

Dropping Out

(for students)

cavegirl



This is a handbook; a tool, made by
a human being, with fears and
faults, just like you.

This is not another story for you to sit
around and passively read.

There is something real, immediate,
and important at stake right
here and now: your life.

Now it's up to you to turn the page.

2001

Contents

Contents	3
Why I'm doing this	3
How it all began: my story	5
A turbulent past...	6
... From a Planned Out Future	6
And now... What I've been up to and how I live	8
First — getting the hell out of there	11
Free food! (and other stuff)	12
Dumpster Diving	12
[other kinds of] Scavenging!	13
Shoplifting (the basics)	14
Other stuff	15
Sleeping and traveling — the really fun stuff!	16
Self-defense	18
Beyond survival	18
Recommended Reading	20
THE END	21

Contents

In here you'll find...

Part One: An introduction to the radical idea of dropping out.

- Why I'm doing this
- How it all began (my story)
- And now...

Part two: Doing it yourself!

- Getting the hell out of there
- Free food and stuff
 - Dumpster diving
 - Scavenging
 - Shoplifting
 - Other stuff
- Sleeping and traveling.
- Self-defense
- Beyond survival

And as an old man once wrote: In this system, if you're not revolting against work, then — like it or not — you're working against revolt.

Why I'm doing this

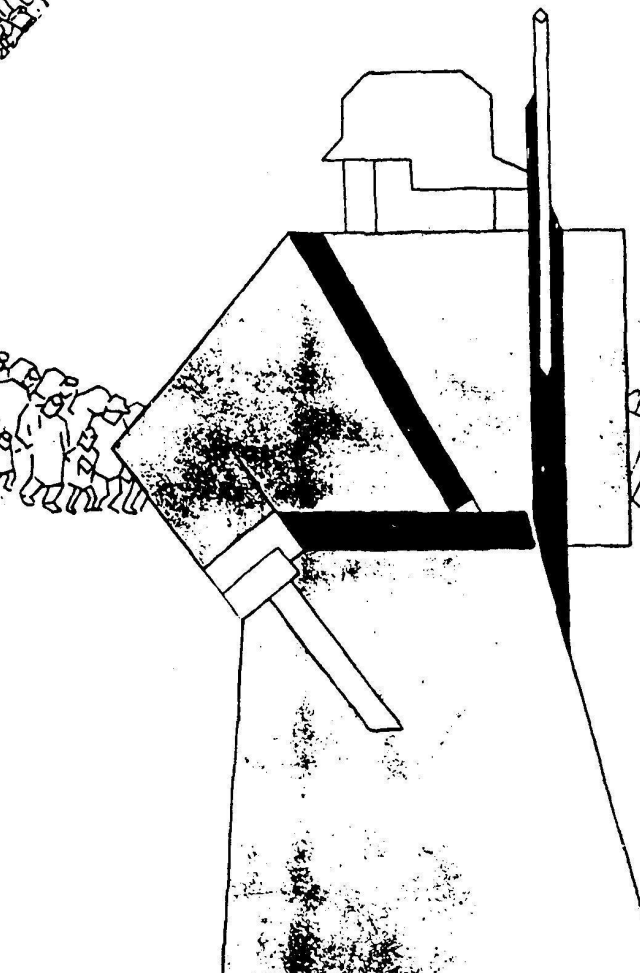
When I first started writing this I thought it would be really simple.

I just wrote off of the top of my head and ended up digressing way too much. But this matters to me way more than any five- paragraph-essay ever did, and it deserves my time accordingly. YOU deserve my time. So I'll try to put some thought, time and effort into this, although I'm not claiming perfection. Let me explain why and for whom this exists.

This is a zine about dropping out of school— and dropping *in* to everything else the universe has to offer; or rather, taking action to appropriate it for yourself. I'm writing this because it's what I know. Dropping out of high school was the best decision I've ever made, and I have plenty of older friends who wish they'd done the same. I see my peers getting caught up in a boring, stressful cycle which may seem new and exciting, or at least somehow “important” now... but if the experience of almost all workers I've talked to can be used to predict anyone else's future, these illusions will wear off) that will most likely consume *the rest of their lives*. This is a crucial point for all of us, and if we don't take back our lives then they may be gone forever.

So, although I'd be thrilled if a middle-aged CEO read this and, as a result, quit his job and went to live with (after apologizing, of course!) the “savage” inhabitants of “third world” lands he once destroyed for profit—this is not for him. I am specifically writing this for teenagers. I spend far too much time with older crowds and have become distanced from my peers, with whom I am now realizing I may share a lot of common experiences and emotions. And although I am an anarchist, and I'm involved

If you like school, you'll love work.





with the punk/ hardcore scene, I don't care if you know what "anarchism" means or if you can name one hardcore band. So if you're in school at all, my friend, this is for YOU.

