

If you're ready then, can you give us a little bit of your background and how you got involved in radical simplicity in permaculture?

EH: Yeah. I grew up in a fishing town in the eighties and watched the fishing industry crash and then went to school for environmental science and conservation ecology. I started working with the federal government Marine Institutes and I still saw ecosystems crumbling. We were going out in boats that were putting oil and gas into the water; we were eating GMO food and not really changing how we were living even though we were trying to save the ocean. So that led me to Aprovecho Research Center, a permaculture center in Oregon where I became staff and I worked and taught at permaculture centers for ten years, but, living under the poverty line to be a war tax resister, I never could afford a permaculture certification. So that led to partly creating this project and doing one of the only by-donation permaculture designs, which I was one of the first students of the very class I created so that, basically, the poor and low-income by choice had access to this amazing science.

So now, through Aprovecho I learned this holistic way of living, which seems to do a lot more for healing the earth than just taking kids out on a boat to look at a dolphin.

You get them really involved in the hands-on process that they can see the processes of nature and understand their relationship to it?

EH: Yeah. You know, and it's interesting a lot of people think our project is really radical, but really we're just following the core principles. So, favor biological resources, we don't have any chainsaw or tractor; you have to bring the draft horses out, which can reproduce, which a tractor can't. And then create no waste, so we not going to the grocery store for our food and everything's coming, a few bulk things coming in brown bags that we can use in our rocket stoves which are fuel efficient cooking.

So it's funny that when you actually apply these radical core principles, people think you're nuts. But yet, I think a lot of times we take these principles as a hobby. We have our herb spiral and we think our permaculture done. So we're trying to invite people to really embody these principles, which when you do it, your life will not look the same.

I've been reminded with several of the guests who I've talked to that it's not the techniques that make permaculture permaculture. It's living the ethics and the principles and integrating them into your life as actual design; that, you're not only designing your landscape but you're also designing your life around it.

EH: Yeah.

And, from the interviews that I've read with you and some of the other material that's available on the work that you're doing, it's presented in a very positive and forward-moving way that, even though the path that you're on

looks very different from what many people are used to because of your lack of electricity and gasoline and other fossil fuels, but that it's a positive experience.

EH: Yeah. Well, we tell people, "We're not against anything." So, for example, people call and they're like, "Can I park my car there?" And we're like, "Look, if you come by a helicopter, that's your choice. And the fact that you want to come here is, is a real honor to host you, that you're curious." And so, we acknowledge that road trips are *fun*. A car in this culture without a good train system allow mobility. And at the same time, we look holistically that a car also has some costs. And I think one thing that's helpful is Oxford definition of sacrifice is, "Giving something up of lesser value for something of greater value." So I'd give up chocolate, which has value, has a huge culinary history, I'd give it up for something for *me* which has greater value which is bioregional diet.

So instead of being *against* anything, the way we move this project is we're *for* it. We're *for* at night, our hand-dipped beeswax candles. People—not only is it more ecological, 'cause our power station is from ten miles away and we can bike there to get it, it also is really moving, to be sitting by candlelight at night Every dinner here is by candlelight and you meet the other, and you have to move slower. With flame you have to have more awareness, there's more responsibility than flicking a light switch.

So not only are we living more ecologically, but people find themselves more able to be in the present moment *and* people come and they see that we feel really happy and joyful. It's not that we don't weep when Fukushima happens, but that they actually see us feel more connected. 'Cause we're talking to people face to face, not through Facebook. We're meeting a horse when we work the land, not just turning a key.

So I think, for mental health, the new book *Finding Nature Deficit Disorder*, so many people come here and after three weeks, they forget the radicalness and they just say, "I feel, I feel more peaceful." We just had a college professor, she came and said, "This is the most peaceful week of my decade." So here they are living ecologically more sound, but I think the big thing is with *real* practice of permaculture, you are a creator again, you're not passively watching. And people then have to go catch the fish and gut the fish and fry it up to eat. And that's really, to me, an incredible way to live.

Your sanctuary and the permaculture work that you're doing, you get to move people from being consumers into being producers, then.

EH: Yeah. And nobody ever sees, there's no money exchange. We give the PDC course, we say, "This is a gift," and we've had people in debt come, and I've seen over ten people out of four classes cry. Grown men just like, "This is a gift, and it's so hard for me to receive it 'cause I'm in debt," and we're like, "Take it and go do your community garden in Lawrence, Kansas. That's how you're going to pay us forward."

And, I think that is also a living testament to Bill Mollison's early third ethic. We have people care here; we have our service groups that go serve those who are homeless, and we just went to Detroit by bicycle. And then the second ethic, earth care; we're saying, "Look, we're going to do puppet shows instead of going to the movie." I wanna see permaculture applied to *entertainment*. To transportation, so it leaves your permaculture site and follows you wherever you go. Then the third ethic, which is abundance share, *earlier*, it was actually limitations create abundance. And so what we're finding here, by creating limitations to follow the ethics and the principles, we actually are superabundant. We host 1,500 people here a year, have nine full-time adults, two kids, we send hundreds out to do service, we do not charge anything, and it takes \$9,000 to run our 110 acre sanctuary educational center. Most single families can't imagine living on 9,000.

And that's because of limitations, we have almost zero bills. Phone line is one of our only bills a month. And, so it's incredible that we might make \$3,000 for our PDC with twenty-five people, where normally you could make forty, but that 3,000 pays for a third of our operating cost.

And so all of a sudden, this third principle has hit me like a ton of bricks. That actually by creating limits on our system, we've become superabundant 'cause we don't go to the hardware store, so we have to be *really* creative, and humans love the creative process. So there's, people come here and they're like, "How am I gonna do it with throwaway stuff and wood from the land, how am I gonna build this strawbale? How am I gonna move this with a horse?" And so it becomes a, I would say, *ecstatic* problem solving where you're *really* solving the problem with nature. And as we know, the problem is the solution, but I, I see people so often be like, "Oh, we gotta get up this urbanite. Let's go get the jackhammer." And after—they want to have the problem be the solution for about five hours and then they get frustrated and want to go to the mainstream, easy industrial route. So it, yeah it's really, I think, incredibly exciting to be really trying to live out those ethics.

Can I ask you a logistical question about this?

EH: Yeah!

How you brought this together, is it, you say that you're currently living on \$9,000 a year to run your 110 acre facility and everything that you're doing by moving to a gift economy. What was required to make that transition to purchase the land and do this development? Did you use your work in government to kind of self-finance the beginning so that you could shift down?

EH: That's a great question. This is where I would enter the idea that the universe is a co-creative force, whatever you call it. Life, god, it doesn't matter, the name. But supernovas are exploding, like kind of cosmic composting. A star basically explodes planetary nebula and starts over again. Just like we have the compost heap. So from that perspective, I think the universe is in cahoots when you move towards life. Serendipities happen.

