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This American Suburb: Fossil Fuels, Personal Misconceptions, and Loss of Community

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How did we come to live this way? The modern suburb has become synonymous with the American dream and yet its inception is still rather new. This work examines the creation of this way of life thanks to the ready availability of cheap fuels and questionable modes of thinking. In light of the energy crisis these vast expanses of homes may not be able to sustain themselves after the peak consumption of oil. In light of this possibility, the author questions what these people will be missing since the sense of community has all but been lost in these areas and personal isolation continues to increase.

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Foreword

I grew up in a lovely suburb in north-central New Jersey. I know what it is like to have a well-manicured and chemically treated front lawn and a just large enough backyard. My house is right across the street from my elementary school and, to this day, my family still receives compliments from people picking up their children about how lovely our landscaping is. Originally, there were many old trees around our property that would not necessarily be considered attractive by contemporary standards. I remember the day when we cut them all down to allow a less obstructed view of our house. Our front garden is full of shrubs, a few topiaries, not to mention some plants that are more or less considered weeds in places like Florida. I also remember when we planted about thirty arborvitaes around our backyard for privacy, which still stand today at about ten feet high.

I think that this is typical of many suburban homes. Keeping these points in mind, I nevertheless wish to question some of the core values of suburban life. People often move to the suburbs as an alternative to city life; however, the suburbs are not much 'closer to nature' than even the most developed cities. Suburbs are carved out, man-made areas just like any city, only the availability of space in which to have a lawn and landscaping creates an illusion of nature. Think of the dozens of trees that had to be cut down so that just one family could have a weed-free lawn with a few puny shrubs.

I never really thought about any of this until I went to Europe in my third year of high school. The whole setup of cities there just makes so much more sense in my mind. There are town centers, surrounded on all sides by small homes, which are surrounded by pretty much nothing but countryside. There are no vast expanses of land existing for the sole purpose of unnecessarily large residences. The European model makes sense in that it was not intended for

people to “commute” to work every day. Examples such as this are what helped enlighten me to how wasteful America is on so many levels.

I think that Americans, and probably most people of Western culture, have an inexplicable sense of entitlement that we can and *should* control the world. Perhaps it stems from religious or philosophical reasons. One thing I know is that my mother has been over watering our arborvitaes in the backyard for years so that many of them have had to be replaced. She refuses to admit it. I think she is just one of the many people around the world who subscribe to the idea that we somehow “know better” than nature does. It is, once again, the sense of entitlement or superiority within our culture that makes us think we are somehow *above* nature. Nature is reserved for the insects and lesser animals, and pretty soon, with the right technology, we won’t need nature anyway. This may very well be *the* core cultural issue behind sprawl and other aspects of our lifestyle.

This seemingly inconsequential delusion exists worldwide and has had immense repercussions over the course of history. I do not think it will be some new shiny technology or program that will save us from ourselves. What needs to change is the fundamental flaw in our sprawling culture. One of my favorite authors, Daniel Quinn, equates our culture with a raging river that is headed for destruction, and all the programs that we try to enforce are just sticks in the river, trying to suppress the flow. What we ideally need is to change the direction of the river.

After listening to stories from my parents for twenty years about their childhoods and how they had always been so close with their family and friends, I began to question why I did not have the same experiences. I have begun to attribute one of the biggest causes of the lack of family and community ties to the physical sprawl of housing. I do not believe I have spoken to

my next-door neighbors in years and neither they nor my family seem to mind. I worry about the people living alone who may go for days or weeks without ever speaking face to face with anyone. I feel that the need for social interaction is becoming less and less of a priority.

There are some people who have given up on changing society and try to live "closer to nature." However, after living in our culture, I do not think it is possible to just one day pick up and leave it all behind. A lot of lessons and basic ideas of our culture are instilled into our brains at an early age and many of them probably never leave us. The solution should not be to just abandon everything that our culture has achieved. Instead, we must reevaluate our values at some of their deepest levels. As of right now, our individualist culture is incredibly wasteful, inefficient, and will not sustain itself in its current state.

Literature Review

Energy Issues

It is revealed in The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies that the petroleum industry has been aware of the inevitable depletion of oil for years and that its production is near its peak. Richard Heinberg believes that industrial nations have become accustomed to cheap and readily available fossil-fuel energy and built a society that assumed constant growth is normal and necessary. Since oil is and non-renewable resource, there will be many problems when it reaches its peak level of production. Every year after that it will become more difficult to extract as much oil as the year before. This will lead to rising prices and potential resource wars. He does not put much faith in conversion to renewable energies such as wind or solar power as they yield so little in comparison to oil and nuclear power carries the burden of radioactive waste material. He proposes individuals take steps towards self-reliance and community building to combat the crunch.

The article, “Growth and Sustainability: Integrating Ecosystem Services into Economics,” notes that most people are either ignorant of the fact that their resources are depleting or else they do not care to think about it. The authors argue that not only has the current system been maintained by continued economic growth thanks to non-renewable fossil fuels, but it has damaged the resiliency of ecosystems thanks to over-exploitation and pollution.

Michael Pollan's article, “Farmer in Chief,” claims that food production in the U.S. depends on cheap energy that can no longer be counted on. "After cars, the food system uses more energy than any other sector of the economy - 19 percent." He attempts to connect the food crisis with many aspects of the President's policies. Other countries have come to find that

their ability to feed their populations hinges on decisions in Washington. If and when problems arise with grain production, these countries will most likely rebuild their own agricultural sectors and erect new trade barriers. He discusses some of the history as to why the country now focuses so heavily on monocrops which has lead to the monocultures of animals. Whereas once livestock where kept on the farm to help fertilize crops, the two have now been separated in favor of producing a greater quantity of food at a much lesser quality. Instead of having organic fertilizer replenish the soil, now oil is needed to do so. He calls for "resolarizing" of agriculture, because whereas people used to "eat" sunlight through photosynthesis, they now "eat" petroleum due to how infused the soil has become with it.

Food

The article by Tina Adler, “Harmful Farming: The Effects of Industrial Agriculture” offers and very general overview of all the health and environmental issues caused by conventional, large-scale farming. It best serves as a quick reference for disturbing facts to enhance the pull of the thesis and create desire for change.

“Soil Not Oil” is a newsletter which discusses the fact that climate change, resource depletion and ecosystem collapse will negatively impact the food industry. The writers propose more organic agriculture but not by simply substituting conventional fertilizers with organic ones, for example, which would continue the system of industrial agriculture. True organic agriculture would produce mixed crops that are consumed locally so as to increase food security. Whereas proponents of large-scale agriculture used to claim theirs was the only way to feed the growing world population, studies of crop yields have shown going organic may be the only way to truly eradicate world hunger. It also describes the negative equation of industrial agriculture

between food production and consumption, saying that it takes 10 times more calories to produce food than is yielded as food.

History and Culture

Green Political Thought by Andrew Dobson examines the history of the American Green movement. He proposes that the movement is not in line with any existing political ideology. Capitalism and socialism, often considered polar opposites, are considered by Dobson to be rather similar because they both grow from the presumption that continuous economic and industrial growth is a necessity. According to him, truly green ideology does not depend on continued economic growth. He draws and important distinction between environmentalism and something he calls "ecologism." Environmentalism is considered a managerial approach to environmental issues, coming from existing institutions, which does not include any considerable changes in lifestyles. Ecologism, on the other hand calls for dramatic changes in people's living habits that will create a more green future.

The Geography of Nowhere by James Howard Kunstler begins with the tale of American development, beginning with the cities, which made sense, as they were based on agriculture and (religious) community. However, due to many factors, mostly foreign (British) intervention, individuals began coming to the New World to try to make it rich rather than build planned communities. The individualist, capitalist nature took hold and people began fending for themselves on their own land. The repercussions can still be seen today. Our recent cities and suburbs have hardly any thoughtful structure and Americans are completely dependent on their

cars. The book offers a good jumping-off point because it summarizes all the problems with the constructed layout of the land Americans have come to take for granted.

Franz Broswimmer's book, Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species, generally outlines the devastation that humans are having on the planet. The ozone layer is depleting, the world's forests have halved since the 70s and a quarter of the world's fish have been exhausted. An important lesson that he mentions, however, regards human culture. He says, "Human cultural evolution is the greatest transformative force that our planet has experienced since its crust solidified nearly 4 billion years ago... Cultural evolution is not only rapid; it is also readily reversible because its products are not coded in our genes" (28). This idea is could be useful in encouraging lifestyle changes among people of the West who forget that they did not always live in this modern setting.

The book First along the River offers a history of the environmental movement, especially that in the United States. He begins with describing the philosophical foundations of the Old World based upon Judeo-Christian, Renaissance and Enlightenment traditions. He discusses the motivations of European expansion into the New World and continues until the prelude to the Green Decade and the subsequent conservative backlash. He aims to discuss the movement's historical foundations, introduce the themes important to its development and supply the tools needed to pursue more in-depth studies of the topics he presents.

Daniel Quinn's books, Ishmael, My Ishmael, and The Story of B provide several important themes. One of the most basic is that there is a common feeling among many people that there is something inherently wrong with either the people of modern society, or else the society itself. He asserts that everyone has some awareness of this flaw but they have never been

able to make sense of or articulate the feelings. The concept of Mother Culture is introduced which extends through both the East and West. The common unifier under Mother Culture is the presumption that humans occupy a separate realm than the rest of nature. Secluded tribes which still exist in remote areas today are not in step with this mindset. They live in accordance with the natural world. The critical change occurred about ten thousand years ago when a system of agriculture was adopted in the "Near East" which gave humans complete control over their food production. This culture spread and slowly took over the rest of the world, asserting that is was the right way to live. This culture was the first to lock up food and treat it as a product. For the first time people were required to work in order to buy their food. This degree of separation between man and his food has existed and evolved ever since to the point where man feels utterly detached from nature.

Design

Chapter three of State of the World: Our Urban Future, entitled “Farming the Cities,” discusses some of the benefits of urban agriculture. Examples are given of various cities throughout the world that practice some form of local, community or individual farming either within the city itself or on its outskirts. There may be a great deal that Americans can learn from these initiatives and apply them to their own lives. One of the most important reasons for participating in city farming is its low cost in relation to the overall cost of growing, transporting, and buying conventional foods from modern-type markets. The chapter proposes and more personal relationship between the consumer and the food. There are about 800 million people in the world who participate in some form of urban farming and there are many benefits that are discussed. In newly developing cities where clean water is scarce, wastewater is used to nourish

crops. According to the chapter, human waste serves as an excellent fertilizer and, when used in this manner, serves a cleaner purpose than having it drained into sewage repositories.

Designing the Neighborhoods for Social Interaction: The Case of Cohousing, by Jo Williams, focuses on the social interactions within the cohousing communities, both formal and informal. However, the underlying theme is the importance of design within communities. Cohousing is designed so that individuals within the community share chores, living spaces and authority. The movement originated in Northern Europe, but within the last several decades has become reinvigorated for its inherently more sustainable structure. It could be argued that the reason this system functions well is that people have more say in their community, yet still rely on one another interdependently.

Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves, by McCamant and Durrett, shows that cohousing has become popular in the U.S. as an alternative to assisted living or nursing homes for the elderly. It is a community system based on interdependence among neighbors. It is now showing to be appealing to more than just the elderly. The houses in the examples in the book very much resemble typical conventional American houses, only closer together and without front lawns. While it is a significant change in practice, visually it is not so contrary to what Americans are used to that it would hopefully not turn prospective families away.

Useful Facts and Data

Julian Ageyman's article, “Where Justice and Sustainability Meet” explains that sustainability simply means the operating of a system that meets the needs of the present but

ensures there will be adequate resources for future generations. She refers to the concept of "environmental space" as that space where humans should live between the minimum necessary consumption of resources (the floor) and the maximum which does not threaten the depletion of ecological stocks (the ceiling). She predicts that there will eventually be more harsh restrictions on natural resources and the quality of life for many will begin to decline. She discusses the creation by UNCED in 2002 of Agenda 21 which addressed this concern. It was adopted by 178 governments, but not the U.S. This agenda takes into account the subsidiarity principle which understands there is a closer connection between local governments and the people, unlike the alienation that is felt by many towards the federal government. "In response [to Agenda 21], many local governments and their communities are now adopting more transparent decision-making processes, involving more citizens, sharing control, and inventorying and adopting the principles of sustainability at the local level through Local Agenda 21" (13).

Howard Frumkin's “Urban Sprawl and Public Health” notes that characteristics of the modern suburb contribute greatly to many health afflictions. He mentions negative factors that people often think of, such as environmental decay and destruction of natural habitats, but also raises interesting points about how suburban lifestyle can adversely affect health. "Other effects relate to land use patterns that typify sprawl: sedentary lifestyles, threats to water quantity and quality, and an expansion of the urban heat island effect. Finally, some mental health and social capital effects are medicated by the social dimensions of sprawl." He discusses how our reliance on the automobile is both one of the leading causes of global climate change and respiratory diseases. Data is given to demonstrate how residential density is related to automobile dependency. Overall, the article is beneficial in that it offers very specific and convincing

examples to further the argument that suburbia does not function in a manner which is in the best interests of its inhabitants or the environment.

The Census Bureau's reports on Demographic Trends in the 20th Century and Summary of Travel trends have both produced useful data on population growth and expansion of Americans and how they have changes their travel patterns. The first says, "While the metropolitan population grew rapidly during the century, most of that growth occurred in the suburbs, with little change in the percentage of population living in central cities" (p 38). This offers statistics on general trends in the population distribution in the U.S. and the increasing rate of suburban living. What is interesting is how every decade of the mean center of U.S. population shifts more southwest, into virgin land, perhaps looking to create more sprawling development. Statistics such as these will be necessary to show just how many people may be affected if and when many suburbs cease to sustain themselves.

The second survey is mostly composed of tables and figures with evaluations of how public trends in transportation have changed since the 60s. Generally is found that Americans own many more cars, use them more, and commute farther to work.

Executive Summary

This work will explore the rather peculiar aspects of what it means to live in the United States and summarize the ways in which the lifestyle that so many Americans have come accustomed to will need to dramatically change. Paying particular attention to urban sprawl and the systems implemented in order to allow for its continued expansion, it will be argued that, in the face of environmental degradation, peak oil, and constant exponential population growth, the American way of life as it exists today will not be able to sustain itself.

The body of the work has been divided into three main sections. The first will examine how the excess in availability of fossil fuels has drastically changed the living arrangements of Americans. The aim is to demonstrate that since around the time of the industrial revolution, the infrastructure of the United States has been defined by and built upon several rapidly depleting resources. One will question the practicality of alternative energies in light of the nation's heavy dependence on fossil fuels.

The second section is a brief analysis of the potentially flawed mindset upon which the Americas were founded and how it may have impacted the situations the country finds itself in today. The last major portion will be dedicated to an analysis of several interviews conducted with residents of the same suburban town in New Jersey. Most of the individuals grew up in urban, Italian communities with very close relationships to their friends and neighbors. This section will argue that a similar sense of community is lacking in modern suburbia.

