

## A life of happy frugality may be worth pursuing

by Ralph C. Martin

I was approached by four individuals in different families who have chosen to sell their cars. In each case, they acknowledged how frightened they were about the sacrifice of not having a car on demand. This fear was mostly an issue **before** they actually sold their car. All of them told me that as time went on without car ownership they began to appreciate how free they were from payments, maintenance, insurance, licensing, parking etc. They shifted from a sense of sacrifice to one of satisfaction.

These families all live in cities, including Guelph, with public transport, bike lanes, sidewalks and walking trails. Rural folks may more practically look for other options to sustain their households.

In January, many of us resolve to eat well for our health. After the feasting of the December holiday season we tend to focus on what we will go without and thus, sacrifice. Sacrifice is not to be understated nor over emphasized. Sometimes sacrifice is just sensible.

A few weeks of eating more fruits and vegetables balanced with protein, vitamins, minerals and calories and eating less food with fat, salt and sugar can result in feeling satisfied. To continue healthy habits it may be helpful to consider what makes our bodies feel good most of the time.

Michael Pollan's book [In Defense of Food](#) has a simple motto of only seven words, "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants." When I first read this motto I wondered what else he expected us to eat, other than food. Right on cue, the first part of the book distinguishes real food (on outside walls of supermarkets) from quasi food (packaged and processed in middle aisles).

Pollan's advice to not eat too much is standard and yet in North America, people on average consume over 3700 calories per day when about 2300 are needed. Two-thirds of health-care costs can now be attributed to chronic diseases associated with unhealthy eating according to a report by the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute.

It's not only the quantity but the quality of our food which contributes to chronic diseases. Calories should be balanced with protein, vitamins and minerals and the latter

two are readily available from fruits and vegetables. Even in January, people in Guelph can buy plenty of apples, carrots, potatoes, parsnips, cabbages, kale and more from Ontario sources.

There are numerous words and phrases associated with eating well such as fellowship, enough for all, not wasting, nutrition, wholeness, health, vigour, freshness, savouring, local culture and favourite recipes. Eating well can be enjoyable and satisfying.

Today, food has become entertainment and like other forms of entertainment we have become accustomed to instant gratification. Planning for a local and healthy seasonal arc of sustenance, preserving local produce and preparing nutritious meals are at odds with immediate satiation. So many rich foods with excess salt, fat and sugar provide temporary pleasure. It is on this basis that they appeal and are advertised.

Nevertheless, more people are drawn to planning, preserving and preparing healthy diets. The challenge, or perhaps the trick, is to use our human faculties to be more aware of the satisfaction of feeling energetic more permanently.

Pierre Dansereau, a well known biologist and ecologist from Quebec, passed away last fall, one month shy of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. His mantra was to be happily frugal (austerite joyeuse). The phrase is jarring. Be happy with frugality? This is a step beyond satisfaction. I'm quite sure he was not advocating poverty but rather wanted us to live our lives within the context of choosing how we will derive an adequate living without irreparable harm to Earth's self-regulating and resilient biological systems. To do that individually and collectively is to have just reason to be happy.

Part of evolved human consciousness, especially within our Canadian social contract, is to aspire for everyone to always have enough. In Nova Scotia, a fully aware, mature couple taught a wonderful lesson about having enough. Allen and Violet Large donated most of their unexpected \$11.2-million lottery winnings to family and local charities. Allen said "we didn't need this big of an amount" and Violet noted "there's somebody worse off than I am." They were happily frugal with their modest home, older car and network of friends and family.

Until Violet died of cancer a short time later, she affirmed she was thankful and satisfied with their decision. With an attitude of gratitude, it is more apparent when we

have enough. Then we can make appropriate sacrifices, be satisfied and sustain our lives with happy frugality.

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