You may not like what I have to say. You may not really feel like this applies to you yet, but I hope you will eventually realize that it does. I discourage showing this to your parents or teachers... unless they're down for the cause. All I ask is that you read this with an open mind (well, hopefully you approach everything that way). Skip around, read whatever sections interest you, and don't let anything I write about at one point that you disagree with negate anything else I have to say that may be valuable to you. Because *this is about you*. Never forget that: your life is about you. And upon greater re-evaluation of what we truly want, maybe we'll discover that looking out for ourselves means caring for others, that being selfish can be generous.

That said... let's go!

How it all began: my story

I'm going to start out telling you about myself because I think you might be able to relate to my experiences in school. This will give you an example of how these issues I've been discussing may turn out in real life. Your experiences will, of course, differ. You might want to skip this section if you're already interested in dropping out. If not — and if you enjoy reading lengthy stories — read on.

Growing up I was never really cool; I was nerdy, and one of the only white kids in a black neighborhood. I didn't follow pop culture. I went vegetarian on my own at age 6; I didn't like the school pledge or national anthem, but I liked some of my teachers, projects, and books. I liked learning and exploring, and I took them in the forms in which they were given to me.

Middle school was a shock: it was in a wealthy, white neighborhood. Having already taken a few blows to my self-confidence by the social structure at school, I spent most of my time there attempting assimilation into these various social groupings that I was just beginning to understand. It was tough, and I was confused, and to me the angry, outcast punk kids were just as cool and unreachable as the ones reading teen magazines. And then I met Alex. He was a mellow, self-assured punk kid, acceptant of his outcast status, who rejected traditional beliefs but never chose to deviate from the beaten path, or from

his computer games. He was sweet, and we spent a year as each other's first boyfriend and girlfriend, respectively. He was laid-back, while I was overly concerned with those things I was "supposed to" care about— physical appearance, social status, grades— and my self-confidence was unhealthily dependent on him. Still, at the end of that year, as we entered high school, the seeds of rebellion— planted in part by my early tendency to think for myself, and motivated also by Alex's music and way of looking at things—had been sown in me.

A turbulent past...

By high school I'd been almost entirely shaped by the very unnatural experience of having gone to such a weird place as school for my whole life. I had a love/ hate, beat 'em/ join 'em relationship with everything from social cliques and drugs to politics and teachers. I knew that popularity was bullshit, but at times I was envious of those with the shallowest of appearances; I knew that school was boring and cruel, "history" was lies (and I also had a then-unconfirmed, supposedly "ignorant" feeling that ANY version of history, which most cultures place so much importance on, is really *notas* important as using our own intuition and experience in the *present*), and math was ridiculously unnecessary and tedious—but I was shown no alternative (only a glimpse at a depressing stereotype of the negatively radical and unpopular idea of "dropping out"). I loved to read and write, but the structure of English class frustrated me. I secretly had no desire to go to college or to work, but that was what everyone else was doing, that was what I was *supposed* to do (and of course it would be . such a *shame* to let my bright mind go to waste by not following the beaten path). I was afraid not to keep getting good grades (after a lifetime of being told that dropping them even temporarily would result in a catastrophic future), but at every opportunity, I let my frustration, confused creativity, and rejection of the — life I'd been given show through in my written assignments, on the backs of math tests, and through the angry music in my headphones. Sometimes I acted silly (dressing up funny, carrying around random objects, sprinkling glitter everywhere); sometimes serious. Sometimes I was obnoxiously social; sometimes I was overtly misanthropic. Sometimes I used drugs; sometimes I detested both them and their users. Sometimes everything revolved around getting others to think like me, around politics and veganism and the image of rebellion; sometimes I was apathetic beyond belief. Any and all of these reactions were my ways of coping with going through a system that was not right for me, that made me miserable. As was my next step...

I enrolled in a small, liberal private school for my eleventh grade year (on a good scholarship; we weren't wealthy). I thought it would be the answer to my problems with school (much like many leftists seem to think that single-issue reform campaigns and "working within the system" will fix problems running much deeper). For a while I liked it— after years of crowded and impersonal classes, uncaring teachers, and tedious assignments, the 20-student sized classes and cool teachers who went by their first names impressed me; made me feel *free*. I was excited to be somewhere where people knew what "vegan" meant, or why people were protesting the WTO. But then I got frustrated there, too. For one, by that point in my life, I'd spent quite a bit of nonschool time with older friends, friends in different places and situations, etc.; with bums, punks, activists, and all sorts of interesting folk. I felt deprived of the company of people of different groups, lifestyles, ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and so on.

