



# The Design Process



The prime directive of permaculture states that:

*"The only ethical decision is to take responsibility for our own existence & that of our children. Make it now."*

This has become the basis of my life path design process, from which I have devised my own Personal Permaculture Plan. By taking responsibility for my actions I've become much more aware of how I interact with my environment. Every choice that I make affects the rest of the World that I live in & sends out a message to it about what I do & don't consider to be acceptable.

For this design I am using the CEAP design framework. This is another mnemonic that stands for Collecting site information, Evaluating this information, Applying permaculture principles to this information and to generate a design and Planning a schedule of implementation, maintenance, evaluation and tweaking.

Of course in this case, I am the site & the information I am collecting is to do with how all my life choices affect the rest of the World that I live in. As this design is one that is constantly evolving, what I include here is as much about the processes I use to make decisions as about the results of those choices.

## Collecting:

**Information:** I am a very curious person. I have always wanted to know about things; how they work, where they come from, why they happen; those kind of questions. So I have collected a lot of information in my head through my life to date; from school, books, TV, other people & so on. There came a point though when I realised that I couldn't always rely on this information because humans often have agendas.

Those who wrote the history books were usually those that won the wars & they had the opportunity to tell any story that they chose to their descendants, true or otherwise. The same is true today, the World is full of people trying to sell their own point of view & often those with the most money have the most opportunity to do this. It is a sad fact that these people are usually those who are exploiting the Earth's resources for their own short term gains & it is their consumerist message that is the one that comes into our homes consistently through the media.



Did it really happen?

So, one day it suddenly struck me that most of what I had 'learned' throughout my life was probably untrue; somebody else's opinions & all that I could really trust were the things that I had experienced myself. That day I got rid of the TV & ever since I have chosen not to have one in my home. I know too well from my own experience, its addictive nature & I see it's effects upon the people around me. My radio is rarely used nowadays (occasionally for a weather forecast) & I have never bought a newspaper. I do my utmost to stay clear of the messages the mainstream media are sending out in order to prevent it 'clouding my view of the World'.

Anyway, coming to this conclusion involved a certain amount of evaluation, which perhaps should be in the next section, but as it very much affects how I collect information it belongs here. So I am selective about the sources of the information that I work with & as I have already mentioned, my own experience is top of my list. I can pick up for instance a Tetrapak & put it on my compost heap & watch what happens to it. I know that a paper bag will be returned to the soil much more quickly; I have seen it with my own eyes.

As for another piece of information that we all consider to be true nowadays; that the Earth is spherical... well, I've been told it is, I've seen pictures of it from space, but I've never had an experience that has actually proved it to me.



Sure, the horizon looks curved & I can only see a boat so far out to sea, but is that just an inconsistency in my eyesight, like the blind spot that I didn't know that I had until I was shown the little experiment that demonstrated it to me? Now, I'm not about to join the Flat Earth society, but I am using this as an illustration of one of the many things that we completely take for granted without it necessarily being part of our own experience. How many other things are there that we assume to be facts because some 'authority', be it a person, a book or a TV programme, once told us that they are? Despite though having been in this body for almost 40 years now, relying purely upon my own experiences does actually limit me quite a lot & so I also choose to trust some of the other sources of information that I come across.

Those sources that actively seek me out usually have their own agenda which can't always be trusted, so I generally only go in search of 'external' answers whenever an observation about something raises a question for me that I can't answer myself. The way I decide whether external information is good or not is if it feels right; by my gut reaction. In my experience, this has always been my best guide in these matters & this is where my own experience again guides me in my information collecting process. So while the collecting process is an ongoing one, I feel that I have evolved my best method to date of selecting the information that I can rely upon when making my life path choices.

### Key information:

These are the important pieces of information that I have observed or trust from my gut, that guide me in my current life choices. Some of the things that I am going to describe below as being observations I have had may appear to be completely obvious. I am describing them this way because I am choosing not to take the words of some outside authority as the truth, but to trust only my own experiences.



Sometimes outside authorities don't always have our best interests at heart.....

Of course, these are often the same as I had already been told they would be, but the important thing was that I didn't just believe it, I tested it out. I have discovered that things are rarely as they seem....

**Life:** I am surrounded by it in its myriad forms all driven towards a purpose by some animating force inside. Because this is my everyday experience I have often taken it all for granted, but I only have to put myself back into the mind of a child again to be fascinated by the incredible beauty & complexity of all that surrounds me. The way that life-forms adapt themselves to create so many mutually beneficial interactions; the way my taste buds & figs for instance, interact is exquisite. It is all truly miraculous, breathtaking... & yet I too am one of those amazing life-forms. I love it all.

**Sunlight:** It appears to be the key thing that animates this World. It's warmth I feel when it appears in the sky & that this is needed by all life is reflected in the growth cycles of the seasons. I see how it effectively powers a planet-sized water pump that makes life possible outside of the oceans & it provides the main means by which I perceive the stunning beauty that surrounds me; my sight. Over long periods of over-cast days I feel a need to get some direct sunshine again, yet I also shy away from too much in the Summer months. I squint in bright light & can only open my eyes comfortably under the cover of shade on a sunny day.



**Water:** I can see that there is a lot of it about & that without it's ability to evaporate so easily with the warmth of the sun, we wouldn't have rain & there would be no life upon the land. Like the plants in my garden I feel a great relief when this refreshing rain falls after a period of dry days & I know that my body needs a constant cycle of water through it for me to feel good. I also know that I crave clean water & that tap water does not smell or taste good to me anymore.

**Air:** I also crave clean air. My experience (running, cycling etc.) has shown me that the more energy I need to generate, the more I need to breathe. My body clearly needs air to sustain it & a good draught of clean, fresh air I find very invigorating. If I visit a city for any reason, my nose always fills up with all kinds of horrible black stuff that I never experience when living in the countryside.

**Food:** It has become very clear to me that it feels absolutely abhorrent to end a life & I am unable to deliberately harm any living creature for any reason, including the slugs & insects that most humans still consider not to be of any consequence. I have subsequently observed over almost twenty years of following a vegan diet that my health has been generally very good, I appear to be wearing well compared to others of my age & I have rarely been ill.

I have observed how much more flavour there is in organically grown food & I know that I don't have any desire to use chemicals in my own garden which are designed to end the lives of creatures or plants. My body has evolved within a natural system that contained a certain collection of naturally occurring chemicals & to eat food covered in those that are completely alien to my body is just asking for trouble.

**Exercise:** I feel better if I exercise & animate my body for a while & this carries over into my day to day feeling of well-being. I have noticed that the muscles I use increase in strength & those that I don't waste away. If I push myself too hard I can injure myself & this usually brings frustration with the need to rest.

**Shelter:** I am a vulnerable creature. I have been brought up in a society of humans that generally live in artificially comfortable conditions & my body does not appear to have the hardiness of wild creatures. At this point in my life I still need shelter & this has meant choosing a place to live. Being too enclosed makes me feel disconnected from nature, so I only feel good where I can get enough light & air to feel that I am at least partly outside.



I also need to have nature around me, I don't enjoy looking out of my windows onto nearby buildings or roads.

**Clothing:** I see two purposes for clothing in our society; moderating body temperature & covering up insecurities & I am still under the control of both of these reasons to different degrees. I live in a climate that appears to be too cold for me to remain comfortable in the Winter & I have also suffered from heatstroke from being outdoors in the Summer with insufficient cover. I also know that if the temperature is within a certain range I can feel much more comfortable naked than clothed & that includes feeling colder for a while after putting clothes on!

The other issue around insecurity comes from the way society is currently geared up to make us feel disempowered. The idea that our bodies; these miraculous & beautiful things, are something to be ashamed of is absolutely crazy & yet the power of our conditioning is clearly very strong. I see clothes being made en-masse which have little practical function, just a lot to cater to our insecurities by convincing us that they will make us feel 'special'. Sadly, I see a lot of people spending their money (energy) this way, while the whole deception appears so obvious to me. I can also feel the way that peer pressure works though, even on a subtle energetic level, as despite all my efforts it still retains some small influence on me.

While I was living in Eire, being naked was a completely natural thing, but now that I am living back in society I once more feel the pressure as an underlying sense of discomfort about being naked outside again. One item of clothing that I have discovered to be unnecessary from experience & that I can shun on all but the coldest days (without being arrested!), is footwear. I noticed how my feet got sweaty & smelly in shoes & looked very pale as well. Now that I have been barefoot for over six years, I see that my feet are much healthier for being able to expand fully & get the air & sunshine that they were designed to receive.