So ten years ago, I had paid off my college loans and got an inheritance for 150,000. In that moment, I didn't need it. I was working a permaculture center that I could live on very little, and I saw in nature that a tree doesn't hoard its apples. When it has that abundance, it lets it fly, for humans, for birds, for compost. So I took a great leap and just said, "I'm giving it all away." I gave a third of it to people: people care. I gave a third of it to the earth to create nature reserves and community gardens. And a third of it I gave to family and friends as a dream fund. So, I liquidated everything, following nature, and then what I've found is in the last ten years, our project, the Superheroes and Possibility Alliance and Sanctuary have moved almost half a million dollars outward to create community gardens, bike co-ops, to protect land, to give a homeless family a house...

And so when it was time for us to start, we had no money, my wife and I. We were war tax resisters living under the poverty line. Also by living under the poverty line, it's a great design to live simple. And so we just put out a call that we found this land, it really matches what we were looking for. And just through lots of people, twenty dollars, a hundred dollars, that abundance came back, and we pay that forward by hosting 1,500 people a year and doing the service.

So what I think is, collectively, we have a lot more, and when we have too much, how do we be like nature and let it slide to those who are in lack and vice-versa? This is the last piece of this, which blew my mind. I was in Eugene, at an ecovillage, doing a talk about what we'd found in Europe, the electricity-free service-based centers that blew our mind. We're the only one like it we know of in the United States and hope there's more 'cause we have a waiting list to come here. I just said, "Hey, silently, everyone write on a piece of paper what your net worth is." 'Cause everyone in the room was saying, "If we had more money, if we had more government funding!" There's fifty people in the room, silently I took the pieces of paper. Thirteen million dollars. A bunch of, like, permaculturist slash alternatives.

Thirteen million was being held up in that room which could have bought out a huge chunk of Eugene to create community gardens or nature reserves. So, what I'm inviting the listeners to, in our own experiment, is why don't we mimic nature in that sharing of energy? There is abundance. And when we hold it, there's death. If the watershed held the water at the top, there's death. And so, I think we're spiritually dying by holding back what could uplift another person or another habitat.

But it's scary. A lot of people will hear what I'm saying—there was a lot of permaculture teachers that were really angry about an article I wrote, it was like, "This is my livelihood. I'm paying for my kid to go to college." And they *attack* this idea, when actually, I humbly say if you looked at nature, are you gonna attack nature's idea of abundance? Like, I'm not telling you this is true, I'm observing and interacting as Bill Mollison invites us to do, and Holmgren. And this is what I'm seeing. And the result is, we have no debt, we're giving thousands and thousands of dollars away. And we're all living like kings and queens, from our perspective, as I said in a *Mother Earth* article. We are *thriving*.

And I can say that, from my own perspective it is something in the context of modern society, it's difficult to understand. I look at my own lifestyle and I know what my family's income is and isn't and what we do and don't take care of. And to hear your message, it's almost unbelievable in the context of this western lifestyle.

EH: Yeah. I think the important thing, which we're really careful about, when someone steps foot on our tour, we say, "Look. There are no 'I should's', there's no good and bad." Realize that, once someone starts putting pressure, like, "Yeah, that makes sense in my heart and I should be doing it," I think the most important thing is wherever we're at, we see risk as a unending scale. And the most important thing is to take a risk wherever you're at. So when I have friends who are selling big medical equipment, they're on Wall Street, I have neighbors who are Republicans, I have friends who are anarchists, I see meaningful things from each of them and I just say, "Take a risk from wherever you're at." So when my friend calls me and says, "I gave up my SUV and got a fuel-efficient Lexus," I cheer. I'm like, "Yes!" One atom moving towards greater ecological and societal justice is wonderful.

So I think what we have to realize is not compare. My wife and I have been on this path for twenty years. So, we're at this point now. I don't know where we'll be in a few years. And so, what I want to invite the listeners and you is, what is a step that wouldn't overwhelm you, wouldn't totally disrupt your family, that would move you towards greater harmony with your vision. And that's, I didn't do it all at once, I gave up downhill skiing. And then I started to realize, wow, backcountry skiing is much more exciting. I hike up the mountain and ski down. I gave up scuba diving and started free diving, and all of a sudden I had better lung capacity and I was healthier. So I waited 'til I took one step and integrated it, and only once it was part of my life, then I took the next step.

So I want to, like, celebrate wherever someone is, the risk is equal. So I use my bike now, and I don't use cars. For me to give up my bike would probably be as scary as someone who's used to driving to work taking the bus four times a day—or four times a week. So what I'm trying to model is, take a risk from where you're at and that risk is what's important. Not the comparison. If that makes sense.

It's a matter of, what is any particular individual's next best step for themselves in their situation. Not to compare to what you're doing and try to model *your* lifestyle necessarily.

EH: Exactly. When I started doing it, I'd meet people who would meet my wife and I and be like, "Whoa!" And they'd drop *everything*. And, within a month, they were way beyond what I was doing, I would be using a spice and they'd be like, "Where'd that spice come from?" I'm like, "Well, it came from Indonesia, but this is where I am right now." And they went much further, and those people crashed and burned in about a year.

And so I've gone through so many rounds of—you know, when I was twenty all my radical friends and permaculturalists in college and then, when we were twenties in Eugene and—all those folks have burned out. And I was never the most radical in college, but yet I just persistently let go of one more thing and then, it wasn't until 1999 after many years of experimenting that I was like, "Well, I'm going to be car-free. I'm only going to get in a car for an emergency or if I can't see someone I love." And in twelve years, I've only had to do that ten times. So I'm not fanatical, like, "No more cars," it's like a gentle approach, like, "Hey, if I can't see my grandmother, I'm getting in a car. If someone needs help, I'm getting in a car." And in those twelve years, I've only—three of those were ambulances riding with friends, 'cause I'm an EMT.

So it's amazing that you start to allow that shift and I'm like, "Wow, I'm not no longer, I'm not biking because of ecological reasons now, I'm forty-two and I'm in great shape! And I move slower through my community. I actually *like* it better than driving." So how do we move towards joy and allow—you know, there's a little bit of time when a new change is really difficult. But when we embody it—I can't imagine not living through the gift economy 'cause I get to give things away every day. And it's so wonderful. I'll be like, "Here's some peach trees!" We have our fruit trees all over Missouri 'cause we have a free nursery. So people come and get raspberries and heirloom organic peaches and we're like, "Here's how to prune 'em, take 'em!" And now those peach trees have propagated to five more inner-city gardens in Kansas City. So, we don't get as much money but we get a lot more of the world we want to see.

When it was suggested that I speak to you, I was told that your story was very inspirational and compelling and now I understand why.

EH: [Laughs] Thanks.

I appreciate that you took the time to speak with me that I could hear your story and learn these things and the compassion and change that it can bring in myself and others by knowing that there are people such as yourself that are doing this kind of work.

There's a local speaker, Charles Eisenstein, who deals in the idea of sacred economics and gift economies. One time, a presentation that he was giving, when we were asking if he needed any kind of an honorarium or compensation to come in and he said, "No, because when I come do this, I do it because this is what I love and this is what I care about. And that, I find that within a gift economy when I come and do something like this, then a week later I get the phone call to come be a lecturer at a formal conference, and that's the lecture that pays me and helps me keep my lights on and allows me to continue to do the free work. And that it all kind of comes together."

