

**“Local Living Economies” a talk by Judy Wicks at  
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**Good Morning Beautiful Business**

When I open my closet door in the morning, I see a sign that says “Good morning beautiful business.” It’s a daily reminder of just how beautiful business can be when we put our best efforts, creativity, and care into producing a product or service we offer to our community.

Economic exchange can be one of the most satisfying and meaningful of human interactions.

When I see that sign in the morning, “Good morning beautiful business” I think of my own business, and how the farmers are already out in the fields picking fresh organic fruits and vegetables to bring into the restaurant that day.

I think of the farm animals out in the pastures – pigs, cows and chickens, enjoying the morning sun and fresh air, and of Dougie, the goat herder, who says that when she kisses her goats ears it makes their cheese better!

I think about our bakers coming in early in the morning to put rolls and pies into the oven for our customers to enjoy that day, of the maintenance crew making sure everything is clean and repaired before guests arrive,

and I think of the Zapatista Indians down in Chiapas, Mexico, growing the organic, fair trade coffee beans for my morning cup.

Business is about relationships. Money is simply a tool. Business is about relationships with everyone we buy from and sell to, and work with, and about our relationship with Earth itself.

My business is the way I express my love of life, and that’s what makes it a thing of beauty.

**Moving to Sansom Street/Jane Jacobs vision**

The first time I walked onto street where I live and work today in 1972, I was enchanted. The narrow tree-lined street, with a row of

charming, if someone rundown, Victorian brownstone houses was a little oasis from the unfriendly institutional feeling surrounding it.

Most of the old houses around the University of Pennsylvania were being torn down and replaced by modern high-rise dormitories and office buildings, strip malls, and parking garages.

In contrast, the lovely one-hundred-year-old houses on Sansom St, with a few small businesses on the first floors, were human-scale – quaint, homey, inviting.

Just after I moved into an apartment at 3420 Sansom, future home of the White Dog, I learned that the entire block had been condemned to make way for a shopping mall.

How could it be that those lovely brownstone houses would be demolished and the local business owners and residents forced out to build chain stores and fast food restaurants!

I was outraged! At age 25, this may have been my first BALLE moment. [BALLE is Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, co-founded by Judy in 2001]. I eagerly joined our local community group organized to fight the demolition and save our homes and businesses. Our group developed an alternative proposal to the shopping mall based on the vision of urban activist Jane Jacobs, author of “Death and Life of Great American Cities,” who had fought to save her own community in Greenwich Village from demolition.

Jacobs talked about the importance of mixed-use, where communities prospered from a diverse and lively mixture of residential and retail where people can live, work, go to school and find leisure activities in the same walkable community.

Jacobs challenged the urban renewal movement of the 50’s and 60’s where whole neighborhoods were razed, destroying vibrant communities and thriving personalized local businesses to build sterile high-rise office buildings and housing projects.

Walkable communities were replaced by car-dependent suburbs where housing plans and shopping malls destroyed rich farmlands, for no more than what Jacobs described as “cheap parking.”

People no longer worked in the same community where they lived. Work life and family life became separate.

Studies show that it was at this time in the 1950's when people were separated by migration to the suburbs, when happiness in American society began its decline.

It was also the time of increased industrialization of agriculture, when farmers, stewards of the earth, began to be forced off of their farms by corporate farms and developers, and consumers lost the personal link between our food and the earth.

today most of us no longer know  
Who grows our food,  
Who bakes our bread,  
Brews our beer,  
Sews our clothes,  
Or builds our houses.

These were the relationships that once provided the foundations for strong and enjoyable communities.

In many places, we no longer know the local shopkeepers.

Many towns and cities have lost their unique identity as streets are lined with the same chain stores found everywhere.

Not here in Yellow Springs, I might add. What a refreshing experience it has been to talk along your main street with so many unique local businesses and an absence of chains.

Many other Main Streets have been left deserted as customers flock to big box stores,

owned by distant corporations selling goods produced in faraway places, often in sweatshops or factory farms.

We've become disconnected from each other and from our places.

Without direct relationships, few of us think about the consequences of our economic transactions on other people and communities, on animals and the natural environment.

Our community group won the fight to save our block from the wrecking ball and I was given the opportunity to buy the house I was living in. I had found my place in the world where I wanted to live, work and raise a family.