**Community:** I have observed through my experience inside several of them, that these are places in which humans learn to interact with each other in a mutually beneficial manner. I have seen plenty of examples of where this has become a very difficult process for the people involved & sometimes those situations have not been resolved. I have been challenged by my need for my own space & my desire to interact with others to create something greater than our individual parts.

**Travel:** I see a lot of people rushing around a lot like I once did, only I didn't notice them then because I was too busy myself. People travelling great distances to earn money to spend on another journey to a holiday destination, that they ought to be enjoying, but probably won't. We live in a World where this has become normal & I notice that the food I am offered in the shops has often done a lot of travelling itself. Why? I see a system geared up to the needs of economic growth & not the individual. Companies getting bigger & putting the smaller local ones out of business.

For myself I have noticed that if I work from home or locally & only aim to earn as much money as I really need I don't need to travel very much at all. I don't need to shop very often when I have food growing at home (once a week). My desire for comfort & a quick trip can lead me to using my van, but I also know that cycling into town (5 miles) & back with shopping is not a difficult journey. Diesel is a fossil fuel & creates greenhouse gases upon burning, but vegetable oils are carbon-neutral, as they only release upon burning what they have absorbed when being grown (this is information that I have been 'told', but feel is correct).

**Energy:** All our energy seems to come from the sun (though I am open to feeling other sources should they become apparent to me). Despite this, it appears to me that certain lower forms of energy are safer to harness for life on this planet than others. I haven't yet worked out how to manage without some external energy inputs; heat perhaps being the most important one. I see that using fossil fuels has to have a limit, even if no other effects were to be considered.





The arguments in favour of nuclear energy never convinced me & I was being taught about it as part of a degree in Physics! Cutting & burning trees may be 'renewable' but to what degree? Directly harnessing the power of the sun, wind & water still requires technologies & raw materials to make them. As Bill Mollison states in the Permaculture Designer's Manual; "it is much easier to conserve energy than to generate it" & that is why I put an extra layer on when I get cold!

**Resources:** I have seen that information is the critical resource & that those in power are constantly using this to maintain their position. We all should have access to the information that we need to make informed choices. I see a lot of wastage in our society because of our fossil-fuelled abundance, but this in itself is a resource that is being squandered. I see a lack of foresight in the way resources are used in general. I see many resources becoming pollution, because we are not seeing the new uses that they could be put to.

**Creativity:** I have noticed that I have an inbuilt drive to be creative & this can manifest itself in many ways. If I don't allow this to be expressed I feel frustrated & I get bored.

**Right livelihood:** Ever since leaving University with a degree in Physics I have wrestled this issue. All the jobs that I had qualified to do I saw had some morally abhorrent factor that prevented me from applying for them. I see the knock-on effects beyond what I choose to do to earn a living in this society & I most often see something that I really don't like & don't want to contribute to. I see that the things that are important to me are not yet apparently services in demand & I don't see an easy way for them to bring a fair energy exchange back to me.

**Relationships:** My experience of human relationships has shown me that I have sought out people to reflect back to me what I needed to learn about myself. In retrospect I see that my relationships were based upon a mutual need & that taking energy was a common theme. Not that this is unusual, I also see it all around me & all the while it serves both parties, it works. It is when one party shuts off their energy to the other that conflict arises & this occurs at all levels from relationships between individuals, to international diplomacy.



**Synchronicities:** I have noticed that when synchronicities occur I tend to be in the right place for something important to happen. I find them fascinating & a lot of fun.

**Zone 000:** I philosophise a lot; it's part of trying to understand the whats, whys & hows that I mentioned at the beginning. I need time to do this, to be quiet & to explore where I can go with my consciousness. This is a vast subject in itself, but it is enough to say here that this is where the fascination that drives this whole process arises from.

I seem to attract to me the items that I ask for, just as long as it is for the highest good of all. Anything from finding the one right sized screw on the ground that I need at that moment to having a free technical drawing table delivered to my door; they all appear at the most unlikely moments if I happen to need them. I have also noticed that things happen to me that I need to learn from & until I do, they keep repeating themselves. Sometimes this isn't obvious until I see the underlying pattern, but when I do it can be quite a revelation. Jobs & relationships are both excellent examples of this & both have already taught me a lot.

When I decide that I need to change an element in my life, something inevitably manifests that allows that to happen, though usually not in a form that I was expecting! With hindsight though I can see that all the 'bad' things that have occurred in my life have been exactly what I needed to happen to me at the time. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today.

**Designing:** I see the great potential for me to affect my environment through my life choices & that Permaculture design is a very effective way of helping me to manage this.

## Evaluating:

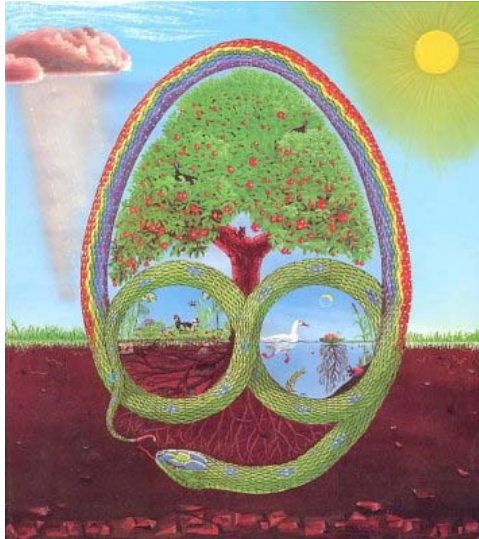
Of course how I experience the World & how someone else experiences it may be somewhat different; the classic "Is the glass half full or half empty?" question is a perfect illustration of this. A person could decide that everything that they do to stay alive has a negative (consuming) effect upon the World around them & if they cared about that World enough, then sacrificing their own life could be seen as the best thing that they could do for it. Of course this assumes that we are only capable of producing a negative impact & doesn't take into account the positive effects that our actions can create too.



We know well how easy it is for one person to affect the behaviour of many; we see it everyday & often in a negative sense from our politicians, pop stars & religious leaders. We are all equally capable of exerting such an influence, myself included, if we are really driven enough to do so. On a smaller scale though, which is where most of us find ourselves, we still have a potential sphere of influence that can send out positive effects into the World. This is where I have to make my evaluations; does the positive effect of me doing this particular thing outweigh the negative environmental effects of say, making this computer? If I can be fairly sure that the answer is going to be "Yes" then I can feel good about making that particular choice. A "No" may not be a reason to abandon an idea though, it may just mean that I need to re-design what I am doing to make it more effective.

### Evaluating the key information:

**Life:** I can only set out to support the existence of life in all its forms, no other action makes any sense. All life is my family. This leads me to pay attention to every small detail, from where I am walking (so as not to tread on a creature accidentally) to what my purchases may be supporting somewhere else in the World. I have yet to experience a situation where taking the life of another being has been necessary to my survival & even if it was to occur I don't know whether I would.

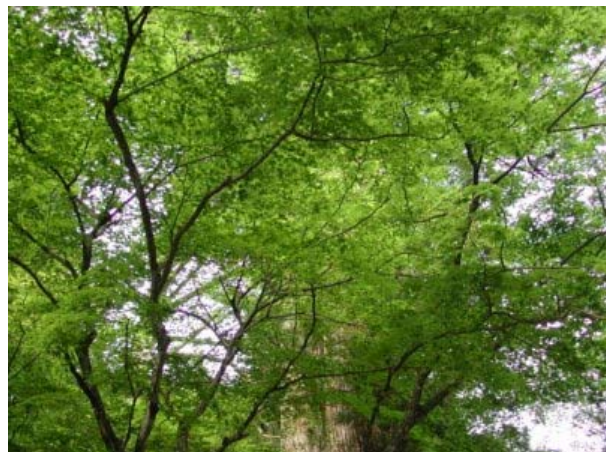


The cells in my body are not the same ones that I was born with. I am actually a cooperative community of millions of cells living together, with a constant flow of newcomers & leavers. Every time I eat something, many of the elements of that piece of food become a part of me. I am literally what I eat, it is what I am entirely made of & will continue to be. I am in a constant flux with the Universe & the boundary I perceive myself to have (my skin) is actually just illusory. If I don't honour all life, then I am not honouring myself.