EH: Yeah. I've read a lot of Eisenstein and he's sent us a few books as a gift, which is wonderful. The one thing, though, it's interesting. We have a great permaculturalist,

Adam Campbell, who came to join us from Virginia and is now starting our ten acre 'piece of permaculture' gift economy institute, which is a class that starts September 24th, a new cutting-edge way to embody your learning. And, he's a math major and he said, "It's important to realize a gift economy isn't free. Zero is a mathematical creation." So, a lot of people come and say, "Oh, you give everything for free." And we actually say, "No, it's not for free. It's a gift. So you have to *receive* that gift." People setting up the course, getting all their organic food, growing it, teachers coming as a gift. I've even been shifting, 'cause sometimes I say 'free'. It's a gift. We give the gift to the person, and when they fully receive it, they're touched and moved either to be like, "You know what, I don't have any money but I'm gonna give one hundred hours to my community garden." Or, they have a little extra and they're like, "Here. Here's \$200 to continue your work." And, that's what's tricky, is it's a gift which then, just like the apple tree gives the bird an apple and then the bird poops by the tree and gives fertilizer, like when that loop happens, there's way more.

And the challenge with our project is obviously we're one of the few operating this way. It's already abundant. So imagine if, in any gift we get, we give away twenty percent right away to make sure we're giving beyond that and that blows people away. So they're like, out of the \$200 you got for your permaculture you give twenty percent away, imagine if every organization and person, every time they got something, twenty percent went to another person or organization. You'd just be getting checks up the wazoo every time you looked in your mail!

That money would always be in motion, or those gifts would always be in motion.

EH: Exactly. Just like water and sunlight. And when they're moving, they reach way more. And so, you know, when I inherited the money, I had this vision and people were like, "Now's your chance to *do it!* You got it!" And I said, "You know what? I don't want people to equate money as the reason we were successful." So I gave it all away. And now we've done it on our terms, which is a group sharing. It's not a handout, it's a sharing. And so now that we're solid, when someone moves next door to us we can send them trees, bring 'em the large arch, bring 'em volunteers.

There is a time in the forest when the little tree needs to take a lot more than it gives. It's an understory tree and it needs to depend on the mycorrhizal fungi, and everything. But then as soon as it can bear fruit, that process happened. So I do realize a natural cycle that there are times when we need more and then we have more to give. And that's something that takes a lot of faith and trust.

And the language that you're using to discuss this, the differences between how we normally would interchange some of these words just as synonyms, there are—the subtle differences are really where the wisdom of this process comes from.

EH: Yeah. And, they've only come from direct experimentation. That—I think that's the genius of permaculture is we're continuing what Bill Mollison and Holmgren and

everyone started, and...that's I think what we're supposed to do. Like I think we're not going to be recognizable in ten years. I *hope* we're not! 'Cause if we just stay where we're at, we're not doing what the entire evolutionary natural cycle is doing. We find the language by action, not by theory.

You know, there's a reality too, that we are not an independent small permaculture center, educational center. We also bring this to the inner cities. So we send people, dressed as superheroes, 'Compassion Man' and 'Love Ninja'. They just went to Detroit and Flint, so I think it would be a privilege to think, "All's we need to do is be here doing gift economy and healing *this* patch of earth," but a big part of it is realizing that that also happens in nature, with migration and everything, that there's a *huge* energy shift with climate patterns and currents. So we try to also mimic that by sending twenty-five people for a month to Detroit to uplift where they haven't had a chance to have good soil. There's not a good seedbed to start projects there, with all the urban decay and violence.

So, I think the next step too is to be involved in everything, which people say it's too overwhelming. We're like, "No, we can go do social engagement and activism and we can go do service and social uplift *and* be good neighbors." And I think that's another piece that I'm excited about is, imagine every permaculture center and ecovillage gave one month of what their gifts are and gave it away to the world. That would be *millions* of people. There's a million people certified in permaculture, a hundred thousand people involved in the ecovillage movement. Imagine that United States with just, take what you love and give it for a month as a beginning. And that's eight hours a day for five days a week. And we would see it transform society tomorrow.

But I think what we think is *we* gotta do it all. But that's not how nature works. Each thing gives its piece, so...that's another invitation. It's like, can you free up your life to give a month of what you love as a gift to others. That's including all life. So, those steps would be revolutionary. And that's what we also do here, is we set limits. We say 'no' a lot. We get ten phone—"I'm starting a lecture c3 nature school in New Hampshire," and once we're on, you know, helping three projects, we have to say, "You know, we're full right now. To help you now would be to give too many apples and the tree would die."

So there's also a thing that I think is hard for people to realize is that the frenzy of the activist destroys the root which makes it fruitful. It's that we have to create limits in our giving. That's what nature does! So, a lot of people come here and think it means you just give until you drop. But we have a feedback where we can actually say, "We're not able to right now. To do it would overwhelm our system, and we would be out of balance." And when we say that, people often are like, "Thank you." I haven't been given that permission."

I feel like it's a bit of a cliché to reference this fable, but *The Tortoise and the Hare* continually comes to mind because if you are slow and steady in your progress, you can reach that end that you're looking for in time that you're not burning out and stopping and having to shift gears over and over again. You

choose what your next best step is and you take a step forward. And as you say, ten years from now it'll look *nothing* like it does today, even though tomorrow it might look like you haven't made any progress. It's still that one step.

EH: Yeah. Exactly. I don't think it is cliché, 'cause I think what we're learning is 'use small and slow solutions'. That's one of the permaculture design principles. I know, roughly, there's nineteen or twenty-one if you mix up all the lists. And so, we move slower. People come here to build with hand tools, and we have to fell a black locust and peel the bark and they're like, "Wait, we built a strawbale in a month workshop! You're moving too slow!" And I say, "Well, how long does it take a redwood to grow? Thousand years." In human society it's so fast, with the internet, with iPhones that we've forgotten that, also when we look at nature, there are some incredible things in nature that are like a volcano which is instant. But that volcano took millions of years of building up gas to that pressure underneath.

And so I think we're finding that just doing what we can do in each day, with staying vital, is enough. That's what we're asked for. And what, again, we see is, slow is *wonderful*. And I don't even think we should call it *slow*, I basically think what's called slow food and all these slow movements should be called *normal* food! We should actually be sitting and digesting our food, and sitting at the table. And so it's only slow in relative to a society that's moving way too fast.

Slow is a reaction to the speed that society has built, where really the slow is actually the human scale.

EH: Yeah, I call it 'earth speed'. When I ran nature reserves for the federal government, I just lived on an island and managed pipe and clovers and, after about a month, I reached earth speed. I would wake up and walk slowly, and a butterfly would be like *boom!* Where as in modern society, you'd have to be a neon sign. That's why we see more and more '*boom!*', because we're so desensitized, you have to have Burning Man to feel creative. You have to literally burn a gigantic fifty-foot sculpture to get any 'wow'. But really, when we slow down from our crazy speed to earth speed, a firefly becomes enough. Firefly season comes here and we set up the chairs and we're like, "Wow. Let's check it out." Or we take inner tubes out on our pond and there are fireflies all around us and the Milky Way above us. We don't need to burn any two by fours for this.

