

## Simple Acts of Sanity: A Seed Catalogue

Glimmers of light for a dark solstice



*Bauerngarten (Farm Garden) by Gustav Klimt, 1907*

*This is a follow-up post to [Sowing Anachronism: How to be Weird in Public, and Private.](#)*

*Saruman believes that it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I found. I found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk, that keeps the darkness at bay. Simple acts of kindness and love. - Gandalf, The Hobbit Film*

The winter solstice is upon us, a time of deepest darkness, but also a time of rebirth. Today's post is fitting for the season, as it's a catalogue of seeds we can plant, through ordinary acts, that can grow into something real and hopeful in a world struggling with its own dark solstice.

We had a tremendous response to our request for readers to contribute their anachronistic practices. There were many that were named numerous times including: reading physical books, walking, biking, baking bread, keeping a journal, and using dumbphones. There were also some practices which seemed quite obscure, such as using a scythe instead of a lawnmower (two readers) or, incredibly, living without a fridge (also two readers).

One thread that carried through many responses was thankfulness for the encouragement to continue to swim against the digital deluge, regardless of how weird or anachronistic it may appear:

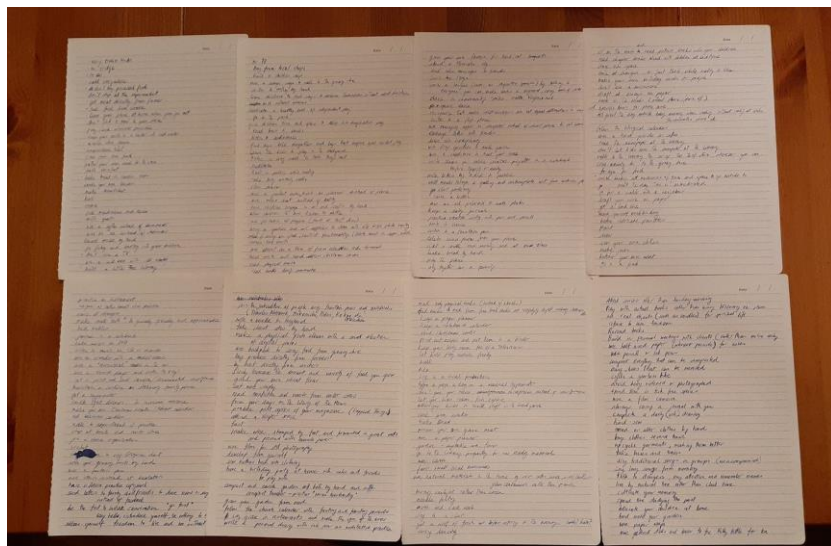
*"...because after reading that piece I felt more at home in the world, un-conformed as I am to it...Peco and Ruth's post, has cheered me up immensely" - Caroline Ross*

*"Inspiring! I want to approach my hopes and prayers for the new year with these marvelous thoughts in mind."*

- B. Bratrud

*"Thank you for always turning my mind and heart toward the actions and attitudes I KNOW are better, yet forget or eschew." - Mary Poindexter McLaughlin*

The comments amounted to over 40 printed pages, which I (Ruth) reviewed carefully, checking off each named action while noting it down by hand. This is what it looked like:



*My handwritten notes in fountain pen, written while at the climbing gym with our youngest son*

Now the question remained how best to share these with readers (the work seemed surprisingly reminiscent of sorting through student data from my qualitative research for my Masters Thesis). The practices seemed to fall naturally into five overlapping, yet distinguishable categories:

- Technology use (reducing, altering, removing, replacing)
- Self-sufficient, minimalist practices
- Embodied & mental practices

- Children and family
- Spiritual and relational practices

We then sorted each of the practices that [readers shared](#) into these general categories. While we would have loved to acknowledge each person who contributed a given practice, it simply was not feasible (after all it's Christmas week and we still want to enjoy actually *doing* the things we keep talking about!). We encourage you to revisit [the original post](#) and savour the comment section with all the wonderfully rich descriptions and stories.

As it would have been impossible to list the anachronistic practices based on “order of importance”, we simply alphabetized each list.

