

Freegans: Living off Our Excess

You may have heard of vegans and vegetarians, but how about freegans? I mentioned this group last year in a column and thought it was worth expanding upon, as this social phenomenon is expanding across the country and throughout Europe. Freeganism was even featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* not that long ago.

So what is a Freegan? Often referred to as dumpster divers, freegans live off the excess of society. But their social philosophy goes way beyond rescuing perfectly usable goods, including food, from the trash. The explanation I found on the web states that freegans are "people who employ alternative strategies for living based on limited participation in the conventional economy and minimal consumption of resources." They embrace "community, generosity, social concern, freedom, cooperation and sharing in opposition to a society based on materialism, moral apathy, competition, conformity and greed."

Freeganism has apparently been around since the 1990s and has grown in recent years with practicing freegans in just about every major city in the U.S. While you might think these are just people who are down on their luck and looking to just survive, most freegans choose this lifestyle as a political statement or an ethical choice. They are educated, articulate and varied in their life experiences.

While researching this topic, I read many articles on the internet about people who live this way and was surprised at what they were finding and sharing that had been tossed away: perfectly good household items, electronics, clothing and food. While that last one may totally gross you out, the freegans interviewed in these stories found good, still-in-the-wrapper food items which were still perfectly safe and edible.

While I totally understand and agree with their thinking, I am not sure I could live this way. I admire their tenacity and willingness to step outside the capitalist society. Sometimes I wonder if we could supply an entire country with all of the excess we have here in the U.S. We should find a solution; I just don't think I'll be diving into any dumpsters to find one.

Here's a thought, though, from Jan Goodwin in her article "Freegans: They Live Off What We Toss in the Trash" (www.delish.com). She said of freegans, "Are they crazy? Or are we?" Hmmm.

Tuesday Trippier lives in Delaware, is a writer and mother of three with a special interest in green living.