Just Omit Yeast: A Recipe for Simple Living or a Life of Loafing

A Literary Critique Of Henry David Thoreau's Walden

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." (Thoreau 1681).

If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, it is fire and brimstone for me. I wish I had a Genie or a Munchkin. What I would give for a munchkin with a clipboard to follow me around; a copious note taker to do my bidding. Instead, I have a six-year-old monkey who follows me around chittering incessantly and eats like a NFL linebacker in a bulking stage.

Dreams. I dream of the day when I can go to the bathroom without company and Barbie puts away her own shoes. Do not get me wrong, I love being a Mom. My kid is as cool as they come, but she is a 'mini-me.' Yes, I said but. Have you ever tried living with a little version of yourself? It is not easy, and it certainly is not simple. It is complicated, very complicated.

You see the warning "they" fail to give, when you are contemplating Motherhood, is guilt. I read Dr. Spock and Dr. Sears. I read "What to Expect When Your Expecting" and "Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child." Not one book I read mentioned anything about guilt. And I am torn. Between wanting to complete assignments on time and her freckled little nose and monkey-mouth that spouts Elmer Fuddisms like "weally" and "actuwally" and "will you wead me Hawwy Potter?"

Oh, the guilt. Come on! Why did I not get that memo? The one that says, "Oh by the way...Motherhood is riddled with a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" sense of guilt. Batten down the hatches and prepare yourself, Ginger." Nope, didn't get that memo. Instead, my mid-wife sent me home four hours after giving birth and said, "Have fun." And when we in turn called her four hours later and said, "The baby, she won't stop crying." Our 'Special Beginnings' membrane-stripper in her infinite wisdom said, "Yup they do that."

The thing is I do not think anyone can prepare you for the guilt. It is par for the course. It is the trade-off. With all the fun, the funny and cute things your kid does, the one thing that runs through your mind constantly is, "Dear Lord, please help me to not screw her up and please allow her to forgive me when I do."

So, in a week when I am pondering my perpetual tardiness, The Communist Manifesto and analyzing loons and beans in 180 pages of Thoreau's "transcendentalist strip-tease," I cannot help but ask myself: What is the point? What in the hell am I doing?

More to the point, that is THE point. Trust yourself. Get out of your box, your pattern, your head. Get spiritual. Think. Simplify.

Besides my regular prayer not to "mess up" my kid, my spiritual this week involved thanking the powers-that-be for the saints at Librivox.org who read and record the classics in the public domain, free of charge. Otherwise about page forty-five (give or take) I would have gouged my eyes out with a stick I'd rescued from the pile of clipplings in my backyard and laboriously whittled down to a sharp point. After reading Henry David Thoreau's Walden, it is clear that this self-published transcendentalist loved to hear his own voice and his verbose opinions almost as much as he loved nature. Thoreau, though he valued "economy" did not value the economy of words. By page 180, I am well acquainted with the loon's diabolical laugh, racial wars between ants and schizophrenic squirrels. Of course, my mere opinion does not amount to a hill of Thoreau's beans considering...
Walden has served his recipe of contradictions, of provocation, of poking for over 160 years.

So what was Thoreau trying to tell readers in 1854, that is ‘Thoreauly’ applicable today? What is the point? I had to dig deeper. I had to shed my preconceived notions. I had to apply Walden to my life, Yegads! That is when it hit me. Like a brick. I had a cutting aha moment. One of those moments that you hate to have because you realize that something that you have learned actually taught you something...about yourself. And you are not exactly sure it is a lesson you want to learn because learning it disrupts the life pattern you have created and perpetuated. And obviously, this pattern gives you some sort of chaotic satisfaction on a deeper level, which is precisely the reason you want to ignore the lesson in the first place. However, now knowing what you know means that you cannot go unknowing it and therefore you cannot ignore it...without guilt.

I racked my brain to come up with what to write on Thoreau’s transcendental principles, my weekly column, a third essay on Marxism in Huckleberry Finn, all due within 24 hours of each other, my pattern is to panic.

Thoreau says, “We need the tonic of wildness... At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplored, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature” (1802).

Instead of panicking, I did as Thoreau might have done. I went outside. In Nature, with my books, I basked in the sun, reading, writing, absorbing. Within forty-five minutes, I changed seats four times, brushed six carpenter ants off me (or perhaps it was only one persistent carpenter ant, I am not sure), evaded a wasp’s stinger and feared skin cancer. On top of that, I now smelled.

Clearly this was not working. The only tonic I wanted was one laced with gin. I had yet to be inspired to whip up a quick essay like a clichéd walk in the park; it was no picnic. Then I remembered something. About the middle of last semester, I came across a book on sale at the campus bookstore and bought it. The book, an international bestseller, titled: Simplify Your Life: 100 Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy the Things That Really Matter by Elaine St. James. I dashed inside and, as noble as my intentions were at the time, there it sat, untouched, collecting dust, on my bookshelf.