*Please Note: We are not suggesting that you need to follow all these practices or any of them. Use them simply as inspiration from other readers. Pick the ones that speak to you, or come up with your own.*

*“It isn't important which things we do, only that we find some, that they re-embody us, enrich our shared lives, and return us to our 'right minds'.” - Caroline Ross*

### **Technology use (reducing, altering, removing, replacing)**



The Garden at Arles by Vincent van Gogh, 1888

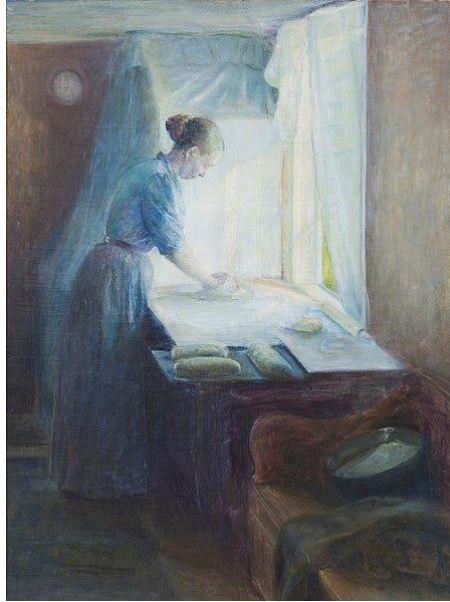
*One of Dixie Dillon Lane's main objections to the smartphone is that it has multiple uses: "You might think this is a good thing, but hear me out. The more things that a single tool can do, the more reliant you are on that single tool, and the less resilient and resourceful you yourself become."*

- Allow yourself the freedom to live and be without a phone
- Build in personal meetings with clients rather than online only interactions
- Cycle instead of using a car to get a better sense of distance, time, and climate
- Delete excess photos from your phone
- Develop film yourself
- Don't link e-mail to your phone
- Don't own a TV
- Get a dumb phone
- Get a land line
- Get a point-and-shoot camera/disconnected smartphone for taking pictures
- Get a typewriter
- Give up social media
- Give your teens wisephones/ lightphones instead of smartphones
- If using an iPad, restrict functionality (delete built-in apps, add screen time limits)
- If you publish a digital magazine, provide printed copies
- Keep a clock that makes audible sound (like ticking or hourly chime)
- Keep a paper planner
- Keep a white board calendar
- Keep your living room free of a television
- Leave your phone at home when you go out
- Listen to music on CD or records
- Live by natural time rather than clock time
- Maintain a landline as stationary family phone
- Make a physical photo album from a small selection of your digital photos
- Purchase a print subscription to newspaper/magazine rather than digital
- Reduce the number of apps on your phone
- Refuse to use Amazon

- Send letters to family and friends to share news and say hello instead of facebook etc.
- Send voice messages to friends
- Set specific hours for phone use
- Spend time in tech-free spaces
- Switch to a flip phone
- Switch your phone to airline mode when walking
- Use a film camera
- Use a local ordinance survey map to walk public footpaths and countryside
- Use a pocket note book as a planner instead of your phone
- Use a radio in the car
- Use a record player and listen to vinyl
- Use a watch instead of your phone to tell time
- Use an e-reader with a backlit screen (so as not to be distracted by the internet)
- Use an old Polaroid to make photos
- Use film for still photography
- Use message apps on computer instead of smart phone to set boundaries
- Use paper maps
- Use paper maps when hiking or camping instead of GPS
- Use portable CD players (found at thrift stores)
- Use the “manual” rather than the automatic door entrance
- Use Victorian-style “calling cards” to give to people to get in touch with you
- Use video chat instead of texting
- Watch movies on DVD
- Write your grocery lists by hand instead of your phone

*“...I am enjoying the weight of the camera when I take it with me and because I can't take a handful of quick photos they end up having more significance to me. Not to mention that the photos at their core are not 0's and 1's but feel more tangible with how they slowly develop to a tinted image separate from the pristine image on my phone's camera.” – Dan*

## Self-sufficient, Minimalist Practices



*Bread-Baking by Charlotte Mannheimer, 1895*

*"I realized that any day when I spend time tending a fire is a very satisfying one, because it makes me feel like a Traditional Human instead of a Distracted Modern." - Gretchen Joanna*

- Bake bread
- Bake intricate pastries
- Bike
- Build a chicken coop
- Butcher your own meat
- Buy beef directly from ranchers
- Buy clothes second-hand
- Buy from local shops
- Buy produce directly from farmers
- Buy shoes that can be mended
- Carpool or take transit when possible
- Compost and enrich garden soil both by hand and with compost tumbler – practice “worm husbandry”
- Compost everything that can be composted
- Cook from scratch