Finally, a short addendum has been added with a few examples of how initiatives are being taken which will serve as potential models for how individuals and communities can take back their self-sufficiency, re-localize their economies and reconnect with one another.

Methodology

Much of the early inspiration for this project developed slowly over the course of my undergraduate studies. Especially influential were the collective works of author Daniel Quinn and others, such as James Howard Kunstler and Michael Pollan. I also drew much from personal experience and expanded it upon the ideas of these men. I could not help but make personal observations about the difference in living arrangements between where I grew up versus those I experienced while abroad.

The first stages of actual research aimed to be mostly empirical. Data was collected regarding the driving habits of Americans in hopes of demonstrating how dependent they are on their automobiles. Information was taken from the US Census report regarding the continued diffusion inland of the American population as well as the history of population growth of the country in general to demonstrate how expansion and development have not slowed. More data was researched regarding energy, especially how much of it is produced from fossil fuels and how much is needed to support modern agriculture.

After gathering most of the empirical data, I thought it would be necessary to research if and how different people are combating urban sprawl and increasingly delocalized economies. I found information on city farming, cohousing, and future cities based on clean renewable energy. It was difficult finding notable places that are actively implementing the types of changes I would propose on larger scales.

I uncovered some articles regarding the Amish and Mennonite ways of life and how they are generally happier on a daily basis. This, along with an article proposing that Americans are

getting lonelier lead me to want to conduct interviews with members of my suburban town. Instead of finding data to support these changes in collective emotions I thought it would be more powerful to obtain first person accounts. Most the people I chose to interview grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, a much more urban area, during a time when its residents were mostly first and second generation Italian immigrants. In the majority of cases, the people interviewed felt they had a stronger sense of community in the areas where they grew up versus in the modern suburb they live now. Many agreed that Americans seem to be getting lonelier, although several attributed this to the advent of cell phones and the internet rather than to the physical layout of their town.

I felt the best way to present this work would be to question modern suburbia from several angles. The first would be to present data and arguments that its dependence on fossil fuels would not allow it to sustain itself. Then it would be helpful to propose that suburbia was built upon flawed perceptions that Americans had on their role in the world. Lastly, I wanted to convince people that suburban living is lonely, unfulfilling and a poor environment to develop the social skills of our children.

Introduction

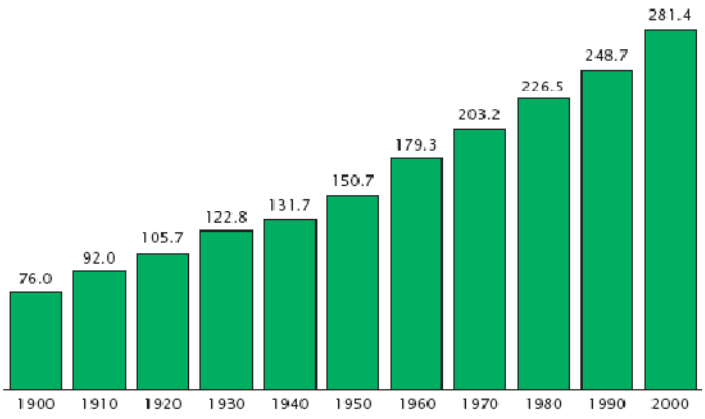
The Anomaly of the American Suburb and Urban Sprawl

> *"In America, with its superabundance of cheap land, simple property laws, social mobility, mania for profit, zest for practical invention, and Bible-drunk sense of history, the yearning to escape industrialism expressed itself as a renewed search for Eden. America reinvented that paradise, described so briefly and vaguely in the book of genesis, called it Suburbia, and put it up for sale"* (Kunstler, 37).

Hopefully it would not be too controversial or profound to say that modern Americans, those described by the above quotation, were and still are incredibly spoiled when taking into account the rest of the world. The US has always prided itself on the tenants of individual freedoms, liberty, private property and self-advancement. People have traditionally been permitted and encouraged to do virtually whatever they wanted with their lives and land so long as they did not bother anybody else. What would arise from these values is the greatest liberal capitalist democracy the world has ever seen.

One of the most noticeable characteristics of this exceedingly wealthy society has shown to be an extensive amount of middle-income families living on their private lots in the suburbs. The trend toward suburban living has consistently increased throughout America's short history. A special report by the US Census notes, "While the metropolitan population grew rapidly during the [20th] century, most of that growth occurred in the suburbs, with little change in the percentage of population living in central cities" (Hobbs et. al, 38). The global issue of overpopulation has not surpassed the United States. "The U.S. population more than tripled from 76 million in 1900 to 281 million in 2000" (11) *[see graph on next page]*. Also, a noteworthy trend which has continued throughout the century is the mean center of population in the U.S. continually moves southwest, 324 miles west and 101 miles south to be precise (16).

Figure 1-1.
Total Population: 1900 to 2000
(Millions)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census of population, 1900 to 2000.

These statistics demonstrate the trend that Americans have always looked to further expansion and development to meet the needs of an always increasing population. As the population continues its influx into the southwest, seeking more untouched land to settle, the problems associated with urban sprawl will continue at faster and faster rates. The question is: why do Americans live this way to begin with?

The advent of the American suburb is both unique and bizarre. No other societies have ever been structured the way so much of the development in America has been. Outside cities are vast expanses of land, most of which is wasted due to individuals' desires to own a respectable amount of land. Interspersed within and in between residential areas are strips of highways that go on for miles, dedicated solely to outlet malls, fast food restaurants and department stores.

One of the most frustrating aspects of this sprawl, if one takes the time to notice, is the lack of cohesion. It is very obvious that land is systematically bought up piece by piece at a time by different individuals in every direction. If there is no room to build in one location, there is sure to be plenty of room down the road. That mindset continues until there are jumbles of highway entrances and exits, and more traffic and congestion, and, still, more development; it is a constant cycle of growth, development and a need for more and more space to build. This

system is not going to stop on its own. Either people have to come up with ways to change it, or it will crumble on its own when it can no longer sustain itself.

The following sections focus on characteristics of American suburban life and how its foundation is both structurally and philosophically flawed.

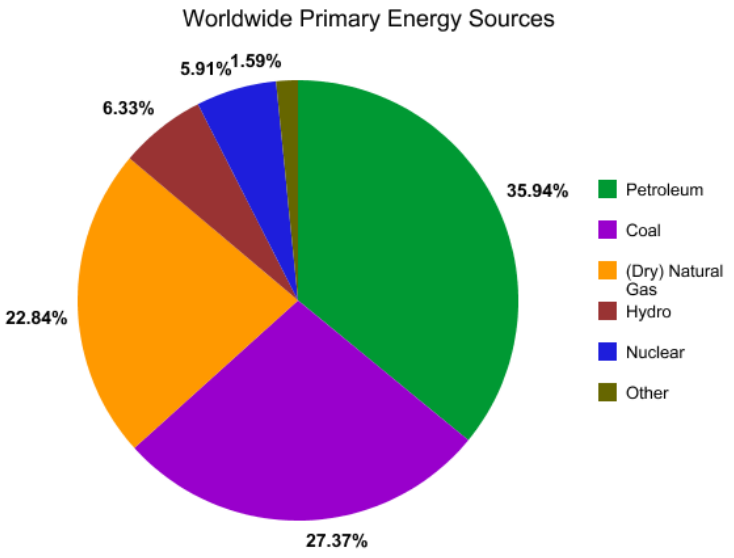
I.

The Effects and Repercussions of the Age of Fossil Fuels

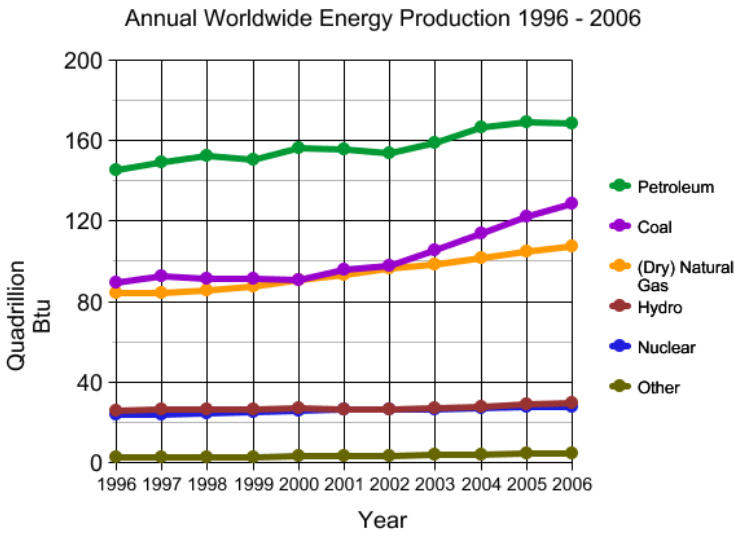
> *"As far as fossil fuels running out, I doubt very highly that we'll ever see that in our lifetime. There's just so many different ways to extract oil"* (Jim, Appx 5E, 64).

When it comes to energy consumption, there seems to be a lack of general awareness, understanding or interest among many Americans. Most would probably agree with this quote from a middle-class suburban father. The concern about the depletion of fossil fuels is not only shrugged off, but firmly believed to be yet another issue of modern society which will easily be remedied either by politicians, scientists or a combination of the two. This section aims to demonstrate how this perception is both naïve and unnerving since so many fail to see how their suburban lifestyle would not exist without these fuels.

To begin, it would be helpful to present some hard numbers regarding the energy consumption of the world as a whole.



International Energy Annual 2006



International Energy Annual 2006

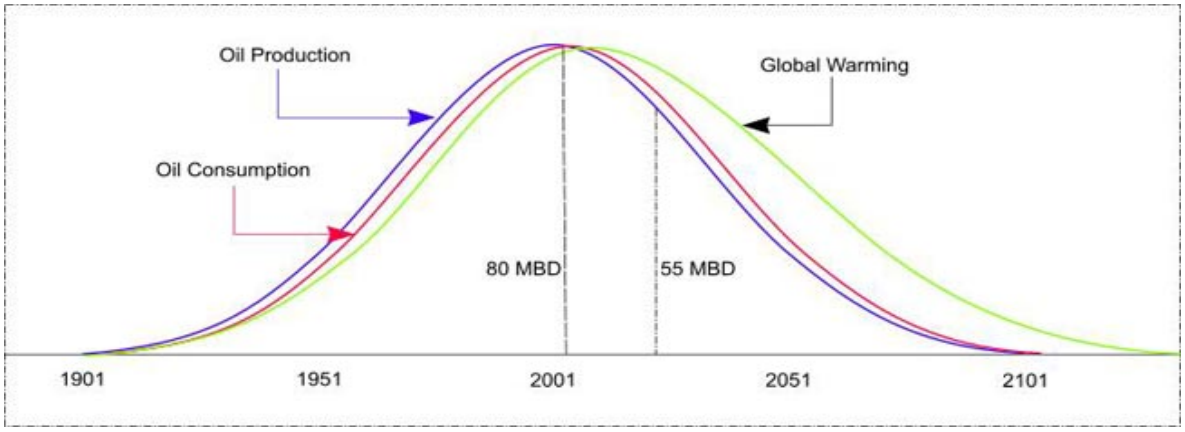
As evidenced by the left-hand graph, the three fossil fuels, petroleum, coal and natural gas, account for over 85 percent of the world's energy production. The second graph demonstrates, perhaps unsurprisingly, that over the past decade the energy needs of the world have increased. The amount of energy produced from each source is on the rise, but most noticeably from coal, natural gas and petroleum. Taking both of these graphs into account, one can conclude that the demand for fossil fuels worldwide has actually *increased* in the last decade and that alternative sources of energy have barely taken off.

Overlooking the negative effects that the excessive burning of fossil fuels has had on world climate and wildlife, one might wonder what the problem is with this heavy reliance on such a cheap and reliable source of energy. Ideally, most informed people would already be aware of this problem. Plain and simple, the dilemma lies in the fact that these fuels, which are responsible for 85 percent of the world's energy needs, are non-renewable. They are running out. Imagine these graphs without the first three sets of data and one may achieve a better understanding of why this situation has come to be referred to as an "energy crisis."

To clarify: saying that these fuels are "running out" is both true and misleading. Some people argue that, yes, of course they are running out, but there is still at least forty years or so before they do. They believe that this is plenty of time to find a viable solution to the crisis. The misconception is that the problems will arise *after* fossil fuels have completely "run out." The truth is that the real devastation will emerge long before that can ever happen. It is very unlikely that humans will ever completely harvest all the fossil fuels from the earth.

Oil production follows a bell curve, as shown by the conceptual graph on the next page. On the upslope side, oil is abundant, cheap, and easily meets the demands of consumers. The

graph shows that until about this point in history, production has always been greater than consumption, leading to an excess of oil which has kept prices fair.



However, once oil reaches the point in history of its maximum possible output, it has nowhere else on the graph to go but down. The supply can no longer meet with demand. This leads to scarcity and skyrocketing prices. "Peak oil," therefore, does not refer to the depletion of oil, but rather the point at which *half* of its total reserves in the earth have been consumed. Its supply continues to decline while its price forever increases.

If modern society were structured differently, being less dependent on these resources, then this issue might seem trivial. However, fossil fuels have become the life source for the modernized world. One really ought to think of it as blood coursing through the body. The body does not die when *all* of the blood is gone. It can die well before even half of it has been drained away.

Nearly all of the innovation and progress that has occurred within the last century was only possible through these sources of immense potential energy. Society has been built around them. They are the foundation for modernity, and anything with a faulty foundation must inevitably meet with collapse.

When the numerous faculties made possible through fossil fuels were introduced, the course of human history took a drastic turn. Whereas the landscape of the US was once characterized by small local economies centered on agriculture, the capability of fast transportation of goods and services helped create the urban sprawl and overdeveloped suburbia which exists today. Physical changes in living situations would prove to have huge impacts upon the daily routines of a people.

The cultural repercussions that accompanied the age of fossil fuels have rippled in many directions causing, perhaps, the most rapid changes in lifestyles in history. In 1790, 95 percent of the American population lived in the countryside. The amount of people living in cities versus those in the country evened out around 1920. Then, in only 70 years, by the 1990s three out of four Americans lived in urban settings (Urbanization of America). Such a dramatic lifestyle shift of an entire people is unprecedented and was only made possible thanks to cheap, energy-rich fossils fuels.

Millions and millions of people, collectively, in only two hundred years, completely changed how they lived. Most of the population used to easily provide for themselves and their families first hand with food and housing. Now, to provide for one's family means earning money in order to *purchase* the necessities of life such as food and housing. An entire population of millions of people moved off the farm and into the office building in only two centuries.

How did fossil fuels allow this to happen? The advent of modern locomotion thanks to the steam engine and then the advanced utilization of combustion significantly diminished the need for localized economies. First, the railroads began to crisscross the continent. Then the automobile was released and eventually became more and more affordable to the general public.

