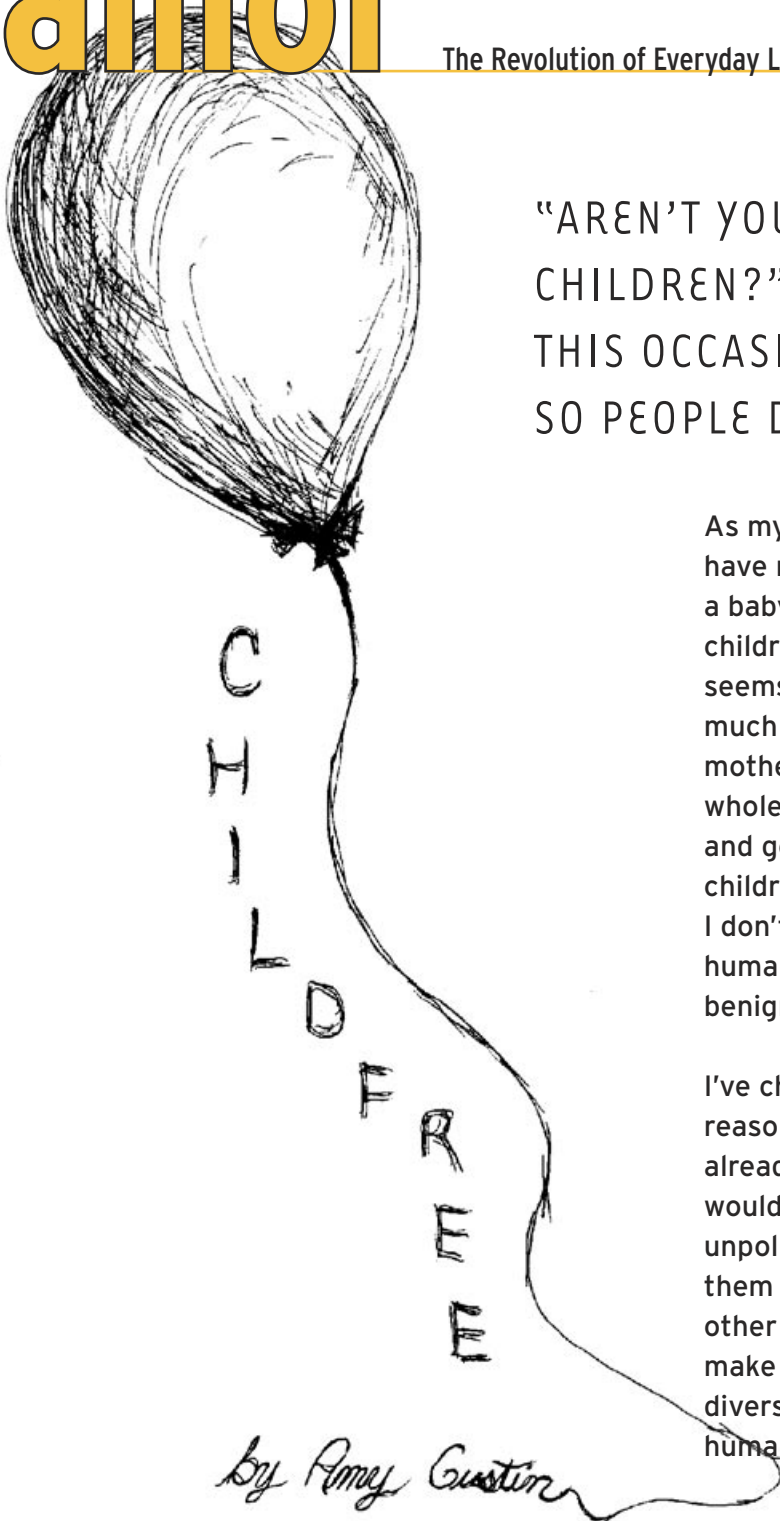


# clamor

The Revolution of Everyday Life

Communique #48



*By Amy Gustin*

“AREN’T YOU GOING TO HAVE CHILDREN?” I GET ASKED THIS OCCASIONALLY. I’M 38, SO PEOPLE DO WONDER.