- Crochet
- Cross-country ski to the grocery store
- Cycle - even when the weather gets cooler
- Cycle a gearless bike
- Cycle to work
- Delve into handspinning
- Don't buy processed food
- Don't use a microwave
- Eat more simply
- Favor small, local businesses
- Forage for food
- Gather your own wood for the stove
- Get meat directly from farmer
- Go carless
- Go fishing and hunting with your children
- Grind coffee beans with a hand grinder
- Grind your own wheat flour
- Grow your garden from seed
- Grow your own flowers for hand-cut bouquets
- Grow your own food
- Hand-sew
- Hand-water your garden
- Knead bread by hand
- Knit
- Knit in public while waiting
- Learn to preserve food by canning
- Line-dry your laundry
- Make bread by hand
- Make cultured dairy like kefir and yoghurt
- Make fermented foods like sauerkraut or sourdough
- Make jam

- Make wine stomped by foot, fermented in vats, and processed with muscle power
- Mend or alter clothes by hand
- Milk goats
- Minimize amount of heat so that attire is dependent on weather
- Minimize the time you use artificial light
- Pay cash whenever possible
- Pick mushrooms and herbs
- Process your own game meat
- Produce your own food supply
- Raise a kitten
- Sew buttons back onto clothing
- Sew your own clothes
- Shop at a local market instead of superstores
- Shop at brick and mortar stores
- Slowly increase the amount and variety of food you grow
- Smoke your own bacon
- Start gardening
- Take buses and trains
- Use a backpack to carry food from grocery store
- Use a camp wagon to walk to the grocery store
- Use a cold box with cold blocks
- Use a compostable toilet
- Use a hand grinder for coffee
- Use a push-powered mower
- Use a scythe instead of a lawnmower
- Use a wooden stove sauna
- Use a woodstove to heat your home
- Use an ax instead of a chainsaw
- Use drop spindle to make yarn
- Use gathered sticks and leaves to fire Kelly kettle for tea
- Use natural materials in the home e.g. wear cotton, linen, wool, leather, glass containers



- Use stairs instead of escalators
- Walk barefoot
- Walk everywhere
- Walk to appointments if possible
- Walk to the library, the co-op, the thrift store, wherever you can
- Wash and card wool
- Weave

## Embodied & Mental Practices



*Young Woman Writing a Letter by Albert Anker, 1903*

"C. S. Lewis also used a dip pen – not a fountain pen. He liked to dip the pen every 4-5 words and he would whisper his next 4-5 words aloud before writing them, to make sure they flowed. He believed it was important to make sure the words sounded right to the ear first." [Nadine Brandes](#) (comment added by Dan)

- Always carry a journal with you
- Build a Little Free Library
- Complete a daily (ink) drawing
- Craft in public
- Dance in community: polka, square dance, waltz, Virginia reel
- Draft all essays on paper
- Draw
- Exchange letters with friends

- Find books to read from free book racks at recycling depots, railway stations, etc.
- Give handmade gifts for Christmas
- Go to the library frequently for new reading material
- Hand-write and hand-address Christmas cards
- Journal in a notebook
- Keep a Commonplace quote book as a standard reading habit
- Keep a daily journal
- Learn a language (such as Argentine Spanish)by talking to everyone you can, make notes in longhand, carry a book of verbs
- Learn the tango
- Listen to audiobooks
- Make your own birthday cards for people
- Make your own Christmas wreath/ Advent calendar
- Paint
- Play the guitar
- Play the piano
- Practice an instrument
- Practice creative writing with pen and pencil
- Practice pottery
- Print out recipes and put them in a binder
- Read books during commute
- Read non-fiction and novels from earlier eras
- Read old books from lists such as [John Senior's 1000 Good Books](#) , [Johnathan Peageau's reading list](#), or St.John's College Reading list
- Read physical books
- Read the newspaper in the library
- Read tons of books
- Reread books
- Roll beeswax candles
- Send Christmas cards
- Sing in a choir

- Sing in a local production
- Sing long songs from memory
- Sing traditional songs in groups (unaccompanied)
- Smash coloured rocks to make ancient paints
- Swing dancing
- Switch to a fountain pen
- Switch to writing by hand
- Take client notes by hand
- Teach yourself bookbinding
- Thrift clothing
- Try needle felting
- Type a page a day on a manual typewriter
- Upcycle garments, making them better
- Use a cookbook instead of defaulting to recipes online
- Use half-used paper (whenever possible) for notes
- Use pencil or ink pens
- Use reeds for quill pens and scrap metal for metal point drawing
- Write a novella in longhand
- Write ideas for online creative projects in a notebook before typing or editing
- Write in cursive
- Write letters by hand in public