People suddenly found that they could travel or live anywhere they wanted. As the people moved, businesses followed in step. It was no longer necessary to grow one's own food when such large amounts of it could be shipped to such distant places in such short periods of time.

Housing developments sprang up to meet the needs of the influx of anxious men willing to work in the factories of the rapidly growing cities. Fossil fuels powered the machines in the factories. The assembly line replaced artisans and craftsmen as the overwhelming desire for innovation and progress pushed the country forward.

Previously, the comparatively small cities could only import their food from nearby. Cargo trains and ships changed this and allowed mass amounts of various foods to be shipped from every direction. General stores were replaced by markets and then by supermarkets with every type of produce imaginable.

Diesel-fueled tractors, among many other farming innovations, came about which changed the face of modern agriculture. It was no longer a family practice but rather a large business. Small-scale farmers were (and still are) being elbowed out by greater competition. There was an understood demand from consumers for a steady supply of food at the markets as their lives became preoccupied with other concerns. Increasingly, American agriculture came to be dominated by fewer and fewer people, cultivating larger and larger expanses of land.

Population growth has shown no signs of stopping. With greater and greater amounts of people getting their food from fewer and fewer sources, modern farmers have had to change their traditional practices. Crop rotations and allowing lands to lie fallow in order to replenish the soil were no longer options. Thankfully, the answer was found yet again in fossil fuels. It was discovered that nitrogen could be used to enrich fertilizers to be synthesized to produce ammonia which helps to quickly replenish the soil. The production of ammonia currently consumes about

5 percent of global natural gas consumption, which is slightly below 2 percent of the world's total energy production. With this process, modern farms can feed an immense amount of people. Once again, though, this process may not be available forever which could have disastrous effects on the food supply.

> *"Fossil fuel reliance may prove to be the Achilles heel of the modern food system. Oil supply fluctuations and disruptions could send food prices soaring overnight. Competition and conflict could quickly escalate. De-coupling the food system from the oil industry is key to improving food security."* ***–Earth Policy Institute*** (Soil not Oil).

Food, housing, clothing and luxuries were all able to be mass-produced and sold thanks to the industrial revolution which brought about the rise in factories and factory farming. As generations passed, skills that people had during their years as subsistence farmers slowly disappeared as new, more specialized skills became necessary in the workplace.

As the wealth of America grew, more people wanted a taste of the good life. Suburbia expanded further and further from the cities into undeveloped land. Physical labor in factories came to be viewed as undesirable work opportunities as innovation continued to replace workers with advanced machines. More people sought service-based jobs in place of manual labor. Business owners would eventually discover that it was much cheaper, anyhow, to outsource their manual labor overseas as sea and air travel got less expensive and foreigners were willingly working for much less.

Over this two-century-long process, Americans completely altered their work habits. Even those who still engage in faming today are practicing something that was unimaginable two hundred years ago. Thanks to the progress that was made possible through oil, Americans get further and further removed from their life necessities. They used to grow their own food and eat it. Now they work in offices owned by corporations, which try to sell products, so that they can

earn money to buy food grown by other businesses, perhaps thousands of miles away. And it is all possible thanks to several dwindling resources.

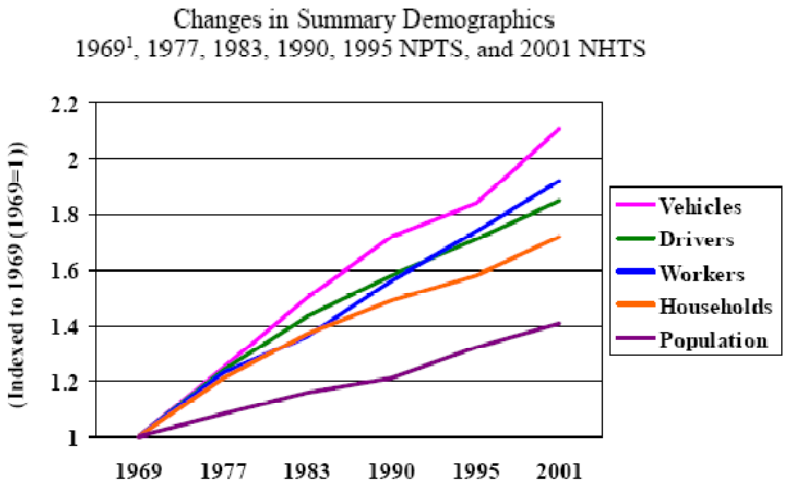
Everything mentioned in this brief history occurred during a time when no one gave thought to the finite nature of their fuels. Every job created since the industrial revolution, every building, skyscraper, home, pipeline, power plant and automobile is sustained and can be traced back to some origin involving production with fossil fuels. As time goes on, more is built upon this fossil fuel foundation and subsequently more has the potential to be lost.

The threat for suburbia is its physical distance from both direct food supplies in the form of farms, as well as intermediary supplies of food in the form of grocery stores. Modern suburbia would very likely not have taken on the physical form that currently characterizes it if its inhabitants did not have access to personal transportation through their automobiles. The people purchasing homes in the suburbs subconsciously understand that their cars will be an integral part to their living situation. This does not seem abnormal to them. Expensive luxury cars in the heart of suburbia have become synonymous with the American dream.

Modes of public transportation were never incorporated into the American suburb. Rural manors originated as a getaway for the wealthy elite, and then were affordably mimicked in more open suburbs for the middle-class who attempted to emulate the privileged lifestyle. Since the wealthy all seemed to own cars, public transportation in these new developments was neither desired nor necessary. The automobile has become, by far, the primary mode of transportation for non-urban Americans.

In fact, Americans have long since past the point of using their automobiles for mere necessity. The typical American household has a least two cars. Many have one for each

member of the family or more. The following graph illustrates the rapid increase in the production of motor vehicles over the last several decades.



From 1969 to 2001, the number of vehicles increased at a much more dramatic rate than other demographic trends. It increased even faster than the rate of new drivers. This either that people are driving illegally or that the trend of individuals and families is to own more cars than is absolutely necessary.

Of course there are numerous negligible effects to the environment when it comes to excessive automobile use, but only several shall be mentioned here. The automobile is considered a major source of air pollution. The emission of carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, ozone and harmful particle matter are widely responsible for air condition in cities and can affect larger regions located downwind of large, polluted urban areas.

Aside from the immediate human health risks and adverse affects on wildlife caused by excessive car emissions, the long term effect is the continuing impact of automobiles on the world crisis of global warming.

> *"…automobile traffic…account[s] for approximately 26% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. During the decade of the 1990s, greenhouse gases from mobile sources increased 18%, primarily a reflection of more vehicle miles travelled" (Frumkin, 203).*

Americans know that their cars pollute. Most realize that their lifestyles are having, at least to some degree, a negative effect on the planet. The problem is that these concerns are shrugged off. After all, the automobile is a necessity of life. People tell themselves that they have no other option. Someone will do something about climate change and the shortage of resources. The regular person cannot be bothered to interrupt his life to deal with such concerns. The following section hopes to examine this aspect of the collective American psyche.

II.

The American Sense of Entitlement

In recent years there has been an increasing trend to recognize and accept the negative effects of human activity on the planet and its contribution to the problem of global warming. This, however, was not always the case. In fact, most of the Western world had been operating under the assumption that human beings had superiority over nature for millennia. One can argue that events of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century were necessary to the eventual realization that humans do not need to be at odds with nature in order to prosper. A large portion of this section will be dedicated to environmental themes rather than specifically sustainability, which should not be problematic since the two are very much linked and the concept of sustainability is a much newer one.

In the late fifteenth century, Europe's age of exploration allowed for probably one of the greatest turning points in human history. Upon discovering the New World, European explorers instigated the encounter of two polar opposite world views. People of the Western world had been living in a state of struggle against nature for centuries when they encountered peoples of the new continents living in very different lifestyles. Although Europeans had always had a history of military struggle and conquest, as well as the perception that they had the God-given right to conquer nature for man's benefit, these characteristics were never more obvious than when they sought to colonize a much purer continent. In essence, they could continue with their same practices, but in America they could start from scratch. Therefore, unlike any other previous countries, those in the Americas were founded on these flawed perceptions and continue to stand precariously on this wobbly foundation.

The discovery of an entirely new continent created an intense desire for technological advancement that would help facilitate the conquest of more unchartered territory. Instead of, perhaps, taking a look at the alternative lifestyles of indigenous peoples, the collective European mouth began to salivate even more at the prospect of new peoples and lands to exploit. More and more resources needed to be procured to meet an ever-growing demand for luxuries while more and more technologies needed to be created to conquer nature faster and more efficiently. The Americas were seen as an endless supply of land and raw materials that were there for the taking. In this sense, the environmental and sustainability issues have always been largely American because of the inherent accidental flaws of the country's very early history.

About the Enlightenment, Kline writes, "The Enlightenment was an age when reason, nature, happiness, progress, and liberty were the dominating themes of intellectuals and progressive thinkers." One might think that in an age of intense scientific advancement and supposedly "enlightened" thinkers, people might begin to pay attention to the needs of the environment. However, the opposite seemed to have occurred. Although in an increasingly secular Europe, where the biblical idea of humans as ordained keepers of the Earth was waning, people still perceived a division between man and nature. The increased interest and study of human consciousness and dualist metaphysics in the works of modern philosophers like René Descartes furthered the claim that humans were somehow separate from or above the natural world. Nature now became something to be dissected and studied in order to find more ways that it could benefit human needs.

Technology, industrialization, and population continued to increase in the subsequent centuries. In the United States, the 1920s brought about such abundance and wealth that few gave any thought to the idea that there could possibly be anything wrong with the way in which

they were living. It was slowly that early environmentalists' voices began to be heard in the twentieth century. The two World Wars served as an initial means of distraction from the building evidence of negative human effects on the globe.

The rise of the atomic era is quite possibly what finally caused any significant amount of people to feel unnerved. Things like photographs of the explosion of the first atom bomb served as the quintessential image of the true destructive might of one of the prevailing world cultures. Noticeable increases in environmental interest can be seen after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the first Earth Day in 1970. A conservative backlash emerged against environmentalism, and people like President Reagan sought to discredit those of this new point of view. Nevertheless, there are numerous groups and agencies within the U.S., as well as internationally, that have survived the backlash and are slowly gaining more support.

The concepts of individual liberties and freedom are perhaps two of the most prevailing tenants of American culture. They stem from the very foundation of the country's independence from its colonial origins. Americans have taken these concepts and run with them. Today's political dialogue is full of talk about "rights." Everyone in the U.S. feels they have certain inalienable rights to or free from something. Somewhere along the line, however, people forgot that these rights were manmade.

Their right to private property is the most applicable to this topic. Somehow the right for humans, specifically Americans, to have private property has taken precedent over everything else. They do not concern themselves with the issue of whether sprawl destroys the environment, because according to tradition, the land was given to them to cultivate and develop. Somehow, the rights granted to them by the founding fathers became muddled with God-given rights that could never be taken away.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this brief history. First of all, the Americas were founded by the Europeans under the mindset that man should take whatever he can from the Earth to serve his own benefit. With modern technologies and fuels in the face of an unsettled continent they were able to develop a new urban layout very different from the ones they had known before, which may have developed hundreds of years earlier in different circumstances. The mindset towards the need for rapid development has endured, up until today and it is the great struggle that environmentalists and activists for sustainability must overcome. Perhaps another very general and tentative conclusion is that humans, or at least those of Western culture, tend to not think very far ahead in terms of their long term interests. It was not until the evidence of the negative human impact upon the Earth was slapping people in the face did anyone begin to take notice.

III.

The Lost Community

> *"The closeness and the tight-knit that I grew up around is* not *what I feel we have here, and my kids definitely don't have that, that's for sure"* (Maria, Appx 5E, 60).

> *"I think that we tend to put ourselves in our little home and not venture out of that"* (Theresa, Appx 5B, 50).

This section will focus mostly on interviews conducted with parents living in Clark, New Jersey in their forties and fifties, many of whom grew up in more urban areas and then moved to this same suburb to raise their own families.[*] The above two quotes are from different mothers, commenting on their experience living in this town.

As one may be able to deduce from these statements, the modern suburb appears to be an increasingly isolating place to live. The amount of physical distance between neighbors in these new developments is rather new in itself. In the past, people generally either lived in cities or in the country. In the country, families usually practiced agriculture together to provide for themselves since other families were generally far away. In the city, living space was much closer together and neighbors often worked similar professions within walking distance of their homes. They probably even emigrated from similar areas looking for work. In the suburbs, neighbors often share nothing in common with one another besides pure proximity.

The suburbs were designed to be further from urban centers. That is their appeal. Since people have cars, they are able to commute long distances to work. This means that neighbors no longer share similar professions. A doctor and a restaurant owner could be next-door

[*] The link to the documentary created with these interviews can be found in the Appendix.

neighbors but go off to work every day in completely opposite directions. On a daily basis they may, at most, share a wave with one another as they walk from their perspective cars into their perspective houses.

Western society seems to be moving in a direction that caters to the culture of individualism which has emerged and evolved over many years. The qualities that make a desirable employee are always changing. Twenty years ago, for instance, businesses sought employees who could be counted on for the long haul. People felt they had job security back then, as they could potentially spend their whole career in the same position, in the same business. Nowadays it is very unlikely for someone to have a similar work experience. Now, applicants are considered more desirable if they are not tied down and can easily travel or change positions at a moment's notice. Workers, in short, should be expendable. They should exist to fulfill their purpose and move on.

What traditionally ties community members together is some sort of commonality that goes beyond just mere geographic proximity. Next-door neighbors in a suburb may, very likely, not even speak the same language at home, let alone have similar jobs, family backgrounds or interests. Small suburban towns may plan get-togethers for certain holidays or special occasions, but this is not enough to instill true community bonds.

> *"You know, you'll see somebody at a wedding or you'll see them at a funeral parlor. That's very sad. That's now"* (Maria, 62).

These true bonds, where people genuinely care about the well-being of one another, usually come from a consistent sharing of life experiences together. Seeing one another everyday or working towards some common goal are what truly strengthens community.

Everything about the current American experience and education is that of compartmentalization. It is not one person's fault that communication between individuals is waning; life has come to be designed that way. Families of four live in their single-family homes with fences between them and the house next to them, designating which area belongs to whom. Parents drive to work, often one person per car. Most people do not car pool because even *that* would be too awkward to do with someone whom they rarely speak to or who may not share common interests. Children go to school and sit in their own desk, forbidden from intruding upon another classmates' space. With these strict boxes and boundaries drawn around people at such an early age, one must wonder whether Americans *chose* to live their private lives or whether they simply are coming know nothing else.

An important theme in past elections has been the concern over family values. Like everything else in society, however, family values and family structure are forever changing. One would argue that the "traditional family values" that the right often emphasize are not so traditional. These values seem to stem, yet again, from the American sense of entitlement that everyone has the tight to have their own piece of property in the suburbs and raise their family on it. By traditional family values, people mean to imply a similar set of values and type of upbringing that they experienced themselves.

