

Brigit Strawbridge disconnects from the National Grid once a week and reconnects with nature – the riches are immense!

Off-Grid Sundays

Has anyone else noticed how busy life has become? It's like we're riding some kind of giant merry-go-round and the faster we go the more disconnected we become; from nature, from each other and from ourselves. In fact, for many of us, the merry-go-round has actually become our main point of reference.

Towards the end of 2010 I spent a weekend with some lovely friends of mine in Devon. On the Sunday they took me out in their car for a 'magical mystery tour' around the beautiful North Devon coast. They mentioned that it was most unusual for them to be driving because, as part of their efforts to reduce their carbon emissions they had made a decision not to use their car on Sundays. This got me thinking; wouldn't it be great if I could rely less on my own car, and also perhaps on my mobile phone, gas, electricity, money, laptop etc? Maybe I could do something similar on Sundays. Something that combined my yearning to jump off the merry-go-round with making further reductions in my use of Mother Earth's precious resources...

slowly, slowly...

I'd always tried to live as ethical and sustainable a life as possible, but I do still rely very much on the National Grid; if it collapsed tomorrow I'd be left up the creek without a paddle. I wish I was brave enough to jump straight into the unknown and go completely off-grid, but I'm not.

So, back in January 2011 I decided I'd begin journeying towards a slower and more reconnected life by going 'off-grid' on Sundays.

I came up with a basic list of precepts that suited my own circumstances. For starters I would turn off the electricity and gas; I'm fortunate enough to have a small wood burner so could use that for heat, to cook food and to boil water. I would do without my car, mobile phone and money, and living on the Malvern Hills where there is a plentiful supply of fresh spring water that I already collect every week in bottles to drink. I would try to manage without using mains water for one day a week. Armed with a plentiful supply of candles, logs and wind-up torch and radio, I set a date for my first grid-free Sunday. That was over a year ago and I can't believe the difference it has made to my life.

My first few Sundays were dominated by the challenges of heating my space, food and water; it was especially difficult coming downstairs on a cold winter morning. I'd have to wait till I'd got my burner going before I could get warm or have hot water for a cup of tea and a wash. However, I soon learned how to multi task my wood burner (which I'd previously only used to supplement my gas central heating). Now I can't believe I ever boiled an electric kettle or used my gas oven whilst I had a perfectly good source of heat burning away in the next room; lack of 'joined-up' thinking, I suppose. I've even perfected the art of baking potatoes inside my burner without them looking and tasting like charcoal!

"My preferred way is to dip my toes in shallow water first and do things gradually"

My preferred way is to dip my toes in shallow water first and do things gradually. This way I'm more likely to make some lasting changes.

the know-how

On a practical level, forcing myself to be grid/car/money free on Sundays has had a huge knock-on effect for the rest of the week. It has given me the confidence and the know-how to further reduce my dependence on mains gas and electricity; which in

turn has resulted in a huge reduction in my utility bills. It has also upped my game when it comes to foraging and growing my own food.

But, it's not just on a practical level that my life has changed...

I now read more and have picked up my guitar again for the first time in years. Having remembered how much I used to enjoy arts and crafts, I have taken up knitting and photography and spend many happy hours collecting objects I've found, and turning them into gifts for my friends and family.

On a deeper level, spending 24 hours without knowing what o'clock it is, has reconnected me to nature's cycles of day and night. Sitting without the usual stimulus of electrical appliances, and having my mobile phone and computer switched off, has taught me to still my buzzing mind. And walking for hours in the woods and on the hills has opened up a whole new world of sounds, smells and sights.

recharging my battery

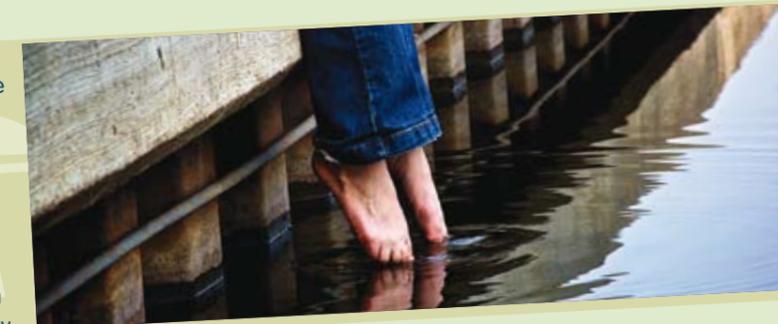
By the time Monday arrives I feel calm, clear headed and fully recharged rather than just 'topped up' - if that makes sense? I also feel more at peace, have regained my perspective and am less likely to be flustered by the stresses and worries of everyday

modern life. I feel completely recharged and ready to take on the world. It really is a great way to start the week.

Not everyone will have the inclination, circumstances or ability to go completely off-grid on Sundays. If you like the idea but are unable to switch everything off, why not just try doing without your computer, mobile, car and/or cash? Doing without any one, or all of these things, will give you a wonderful feeling of liberation and empowerment. It's so easy... just give it a go!

I've got a long way to go, but my new point of reference is 'Nature' and it feels pretty good!

Read more on Brigit's blog - www.beestrawbridge.blogspot.com



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