

What if? Walking Our Talk

Where we're standing right now, in the ruins in the dark, what we build could be anything."
 – Chuck Palahniuk (from Choke)

I'm in the dark right now. Not literally, but figuratively – feeling pessimistic. Cynical. The war rages on half a world away, and here in our own backyard, construction continues at a fevered pace, big SUVs prowl county roadways, and people still wolf down fast food burgers and fries, which have traveled a thousand miles or so to end up in our big bellies, as if they really were food. And speaking of food, our politicians and energy industry officials are now pushing us to seriously consider turning perfectly healthy foodstuffs into fuel to run our overly-large, gas-guzzling vehicles, possibly contributing to increased world hunger as a consequence just so we don't have to make any major lifestyle changes, like learning to walk again. *Whew!* I guess you can tell: I'm in a mood.

But maybe that's not so bad. Standing here, in this dark space, in what I perceive to be the ruins of a wonderful experiment in human liberty gone amuck, with nothing left to lose, it's time to be creative. So here goes.

Did you ever play "What if..." as a child? It was fun then; it could be fun (and maybe crucial for getting out of this mess) now. There are no right or wrong answers in "What if..." However, there may be choices, and, as we've yet to learn on a species-wide scale, all of our choices have consequences. Want to play?

What if... we all woke up tomorrow morning determined to have a positive impact on



our own life, the lives of others, and the planet itself? What might that look like? I can only speak for myself, but here are some ideas.

What if... "community" wasn't just an advertising buzzword but actually meant what it's supposed to mean: "a unified body of individuals" sharing a common vision, interests, and goals. We've sort of tried this before – communism and communes come from the same root word and ideal – but we've always managed somehow to mess it up. I think it's worth trying again, though, without the power plays and self-destructive behaviors this time, of course.

So, let's say we have a community. What if... we began right now to redesign it so that

motorized vehicular transportation had to take a backseat to bicycling and walking. City streets could be turned into foot and bike paths; outlying neighborhoods rezoned to include residential housing, grocery, and hardware stores, beauty parlors and barber shops, churches and schools, all within walking distance. What if... public transportation was so affordable and so reliable that folks didn't mind taking the bus from one community or neighborhood to another, when that kind of trip was necessary – a far more environmentally sound choice than each of us driving in our own gas-hungry,

toxic-fume-belching vehicles. Of course, the buses would be hybrids – or maybe something even better. Any ideas?

So now that we got rid of all the cars and trucks, we can forget about having to convert food into fuel and concentrate on converting so-called "food" into *real* food. What if... local organic gardens, farms, and markets made growing and shopping for healthy food so effortless and cost-effective that stopping at a fast food outlet for a burger and fries would seem to be not only nutritionally unsound but also economically ridiculous? What if, too, we collectively decided that hunger—or poverty, or violence—anywhere in the world was just not acceptable any longer? Not as a grand, ethereal ideal, but really, really not acceptable. Wouldn't the powers-that-be have to listen? Eventually, I think they would.

Maybe I'm naïve, but I'm feeling a little brighter now, how about you? Somehow, things don't seem so hopeless. Where we stand right now, we can build anything. What if... we all played this game every day?



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