**Sunlight:** I feel that my need for a certain amount of sunlight, but not too much probably stems from our forest origins, where it would have been filtered through a green canopy of leaves & been essentially the same all year around. Therefore I need to ensure that I don't get exposed to too much direct sunlight during the Summer, while catching what I can during the Winter.

**Water:** While I know that my body has a need for clean water & that the tap is not where to get it, I have yet to find any real clarity about the best source. I have read raw food texts praising distilled water & Viktor Schauberger's work that warns against it. I only know what I definitely don't want to be drinking at this point in time.

**Air:** It seems to me that the best place to get the cleanest air is well away from industry & cities, though the nature of our World ensures that the pollution still gets blown everywhere to some degree. While the countryside is not exactly free of poisons, the air at least tends to be cleaner.



**Food:** I first became vegetarian partly for moral & partly for health reasons, although I didn't realise at the time that it was a decision that I made with my head. Since then I have evaluated the issue with my gut too; it just doesn't feel right to me to end the lives of other creatures just to eat when I don't need to & no amount of external information to the contrary has been able to change my mind.



Organic food tastes much better to me & in theory doesn't contain any toxic residues. Like us all, I have an inbuilt survival mechanism which warns me of danger so that I can stay clear of it. My gut feeling is saying a big "NO!" to foods grown using herbicides, insecticides & artificial fertilizers. If a lot of these chemicals are poisons then why would I want them in my body? As my body is ultimately in constant molecular transfer with the rest of the World, then why would I want them in my World either?

If I want my food to be nutritious then it really needs to be fresh too. That means ensuring that it travels as little as possible before I get to eat it.

Logically then, all our food should be locally grown. I don't know though if it is possible to obtain optimum nutrition from food grown in our climate, especially in our often depleted soils. If we are going to be trading around the World, then at least fresh fruit is one of the most justifiable cargoes it seems to me.

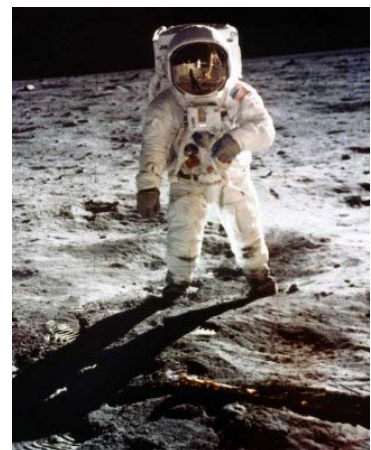
**Exercise:** I need to ensure that I have a regular programme of exercise to stay healthy whilst not injuring myself through over-exertion. Gentler forms of exercise such as some of the Eastern arts seem to be much less risky than the impact sports that characterise Western society.

**Shelter:** To be the healthiest environment to live in, a shelter needs to be light & be able to breathe. Combining this with good energy efficiency in this climate is a bit of a challenge.

Maybe a compromise is to live in a very low-impact dwelling such as a yurt in the Summer months & somewhere a bit more insulated, but still light in the Winter. I certainly need a garden outside my home & preferably trees, countryside & quiet too.

**Community:** Being in community offers me an important opportunity to learn how to interact with other people on a day to day basis & to practice the ethics of People care & Fair share in particular. It is a chance to find ways to negotiate how everybody's needs can be met in a socially acceptable manner. I have learned much from being in community situations in the past & will continue to benefit from them in the future. It makes the most sense for me to continue to be in communal groups; both temporary & permanent, distant & local, to continue to gain the social skills that I can obtain there.

**Clothing:** If clothing is for keeping warm (or to provide protection from the Summer sun), then it should be designed for that purpose. That's not to say that it can't be colourful, but it needs to be practical. Anything else is just wasting the precious resources that we have been given & it is now back-firing on us. It is obscene that our society throws away vast quantities of once-fashionable clothes, that despite some finding their way to charities would be of no use to poorer people overseas who just need to keep warm.



A good example of where practical clothing is really important!

**Travel:** Society is geared up to make us travel further & further to earn our living, buy our shopping & take our leisure. Those people with power just want to keep us all busy, so that we do not have time to think, let alone question them. More travel means more fuel purchased, which means more economic growth.... Spending as little time travelling as possible gives us more time to really live. All the answers that I seek are not somewhere else & I don't need to go anywhere but 'inside' to find them (I have even written a song; 'Bones' about this). I have set out to arrange my life this way as much as I can & this has had the multiple yield of saving me time, money, stress & the Earth a little of the pollution that I would have generated.

When I do 'have' to travel, it makes sense to do it as energy efficiently as possible, which could mean cycling, lift sharing or public transport. I can also do things to reduce the pollution generated by my van when I use it; I can drive more gently, use biodiesel & also fit an Ecoflow unit to increase m.p.g.

**Energy:** As conserving energy is simpler than generating it, then I need to question every time that I use energy generated on my behalf somewhere distant. I have to ask if what I am doing with that energy has the potential to do more good than the environmental damage that occurs at the power station. I need to harvest what I can myself at home & do my best to conserve whatever I use.

**Resources:** All resources ultimately come from the one source & we should use them efficiently. The way I use resources needs to be properly designed in order to minimise my impact upon the environment & to maximise the outputs that I can generate with them. I have to consistently ask myself what purpose I am going to be putting them to & if it is going to be a beneficial one.



**Creativity:** I just need to allow myself time to explore my creative side & use it to shine a light out into the World... Oh yes, it ought to have multiple yields, don't you think?

**Right livelihood:** In order for me to have a positive impact upon this World, I need to ensure that all my actions are intended to be beneficial. The way that I choose to earn a living in this society is especially important as I spend a lot of my time doing it. People have a habit of labelling each other by their jobs & this is an opportunity to be known for doing something positive. People often enquire "So what does a Permaculture Designer do then?" & this is a great opportunity to introduce them to ideas about sustainable living. I do however need to receive a fair exchange of energy for my work & this is where a bit of designing is required to make people realise that they need what they don't yet know about!

**Relationships:** These are clearly providing me with the opportunities that I need to learn about myself. As I am no different in this respect than everyone else, all relationships that I have had, whether with family, friends or lovers have been a two way learning process & it is as much my role to help the other to learn as it is for myself.

**Synchronicities:** These seem to be one of the ways that I am being guided along my life path & so I should be always keeping my eyes open for them. Here's one that was hard to miss....!



**Zone 000:** It all starts in my mind it seems, so the way that I think is the key to what happens to me in my life. If I choose to see opportunities then they will be there for me; I must remember to stay in a positive mindset, even when I encounter the inevitable challenges I meet to test my resolve. I need to give myself plenty of quiet time to hear the thoughts that come into my mind & from which I learn how to find my way forward.

**Designing:** This is my key to achieving what I want, by making the best of all the opportunities & resources that become available to me. Designing all my life choices is essential for me to be able to accurately reflect out to the World what I truly believe in.



## Applying:



### Principles:

#### The Principle of Cooperation: (from the Designers Manual)

"Cooperation, not competition is the very basis of existing life systems & of future survival".

The first of the three main ethics of Permaculture is:

#### Care of the Earth:

"Provision for all life systems to continue & multiply".

Both of these suggest that to honour all life is the only sane action for us all & it is the underlying motivation for everything that I do.

#### Care of People:

"Provision for people to access those resources necessary to their existence".

This is simply a subsection of the first ethic, although as humans currently have the potential to do so much damage to our environment, it has become particularly important that we all have access to the resources we need in a sustainable fashion. I can help to provide these by firstly simply living & being an example of good practice. Secondly I can actively promote sustainable methods of obtaining those resources, so that many others may be able to make an informed choice.

#### Setting limits to Population & Consumption:

"By governing our own needs, we can set resources aside to further the above principles".

In order for all life to be able to have their fair share, it is my responsibility to limit my consumption of resources simply to those which I actually need. By doing this I also see how little I really do require to live a happy, healthy & fulfilled life.

## Rules of use of Natural Resources:

### Reduce waste, hence pollution.

I need to ensure that I design my life choices so that my outputs can be utilised as useful inputs somewhere else (nearby!) as often as is possible. That I maintain what I have to last as long as possible & that I am responsible for dealing with whatever pollution that I generate as safely as I can.



A treebog at Paddox Farm; reducing waste by turning it into a resource

### Thoroughly replace lost minerals.

This means both within the soil & within myself. I need to carry out a programme of revitalising the soil within my own garden where I grow some of my food & this in turn will help to replace the minerals which my body needs. A mineral depleted body does not work as efficiently as it should & so requires more inputs to sustain it & this goes for plants that grow in depleted soils too.