... From a Planned Out Future

In fact, I realized— I never really had *any* friends there! Sure, almost everyone knew me (there were only about 170 students; we all knew each other) and some of them may have considered me their friend, but I didn't feel a significant connection with anyone. My mom blamed me for this, but what was I supposed to do? I couldn't relate to anyone. Sure, as the school may have claimed, it was "ethnically diverse" with "open-minded" students and staff, and all of those other PC terms... and yes, the other students had lots of ideas. But that was about it— just ideas, like • kids growing up in a bubble

reading philosophy books about the • meaning of life, while life itself slips further and further away from them. So it was slightly more radical book knowledge than that of my other peers. But where were the *experiences*,” the *emotions*? (...somewhere else, not to be handed down through any institution.) I also saw a great deal of hypocrisy in that school’s system: rather than take action to protect the Earth which the school purported to care for (by biking instead of driving, cutting down on consumerism and meat/dairy consumption, spiking trees...), we wrote reports on the plight of the Siberian Tiger or the Ballona Wetlands (just as I was realizing that it was impossible and unsustainable to preserve one part of the natural world and destroy the rest; and as if writing reports did anything to help anyone, anyway). And I had one awful teacher there. But far more fundamentally (and importantly) than any individual qualm with that school (or any institution) was my new, slowly forming revelation that *as long as anything is mandatory, it cannot give me happiness or freedom*. And despite any rhetoric about an imaginary tomorrow in which all of one’s present misery will somehow pay off, there is nothing more essential to life than happiness and freedom today.

It was tough realizing that; I’d been trying to deny it for years. Knowing that was a big weight on my shoulders: because I still had the will to live, I couldn’t resign and accept a given fate, I HAD to trust my instinct this time, to do what was right for me with this new conscience— to take a chance and escape. I had to negate ten and a half years of following the structure, reject what it had almost earned me, and risk everything. Even this was a slow process. I read the *Teenage Liberation Handbook* and at first tried to set up an independent studies program (ISP) through my school. I figured I might as well get something out of the rest of that school year, since it had already been paid for. But that didn’t work— I was still being monitored and structured and I hated it. And I knew I wasn’t going to even start my senior year anyway, whether at that school, through an ISP, or whatever. So slowly I let the ISP fade until it became clear to my (very worried) mother and teachers that I was going to do what I wanted with my life from then on. It wasn’t that I wanted to frustrate or sadden them, it was that I had to do what was right for me.

Tensions grew between myself and my mother. Tragically, there wasn’t much more to her life than work and me, so she was incredibly stressed. I was at home during the days, sleeping in, cooking, hanging out, doing a little of my own projects (which was not much then, as I was just getting used to having my time back in my own hands). This upset her even more. At one point she had threatened that the next time I fucked up, she would call a facility for rebellious kids and have me LOCKED DOWN. Well, the breaking point came sooner than I thought. One day my best friend (who I was also romantically involved with), Vincent, was over while she was at work— or so I thought. She came home early, and there was no chance for him to leave before she came in. I thought it would be alright if I locked us in my room, hoping she wouldn’t check to see if it was locked (since I would have to be inside of it for it to be locked), pretending I wasn’t home, and then just snuck out when she was in the bathroom or something like that. But she tried to open the door, and wouldn’t stop banging on it and yelling at me to come out. Vincent got pissed at my futile plans for his escaping without her seeing, and walked out of my room and left right in front of her, and so of course she assumed the worst— and then, locked back in my room again, I heard her on the phone giving our address to someone. Someone who, uh, was going to send the authorities out to get me? I had to think fast! I got dressed, packed my backpack, and jumped out of my second-story window onto the awning below covering our patio; ran across that, climbed down the wall at its end, and ran to the first place I could think of— a nearby house where a nice, very cool married couple and their two kids lived. While waiting in their patio for them to get home I was sure that someone was out looking for me, that I would get caught. I didn’t. It turned out my mom didn’t have them come and get me, although she was trying to at the time. The people I ran to were kind—made me dinner, drove me to a friend’s house, and served as mediator between myself and my mother, favoring my side.

From there, things eventually took a surprising turn for the better. In those few hours right after my jumping out of the window, I had been preparing myself to never see my home again, to be a runaway, to flee everything and everyone I knew. And then—I heard from my mom that she wasn’t going to

call the cops on me. What?! I was free? Yes, and I was also free to come home for food or shelter or whatever I needed whenever I wanted to. She had realized how futile her efforts to tame me were, how they would only infuriate me more and drive me away from her. The catch: I had to call her every day to let her know I was alive. Understandable. Agreed.

...And then I dove into the present
and nothing else mattered.

