

GAIA Newsletter – Midsummer 2008

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The beauty of nature

I belong to a very fortunate generation. I grew up without war, diseases, starvation or poverty. I grew up in one of the rich countries of the western world – Sweden. Because of my work I have traveled the world through more than 70 countries and I have lived many years outside my home country. This means I have very much experienced the transformation of our society and way of living that has occurred during this time. This transformation that has brought us so many good things and made us healthier to live longer than earlier generations. But the transformation that has also had a very high price – the destruction of our nature now shown in the global warming. And this wealth (and pollution) has so far been limited to a minority of the global population.

I was very fortunate of an other important reason. I was born and grew up on the country side. In a small village where we lived of and with the Nature. We are all affected by our early years. Therefore I believe everyone who grew up with Nature will be attached to Nature. I have also lived in the city. I studied and lived in Stockholm for many years. I lived three years in Los Angeles and three years in Sao Paulo. Two extremes and two of the largest Mega cities in the world with what is good and bad. But even when I lived there and maybe because of this I always tried to escape out of the city. To the mountains or desert behind LA. To the coast and ocean or the rain forest outside Sao Paulo. I have been a photo amateur since I got my first camera from my uncle and I have taken tens of thousands of pictures from this nature that I love. Because of this love I am fully convinced that what we are doing – our generation is doing to Nature is so very wrong. Nothing can justify that.

The problem that I have been trying to point out on my website is that although we see all the evidence of our failures and although we talk about it – we really do not change our behavior. We don't walk the talk. It does not matter how much alarming facts we get, but our way of living has taken priority – and now half of the world is living in cities. And there is a big difference if you live in the city protected within the convenience and even luxury of city life – just to once in a while fly on vacation to Hawaii, The Maldives or most probably to Las Vegas or Disney World to experience another artificial world. To feel “sustainable” we go to the shopping center to buy ecological food and may be even invest in a tree in Amazons. We even believe that we can buy us the right to emit more carbon dioxide, just so we can continue business as usual brainwashed with commercials– buy more and consume or else our economy is going down.

This is why I am fully convinced that in order to change our behavior we first need to change our attitude towards Nature. We do not have to “Go back to Nature” physically but we need to go back to Nature emotionally and spiritually. The well being of all of Nature and of all humans should be the priority – not endless growth by consuming more and more. We need to find our way back to this original love.

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I grew up in Sättna and a small village outside Sundsvall in the middle of Sweden. My ancestors had been farmers since generations and living on the family farm surrounded by the river and a small creek. My grandfather opened a general store at the farm 1899 and 1913 he built a separate general store across the road. He got married 1917 to my grandmother and died 1932 leaving her to raise four children, running the store and bakery as well as helping out at the farm. My parents took over the store 1949, the same year I was born. The farm and the store was my universe for many years and I lived there until the year of 1968. The farm was self sufficient of almost everything. What was needed like salt and sugar or horse shoes and nails was bought in the store. We ate ecological food locally produced. I went by bike to school and learned to swim in the river. Rye and oat meal was grained in the local mill in the same river. We used bio fuel for heating and cooking. Everything was re-cycled and nothing as wasted. We lived a sustainable life before this word was invented. And it was a good and rewarding life – without TV, car and no excess. But with a real quality of life. My mother came from another reality. Her father was born in a small house on the island of Alnö, had worked all his life on the sawmills and became one of the pioneers in the trade union and the struggle for democracy. Swedish women got the right to vote 1921, the same year my parents were born.

This life will never return but I returned to this village for Midsummer 2008 since me and my wife now own the old general store. Naturally everyone now has nice houses with TV and Internet. And most people have their own car so they can go to the largest shopping centre in Northern Scandinavia, just a few kilometers away. But still the spirit of this small village survives. And the beauty of Nature!