And so, you know, it's an interesting idea to re-gain the sense of actually how all life is moving, and that we're running ahead. "If you don't slow down, nothing meaningful will catch up to you," is a proverb I've heard. So, yeah, how do we just stop and let something arrive from us. I love Lao Tzu, he says, "Can you let the mud settle?" Can you actually stop and all your worry and anxious and here's your new design? Just let the mud settle and see what the earth and nature and what does life bring up forth from you?

I have several friends who are Buddhists and they reference, it's Thich Nat Hanh—ah, I can never pronounce his name—

EH: Thich Nat Hanh?

Yes. And it's "Hurry up, do nothing." I keep hearing that from time to time, and I think about that, and it's just that need to just stop and relax and take hold of your life. And enjoy it.

But, some of these principles and ethics and aphorisms, one of the notes that I came across was that you're living under five tenets now with your work, and I was wondering if you would share those with me and the listeners.

EH: Yeah. Well we found that we wanted to use and value diversity, one of the principles. And also realizing that we felt like nature had an agreement. It was moving towards the most abundant life, like going towards a coral reef, or going towards a climax forest where there's like a setup where there's the most life functioning. And so, we have a mission statement and the five tenets simply are guiding towards that goal. And it's important to realize that those could change. And they're not written down anywhere—that's really important just for people to understand—we don't put them on the wall, they live in our heart and so then you can say 'em in your own words each time they arrive.

So, the mission statement is really simple. We wanted it for a second-grader to understand, and that's "Living for the upliftment of all life and reaching our highest human potential." So that's our mission statement. All decisions are made by that. And, what's exciting is, the second grader comes here and they're like, "Oh, be kind to stuff, and be a good person." We're like, "You got it!" A Christian comes here: "Hey, protect creation, and be a vessel for the Holy Spirit." I'm like, "You got it!" A Buddhist comes here: "Uplift all sentient beings, and find your Buddha nature." I'm like, "That's it!"

It's so simple that anyone can attach their worldview to it. And so, that's our driving principle, and it's really going for global transformation and self-transformation. What—it's a lifetime or multiple lifetime work, and I think the only difference between us and other people is we are *saying* we're going for it, even though we're imperfect and make mistakes.

It's interesting that, with that—that's the vision—we have five tenets, which are daily practices to make sure it happens. And that is, simplicity, meaning that every day we try to shrink our ecological footprint. Every permaculture center I've ever been ends up going the other way. One more car, or one more staff building. So we, per person, shrink our footprint. A lot of people call us 'radical simplicity', but I call it 'necessary simplicity'. So, basically, with seven billion people on the earth, the average American, to bring that world up to it, is three planet earths. I'm sure we're not going to build another earth.

So there's a big pill for all of us to swallow, which I think is also a pill which grows us wings. And that pill is: We have to reduce. We have to simplify. I like that term, 'necessary simplicity'.

And then, the second tenet is 'service': That if we're not serving our neighbors or the people around us, we're a closed-loop system. So we go, our neighbor has cows next door—it's not exactly how we do cattle, but he takes great care of the animals for the system he's using, he's very integrous—and we'll go help him round up his cows. He's sixty-eight, and we love to help our neighbors. I'll help him put in an air conditioner. Service is meeting people where they're at. Even though I'm car free, I go and help move elderly with a vehicle. I'm not gonna have a woman bike across the town.

So service is meeting people where they're at and serving them. If a neighbor's house burnt down and we rebuilt a very mainstream house with carpets and everything else, I wasn't gonna demand he does a strawbale. So, we just built it so he could have a home.

But, then after service, is tenet three or practice three, which is 'social engagement and activism'. This is where we go out with an agenda. So we put in a community garden in Kirksville with the fifth grade. We put in a bike co-op. We go down for small farmers' rights at the State House. We've laid in front of a nuclear weapons plant and went to jail and were singing songs to the police. In our activism, it's really important: We do what's right, but don't leave the other out of the heart. We have no enemy. And that's really important.

And the fourth is 'inner work'. That if we don't actually work on our own greed, our own selfishness, our own attachments, the movement falls on its face. Eating local has nothing to do with food availability, it has to do with controlling your palate so that I can be like, "Yeah, I'm gonna be happy with another leek and turnip and kale salad." And that the inner work allows us to make the choices that align with our heart. We don't care what tradition, you can be of any tradition or non-tradition here, but that you're doing some inner work. Walking in the woods makes you feel more connected, walk in the woods. Reading the Sermon on the Mount makes it happen, read the sermon.

Then the fifth, and most important at times, is 'silliness, joy, celebration, and gratitude' is our fifth tenet. We have Olympics in the pond, we do puppet shows, we've done a remake of The Sound of Music. We've done mini golf croquet dressed as Cro-Magnon people...so we like to have fun. And we have a Director of Homeland Spontaneity, so it's a Department of Homeland Spontaneity and a Director of Fun. So we make sure that we're enjoying this because that's what living is about, is enjoying being here. So people come here, kinda remarkable, they expect us to be like really crazy hard-core fanatics. And they come and we're juggling, and we're doing synchronized swimming with real judges holding up numbers.

So those five together are meant to be a dance. There's some days we let a neighbor come in with their truck and get dirt 'cause they're having to build a house and they're rural poor. And there's other days where we remove another system to simplify on-site.

So those tenets and that mission statement really help us with direction, but anyone can choose how to do service, and that's the diversity. We go to the elderly home, some people paint murals, some people build a garden. You can choose a million choices in service, but we just wanna make sure everyone here is doing some form of outward service.

And the final thing is, all within the context of the gift economy. We're all volunteers; we have a BP Oil engineer here, full-time now, who's kind of like Daniel Boone. He makes his Osage bows and wears buckskin and he's like, "This is the life I dreamed of!" [Laughs] And, that's the final tenet, then it's all the science of permaculture is our leading edge for our relationship with the earth.

That's right now, and the experiment our guiding principles, and it's important to realize those can change! We may add one or drop one.

They're not intended to be dogmatic.

EH: Exactly, and that's why they're written down in an interview, but we don't have them *anywhere* here. And each person is gonna say it in a different way, which I think is very important; just like a birdsong. They're all marking territory and calling 'em eight, but they all have a unique expression of it.

It's a very intentional way of living.

EH: Yeah. I mean, some people won't come here, or they won't touch it with a fifty-foot pole. Even though they'd be welcomed, whoever comes. We've had people recovering from heroin here, we've had people come who are rock stars, we've had a nuclear physicist come...we'll welcome everyone. Everyone who comes to our door is sacred, is part of this world, so, it's funny that some people avoid it 'cause our culture teaches us *not* to live with intentionality. And the very permaculture design principles are about being intentional. And, being intentional and observing, not letting our mind wander. Being intentional and catching and storing energy and letting it *flow* through the system, not catching it to hoard it but catch it so that—we keep a little bit more water up here; water equals life. There's gonna be more life. And then we let it go down the watershed, slow-flow. And that's funny, that's slow, also, equals life. Not speed.