The next three months were a blur, but they were the most beautiful three months I have yet experienced. More revolutionary and joyous than any summer vacation, no matter what the weather, because it wasn't on time that the system had allotted me— it was on the rest of the time, time they made us think was inevitably ordinary and without potential, time that I had *stolen back* from the system, time that would have been utterly wasted had I not taken action. Imagine the drastic effect it would have on your life if even just one in ten of those routine, mundane school (or work, or whatever) days was replaced with one of those rare exciting, action-filled, memorable days— one in which you explore a new place, make a new friend, create something you're proud of, read something that moves you, fall in love, whatever it is that makes you happy. That's basically what happened ALL of the time for me once I was free from school and home. To make a long story short, I squatted around my hometown a bit, couch-surfed, visited acquaintances and made many new friends in cities within my state, came home a few times (for good food, a nice bed, hot showers, and to earn money from my mom by working for her), was arrested at a Mayday protest, argued a lot with my mother and worried a few times that she would in fact call the police, became an expert dumpster-diver and urban scavenger of good food and other fun stuff, partied, went on a weeklong road trip with some friends to an anarchist bookfair and back, went camping, slept when I wanted, picked up lots of useful skills, broke hearts and had mine broken, read and wrote, laughed and cried, lived and learned.

Again this is a personal testimony, of unique, [TEXT OBSCURED] should be read only as a documentation of what has been possible for one person with earth-shaking implications as to what else might be possible for other individuals.

There is an adventure waiting ahead for you, too, in some possible future...

It is up to you to fight your way to this adventure, and liberate others on your way.

And now... What I've been up to and how I live

So far, the work I've done on this zine has been done in a nice town I've been staying in for the past week or two, about a thousand miles from home. A friend of mine is just finishing up a book he's working on, with the help of another guy who lives here. I've been staying in this cramped yet cozy apartment, sleeping whenever I want and doing whatever I want; going out and scoring free food for myself and my friends, and cooking; reading J. D. Salinger and a large assortment of zines; occasionally going down near the water in a beautiful wooded area to write. Yesterday, I met a guy there who baled hay on a farm part-time, and came to that town the rest of the time to get away from everything. We went exploring the hills around there and found a beautiful spot to hang out in. He left before me and I was going to stay up there to work on this, until I realized that I'd left my sweater by the water, and so I left to retrieve it—but I got lost! I must have taken a wrong turn somewhere. It took at least half an hour to get down, and I got incredibly scratched up, as there were thorny vines covering everything. I almost fell several times— the ground was so covered in ivy that I couldn't tell where it dropped. At the end I had to get down an especially steep part. It was an adventure, though, and it was fun... it beat the hell out of a day full of school, TV, buying stuff I don't need, or any of that.

As soon as my friend who's writing a book finishes, he, I, and two of our friends are going to hop trains and hitchhike across the country to sneak into a 3-day music festival. From there, we'll travel around some more all summer. I'm really looking forward to this. I'm not sure yet where I want to go this fall/winter. I could come back to this town I'm in now and live in a co-op with the people I know here; I could go back to where I'm from and live with my mother again and hang out with old friends; I could travel around the warmer regions of the country... I think I'll figure it out later. Maybe while I'm traveling this summer I'll find a place I'd really like to stay in later on, and I'll go there.

A few weeks ago I did some odd jobs for my mother so that she would buy me a good sleeping bag. I'd been using a very thin, bulky one that a friend gave me, which hardly kept me warm at all. So now I have a water-resistant sleeping bag that stuffs to about 9"x12" and will keep me warm at 20 degrees Fahrenheit. I carry a black backpack containing that, a few clothes, notebooks, an atlas, pens, a toothbrush, vitamins, a flashlight, and a few other basic items. Most of these things I rarely need. I usually can find all of the food I need in dumpsters (more on dumpster diving later) or in the kitchens of generous friends. If there's anything else I need, I steal it (more on stealing later). I stay clean enough by washing my hands and face, and taking a shower or doing laundry when the opportunity arises. I don't look homeless. I keep a clear head and am drug-free. I enjoy the sun and the outdoors, exploring forbidden territory, meeting people and doing crazy things, and pretending that money and technology and authority don't exist.

* * *

And six months ago I was still in school. Six months ago I was living a life I hated. Six months ago I was frustrated and scared and never thought any of this could happen.

<i>Prisons</i>	<i>Schools</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian structure • Dress code • Pass needed for going from one part of the facility to another • Emphasis on silence and order • Negative reinforcement (solitary confinement, verbal abuse) • Walk in lines • Loss of individual autonomy • Abridged freedoms • No input in decision-making • Set times enforced for waking, eating, etc. • Dress code • Pass needed for going from one part of the facility to another • Emphasis on silence and order • Negative reinforcement (suspension, detension, chastising, low grades) • Walk in lines • Loss of individual autonomy • Abridged freedoms • No input in decision-making • Set times enforced for waking, eating, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian structure

a new reality is better than a new movie

a fantasy of defeat,

an escape into chains,

a vacation at a dead end



life can be beautiful when we start to
break free!

