

Conscious Living is Positive Thinking in Action

Once read of a family, living in New Jersey, whose claim to fame was throwing away one pail of garbage a year! One. For the entire year. Even while they were raising their children!

I look at my full garbage can as I take it to the curb once a week, and I think: *How'd they do it?* Sure, I take out the recyclables, put the glass jars and aluminum cans in their separate bins. I reuse my paper grocery bags over and over again. I pack my son's lunch in reusable tupperware rather than disposable Ziploc bags. I break down the plastic egg containers and stomp on the juice cartons with my feet so that they take up less space in the trash bag. But I'm lugging that garbage can to the curb every week.

In researching ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle, I came across the book *Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping*, the journey of a woman who chose to buy only the most basic necessities for a full year. Food, Yes, movie tickets, No. She said that defining the line between need and want was often challenging and that during the course of the year, she ended up caving in once to buy new clothes.

Not to be materialistic, but new things can be such fun. And, I must admit, I'm a sucker when it comes to buying stuff for my kids. With my daughter, it's: "A Princess Aurora dress? Of course you *have* to have that! You look so pretty in it." With my son: "You want a butterfly habitat? Oooooo, yes! Watching caterpillars transform into butterflies. You got it!"

Then I watched a television special on how Oprah Winfrey built a leadership academy for girls in South Africa. Some of the girls lived in a home that was but one small room they shared with their family with no electricity, no running water. Many had lost one parent or both. A few described drinking water to stave off hunger and having little or nothing to eat. Oprah Winfrey gave these girls a new start, an education, a safe place to live, new clothes, plenty of food. I choked back tears for the entire one-hour show.

And, wow, that really gave me perspective! I enjoy three meals a day, food of my choice. I drive a car. I live in a nice house, with air conditioning and heating. I have a college education. I was born in North America. Lucky me! In terms of my birthplace, I won the lottery! Do I feel miserable and achy inside for those going hungry in South Africa? Yeah, I do. But I've learned that negativity is not productive. Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, founder of Nonviolent



Communication, says that guilt, anger, resentment, and shame are four emotions that contribute to violence on the earth.

So, then, in an effort to keep my thoughts positive and do what I can to contribute to the welfare of the planet, where might I start? Well, for one, www.heifer.org is a wonderful organization to support; they help stop the cycle of hunger and poverty by empowering and educating. I also like www.epa.gov/kids, featuring games and fun ways to contribute to a cleaner environment.

I love Sarasota's Efest, www.efest.us, featuring many wonderful forward-thinking local businesses. And I'm particularly impressed with SOS, the Save Our Selves campaign, launched by Al Gore, Kevin Wall, Pharrell, and Cameron Diaz. SOS is putting on a Live Earth Concert on July 7 of this year, a concert for a climate in crisis. For more information, go to liveearth.msn.com.

Global warming needs our attention. It's the little details that make a big difference in helping our environment. Little things, like: turning off the lights when you leave a room; turning your computer all the way off, not leaving it on standby; using compact fluorescent light bulbs; buying organically and locally; driving less; or using free services to exchange or get rid of things you don't want—freecycle.org, paperbackswap.com, titletrader.com, craigslist.org, GoodWill.

To me, the biggest impact we can make as parents and as people is not only to

heed these standards of sustainability, but also to listen to our words, listen to how we speak to each other. To me, green living and voluntary simplicity are excellent examples of nonviolent communication. They are profound movements toward positive change, without placing blame. They are grounded in improving rather than disapproving.

Again, it's the little things that make a difference – the small ways we relate to each other – that leave us feeling either full or depleted. We each have an inherent need for inner peace and fulfillment. We have need for play, health, safety, connection and autonomy. We crave the freedom to make choices that benefit ourselves as well as our fellows. When anger, resentment, shame and guilt rear their ugly heads, it's because one of our basic needs is not being met. And to fulfill that need, we need to surround ourselves with people who will listen, folks who can understand and empathize... for it is empathy that propagates compassion.

Kim Park is a mother of two and an advocate for holistic living. Her favorite pastimes include finger painting, duck-duck-goose, and pretending to be lost in Fairyland. For a good laugh, go to www.couragetobirth.com to read Kim's Perky Parent tip of the week.