### Do a careful energy accounting.

I need to ensure that I am aware of the costs of all the resources that I use. This way I can calculate whether the beneficial outputs that I can generate from the resource outweigh the cost of producing it. Some elements will inevitably have a negative effect on their own (such as producing my computer), but if I can use it to produce a lot of positive outcomes, then it 'pays for itself' in an ecological sense.

### Make a biosocial impact assessment for long term effects upon society & act to buffer or eliminate any negative impacts.

I can see a lot of the behaviours that are leading society towards catastrophe. The way I can act to buffer this is to be a good example of sustainable living for others to see & to tell other people how to follow my lead.



### Life Intervention Principle:

"In chaos lies unparalleled opportunity for imposing creative order. Just join with one or two friends to make your way in the confusion. Others will follow & learn."

This describes my role within pioneering communities, such as my home at Paddox farm (where more & more people are drawn to visit & become part of the wider non-residential community) & the wider Permaculture community of people who are joined at a distance by a common purpose.

### Directive of Return:

"Every object must responsibly provide for its replacement. Society must as a condition of use, replace an equal or greater resource than used."

This can happen directly or indirectly. I can grow plants in my garden that produce enough seeds for me to grow them again next year, plus surplus for me & wildlife to eat; this is the direct occurrence. However, I can also use a resource which may in itself be unsustainable (i.e. my computer again), but which can enable me to influence the actions of a great many people & create more positive change than I could ever achieve by changing my own actions alone. This of course only applies to the crisis situation that we currently find ourselves in where putting the brakes on environmental pollutants is effectively a positive outcome.

### Work with nature:

"...rather than against the natural elements, forces, pressures, agencies & evolutions, so that we assist rather than impede natural developments."

I try to live as naturally as I can & go with the flow of whatever is happening. This can be the way that I follow my impulses or intuition to do something, the way I plant my garden to mimic natural communities or the way I work outdoors when it is dry weather & indoors when it rains.

### The problem is the solution; everything works both ways:

"It is only how we see things that makes them advantageous or not."

If I remember this, then almost anything can be a potentially valuable resource, even the so called rubbish that most people still throw away. I have created a lot of gardens using materials in this manner & much more besides. The garden will always need rain & I will always have something that I need to do indoors & this can also work in reverse; if I am indoors & the heat is becoming too much then I'm bound to find something outside that needs doing urgently too.



### Make the least change for the greatest possible effect:

This principle reminds me that my first action should always be the most energy efficient one. Apart from maximising the possible benefits it will also raise my moral by allowing me to feel that I have really achieved something!

### The yield of a system is theoretically unlimited:

"The only limit on the number of uses of a resource possible within a system is the limit of the information & the imagination of the designer."

This applies to my life as a whole; there is always something more that I can do to the design for an overall improvement; it is never 'finished'.

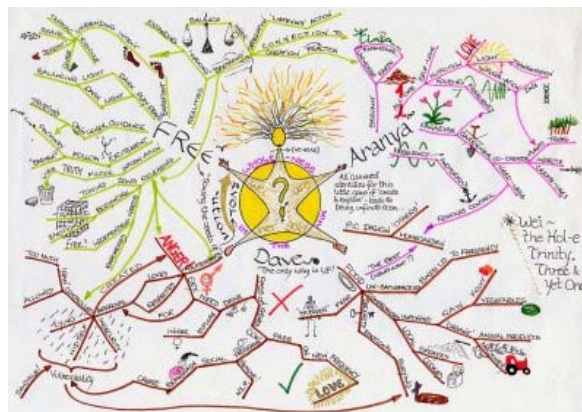
### Everything gardens, or has an effect on its environment:

Everything that I do has an effect upon my environment & by making careful choices I can affect it in a beneficial manner, rather than a negative one.

### A Policy of Responsibility:

"The role of beneficial authority is to return function & responsibility to life & to people; if successful, no further authority is needed. The role of successful design is to create a self-managed system."

As a permaculture designer, I am a beneficial authority & it is my responsibility to show others how they too can take back responsibility for their own lives. This makes my role a temporary one, but as the whole point of what I am doing is to make myself redundant then I look forward to my retirement!



### Policy of Resource Management:

"A responsible human society bans the use of resources which permanently reduce yields of sustainable resources, e.g. pollutants, persistent poisons, radio-actives, large areas of concrete & highways, sewers from city to sea."

To be a good example to others, I have to start at home. This is why I garden organically, will not use chemicals in my home & use a composting toilet. I suppose that by having a vehicle I am still supporting the concrete & highways, but I look forward to the day when travelling becomes unnecessary for me. I also changed my mind about building a small nuclear reactor to keep my poorly insulated mobile home warm over the Winter months; instead I got a few extra jumpers from the local charity shops. Sorry, I couldn't resist that one...

### Dispersal of food yield over time:

- \* By selection of early, mid & late season varieties.
- \* By planting the same variety in early & late ripening situations.
- \* By selection of long-yielding varieties.
- \* By a general increase in diversity in the system, so that:
- \* Leaf, fruit, seed & root are all product yields.
- \* By using self-storing species such as tubers, hard seeds, fuelwood, or rhizomes which can be cropped on demand.
- \* By techniques such as drying, preserving, pitting & cool storage.
- \* By regional trade between communities or by the utilisation of land at different altitudes or latitudes.

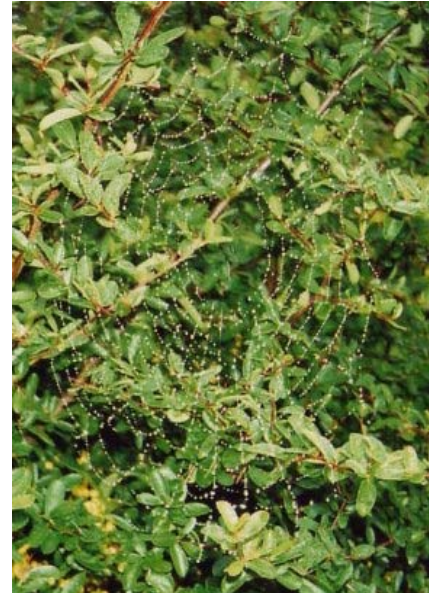
These are techniques for me to apply in my garden & maximise my own home-grown food potential. The only different altitudes that I currently have are my garden & on my decking; though even that small distance off the ground can make a difference in terms of frost & slug & snail protection.

### Principle of Stability:

"It is not the number of diverse things in a design that leads to stability, it is the number of beneficial connections between these components."

This is an important element of design, both in my garden & in my own interactions with the World at large. This is the primary reason why I no longer live in the mountains of Eire, despite that being my most ecologically friendly lifestyle to date.

While I was there, my beneficial connections with the rest of the World were extremely limited & all the while that I need to be making them I am choosing to make compromises..



### Information as a Resource:

"Information is the critical potential resource. It becomes a resource only when obtained & acted upon."

...And this is why I am so careful about how I gather & use it.

# The Final Design

## Zone 00

This section describes my activities in following my life path. Top of the heap is zone 000 & I have put it here because everything else that I do stems from my thought processes. Through meditation & dream work I explore my subconscious mind & I have worked on releasing old negative patterns still residing there most recently using Rebirthing. I find that the help of crystal energy & drawing sacred geometric patterns has also assisted this process. I have found that selected 'channelled' writings have raised important questions for me & made me aware of the way I can manifest into reality whatever my mind projects into it. As a result of exploring these ideas I have discovered that following my excitement & the appearance of strange synchronicities is a good way of staying on my optimum life path.

I have chosen to go barefoot for the past six years & this has given me much healthier feet & enabled me to become more sensitive to the messages around me. I drink the best water I can get & this is rain collected off my roof as long as it is fresh enough. Only as a last resort will I drink tap water. For fitness, I have found Aikido to be the best all-round exercise, giving me improved coordination, flexibility, fitness & stamina. Despite it being a martial art, it is not a contact sport as such like many of the others, as the essence is put upon blending & flowing with one's opponent.

My actions speak louder than my words I'm told, so I want the way I live to be an example of good sustainable living for other people to see. The underlying essence of my life choices is the honouring I have of all life forms. Permaculture principles have helped me to design a life that enables me to live out my wishes in the best way that I can. I seem to be fairly empathic & can easily put myself in others' situations & be aware of how they feel (& I don't just mean humans here). This helps me to be compassionate to all beings & to adjust my own actions accordingly.