First — getting the hell out of there

This is the part I'm going to be least able to write about, because each situation is different...

Maybe you're not yet in high school, or maybe you're just about to finish. Your family situation will be unique from that of anyone else— how much money your parents have and how much they give you; how well you get along with them; how accepting they are of your decisions; how honest you are with them; what kind of resources you have at home that will help you; etc. And your social circle, of course, will figure into this, as well as your level of dependency upon that circle. Maybe you're young and female (as I am) and feel defenseless; maybe you don't know anyone with a single unique thought in his head, or anyone outside of your county; maybe your entire family is counting on you to support them financially. There are no easy answers. But there never are, for anything that really counts. And, be warned— you'll never really be "prepared" or "ready" for any of the big things, either. Life is about taking risks.

You may or may not want to drop out of school completely; you may want to do an ISP, a home studies course, or another alternative. Dropouts can enroll in college if they so choose, but if you need a scholarship, that's another issue. You can get your Graduate Equivalency Diploma when you're 18, or take a statewide test earlier (like I did). Check out www.gedonline.org if you're interested in that. I really recommend stealing a copy of the *Teenage Liberation Handbook* by Grace Lewellyn and going from there, if you're not willing to flee right into the great wide open.

You may or may not want to leave your home, and if you do, you may or may not do so permanently; you may or may not consider it "running away", and you may or may not be reported to the police as a runaway. This is a very serious thing to consider, and it will have a profound effect on your life. Getting reported as a runaway creates a need to get as far away from your home as possible, as well as a need to stay away from cops and out of trouble. But if it comes down to it, I still think we should all take those risks. Think about what you want to do.

If your relationship with your parents is decent in any respect, I recommend talking with them honestly about what you want to do. I've found that some important things to remind them of in such conversations are:

- You are going to do what you want to do with your life, whether they like it or not. You love them and don't want them to be unhappy, but if it comes down to it, you won't sacrifice your life to satisfy them by fitting into their mold. They can either accept this and move on from there, or they can bitch about it. They can either try to assure your safety by giving you what you need, or they can refuse to contribute to your so-called delinquency and leave you still planning to run away, but having to fend for yourself. They can either take your side and maintain a connection with you, or they can report you as a runaway, forcing you to sever ties with them lest they figure out where you are and have you locked down (and then they would never even know if you're alive unless you got caught).
- The harder they push, the more you'll revolt. If they put you in juvy or another facility, or try to get you to do anything you don't want to do, you'll hate them for it, and come out of it fucked up and pissed off.
- Ultimately, you know what's right for yourself. And if you're wrong, well, that happens— you're at the point in your life where you have to learn from your mistakes.

Of course, if your parents don't love you at all, they won't care if you hate them or never talk to them again. If such is the case, fuck 'em and leave. It will be hard, painful, scary, and lonely at first, but that's a part of life, and life is worth every bit of struggle.

And then —

The ideas in the rest of this section are more useful (possibly necessary) if you're going to be away from home, but you can find ways to apply them to life with your parents, too, just to make that more fun :)

So I bring you...

Free food! (and other stuff)

I mentioned dumpster diving and stealing earlier, one or both of which may turn you off. I'm not forcing you to do either of them — I'm not forcing you to do anything — but please, at least, don't let my strange habits make everything else I have to say irrelevant to you. I'll explain why and how they're done.

Dumpster Diving

Tons of food gets wasted in this country. Farmers are paid to destroy part of their harvests, food rots away in warehouses while people starve to death... and perfectly good food gets thrown out everyday. It's all for profit. It's incredibly wasteful. And we can help put an end to it and take care of our own needs in one step: going in and retrieving it. Sound gross? Let me tell you some of what I've found: entire still-warm pizzas in their boxes; pounds and pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables that only need to be rinsed off, which were thrown out because they're too ripe to be sold (but not too ripe to be eaten); huge trash bags full of nothing but day-old bagels, bread, donuts, and pastries that will be too stale to be sold the next day, but are still fine to eat; wrapped, still-cold tofu; canned foods that were thrown out because the wrappers were messed up, or because the cans were dented; bags of pasta and rice which were thrown out because there was a little tear in them; just-expired juice; Sees' chocolates; boxes of cereal, thrown out because they were dented; tins of coffee, thrown out because the labels had been torn; three bottles of beer, once; boxes and boxes full of still-wrapped, perfectly good bags of cookies and snacks of all kinds; the list goes on. And that's just food. I've found huge amounts of really nice clothes, blankets, pillows, furniture, office supplies, toys, you name it. The apartment I'm in right now has a big dumpstered TV, and the video that my friends here made will be sold in dumpstered video boxes. Once I found a ripped-up five dollar bill in a trash can, taped it back together, and bought something with it.