> *"An examination of the history of suburbanization in the United States shows that the suburban ideal has…been associated with a vision of family togetherness, meaning that husband, wife, and children choose to spend their leisure time with one another… The social and spatial structure of suburbia promotes familial isolation through a lack of public space and through and emphasis on home maintenance and home-centered entertainments"* (Miller, 393).

More and more, children find themselves indoors. Several families interviewed find that distractions from the internet, TV and video games are slowly replacing outdoor play. Some claim that they do not feel their children are as close to their friends as they were with theirs. They find the communication skills are diminishing from being able to hide behind computer screens and cell phones. Play is much more structured now. One mother commented on her daughter once asking her to have a play-date:

> *"But, a* 'play-date*?' Like, they have a name for it now? Like, we didn't even know what... I looked at him and I said, 'What the heck is a play-date?' We just went outside and knocked on somebody's door and was like, 'Can you come out and play?'"* (Maria, 58).

Several of the interviewees also recounted how they felt comfortable leaving their doors open and walking, uninvited, into their neighbor's homes as children. Everyday interactions that may have seemed trivial to these people at the time, appear to be more scheduled in their lives now. Families have to plan get-togethers with one another ahead of time and parents find themselves having to enroll their children in organized club sports to encourage them to be outside.

Also, several of the subjects noted the source of their community bond as children was due to the common heritage of their neighbors. The majority had either parents or grandparents that grew up in Italy and immigrated to the same place in the U.S. They carried on many of their traditions that had been passed on for generations into their new locations. They more or less picked up their former way of life and applied it to a new setting. These common bonds are what helped maintain their sense of community.

Many explained that the reason they moved to Clark from the area of their childhood was due to the gradual socio-economic deterioration of the neighborhood. One would argue that this process occurs in step with the imminent assimilation of these small, culturally distinct,

communities, into the mainstream culture. One husband noted that his wife's neighborhood all came from, practically, the same town in Italy. These people seemed to pick up and transfer their entire culture to another continent. The dominant culture, however, inevitably infiltrates these distinct cultural practices until individuals begin to peel off and associate themselves more with the mainstream.

An interesting point was brought up by one woman who said that she prefers to do her grocery shopping outside of town because she would prefer to avoid other local women who like to gossip. This is understandable, as most people would not want mere acquaintances knowing personal information about their lives. On the other hand, when asking another family whether they minded having little privacy growing up around so many relatives and neighbors, none of them did. They said it was all they knew and that they felt safe.

One man also commented on his wife's new interest in online grocery shopping. She finds it to be a convenience, whereas he commented on the fact that food shopping used to be an integral part of the social dynamic of women. When members of a community feel closer to one another, it seems they do not mind having others know their business. It would seem that the word "gossip" did not apply so much, but rather people had genuine interest and concern for the happenings in their community-members' lives.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the interview process of some of these families was their realizations that they cannot offer their children some of the experiences that they had growing up.

> *"There's so much lost from the time I was a kid to now for these kids to experience. And, it's hard to* give *them that just by talking if they don't experience it. You know, they can't relate to it"* (Maria, 63).

Another noteworthy realization was made by another woman who seemed to question her motives for the first time as to why she and her husband decided to move to Clark:

> *"Actually, when we bought here, why we bought on this end of town, was because we weren't* as *close to our neighbors. Believe it or not, even though we grew up right next to our neighbors, remember? We didn't want to live right next to our neighbors when we bought this house…Which is odd, right? I never thought of it before, but..."* (Debbie, Appx 5A, 48).

It goes to show that many people seem to have some unconscious understanding that they and their children are missing out on something. They seem to think that the way they live is normal since so many people around them are doing the same thing. This seems to be the direction that society is headed. People have become so distracted by their daily routine, their kids' needs, electronics, and so on, that they forget about the community that was once so valuable to them. They do not seem to know what they had until they realized it was gone.

Addendum:

People Living Differently

There are numerous examples of people in places all over the world who are making small advances to achieving self-sustaining ways of living. One of the best examples is that of Cuba. For years it had been completely dependent on the Soviet Union as its major source of trade and commerce.

> *"When the Soviet system collapsed, Cuba was hung out to dry without the ability to produce enough foods for its own population. Without the agricultural inputs -- chemical pesticides, fertilizers, fuel -- on which* Cuba *had previously relied, and without even sufficient fuel to transport produce into the city, the daily caloric intake of Cubans dropped by approximately 30%"* (Killoran-McKibbin).

However, because Cuba was forced into this situation, the country was able to adapt. Small farms and gardens appeared throughout Havana and in 2000 approximately 58% of the country's vegetables were grown through urban agriculture. The article by Killoran-McKibbin also discusses how women might perceive a movement towards urban agriculture as just another household chore for them to undertake. However, it actually appears that this creates more opportunities for women. The author claims that women represent 70% of the technical force in grassroots government bodies of the Ministry of Agriculture, working as inspectors, extension agents, coordinators and educators. This means that women are the primary promoters and educators for urban agriculture.

Rooftop gardens also are incredibly beneficial. Besides being a perfect space for plants in cities where buildings block out much of the sunlight, they also have been shown to keep buildings generally cooler. Also, programs such as community-supported agriculture and co-ops have proven to be successful in relatively poor urban areas (Halweil).

One example of a large group of people who are employing green measures into their daily lives is from the city of Vancouver. It is a city that is actively encouraging its citizens to grow and buy fruits, vegetables and such that are produced in or around the city.

> *"According to a recent survey, an impressive 44 percent of Vancouverites grow vegetables, fruit, berries, nuts, or herbs in their yards, on their balconies, or in one of the 17 community gardens located on the city property. Vancouver's mild temperatures and ice-free winters make it the ideal city to grow food nearly year-round"* (Halweil, 49).

While some are learning how to utilize already existing residences within the cities, some prefer to start from scratch. A type of housing which originated in northern Europe is beginning to gain popularity in some areas in the United States. Cohousing was originally an alternative to assisted living or nursing homes for the elderly. It is a community system based on interdependence among neighbors and is now attracting more than just the elderly. The houses in the examples in the book very much resemble typical conventional American houses, only closer together and with no lawns. While it is a significant change in practice, visually it is not so contrary to what Americans are used to that it would turn prospective families away (McCamant).

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of sustainability in the United States is the various orders of Amish and Mennonites throughout the country. In Iowa, for example, the Old Order Amish have farmed for 150 years. While they have implemented some minor changes to adapt to their environment during this time, their agricultural knowledge and traditions reflect their European origins.

> *"[They] produce much of their own food, and remain labor intensive based on the family farm. Energy used is renewable – wind, horse, and human power. Capital is based on resources available through the family and the church community. The Amish do not*

> *participate in social security and federal agricultural programs, do not buy insurance, and accept no government subsidies"* (Warren, 45).

While some of these choices may seem like disadvantages, these communities experience little to no backlashes from negative effects in surrounding economies. There is something to be said about a community that can remain relatively unchanged and isolated in the midst of such a modernized country. Groups like this can be emulated and modeled after in the future to show communities how to provide for themselves.

Conclusions

What will prove to be the biggest obstacle for redirecting America to achieve a sustainable future is convincing people that the way they are living is flawed. There are definitely people who still hold the tenants of the American dream very dear. Hopefully, signs in the market will begin to clue people in to the fact that the age of oil is coming to a close and everyone should expect to see some big policy changes.

Another huge dilemma will be the actual transition Americans will have to make in how and where they live and work. It will be a long and slow process of making sure that those still living in the suburbs will be able to sustain themselves while various restructurings occur. The ideal move to local, self-sufficient cities for all Americans may take an incredibly large amount of time, but however the restructuring of the man-made physical landscape of America ends up looking, what is important is that residences are planned and mapped out and function in a cohesive and collective fashion.

Again, a huge hurdle to overcome will be misconceptions by the public. There is a tendency to put to must trust and faith in politicians and policy-makers as the only source of problem solvers. People point to how civilization has overcome tremendous depressions and crises as evidence that things will always turn out for the best. The current path society is on, however, is heading in a direction never faced before on such a grand scale. The problem lies in the fact that the public is simply unaware of what may lie ahead. Moreover, powerful people with certain agendas may even attempt to public denounce the issues laid out in this work as sensationalist in order to protect their own interests. The influences of mass media, bringing various opinions to the public at all times prevents individuals from knowing who to trust of what to believe.

It is time for individuals to take the initiative. The collectively held-breath of the world during this economic crisis demonstrates how much so many people have invested into one system. In smaller, more diverse systems, mass amounts of people do not risk losing so much from the ripple effects of single incidents. Small communities, like the Amish, will not be greatly affected if, say, another depression were to strike the U.S. The public, however, has grown accustomed to policies being made for them and many cannot fathom a world in which they sustain themselves.

It is said that necessity breeds innovation. There is no one solution that will commonly combat the effects of the energy crisis in every situation. Communities need to assess their local situation and discover systems that function especially well for them. These initiatives can only start from the ground up. Evidence of these initiatives is already taking place and they need support. It is important to support local agriculture and local businesses as much as possible and to not just treat them as a novelty.

The benefits of what will emerge from the slow reclaiming of local economies are two-fold. The first, as already mentioned, will be increased self-sufficiency of communities that will not depend on foreign products and food. The second is the rediscovery of the emotional bonds found within true communities. There will be true empathy for the concerns of neighbors, children will, hopefully, rediscover the joys of group play outdoors, and the loneliness that some note to be sweeping the country will begin to diminish.

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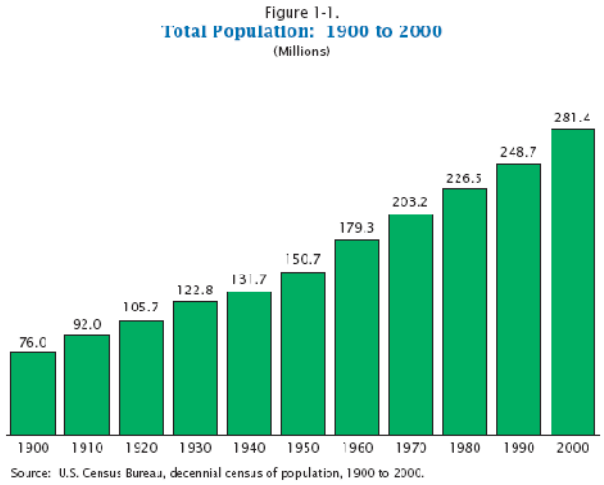
Appendices

1.



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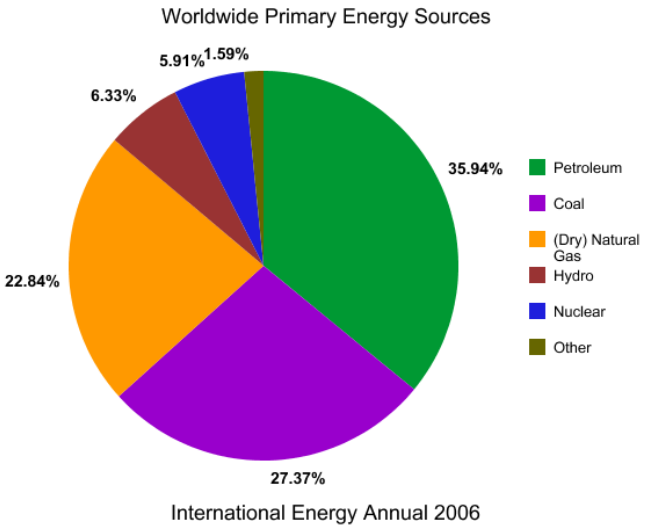

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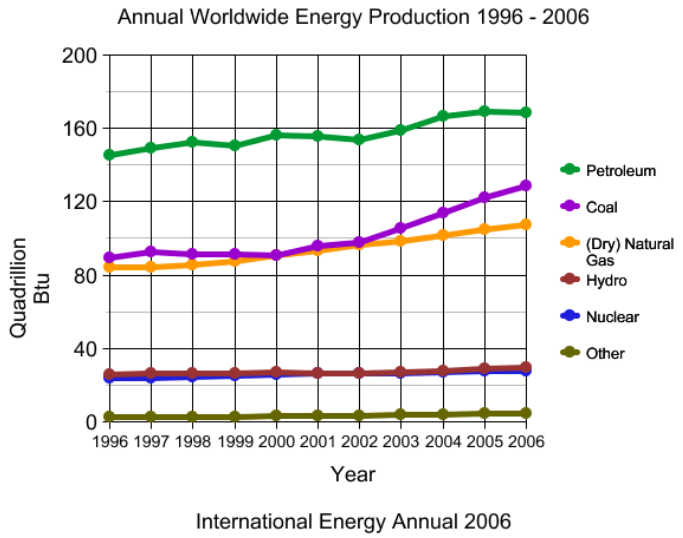

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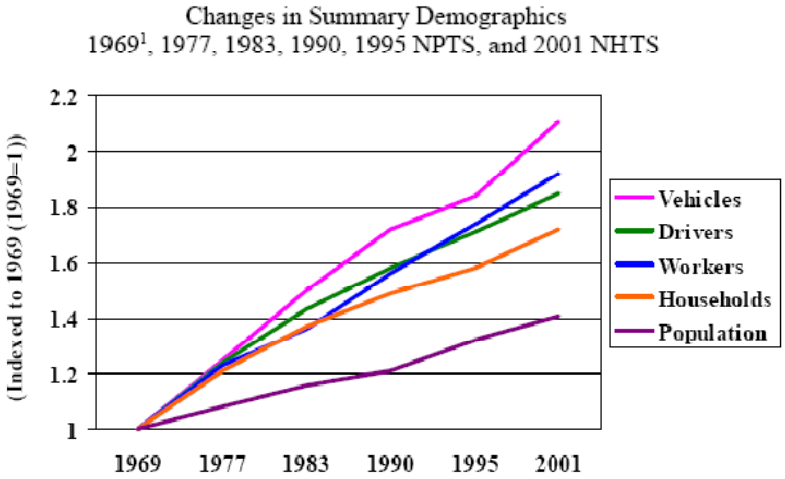

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5. Transcripts of Interviews

**Please note: All interviews have been edited for content to minimize erroneous or unnecessary conversation.*

A. Debbie and Pete (March 9, 2009)

I: How long have you lived here in Clark?
D: 15 years. December was 15 years.
I: What made you want to move to Clark? Did you look anywhere else?
D: Yes, we looked down the shore, remember? We looked in Manalapan and we looked in Mountainside. But I'm afraid to drive, so... Clark was close to work.
I: Close to work?
D: Yes.
I: So where do you work?
D: I work at the refinery in Linden.
I: And what do you do?
P: I'm self-employed.
D: At the time, when we first moved here, he was self-employed.
I: So that was one of your biggest reasons, was because you wanted to be closer to work?
D: Yeah, and I didn't want to be far away from the kids. I didn't want to put them in school in Manalapan and then have to come to Linden to work. Close to the kids and close to work.
I: So, how far would you say you commute to work every day?
P: You're five miles and I'm one mile.
I: So, you're both pretty close.
D: Yeah.
I: That's good. And you drive?
D: I drive, right.
I: So, where do you generally do all your grocery shopping and stuff?
D: Right here in Clark. Shoprite.
I: This is kind of a strange question: What do you think you would do if your family didn't own a car?
P: Go out of my mind. Really, really, over here, you can't do it.
D: Yeah, I don't know what I'd do without a car.
I: Why don't you tell me about where you grew up? Where was it?
P: Elizabeth, New Jersey.
I: And how long did you live there?
D: My whole life.
P: 29 years. And you…
Both: 28 years
I: What was it like for you as a kid? Growing up? Say on a typical school day, what would you do?
D: After school you were always outside, playing. Stickball, or hide-and-seek, ring-a-lario.
P: Yeah, and your mother and father didn't drive you nowhere, like these days.
D: Yeah, you didn't get driven over to your friend's house.
I: How'd you get to school?
Both: Walked.
P: Miles
D: No, c'mon.
P: I walked miles.
D: [laughs].
I: So, why do you think that was, that you were always outside, just hanging out with your friends?
D: I think it was safer back then. That's why we walked to school. We walked everywhere. I mean, I used to walk home from the berg, eleven o'clock at night.
P: Right.
D: Being a girl. So, it was a lot safer back then.
I: So, would you say it's still safer there than here, for example?
D: There? No. It's gotten worse.