Having yet to make the Thoreauvian connection, I opened the book to the inside flap of the dust jacket and read:

Simplify, Simplify." That’s what Henry David Thoreau urged his fellow Americans to do a hundred and fifty years ago. With remarkable foresight, he saw our lives being “cluttered with furniture” and “ruined by heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim.”

Now, Elaine St. James has turned Thoreau’s philosophy into sensible advice for the twenty-first century. (St. James)

So what next? How to apply Thoreau’s principles to my life? How could I transcend? How could I get wild? What would be my recipe? Figuring best beginnings are best began by defining moments; I went to the online dictionary.

Step One: Flour & Salt or Get Clear & Define Your Terms.

What is transcendentalism? Allan Sugg says it is “limited and subjective” with major principles being: freethinking, self-reliance and non-conformity, growth and renewal of the individual, revolt against tradition and established institutions, civil disobedience, brotherhood of man, nature and spiritual unity, and educational reform” (Sugg).

Dictionary.com includes the following definitions:

Transcend: To rise above or go beyond; overpass; exceed: to transcend the limits of thought; To outdo or exceed in excellence, elevation, extent, degree, etc.; surpass; excel. To be above and independent of (the universe, time, etc.). To be transcendent or superior; To pass beyond the limits of: emotions that transcend understanding. To be greater than, as in intensity or power; surpass. To exist above and independent of (material experience or the universe). (Dictionary.com)

Transcendentalism: To be of transcendent character, thought, or language. Also called transcendental philosophy: Any philosophy based upon the doctrine that the principles of reality are to be discovered by the study of the processes of thought, or a philosophy emphasizing the intuitive and spiritual above the empirical. A movement in nineteenth-century American literature and thought that called on people to view the objects in the world as small versions of the whole universe and to trust their individual intuitions. (Dictionary.com)

If not only Thoreau, but Emerson, are considered core transcendentalists, where the movement thrived in the 1840’s and shaped America’s personality; shaped her attitude towards “individualism, nature, religion, philosophy, education, politics, society and culture” (Sugg). If these rebels, "who
expressed new ideas and new ways of writing on a whole spectrum of principles.” (Sugg) defined the American, rugged and individualistic, can I allow it to define me?

What does being wild mean? What is wildness defined as? Is it thoughts? Actions? A mindset? The online dictionary defines wildness as:

1. Living in a state of nature; not tamed or domesticated; 2. Growing or produced without cultivation or the care of humans; 3. Uncultivated, uninhabited, or waste; 4. Uncivilized or barbarous; 5. Of unrestrained violence, fury, intensity, etc.; violent; furious; wild strife; wild storms. 6. Characterized by or indicating violent feelings or excitement, as actions or a person’s appearance; 7. Frantic or distracted; 8. Violently or uncontrollably affected; 9. Undisciplined, unruly, or lawless; 10. Unrestrained, untrammeled, or unbridled; 11. Disregarded of moral restraints as to pleasurable indulgence; 12. Unrestrained by reason or prudence; 13. Amazing or incredible; 14. Disorderly or disheveled; 15. Wide of the mark; 16. Informal. intensely eager or enthusiastic. (Dictionary.com)

Step Two: Olive Oil & Honey – Omit Yeast or Get Wild, True, Essential, Pure

In a lecture, Ann Woodlief at Virginia Commonwealth University describes Walden as “transcendental strip tease.” Thoreau forces us to think to get down to the essentials of our being, our thought process. To omit what is not necessary. For example, take Thoreau’s account of the art of bread making:

I made a study of the ancient and indispensable art of bread-making…going back to the primitive days and first invention of the unleavened kind, when from the wilderness of nuts and meats men first reached the mildness and refinement of this diet, and travelling gradually down in my studies through that accidental souring of the dough which, it is supposed, taught the leavening process, and through the various fermentations thereafter, till I came to “good, sweet, wholesome bread,” the staff of life. Leaven, which some deem the soul of bread, the spiritus which fills its cellular tissue, which is religiously preserved like the vestal fire — some precious bottleful all climates and circumstances. (Thoreau 1665)

My pattern is chaos. It is analytical. It is striving to be proper, correct, right…perfect. It results in hours of activity with little productivity. It does not work. It is not enjoyable. So why do I do it? Fear. Fear of being wrong. Fear of a failure. Fear of failing.

Thoreau’s Walden urged me to think about that. What would happen if I did not do what I normally did and got a little wild? Would I enjoy the process more? Would it reflect positively in my productivity? What would happen if I did not do it the way I considered the “proper” or “right” way, but instead infused creativity and fun? Can I be wild with purpose? Would I not be, as Thoreau, trusting my instincts and being transcendental?