I enjoy dumpster diving— It doesn't embarrass me or make me feel pathetic, as one might assume. I feel good that I'm putting use to something that would have ended up in a landfill. And you never know what you're going to find— it's an adventure. It's especially fun with friends. While living at home I would bring back dumpstered food just because I'd rather use it up than have my mom be a consumer and buy stuff at the store. I would cook her delicious dumpstered veggies. Dumpsters don't usually smell too bad, unless you're in a dumpster where meat/ dairy/ fish are thrown out, in which case you learn to get around that to find the goodies. (DO NOT eat dumpstered animal products unless they were *just* thrown out! Be careful; *thatcan* get you sick. But don't worry about the other stuff, just look it over, smell it, and rinse it off and you'll be fine.) And trash gets taken out fairly often, so nothing will be too rotten. If you're worried about being sanitary, wear rubber gloves. Most importantly, if at first you don't succeed, try again and again. Certain dumpsters always suck, certain days are unlucky, even whole towns can be unprofitable. But please, if you're at all willing to try it out in the first place, don't let negative experiences turn you off from trying again. Eventually you'll hit a jackpot.

Recommended dumpsters to go for food are those of supermarkets, bagel and donut shops and bakeries, and natural food stores. (For other stuff, go anywhere! Sometimes even apartment dumpsters have fun stuff in them, when people get sick of clutter and throw out completely useful stuff. I don't usually recommend restaurant dumpsters, though, since leftover, already prepared, unwrapped food

goes bad quickly.) Usually they're behind or on the side of the store. Sometimes they're somewhere visible in front, in the parking lot, in some kind of gated thing that you can easily get into (unless it's locked). Explore. Some dumpsters will be locked; you can pass these up and move on, or, in an act of retaliation against a store that would rather fill up a landfill than give you something for free, you can glue the lock or cut it open with a boltcutter. Some dumpsters will be nonexistent; in some strip malls, you just can't find them! Some dumpsters won't be dumpsters at all, but rather, huge and scary trash compactors, which I recommend staying away from. And then, as I mentioned, some dumpsters just won't have anything for you— just packaging, broken things, etc. *But* when you find one with potential, you'll be thankful. Open up the lid (if it's not already open). If there's anything cool you can reach from the outside, grab it. If not, climb on in. Don't worry, it's not hard to get out, and you won't end up smelling like trash. Look through stuff. Don't touch anything if you can't tell what it is. Tear open trash bags and look at what's inside. When you've looked through everything and gotten what you wanted, put your goods in a box or bag (easy enough to find) and move on to the next one, or go back to a home base to rinse off your hands and your goods. Sometimes you might find so much stuff that you'd need a car to get it all; you might want to just put the stuff you don't need on the sidewalk with a sign saying "FREE". It's liberating. Also fun is dumpstering flowers (a very common find) and giving them to strangers with a smile or a marriage proposal. These are just my tips. I encourage you to find your own way of doing things. Most importantly, have fun!

[other kinds of] Scavenging!

Table scoring (aka table-diving): Go into a restaurant, pretend to head for the bathroom, and look for deserted tables that haven't been cleaned up yet. You might see some leftovers. Go over and grab them and keep walking, or sit there and dine until they ask you to leave.

Donations: Go to a Farmer's Market (this works best on Sundays) towards the end of the day and ask workers if they have any extra food they were going to throw away that they could give you instead. Be nice. For better luck, you might try explaining that you're with a group like Food Not Bombs, which collects food and cooks vegetarian meals and serves them to the homeless in their communities for free. This may or may not work. Back when I actually did work with Food Not Bombs, we used to get donated huge bags full of zucchinis, onions, peaches, tomatoes... mostly organic, too. You can try this same thing (at the end of the day is always best) at natural food stores, pizza places, and bagel places, but if they turn you away coldly, chances are they won't be friendly if they see you digging in their dumpster later, so be sly.

Pizza: Go to a *pizza place* when there's lots of people... and notice that hardly anyone eats their crust! Get it off of tables and the tops of trash bins. You might want to get some tomato sauce to dip the crust in, since plain old pizza crust can get boring. At one beach boardwalk I was hanging out at once, there was a popular pizza place that served huge, rich slices for 99 cents... which meant that half-eaten slices got thrown away, not just the crust! I would walk around, picking pizza off the tops of trash cans all along the boardwalk. I got really full that day.