I feel a need to communicate the feelings & ideas that I have & in the past I have done this by writing & talking to people, either informally or as presentations to large groups. For the last few years I have been exploring the medium of song as another means of communicating, as it offers me the extra opportunity to add emotion to my message. This is one of the outlets that I currently explore for my creativity & another is in creating beautiful patterns with the salad leaves & flowers from my garden. Both of these have other yields; my songs can also communicate a positive message & maybe the salad art will encourage people to eat & grow more varied plants themselves. If nothing else, people enjoy the beauty before they enjoy eating them, so the nourishment is absorbed on two different levels. I also like making ecological things, the most recent being the cover for my yurt.

In my relationships with all beings I aim to communicate clearly & honestly, without attachment to outcomes. I have discovered the hard way that if I pretend to be someone that I am not, I will attract friends who like that projected personality & not the real me. Being the real me is also essential in truly honouring the other being.

Right livelihoods is something I am still getting to grips with, so there are no other details here. Perhaps though I could have made an extra link to poly-incomes as this certainly seems to be the way that my life is heading now & in true permaculture terms provides me with a 'multiple supply'.

My two main strategies for gathering the information that continues to guide my journey are to rely upon firstly my own direct experiences & secondly only the sources that I trust. The latter strategy also relies upon my gut feelings which tend to be uncannily accurate in such matters.

## Home

This & all of the following sections cover the choices that I make on my life path. I start here with my home environment. I choose to live in the Dorset countryside for the quiet & the opportunity to see & hear the fairly abundant wildlife.



This is also likely to be the cleanest air that I am going to experience without getting into some serious wilderness, but right now I need to maintain a certain amount of connection with society to be able to communicate with it.

I am torn between the pros & cons of two shelters; the mobile home that I have been living in for the last two & a half years & a yurt that I have since completed. The former has the mains electricity that powers the tools that I am currently using to communicate with the World. It is however very boxy, metal skinned & poorly insulated, making it cold in the Winter & hot in the Summer; even with all windows & roof vents open.

As it is only a temporary dwelling in a planning sense, wrapping it in a wooden skin & insulation is not currently a viable alternative. The yurt is circular, very beautiful, has a woodburner & is much more the kind of home I feel comfortable in, but is unable to accommodate those currently important tools. I have erected the yurt over the Summer months so that I & others can use it & a lot of people have already enjoyed its welcoming space.

My garden provides food for my body & my senses & an abundance of wildlife now visits it to feed & make their homes themselves. It is also an opportunity for me to get gentle exercise, sunshine & fresh air & to earth myself (my mobile home is off the ground). I compost my food waste for my garden in zone 1 & use some of my urine to activate the heap & as a nitrogen rich feed for my plants. The treebogs further away in zone 2 deal with the rest of my bodily wastes.

Zone 2 is also where I interact on a communal level. I live here with two other people, both of whom have their dwellings less than a hundred yards away. In a town this would be quite a long way for a neighbour to be, but here we all have a shared interest in caring for the land & we work cooperatively & permaculturally towards that end. I am also part of various wider communities of people connected by common aims & Permaculture is the one that I have been most recently actively engaged in.

## Food

This section deals with the choices I make about my food. While I am open to the idea that we may be able in time to adapt ourselves to feed from some other energy source (plants are only concentrated 'solid' sunshine after all, as are we), at present my body still appears to need to eat. Therefore I have to make choices about what food growing practices that I want to support. The safest, freshest & most local food will always come from my own garden where I am using Permaculture design & organic practices. I find it inherently satisfying to be able to go out & gather food from around my home for a meal for myself.

What I cannot produce myself I need to purchase & this is where I meet my dilemmas. Obviously there are criteria which I can use to make my choices & top marks go to locally grown & organic foods & I also have a high preference for foods that I can eat raw (I wrote a booklet about this called 'The Next Step'), especially fruits because of their excellent nutritional content. It is where the criteria overlap that I have to choose; am I better off buying a non-organic locally grown apple or an organic orange, or perhaps a potato from my garden that I will need to cook or organic salads shipped from somewhere else? In practice I tend to choose a bit of everything & until I get more clarity around this issue I'm sure it will continue to be this same way.

I also buy long shelf-life foods wholesale to save on packaging & cost; these tend to be primarily dried fruits & nuts & seeds. When I go shopping I always take cloth bags or panniers or a rucksack to bring my food home; I have long since stopped using plastic carrier bags. I also no longer buy anything in a can or a Tetrapak because I cannot justify the negative environmental impact of using these food preservation methods.

So in general my diet consists of mainly raw food; primarily fruit with salads & some vegetables. For the last six years I have also enjoyed arranging the leaves & flowers that I gather from my garden into 'salad art'. This nourishes me on two levels, with beauty & nutrition (& it appears that it is becoming part of my poly-income too, as I have recently sold three pictures of them!).

I also eat a little cooked food, steamed vegetables (often home grown) or sometimes bread or a vegetable pasty perhaps. The latter I buy & I assume that they are baked in large ovens as part of a big batch, which I sense may be more energy efficient than if I cooked them at home. I don't think that I have ever used the oven in my mobile home!

## Energy

The choices that I make around energy are also very important & can have a significant impact on my environment. Firstly, as Bill Mollison states in the Permaculture Designer's Manual; "It is easier to conserve energy than to generate it", therefore my primary aim is to do just this. I have become very aware of energy & always question what I am using; whether it be lighting, heating or power for my 'communication tools'.

The two most sustainable sources of energy that I am currently able to harness are my own body heat & the output from a solar panel that I now have. In the winter I will always put on extra clothes or a thicker duvet on my bed before turning up the heat. The solar panel gives me enough stored electricity to power lighting & this is used in the yurt during the Summer & in the mobile home during the Winter.

I now buy my electricity from Unite; a company that generates all its power using sustainable sources, such as wind & wave energy. This improves my energy accounting & gives support to a company that while we are still geared up to a national grid system, I would like to see being successful.

Of course, with a wood burner I also have the opportunity to make the most of 'waste' wood. By this I mean wood that even I can't use to make something & that is best used to provide heat in an efficient manner. I have acquired quite a lot of tree prunings from my gardening work, when the houses have had work done on mature trees & diseased limbs have been removed. I can see that these are a valuable resource & make the most of them; of course the wood ash then becomes a valuable input to my garden.

## Resources

As far as clothing goes, most of what I wear I have been given as presents. When I buy clothing I try to find something I like secondhand & I very rarely resort to buying new. What I have is very practical & hard wearing & I wear them until they fall apart, at which point they become used as rags. Most that applies to clothing in this section, could equally be applied to many other physical resources that I might discover a need for.

I have a habit of always reusing what I can & not refusing items that I might be able to make some use of somewhere. I only buy new what I can't obtain in any other way. With all such purchases, I weigh up the benefits against the production costs & aim to get the most beneficial outputs from them that I can.

## Travel

I have discovered that I need to travel less & less, the more that I design my life sustainably. During the Summer in particular, when I have plenty of food growing in my garden, I have got down to shopping once a week. This I could do on my bicycle, but I have to admit that I often use the van instead. I still haven't managed to arrange my life to be injury-free & a back injury or neck pain becomes an excuse not to cycle.

When I do go by bike I have a good set of panniers & for bigger loads I have a bike trailer too. The public transport is very sparse in Dorset. The buses don't come near my home & the nearest train station is over ten miles away. Taxis are the main method that locals without cars seem to get around, though I can't see the logic in them driving twice the distance (from town & back to both pick me up & to take me home) than I would in my own vehicle.

When I use my van I aim to make journeys as fuel efficient as possible & to do this I use three main strategies. I have an Ecoflow magnet fitted onto my van's fuel line & this definitely seems to do what it claims to as my fuel consumption for a fairly big van is over 50 m.p.g.

I also use carbon-neutral fuel, making the most of biodiesel or it's vegetable oil source directly. On journeys I also try to travel-share & this can apply to a trip into town for shopping or a long distance trip to a Permaculture event. At one time I drove like most other people; quite quickly & accelerating & braking quite hard. These days though I drive very gently & this no doubt adds to the m.p.g. that I get from the fuel that I use.

# Implementation

## Planning a schedule

### Implementation:

This is a list of the changes that I have made in my life using the same headings & where I am with them all today.