## Children and Family

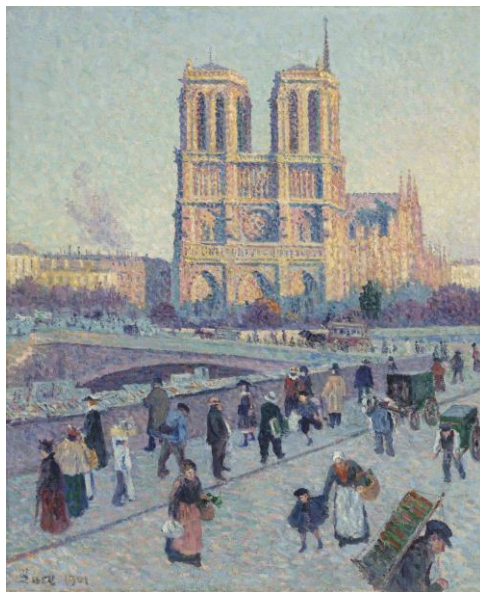


*The Whittling Boy by Winslow Homer, 1873*

- Allow children to use knives to whittle
- Allow your children ample free time to pursue their own interests
- Allow your kids to build stuff in the backyard
- Approach home education the Charlotte Mason/ Classical way with lots of time in nature
- Bring games and art supplies to share with other kids while waiting (during lessons)
- Cultivate a healthy level of independent play
- Don't let kids use computer at the library
- Educate your children at home
- Find toys like Megatiles and Lego that inspire open-ended play
- Follow Classical Education to give perspective on modern times
- Give children time and space to delve into imaginative play
- Go to the park
- Have a birthday party at home, with a simple meal/cake, and friends to play with
- Have children engage in arts and crafts by hand
- Have children practice copy work by hand
- If using an iPad, have it "living" in a very public part of the home, rather than children having their own
- Leave children to find ways to amuse themselves without adult direction and without screens

- Leave the kids to play in the backyard
- Let kids play outside freely
- Let your kids climb trees
- Let your kids roam, fish, explore
- Listen to audiobooks
- Read chapter books aloud with children at bedtime
- Read tons of books
- Sing together as a family
- Sit on the couch and read picture books with your children
- Take a long walk to talk things out
- Use a Yoto player for screen-free audiobooks and music listening
- Use ideas from the [LetGrow](#) project to help your children develop healthy independence

## Spiritual and Relational Practices



*The Quai Saint-Michel and Notre-Dame by Maximilien Luce, 1901*

- Attend a Messiah sing
- Attend a Vesper service
- Attend services other than Sunday morning
- Cross yourself and say a short prayer when you see the sun rise and sunset
- Cultivate your memory

- Develop awareness of seasonal changes in trees, wind, animals, ground etc.
- Fast
- Follow the church calendar with fasting and feasting periods
- Follow the liturgical calendar
- Form your days on the Liturgy of the Hours
- Get a whiff of fresh air before retiring in the evening (hobbit habit)
- “Go first” -be the first to initiate conversation, say hello, introduce yourself, be willing to be a friend
- Go for a walk with a neighbour
- Go on a pilgrimage
- Great the day outside every morning when waking without looking at clocks, thermostats, phone, etc.
- Have candlelight dinners to create reverence
- Hold babies
- Learn ancient Latin hymns/ chants to sing throughout the day
- Learn to sing Gregorian chant
- Light a candle each morning and at meal times
- Make small talk; be generally friendly and approachable
- Meditate
- Practice a weekly Analog Day
- Practice morning, midday, evening, and Examen prayer
- Pray
- Pray with actual books rather than using breviary on phone
- Put away electronics (except for necessary communication) as part of Lenten fast
- Read the Bible or another book before getting on your phone or computer
- Recognize that online relationships are not equal alternatives to real ones
- Say grace in restaurants and make the sign of the cross
- Singing ancient songs helps to set the pace when walking
- Slow down
- Spend time studying the past
- Stare into space, smile at strangers, or just think while waiting in line

- Take long morning walks
- Take pilgrimages to familiar places
- Talk to strangers, pay attention, and remember names
- Use Advent as time to step away from tech
- Use real objects (such as candles) for spiritual life
- Visit with friends at home, restaurant, or pub
- Walk in the woods (without your phone/ phone off)
- Walk to church on Sundays
- Wander through a gallery and contemplate art from centuries past
- Write a personal diary with ink pen as meditative practice



*Cutting Christmas Trees by Hans Andersen Brendekilde, 1885*

*“...it does not make much sense to be anachronistic simply to be contrary. We must ask ourselves “why” we are doing something a certain way, and be honest with the answer.” Shannon Hood*

In order to resist the dehumanizing effect of the Machine, it is necessary to draw a line. To create a frame around what defines our humanness. We need to fiercely protect these lines that the Machine continually tries to encroach upon. Yet, once the frame is defined, it is much easier to defend it. [Peco’s Pilgrim’s Creed](#) provides one example of how to anchor our core meanings and relationship to technology, and might inspire you to reflect on your own frame or standpoint.

