

Geoff Bond
Nutritional Anthropologist
February 2009

Press Article

Thoughts from the Savanna: The Stress of Tidiness

Our evolutionary history designed us for life on the savanna...

We all know how hard it is to get a teenager to tidy up his bedroom; how we have to train our children not to litter; how scoundrels fly-tip without scruple; even how drunk city gents urinate in phone boxes. We are familiar, too, with the picture of disease-ridden medieval cities, where people emptied chamber pots from upstairs windows, and filth accumulated in the gutters.

Gorillas, chimpanzees and humans have a lot in common, one of which is: tidiness does not come naturally! Gorillas and chimpanzees leave a trail of devastation as they move through the bush. Up in the trees, they defecate with careless abandon, not caring about who might be below – or even about leaving a trace of their whereabouts. This is unlike many species (such as the cat family) which have to be careful about hygiene. They have mentalities programmed to make it a pleasure to stay tidy!

When the human forager band camps, it makes a lot of mess. Then it moves on to the next clean place – rather like the Mad Hatter in his Alice in Wonderland Tea Party. Even when the foragers come back to the same area, they camp a hundred yards from the first. Their debris and excrement still pollute it. We wouldn't like that place either. It is now a welcoming habitat for snakes, scorpions and horse-flies!

The foragers could get away with messiness: they were few, and the savanna spacious. Today, high population densities force us to work against our natures. It takes an effort of will to stay tidy, to impose the discipline on our children, to battle the outside forces tending to make a mess of our world.

All this battling is not without a cost. It removes us from a care-free existence to one where we are constantly having to exert force of personality. This is one more source of background stress that our constitutions are not designed for, and which is one of the factors undermining our health.

For example living in a town which practices garbage recycling imposes a stress on us in two ways. First it is an extra burden to separate out our refuse into separate bins and to find the place to put them all; secondly, it triggers a stressful guilt feeling if we resent doing it.

I have no easy answers to this conundrum: but it helps to understand that our society is structured with rigidities – ones that are not even on our radar – that contribute to making us sick. I evoke this theme in Chapter 8 of *Deadly Harvest*. Think about ways, where you can restructure your life so as to align it with our mentalities.

GeoffBond@naturaleater.com

Geoff Bond is a nutritional anthropologist and a recognized authority on what it means to be human in lifestyle terms. He is currently on his annual speaking tour to America to instruct doctors about mastering the lifestyle diseases like cancer, heart disease, obesity and osteoporosis. Geoff is available for the occasional talk to interested groups.

Geoff's latest book, *Deadly Harvest*, is the reference work for lifestyle anthropology and the connection with degenerative disease. It is stocked by all good bookstores.

More information about Geoff's work on his website: www.naturaleater.com.

©2009 Geoff Bond