**Life:** I honour life in all its forms & will not deliberately kill any creature. I maintain a steady negotiation with the plants in my garden & only remove those that are getting out of balance within the overall community. I prefer to eat fruit, leaves, flowers & seeds than kill a plant to eat it, but I still occasionally do eat foods that necessitate this.



**Sunlight:** Since being at school I have rolled up my sleeves at every opportunity & this has allowed me to directly receive enough sunlight upon my skin to assimilate enough vitamin D it seems. These days I also utilise the top of my feet, which is quite a large surface area if you look at someone from directly above (the general direction of the sun). I avoid too much in the Summer & get what I can during the Winter in order to try & maintain an overall balance.



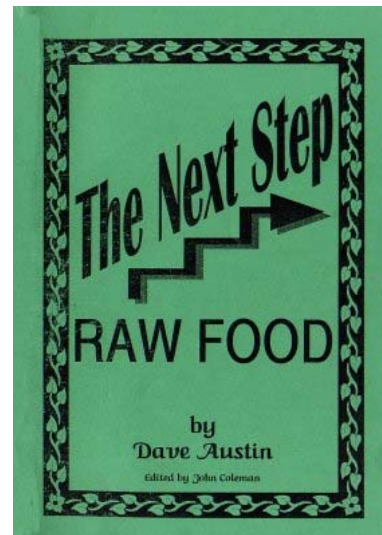
Polluted skies are something I do my best to avoid because of their filtering effect. I also read once that the glass that is usually used in windows filters out some important frequencies from the light, so being out of doors is particularly important. This is another benefit that I get from gardening.

**Water:** I have at one time owned a water distiller, but I sold it when I went to Eire & then started drinking water from a wellspring; the best source of it according to Viktor Schaubergger. Today I use several strategies; I collect the rain water from my roof in a butt that I regularly scrub out & drink this all the time it is fairly fresh. I store it in bottles under my sink (in the dark) & in a water egg, based upon an idea of Viktor Schaubergger's. I also have an Amethyst 'vase' which I use to energise my drinking water. Despite the fears that would be inevitably expressed by the average paranoid, bleach-using tap water drinker, I have never suffered any ill effects from drinking rain water this way. I only resort to tap water when I have no other option & then I leave it to stand so that the chlorine can evaporate.

**Air:** This always feels freshest to me in the countryside, which I why I chose to live & spend most of my time here. I also once read that when travelling in a vehicle you inhale three times the dose of toxic exhaust gases than if you cycle along the same road, because of the way the vehicle interior traps it around you. Another good reason to travel as little as possible.

**Food:** Adopted a vegetarian diet (1983). Adopted a vegan diet (1984). Started growing my own food, organically (1986). First came across permaculture & started using ideas in my food growing (1987). Organised a 'shop' at the Animal Rescue Centre, buying in wholefoods from a cooperatively run wholesaler in Bristol (1988-90). Adopted a raw diet for personal health (1995). Started buying organic food whenever I could get it - found small organic fruit & veg wholesaler (1995). Researched the ethics of the raw food diet & wrote a booklet 'The Next Step', incorporating Permaculture principles (1997).

Started eating & learning about a great diversity of salad leaves & flowers (wild & cultivated) & teaching visitors to the land where I was living in Eire about them all too. While there I ate only home-grown food & decided that a locally grown, part-cooked diet (which I had adopted) was better than an imported uncooked one (1997). Since then I have found some middle ground & currently eat an almost 100% organic diet; mainly raw, & locally grown (including my own garden) with some imported fruit.



**Exercise:** Started running & cycling at school (late 1970s). Ran for local athletics club (1978-82) & then at University (1982-5). Afterwards did a few runs for charity, culminating in a partly successful attempt at running the Pennine Way in seven days (1994). This caused the worst overuse knee injury that I ever sustained & effectively ended my running. After that I did more gentle exercise; gardening, walking, leisure cycling etc & this was far more joyful & less stressful. Started Aikido which provides me with a good balance of speed, stamina, flexibility, coordination, movement & stillness (2001).



**Shelter:** I have lived in stone & brick buildings from time to time since leaving my parents home. In between I have lived in a selection of lower impact dwellings, some of which were more comfortable than others! Lived in a mobile home for three years (1986-8). Lived in a large tent in a field for a whole Summer until it became too cold (1995). Bought a small caravan & lived in it over a winter (1995-6). Lived in a shed for over six months during the Summer (2000). Moved into another mobile home; where I now live (2000). Stitched cover for a yurt; a low impact dwelling I had already bought the frame for (2002).

**Community:** Lived in Halls of residence at University (1982-5). Lived at an Animal Rescue Centre for five years (approx 10 people on average) (1986-90). Lived as part of two small 'raw food' houses for a year & a half (1996-7). Lived at a barefoot land-based permaculture project in S.W. Eire for a year (1997-8). Now living on a Permaculture farm community of three (2000-3).

**Clothing:** I have always preferred practical clothes that enable me to be active & worn them to the point that they fall apart. I have always been happy to accept passed on clothing (just so long as it is practical!). Became full-time barefoot to walk lightly on the Earth & feel Her communication better (1997). Wore only local materials as clothing in Eire (linen, wool - you can collect it off the Gorse!) (1997-8). I never throw clothes away, they eventually become rags & then compost. I would like to be able to wear more organic fibres, but I still have a large enough collection of clothing to not need any more for a while yet.

**Travel:** I have cycled, walked & run a lot since childhood for leisure, exercise & travelling, I used a cycle exclusively as transport until my early twenties & at times since. I started planning all my journeys to maximise their yields & to drive more gently (1998). Bought an Ecoflow device for my van to increase the efficiency with which fuel is burnt & hence increase m.p.g. (2000). Bought a recumbent bicycle (2001). Started experimenting with vegetable oil as an alternative carbon-neutral fuel for my van, when I do use it for journeys (2002).



**Energy:** Used a dynamo for lighting on my bicycle (from teenage years). Started using rechargeable batteries where I needed them (mid 1980s). Adopted a raw diet for personal health & a big reduction in fuel use - no cooking! (1995). Started evaluating yields of all energy (electricity etc) consuming activities against the 'cost' of the energy (1998). Started using LEDs for some lighting & bought a wind-up torch (2000). Bought a solar panel for the yurt, but installed it temporarily in my mobile home for lighting until my yurt was finished (2001). Switched to using Unite 'green' electricity (all of Paddox Farm) (2002).



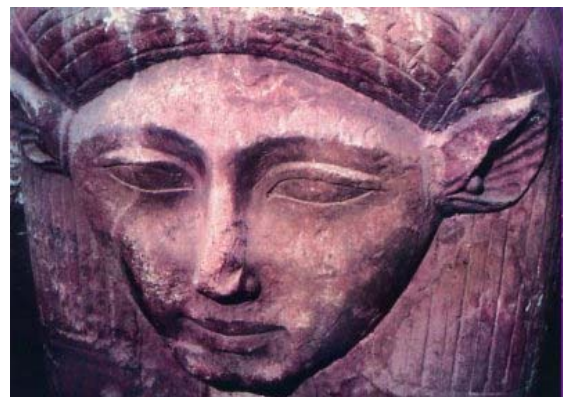
**Resources:** I have been making things from cast off materials ever since I was a child. Stopped using disposable carrier bags & took my own cycle panniers, rucksack or cloth bags shopping instead (early 1980s). Started composting food waste when I started gardening (1987). Started recycling Animal Rescue Centre waste (excess donated newspapers to recycling plant, cans etc) (late 1980s). Realised that the outputs generated by the use of resources can more than offset their costs & began using them to promote positive change (early 1990s). Being in a complete cycle with the land I was living upon in Eire (all food came from the land & all our human wastes were returned to the land), I realised that I had never felt more at home anywhere in my life (1997-8). Now I see resources as tools to help me to play my part in the movement for change. If a resource is available to me to use, then I decide whether or not it justifies its production by what I can do with it. Technology is not evil, it is simply neutral. What we choose to do with resources is what matters. I feel that the technology that I now have, enables me to make a positive impact upon the World, that far outweighs its environmental cost. The other main factor that I use to choose is the reusability of a resource as a valuable input somewhere else, food of course is a fine example of this!



**Creativity:** I've always liked to make things, but some of those things that I created early on in my life didn't have any particularly sustainable element to them. Later on I wrote regularly for 'Vegan Views' & F.R.E.S.H. magazine & wrote a booklet; 'The Next Step', about raw food ethics (1990s). Began creating beautiful & often geometric patterns with my salad leaves & flowers - multiple yields of beauty, taste & maybe even income (1997). Realised that I needed to express my life influences in song as it is such a powerful medium for communication (2000) & to help myself & others do the same, I bought recording equipment (2002).