I: At the time?
D: At the time.
I: So, for people who don't know, what does Elizabeth physically look like? Is it more of a city, I guess?
P: More city. Buildings were stuck together.
D: There was an alleyway between my house.
...
I: So, how much time did you spend hanging out with your friends?
P: Growing up?
D: I would say every day, right? You were always with your friends.
P: All day. From eight in the morning until eight at night.
I: What about with your family? Your direct family.
P: Never missed a meal.
D: Yeah, you still had to be home for dinner.
I: What about by yourself, did you have a lot of alone time?
P: None. No
D: Family or friends.
I: Besides your immediate family that you lived with, did you have other family or relatives nearby?
P: Yes.
I: How often did you see them?
P: You'd see them at least once a week. Grandma on Sunday and the aunts during the week.
D: Yeah, you always saw family. Family was always around.
P: Always in the backyards.
D: Because they lived closer then. Now family is so spread apart, you don't get to see them anymore.
I: So would you say that growing up you were closer to you extended family than, say, your daughters are?
D: Yes, definitely.
I: What about with your neighbors? What was your relationship like back then?
D: Gee, my neighbors were always my relatives. [*laughs*].
P: We were always close. In fact the neighbors were godparents to our kids. That's how close they were. It's not like nowadays, you have relatives. We had friends of my parents be godfathers.
I: Is there anything you didn't like about growing up there?
Both: No
P: No, I loved growing up there.
I: What would you say was your favorite thing about it?
P: You'd keep the doors open, it was safe, and a lot of people.
D: Everybody knew everybody.
P: Everybody knew everybody.
D: Everybody knew everybody's families, so.
I: Would you feel comfortable raising your kids there today?
D: No. It's gone bad now, the neighborhood.
I: What made you want to live somewhere else?
P: To bring up my kids in a better environment. Definitely.
I: What did your parents do when you were growing up?
P: My dad was a truck driver and my mother stayed home.
D: Mine both worked.
I: Did they work nearby? Would they drive to work?
D: No, my mother would walk. My mother didn't drive. She worked at the high school. She served him lunch.
I: What about food shopping and stuff there? Was there a market?
P: Walked to the market.
D: We used to walk. With the basket. [*laughs*].
I: Just down the street?
D: Mhm.
P: Yeah, a couple blocks.
D: We used to go on Broad Street every weekend.
P: Right in the neighborhood.
D: Everything was close, so you just walked.
I: So, would you say you, kind of, need a car, living in this type of area, more than you would back in the city?

P: Absolutely.
I: Looking back, living here, are you glad you decided to raise your kids here and everything?
P: Absolutely.
D: Yeah.
I: Anything you disliked or would have changed?
D: When we moved here there weren't a lot of kids on our street. Like, we came from a neighborhood where there was *always* kids, you know what I mean? And then we came here, and it was mostly older people on our block. Now the younger families are moving in, and the younger kids, but when we came here, there were no younger kids on our block.
P: Not on the block, but there's not so many houses here.
I: How often do you think you see your extended family now?
D: Not a lot.
P: Not a lot. Once a month, you figure we all get together.
D: I see my cousin a lot because he lives down the street.
P: But the aunts and uncles: once a month, maybe.
D: At parties or, hate to say it, funerals.
I: Do you think there is a sense of community here, in some kind of way?
P: Yeah, because this is a small town. I think there's a community because I brought my kids up with the softball and the basketball. That's how you meet the people and the neighbors: through the kids.
I: Do you think it's a different type of community than what you grew up with?
P: In that part, no. Because, if you were into baseball, then you met all the parents and the neighbors at the baseball field. And that's how we mainly met everybody here: through sports, with the kids.
D: Yeah, but in the old neighborhood, a lot of it was... Like, people knew your grandparents... Like, they *knew* your extended family. Like, here they just, basically, know *you*. You know what I'm saying?
I: Do you think that's typical? Families start out in the cities and then move? Of course, not just your family, but...
P: Yeah, it's typical because they want a better life for their kids. Because you want a backyard, you want a little swingset. In Elizabeth we couldn't do that.
I: So, how often would you say you go food shopping?
D: I go every two weeks.
I: And you keep the food in your refrigerator.
D: Right.
P: Two refrigerators.
D: Two refrigerators. And I go to BJ's one day and then I go to Shoprite another day. Then, if I want to buy meat, I go to A&P.
I: OK.
D: OK? So, it's like three different stores just to go food shopping. [l*aughs*].
I: Are you at all concerned about gas prices or things like that? Or the future of gas prices?
P: I'm always thinking about that. It seems like it’s out of our control, so you just go with the flow.
D: Yeah, I think the kids are going to have it a lot rougher than we do.
...
I: Any other distinctions you want to talk about between life before, when you were younger, and now?
D: I would say the only difference is you knew everybody. I think you were tighter knit. Don't you?
P: In your neighborhood.
D: In your neighborhood. I don't think here you're as tight-knit as we were. But then, I don't know if it's because of the neighborhood. We came from, also, an all Italian neighborhood. Where, now, you have different nationalities mixed.
I: So, would you say you had, like a common...
D: Bond.
I: Bond, right. Because of your heritage?
D: Right. Now you don't have that.
I: What else do you attribute that to? Besides just the heritage thing, do you attribute it to the physical landscape? Like, the way houses are here?
P: Much farther apart.
D: Yeah, I guess over there you *had* to get to know neighborhood, your neighbor. Because you were right on top of them. You heard them sneeze.
P: Now you have a little space between the houses, it's a lot better.

D: Actually, when we bought here, why we bought on this end of town, was because we weren't *as* close to our neighbors. Believe it or not, even though we grew up right next to our neighbors, remember? We didn't want to live right next to our neighbors when we bought this house.
I: Oh, OK.
D: Which is odd, right? I never thought of it before, but...
...
I: About the physical landscape, you're generally further away from your general necessities like food at the grocery store. Because you said you used to be able to walk to the grocery store. Could you imagine not having your car with you now?
P: No, we can't imagine no car.
D: I had my foot operated on, and I couldn't drive for six weeks. I was going crazy.
I: But you think you could have done pretty well without a car growing up, right?
D: Yeah.
P: Oh yeah, absolutely.
D: Yeah, I find kids don't walk nowadays. I don't know why. Like, the distance she [*refers to daughter*] would walk to school, and the distance I would walk to school is about the same. But, yet, I don't know. I wouldn't even think about making them walk to school.
I: Are play activities different? Do your kids spend less time outside than you did?
D: No, my kids always were outdoors.
P: Always outdoors.
D: Yeah, and I think they are a lot closer to me. I think they could talk more to me, more than I could talk to my mom.
I: Did you used to play in the street and stuff, no problem?
D: [nods].
I: Is it less like that now?
P: Well now they have yards and front yards and that's where you'd spend your time.
D: We didn't have yards. We had playgrounds and streets.
P: And we got a driveway that holds six cars, so we never had that before.

B. Theresa (March 10, 2009)

I: How long have you lived in Clark?
T: Twenty years.
I: What made you decide to move here?
T: We moved here from Elizabeth because, at that time, my oldest son was five, and MaryAnne was four, he was riding his bicycle in front of our home, and two boys pushed him off and stole his bicycle.
I: Oh, wow.
T: [*chuckles*] So, we decided that we couldn't live in that area anymore, so we wanted to look into a town that was safe, had a good school system, and that, you know, our children could walk to and from school and not be harassed by other people.
I: So where did you grow up?
T: I grew up in Elizabeth.
I: What was it like growing up there for you?
T: For me? It was suburban then, when I was growing up. I lived in the Westminister section of Elizabeth and I went to Catholic school all my life. We walked to school, walked home for lunchtime, walked back. It was just growing up normally.
I: Did it look like it does here? The houses and everything?
T: No. Well, I guess, sort of. When I was growing up there was an apartment complex in the neighborhood, but at that time it was all well-to-do families and young professionals who lived there, so. There aren't apartments around this area right now, but where I grew up there were some apartment complexes.
I: What was a daily routine like for you as a kid, after school?
T: After school, come home, usually had a snack, then you did your homework, and you were out of the house by like, quarter to four. You were outside. And I, actually, was lucky enough to live in a neighborhood where we had a dead end street, so that's where all the children would congregate, and we'd hopscotch, play ball, we'd, you know, jump rope. There were really no cars going up and down that street, so. And you didn't go home until your parents called you.

I: Did you spend most of your time with your friends?
T: Yes, mhm.
...
I: Did you have any other relatives or extended family nearby when you were growing up?
T: Well, I lived in a three-family house and my aunt lived downstairs, my grandmother lived with us, and a cousin lived upstairs. So, yeah, we were with family all the time.
I: So do you have as much family living near you nowadays?
T: No, no. When my husband and I first got married, we lived in Elizabeth, we rented his grandfather's house, so Grandpa was there, and around the corner from his grandpa lived his grandmother, and then he had aunts and uncles that lived within walking distance to the house. So, the first six or seven years of my marriage, we had family all around us. When we moved to Clark, there was no one around us.
I: Do you feel like your kids have less of a close relationship with their extended family as you had growing up?
T: Yes, I do. Other than their great grandfather that lived with us for twenty-five years, their grandparents moved to Florida, and then moved to Arizona. Their aunts and uncles moved out of state, so. Other than their great grandfather, they really don't have that close-knit of a relationship with their other family members.
I: When you were growing up, what was your relationship like, your family's relationship with your neighbors, your neighborhood?
T: We were all close. Yes, we were all close neighbors. Doors were always open. You could always walk into somebody's house. You know, there was either a mom home, or a grandma home, making something so that, if your parents weren't there, you could always grab something to eat at someone else's house.
I: Is there anything you didn't like about growing up there?
T: Anything I didn't like about growing up there? No, I'd have to say I really enjoyed my childhood. The friends I had were nice, the families that my parents associated with were wonderful, they treated us like family, so, I can't complain.
I: Would you feel comfortable raising your kids there today?
T: No, I wouldn't, because the area has deteriorated and those apartment complexes that I told you about that, at that time were high-end apartments, they became low-income family homes and the area there now is not that great. They actually have shootings and stuff there now.
I: What did your parents do when you were growing up?
T: My mother was a stay-at-home mom until I was in high school and then she got a part-time job. My dad was an oil burner repairman, so he worked for Hess Oil.
...
I: How did your family do all your food shopping?
T: Actually, my uncle did all our food shopping. My mom wasn't a great cook, she wasn't really interested in food. My grandmother and my aunt did all the cooking, so my mom would drive my uncle and he did most of the food shopping.
I: So, was there a market nearby?
T: Yes, there was. It was called the Big W. It was about five blocks away, on Morris Avenue.
...
I: What do you think you would do if you or your family didn't have access to a car?
T: What would I do? Well, right now, because I provide childcare, I actually walk everywhere with the children and, I mean, we're able to walk to the schools, I'm able to walk to the library, the grocery store, to the pharmacist. So, right now, where we live, I mean, you can actually still do things without a car. So, I can say that *I* could manage okay. I don't know if my *husband* could manage without a car, but I know *I* could.
I: So, looking back, are you glad that you decided to raise your family here?
T: Yes, I am. I feel comfortable with the community. In every small town, everybody sort of knows your business, but other than that, they grew up in a safe environment, the school system was excellent, I can't complain about the education that they received. The children and the friends that they've made over the years, they were smart enough to pick the type of people that had common interests, they were able to do that.
I: You mentioned community. How would you define the type of community that there is here?
T: How would I define it? I'd define it family-oriented. I think Clark is a very family-oriented town. I think most of the people that move here are parents that are concerned about their children and want them to have a normal suburban life, like you would think. Where you could, you know, play outside, you know, walk to school, ride your bicycle until dark and not have to worry about their children. You always worry about your children, but not have to worry, God forbid, there's street gangs down the street or there's, you know, shootings and stuff like that. I really don't know if I could have lived in that type of an area.

I: How would you say the community is now compared to when you were growing up in your area? Are there any differences?
T: The only thing I think is, because when I was growing up, there was mostly a lot of family close by you. I mean, if your aunt didn't live down the street, there was always a family member that lived close by. The only thing I see, which is sad, is that in this community, people have a lot of friends, and their family seems, their extended family members seem to... they don't have that close relationship with them. So, other than that I think it's pretty the same, except, you know, I would've like my children to grow up more with a family-oriented base than a friend base.
I: Could you think of, maybe, a reason why you think that happens nowadays? Why families don't live so close anymore?
T: Well, honestly, I think it's because people tend to do their own thing now. They don't worry about what their mom and dad think. They don't worry about, you know, moving away. Sometimes, I think they want to move away because, you know, they think that's what they're supposed to do. If that incident didn't happen with Frankie, I think we probably would've stayed in Elizabeth. You know, I *liked* the fact that Michael's grandmother lived around the corner from us, and his aunt lived down the street, and his cousin lived in the backyard, behind us. I felt safe. It made me feel secure. I knew that I could always count on somebody. When you have family around you, you feel safer and, you know, you're not afraid to say, "I'm running to the store." You know, when you live in a community like this, where it's mostly friends, you don't have that access to that security of your family.
I: Along those lines: Is there anything you didn't like about living here or would've changed maybe?
T: Well, I don't think I would've changed anything. When you brought it to my attention, I think I would've liked it that, you know, maybe, their grandparents or something were closer and they had a better relationship with them, but other than that, I don't think I would change anything.
I: Where do you do your grocery shopping now?
T: Oh, I do my grocery shopping at Wegmans in Woodbridge; I don't grocery shop in town.
I: Is there a reason for that?
T: Yes, there is. [*laughs*].
I: But, you don't want to say?
T: The reason that I don't grocery shop in town is because I, personally, don't like bumping into everyone that knows your business. [*laughs*]. So, it's different when you're out walking, but, you know, it just seems you bump into people and they're talking about other people, and I just don't like the gossip. I don't like to listen to the gossip, plus I hate when people talk about other people, and that's usually where you meet the people: at the grocery store.
I: So, how often do you generally go food shopping?
T: Once a week.
I: And you stock up... you have one refrigerator?
T: I have two refrigerators and one freezer. So, I buy for the children that I provide childcare for, so I always keep food in that one, and then for my family, we have five people living here, so we go through a lot of food.
...
I: There are some people who think that Americans, in general, are getting lonelier. Do you think that's true at all?
T: I think it's true, I do. I think that we tend to put ourselves in our little home and not venture out of that. I mean, I know with myself and Michael and the kids, we volunteer, we do things to get involved in the community, but a lot of people, they don't do any of that stuff. They don't get involved, they don't volunteer their time, you know, whether it's though the township or through your church, I think it's important that you go outside of your bubble. I think it's important that you do things for other people because it makes you feel more intact with other people, not just your family and friends. You have to, you know, integrate yourself with others.
I: Do you think there's a reason, maybe, why that might have changed over the years? Why people feel less attached like that?
T: I think because they're more selfish now. I think if you weren't brought up in a family that volunteered or did community service... Those values rub off on you so, if you're not brought up with those types of values, you're not going to do that for someone else; you have to actually be taught to do that.

