

## Chapter Seven Concerning Work & Play



he sun had already begun to slip behind the Western range when Lirit's stirrings awoke the sleepers. The air was quite warm, and full nightfall still several hours away, so Bend suggested a walk up to the nearby hot springs, located closer to the base of the mountains. Pen acknowledged feeling a bit grubby, and still stiff from her "trip" down the river and the ride to their campsite. So the four began to follow a narrow path leading up the alluvial fan to a grove about a kilometer away.

Pen returned to her remarks about the general health and well-being that seemed so apparent among the population at Cottonwood. "As I mentioned before, there don't even seem to be any people who might be called 'unattractive'; everyone seems rosy-cheeked and healthy, but nobody's either fat or rail-thin. Do people have to diet and exercise to maintain their slim, girlish figures?"

"*Meden agan*" laughed Theo; "Nothing to excess. It's not only a philosophical principle, but it also describes the way we live physically. Nobody eats too much, although the occasional feasting often leads to a few extra helpings; and there's probably no other element more important to health than regular, purposeful exercise. Nobody needs to run off to a health club to do artificial exercise because everyone works, and often that work involves strenuous movements of one kind or another: lifting, hauling, pulling, walking long distances, hoeing, reaping, winnowing, stomping, all that. While we do have physical practices that resemble exercise—such as Yoga or Tai Chi, these have more to do with philosophy than with exercise. And when we eat, we take our time. Few meals take less than an hour or so, because everyone's busy

discussing what needs to be done or what's being learned or read, so digestion happens naturally. Nobody would ever think of eating hurriedly because eating-and-running would offend the people who spend the time preparing food. Even when we eat alone or in smaller groups in our homes, we take our time. Some people who aren't interested in cooking for large numbers still like to cook occasionally, and so the eating experiences around here tend to be both rich and varied. Breakfasts are usually simple and eaten singly or in small groups. But the food is always thoughtfully prepared, and gratefully enjoyed. Breakfast itself provides a chance to greet the day, make plans, discuss what needs to be done, reflect on the previous day's activities, or just take time to awaken."

Bend added, "This is part of the aspect of time we were discussing earlier. Food is never fast. There's no need to speed up the necessary parts of life, like eating and drinking and working, because we don't 'spend' time as a commodity. It's not that we don't ever sit around and do nothing—although 'doing nothing' usually involves sitting somewhere thinking, reading, planning, or otherwise occupying oneself intellectually. But the concept of 'spending' and 'wasting' time is pretty alien to us now."

"But children have different requirements, don't they?" asked Pen. "What do you do, Theo, when Lirit comes up to you and says 'Daddy I'm bored?' How do you keep her entertained?"

Theo looked at her as if she had just dropped off another planet, and then realized that she had, in essence, done just that. "I'm sorry," he replied. "It's just that I don't think I've ever heard any of our children say that. 'To bore' here would be taken as 'to drill a hole into!' When life amounts to a continuous stream of relationships and discoveries, boredom doesn't occur. Surely you've noticed that Lirit is never unoccupied, or that if she's not physically doing something she's either listening to the conversation or watching the landscape, or simply sitting quietly, thinking."

Lirit, who was clearly attending to the conversation as they walked, piped in: “Sometimes I just sit and don’t think!” At that moment a lizard darted across their path, drawing her attention to it, leading her away from the adults for the next few minutes, until she caught up with them, having satisfied her curiosity.

Bend continued. “Early on in our deliberations about how to live, we realized that electronic media like television might provide enjoyment, but they also created so many problems that imagining life without them became the center of our planning. Most of those who were parents had already experienced the phenomenon of reified short attention spans that seems to have been initiated by well-meaning educators who sought to tap into children’s limited ability to focus for any length of time. Television shows for children used this small unit of time to teach kids information like letters, colors, etc. But missing from that mix was any real way to help them to extend their attention to longer, more meaningful periods. This may not have been the sole reason why psychologists began to see increases in ‘disabilities’ like ‘attention deficit disorder’ and hyperactivity, but we recognized it as a major contributing factor. When children grow up thinking that they have to be entertained at all times, whenever they’re not, they get ‘bored.’