**Right livelihood:** Worked as a full-time volunteer for an Animal Rescue charity (1986-90). Worked for the N.A.V.S. as a Campaigns officer (1991-96). Worked as a volunteer for F.R.E.S.H. for over a year (1996-7). Lived entirely off the land where I was in Eire for a year (1997-8). Became self-employed as an organic gardener / permaculture designer (2000). Gave up part-time gardening job as too many un-permaculture practices involved (i.e. weeding gravel drive of pioneer plants!) (2002). Re-launched self-employment (Aranya Gardens) as more permaculture based (2003). Decided to develop a poly-income to follow principle of 'multiple supply' & to work mostly from home - created Paddock Farm website as part of this process (2003).

**Relationships:** I have always sought to learn from relationships that I have been in & today I am clearer than ever about how I need to engage in them. Whoever I am relating to & at whatever level of intimacy, I need to be clear & honest in my communication; I have learned that anything else will only lead to problems. Although I am still aware of the parts of me that still react to being needed, I aim to relate on a level that goes beyond 'old inherited patterns'. Not all my relationships are with humans of course; I have a close relationship with all the creatures & plants in my garden.



I have at times noticed how I haven't been honouring the elements that give me life, such as water for instance. These are important to me & I aim not to take them for granted any more than I should with any human that I have a connection with. Of the more ethereal beings that have come into my life; whether they exist or not, they provide a way for me to hear messages that make me think about important issues. I really value them having come into my life & I see them, whether they are just icons or not, as friends. The Hathors (above) are said to be Masters of Love & Sound & when I look at this representation of one on an ancient Egyptian pillar, I really feel a strong connection which cannot really be put into words. Whatever relationships I have, I aim to come to them with love & integrity.

**Synchronicities:** I consistently look out for these now as guideposts along my journey. I also use a saying that I once read in a book "**Follow your excitement**"; it said that its purpose was to guide me & my experience has given me no reason to disagree with that six years on. Four perfect examples of this are as follows:

I was travelling into town because I needed to get some photocopying done & I knew where the shop was that I wanted to go because it was the cheapest. As I drove into town I passed a rare parking space outside the Post Office, but ignored it as I was heading around the corner. I got there, parked up & walked over to the shop only to find that it was closed.... Oh well, I thought, the library is just up the road. Only that was closed too.... where did I end up getting my copies done? At the Post Office of course. I was being offered just what I needed, but my head thought that it knew better!

When I was living in Eire I came back to England to collect from Steve Charter the van that I had given him & that he no longer wanted. I travelled with him to Plants for a Future & filled the van with plants to take back with me. I then collected a few sacks of apples from the house I had been living at before & drove back. I went over on the ferry & a few miles after driving off the ferry on the other side, steam came gushing out from under the bonnet. I was delayed for about an hour, but got back on my way otherwise OK. As I was driving out of a town about forty miles from my home I pulled over to pick up a hitch-hiker with a musical instrument case. He looked familiar...

I opened the back doors of the van & he made a comment about all the apples. At that point I remembered where I knew him from; a raw fooders gathering the previous Spring in Glastonbury! He had travelled over to Eire on a whim & having checked out the musicians haunts in Dingle felt that it wasn't why he was there. I took him back home to stay overnight & he spent a month with us, eventually moving to another place nearby. He had only just arrived at that place when I picked him up & the universe had to hold me up it seems to enable us to make the connection. The reason for the hold up? All I remember was that it was simply to do with a caterpillar having made their cocoon somewhere under the bonnet. Nature can be so devastatingly subtle sometimes!



When I went to the interview for the Manor house gardening job, I had two signs that I took to mean that I was in the right place. Firstly, right where I parked my van was a huge clump of *Montia sibirica*, my favourite plant from my garden in Eire & one that I had been trying to get for my new

garden ever since. The previous gardener said that he had never seen it there before! As well as this, there was a stone arch on one of the lawns. I had just been introduced to Andy Goldsworthy's beautiful nature art & he is rather fond of making arches out of stones & the like. It turned out to have been an obelisk threaded onto a pillar which just fell over one day.... However it happened it was good enough for me.

The Spring before I moved to my present home I was living in the shed at Holmbush. One day I had to take my van into Bridport to leave it for some work to be done on the engine & cycle home again. It was early Spring & I had forgotten my gloves. I knew that my hands were going to get frozen if I cycled home without any, so I did a tour of Bridport's charity shops. However no gloves were to be found, so I set out on my return journey in cold drizzle. A few miles down the road I had to get off & push my bike up a steep hill & nearing the top I caught the sight of something bright red out of the corner of my eye. I turned & there on the grass verge in the middle of nowhere were two fleece-lined bright red nylon mittens. They were rather wet from being there for a while, but I took them as the gift that I needed from the universe & I was able to cycle the rest of the way home with warm, if damp, hands. Although I didn't know it at the time, where I now live is only about half a mile away from that spot & that day I cycled right past my current home.

**Zone 000:** All that I do essentially stems from here. My most creative time is immediately after I wake up in the morning, while I'm still half in a hypnogogic state. This is where I do most of my problem solving & dream analysis which helps me in my day to day life. I have explored my consciousness & discovered new perceptions of the World through techniques such as staying awake & eating a high quality raw diet.

It has opened up my ability to feel the energy flows in my own body which can become enhanced by practising Aikido, visiting churches or pagan sites or just walking along the Earth's energy lines. I have no doubt that these things exist as I can consistently feel them now. I also work, or maybe that should be play with crystals & they too amplify my own energy, I even have a simple square shaped scarf with a rainbow coloured spiral & a lot of strange symbols upon it that behaves just like an energy site. If I lay it down anywhere & stand upon it, I feel an incredible rush of energy, just as if I was under the tower of a church or cathedral for instance. I don't know how it works, but I can feel that it does & it's very real to my perception, which stems of course from my consciousness.



Some may say it must be my imagination, but as Morpheus reminds us in the film 'The Matrix' (something along the lines of):

"If all that we think we perceive to be real amounts to just a series of electrical impulses in our brains, then how can we say what is real?".

Don't ask me... I'm still trying to figure it out!

**Designing:** 72 hour Full Design Course! (1996). Did my first full land-based design by myself & began it's implementation (1998). I have designed & created a permaculture garden everywhere I have lived since & done a few non-land based designs too. It is mostly here in this portfolio..... so read on!

### Maintenance, Evaluation & Tweaking:

The most important thing for me to remember here is that everything is up for constant re-evaluation. The moment that I decide that I know something for certain I am narrowing my perceptions, so I keep coming back around to things & seeing if they still stand up as well as they did before. This is a design that is never finished & will be constantly evolving. As long as I remember that I am always doing the best that I can with what I know, then I can honour my mistakes & know that they have been valuable lessons for me on my life path.

# Design Review

As this is an ongoing design process, this section covers not only the main areas of my life that I have been through, but also what I am dealing with now. I could make this a very long list, so I am going to reduce it down to what is still rather a large selection in each category.

## What went well

**Becoming a vegan:** Once I read why people made the choice to become vegan I found it easy to make the dietary change. Just the strength of my moral convictions alone was enough to stop me 'cheating' once I had made the change. It could be said that it wasn't so easy as I had been involved in the University vegetarian society for a year, which was run by a few vegans & they never took the time to tell me why they were! In the end I had to find out from a book & I vowed to be a more effective communicator than they had managed to be. These days; twenty years on, the very idea of taking a life so repulses me that I am pretty sure now that this is going to be a lifetime thing.

**Growing my own food:** Despite there being the inevitable challenges that come when learning anything, I was surprised at how easy it was to grow my own food. The more I grew, the easier it became & finding out about Permaculture helped me even more. I have got so much out of doing this; healthy food, exercise, fresh air, sunshine, joy, satisfaction & a real feeling of self-reliance.

**Community:** After a wobbly start in the first Hall of residence that I lived in at University, I got right into communal living the second time around. From there I moved to the Animal Rescue Centre where I was part of a mainly vegan community of ten or so people & although that had its conflicts, I was rarely involved in them. In fact I tended to be the one doing the diplomacy & keeping it all together! I have always enjoyed communal living, just as long as I have my own space to retreat to. Even when necessity brought us together to share fires & candles through the Winter when I lived in Eire, I didn't feel crowded. How I am living at the moment feels ideal; sharing responsibility for the land, while each of us having individually situated dwellings to live in.