C. Barbara (March 11, 2009)

I: How long have you lived in Clark
B: Well, I moved here when I was three. So, not counting the first few years when I got married, we lived in Colonia for about five years, and then we moved back to Clark, but, basically, I've lived in Clark since I was three.
I: Is there any reason that you wanted to move back to Clark after you lived in Colonia?
B: The main reason was the house we were living in was too small, our family was growing, so we definitely had to

move to a bigger house. We were going to move out to Hillsborough, which was, like, a new area at the time, and we actually even put a contract on a house to be built out there. We were all set to move out there, but at the last minute, [he] said he didn't want to travel that far because, at the time, he was working in the Newark area, which would have been at least an hour, probably more, drive every day. So, he said he didn't really want to travel. I didn't blame him at all. So, then it was, "Well, where do we go?" And we were both from Clark, originally, so we just came to Clark because it was what we knew.
I: Do you think it's changed a lot since you were younger? The people or anything?
B: It's changed. Everything changes over time. Has it changed a lot?
I: Or in what ways have you noticed, maybe?
B: The town itself I don't think has changed a lot, visually. Of course, you know, some stores may come and go, but for the most part the town is pretty much the same. Differences that I might have noticed, like as far as kids and school-wise: it's a little bit different now than when I was growing up, I guess, in the respect that... When I was growing up there was clearly two sides of the town: There was the Valley Road side and there was the Hehnly side. And, in those days, especially with girls, there was not sports for girls for the most part. And, even with boys, they didn't start sports young. So, the Valley Road side and the Hehnly side didn't meet each other until they were in high school, ninth grade. So, it was always a division. You never really got to know the "other side of town" until high school and, by then, you're too old to even really connect. So, I think that's a good change, mostly because of sports, that they start the kids young, so both sides of the town are coming together sooner, and when you guys get to the high school... Is that when they combine?
I: Middle school, actually.
B: Middle school. So, now you're combining at the middle school, you're combing younger, and you even know each other before that because of the sports. I feel like the town is a little bit whole.
I: What did you parents do when you were growing up?
B: My father was a maintenance mechanic for Sunoco, Sun Oil. My mother worked full-time most of my life, because I was the youngest of three kids and she started working full-time when I was in fifth grade, so, for most of what I can remember, she was working. And she was a bookkeeper for an aluminum siding company.
I: Did they live far from where they worked?
B: My mother worked in Avenel and my father, you know, he had a territory, stations that he went around to, so he was probably local.
I: Did they drive to work every day?
B: My mother drove to work every day, my father brought home a truck that he kept in the driveway.
I: So, when you were growing up, did you have other extended family living near you?
B: Not really... I'm trying to think who would be the closest. No. I mean, I'd say mostly everybody was in New Jersey, but close-close, nearby, no.
I: Do you think you'd be able to manage nowadays if you didn't have access to a car?
B: No! [*laughs*]. And, even worse is, I'd hate to admit it, is I can't manage these days without my children having a car either. It makes life a lot easier for me that they can drive their own car.
I: Would you say it was different when you were growing up?
B: Absolutely. When I was growing up, again, we were three children, and we shared... actually, well I told you my father brought a truck home, so the family had that truck and two cars. So, basically, that extra second car was not being used because my father drove a truck. So, that extra car was shared by three of us.
I: Is that how you got to school generally? Did your parents drive you?
B: I remember a carpool. Five kids in the carpool, one parent, each took a day.
I: What was typically a day like for you growing up, after school?
B: [*laughs*] I can't remember what I did yesterday! Well, in high school I was a color guard, so I know I was doing that after school every day, otherwise...
I: Were there a lot of kids in the neighborhood that you used to hang out with?
B: Yes. When we were young, there were a lot of kids in the neighborhood, and I actually saw that cycle, because as we got older, the kids kind of waned off, there were not many kids around. Then, you saw that there was a turnover. As a matter of fact, this development that we live in, Steve, was built around, like, 1965, which is when my parents moved in. So, in 1965, all these young families were moving in, and then they got older until, maybe, twenty-five years later, there was a turnover. They were retiring, and selling, and new younger families were moving back in.
...
I: What area of town did you grow up in? Where was your house?
B: Right around the corner.
I: And that's the same house that your mother still lives in?

B: Yes.
I: So, growing up, would you say your relationship with your direct neighbors was different than what you have now?
B: I would say we were closer back then.
I: So, how would you say it's changed, or why?
B: And then, on the other hand, you know what, Steve, I think, again, it has to do with where you are in your life. Initially I said we were closer, but I'm thinking when we were young and we were all close. When you guys were all young, the neighborhood was close too. But, now that you're older, and you don't have the kids for that connection, it doesn't feel close anymore, but I really think it has to do with your stage of life.
I: Would you say that, in Clark, or in this area, that there is a type of community, or how would you define it?
B: How would I define the type of community it is? Oh, that's a tough one.
I: Or if it's changed, maybe, since you were a kid?
B: I'm not good at those questions. It's definitely a community that I'm proud to live in. I'm a little more dissatisfied with it lately than I used to be. I'm not sure that I would encourage my own kids to live here.
I: Is there any reason, or do you not want to say?
B: Not that I don't want to say, I just don't think that Clark offers what it used to. I think we pay a lot of taxes and we really don't get much for it, whereas, surrounding towns, they pay a lot of taxes, but they get a lot of benefit from it. I don't see where our taxes go and, this school system, I don't think is as good as it used to be.
I: Did you, overall, enjoy growing up here?
B: Sure, yes.
I: Is there anything you didn't like about it?
B: No, but I really don't have anything to compare it to.
I: How often would you say you go grocery shopping?
B: *All* the time. [*laughs*]. At *least* once a week.
I: One refrigerator?
B: Two.
...
I: Looking back, are you glad you decided to raise your family here?
B: Yes.
I: Would you do it again, maybe?
B: Yes, but with hesitation. Like I said, I'm not so sure about the school system anymore.
I: Do you and your family see your extended family more or less than you did growing up?
B: My kids see their extended family more than I did.
...
I: Some say Americans, nowadays, may be getting lonelier as time goes on. Do you think that's true?
B: I think it's a definite possibility. I don't know that it's actually happening yet, but it's an absolute possibility. I believe it more so for your generation.
I: What makes you say that?
B: The internet. I don't think that you are all learning how to communicate. You communicate through texting and typing and you don't get that emotion. When somebody texts you or e-mails you, you're reading what that person is saying in your tone, and it very often gets misinterpreted, and, I think... I'll give you an example of something else: at work, where younger kids are starting to come in and work at the office, and I'm talking, you know, twenty-five-ish. And, they don't understand the etiquette of 'put your phone away.' They don't think anything about texting in the office at their desk. They don't even know they're doing something wrong. My own children will go out to dinner, in a restaurant with me, and just text away, and they don't think they're being rude. So, I think that your generation, absolutely, is going to get lonelier because you're not learning how to communicate the way you were taught.
I: Do you think it's inevitable? Or do you think there's some hope?
B: Well, there's always hope. You know, *hopefully*, when you all get older and *wiser*, you'll realize that, you know, there's something else out there, but I think it's a definite concern.
I: Do you think it may have anything to do with the physical landscape? That people don't have a community feel as they would in cities or smaller communities? Do you think there's any truth to that?
B: I think there might be... I tend to want to say yes, that there is something to physical distance. It's easier to talk to your neighbor when they're at a yelling-length away. If they're a mile away, you don't tend to... honestly, there's new people who just moved in three houses down. I don't even know what they look like.
...
I: What do you think is the biggest appeal for people wanting to live in a suburb like Clark?

B: What do I think the biggest appeal to this area is? Well, the standard answers: you feel safe, you don't think about the fact that I might not have locked the door before I left, I don't have to look over my shoulder when I'm outside, I feel safe and secure, and it's clean, and all of those typical things. [*laughs*].

D. Gary and Joanne (March 11, 2009)

I: So, how long have you lived here in Clark?
J: We moved here in, what? '88?
G: About 23 years? Twenty-ish years.
I: So, what made you decide you wanted to live here? Did you look anywhere else?
J: We were driving around the area and Gary really liked Clark. We were living in Jersey City at the time.
G: We did look in other areas. Towards Roseland.
J: Metuchen.
G: Metuchen. We looked in a lot of different areas.
J: Cranford, Cedar Grove.
I: Was there anything specific about Clark?
G: Price and, back then, it was an older town. Younger people were moving into the town, they usually sold to themselves or family members or something like that, and we happened to come across this house. We actually had a realtor show this house to us but we bought it from the homeowner. I had to give the realtor a gift.
I: So, where did you both grow up?
J: I grew up in Staten Island. Born in Brooklyn and moved to Staten Island when I was six.
G: They call it 'the bridges.' They go from Verrazano to Outerbridge. [*laughs*]. I lived up in Jersey City. That's where I grew up my whole life.
I: What was it like for you growing up? A typical day after school?
J: I went to Catholic school. We walked home, about a half a mile, did homework, and I used to go out and play stickball with my brother, and, you know, the kids in the neighborhood,
I: 'Til late?
J: 'Til late, yeah. Come in, do homework, eat.
I: What about you?
G: Jersey City: big basketball community I lived in. Grew up in Jersey City and I went, actually... I moved when I went from grammar school to high school to a different area of town and my freshman year I went to Bayonne High School, so I took a bus to school every day, which was Marist High School, it's a Catholic school, so it was a pretty long trip. From Kennedy Boulevard I used to walk to the bus up to Journal Square, which was a pretty good hike, and then take a bus to school. So, I was in school all day, a real long day. And I played basketball at St. Joe's basketball yard every day, like clockwork. Weekends. I played basketball until I was twenty-three, twenty-four years old at the grammar school yard.
I: How many cars did your family have growing up?
J: We had one.
G: Two. My father had a car and my mother had a car.
J: My mother didn't drive.
I: How long was their commute to work?
J: My father used to drive into Brooklyn. He worked at the post office. My mother would either walk up the avenue to the stores or take the bus.
G: My mother didn't work. My mother was a housewife, working housewife, but she had a car to get us to places. My father was a contractor, so, wherever the job was, or his office, it was local. Most of his stuff was local.
I: Do you think that you'd be able to manage nowadays if you didn't have a car?
J: No, because everything is so far.
G: When we lived in the city it was a lot easier because there was a corner grocery store, there was a Path Train, which was five blocks away. Buses were all running on schedule and close. It was all bus, train, walking distance. I walked to college. St. Peter's College. I was ten blocks away, so I could walk to college. I took a bus to high school, but I could walk to college.
I: Do you feel like you're more dependent on having a car now than you used to be?
G: Way more.
J: Oh, yeah. Without question.
G: I mean, the only thing that would be close here that would be considered like a grocery store is Rotondo's.
J: Good thing...

G: And that would be the only thing that would be close to what you would consider walking distance nowadays.
I: Growing up, besides your direct family, did you have other relatives nearby?
J: No, because we moved from Brooklyn to Staten Island and we were the first there, so all my family was in Brooklyn when we first moved.
G: I had a lot of family in Jersey City, a *lot*. Most of my family was in Jersey City. They were all born and raised there.
I: Did you see them a lot back then?
G: A lot. My grandmother owned a house right by State Teachers College and it was a big two-family house that my father and my mother lived in, and my aunt got married and lived in that house, their sisters and brothers lived right across the street in a house. I mean, they all lived on Audubon Avenue in Jersey City, so they all grew up there and moved to other houses in Jersey City that weren't too far away. So, we had a lot of aunts, uncles, cousins, relatives.
J: When we were in Brooklyn we had the same situation, family was all around.
I: So, do you feel like your kids nowadays are less close to their extended family than you were growing up?
J: They're pretty close. The boys are close to their grandparents and uncles and aunts.
I: Do you feel like you see them as much as when you were a kid?
G: They're really not that far away, considering, you know, we're pretty local. I mean, my mom and dad are in Springfield, so you're talking twenty minutes away. Two of my brothers live in Basking Ridge and my other brother is pretty far away, but he's in New Jersey. So, all my family is in New Jersey.
I: When you were growing up, what was your relationship like with your neighbors? Was it close?
J: When we first came over from Brooklyn, we lived in the apartments, yeah, I guess. I did have a couple of close friends above me and on the same floor. I guess, yeah, you could say we had a close relationship.
G: We had a lot of close friends. My father built the houses that we lived in, so, a lot of good neighbors. The neighbors upstairs from us were really close. My grandma lived two doors next to us and my father bought the house and put them in the house. So, I mean, we had a lot of family and relatives and friends. As a matter of fact, I just went to my brother's fiftieth birthday party and he had ten of his friends there from Jersey City. So he still, you know, hangs out with his friends from Jersey City and he's fifty years old. So, it was, you know, close ties.
J: Close ties.
I: Would you say in Clark that there is a different sense of community than you had growing up?
J: No, it's a different sense.
G: I think the kids have a different sense of community. I don't think we do.
J: With the neighbors, when we go over?
G: I said I don't think we do. We have a real sense of community, we have friends and we're close to the people around us, we know them all by name.
J: We have good neighbors.
G: We have parties and things. I don't think the kids are as close with their friends as we were with ours.
J: Mmm, I don't agree.
G: I think kids nowadays spend more time in the house, and don't go out and play a lot, and they don't hang out together a lot.
J: No, that's not true because Geoffrey is always out with his friends, they come here...
G: The other kids don't.
J: They did when they were his age.
G: I'm saying. It doesn't carry on like we did. My brother, Alan, still talks to his high school friends and his grammar school friends all the time, hangs out with them, has dinner with them and everything. So does Jerry, so does Robbie.
I: Do you think there's a reason why it's different now?
G: I'm telling you the reason: because they hung out together all the time and they didn't stay... a lot of kids, nowadays, stay in the house. They play computers, they don't go out, they don't do what kids did years ago. I mean, who does Chris hang out from Clark with?
J: A couple of friends.
G: One, maybe.
J: Well, that's Chris, but the other three...
G: Who's Greg hang out with?
J: Well, he has a few. Right now he's on the game with Adam.
G: One.
J: No, he has a few. Once in a while _____.
G: Never. OK. So, it's not the same as it was. It's far from being the same as it was.