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Midsummer 2008 in Alnö and Sättna

Midsummer is a wonder of rebirth from snow to beautiful life –every spring. At the island of Alnö it is celebrated at Tunet, a hill near the church with view over the straight in the Baltic sea. In Sättna Midsummer is celebrated at Ånäsparken peoples park near the river. But the real celebration is in Nature. The rare yellow flower below is called butter bowl and grow at the Öhlen family farm. The purple flower is a delicious but nowadays an extremely rare berry called Åkerbär growing in a secret place.....



Alnö



Smörboll/ Trollius europaeus



Åkerbär/Rubus arcticus



The Sättna peoples park



The Öhlen family farm

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Midsummer 2008 in Sättna

Road 399 goes from Solum via Tösta to Östanå. It follows the Sättna river, first in a distance and then so close that the road is always threatened during the spring flooding. When the road passes over the hill you can see the Östanå valley. Here below you can find the red house near the mill and “the river that runs through it”. The white Priest neck (Prästkrage) and the blue bell flower (Ängsklocka) together with many other flowers are covering the meadows along the road.



Ängsklocka/Campanula patula



Prästkrage/
Chrysanthemum leucanthemum



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Midsummer 2008 with relatives and friends

Midsummer with the summer solstice is a very long tradition in Sweden when families, friends and neighbors came together to eat, drink, sing, dance and maybe find love.

These pictures are all from our Midsummer celebration 2008 in Medelpad when we stayed in the old Öhlen general store (Monitored by Els-Mari & Tore) and visiting the old Öhlen family farm with Gulli and Sven. Anton Öhlen (My dad) was visiting Hilda (Born 1912) who remember the day he was born 1921. And he also visited Sigrid on Alnö on her 81th birthday as well as his super market in Kovland now being expanded to an even bigger supermarket by the new owner. Noemia (My wife from Brazil) and I went to the new country home of Leif and Sonia (from California) for a reunion with us living in a commune in the early seventies where Jane (visiting from Canada) called her and mine son James (Born in the commune & now living in USA) . We do live in a global world!



The store being modified



Anton with Noemia and Jane



Midsummer sport in Tösta



Sigrid and Josefs children and grandchildren at Alnö



Anton with Sigrid
(Wife of Antons brother Josef)



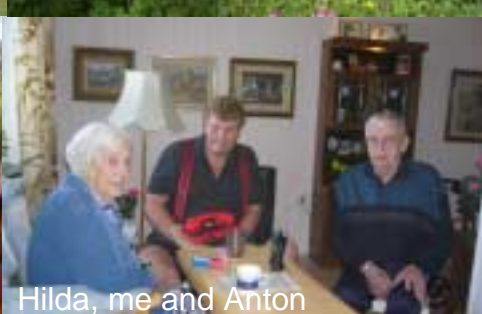
Our ALnö cottage
(Owned by Öhlen cousines)



Midsummer dinner in the old
J.A. Öhlen General store



Midsummer at Edlunds in Tösta



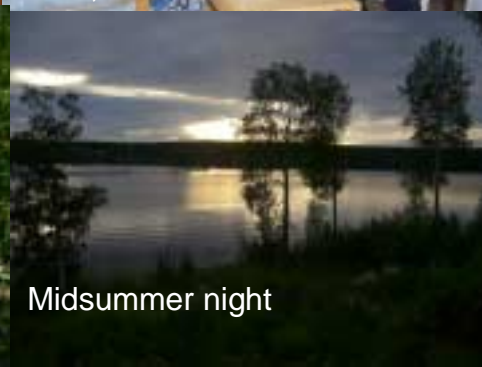
Hilda, me and Anton



Maria, Sonia, Åsa, Leif,
Noemia and Jane



At the Öhlen family farm



Midsummer night

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Life is full of coincidences. Noemia and I have our home in Myrskären outside Stockholm. A house between the forest and the lake. The spring brings both plants and animals to our place. Birds of all sorts nests here. Deer, moose, mice, frogs and even once a bear. The house is located in the cultural center of Sweden with remains from the Bronze age. From the mountain you can see all the way down to Birka, once the Viking capital of Sweden. We can pick wild strawberries, blue berries, lingon berries, raspberries and mushrooms and we grow our own vegetables. This is our home on earth but we have never worked here. But we have returned here from our other working locations. And it is here we will retire. Still some people are wondering why we keep this place. The answer is very simple. It is our home and for us it is the most beautiful place on earth. But now to story about how we got here.