As my gynecologist put it “You don’t have many years left if you want a baby.” “No, I don’t want to have children.” The conviction in my voice seems to surprise the questioners as much as my answer does. People see motherhood as natural and healthy, a wholesome activity bursting with love and goodness. While I generally like children and care about their welfare, I don’t view the decision to bring more humans into existence in such a benign light.

I’ve chosen to live childfree for many reasons. One reason is that the world already feels far too crowded. Where would my grown child live? How much unpolluted water would be left for them and their generation? How many other species would be wiped out to make room for their homes? Healthy diverse ecosystems are critical for human survival, and indispensable

for my emotional well being as well. The decimation of plant and animal species, by the generations that came before me, is something that I will never forgive. My happiness was stolen as surely as those species' lives. Not contributing to overpopulation is part of what I do to stop the destruction today.

I'm a refugee from the DC metropolitan area. I've lived in a number of small towns and rural areas that were popular with other urban-suburban refugees. While a lot of other refugees seem to have been looking for a nice place to raise a family, I've recognized that an expanding population is detrimental to me, and threatens to degrade the places I've loved. I've always wanted to keep these places from coming anywhere close to resembling the nightmare of pavement, developments, and shopping malls that marred my childhood home. Growth and development, however, have taken their toll, and ultimately, they have all proved unlivable for me. After the boomers bought up land and homes, availability declined and prices skyrocketed. By the time I came along, the cost of living in my chosen locations always exceeded what I could really afford. I've been squeezed out of one beautiful location after another. When I landed in northern California, I was grateful to have found a place where I could live simply, and see trees, bobcats, foxes and deer, more often than I see pavement, homes and people. Living childfree is an adaptation to the difficult circumstances many of us find ourselves in, as well as a tactic for protecting and improving the quality of life.

When I think about the future, I wonder what life will be like for the children being born today. Nearly every social and environmental problem we have is exacerbated by population growth. Some say we could all live well and have room

for more, if we distributed resources more equably and learned to live more sustainably. I don't see a serious move in that direction, and a lower population would be much more sustainable anyway. Water is becoming a critical issue. It is a finite resource, and population growth is already increasing competition between humans, as well as between humans and other species. Oil is another finite resource, and we are already in the stage of declining availability. The production and use of oil has had a devastating impact on our world. Industrialized nations can't function without it. Long before it is gone, the competition over what remains promises to get really ugly, as current events have indicated. But it can't run out soon enough to save us from global climate change. Even the best case scenarios promise destruction and upheaval.

While the consequences of overpopulation greatly concern me, the social ramifications of raising a child make it untenable for me. Raising a child reproduces your culture. Human beings are the most basic component and resource of any culture. A parent's job, fundamentally, is to teach the child how to live in the world. Parents transmit their culture to their children, since you teach what you know, and children learn what they see and experience. Even if some of your values and practices differ from the norm, you still function within your culture. I find myself within a culture that doesn't fulfill the real needs and desires of its' participants. It in fact greatly harms them as it destroys and devours the world around it. The last thing I want to do is to help this culture continue by supplying a new recruit.

People have children, in large part, to satisfy their own emotional needs. They expect to feel fulfilled, and to receive unconditional love

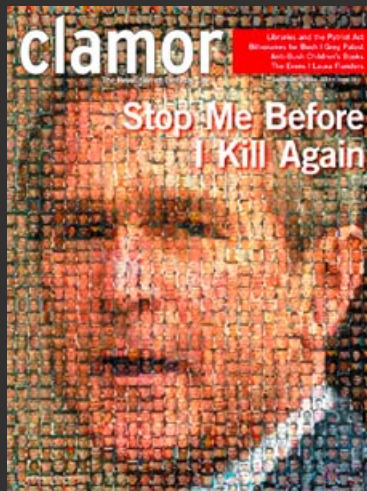
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and admiration. Having children also gives you power over another human being, as well as a sanctioned role in society. Using children to fulfill some of these needs is unfair and damaging to children. Most of these needs could be better met through other relationships and activities. I think that if more people examined their motivations, they too might opt for a child-free life.

Being childfree gives me a greater degree of freedom to take risks, experiment, and live life according to my convictions. I don't take this freedom for granted. For the better part of the last 10,000 years, the women of our culture have been treated like just another farm animal to breed. The sentimental image of motherhood, that is prevalent today, obscures this aspect of our history. I choose to define myself and my role in life.

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