J: It's different. The kids today go away for college. You guys didn't go away to college except for Alan.
G: I'm just saying it's different. It *is* different. It's completely different.
I: Was there anything you didn't like about the area you grew up in?
J: No. We moved a few times when we lived in Staten Island. So, no, I always had friends and I was happy.
G: I enjoyed it. It was good. Good learning experience. The city was tough.
J: Yeah, he was city, I was in a suburb.
G:I was in a real bad area.
I: Would you feel comfortable raising your kids where you were raised today?
J: Me, yeah. Not when I first moved to Staten Island. We lived in the apartments, the projects, but after that we were in residential areas out in Staten Island, so it was nice.
G: The area that I was in, now, is not the same area that it was when I was there. You know, it went downhill a lot. But, the city is a good way to grow up. You learn a lot. Brass tacks. You grow up fast.
J: A lot of common sense.
G: Street-wise.
J: Street-wise, right.
I: So, what do you both do now, for a job?
J: I'm a Parish secretary at St. Agnes, for about five years.
G: And I've been with the same company for over twenty-six years, Allied Building Products. I'm the manager in East Rutherford, New Jersey.
I: So, what's your commute like on a daily basis?
J: Mine's two minutes.
G: She should walk.
Both: [*laugh*]
G: I'm about twenty-five, thirty miles away, in East Rutherford, so it's not that bad. It's easy in the morning, bad at night.
I: Looking back, are you glad that you decided to raise your family here?
J: Yes, most definitely.
G: Yeah, the town's a great town. A lot of good friends, a lot of nice people, great block, never had any problems or main issues. It's a good town.
I: Is there anything you didn't like, or would have changed, maybe?
J: Living in Clark? No, not really.
G: Never had any really bad problems or issues.
J: We have good neighbors, it's very safe.
I: Where do you do most of your grocery shopping now?
J: A&P and BJ's.
I: How often do you go usually?
G: A&P almost every day.
I: And you have one refrigerator or two?
J: Two.
...
I: Do you think there is any truth to the claim that Americans are getting lonelier?
J: Lonelier in what sense?
I: Less friendships, less social connections, maybe not in *your* life, but in general?
J: No, I don't find that. Do you?
G: Well, you'll talk to anybody.
J: I do.
G: Nah, I have a lot of friends, you know.
J: We're involved...
G: My two best friends live in Clark, since I moved here. I don't, actually, socialize with any of my old high school buddies, or from where I lived, because I moved from grammar school and high school to two different areas. So, I left all my grammar school friends. I moved pretty far away in Jersey City, from one end of town to the other. So, two of my best friends live in Clark. You know, I consider them my two best friends.
I: How often do you see them?
G: I see them all the time. I haven't seen them recently, but, you know, I deal with a business. I make sure I go golfing with them once in a while. If we have parties, we invite each other to parties. We don't have as many parties as Big Daddy does. [*laughs*]. We'll be going to, you know, his daughter's wedding, Mike's daughter's wedding, it's

coming up. They're good people, they're nice people.
I: When your kids were growing up, did they have cell phones?
J: Chris didn't get his until he was a junior in high school, right when he got his license, which was right before 9/11.
G: Yeah, they didn't get them real early. Geoff was the earliest one to get one.
J: Yeah, when he graduated eighth grade.
G: When he graduated eighth grade.
J: I held off. I didn't think they were necessary.
I: So do you think there's a difference between when you were growing up? Like, you didn't have cell phones and nowadays kids do. You said you would go out until late. Did your parents almost expect you to be out?
J: Oh, yeah. I mean, you would come in for lunch, go back out, come in for dinner. It's the way it was.
G: It was a lot safer years ago, too.
J: He used to travel on the, uh...
G: I was twelve years old when I used to go with my friends over to Madison Square Garden, okay.
J: You can't do that today.
G: You're twelve years old now, you go to a game with your mother and father, and they walk you to the bathroom, and you got to hold their hand.
J: Yeah, it's a different world.
G: So, it's a completely different world than years ago. I used to walk to the Path, take the train, over to 33rd Street, walk underneath, you know, where the bums were all laying all over the place and everything, and go up to the Garden and go see a college game. Twelve years old.
I: Do you think parents, nowadays, maybe, are more protective of worrisome?
G: I think they have to be.
J: Some are *overprotective*. Kids don't know how to deal with... if there's a kid that bothers them at school... they don't know how to deal with issues today.
G: 'Adversity.' Is that the word you're looking for?
J: Yeah, that's it: 'adversity.' That's it. Parents, you know, they go into a school, they complain, in front of their children, in front of an adult. And children do not know how... they're not going to know how to function in the world when they grow up. Their parents are way too... *I* think...
G: That's enough, what are you going to start giving a philosophy class?
J: No, no, well, that's the truth. This generation coming up, I don't know. They don't know how to deal with situations. They panic, they don't...
I: Do you think there's any reason for that?
J: The parents, yeah. I can see it.
I: Do you think people are less involved with their community as they used to be?
J: We're very involved with our community at our church, so, I don't know. Maybe. But, in our case...
G: I have no idea. I know I was involved in Little League. I was involved with Pop Warner. I was involved with Babe Ruth. So, I was involved with all those things, you know, growing up, but I hear the involvement with the younger parents that were coming through was a lot less than when I was with, you know, Ray ___ and Bob ___ and Mike ___, and, you know, I could just go on and on with the names of everybody, Garry ___. I mean, everybody got involved a lot, way back, and a lot of good friendships made out of that too. And I don't think it's... I *hear* it's not as good as it used to be. Now, whether that's true or not, I don't know.

E. Jim and Maria (March 13, 2009)

I: How long have you lived here in Clark?
M: Fourteen years?
J: Yeah, just about.
I: What made you want to move here?
J: Well, my brother had lived here, I liked the area. We'd been married, what, about four years, at the time?
M: [*nods*].
J: And our daughter was just about getting ready to go to school.
M: We just thought that it would be a safer place...
J: A better environment.
M: You know, a safer place to raise her and for her to grow up. It was a smaller kind of community.
J: It wasn't so much *safer*. Elizabeth was changing at the time...
M: It was safer! It was safer. I was born in Italy and, when we came to America, we settled down in the Peterstown

area of Elizabeth, and, at that time, which was quite a few years ago, was very safe, very comforting to know you came from there. You were safe whenever. Day, night, walking. And you knew everybody there, you know what I mean, and everybody knew *you*.
J: Everybody knew each other...
M: Right. And, you know, it started changing by the time, you know, we grew up and we were teenagers and stuff like that, and, I don't know. I guess, raising a child down there, being it was changing...
J: It's the old adage: You always want better for your children than you had for yourself.
M: Right, right. And, again, like you said, being that his brother lived here, and we used to come to their home so much that we got to come into the town and... I don't know, it was nice...
J: We didn't just look exclusively in Clark, we were looking all over...
M: We were looking at a couple of neighboring areas to Clark, but we happened to stumble across this house and we were like, "Yeah, I guess this is going to be it." So...
I: When you were growing up, did you have any close, extended family near you?
M: Oh, my God, yeah.
I: Like who?
M: Well, when I came here, like I said, we settled in Peterstown on 3rd Avenue because my grandmother and my grandfather came first, and they started bringing their children with their families, one at a time, getting them settled, and so, it was just like, they made their own little community, their own little home, basically, on that block. So, I had my whole family, and then, extended family... like, you're not necessarily related to them, but you call them aunts and uncles, and, you know, they were from the other country too. So, it was just, like, all family around me.
J: And my grandparents and my aunts and uncles, on my dad's side, were in Elizabeth and my mother's side, they were scattered around. Some were in Linden, some were in Edison, so they were not on the same, general, block. I didn't grow up in Peterstown, I grew up in the Elmora section.
I: Did you like having your family nearby? Did you see them a lot?
M: Like the pros and cons of that?
I: Yeah.
J: Every Sunday. We went to my grandmother's house every Sunday for dinner. So, yeah, I saw my cousins every Sunday.
M: I'd see my family every single day. Every single day. We were just with all my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, we'd see one another. Weekends were special if you got to sleep over their house, but I'd see my grandmother every single day, she was like my second mother. On Sundays, yeah, we went there for dinner every Sunday,
I: What about now? Do you have a lot of extended family nearby as close?
J: No.
M: No.
I: Would you say that your kids, nowadays, are not as close to their extended family as you were, growing up?
Both: Absolutely.
M: Yeah.
J: That's one of the reasons, is because everyone is so spread apart.
M: And not only that. I find it, now, it's harder to be as close to family because, back then, it was, you know, one person, the husband, was working and the mom was home. And, you know, her job, basically was to stay home, tend to the kids and, the house, and cook, and stuff like that. And that sounds *so* old-fashioned, it really does, but, seriously, I wish it would still be that way, because you lost so much. You know, our kids, I feel our kids lost so much that...
J: The weekends are the only time that you get to do anything, do laundry, cleaning... The kids have so many more activities than we did when we were kids. You know, you were lucky if you had one activity...
M: Pff, you were lucky if you were doing *any* of them.
J: Now they're in everything, you know. Every weekend there's something else to bring them to.
M: And, like you said, it's the only two days you have to catch up on any kind of repairs you need to do on the house...
J: *If* that. That's if you want to work on the weekends. Because I work on Saturday too, a lot of times, so, it's tough.
M: Exactly, exactly. The kids are losing out on a lot.
I: Can you think of a reason why, maybe, that's changing so much.
M: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Because, the economy, I mean, forget about it being so poor, but, you need to have two incomes, basically, to survive now. And it goes back to, again, you want to give your kids what you didn't have, or better. And, to do that, you have to have two incomes coming in. So, the mom's not here. And, if it's a single parent, I think it's even worse, and I grew up with a single parent. I grew up with a single parent. My mom was the only

one...
J: I don't know how single parents do it nowadays. I don't know how they survive.
M: I don't know. That's got to be rough.
I: So, what was a typical day for you like, growing up? Maybe, after school, what would you do?
J: Me, well...
M: He went home and took a nap. [*laughs*].
J: Well, when I was in grammar school, no. All my friends, there was like six or eight friends, that we all lived on the same block, so, after school, we'd just, go home, get changed, and play. We'd have wiffle ball. My friend had an actual wiffle ball field set up in the backyard, with the bases and everything. It was like embedded into his backyard grass. And, we used to be there all the time, just either playing basketball or wiffle ball, baseball, stickball or whatever.
M: Always outside.
J: Yeah, we were always out.
M: Always outside, playing. And, it wasn't like now where , I mean, we used to go out, and that was it. Like, as soon as you felt it was starting to get dark, you knew it was time to start heading home, no matter where you were, because it was, like, time for dinner. And, your parent, there was no cell phones for them to find you, for you to call home or anything like that. You didn't need to...
J: Yell out the door, "Jimmy! C'mon!"
M: Yeah. They kind of knew where you were going to be. If you weren't at this one's, you were at that one's or this one's or that one's. You stayed kind of local. But, not like today, in today's world these kids don't go outside and play, or, you know... I guess, because, number one, they have all the activities that they do...
J: Play-dates.
M: Oh, my God, play-dates! That's the funniest thing. Alright, I have to tell you a story. I'm well in my forties and we come and move into Clark, and my daughter starts school at St. Agnes. Yada, yada, a year or so goes by, or whatever, she comes home and she's like, "Hey, mom, can I have a play-date with so-and-so?" And I was like, "... Play-date? What... what's a play-date?" And she was, "*Mom*, play-date. Can I have somebody come over to play?" I'm like, "Sure." But, a '*play-date*?' Like, they have a name for it now? Like, we didn't even know what... I looked at him and I said, "What the heck is a play-date?" We just went outside and knocked on somebody's door and was like, "Can you come out and play?"
J: Scheduling an appointment to have your kid come over.
M: Yeah, exactly. It's scheduled to have an appointment to play. I don't know. It blew me away because I'd never heard of such a thing.
J: You know, the progression of society, nowadays, it's different.
M: Exactly. It's 'fitting it in.' The kids are fitting it in to play and be a kid.
J: To our schedules.
I: So, what was your relationship like with your neighbors and stuff? Was it different than your relationship now with neighbors here?
J: Not really, no. I mean, I had a good relationship back home with most of my neighbors. We have a good relationship here too. Knock on wood, we have good neighbors.
M: Most of my neighbors were my family, so... [*laughs*]. Yeah, yeah we had a great relationship with them. And the ones that weren't family, they were still very close, and they kept an eye on you, you know what I mean. My mom would keep an eye on their kids.
J: Well, we were very lucky here that we got good neighbors. And, even after we had a couple people move out on either side of us, the new neighbors were still good.
M: Yeah, I love my neighbors. I mean, we've never had a problem with them and... you know, they're always keeping an eye out for our home and our kids if they're out and about here, and same goes with us, so, we got lucky.
I: Did you walk to school? How did you get to school, generally?
M: I walked.
J: I got a ride, because I went to school a few miles away, so my mom used to bring us to school.
M: [*laughs*].
J: Well, I was in Elmora. We had to go to Peterstown to go to school, St. Anthony's.
M: I was on Martin Street I walked to the Bayway Circle. It was three miles. My mother didn't have a car. I walked everywhere. My mom and I walked everywhere or we took public transportation.
J: That was my mom's job. Your mom had to go to work, so, my mom's job was to take us to school and to pick us up from school.
M: There you go. The difference between having a single parent and having two parents, with a mom being home.

