

Three Windows Three Women

Caring For God's Creation

*Alexis Sauder, 25
Harrisonburg, Virginia*



It's a beautiful day in the Shenandoah Valley. The sun is shining brightly in the crystal clear sky; the mountains are sharply defined on the horizon. A cool breeze rustles the leaves and flowers that bejewel the nearby trees, and the grass is rich and thick from the week's rains. Days like today make me applaud God for another masterpiece.

Yet, lately, I've wondered if this view will be here for my children to see. In fact, will I be able to enjoy this beauty a mere fifty years from now? Startling evidence points to the damage Earth's 6.7 billion inhabitants have inflicted on their host planet. Scientists warn of irreversible damage to a planet that has bounced back from natural disasters for billions of years. It's a scary and overwhelming thought, and not one I feel I can ignore.

Genesis 1 chronicles God's creation of the earth and everything on it, including woman and man, whom God charged with the guardianship of his creation. God left all that he thought was "good" to our care, and I don't think it's a job we should take lightly.

But I haven't sold my car, turned to solar power (yet), or become vegetarian. Instead, I've made little daily changes to make a huge difference. I bike or walk to work every day, eat less meat, and compost my kitchen waste. I take shorter showers, eat as locally and organically as my budget allows, and unplug appliances when I'm not using them, among other things. The steps I take to care for God's creation aren't huge, but they allow me to be a good steward of what God has given me. If others did the same, we could make a big impact.

This topic is an concern for today, and for me, it's an issue of faith. God has charged me to take care of his creation, and that's what I plan to do. 📌

Editor's note: This column is a forum for women to share perspectives on the current issue's theme. It introduces women spanning their 20s-30s, 40s-50s and 60s and above. If you are interested in writing for this column, please contact new editor Patricia Burdette at PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org.



*Cookie Wiebe, 54
Newton, Kansas*

I used to dream of a great big house with extra bedrooms for guests. Instead, at under 1,400 square feet, we have a “not-so-big house.” For three years as volunteers for Mennonite Central Committee, we lived in a bush village with no running water. We also had an outdoor privy and a solar panel for electricity. We came home to our house, and I wondered why I ever thought it was so small.

Whenever I start to complain, my husband, Dave, wonders aloud if it’s time to go overseas again. In 2000, we added central heating to our home and chose not to include air-conditioning. A whole-house fan, ceiling fans in every room, and a cooling dip before bed in a backyard pool make it doable—even in Kansas in August. It also helps our electric bill stay on the conservation rate.

In the summer of 2006, we hosted 20 cross-country bicyclists. None complained about the lack of air conditioning. I hope they remember the hospitality rather than the front room that resembled a storage shed. A bicyclist last summer wrote in his blog that this was the “tightest” house he’d ever been in. I hope to host cyclists again this summer; this time, they can sleep on the mattress on top of storage cabinets (now upstairs), close to the ceiling fan.

Along with being able to clean the whole house in two hours, I’ve realized staying in our starter home has been the key to our freedom. A smaller house with a smaller mortgage has created a “margin” in our time and money that has allowed us to spend both on service overseas and involvement in our community. Hospitality is less about space and conveniences and more about opening our lives to guests. It also includes the ways in which we try to be a good “guest” on this Earth. 📌

*Mildred Stauffer, 82
Fredericktown, Ohio*



“Brighten the corner where you are” is a chorus many probably remember singing as small children. When our grandchildren come to visit we try to put that idea into action. We often take a walk down to the bridge on our country road and pick up aluminum cans to recycle as we go. As a result, when the kindergarten teacher asked our granddaughter, Melissa, what she does at Grandma’s house, Melissa said, “We pick up beer cans!”

Growing up during the Depression days of the 1930’s has taught me to avoid waste, make do, and recycle whenever possible. As many families do, we have boxes in our basement for plastic, paper, and tin cans that we recycle on a regular basis. But I also try to recycle other things as well.

For instance, in the winter months, I spend some of my spare hours at the sewing machine, making doll clothes and doll quilts for various charities, including MCC. Our daughter-in-law volunteers at the local thrift shop and can furnish most of the yardage remnants that I use, recycling them.

With food prices on the rise, it just makes good sense to continue having a sizeable vegetable garden. Canning and freezing the surplus helps the budget in the winter months. We enjoy the warmth from our Ben Franklin stove on cold winter evenings, too. Most of the wood burned comes from cleaning up fallen tree branches in the fence rows on our farm.

My favorite household chore is hanging our laundry outdoors. I’ve hung up many, many dozens of diapers while raising our six children. Using God’s clothes dryer can save money twice since there is never a charge for drying nor for the stretching exercise I get while hanging the clothes.

Using what God provides to “brighten the corner” where we are never costs much, and the result can also do more than beautify. For example, several years ago a friend, Cindy, suggested planting a memory garden along the back side of our church building. We solicited plants from our members to be placed in memory of our deceased members, and we now have 16 markers placed among the peonies, iris, mums, bleeding hearts, etc. While it is not a professional-looking garden, I treasure the memories of these dear ones as I weed and mulch the flowers and watch them grow more beautiful each year. ☐