Making Ripples

Car-Free Living: a Bumpy Road?

by Amanda Bancroft

After considering alternative forms of transportation, such as magic carpets and pixie dust, Ryan & I eventually settled on bicycling, walking, carpooling, riding the Ozark Regional Transit van and taking the free Razorback Transit bus. This isn't as exciting as sprouting wings, but it's certainly more realistic than wishing I were Aladdin.

We don't own a car, by choice. Last month marked our 1-year anniversary of living without a car! But this is nothing new in Fayetteville. Some people have never owned a car, or have been cycling for more than a decade. My heroes!

To get to work, we bike or walk and enjoy the scenery. Ryan's commute is 45 minutes walking or 20 minutes biking one way. We carry produce home from the farmer's market and grocery store. When buying in bulk from Ozark Natural Foods, we carpool with friends. To visit the mall and other stores, or to take our vacuum cleaner in for its annual tune-up, we ride the bus. For vet visits for our two cats, we bring them in together, and ride the van or carpool with a neighbor. To go to a museum in Bentonville, we ride the van or carpool. We walk to the library, using backpacks or wheeled bags to carry heavy items. When we want to leave town for a vacation or family visit, we rent a car. This lifestyle saves us approximately $850 per year.

This was not an easy part of our journey towards a sustainable lifestyle. It can be hard some days. We often miss the bus. We get ticks, chiggers, scrapes and sunburns. A simple errand can take 3 hours. We carry heavy things for long distances. We're exposed to thunderstorms and ice storms. It's exhausting for Ryan to bike to a job where he's on his feet all day. But we thank these experiences for our nice leg muscles!

The Joys of Alternative Transportation:

1. Holding hands on a beautiful sunset stroll to a downtown restaurant.
2. No fear of car wrecks or skidding off the road in bad weather.
3. Reduced risk for health problems like obesity.
4. Hearing languages from around the world on the bus.
5. Watching wildlife like songbirds, turtles, armadillos, bunnies, and butterflies.
6. Getting enough exercise without paying for a gym membership.
7. Having a picnic en route to a destination.
8. Peace of mind knowing that no emissions will taint my travels.
9. Meeting new people with interesting stories, and stopping to talk to friends.
10. Going at a slower pace to notice our beautiful city, smell the flowers or autumn leaves.
11. FREE bus service to the mall, downtown, the library, restaurants, and parks.
12. No stress from driving (in traffic, rain, snow, etc).
13. Not paying for gas, insurance, or car maintenance!

Fall is a great time to get outdoors and shed a few pounds while saving gas money and spending time with friends!

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org