That was a little bit of the, I guess, perks that you get.
I: Do you think you would be able to manage, nowadays, not having a car?
J: Absolutely not.
M: Heck no.
J: Absolutely not.
M: Heck no. Except that, I did swear that I was either getting a horse or I was going back to a bicycle when the gas prices went as high as they did, because I had just about had enough.
J: Car, no. Cell phone, *maybe*, I'd be able to live without.
M: Oh, I could live without a cell phone. I could definitely live without a cell phone.
I: So, would you say you're kind of dependent on having a car now?
J: Absolutely.
I: Do you think it was different growing up, though?
M: I never knew to have a car. Like, I didn't know... That was, like, a luxury for us, to get picked up and brought somewhere by car. I mean, we walked everywhere. I don't know if you're familiar with the Peterstown area...
I: Not really.
M: Well, I mean, we used to walk from Peterstown to Broad Street and Elizabeth Avenue, and I mean *walking*. You know, shopping it all day long. And, they used to have the fresh open market, way back when. We would walk, my mom would have her little, you know, metal cart, and we would walk to the market. We walked everywhere, I just never, you know...
J: Yeah, for me...
M: He didn't, he was spoiled.
J: Well, I mean, if we had to go somewhere, my mom or dad used to take us, but we were all friends all together, we didn't get a ride. I mean, we used to take our bikes or walk...
M: Yeah, that's if you were out and playing and stuff like that. We're talking about if you had to *go* places.
J: We drove our bikes from Elmora to Woodbridge Center.
M: Yeah, and? If your mother had to go food shopping, and she needed help, what was happening? ... You would be getting in the passenger seat, you'd be riding shotgun. [*laughs*].
I: What did your parents do for a living?
M: My mom is retired now, but my mom used to work in a factory. She used to make mattresses for Simmons.
J: My dad had his own construction company, excavating contractors.
...
I: Is there anything you particularly didn't like about where you grew up? Would you live there again?
M: If I could go back to when I was a kid, I would take my kids right back there. Absolutely.
I: For what reason?
M: The close-knit, the comfort of knowing everybody. Times back then were a little bit easier, in a sense, than I feel it is for parents now. Looking back, as a parent now, looking back at being a kid, it just seems like, right now, it's so much harder to be a parent than it was back then. Not that I'm saying it was easy, because my mom had it very hard.
J: I think it's harder being a *kid* nowadays.
M: And it's also very hard being a kid now. Again, they don't have time to be a kid. There's so much that's taken over their life. Electronics has totally destroyed... It's sad. Their social skills, I think, have diminished from being able to hide behind a computer screen, texting.
I: The same for you?
J: Yeah. Where I grew up was a little different. Where she grew up it was all the same ethnicity. Everyone was from, basically, almost the same town in Italy. Where I grew up it was a mixed bag. There was a melting pot. There was a little bit of everything. There was, you know, Irish, Jewish, Greek, Spanish, Italians. There was everybody on our block. It was different. It was, not everybody knew each other, like that community that she lived in, but everybody got along. Everybody, you know, respected each other and everything, and the kids all played and got along. It wasn't like anybody, you know, isolated each other.
M: Oh, yeah, no.
J: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn’t mind my kids growing up there. Well, they're kind of, now, like that, but... the problem is...
M: You got to watch where they're going, every minute. You know, you're petrified, if they're out of my sight.
J: Right. That's the difference.
M: Petrified.
J: Nowadays, compared to when we were younger, you didn't have all these...
M: No, because your moms used to let you go. You'd go play...

J: Well, there wasn't all these crazy lunatics out there. Pedophiles and this and that, that you hear about. Megan's Laws and...
M: Well, that's not true, though, Jim. They were out there. They were just not as magnified by the media as it is now.
J: It's a lot more prevalent now than it was back then.
M: When I moved from 3rd Avenue, and we moved to Martin Street, holy heck, what opened up there was like a Pandora's box of... You want to talk about cultures... *There* I wouldn't want to take my kids back to growing up there. Not that I had any bad experiences, not that I wasn't safe, but I was amongst... Everybody around me was a stranger opposed to who lived in the six-family apartment home that my grandfather had built. And then, next door, there was a home that my aunt and my uncle then moved in to. So, again, I was surrounded by, somewhat family, but not like where I initially grew up: down in Peterstown. And, that stuff all existed. All the drugs and the, you know, the car-stealings and the house-breaking-in-to, and, you know, that was all there, it was just not as magnified as it is now. It [was] just not as magnified. I don't feel it [was].
I: But you feel safe in this community now?
Both: Yeah.
I: But would you say that it's in a different sense than the security you used to have?
J: Yeah, a different sense of security.
M: I mean, this is our *home*. You have to feel safe in your home or it's not your home. But, the closeness and the tight-knit that I grew up around is *not* what I feel we have here, and my kids definitely don't have that, that's for sure. And, [also], it's because we're not surrounded with as much family as I had been surrounded by, growing up.
J: Yeah, no. I don't feel as safe now as we did when I was growing up. I mean, we used to leave our doors open all the time and...
M: I still lock the doors in the car sometimes! [*laughs*]. He's like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "I can't help it, it's a habit."
J: We never locked the doors in the cars when we were in Elizabeth.
M: Your house. But, you were talking about your house and I'm like, I'm still locking the doors to the car sometimes.
I: Do you think you'd attribute any of that to the actual physical landscape of the development here as compared to there? The way the houses are set up?
J: Oh, no, not at all.
M: No, it has nothing to do with it.
J: We're more spread out now, over there it was like...
M: You could literally hand a cup of coffee through the window to your neighbor next door. Literally, that's how close the homes were.
J: That was you. I mean, we had driveways in between us, but we were in a two-family house. So, there was a family above us all the time and the houses next door to us were all two-families, all up and down the block, they were all two-families.
M: I lived in a six-family apartment home. We always lived in an apartment, growing up. My mom was never able to purchase a home, so, we always lived in an apartment. So, no matter where you were, you know, within and earshot, there was always somebody right there. And, there was an alleyway between the six-family... but, literally, like, the alleyway between the two buildings, you could walk through it, but you kind of had to sidestep. That's how close it was and, if there was a window on that wall, you could hand a cup of coffee right over to your neighbor.
J: Yeah, it's not due to the geography here, because we're much broader and spread out, and it's much nicer now than where we grew up, but...
I: So, would you say there's more privacy now?
M: Yeah. [*laughs*].
J: Yeah, absolutely.
I: Did you necessarily mind, growing up that you didn't have as much privacy?
M: No, I didn't mind it at all.
J: No, it didn't bother us back then.
M: There wasn't anything that you knew differently.
J: No, it didn't bother us.
I: Do you think it would bother you now to kind of integrate?
J: Oh, yeah.
M: Uh, yeah. If we were like, happened to get like a crunch here, yeah, it would be a little awkward.
J: Absolutely.

I: Looking back, are you glad that you decided to raise your family here?
J: Yeah, no regrets. I'm very satisfied with the choice.
I: Nowadays, how often do you see your extended family?
J: Not as often as we'd like to anymore.
M: His dad's not with us anymore, either.
J: Now it's become, basically, holidays and birthdays, stuff like that.
M: Special occasions, basically, and that's it.
J: Yeah, special occasions, more so. It becomes harder and harder to, you know, with the everyday rigors, plus, you know, working six, seven days a week, sometimes, it's impossible to just get there anymore.
I: Do you think there's a type of community here? And, if there is, how would you define it?
J: No, there's not really a community here. It's a...
M: Wait, wait. Well, there is, it's just that we're not from it. [*laughs*]. We're not from it. I think that the adults that were born and raised here... and we've lived here, now, fourteen years, so, we've come to know quite a few people, and quite a few that were born and raised here. But, once they either went away to college or got married, moved away, but then eventually came back. So, *they're* the ones that really, I feel, they're the ones that have that community because they have so much more to reminisce over, you know, it's their schools, it's their neighborhoods, you know what I mean, it's their stomping ground. We're not *from* here, per se, so... Is it a community? Yes. Do I feel, I'm not going to answer for him, do *I* feel as though I'm a part of that community? Not really, no.
...
I: Where do you do most of your food shopping?
M: In town. You mean what store?
I: Well, not necessarily.
J: Just in town or out of town is basically...
M: Well, in town, mostly.
J: You do all your shopping on the computer.
M: Yes, I do, and I love every minute of it. I do online shopping at Shoprite, which, for any woman that hasn't done that, or any man that does the food shopping for the home, I think it's highly recommended because you can put your order in whenever...
J: Roll the tape back of how the electronics ruin the community and ruin children...
M: No, no, no, no, no. Wait, hold up, hold up, hold up a second. That's their social skills. There is nothing wrong with my social skills, and that there is to feed *you*. So, therefore, I think it's a win-win situation. *Anyway*...
J: Years ago, that used to be a part of the social part of women. You know, they'd meet each other at the grocery store. Nowadays, who do you see?
M: Hold on a second!
J: You're looking at yourself in the computer screen. You're not bumping into anybody, you know what I mean.
M: Hold on a second. How would you know that? How much food shopping are *you* doing?
J: I *used* to do the food shopping.
M: Yeah, because I was nine months pregnant and I couldn't walk! [*laughs*].
J: They didn't have the online shopping, I used to go...
M: Anyway, online shopping is fantastic. You can put your order in on a Thursday, pick it up on a Saturday, whatever. And, if you're on a budget, it works out perfectly, because you can manage it, almost to the penny, as to what you're going to be spending. And, with, you know, sort of a fixed income...
J: And you become a social outcast.
M: Or you *choose* to become a social outcast. You know, it's great. But, in the summertime, we *do* visit our local market, our fresh market. So, that's kind of neat, to know that we have, which I was very excited about when we moved here, was that there was still, actually, a family that had the fresh farm. And, you know, you could get your vegetables and fruits there, which is, you know, pretty cool, coming from, you know, down in Peterstown. And we used to have that and then that stopped. You know, you kind of felt spoiled getting that fresh fruit and produce, and then, you know, not always getting it in the food store.
I: How often do you do food shopping?
M: Every two weeks, basically.
I: Do you have one refrigerator, two?
M: I have two.
I: Yeah, I'm noticing most people have two refrigerators nowadays.
M: Yeah, because you can buy in bulk and, you know, when you do those Costco trips, or whoever has...
J: Yeah, like once every five or six months, we'll go to one of those wholesale clubs...

M: Sam's or BJ's. Especially when you have more than one or two children, you kind of go through things quick, so you stock up, and having two refrigerators is helpful.
...
I: Do you think parents are more protective or worrisome than when you were growing up?
J: Absolutely.
M: Yeah.
J: There's more to worry *about*.
M: But what changed? I don't know what changed! I really don't get it.
J: You know, you say the media blows things out of proportion...
M: To a certain extent, yes.
J: I say, maybe that's so, but I think there's a lot more of these crazy people out there that are doing these things to children and there's more gang violence. And, they have...
M: But, what do you attribute that to?
J: ...more to feed on by the internet...
M: Right. Thank you.
J: and it drives them more mad and...
M: It's [also], they're exposed to so much more because they have the ability to research things, look things up and, for somebody that may not be mentally stable, rather than that being a form of education, it may steer them the wrong way and...
J: And now with the, you know, terrorist threats, and this and that, and homeland security... Things are much more, how do I say it? It's much more dangerous now than when we were growing up, I think.
I: Americans may be getting more and more lonely. Do you think there's any truth to that?
J: Yes. Yes, absolutely.
M: There's a lot lost in family. And tradition. In families, there's just, there's a lot lost there. I, again, you know, I have to go back to when I was a kid. We grew up with our cousins, we grew up with our aunts, our uncles, our grandparents, extended aunts and uncles. And you spent your, not only your holidays, which is, you know, what I'm seeing now, is that's when you *try* to get together with family, is on the holiday, on a special occasion. You know, you'll see somebody at a wedding or you'll see them at a funeral parlor. That's very sad. That's now. But, when I was a kid, we'd see them constantly. And, it wasn't like the reaction I see now, is like: [*rolls eyes, sighs*] "Not them again." We *never*. Oh, my God, we never. And we played and we fought, and, you know, we laughed and we cried. You know, as much as we loved one another, yeah, we would pick and fight, also, but, there's so much lost from the time I was a kid to now for these kids to experience. And, it's hard to *give* them that just by talking if they don't experience it. You know, they can't relate to it.
J: The other thing is, there's a lot more people that are growing up now, like, maybe kids your age, or a little bit older than you, that are more career-oriented and they're career-driven, and they don't think about starting a family and raising a family. They, basically, are, like, in a tunnel vision, you know what I mean. Their career is everything and, by the time they get ready to start a family, it's too late then, you know what I mean. It passed them by already, so, you know, they become more goal-oriented towards...
M: Too late in what sense? Too late in the fact that their grandparents are already gone? In a sense that their parents are older already? In that kind of a sense?
J: Or, just, no. That, you know, time has passed them by, by that time.
M: Because that's what I think. Yeah. By passing them by, look at what's passing by *them*.
J: Not only that. Just the time for them to start and raise a family. By the time they get to the point where...
M: Well, absolutely, but not only by the time they're starting to raise a family, but you got to remember, not only are they getting old, but so are their grandparents and their parents. They don't have what we had. Like, when we were little, our *grandparents* were who looked after us. We didn't go to no *daycare*! There was no...
J: Well, our grandparents were young, considering...
M: Exactly, because they started young, because they didn't have that career-driven thought. You know, it wasn't...
J: They started at seventeen, eighteen years old, having kids.
M: Right. And now, right now, that would be totally absurd for us to see that. Like, we look at that, *we* even look at that and that was, you know, normal when we were kids. But, we look at that now and we're like, "Are you crazy?" You know, but, we were married by the time we were, I was twenty-five, and I had my daughter at twenty-six. Did we plan it that way? Absolutely, because we wanted...
J: And that's late compared to the generation before us.
M: At that time, right.
I: And that's kind of early now, maybe.

M: Oh, absolutely. People look at us and are they're like, "What? You got married *when*?"
J: Yeah, but, if you think about it, I mean, people are having kids in their thirties. The child's grandparents, sixty, sixty-five.
M: Right. So, they're not really able to enjoy them.
J: You know, my grandparents were, I guess, in their late fifties, early sixties when, and I was the youngest out of four. You know, my brother was ten years older than me, so... We were able to enjoy our grandparents. They were, you know, around until we were fifteen, sixteen. Nowadays, you know, the kids, they know their grandparents two, three years and, unfortunately...
M: Because they're so much older. Because people are getting married, they're getting married in their late thirties. You know, thirty-six, thirty-eight. Yeah, they lose a lot.
I: Concerned at all about the energy crisis, the end of fossil fuels that people mention?
J: I think they should start exploring alternate energy sources. As far as fossil fuels running out, I doubt very highly that we'll ever see that in our lifetime. There's just so many different...
M: Don't ever say that... Don't ever say never.
J: Yeah, but there's so many different ways to extract oil.
M: Absolutely, but don't ever say never. [*laughs*].
J: You know, there's oil in shale and there's oil in other rock products. It's just a more costly, you know, expense to... ...
I: With being so dependent on you cars, what would happen if you suddenly didn't have them? How would you, or older people, for instance, get access to food?
M: Well, the seniors, fortunately, they have set up for the seniors that they have transportation. So, they have, you know, a bus that can hold, probably, like, eight to ten seniors and they have a set schedule for the week where they take them twice a week food shopping. Another week they'll take them to Home Depot...
J: That's one of the differences of living here compared to living in Elizabeth. We were able to walk to a supermarket within walking distance and go food shopping without a problem, whereas, now, forget about it, you couldn't walk to the grocery store or bring your bags back.
M: I *used* to, though. Used to pull out the little cart. [*laughs*]. Oh, God, help me.
J: Here?
M: No! When I was little!
J: OK, I was going to say, here, I don't remember you ever doing that.
M: Not here. I'm not pulling anything! [*laughs*].

6. Link to Online Documentary

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqZCpvs0SzA