### **White Dog Cafe**

Ten years later in January of 1983, I opened the White Dog Cafe on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of my house – first as a simple coffee and muffin takeout shop, then soup and sandwiches. When I decided to begin serving hot food I realized I couldn't afford to put an exhaust system up through three floors of our row house, so I set up a charcoal grill in the backyard, with an assortment of old lawn furniture and picnic tables.

For advertising, I would go over to the university campus with my two and four year old children and hand out flyers. Then we would run home and look in the backyard to see if any customers had come.

In the winter we enclosed the grill in plastic and put a chimney up through it. The waiters would go down through the basement and out the back door to pick up the food.

The three-bowl dishwashing sink was in the dining room, and the customers would hand their plates over to the dishwasher.

If you had to go to the bathroom, you would go upstairs and wave to the kids, who might be playing on the floor as you made your way to the family bathroom.

At the end of the evening the last server would put the money under my pillow, which was the only safe place to keep it.

Over these 25 years we have expanded our menu and grown to occupy four consecutive brownstone row houses – three for the White Dog Cafe and a fourth for our retail store, the Black Cat. We now employ more than one hundred people, seat more than two hundred customers, and gross over \$5 million a year, which is more than can fit under my pillow any longer!

I attribute our success to staying one small, very unique community-based business, where decisions are made, not for the sake of maximizing profits, but for maximizing positive relationships with our

customers and staff, with our community, with our suppliers and with our natural environment.

### **Compartmentalizing Values**

Like the family farm, family inn, the general store and other traditional family businesses, I continue to live above the shop in the old-fashioned way of doing business.

For me, home life and work life have always been interwoven, and so I naturally have the same value system at home and work.

Physically separating home life from the workplace often leads to the compartmentalization of values.

Business schools tell students "Leave your values at home, when you go to work." So it's teach your children the Golden Rule at home, but at work "Gold Rules!" No wonder people are unhappy with their lives. Work is where we focus the majority of our time and energy and it must be a place aligned with our personal values in order to be fulfilling.

In too many cases, work has separated us from our own values.

### **Short distance**

Living and working in the same community has not only given me a stronger sense of place, but a different business outlook.

Making business decisions in the best interest of the common good comes naturally when those affected are friends, neighbors, employees and the community and environment I experience every day. I believe this is what motivated the Maine lobster fisherman, Tom talked about last night, who threw back his undersize catch. The fisherman understood that his decisions affected his place – the environment and people he loves and cares about.

At the White Dog Cafe, there's a short distance between me as the business decision-maker and those affected by my decisions – a basic principle of BALLE and the local living economy movement.

As a small business owner, living and working in the same community, I am more likely to make decisions from the heart, not just from the

head, and they are more likely to be in the best interest of those around me.

### **Paying a Living Wage**

An example of this was committing to paying a living wage to dishwashers and prep people. When I first heard about the living wage, I had a typical business person's knee jerk reaction against it – "no one's going to tell me how much I should pay my staff."

Months later, I was in the kitchen when for a split second, three young men who were cleaning and chopping vegetable all happened to look up at me at the same time. Looking at their faces, I had an instant realization. "Of course I want these young men to make enough to live on. How could I not pay people working for me full time enough to buy food, pay rent, and cover other basic needs. Of course I want to pay a living wage. What had I been thinking!"

It was this direct personal contact that caused me to make a decision from the heart as well as the head.

### **Signing Up for Wind Power**

On another occasion, I was influenced by a direct relationship with nature. I had heard about the problem of global warming and the idea of sustainable energy. I understood the principles intellectually, but hadn't been moved to action.

Then one summer about seven years ago, I was driving up to my favorite woods north of Philadelphia. We had been experiencing a severe drought and when I arrived in the woods I noticed that the beautiful ferns on Fern Hill, which once swayed in the wind, big, green and lush, were crumpled on the ground like brown tissue paper. I could see that the tops of the trees were all brown and many of the leaves had fallen and it was only July. I came to the creek, once blue and rushing, and found there was no water at all – only dust covered rocks.

As I walked through the woods, the only sound was the snapping of dead sticks and rustling of dry leaves. There was an eerie silence – not even the birds were singing – the danger of fire was in the air and I could feel the woods calling out in distress.

This is what it will be like, I anguished, when global warming brings drought and fire to some parts of the world, and storms and floods to

others. I went over to a huge old oak and put my arms around it – I became a tree hugger! With my face pressed against the bark, I promised I would do all I could to stop the global warming that was endangering the place I loved. Back in the city, I came into the office and said, “Lets find out renewable energy – how can we get it?”  
Before long, the White Dog became the first business in Pennsylvania, to buy 100% of our electricity from wind power companies. Though we paid a 15% premium, it was more important to me to do what I could to operate with a positive relationship with nature and build a sustainable future, than to maximize short term profits

Though I intellectually knew what I had to do, it was my personal relationship with the natural environment that touched my heart and caused me to act on what I had already known in my head.