They say if comes through quickly, that causes destruction, whether that's the rage of the forest fire or the erosion caused by fast-moving water.

EH: Yeah, I never thought of it, about it that way. That when you speed up these natural cycles they go from life-giving to destruction. I'm not against death, or against, you know, there's times for a tsunami and a volcano, and I know it's

devastating for the human culture, but that's a cosmic leveling agent which I don't understand. But a lot of our calamities come from our own human ignorance and lack of humility, I think.

And I have a couple technical questions for the work that you're doing there. One is, how do you make decisions with so many people coming in and heading out through your space?

EH: That's a great question. So we have a core group, those are people who have committed their time here as full members, and part of that is really fun. Like Dan, who came in with a lot of money, is an engineer. To become a member, you have to give away all of your excess resource and actually tie into nature as your bank account. And we find that a lot of people aren't gonna choose that. So Dan has had the pleasure of giving away tens of thousands of dollars this year. And now he's gonna be held up through the natural system, which is much more abundant than the capitalist system.

And, that's the core members. So we decide by consensus, and we call it 'deep consensus'. It's a little different than normal consensus. We take that from the Quakers. And the idea is one, you have to allow emotional release in the decision-making. We don't know what we're gonna do tomorrow. If there was a big fire in Chicago, we might take twenty families as refugees. That might be scary for someone who's like, "I just came to a permaculture center and we're gonna host twenty families?" So there has to be a way to release fear, 'cause emotions block clear decision-making. And the second unique part is we always look at the big picture. We put up the Milky Way galaxy at our decision meetings, and whenever we're getting stuck, someone can point to the Milky Way and realize we're just 110 acres in this one Milky Way galaxy out of millions. Let's not take ourselves so seriously.

And then the third tenet—is third way—a Gandhian idea that even if it seems like conflict and contrary in our decision-making, there's always a third way, just like in nature, that threads the needle to abundance. So, one example of this is, we have introverts living here and extroverts. You can probably tell I'm an extrovert. [Laughs] You know. I wanted more people! I'm like, "Look, we have people signed up to come see this and when they see it they're like, 'It's possible!' We can't, we gotta just keep letting people come." And introverts were just like, "I'm burned out, I wanna go for *quality*, not quantity." So this was a tension because each person has a certain social max. So, out of this conflict, which we sat with as a gift, not as a problem—a problem is a solution. What came out of it is we've created this ten-acre campus right on our northern border. We have the Peace and Permaculture Center yet to be named, which is going to be our kind of 'yang' institute, which can move way more people through, and this is going to become more of the grounded homestead moving towards—if it was just the full-time members here we'd be a hundred, way beyond a hundred percent self-sufficient. But, hosting 1,500 people, we're still getting grain from neighbors and things like that.

So, that's our decision-making. Our visitors can watch that process. So visitors get to watch it, and then we have apprentices, six or seven apprentices that do a seven-month immersion here. And they are able to sit through every decision and be part of that decision-making. And, it's pretty easy because our consensus is based on the upliftment of all life. So if someone came in and said, "I want a solar panel," really factually we can see, well, that creates a bigger footprint, so, therefore, it's not there. But. We had someone come who had a thyroid problem and needed refrigerated medication, and we were like, "We don't have a solution without electricity for this one." So you *could* have a solar panel, until we figure out how to cool your medicine for your thyroid.

So the important thing is there's no fanatical energy here. 'Cause if we can't find a solution with the radical simplicity, we will take whatever solution will work for that person. So there's a wonderful dance in everything that we do.

And they seem to be very balanced decisions, based on the needs of those who are involved.

EH: Exactly. You know, we do have some visitors who come, and the great thing here, 'cause we're an experiment, they're like, "Wow, your rain catchment. I saw this place that's much better." We're like, "Great! You wanna stay and do it?" We slowly can only take on so much in each day; all of our systems are constantly enhancing. We've added 1,200 fruit and nut bushes and trees; some people come here and they're like, "You can have *more!*" And we're like, "Well, this is the sustainable amount," and 'cause we're an experiment, we can just say, "You know what? You're right!" Our bike system isn't thriving. Five out of ten times, the person then gets excited, 'cause we invite them to enhance that system.

So we get rid of the dissentiveness because we're an experiment. And, you know, also, I want listeners to know, last summer I kicked a chair. I got so angry I, like, booted a chair across the back of the property into the outdoor adobe kitchen. And, I grew up in a town where we were fist-fighting and broke into cop cars and so I, the great thing here is—I have anger issues and I'm healing from it—but the great thing is when I kick the chair, my community responds by, you know, like, "How can we support you?" Not that, "You're dangerous." And I think *that* would be radical for society to realize we're *all* carrying a heavy load. We all have wounds. Instead of pointing the finger, how do we actually respond by, "Wow, Ethan does some great stuff, he's tried to be non-violent for twenty years," and I'm still kickin' chairs [laughs]! But that's human!

I think what people are inspired by here is they come here and they're like, "You people are clueless." We're like, "You're right! But we're still going for it!" And I think more people go for it after being here because we *don't* have it figured out. We had a couple come here and saw all these things we were doing wrong, and we were like, "You're right. What can we do?" And then they're inspired, they're like, "We can"—then they have 'Be the Change' projects. So one of our sister projects is this beautiful project, half-acre in inner city Reno. College students came here and

they're like, "You're not doing enough work with the poor." We're like, "You're right!" We helped them fundraise and in six days raised enough money, they have a shade tree collective in Kansas City in the ghetto. They have a half-acre permaculture garden so people can get good food. A nurse came here and was like, "I'm tired of the healthcare debate! I just wanna walk and heal." A few people were like, "I'll walk with you." And he walked out our front door and she walked 300 miles doing health care.

So what we start to create here is a culture where we all realize we're messed up and we're all crazy, and despite of it, let's get along and transform ourselves and the planet! And we're the Possibility Alliance simply because it's not about us, anyone who comes here, we're like, "What's your dream? We have resources, and we have people to support you."

And whatever place they're coming from, you can look at them and say, "I understand that you have this past or these problems. What can I do to help you?"

EH: Yeah. You're still invited to the table. I love the Rumi poem, "Come, come, whoever you are, even if you've broken your vows a thousand times, this is a caravan of joy. Come, come, come again." And I think a lot of people get confused, because we at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage and Retteret Farms, these amazing projects are our neighbors, and I'm on the Retteret board, and we've sent the Superheroes to help at Dancing Rabbit that has wind and solar, and they're like, "Well, but your project's electricity free, why would you help those other projects?" And we're like, "Well, they're part of the transition." We're only gonna catch the few nutballs of the radical edge [laughs], like myself. But everyone else needs to do that transition, they need to go from mainstream to an ecovillage.