Another trick for getting free pizza is to call up the place about an hour before it closes, pretending you're actually going to order something for pick-up (asking when they close and if they can make your pizza in time, then saying you can make it over there by then; asking about the price; etc). Order whatever kind of pizza you would like (I say veggies, no meat or cheese; it's healthier, and nicer to the animals, and besides, if you order something the employees might want to eat, they might take it home themselves). Don't pick it up. Wait for them to close. Watch from nearby to make sure the employees leave. Then go and retrieve your fresh-baked, just-disposed pizza from the dumpster. (Of course, before calling the place at all, make sure that they have a dumpster that's not locked!)

Drinks: For free soda, go to a fast food restaurant, pick an empty cup out of the trash, and fill it up at the self-serve soda machine. Walk out before anyone hassles you. The same can be done for coffee at bagel or coffee shops that have self-serve refill coffee dispensers (and at some fast food restaurants

which also have self-serve coffee). It's also possible if you bring your own cup to a gas station mini-mart, but I got caught doing this once and the manager chased me out, demanding I give him his 60 cents before he called the cops. Even if you're against stealing, you have to admit that paying so much for basic things like soda (although I much prefer water or juice) or coffee is ridiculous.

How much do you want to get away?

Shoplifting (the basics)

The main part of this, I guess, will be justifying shoplifting ethically. Not to say that I'm trying trying to convert you, to make you adhere to my love of theft; you don't have to do it; I just want you to at least get you to understand where I'm coming from, why I do what I do, and not to negate everything else I've written about because you disagree with this one issue. You may not care, but I know that at least some of the readers will have moral objections to shoplifting.

SO, to those of you who disapprove of shoplifting, may I ask why? I want you to really think about it, because I've thought this over a lot myself. Here's the long and short of my take on it: corporations profit off of the blood, sweat, and tears of our fellow humans, and the raping of our earth. They overprice the hell out of everything, making even those of us who don't work for them pay up, as our money comes from whatever labor we give to some institution or another— our work, for which they pay us, giving us the “privilege” of eating. Why should we be financially loyal to the corporate monsters, while we refuse to help out the real people around us? A lot of unpurchased food gets thrown out, anyway. I think that I'm doing the workers of the world a favor by stealing instead of buying, by not contributing to what hurts them. But what it really comes down to in the end is the present and your immediate needs. Why should anything in the world matter more to you than your needs? That's why quitting school is good, isn't it? Because we need to feel alive, to make ourselves happy, right now. We might not be around in twenty years— we can't wait. And so if you want some food or anything to make you healthy and happy (which is not to say that a product can make you happy; only action can do that), why should you put your needs on hold and worry about the effect that ripping off Safeway for a few dollars could possibly have on someone you don't know? What makes some hypothetical potential negative effect of shoplifting more important than your grumbling stomach?

Hoping that was a good enough explanation, I'll move on to give you what little tips I have for shoplifting. Take them if you're interested. References at the end of this zine will be much better help.

- Dress “normally.” Look like someone who wouldn't possibly steal; look wealthy, or crippled, or Mormon, or whatever.
- Putting objects in your pocket or bag is recommended only if you're sure no one's looking (watch for cameras too); walking out confidently with them in your hand actually works pretty well. You can stick things up jacket sleeves, but don't wear warm clothes if it's hot outside, or you'll look suspicious. If you're going to carry a bag, get a messenger bag; it'll be much easier to drop stuff into quickly. Or try carrying around a bag from another store in your hand, and dropping things into there. Or, you could use a bag from the SAME store, acting like you already bought something there and were coming back to look for something else— that way if you get questioned, you can say that whatever you put in the bag was already purchased.
- Back storage rooms in supermarkets are often where the bathrooms are located; you can try to take advantage of this by feigning the need to urinate. Be careful, though, as there are usually workers back there.
- One technique my expert-shoplifter friend here uses most of the time is called left-handing: you pay for something cheap while holding other stuff in your other hand, beneath the counter. If they see it and question you, pretend you forgot you were holding it, and either pay for it or put it

back; but most of the time, you won't get questioned, and if you do get caught, you won't get in nearly as much trouble as you would if you got caught just walking out with something. Aside from left-handing, when you have merchandise in your pocket or bag, you can still buy a cheap decoy purchase to make yourself look unsuspecting. But if you get caught with stuff in your pocket or bag, there's no excuse: you were trying to steal, and you're in trouble.

