

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

There's only a hint of autumn in the air, but back-to-school season is already here. The tax-free weekend for purchasing school supplies has come and gone. Some students started their first day of the school year this week, and others just experienced their first day of school, ever. Oh the twittering anticipation of new buildings, teachers, classmates and subjects! No matter what their educational background may be, world-changers are typically self-taught to some degree. With the guidance of those who came before us and inspiration from teachers we meet on the journey of life, caring about people and planet is a highly educational activity, much to my consternation.

It would be more comfortable if I knew what I was doing. What an easier sell for "making a difference" if there was a fail-safe, tested way for more people to do it! Unfortunately, whether one is working at a non-profit, running an organic farm, volunteering through their religion or transforming their personal life to help others or the environment, those how-to manuals are few and far between. And yes, the tests are harder and we're graded more severely, since the consequences can mean the difference between life and death.

Sometimes, we start a community project only to discover the legal requirements are astonishingly complex to navigate. Many filled-out forms and permissions later, the project may become a success, but only if we buckle down and learn what it takes. Other times, we merely want to change our shampoo so that the froggies downstream from our shower won't be poisoned, and yet to confidently do so, we must learn those big, hard-to-pronounce words on the label. It's like kindergarten and the alphabet all over again.

As lifelong learners, we find ourselves committed to things in which we never consciously made a commitment. We may have a child and need to suddenly become advocates for children with disabilities. Or maybe we buy a sustainable house brand-new only to discover that if we want to live in it, we're going to learn basic plumbing and electrical repair, despite that not being in the contract! The phrase "I didn't sign on for this," comes to mind. So we crack open a mammoth-sized book or spend hours browsing the internet late at night, trying to come up with solutions to personal and global problems.

Life is chaos. Making a difference is chaos by nature of being a part of life. If a goal is seriously important to you (maybe because you love someone or some aspect of our natural world, or hate the suffering of innocent lives or the pollution of our planet) getting an education in the topic cannot be more highly recommended. No matter how much we learn, there is always more to know. It's Back to School for anyone and everyone who wants to be their best and do what they can to help the world.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at www.MakeRipples.org.