

### The Gift of Life

'Tis the season to consider gift giving so I'm here to talk strategy. No, not about what to get Aunt Bertha for Christmas. Instead, I'd like to discuss your giving during 2008; what do you support and how do you support it?

On a daily basis you and I get hammered by appeals to support countless organizations and issues; free credit card offers and other free hooks targeted to attract us to our aggressive, material culture. I'm numb to the appeals; there are so many and they're so pervasive, they piss me off. Almost like we're fish swimming amidst a barrage of consumer bait. Bite me, please!

My shields are so strong that almost nothing gets through; even the good causes are invisible to me because I abhor all of the bait. So, with shields drawn and bait held at arms length, how do I decide what to do? Have my shields become a barrier to my goals of social equity.... sharing my wealth? How do I make corporate and personal giving decisions?

How do *you* do this?

Simply put, I *don't* have a logical plan, and this is the year I'm going to change that. Until now my giving has been haphazard. I don't have an annual giving budget of what I'll support next year. I know the organizations I like and I tend to make decisions almost on a whim....'oh, that sound like a good cause, I'll support that!'

What I don't know is how much I give overall per year, nor if it's very broad based. Am I supporting the *array* of causes I adore or am I too strong in one arena. I know my passion is the environment and sustainability, but what about peace and justice, political action, women's rights..... what's my plan, damn it?

I have none.

What appeals to me is the concept of tithing. A tithe (from Old English *teogopa* "tenth") is a one-tenth part of something, paid as a (usually) voluntary contribution or as a tax or levy. Today, tithes are normally voluntary and paid in cash, checks, or stocks, whereas historically tithes could be paid in kind, such as agricultural products.

Before the New Year Cindi and I hope to create a plan for '08. We'll first select a percentage of our combined income; say, for arguments sake we arrive at this 10% figure – our one-tenth part of something. What portion of this are we already giving in kind through our involvement with RE Sources, Futurewise Whatcom, Sustainable Connections, Sustainable Bellingham, and the Pachamama Alliance? Should I consider the time I devote to my Weekly column as an in kind donation to my passionate cause of sustainability? Clearly, we'll have to make these judgment calls.

Once these in kind donations are subtracted from the 10% of our combined income, we'll donate the balance to the mix of causes and organizations we agree to support. We'll create a list of these causes and organizations and then decide what proportion of our 'cash' donations will go to which ones.

What better time of year to create a pie chart of our giving then when we ingest a disproportionate amount of pies! Yes, it's time for being thankful and to celebrate all that abounds around us. I ask you to design your giving; share your wealth, be it your time or money.

'Tis the season (to make a plan)!