**Permaculture:** Permaculture sought me out & I was in the right place twice. Firstly a woman named Grainne moved to the Animal Rescue Centre & she loaned me some books to read. Later I was drawn to live in a raw fooders' house near Exeter, where the main founders had originally met up on a Design course. This was the place that I did my own 72 hour permaculture design course & where this whole exciting process really started to take off for me.

**Barefooting:** Despite a lot of people telling me how I was going to hurt my feet etc. etc. shedding my shoes was really pretty straightforward. Of course, my feet took a few weeks to really harden up, but all in all it was really easy & my feet felt so much better for it. Imagine what it would be like to have been wearing gloves your whole life & then to take them off....

**Dreamwork:** I have long had fascinating dreams & so I decided to look a bit more into them. I got a few books & started keeping a dream diary, but I found that as soon as I picked up that pen beside my bed the dream details just melted away. Then I decided to buy a dictaphone & this became the key for me. Instead of having to wake up properly, I could roll over & mumble into the dictaphone & in the morning I had reams of dreams.... The whole process was so successful that at one point I was spending three hours a day transcribing & interpreting them! I had however noticed commonly repeating themes & so these days I only go to those lengths if I have some deep issues that I wish to get to the bottom of.

**Possessions:** When I went to Eire I chose to give all my possessions away. Letting go of them turned out to be much easier than I had anticipated & while I lived in Eire I really didn't miss them. I had music in my head & a garden to keep me entertained & that was plenty.

Actually getting rid of my possessions was however not quite so easy. I was amazed at how difficult people found it to simply be given something for free & although plenty of my things did find new homes, in the end a lot of them ended up in my parents loft.

**Manifestation:** Since really beginning to explore zone 000 I have become aware of how I manifest things in my life to help me to learn. I'm sure that I am getting better & better at this, or maybe I am just noticing more often when I am doing it. Either way it's been a very helpful process for understanding why certain things have happened to me in my life & how valuable even the apparently 'bad' times have been.

**Aikido:** Finding Aikido, or rather it finding me was another of those lovely synchronicities. I moved to my current home because of it's potential rather than its particular location. Soon afterwards I went looking for a local Aikido club, having been pointed in the general direction of the martial art by the usual hints from the universe. Not only did I find one, but it also turned out to be the Ki style that I wanted to do. All the other clubs in the school are based in big towns or cities, Bridport in the single exception.

## What was challenging

**Right livelihoods:** Ever since I left University with a degree that qualified me to do a lot of jobs that I had developed moral objections to, I have found it challenging finding right livelihoods for myself. I was happy working in Animal Rescue, but it didn't pay me any money. The job I had at N.A.V.S. was satisfying in some ways, but involved an awful lot of driving. Since then I have found plenty of situations that gave me 'job satisfaction' without paying me a wage.

Most recently, self employment as a gardener has given me some satisfaction & all the money I need, but on another level I knew that I could do much more. I am currently trying to pull together a poly-income based around ethical website design, yurt rental, selling my salad art pictures, recording music for ethical musicians, telephone tutoring for the Diploma WorkNet & Permaculture designing & teaching. It sounds like a lot, but as yet most of them haven't got off the ground & I'm living happily ethically on pennies!



**Relationships:** ...And who wouldn't have this one filed under 'challenging'? It's what we are here for; to learn to relate to everything we meet in our World. That said, I've learned a lot & have a pile of 'done differentlies' to show for it. A big thankyou to all those that have shared their learning process with mine & I just wish it could have been easier at times...

**Fitness:** Having been a long distance runner at school I got used to being fit & active. Over the years I picked up overuse injuries in my legs & back in particular & ultimately had to give up running. These days, despite keeping very active I pick up injuries apparently very easily & I am starting to feel my body struggle to do what it once found so easy. I want to stay fit, but it is becoming a real tightrope walk. Aikido seems to be providing me with most of what I am looking for, but I still pick up injuries from rolling badly out of a throw for instance & then that stops me exercising again. It has been a long & challenging road.

**Sourcing organic food:** This is not so much a problem these days, although there are still plenty of things that I would like to see available organically. To begin with though, especially as I was living in the North East of England, it was very difficult to find organic fruit & vegetables. How can we choose to buy what is not available in the shops?

**Raw food:** Unlike becoming vegan, a choice that was based upon moral principles & that I found easy, switching over to a raw food diet proved to be rather more difficult. The primary argument for eating raw foods given in most of the textbooks on the subject is health. In fact there didn't seem to be any books at all upon the ethics of following a raw diet. It was for this reason & as much to try & convince myself, that I set about researching & writing a booklet called 'The Next Step'. Despite this, to this day I still include a proportion of cooked foods in my diet, but as I don't feel that I live in an ideal climate for growing a completely raw & nutritionally complete diet, it feels like a good compromise for now.

**This climate:** This relates partly to wanting to eat a completely raw diet, one that contains foods that I cannot grow in this climate. Having been to Spain however, during the Winter months, I can tell that if it was hot enough to grow those fruits it would be too hot for me.

Then again Winter can be cold & although I love the seasonal changes, I don't like to be tied to having to find some way to heat my home at this time of the year. There's no easy answer, but it still remains challenging.

**Writing:** I seemed to be able to write a lot before I went to live in Eire, but after that just putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) didn't seem to be enough to convey what I had to say. A lot never got written or was abandoned part way through. Now I have discovered that I need to work through song & that has got me started again. Writing up this Portfolio has proved to be the one big exception to my writer's block. Then again, I hadn't worked out how to present a singing Portfolio... now there's an idea that somebody may like to take up!

**Cycling:** I grew up loving to cycle, but as I have got older & picked up more injuries along the way it has felt like harder work. Of course, when you stop cycling, getting back on again & regaining some fitness is that much harder. It's a situation that hasn't been helped by the fact that I went over the handlebars last year & received a shoulder & upper back injury that stopped me from doing Aikido for four months.

**A need for tools:** Having got to the point where I was living very close to the land with virtually no possessions in Eire, it felt much harder to justify acquiring things again. I have tried to be selective about the things that I have gathered around me & ensure that they all have their purpose in my 'game plan'. I see them now as tools that have been given to me by the Earth to do my job & that job is to help to communicate her needs before it becomes too late.

**Van conversion:** I found out about running diesel vehicles upon waste vegetable oils & I wanted to know more. I bought the book 'From the fryer to the fuel tank' & got very excited about the process. I then discovered how difficult it was to find the components that they were listing as they were providing American manufacturers details.

Whilst I know how to convert my van in practice I have yet to find the components in the UK to do it with. I'd be pleased to hear from anybody out there who has actually managed to do this.

**Yurt:** Paul King's 'The Complete Yurt Handbook' was a very informative read & well worth buying, but I did find that at times it lacked some detail that I really needed. Perhaps the worse thing about the job was that the canvas was impregnated with a fire retardant. I found that the pounding of the needle on the canvas brought up lots & lots of white powder. This got everywhere; in my hair, my clothes & worst of all my lungs. Had it not been so bad I may have enjoyed the process much more.

## What I would do differently

There are plenty of things that I could have done differently & made my life more 'comfortable' but then again, if it hadn't all happened the way it did, then I wouldn't be the person I am today.... Nevertheless there are a few lessons that I could have learned quicker:

**Marriage:** Yes, I was married for a while & it seemed like a good idea at the time. It was fairly early on in my life & there were a lot of issues that I still needed to address back then. I learned a lot, but perhaps I could have not taken so long about it....

**Diet:** This is a done differently that I would have needed the cooperation of my parents for.... It would have been nice to have been brought up on a vegan, maybe even raw diet, but my parents did the best they could with what they knew & ultimately it's all fine anyway now.

**Teeth:** By the time I was a teenager my teeth were pretty poor. Being built out of a typical diet at the time & with the assistance of plenty of sweets to help rot them, by the time I was old enough to realise what I was letting myself in for, it was too late. Now I have a mouth full of teeth mainly consisting of fillings & crowns. I had all the mercury removed from them a decade ago, but I still wish that they were my own teeth.

There are plenty more that I could list; some more recent like my decision to not stay & help Robert Hart, but I have reached the point of acceptance of all that has happened to me & realise that it is all for the highest good in the long run. It would help for me to remember that though, the next time I find myself in the middle of a 'crisis'!