Anyone remember 1968. 40 years ago. I do. I graduated together with a bunch of other kids who all of us were the first in our families to study longer than 6 years. A new generation was born. The 1968 generation. Instead of working on the farm or in the lumber yard like our ancestors we wanted to see the world. And we did. This year I also met the mother of my son and my first wife. I “the graduate” was entering a new life. After serving in the Swedish army on the border with Finland waiting for the Russians who just had occupied Czechoslovakia I moved to Stockholm to go to University. From a small village on the countryside to the big city. The world! Soon more of my friends followed and we decided to move in together in a commune. A big old wooden house with three stories in Djursholm. We were always about ten persons living here permanently but occasionally many more and during the sometimes wild parties we could be more than one hundred. And here we wanted to change the world.

The Americans were still bombing Indochina with everything from chemical and biological weapons to monster bombs from B52 planes. Then the terror of September 11 when US supported military in Chile murdered the democratic government under Allende. We had political refugees from Chile and American deserters along with many others living with us just for a day or longer time. 1972 when the first UN conference on the environment was held in Stockholm we protested, distributed leaflets, made posters, held alternative presentations to make the world aware of the environmental disaster unfolding in front of our eyes. We lived as we believed. We did everything together. Low energy and low consumption with common dinners. Went canoeing or bicycling for holidays. We even made our own vine from our own apples.

But we also grew up. We got jobs and got married. And for different reasons the commune was dissolved. But some of us still wanted to have a common place to meet. So we finally found Myrskären. A small cottage near the lake Mälaren with many bedrooms that six of us bought but many more visited for many wild parties. This became the new gathering ground for the generation of 1968. An extended family. Including my second wife and my two daughters. But things changed more in our lives and finally I was alone left on Myrskären until I met Noemia. That is why this is our home.

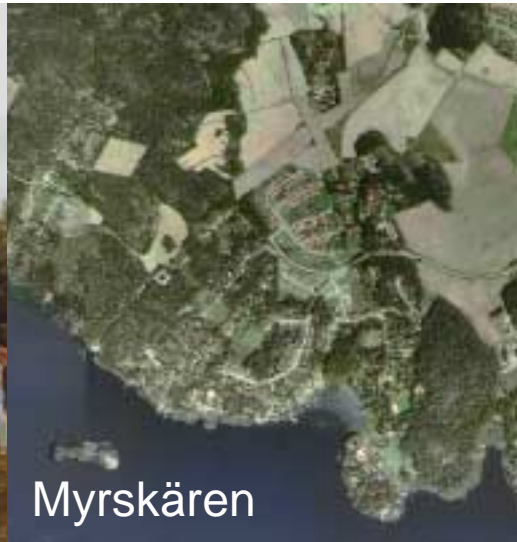
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The Djursholm Commune 1976

So why I am I telling all this Midsummer nostalgia about my life on the country and in our commune? To say it was better in the past? No – but that it was not only possible but very rewarding to live a life on a much lower level on consumption and pollution. To share the joy of common experience instead of buying happiness somewhere else. In the new privatized era we are risking to become ego centric and consuming slaves. In this one track world with no alternatives we have redefined community and freedom to a common market where everything has a price and everything is for sale – even nature and humans. But there are alternative ways of sustainable living – if we want!



The Myrskären Commune 1986

Myrskären



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Spring 2008 in Myrskären with photos of natural beauty around our home.

Myrskären in February 2008
(The first winter without ice)



Vitsippa och Gullviva
Anemone nemorosa
Primula veris



Ek/Oak



Liljekonvalj
Convallaria majalis



Smultron/Wild Strawberries



Our home



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Midsummer pole



Myrskären June 2008

Bronze age monument



The islands of Myrskären in lake Mälaren



Growing own vegetables



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Where is home?