“Here children seem to soak up everything, and process it with the help of everyone in the community—there are no professional teachers here, although we have our share of ‘gurus’ who focus on certain aspects of learning. Since we haven’t published many ‘how to’ books (except for the likes of Isaak Walton’s *Compleat Angler*, or Thoreau’s *Walden*), if someone wants to learn how to knit, for example, he or she hustles off to the local expert for a few lessons. When children want to learn something, they learn it. Our job is to live our own lives well, and to set examples—metaphors by which our children learn to live. And since we don’t gather them all together in one place, in the charge of only a few

people for most of their learning lives, they learn by being around people who do things that are intrinsically interesting: growing, harvesting, reading, creating, playing.”

“And what do you play?” asked Pen. “Sports? Games? Besides musical instruments, I mean?”

“All of the above,” laughed Bend. “In fact, baseball season is in full swing, and we may be able to see a game between the Glacier players and a group from Tinemaha.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” said Pen. “Don’t tell me you have uniforms and stadiums, too.”

“Well, no. But baseball fits in well philosophically with what we do here. It takes as long as it needs to take, it requires skill and thought, and craftsmanship is involved in the making of balls and bats—but it can be played almost anywhere. Like golf.”

“Now that sounds anomalous somehow. A rich guys’ sport in an egalitarian economy?”

Bend suppressed a snort. “We don’t have fabulous green golf courses, nor the latest high-tech equipment, but we do have golf. Remember that it was invented in Scotland, and originally played on some pretty marginal terrain. Most communities in the valley have groups who create courses and sponsor tournaments. All the clubs are wooden or made from salvaged metal; they tend to be shared among members of a particular community, although several people have invented their own ‘special’ clubs. The highly treasured balls are made by some ‘secret’ process that the inventor has only told two people about, but the rules are pretty close to the original game.

“Well,” asked Pen, “who decides what sports you get to play?”

“We all do. But there are some considerations. Because we have limited medical facilities, we don’t tend to play games with high injury rates, like American football or Rugby. But plenty of people get together for friendly soccer games, or even ice hockey in winter, if it gets cold enough to freeze the lakes. We don’t tend to be very competitive, either, which is why we generally play games that pit us against ourselves, or that foster skills we like to develop: baseball, cricket, golf, swimming, dance, non-combative Asian martial arts. But nothing that requires a lot of specialized equipment or has much potential for serious injury.”

They reached a circle of rocks which girdled a pool about twenty five meters long and twenty wide. And is this where you swim?” asked Pen.

“This is where we come to recover after a baseball game,” said Theo. “Actually, this is one of many volcanically generated hot- or mineral springs located throughout the valley, and it’s often visited on the way between the two communities. It’s one of the largest as well, and every other year or so, after the last harvest, groups of people come up here for a week or two until the weather starts to change. They gather firewood from the forest above here and haul it back to Cottonwood for the winter. They fell diseased trees, salvage some of the dead wood, and make sure the forest’s healthy before they leave. Several forests along the western edge of the Valley are visited in alternate years to augment our wood supplies. But our needs are surprisingly small in this regard, because of the way our houses are planned and the passive solar nature of the architecture in the valley. The eastern forests are smaller and quite clearly “newer” so we don’t harvest them, except to gather pinyon nuts, which are also plentiful around here. Lirit held up a handful of small thin-shelled seeds she had already collected and proceeded to show Pen how to “peel” and eat them.

“*Pignolis!*” exclaimed Pen. Theo grinned and looked at Bend. “Well, at least they still have these in the old world!”

Bend took off his caftan, revealing a pair of drawstring shorts, and plunged into the pool. Theo took off his tunic and trousers, carefully folding them and laying them aside, and sported a pair of sand-colored shorts with an embroidered flower over his left buttock. Lirit pointed proudly to it and acknowledged having been the creator. She then stripped down to her shorts and followed the men into the pool, adeptly swimming out to her father. Pen realized that the union suit under her tunic would suffice as a swimsuit, so removed and folded her own outer garments, placed them on a rock, and joined the rest. The water smelled a bit sulfurous, but was quite warm and soothing to her sore muscles. She dipped her head under the water and surfaced to see Theo scrubbing Lirit's hair and scalp with a handful of sand as she sat on the edge of the pool. The child then scrambled out to fetch a wooden bucket which she carried to the nearby stream to draw water for rinsing. Since she was clearly having trouble lifting the bucket, her father got out to help her, and she squealed with a mixture of chagrin and delight as the cold water poured through her hair onto a flat rock. Father and daughter then returned to the pool, where Lirit proceeded to float about expertly while the adults continued their conversation.