### **Small is Beautiful**

When businesses continually grow larger and larger, that distance between the decision-maker and those affected grows longer, so that

many CEO’s rarely have personal relationships with those affected by their decisions. And of course, publicly traded corporations are required by law to serve the financial interests of stockholders above all else.

What we don’t see, we often don’t care about.

Yet business schools teach “grow or die.”  
Bigger is better, rather than small is beautiful.

Success is measured by material gain.  
As a society, we are taught the false premise that economic growth benefits everyone.

Yet continual growth is destroying the planet by using up more natural resources than can be regenerated,

and it is the rich who are getting richer, while the share of wealth for everyone else is declining. As David pointed out yesterday – the top 2% of the richest people in the world own over 50% of global assets.

As a country, though the US is less than 5% of the world population,

we use up more than 25% of the natural resources  
produce more than 25% of the pollution  
and jail more than 25% of the world's incarcerated people, offenders  
who are largely those left out of prosperity.

With all our material wealth and consumption, studies show that  
Americans are less happy then we were 50 years ago, and less happy  
than our European counterparts.

And we are largely less healthy. Over-consumption of processed foods  
lacking nutritional qualities, and full of fat and sugar, along with a lack  
of walking and exercise has caused an epidemic of obesity, as well as  
heart failure, diabetes, and other preventable illnesses.

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There was a time when I questioned my own success because I didn't  
have two or three restaurants. I still get the question, "You mean you  
only have one restaurant?" People are surprised that someone  
considered a successful restaurateur only has one.

But I made a conscious decision to stay small, to be one special place,  
because I realized that if I grew beyond a certain point, I would loose  
what was really most important to my own happiness – authentic  
relationships with all of the people involved in my business – my  
employees, customers, suppliers, community, and even my own family  
– relationships that increased my quality of life.

I came to understand that success could be measured in other ways  
than growing materially.

We don't have to continually grow our businesses or our homes and  
possessions – we can grow by

increasing our knowledge,  
expanding our consciousness  
Developing our creativity,  
enriching our relationships,  
increasing our happiness and well being –  
and having more fun!

## **White Dog programs**

At the White Dog Café we grow deeper through our many community-building programs.

Education has become a product of the White Dog along with food and service.

we take our customers on solar house tours,  
teach them how to conduct energy audits of their homes,  
how waste veggie oil works as a fuel – a farmer who collects our oil,  
uses it to heat his green houses and run his tractor.

We take our customers on tours of farms, of prisons.  
Child watch tours witness the lives of inner-city children,  
International tours through our sister restaurant program to see the  
effects of US foreign policy - places like Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba,  
Viet Nam, and the Soviet Union.

## **Visiting Cuba**

Five times during the special period when Cuba was adjusting to being  
cut off from oil and other basic needs by the collapse of the Soviet  
Union and the tightening of the US embargo. This was well  
documented by the film produced by The Community Solution, which  
showed how Cuba was the first country to confront the lack of oil, by  
building community self-reliance.

We visited the community gardens program, bringing our customers  
and even one of our farmers to witness the advances the Cubans had  
made in organic farming. How they taught self reliance in high schools  
– how to grow food, how to grow and use herbs as medicine, how to  
sew clothes, make shoes, even how to grow grapes and make wine for  
high school graduation.

At the White Dog we have guest speakers at Table Talks such as  
Michael Pollan, Eric Schlosser, Frances Moore Lappee, David Korten,  
juliet schor.

We have storytellings by ex-offenders and recent immigrants,  
show films like the End of Suburbia.

We take customers on affordable housing tours, community and school  
garden tours,

We brought 35 customers and staff to New Orleans to volunteer after  
Katrina.

Some people claim my true profession is using good food to lure innocent customers into social activism!

We also grow by continuing to improve our business model - last year adding a compost project that now supplies compost to inner city school gardens, and most recently we installed a solar hot water system to heat the water for our dishwasher.

### **Buying local /Pig Story**

One of the most important and effective things we do at the White Dog is to buy from local farmers, which we've been doing for over 20 years.

