

I had been a media hound for years, a keen observer of socio-political events with a need to keep up with what's happening in Canada, the US, and in the world at large. After both my parents passed into spirit in October of 1995, I gave myself a retreat that spawned new reflections on media, particularly as it relates to the ecology of children and the very notion of a sustainable society.

On an island off Canada's west coast, I tuned into the natural dynamics of my environment, that timeless reality. I felt the rhythm of the day's passing light, stoking the fire in the wood stove, watching the play of tides on the bay, hearing the fray of emotions within - I put the world on hold.

I found myself not wanting to buy the newspaper or turn on the TV, the Radio and CD player. Uninterrupted by random voices and images, I came to feel an expanding inner self. With my attention not spread so thin, the immediate world became very important. The tranquil beauty of the bay and the tree-clean island air - became dear to me. My interiors were expanding. When I returned to the city I didn't need to turn on the car radio for company. My life felt complete without it.

I pretended that I already had all the information I needed, at least the kind I was likely to get from commercial media. I was still reading all sorts of books, but something had shifted. I felt a sense of contentment, of having enough; and that fullness, now in the forefront of my being, didn't want or need the intrusions of outside stimuli.

I wanted this new feeling to last. I noticed how much time I had gained. I noticed the absence of jarring news items, some gruesome murder, another child abduction nearby, a civil war, or other horror story - and how this absence allowed the day a clean start to unfolding possibilities. Less need to react, more time to initiate.

I was still getting "news", of an airplane crash or the Republican party's presidential nominee, but now, by way of friends, not media. I'm not unaware of the irony that these people probably got their news from the media. It is enough to make the distinction of how different life felt now, how present I felt. I had stepped out of a steady diet of media distraction, and thrown light on a habit that, in retrospect, had all the signs of an addiction. The constant multimedia channel surfing - "remote" hoarding of inane imagery, the mind's constant chatter wrapped in every day's newspaper - had ceased.

This disengagement brought other changes: very few commercial messages crossed my path; the shopping impulse, already low, lessened; I was comparing myself less to others; less mental and emotional energy spent on faraway stories that had little to do with me and that I could do nothing about. People in my immediate life took center stage.

Media sells news, pushing events to the edge to get attention, to make money.

The lengths that corporations and entertainment companies go to maximize profits, outdoing each other to win the greatest audience in a marketplace of expanding user options and shrinking loyalties, makes the use of sensationalism compelling if not inevitable. Contrive a crisis, stir up controversy.

“Crisis-casting” is bad news: it spins everything into discord and scandal. If producers of news programs fiscally favor “disaster” over good news, outrage over comfort, and conflict over peace, their very preferences fabricate a self-fulfilling and distorted world that dances in the minds and hearts of the people they reach.

A loud “ambient noise” obscures and impairs mature understanding of the signs of our times, the ones deemed “not sexy”, like the loss of global biodiversity, and ecosystems at risk. Our high-fat media diet creates a “virtual” reality, a giant negative feedback loop expanding and feeding on itself. Life as performance, relationship as marketing, a techno-babble melodrama where time and complexity are compressed into a numbing tedium of pseudo-crises and shopping solutions.

Against this backdrop, consider the ecology of the child. Consider the magical child turned TV-junkie at an early age, and the wanton theft of imagination from this young child’s life. Add junk food, trash music, and parents who are not home all week; throw in a gaudy Christmas season, and watch a vacancy grow — into a grounded, caring, exemplary citizen? By which means? You’ve got an obsessive neurotic with much to undo, lost in a sea of trivia—miles from the shore, restless, homeless. And all the schools and jails in the world won’t put this broken seed back together again.

Before my media fast, I suspected something that I now see is true: our economy fuels this “toxic media”. And they both exploit children. Society’s problems are systemic. They cannot be addressed without looking at the ecology of the child. Ungrounded children grow socioeconomic problems that are not addressable in isolation. The contrived media world-view presented to children, the one we call normal, is a scarcity view contrary to Earth’s abundance, a fraudulent ad. The budding worldwide movement of socially responsible businesses is a genuine search for responsible, ecological commerce and I am proud to be part of it. Unlike the amoral shifting of global capital and labor, community based commerce as communion can bring us together in a spirit of service, and reverence for the Earth and for future generations.

Increasingly we realize the interconnected “systems” that nurture life: everything affects everything. And for humanity, everything starts with the child. In planting the seeds of behavioral change towards a humane society, we would do well to remember that the psyche of the child is a container for life and it drives most of adult activity. Molding young children into lifelong consumers is a violation of their free-spirit, an inexcusable waste of human potential and planetary energy - a sacrilege.

Money will not fix “soul erosion”. The ecological citizen-child needs to grow in environments of care and support expressed at every level of human endeavor, rooted in the matrix of parental love and a conservative bond with mother Earth and father Sky. Above all else, shaping a restorative and sustainable society requires children who feel wanted and loved.

The village it takes to raise a child needs redesign: our economic foundation does not protect or inspire the magical child. That child is looking to us for help. It’s hard to access the timeless reality whose reflection we are. It takes effort to find the silence that heals. A media-fast of any length—for one day, a weekend, or a week- can provide a mind-cleansing time to put the world in perspective, and polish the lens of the heart.

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Raffi is a singer, songwriter, and internationally acclaimed children’s entertainer. His unprecedented success in 20 years of family entertainment resulted in numerous “gold” and “platinum” sales awards in both audio and video and over 1.5 million books sold. Avoiding commerciality and consistently championing the child, Raffi has been honored by Parents’ Choice Awards, and The Order of Canada. Raffi’s work on ecology advocacy earned him the UN’s Earth Achievement and Global 500 Awards. He lives off-line in Vancouver, B.C., and is currently writing his auto- biography.