Pen said, "I still can't get over the fact that everything looks so clean and unspoiled. Nothing seems interfered with or 'built'—even this pool seems accidental. Everything lying about is natural, and I still haven't seen a bit of trash. How you keep it this way?"

Bend answered, "Part of it has to do with the 'recycle everything' credo; and having to deal with our own waste, whether from cooking or taking care of bodily functions. Besides perfecting our composting toilets, we've minimized our use of chemicals which could damage the water supply. You've already noticed the sand bowls in the bath at Clara's house, and the small bottles of mint-water next to the loos. Less obvious are the recycled paper tissues we use when absolutely necessary. Women make and clean their own sanitary napkins, families make and clean their own babies' nappies, etc. Since paper is

all hand-made, we tend to use it for really important stuff, but we do manufacture some fairly simple-to-make paper that biodegrades easily. Traveling families line diapers with the stuff, but otherwise we just clean up after ourselves in the simplest possible way. None of us were comfortable letting our children run around naked just to save paper and cloth, so we have wash-houses with a vat to boil diapers in when necessary, and are careful to recycle the water through a leaching pond. Fortunately, the communities are so small (and it's one of the reasons they stay that way) that keeping up with dirty nappies is a relatively simple task. It's harder to deal with the byproducts of the various pets children have made. But one of the children in Cottonwood developed a pet-loo, and he and some of the other members of the community police the grounds looking for pet poop to deposit into a dedicated composing toilet for animal waste. It could have been handled easily (as it had been) by the domestic toilets in peoples' houses, but the children had a great time building it (they all know how the toilet is built and maintained), and since everyone enjoys the animals, nobody minds picking up after them occasionally."

"And so now, I just go off and find myself a bush?"

"Yes," said Bend. "But take the bucket and some water with you. There's a packet in my pack for you, with a bar of soap in a small pouch, a cloth, and a small wooden trowel." Pen commented that she felt as if she were becoming a part of the community; she not only had her own water bottle, but now her own toilet rag and poop scoop as well. They all grinned, and Lirit got out to lead her to a stone shelter for washing off after she had taken care of whatever needs she had at the moment.

After everyone had cleaned up, they put their outer clothes back on and started down the trail. Bend noted that the air was so dry and warm that their underwear would be dry by the time they got back to camp. When they arrived back to where the horses were tied, Pen tidied her clean hair with a wooden

comb from her new kit, and Theo proceeded to light a fire in a grated stone ring for making dinner. He placed the contents of a pouch into the pot Rain had given them, and poured in enough water to make a thick soup. Bits of dried fruit and vegetables began to rehydrate as they cooked, and Lirit added some of the pine nuts she had shelled along with some oregano and watercress she had picked near the creek. Bend brought out the bowls, spoons, and mugs to hold wine from one of the flasks they had carried with them. Lirit filled her cup with water, and then filled a small handled pot with more water and a small cloth bag which turned out to contain herbs and flowers for making tea. Her father placed it on the fire grate next to the soup pot. Lirit went back to the packs and produced another loaf of bread and some cheese, which she sliced on the board they had used earlier from the cooking kit. Pen was surprised to see such a small child handle a knife with such facility, but she also noticed that Theo carefully guided her—without apparent concern. Noticing Pen’s look of wonder, Theo assured her that Lirit had solid hand skills, but that an adult or much older child would always supervise potentially dangerous activities.

Bend began to talk about the way their children had begun to learn in the valley, as soon as the first baby had been born. “Everyone expected community involvement in the beginning when babies were a new and exciting addition to the valley population, but no one would have been terribly surprised if the interest had waned as children became more numerous. What became apparent, however, was that the lack of pressure to produce children as a necessary part of any committed relationship made it possible for everyone to enjoy all the children. Some couples did not want to have children of their own, but appreciated being able to participate in the education and upbringing of others’. And since the responsibility for raising kids fell on the shoulders of everyone, each member of a settlement took a particular interest in some aspect of child-rearing.