For a long time I had bought only cage-free chicken and eggs, but I did not understand about the factory farming of pigs until I read about it in John Robbins book back in the 90's.

There I learned about the barbaric way in which pigs are raised in confinement with unspeakable pain and deprivation – unable to move, standing on slates above a lagoon of their own excrement, which goes on to pollute the community, water supply. Never enjoying a breath of fresh air, or a ray of sunshine.

Though very social animals, never able to touch each other, socialize or lay in big piles, as pigs love to do. The sows are artificially inseminated, prohibited from building nests and caring for their young as their instincts call them to do. Their babies are taken away prematurely, and the process repeated over and over.

Pigs are not machines; they are intelligent, sociable sentient beings with feelings and emotions like other mammals – like dogs, like humans.

It's a violation of nature to treat pigs in this cruel and inhumane way.

It's a betrayal of our sacred trust as stewards of farm animals.

It's institutionalized cruelty that is destroying our own humanity.

I realized that the pork I was using must have been coming from factory farms, as most all pork does. I could not participate in this evil system, so I came into the kitchen, took all the pork off the menu – the ham, bacon, and pork chops - and our chef set out to find a new humane source. A farmer who was bringing in free-range chicken from Lancaster County started bringing us pork raised by his neighbors in a small-scale, traditional way.

Next I discovered the terrible way cattle are raised – how important it was that they have a diet of grass as they were meant to rather than forced to eat corn, made cheap by government subsidizes, and even ground up animal parts, which make them sick. So we found sources for local grass-fed beef. Eventually, all the meat and poultry on our menu came from small family farms where animals are raised on pasture and treated with respect. We finally had a cruelty free menu – “That would be our market niche,” I thought to myself. I wanted to be the best –to be the only restaurant in town that could make this claim.

But then I thought, “Judy, if you really do care about those animals, if you care about the environment that’s being polluted by industrial farming, if you care about the workers in these horrible animal factories and slaughterhouses, if you care about the family farms being driven out of business, if you care about the consumers eating meat full of hormones and anti-biotics,

then you would not keep this as your market niche, but rather share what you have learned with other businesses including your competitors.

I was doing the right thing within my company, but that was not enough any longer. I had to move from a competitive mentality to one of cooperation in order to build a whole local economy based on humane and sustainable farming.

I asked the farmer who was bringing us pork if he would like to expand his business, and he said he would. “What’s holding you back?” I asked. He needed a refrigerated truck so I loaned him \$30,000 at a 5% return, and he bought the truck.

I increased the Cafe’s charitable giving from 10 to 20% of our profits, and started a non-profit White Dog Community Enterprises to support projects that would take what I had learned from my business to a higher level of social impact.

### **Fair Food**

So I found a way to share our knowledge by starting the Fair Food Project. First staff person, Ann Karlen, began by providing free consulting to restaurateurs and chefs on how to buy from local farmers, not just for meats, but all locally grown products. She’s connected hundreds of restaurants, stores and farms, so that our region has become known for our local food system.

Fair Food Farm Stand selling 100% locally grown food, and some locally produced foods such as tofu, seitan, and stone ground flours. Annual consumer guide to buying local food, now in sixth edition, which lists farmstands, CSAs, and restaurants and stores that buy local.

Wholesales guide for chefs and stores that buy directly from farmers.

Farm to institution program

Pig Farmer assistance program

Along with other partners, we're starting a food distribution business called the Common Market.

## **Seattle**

Two events took place in the fall of 1999 that caused me to direct my full attention to creating a national movement.

The first one was the massive protest against the World Trade Organization in Seattle.

There I saw environmentalists, labor union leaders, farmers, teachers student, but there was no clear voice of progressive business.

The protest was against corporate control of the global economy, what we didn't want business to be in our lives, but no one was articulating a new vision of what business should and could be.

How could we direct our energy toward building a positive alternative to corporate globalization?

## **Ben & Jerry's**

Only days after Seattle, the second event happened: Ben and Jerry's was sold to Unilever. It wasn't by choice, by the way. They fought it, but there was a forced buy-out because they are publicly traded and by law must sell to the highest bidder if that is favorable to the financial interests of their stockholders.

When it finally sunk in, I sat up in bed in the middle of the night and said to myself, My God, they've got Ben and Jerry's. I just couldn't believe it. That company was the leader of our movement and had taught us so much. I learned about the living wage from Ben and Jerry's. It was Ben and Jerry's that came up with the idea of the multiple bottom line, measuring success not just by profit but by a business's effect on society and the environment.