So, it's supporting the whole succession. In nature, we have to support the whole succession from the empty lot to the dandelions, to the shrubs, to the final trees. So maybe we're—if we're blessed, if we're having a good day, we may be the shrub coming in. And Dancing Rabbit may be the dandelion. But they are all *very* important steps to returning to a sane planet and a sane culture. So I think that's also important that we support anyone along the way—I'm gonna support someone getting rid of their SUV for a Lexus. I'm in—I'm in the game!

And it's about that co-operation among individuals and in concert with nature in order to move forward, not to compete. And to drag or to destroy in that process.

EH: Yeah. I mean, think about it as permaculturalists, if we said, "You know, that oak tree is much better than the dandelion, 'cause look, it's giving all these—it's a burrow. So we're eating it, it's feeding the turkeys and the deer, it's *gigantic*, and look at this little dandelion."

In nature, it would seem ridiculous to compare a raspberry to a peach tree. Each has their role. But yet we do that. People come here and want to compare, and then they

feel bad. It would be really depressing for a dandelion to compare itself to a redwood. But yet, it has a sacred role which the redwood cannot do. Or a dynamic accumulator, like comfrey.

And so how do we notice that we each have a role whether—we have bands that come here and give music unplugged on their tours, and they're like, "We should be doing more," we're like, "Look, you're allowing us not to have a stereo. This is wonderful. You're making a trip here." And, you know this one band, the Menders, who tours the country, they've come here three times by van, and, without us saying anything, he said, "My next tour, I'm walking. And it's from your influence."

And what's so amazing for me, when I was in Eugene and I got out of cars, and I'm like, "Here's what cars are doing! A million people are killed in vehicle accidents! The wars!" And, no one got out of cars. And now that I'm simply just living it, people come here and we don't even mention cars, we're car-free, that people come here for a week and never hear anything about a car and then they call us and they say, "We got rid of our car. We're biking now." And I began to see that by living it and embodying it, as Saint Francis says, "Teach, and when necessary use words."

Gandhi, "Be the change that you want to see."

EH: Yeah. And it is slower. You know, I think that's beautiful. "Small is beautiful," B.F. Shumacher says. So, a lot of people have come here and are like, "You guys are dynamic! You should be going on speaking tours! You should be on the—you should have a huge website, like, people need to know this information!" We're like, "You know what? What we are called to do right now is embody this 110 acres in Missouri, sometimes, go to Hurricane Katrina to help or—but mainly stay and be married to this land and be bioregionalists and become indigenous to this area. And, if people are moved to come, they can come. But we wanna become, we don't wanna tell.

We don't have press releases or anything so, when you called, it's wonderful. We're like, "Okay, someone wants to interview us, and this is the moment. It's meant to get out in that way." So I take an hour this morning, and when I get done I'm gonna go cut firewood with a crosscut saw by hand; it's all part of the system. So you are a part of our dynamic system. You're carrying a message out; it's so efficient 'cause I don't have to do it! I don't have to run a website or a radio show. You're gifting that to us. And so, we're all part of it, and I hope that you also—and I imagine with how many people you talk to, you're constantly asking the question, "How do I make this radio, how do I make this more in line?" And each system is going to move closer to those permaculture principles.

So, we also have to trust each other. Like I trust that you're already on that journey. If you want help, you ask, otherwise, you're sharing great information and you're, you're collecting information from hundreds of people that will never meet. And that's a sacred task, too, in the ecosystem.

Doing the work that I do reaches people all over the world in a fairly efficient way. I love getting to talk to folks who are doing this kind of work and getting to share their voices so that what they're doing, they resonate with others.

EH: Yeah. And yeah, we have a niche—we are actually hoping that there's more electric-petrol-free permaculture centers simply because of, not because it's right, but because when we have zero waste and we favor biological resources, that's what happens when you follow those. And when something else happens, I'm open to hearing it. But we can't host everyone who wants to come. And that's a beautiful sign. 'Cause ten years ago when my wife and I were living electricity free in Oregon outside of Eugene, and doing the gift economy, most of the most radical people thought we were nuts. We wouldn't go to the vegan chocolatier, not because it was bad, but we're like, "You know what? We're happy with this, this raspberry. We're content—content with what it's."

And it's really radical, even within the progressive culture, to say, "Joy comes from inside." Not from Burning Man, not from a restaurant, even those can be great experiences. When we think those experiences are creating our joy, it's just consumer culture. The green economy is still consuming. And how do we come from consumers to actual integral parts of life and abundance and healing. And so, the great news is ten years later, people are like, "You, you don't ride in cars, that's *awesome*." Ten years ago, people were like, "I tried that once. Wait 'til you have kids." I'm like, "I already got two daughters and a wife, still doin' it."

I don't think it's conscious, but people are realizing that this model is reaching its end. And so, it's amazing that tens of thousands of people are wanting to find out about this, not out of curiosity because that's how they want to live. And having been doing this for over a decade, that wasn't the case ten years ago. So there is a, there's a shift happening, which is really exciting.

And then what will this look like in another ten years? As you look back and say, "Well, I know where we were twenty years ago, and this is where we were ten years ago, and this is where we are now, twenty years into this project, and how much else has changed."

EH: Yeah. If we keep opening and observing and interacting, the only difference between us and other projects is that we have a five-year head start. You know? And that, that's great! 'Cause we are a little ahead in the succession of these principles, and again, imperfectly; there's a lot of ways we are making mistakes, and that's how we learn. But that, we'll just stay, if we can just stay ahead of that edge, the great news is we can keep giving the information in the follow-up succession.

It's really exciting place to be, and the most important thing, again, is out of it, everyone here feels more alive and more connected than they have ever in their life. And that's also an important part of the experiment. When things are in line with nature, the tree thrives. The bird thrives. The kingfisher takes just as much as it needs from the pond to mate and make a nest, to sing; it doesn't take anything else.

And *that's* what we're moving towards is just, what is the perfect amount so we can thrive? And when something gets too much, it goes into decay. Rats in the lab that eat too much, their health drops. And so we're in a culture of excess, and you can't thrive under those conditions. Too much nitrogen will kill the tree. Too much water will kill the plant.

Everything in balance and the appropriate level of moderation.

EH: Yeah.

And that applies to each of the individual plants we grow, the animals around us, and to each human being.

EH: Yes, that includes, you know, one day we may choose to give our excess resources to this land, or to a tree in the next stage, it might be the women's' shelter for when we host the woman with her two kids 'til she gets on her feet. And I think that's the genius of the permaculture ethics, is, a lot of us focus on people care, like a lot of great projects, but they forget earth care, and a lot of great projects focus on earth care but they forget people care. And, for seven billion people, we need both if we're gonna make it through this time of extinction and climate weather weirding. I mean, we just went through one of the biggest droughts in Missouri history. A lot of the farmers who lost everything are looking at our land and being like, "Wow, everything's so green there."