“One couple became what they called Babysitters to the World, and began to welcome children into their home whenever parents wanted a break or needed to travel longer distances than would be convenient with a child in tow. Once, when a scouting party went south looking for a good place to plant a citrus grove, this couple took care of six children, all under three years old, for about three weeks. The trip was an important one, and not without its dangers, so the children needed to stay behind for the moment. The party came back, having successfully planted the grove and left people behind to get it started, the parents reclaimed their children, and everyone had enjoyed themselves. Nobody worried about children or parents, because the people who took care of the kids amounted to an extended family—whom the children began to refer to as the Lemons thereafter. Three years later, everyone involved went down to look at the grove, which was beginning to bear its first fruit. So the kids also felt as if they had played a part in the establishment of the grove, and eventually some of the families moved down to live there permanently. As always, however, close contacts are maintained, and the kids still visit back and forth, often staying with their old ‘family,’ the Lemons.”

Bend then began to describe one of the foundational concepts the community carried with them into the valley. “We wanted to recreate the Greek idea of the *oikos*, the home, as the center of the economy, the *oiko nomos*. The concept is helpful, because it embodies the idea of the home as the center of things, out of which custom or habit—what the Greeks called *ethos*—emerges. But *nomos* also means pasture, with a different accent, centering ‘home’ on the notion of cultivation, or at least sustenance. Economics in the old world had drifted a long way from its etymological roots. We wanted the ideas of home and habit to return to the center of what we would become as a community, and at the same time re-connect it with the notion of ecology—the *logos* of the home. Both terms, economy and ecology, are as complex as their roots, and thus as full of possibility and meaning. And that was another central idea: to create lives that held meaning—linguistic, philosophical, emotional, ethical, traditional.”

“Right,” said Theo. “We wanted to become home-makers and home-keepers. So we came here to build and to keep, to maintain. The old economic systems all seemed to have built into them some kind of growth, expansion. An economy wasn’t considered successful unless it got bigger. ‘Economic development’ was measured in road-miles and hospital beds; the more there were, the better. But few people understood that if roads weren’t needed, they weren’t meaningful, and more hospital beds simply mean more sick people. What if development, instead, were measured in contentment and sustainability? Some people clearly began to understand that bigger might not necessarily be better, and started to talk about ‘limits to growth.’ But in many towns and cities in the United States, for instance, by the time planners recognized the problems, it was already too late. The endless cycle had already begun: build more roads to hold more cars, people buy more cars because there are more roads, so more roads have to be built, people move further away, more roads, more cars, more gas, more *more*. For us, it had to stop.”

“But what about traveling long distances?” asked Pen. “Horses and carts seem adequate for relatively short distances, but without efficient means of travel, how can you go anywhere far away? It would take so long to get there that surely the community would be disrupted.”

“Your veils of technology are showing,” laughed Bend. “At least three of them. First of all, why would we necessarily need to travel ‘far away’? We do have plans to eventually travel south, to see what’s going on where the big southern cities used to lie, and also north and over the mountains to the coast to see what’s happened over there. But it’s not necessary—it’s quite clearly a desire rather than an actual need. Then, why does travel need to be efficient? What does it mean to be ‘efficient’ anyway? In the old world, it meant primarily to do something with greater speed and less work; but if one values the work, and speed isn’t really a consideration, that concept of efficiency loses meaning. Look at what we’re doing here. It’s hardly efficient to make a fifty-kilometer trip

in two days, especially if there's a sense of urgency involved. But 'efficient' in what sense? It's unlikely that a couple of days is going to produce a measurable impact on the situation; in the meantime, you're learning about us, you seem to be regaining your memory to some extent, and you also seem to be enjoying yourself. There's no real calculus involved, but if one were to judge what will be gained by a day or two's delay in meeting up with the other traveler, it may be that the 'delay' turns out to be more 'efficient' in the long run. And we really do consider the 'long run' to be important here."