When I grew up in the country the word “vacation” did not exist. My spare time I spent in the forest and by the river at home – and had a great time. But then we all “grew old” and had to work like mad to make money so we could travel somewhere on vacation. But this year 2008 we spent our two weeks vacation after Midsummer at our home in Myrskären. For two reasons. We love it here. And to save CO₂ emission so we can afford to visit my son i USA. We grow our own vegetables. Pick wild strawberries. We go by bicycle to buy milk at the store or to enjoy a rock and roll band by the beach in Kalmarsand. We spent our 4th wedding anniversary here. (All photos are from July 3) Took our small boat out to the islands in the sun for a pick nick & fishing on a cliff.



July 3, 2004 at Skokloster castle



July 3, 2008 in Myrskären



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A new generation is born

Per and Kristina visiting on July 3 with Carl's grandchildren Valter and Alice. Kristina met Olivia (expecting) with her son and mother Grete. Kristina and Olivia used to play together in Myrskären when they were small. And on July 4 Kent & Tina came by boat from their home by the same lake together with their daughter Lisa and their grand daughter Alma. In the evening our neighbors Håkan and Ann Christine joined with daughter Jessica for a sunny evening with the highest temperature this year. What a great and green vacation. We still live in a new global world and I still travel in my job and to see my family. But there are alternatives to charter and caravan vacations. We do not NEED to go away to enjoy nature. There is another life style & quality of life.



Valter on his first bike
meet with Oliva & son



Kristina with Alice



Valter with his girlfriends
monitored by grandpa Carl



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A new way of living

Nothing of what is being reported now about our environment is new. Most of it was very well known 1972 and even earlier since Rachael Carson wrote "Silent Spring". And a lot has been done to limit the impact on the environment. But it is not enough by far. And we still live with "denial". The problem is that the very mechanism that controls the development in the world is accelerating the exponential growth in the wrong direction. We are basically consuming our only earth. And we have so far been the lucky few 18% of the world living in the rich OECD countries with USA in the lead. The reason why we now seem to notice the consequences is the fact that India and China is growing their consumption and pollution that ironically also is driven by us since we import most of our consumer goods produced there. We have a system error but we do not seem to grasp this. We are still looking for simple one-solution tricks to one problem but the same people who created the problem cannot solve this.

We need a new thinking to create a sustainable world where we change our priorities from stimulating growth by consumption to stimulating health by an efficient life cycle. We now have a technology that is outstanding and powerful to allow us to continue develop a better and sustainable world. We have knowledge and medicine to let us live longer without pain. But we have lost the most important – the connection to the Nature we are an integral part of. Imagine how fast this has happened. I have experienced it from my self sustaining village in the country. My wife of native Brazilian origin has experienced it. We know many things but we have not understood that everything is connected. And how much we know about every single detail we can never control the whole. This was known by my ancestors. This is known by the Indian tribe just discovered in Brazil. We need to humble ourselves to this insight.

We do not need to become peasants or hunters again. We have all the tools we need to live a very rewarding life with a higher quality of life than today but with much lower impact on the environment. My wife is talking every day with her friends in Brazil using Skype. I am addicted to Internet as the source of everything and I can work with my photos, films and music on my PC as well as listen to basically any radio station in the world. . Yes this also require energy but still so little compared to the benefits. But in our physical world we are locked in our outdated model.

It is not easy to change, because our world is built to consume. I am a living "proof". Both in my work and privately I travel emitting carbon dioxide. Now I have an ethanol car, we use hydro electricity for all my electrical tool to cut grass and wood, heat our house with bio fuel and keep it at low temperature when we are not there, we use water from the lake, alkylat instead of regular gasoline for the boat, try to use train when we can, buy locally produced food and limit meat consumption to a minimum. But it is not enough my far. Now the electricity prices are sky rocketing. Ethanol is competing with food. Etc. Etc. We need to find a sustainable lifestyle in a sustainable society for all. And this is not done by UN or big business. It is done in our mind, spirit and soul.