We hope this post has given you a handful of seeds that you can take into the New Year, to spread simple acts of hope and sanity wherever you go.

Merry Christmas and blessings for the New Year,

Ruth and Peco

*“The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions. Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective.” -G.K. Chesterton*



*View of Argenteuil in the Snow by Claude Monet, 1875*

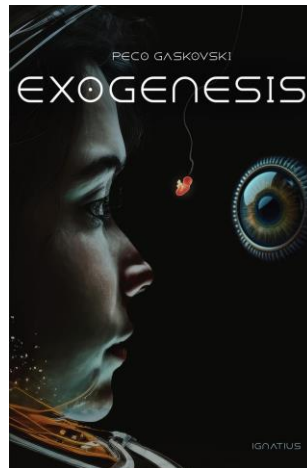
*If you found this post helpful (or hopeful), and if you would like to support our work of putting together a book on “The Making of UnMachine Minds”, please consider supporting our work by becoming a paid subscriber, or simply show your appreciation with a like, restack, or share.*

You can also support us by buying Peco’s new release [Exogenesis](#) (Ignatius Press), a novel which cuts to the core of what it means to be human in an increasingly technological world. *Exogenesis* was just recommended as one out of eight of [The 2023 Public Discourse Books List!](#)



Serena Sigillito *"This is a novel of ideas, to be sure, but it's also a fast-paced and compelling read. Although the society Gaskovski describes may initially seem far-fetched, the characters' justifications for upholding its dehumanizing systems will sound eerily familiar to anyone who has been paying attention to our own."*

[Exogenesis](#) imagines a technological future where a parallel rural society has arisen beside a technologically advanced city, giving it the feel aptly described by one reviewer of *Blade Runner* meeting *The Benedict Option*.



## Further Reading

Christopher Whittington [Otium Omnia Vincit](#) -*Against efficiency and the triumph of leisure.*

Kaitlyn DeYoung [Hercules, the Hydra, and the Holidays](#)- *An invitation to join the fight against the monster of our time*

Caroline Ross [School of the Unconformed](#) - *An Appreciation* "As someone who gathers and grinds rocks and earths to make paint, and teaches how to do this for a living, being years, centuries, or even millennia out of fashion in my behaviour is an everyday occurrence."

Joel Timothy [Living on the Fringe](#)- *On the ubiquity of modern technology & why I'm getting rid of my smartphone*

Isabelle Drury [Thoughts on being technology free- could that be me?](#) -*And why I bought a map and a calendar.*

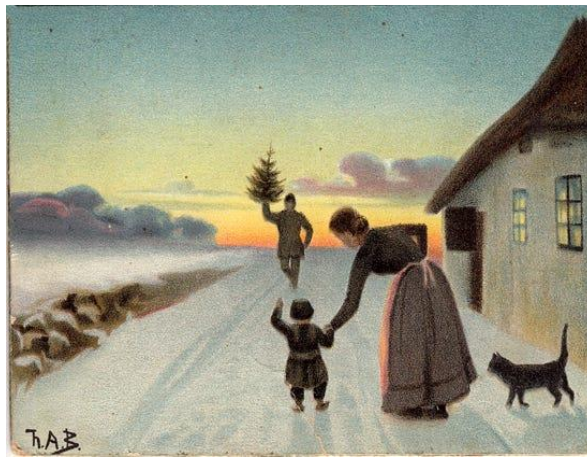
Catherine Oliver [Some thoughts on screens, reading, and childhood](#)

Dixie Dillon Lane [Technology in the Family Home: Add Before You Subtract](#)

Tsh Oxenreider [End of the Year Reflection Questions](#) “Ask these questions out loud with friends and family, spend time in solitude to journal your own thoughts, use the **printable version** to cut out questions and draw them from a bowl, or employ any other form that strikes your fancy.”

Separately, here is a newsletter from a reader that I have come across and is worth your consideration: Adam Wilson [Introducing Sand River Community Farm](#) “*At Sand River Community Farm, we long to recover our deeply human capacity for mutually sustaining relationships, both human to human, and human to all that is not human. We grow and glean food which is offered as a gift to anyone who is hungry for any reason. Through practices of radical hospitality and intergenerational table fellowship, the Farm sparks a lively conversation to imagine how we might feed one another without buying and selling food.*”

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*The Arrival of the Christmas Tree by Hans Andersen Brendekilde*