Thoreau says:

As I came home through the woods . . . I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he represented . . . The wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good . . . We are most interested when science reports what those men already know practically or instinctively, for that alone is a true humanity, or account of human experience.” (Thoreau 1745).

For me, wildness would not involve eating a woodchuck, but something as simple as expressing my gut opinion, without second guess, thus allowing me to submit a paper on time. It would mean trusting myself to know, what I know, and put it into play without overanalyzing.

Step Three: Knead & Bake or Putting It All Together.

Several years ago, I accompanied my former spouse on a company trip to San Juan, Puerto Rico. I had just become a Mother; my daughter was six months old. The executives had scheduled an early morning excursion. Fifty-plus people loaded a tour bus, most hung-over from the night before, some still drunk, which deposited up at the base of the mountain. As a group, we then
I hiked to the top of the El Yunque National Rain Forest. I joked the entire trip that Puerto Rico was best viewed facing the Ocean. That is until I got to El Yunque. We had a magnificent guide who pointed out the indigenous species of the rain forest: the stick bug, the many breeds of orchids and my favorite the Coqui frog. Although I cannot remember the guide’s name, I can still hear his voice rising and falling an octave as he said, “Check it out” followed by some interesting description of a creature he had discovered.

"Check it out."

“What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates his fate” (Thoreau 1634). If I take my cues from Thoreau, from nature, I believe it is possible.

I think that is what Thoreau, Emerson and the transcendentalist movement prescribed. To check it; to get out of your box; to get out of your head; to trust yourself; to do something different. Because there is, a sense of freedom in that trust and because you never know where that different may take you.

"Check it out."

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**Works Cited**


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Deloris Lamarsh
February 7th, 2011 at 15:17

some really select blog posts on this website, saved to favorites.

Johnny Cricket
May 2nd, 2010 at 00:52

Hey there, I often read your blog. I love it, you mention anything from sport, news, entertainment, adult topics or simply general topics. Maintain the nice work. Have you ever thought about blogging for money?
1 Week Diet
April 30th, 2010 at 08:05

i think that that was really interesting. Good submit!

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Burton Dismuke
April 21st, 2010 at 16:50

Thanks for the great post! You have a new fan.

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Personala Atlase
April 15th, 2010 at 07:57

One of my friends already told me about this place and I do not regret that I found this article.

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Gisela Gabrelcik
April 10th, 2010 at 04:50

I can agree with you, excellent factors you have made for a case.

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Więźba Dachowa
April 5th, 2010 at 05:15

Thaxn for the effort, keep up the good work Great work, I am going to start a small Blog Engine course work using your site I hope you enjoy blogging with the popular BlogEngine.net. The thoughts you express are really awesome. Hope you will right some more posts.

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Quit Smoking Drug
April 4th, 2010 at 17:48

I read your weblog once in a while, so therefore i am sony that this is abit off subject matter, however i ought to mention that i like your template!

↓ 0 ↑ 0 Chew on this.

Reply

Matha Toppa
April 2nd, 2010 at 04:28

i discovered your blog looking out about a completely different matter on yahoo, weird ...... in any case, i spent some minutes reading this and some other entries and gonna come again often, i liked
Chew on this.

Song Lyric
March 31st, 2010 at 15:26

Nice story, hey I came across this article while searching the web for random downloads. Thanks for sharing I'll post this to my facebook about this too.

Chew on this.

Leave A Reply

Enter your comment here...

Natural yeast/sourdough can be very fickle. Because you are working with a living thing, it takes a lot of patience and PERSEVERANCE. My loaves don't all turn out perfectly after several years of working with it. But I know the possibilities, and I know the benefits, so I keep moving forward! Along the way I've had some fabulous successes and some epic fails. Recently I was visiting with a cousin-in-law who also bakes with natural yeast. She had made this Challah bread from the Beyond Basics with Natural Yeast book and it looked incredible. I could not stop gushing about how beautiful it was (Muffins, biscuits, scones, and loaf breads that do not contain yeast (like this one) all fall into the “quick bread” category. Quick Bread Mixing Method.

The mixing method used for quick loaf breads, like this one, is called The Muffin Mixing Method. The basic savory version of this bread could be used as a substitute for a yeast bread if you are unable to have yeast. It does have somewhat of a different texture and flavor than regular yeast bread, but works well if you are unable to make traditional bread. Flour. If you use self-rising flour you can omit the salt and the baking powder from the recipe because it is already included in the flour. Gluten Free Quick Bread. I have tested this quick bread with several gluten free flour blends such as Cup 4 Cup and Bob’s Red Mill Gluten Free Blend.