So by example, we're showing small-scale and intensive in weirding weather outperforms large-scale. It's interesting that we also get to be a part of the shift in Missouri. And that's important to bring these projects to all the areas of the United States.

The more examples that people have to look at, they can see how these systems function. And that it really is possible, whether its on a 2,000 square foot lot in the city, or someone's porch in their apartment, or someone who's doing large broadscale work.

EH: Exactly, and it's *so* many people who come here from the city and they're like, "Oh, it's easy for you." And I point to an inspiration of mine, Lawrence, Kansas, he lives on \$600 a year and he imports five things; he has wheat plots in everyone's back yards. They harvest it by hand scythes and the mill it in a bike-powered thresher and winnower. And it's amazing that, his name's Tim, he lives without even candles. I called him, we were writing letters, he's identified 700 plants, 500 insects, he does weather patterns through index cards, he doesn't have a clock, he uses a sundial....when I wrote to him, I was like, "Yeah, we use beeswax candles," he's like, "I don't use any light. I'm a mammal." When it's dark, he sleeps. He doesn't have even candles, and he said, "I only use the train for emergencies." He bikes, so he said, "We'll probably never meet unless you come to meet me."

So, when I read this letter, I could have been threatened, but I was like overjoyed, like, "Wow, he's taking these permaculture principles and going deeper than we are,

and he's in the middle of the city, seven blocks from the train." And he also said, "The train comes in at two in the morning. Send anyone any time. I'll welcome them." What an amazing example. He's living simpler than we are in downtown Lawrence, Kansas.

So I always *love* to one-up peoples' possibilities. I think we're in a culture of impossibility. When we said we were gonna do this in Oregon, they were like, "It's not possible!" What would happen if we started to support the impossible? The response would be, "I don't *know* how to do it, but I know it's possible." And there's sometimes people call me—I've had an ecovillage, I don't wanna say, to honor privacy—they call and they're like, "We have a million dollars of debt. We heard the gift economy works, how are we gonna do it?" And I said, "I don't know how to do it, but I know it's possible." Like, the humility to not limit what nature can do and what miracles can happen. And being humble enough to be like, "I couldn't figure it out." And I think that's the hard part for people. When they can't figure it out, it's such a blow to their ego they have to put it under the title 'impossible'. What we're finding here is as we open to it, more and more is possible that we could never even have *dreamed of*.

We just have to step away from our own fear of those boundaries and open ourselves up to what we *could* do, and not what we feel we *can't* do?

EH: Yeah. And it's a devastation, I mean, there are all times here where people are like, "Oh, so if I move there I'm gonna be happy and connected to nature." I'm like, "Oh no. Love's threshing floor means we're gonna laugh all our laughter *and* cry all our tears." So there's days here where we have to look at our own self-created limitations and that's really devastating. But you know, a friend who says, "There's no such thing as miracles, Ethan. You're in a pipe dream." I'm like, "Hey check this out. Right now, you're being heated by light from ninety-three million miles away. *Everything's* miraculous." Rain, which life depends upon, it's the bedrock of life, falls from the sky. Now, if gold fell from the sky, my friends would be whistlin' Dixie, like, "It's a miracle!" You can't do anything with a chunk of gold! I mean, if there wasn't the commerce market. So here's rain falling and people are grumbling, getting their umbrellas out.

And so I think that's also what happens when you tie yourself into nature. Everything becomes miraculous. We just found chicken of the woods yesterday. We found like twenty pounds of it just growing out of a log. We milked our cow and we had cream of chicken of the woods soup! You'd have paid thirty bucks for it at our organic local restaurant, and we're eating it and it all just came from the abundance of the land. Like, those just grow out of logs! A five-star medicinal mushroom. And we're drying the rest of them. And I think people have fallen asleep to this factor that—you're eating an apple. Light from ninety-three million miles away made it happen.

Through millions and billions of years of evolution to produce this one apple, in this moment, that you are currently enjoying.

EH: Yeah. One of our big quotes is, I tell people when they're leaving here, "If you take away one thing, take away this. Statistically, the probability of any one of us being here is so small that the mere fact of existing should keep us all in a contented state of dazzlement and surprise." This idea's like, you, when's the last time you said thanks to gravity? Right now we'd be sucked into space and explode because our body pushes out with two and a half tons of atmospheric pressure. Our body is a superhero, it's pushing out at two and a half tons! When's the last time you said, "Thanks, body, for pushing out with two and a half tons."? When's the last time you thanked your mitochondria, 'cause we wouldn't be having this interview right now without it?

And I think we wake up focusing on the one percent that's not working, when ninety-nine percent of the world is supporting us beyond our wildest dreams. I love Byron Katie said to someone who was depressed, "Okay. Here's your first assignment. Write a list of everything that supports you. *Every* little detail." They wrote for three days and couldn't finish.

So I think, to be real, we have to focus on the one percent, but only one percent of our energy should focus on the one percent. So I should say, "Yeah, I broke my toe today, *and*, I've got gravity! Mitochondria! The sun's still shining! The meteorite that's 30,000 years overdue from hitting us hasn't hit yet from modern astronomy!" So, we should be, I think if we really saw the world as it is, we'd be doing a dance every thirty seconds; the problem is, we'd be so delighted, we'd be just dropping to our knees at every plant and person.

I've summed up that kind of idea recently with a single word: perspective. That it's all a matter of our perspective on how we interact with the world and our moment-to-moment living. And if your perspective is one of negativity, then that is the place that it's going to be. And if you can find that joy and realize even when everything else around you is melting down and seems like it's going to be the end of days, that, well, you made it through yesterday, you'll make it through tomorrow, you'll make it through today. And you can do so with joy.

EH: Yeah, I think you're right. And I think permaculture, simply, is a science that helps change our perspective. And that's why we put the Milky Way at our decision-making. Trying to keep perspective. You know, every time I kill—I take the life of a rooster, or a bird, or a male goat that we can't find a home from—I cry. There's someone who doesn't want a sheep 'cause it has a broken leg and I bike in and take its life and use its bones and its hide—every time, I cry. It doesn't mean that I'm not—I'm crying because I'm amazed at the beauty. There's a quote that says, "I'm weeping because life's so beautiful and so short." I also can, with the perspective of the supernova is useful, and I also can realize, there's never gonna be a chicken like this ever again. And it's given me eggs, and given me manure. And I'm gonna grieve it, and eat it and use its energy to try to uplift other things. And that's the best I can do. So it's also about feeling our impacts.

So, I think that's the important thing is having the courage to cry. Fukushima happened, one of our members cried for three hours straight. I thought, "That is one of the only sane responses that I've seen."

That compassion for the people who were there, and feeling that connection with them?

EH: Yeah. Just allowing it to hit you. I think we think if we actually let the grief of the world in, we'll be overwhelmed, but what we find is like the Dalai Lama says is, your suffering will lead you to compassion. And that, when I'm down in St. Louis in the big snowstorm two years ago, and saw a hundred families living in tents by the Mississippi River, my heart was changed forever. I'm no longer going down there because I, I'm supposed to do it—like if someone listens to this interview and they're like, "Oh, I'm gonna go out to the soup kitchen, for crying out loud." That's not the message. The message is, I witnessed those people and talked to 'em, and became friends with them. So I cannot choose anything except to go serve them when I can.