"So there's no pony express to deliver mail from one place to another, no notion of almost instantaneous 'messaging,' and no way to get from one place to another really quickly. But what do you do in an emergency, when someone needs a doctor or needs to get a message to someone about an accident or something?" Pen asked.

"At some point we may suffer because it takes several hours to ride quickly from Tinemaha to Cottonwood, for example, or from Glacier to Tinemaha and that sort of thing. Theo rode down in about five hours, and it took the messengers who rode north after you appeared about the same amount of time. So, it's possible that someone's father could become ill unexpectedly, and might die before the daughter could arrive. But every community has at least one doctor, several assistants with specialties like midwifery or basic pediatrics, and there's quite a bit of daily travel between communities. Letters also get sent back and forth on a regular, albeit informal, basis. Everything, however, takes time—but our sense of time has already become radically different from yours. We expect everything to take time—its own time. The daughter whose father is old enough to be near death is probably not going to be living very far away; nor is the daughter going to be the only person who cares about the father. No matter where he lives, he will be part of a nurturing community that values his age, and that takes care of his needs when he cannot take care of his own. We don't discard old people here, and our old

people tend to be healthy and productive far longer in this world than they would have had they stayed behind. Clara is the oldest among us, but we now have many people in their seventies and eighties, and only a couple of them need regular nursing care; most are still working in some capacity, and most have groups of young people and children who hang on their every word, learning from them and recording what they learn. All of the original settlers are at least fifty, and there are enough children to eventually replenish their numbers—but only just. The balance is pretty fragile, but everyone also understands that our very sustainability takes time.”

By now darkness had fallen, and Pen volunteered to clean and stow the dishes. The fire helped take the chill off the evening, and Theo poured mulled wine into a cup for each of the adults. Pen doubted if she had ever felt more relaxed. She stood up and walked out beyond the trees, and Bend followed. Theo stayed behind, once again providing a cushion for his sleeping daughter, and as Pen looked back she saw a picture of contentment: Theo with a mug in one hand, thoughtfully sipping, while he stroked Lirit’s hair.

Pen smiled, then turned to look at the night sky. Startled, she pointed to the smoky band that stretched across the star field above. “This is the first time I’ve seen the Milky Way this clearly. Where I come from the sky is so filled with other stuff that even in this valley it’s not as visible as it should be. Airborne particulate matter and light pollution were the culprits. There were few places at all that didn’t produce so much smog and light that nobody could see our own galaxy. Electricity: the stellar blindfold.”

Bend watched Pen’s amazed face with pleasure and alarm. While he was moved by her obvious delight, the likelihood that she was an astronomer attached to the radio telescope array had become apparent. If she were, it was equally likely that she would be missed, and that someone would begin hunting for her. Her memory was clearly returning, and much would depend on how

rapidly she remembered the circumstances of her arrival, and that of her apparent companion's.

She looked up at him as she realized the implication of what she'd just said. "Since I'm remembering this stuff, I guess we'd better get some sleep, since we should probably make an early start of it—efficiency or no efficiency."

But Bend relaxed after his initial alarm, remarking only that the situation was probably not as urgent as it seemed. Pen glanced at him with a puzzled expression, but he only smiled and said, "All will become clear in time."

They returned to the campfire, where Theo had retrieved the bedrolls from the horses and put Lirit to bed. Having done so, he watered the horses again before tethering them for the night. The gibbous moon had risen, casting a pale light on the small camp as the fire dwindled. Pen remarked at the warmth of the bedrolls, and Bend noted that they were filled with a soft byproduct of the hemp paper process, and covered with a densely-woven hemp fiber cover. Theo had gathered sagebrush bundles from a stash that had clearly been placed there for such a purpose, and distributed them for use as pillows under the tops of their sleeping bags. "A bit rustic," he noted, "but they work—and they smell great."

Pen tried to reflect on her experiences during the last two days, but fell into a deep sleep almost immediately. Bend told Theo about his discussion with Pen, and the two agreed that they should quicken their travel pace a bit, and that, although Pen's sense of urgency was probably not warranted, they should leave at daybreak. The camp soon fell silent, except for the occasional snort from a horse, and the crackling of the dying fire.



