturally our house would follow suit even though the structure is inflammable. You might even know a certain ex-vegan who declares, “I went vegan and lived on potato chips and rice...I felt terrible. Really, a vegan diet just won't work for you!”

Collapsing alternative homes, or back-to-the-land youth almost starving to death, or the dreaded composting toilet turned public health hazard are all examples of what happens when action is taken in ignorance. Sustainability is often perceived as doomed to fail, when really what's doomed is a compost toilet that wasn't installed properly and is now overflowing the bathroom with excrement, or a roof-less arid desert home built in the rainforest. Unnecessary experiments like these are not definitive of sustainable living. True, we will all make mistakes and have problems. But thanks to the sharing of knowledge and history, these mistakes can be different mistakes; these challenging problems can be new ones to tackle.

Transitioning to a sustainable lifestyle involves changing our way of thinking, and if we're privileged enough to have access to knowledge, we study what works and what doesn't. Especially what doesn't. One of the main stereotypes of an off-grid lifestyle is that it needs to look like abject poverty and miserable suffering. People often send me photos or articles about families (through choice or force) living off-grid in ways that don't support human health, with a note, “Saw this and thought of you!”

Point out the differences that may account for any experiential contradictions when someone uses an illogical argument against sustainability from their own past. Do sustainable smart! If you make intentional, informed decisions about your lifestyle, it won't eliminate every possible problem but it will make things easier the next time someone predicts your doom. And you

won't end up like that guy on the news who was trapped on his roof while trying to become a human solar battery.

*Ripples* is an emerging online educational center inspired by a holistic approach to making a difference. Follow our journey to live sustainably and make ripples with our lifestyle at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).