And it's, "Let's not have moral actions, let's have beautiful actions." I think that was Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology, who was inspired by Gandhi and has since inspired Joanna Macy and these other deep ecologists who also love permaculture as, like, "Yeah, how do we let the world *touch* us, so we'll have beautiful responses?"

You know, I don't eat bananas unless they're dumpstered because I was in Ecuador and I stood at the banana plantations and I met people who are dying from the chemicals, and know globally that over ten thousand people die from improper use of chemicals at the banana centers. If someone eats a banana, I'm gonna say, "Hey, enjoy it, that was a lot of work. Don't feel guilty about it." And I know that my heart was changed by seeing it and letting it touch me.

So how do we see the world and let it touch me. Not only the Fukushima, I hope on the same day, I'm also celebrating that this Pacific Ocean, all those islands are creating the largest nature preserves ever seen in history. So how do I let both of it hit me? 'Cause that's balance. Yes, there's a supernova taking out a thousand worlds right now as we speak, and also as we speak, an old supernova has turned into planetary nebula and a thousand *new* worlds are coming to be. So how do you sit right in between that?

So I think if we go over, too over to magical thinking, we're like, "The world's great, there's no problems," we're missing the devastation that opens our heart. And if we go over too far like, "Everything's messed up, we need to take out corporate leaders," we're also missing something. We miss it often, but on some days we're right on the middle. And it's really an incredible place to sit.

And those are the moments when the magic happens without having to have magical thinking.

EH: Yeah. Exactly, you're not faking it. And there are days that I fake it, a lot of friends will say, "Yeah, you were forcing that one a little bit." I was so desperate to want something to be different in the future, instead of just taking it as it comes, as nature does. Mount Saint Helens, I had the honor of hiking it after the eruption and going up to the rim and being like, "Wow! The earth, the universe is...Oh my goodness, the power." And I also went up there, it was '96. So I started to see this new life come out of that. And chaos, you know, Chinese symbol of chaos and opportunity is the same symbol.

And so I also agree with Eisenstein that what seems impossible now, I think what we're doing here is gonna become normal. And then once normal, I hope to push beyond that until we're truly what I think our birthright is that we're all thriving just knowing that it comes from inside and we all emulate the joy of a chickadee singing in the morning, and it's authentic.

Thank you for your time that you've spent with me today. Could I ask you about three different types of technology that some folks were wondering if you were using, and then, we'll be about at the end?

EH: Okay, great!

Are you using composting toilets?

EH: Yes. Right now we have the orchard composting system where we dig hole, poop in it, cap it with a foot of soil, sawdust, and straw, and then after a year, we either plant a tree on it or dig it back up and use it. So, that system we prefer when we just plant something on top of it. That orchard toilet moves around some of our damaged land that's high-clay, it moves every four months. Small hole, and then we cap it.

Okay. Do you use cold frames to extend your growing season?

EH: We do. We plan to do a greenhouse using all throwaway or recycled, it's a little bigger project to match, you know, kind of throwaway windows. We're not gonna just go get the plastic for the polytunnel. Even though I appreciate those who are using that as a step. So right now, actually, cold frames are our leading extension of how we push our growing season.

Okay. And last, are you using solar ovens?

EH: We are. That opens a really good question. Sun Ovens is right in Illinois, and it's made there in Illinois, so, in the beginning we purchased some Sun Ovens, and now we have a really large handmade solar oven that we're re-tweaking so that it can function while—sometimes with a project we'll get off-colored eco-paint from nearby, but at the same time my wife is making homemade milk paint with iron oxide. So we're both, we're kind of threading that needle and at times people come they're like, "Why'd you buy a solar oven?" We're like, "Well, with everything we're doing it might've been a year before we built one. So, this is in Illinois, it's closer to

us so, this is an exception.” And each person has to choose—we make our best choice in each moment. These solar ovens, we prefer cooking by the sun or raw. Because we get most nutrients from eating raw, and then when we need a solar oven, and the other main thing is we have an adobe oven that’s super-insulated so we can bake bread or pizza and then, later, cook in it for another twenty-four hours.

Is your diet vegetarian?

EH: You know, following permaculture we have a very diverse source of food. So, one of these is our fishpond and our dairies, we have goats and cows, eggs. But, we like to serve, we have a full member who’s vegetarian, we have mainly omnivores, and we actually had a woman here for two years that was vegan. So we produced a lot of sauerkraut and have tons and tons of crops and root cellaring. So, without refrigeration, our goal is if we can express each diet locally, wonderful.

But we also have to say that we find having a really diverse diet, as omnivores, is the least amount of energy for this area. So we can, for example, get a lot of trophy deer; it’s just dropped off here. The guys cut off the antlers and we can 100 quarts of deer. So, omnivore for this bioregion, zone five, is the easiest for us. But, we definitely want to express any diet so everyone can choose their diet based on their locality.

That covers the questions that were sent in to me from the folks who knew that I was going to be talking to you. I look over this, and it’s been an amazing conversation. Makes me think of the places in my life where I can change my next best step to get a little bit closer than I have been.

To wrap things up, is there anything else that you’d like to add or sign off with for this interview?

EH: Thanks for the question. Yeah, first I wanna say thanks, I, I just felt a real openness and appreciate your questions and listening and it was a delight. Thanks for your presence in making that happen.

And, the second one is, I guess an invitation to anyone listening right now, it’s a really simple homework assignment, only if you’re excited to take it on. You make a list of everything you would like to be doing in your life but you’re not. Then make a list of everything you’re doing that you like in your life. Then make a list of everything you’re doing that you don’t enjoy doing, it’s not in line with your ethics. Once you have that list, starting the next day, either pick something you’re not doing and you want to be doing and start doing it, or pick something you don’t want to be doing and remove it. Only one. That’s the rule of the homework. Pick only one. And then live into that until it feels like it’s part of your life, and then go back to the list and incorporate another one. And you will be on the path to, I think, being really joyful and connected.

That is a modified list from when someone asked how to be happy by the Dalai Lama. He said, “Make a list of what makes you happy and what makes you unhappy. Start adding to the happy and start subtracting from the unhappy. But what I’ve

added so that it's sustainable is only add one or subtract one, and wait until you feel like you're balanced. And then do another. And they say it takes forty days to form a habit, so...That's what I did in my experiment in what we're doing here and we find we're healthier and more alive because of it, so.

Something real out of the talk, if you want to try something, try it. Feel free to call us and share where it's leading you.

Thank you for all this time, Ethan. It was a great conversation and I look forward to getting this out for everyone to listen to.

EH: [Laughs] Yeah, thanks so much, Scott, it was great. And, just strength and peace and joy for everything that you're doing in your life and thanks for, yeah, sharing these amazing people with the world. And, yeah, we hope to keep in touch over here. And whenever you're in the Midwest, come by and say hi.