

The Bridge Between Modern Living and Downshifting Is Crossable

Contributed by Tracey Smith

Yesterday, I took another fairly enormous step on my personal road to self-sufficiency.

In the flurry to get out of the chicken house, one of my 5 month old egg layers fell and broke her neck.

There I was, presented with a freshly despatched bird and nothing particularly planned for tea.

When presented with this situation in the past, my dear friend Jen would take the dead bird in hand and I assisted with their 'dressing', but I had never actually dealt with the whole messy business on my own.

{kl_thumbimage img="animals/easter.jpg"}

I knew roughly what to do, I had the equipment but I needed a guiding hand, so I called my neighbour, chicken keeper and ex-chef, Denis. Butchering my first chicken

He came over, sat under the welcome shade of the terrace, drank tea and belted out in his broad Derbyshire accent, "Right girl, get yer 'and in there and have a good feel around", referring of course to the little incision in the business end of my recently departed chook.

Step by step he explained what to do as I removed another 'bit'. He told me which of the two bowls the item should go into (edible and non-edible) and danced an impressed pair of eyebrows when I produced "The best looking liver I've seen in a long time, pet!"

He headed home, leaving me with a 5 1/2lb dressed bird (soon to be smeared with butter, herbs, cracked black pepper and a little sea salt, then put in to roast) and my bowls of bits.

The non-edible bowl contained intestines, crop, stomach contents, gall bladder and feet and the edible bowl had 8 yolk sacks, one complete egg (due to lay that morning) heart, gizzards, liver, kidney and head. It all seemed quite straightforward the other side of the job, but there is nothing like a helping hand to get you through your first times. A step closer to self-sufficiency

As I cleared up my bloody table, I suddenly felt an enormous flush of pride for my accomplishment and also a step closer to despatching my own birds, which is an enormous hurdle on the self-sufficiency trail and one I feel much closer to jumping.

Recent reading material has given me much food for thought, pardon the pun, with details of antibiotics, growth hormones and the terrible living/dying conditions of mass-produced poultry.

How good did I feel knowing our evening meal was going to be absolutely organic, completely free-range with enough left over for a pie and soup the next day? Very...

As I prepared the stock later that evening from what had been a truly succulent chicken with real bite to the meat, I allowed myself a wander down memory lane. A handful of years ago I could have given you a few tips on frugal living, but because I am now immersed in it, I feel like a walking book on ways to live the simple life. How did I get from there to here?

I asked myself, if I were back 'there' again, looking at the new me with bloodied hands and a determined smile, what would I make of her? Could I aspire to being such a confident and contented downshifter?

The gap between the two is surely worlds apart, isn't it?

A look around at the array of good sites like www.Downsizer.net, packed with information on all levels, is testimony to the fact that there are literally thousands of wannabe downshifters. Folks who long to grow their own food, maybe even raise a little livestock and live a time-rich Good Life, but who would not know a bag of seeds if they jumped up and sewed themselves.

If you are one of them, it's fine - don't panic - you can do it! The gap between who you are and want to be is not as big as you think

Start by taking little steps. You will achieve results and gain confidence at an alarming rate and that is one of the keys to

success.

Never grown anything? Start with a few window-sill herbs or beans and shoots in a jar. Tap the knowledge of any green-fingered friends, they will probably be delighted to help you get started.

Never reared anything? It's easier said than done if you have limited space, but how about a couple of rabbits or chickens in the garden? If you have a friend who keeps a few, get over there and get grubby, find out exactly what is involved. They might even be able to look after a few on your behalf if you contribute towards their feed.

Don't be overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. It's all a bit acorn and oak tree really, but the journey is one of self-discovery and much excitement and anyway, you have made the first step by being here.

Good luck on your downshifting journey, enjoy the ride!About the Author

Tracey Smith downshifted to rural France in 2002 with her husband and children. A prize-winning writer and photographer, she shines practical and emotional light on the subject and has unravelled some of the secrets to successful downshifting. With radio and television credits also, Smith is fast becoming the "Spokesperson for downshifting" - Venue Magazine. Read her column in "French Magazine" and at www.FrenchEntree.com/fe-downshifting