

**We didn't have the environment when** I was a boy. We just had surroundings and nature. The environment was invented in 1975, for a TV show called *The Good Life*, in which the next-door neighbour kept trying to have sex with Felicity Kendal. *The Good Life* was a British sitcom parodying the attempts of a middle-class couple, Tom and Barbara Good, to achieve self-sufficiency in a Surbiton garden.

My mum and stepfather mistook it for a documentary and soon we were growing our own food in a backyard only about 30 kilometres from the Goods's fictional home. It was OK when we just had a strawberry patch but they insisted on raising vegetables, too. "Isn't this convenient?" Mum would say as I handed her a potato, caked in hard, black mud, that I had spent several minutes disinterring. Actually, it was far less convenient than the corner shop, which sold potatoes with the dirt already removed.

My stepfather joined Friends of the Earth (the Earth is like the environment, except it has mates) and we were the first people I knew to have a compost heap. I thought it was disgusting.

I left home at 18 and have never even grown a weed. I deliberately put non-recyclables in the recycling bin — because I believe it goes into one big hole in China. I use a clothes dryer, a dishwasher and an air-conditioner. I take lots of short-distance flights and run an old fridge in the garage to keep my beer cold. I think organic food is more expensive than real food and of poorer quality. My baby son wears disposable nappies and I would wear disposable underpants if it were not for the fact that they are only available from sex shops and sometimes have inappropriate attachments.

So when *the(sydney)magazine* asked me to "go green" for a week, I feared I would have to make some painful

lifestyle adjustments. As I was describing the experiment to my girlfriend, I idly washed a butter knife in preparation for slotting into the dishwasher. "What are you rinsing that for?" she demanded mellifluously. Uh, right. I'm wasting water. I made to wipe the knife instead. "And I don't want butter on the sponge," she warned.

There was a storm blowing outside. Cold rain fell like hysterical tears onto the wooden balcony floor. "Why don't you have a shower there?" suggested my girlfriend sweetly. "You've got to have a cold shower anyway. It wastes electricity to use hot water."

I had a better idea — or at least a more comfortable one. I placed the butter knife on the breakfast plate in the centre of the deck and let the elements wash away the residual grease. My son, who is instantly sensitive to any small change in his environment, became immediately distressed

**wash  
away  
your**

It believe  
cope  
ankfully,

# STOPS



and pointed frantically to the plate, which was clearly not where it was supposed to be. He made to rescue it but was driven back by the downfall.

"What if I did have a shower in the rain?" I thought. It was not the kind of thought I usually have but there was something oddly compelling about it. I stripped down to my boxers and stood on the deck. It was cold and uncomfortable but not as horrible as I might have expected. My girlfriend handed me the shampoo and I lathered up.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to lather down. There was insufficient rain to rinse the shampoo out of my hair (and I didn't use much shampoo since, for ecological reasons, I don't have much hair) so eventually I was forced to run back inside. Afterwards, I drank a cup of tea to warm up. Green tea, of course. "If you're going to go green, you might want to spend the next 10 minutes taking the recycling down," said my girlfriend. "There's loads under the sink."

Meanwhile, she drove to Vintage Cellars in Leichhardt to stock up on organic grog. In *The Good Life*, Tom and Barbara Good used to get drunk with their neighbours on Tom's peapod burgundy wine. Peapod burgundy is not available from Vintage Cellars but the cellarman says he cannot keep up with the demand for organic wine. There are only about six certified organic wines in stock and another four that are simply preservative-free. Many other wines are produced organically, he says, but they lack certification.

I felt I needed help to steer me through the maze of sustainable living so I contacted Michael Grosvenor, author of *Sustainable Living For Dummies*. He agreed to come to my house, roundly chastise me for my ecological crimes and point out where I could do better. I expected an embittered, bearded fanatic who lived in a tree stump. In fact, Grosvenor is a clean-shaven, friendly, sensible bloke who gave my lifestyle a green bill of health. I scored loads of points for living in the inner city, near public transport. My fridge, which I had thought a monster, is actually smaller than the nook in which it is supposed to sit. My habit of rinsing dishes before

using the dishwasher probably prevents the machine from clogging up, thereby saving energy. My beer fridge is not of the CFC-emitting type. I don't drive a car. Our 55-centimetre television is apparently comparatively small. I even won points for cooking with the barbecue rather than the oven and using gas from the mains. Turns out I'm practically a feral.

My girlfriend's herb garden also won praise. Grosvenor suggested we might diversify from our core crops of lemon grass, mint and basil, although he stopped short of proposing we run cattle on the balcony. He thought we should consider buying an internal composter and paying more attention

## The cafe serves two microbrews, Redoak Hefeweizen and Organic Pale Ale, and in an effort to help save the world, I decided to drink as much Hefeweizen as I could.

to the energy-efficiency ratings on whitegoods. Most importantly, he told me that the Redoak Boutique Beer Cafe in the city serves organic beer. Gripped by environmentalist fervour, I resolved to visit this establishment at the first opportunity and reward it mightily for not pouring beer through the hole in the ozone layer.

The cafe serves two microbrews, Redoak Hefeweizen and Organic Pale Ale, and to help save the world, I decided to drink as much Hefeweizen as I could. My mate Pat was willing to do whatever he could to help the planet, too.

At the weekend, my girlfriend and I went to an organic supermarket. For legal reasons, I cannot name the store but we bought a week's supply of fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and toiletries. The first apple I bit into, which cost 50 cents more than an ordinary apple, was shot through with pasty, black gunk; the organic mixed salad, flown in from Queensland, had arrived accompanied by a local grub; and there was a weevil in the save-the-planet chocolate.

I bought a suite of tea-tree products for my bathroom.

Tea-tree toothpaste contains no fluoride and leaves the mouth feeling fresh but not cloyingly sweet. Tea-tree deodorant smells like acetate. Tea-tree anti-dandruff shampoo makes your hair go a bit lank but it does not lather up much – ideal for rinsing out in the rain. All of the organic meat was very nice indeed (as were all three organic wines).

Despite my saintly shopping, I felt I had not done enough to honour the memory of my mum and stepfather's vegetable patch. So I visited the Belgian Beer Cafe in The Rocks, another of Grosvenor's recommendations. Although the cafe does not advertise its beers as organic, they apparently are.

A friend offered to meet me at the Australian Hotel in The Rocks but I said I was living organic for a week. "Did you lose a bet, then?" he asked, before he agreed to try the beer cafe.

There, I told him about my enviro-friendly existence. He told me how he had squared his consumption with his conscience by using a website, [www.greenfleet.com.au](http://www.greenfleet.com.au), on which he had calculated his carbon emissions and the amount it would cost to offset them. He had paid the website \$200 and now slept as soundly as Al Gore.

I was already about \$150 down on the price of an average week's eating and drinking due to the large premium green products seem to attract and my efforts to stave off environmental disaster by drinking beer. Grosvenor acknowledges that sustainable living can be expensive but says it is up to wealthy people like me to create the demand for green products so the price will come down for everyone.

I did my bit to work that economic miracle for Redoak Hefeweizen, anyway. Tom and Barbara Good would have been proud of me. (6)