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I am Jim Natichioni of RightLivelihood.com and I have written the inspirational book: **Finding Your Path, Tales of Right Livelihood**. This excerpt is from Chapter Six: “The Tradeskills of an Entrepreneur” and relates to living the good life which is quite different from the capitalist version. To read more please visit RightLivelihood.com.

Finding your path and right livelihood: Another kind of decision that has to be made that gets to the root of who you are is, “do you wish to work for an institution/organization/big business or do you prefer to be self-employed.” The decision to earn ones income by owning their own business is not for everyone. When a business is operated according to the principals of ‘right livelihood’ entrepreneurship can be a liberating thus purposeful endeavor. To be a successful entrepreneur there is the necessary attitude of a maverick who not only organizes and operates an enterprise but who is also willing to take risks and accept responsibilities. There are a certain group of skills, aside from intellect that are the tools of his or her trade that also must be mastered. There is also a necessary money consciousness, a craving for money that many people just don’t have or want. If you do not possess the requisite makeup, skills and desires the path of an entrepreneur may not be for you.

Living the good life off of a self-sufficient homestead:

A couple who represent the antithesis of everything L.L. Bean represents stand on the other end of the spectrum. The Nearings were born in the same generation and homesteaded in the same state of Maine as the Bean’s, but the families lived in two different worlds. There was nothing about automation, rubber, leather, hunting or big business that the Nearing’s considered ‘natural.’ You could sum up the difference in philosophies this way: one of L.L. Bean’s proud symbols of success is a new, high tech, mile long conveyor belt; the Nearings used the same hand cement mixer for twenty years, and refused on principal to trade it in for a new power operated one. I have read their classic book Living the Good Life a dozen times, and the following is my summary of its pages.

Teachers: In the early 1930’s New York City blackballed Helen and Scott Nearing for their promotion of pacifism and collectivism. The Nearings left the ‘Big Apple’ for the ‘Big Maple’, in order to search for a simple life devoted to treading lightly and passive activism. They were radical teachers with no place to teach, so they built a self-sufficient farm and used that as their pulpit. Their first farm was in Vermont, then they moved to Maine. The Nearings had no intention of making money, nor did they seek profits or even wages, rather, they aimed to earn a livelihood on a ‘use economy’ basis. Theirs is a story of ‘right livelihood’ in the purest form. The Nearings endeavored to work part-time in order to pay for their necessities, barter for added luxuries, and use their leisure time to advance change in the existing socio-economic system. Their efforts in pioneering the back to the land movement created a path for those who would follow

in their footsteps. Today the homesteading movement in Vermont remains the largest of its kind in the country.

Schedule: In order to accomplish so much, by necessity, they adhered to a regulated schedule, which the constant stream of visitors and neighbors could not understand. Visitors saw the Nearings spend half their time on leisure and assumed they were free spirits, coming and going as they wished. The opposite proved true. The hard-working couple needed a rigid schedule in order to create free time. Helen said “No job is overwhelming if you have a general idea of what you are about, break the project into manageable units and fit them into the overall pattern.”

Lao-tzu: And who accomplishes each small task with full devotion, as if it were the greatest of tasks is naturally recognized as great. In managing people and serving Heaven, there is nothing better than sparing unnecessary activities and expense.

Easy thing to do: I have a friend named Frank who dislikes play but loves work. The easiest thing on earth for him to do relates to career activities; he could do them all day. The hardest things for him include cooking or relaxing, mowing the lawn, recreation or playing a musical instrument. It is easy to do those things in life you enjoy to the exclusion of necessary or balancing activities you could do without. The trick the Nearings realized was to balance their life. To the daily work schedule they added nesting, music, literature, fitness, fresh air, activism, art, teaching, socializing, etc. They realized that a normal, balanced life is much more important than full time retreat.

Lao Tzu: Periodic retreat from society was the master’s renaissance, yet they did not use their retreat as an excuse for inertia or as an escape from their spiritual obligation to awaken the world.

Yin/Yang: Helen and Scott Nearing were spiritual, idealistic people who had their feet firmly planted on the ground. They achieved their accomplishments as a couple. As such they brought opposite but complimentary qualities into the relationship, a relationship that apparently worked quite well. Oriental philosophy proposes that all things are composed of infinitely varying proportions of yin/yang, and like Helen and Scott, each compliments and accomplishes the other. The critical balance of these two forces holds the tiny atom, the vast galaxies, and relationships together. The integration of the duality of yin/yang, that which brings forth life, is called the tai chi, of which man may potentially model in its most complete form, combining the subtle aspects of the mind and spirit with the physical body.

A Yin/Yang Story: A blind man and a lame man shared the same dwelling, and one day a cinder flew out of the fireplace. Within a short time, the entire house was in flames. Each man tried separately to escape, but neither could get out of the house. Finally the blind man said to the lame man, “You have eyes and I have legs. If you climb on my back, you can direct me to the door.” In a few moments, they were safely outside.

The quintessential environmentalists: Helen and Scott sought to liberate themselves from the cruder forms of exploitation and accumulation, such as cruelty to the planet, animals, and mankind. They would not, for instance, condone Burt’s ‘robbery’ of the honey from the hardworking bees, or L.L.’s taking of cows’ hides. In an effort to

disassociate from such producers, they made a living by the sweat of their brow under conditions that would enlarge joy in workmanship. “Life is enriched by aspiration and effort, rather than by acquisition. We had our work, did it and enjoyed it; there was never a need to hurry and there was always time for leisure.”

With no boss to answer to, they fit right in with the notoriously self-dependent New Englanders. The stone houses and outbuildings the Nearings crafted by hand made up the cornerstone of their farm. Their homegrown organic food supply was their keystone, as food costs make up the largest item in a low-income families budget. Scott lived to be a centurion and Helen just a decade shorter. “The business of procuring the necessities of life has been shifted from the woodlot, the garden, the kitchen, and the family to the factory and the large scale enterprise. In our case, we moved our center back to the land, where we raised the food we ate.”

Maple Syrup: They financed their good life by harvesting maple syrup. According to Helen it is “a crop better than cash; it sells readily and doesn’t depreciate.” (this experiment took place initially in the 1930’s depression era). They planned a subsistence homestead, not a business, and as a result it paid it’s own way and yielded an adequate surplus, independent of the price profit, labor, and commodity markets. Helen and Scott felt that the existing market economy seeks to bamboozle consumers into buying things they neither need nor want, compelling them to sell their labor power as a means of paying for their purchases.

Mark Twain: Civilization is a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities.

The quintessential environmentalists Helen and Scott also avoided buying tools, etc. from the assembly lines of big business, made their own implements, and used wood for fuel. The Nearings may not have made a fortune, but the thousands of visitors and students they had, and that the Good Life Farm on the coast of Maine still has, cements their unparalleled legacy in the world of sustainability.

The bottom line is that the Nearings, *like most of the entrepreneurs in this chapter, were unique individuals who were or are really good at what they did so attracted to their own level.* Just as the makeup of the professional entrepreneur was highlighted so are the qualities that make up an amateur highlighted in the following stories. Conformity and following the crowd is not the way of the maverick.