- Certain people work at stores specifically to prevent shoplifting; they're called "loss prevention". Often they dress up as shoppers and watch people, the thing is, in order to catch and confront you, they have to actually see you pick the item up and not lose visual contact with you until you leave. If you think someone is watching you, escape their vision for a while.
- Most stores have a "no-chase" policy: employees are not supposed to chase you. BUT, both loss prevention and uniformed security CAN chase you AND detain you, and many times other employees (mainly managers) will violate this rule anyway, so it doesn't really mean anything. A friend of mine almost got sent to jail for twenty years for doing a beer run at a chain mini-mart that had a no-chase policy; the manager chased him, beat him up, and then, when it was discovered that a knife was in their getaway car (it was there for completely different reasons, though), he accused my friend of trying to stab him. But if you think they're onto you and it's too late to get out of it, I recommend running, because getting arrested is hell. But remember that they'll call the cops if you run, so you'd better get home (or to a good hiding place) quick. If you're in a car, don't let them catch your license plate number.
- Remember, it's not stealing until you walk out the door, and so if you think someone's onto you, you can actually take something out of your bag or pocket while inside the store, right in front of people, and no one can do anything about it. But I wouldn't recommend returning to a place in which anyone's seen you do this.
- If you do get caught, different things can happen. One friend of mine was actually let off with the stuff he'd tried to take, without being charged for it! Sometimes they'll just make you pay for it, or not give it to you and just make you leave. Most likely, in any case, they'll get your name and photo, or something like that, and ban you from the store, which isn't so bad. If you're unlucky, they'll detain you and call the cops and you'll get taken to jail. This is what happened to me the one time I got caught stealing (it was shoes—I was dumb enough to try to walk out with them on—don't ever try that). You'll either get formally arrested or just detained at the station (technically, I was just detained), and then you'll get released to your parents. Then you'll have a date in juvenile court, where you'll wait around for hours, then get put in front of some asshole judge who lectures you and then gives you a fine or community service.

...and we will fight until the grass breaks the concrete...

Other stuff

You can return items without receipts at many stores for store credit; steal something, and then have a friend return it (or return it yourself at a different location). At times, if you make sure no one sees you, it's possible to just pick an item off the shelf and return it. If you find a receipt near a store on the ground or in the trash, you can use that to get cash back—that's much better.

Books are easiest to get for free from B&N: easy to steal, or easy to "return" (without walking out—it's one of those places in which you can pick something off the shelf and return it) without a receipt for store credit, or with a receipt (within 30 days) for cash back, if the item was originally paid for in cash.

If you really need money for something and are hesitant to acquire it any other way, you can panhandle. I hate panhandling because it plays into the idea that one needs money to survive or enjoy

life, that the poor are helpless and pathetic and “lower” than the well-to-do; and plus, it’s boring. But if I need to, I’ll do it. Just being young and female helps a lot— sorry guys. Go somewhere where lots of people are. If in front of a store, ask people on their way out rather than in; that way they’d have to go back in the store if they wanted to tell the manager on you, and they’ll be more likely to have change on them. Enunciate, don’t mumble; make sure they hear you. (A friend of mine who liked to panhandle always mumbled and it annoyed me; I kept telling him, they don’t even *hear* you!) Be nice and look sad and say something like “Excuse me sir/miss, could you spare any change for a bite to eat?” Or be funny. Whatever. I’ve found that panhandling solicits a much more generous response from middle class people in small towns who are well-intentioned and aren’t used to always being asked for money. But I don’t really recommend panhandling in general.

capitalism makes food a source of profit, not of nutrition. Let’s fix that...

Here are a few ways to rip off copies from Kinko’s:

- As you walk in, covertly pick up not one but two copy keys. Do most of your copies on the first one, and then put the second one in, make a few more, and bring the second one up to the counter when you pay (hiding or stealing the first one)— they’ll only charge you for as many as you did on that one. Put the extra copies in your bag when no one’s looking, before you ring them up. Just make sure no one notices any of this.
- If you can, steal a copy key (you might want to pry off the wire and plastic attached to it) and do the trick above, using the one you’ve stolen as the first key and the one you pick up as you enter the store as the second.
- A super-strong magnet can be used to set the numbers on the card back to zero. You’ll have to go to a bit of trouble to find one, but it shouldn’t cost too much. Keep it in your pocket and just swipe the key card by your pocket after you’ve made most of your copies.

As of yet, I haven’t done any of these, but my friends have, sometimes in my presence.

A note on consumerism:

It sucks — whether you’re buying things or stealing them. Please don’t take my promotion of acquiring things through alternative means to imply that material objects are important. I completely reject that mentality, but it’s all too easy to slip into a false world based on objects once we start getting stuff for free. As I’ll discuss later, dumpstering and stealing can be fun, but are merely a *means*, not an *end*. What we should be striving for is to live really fulfilling, action-packed lives.

So let’s move on...

Sleeping and traveling — the really fun stuff!

If you’re at all going to be squatting or camping, it’s really important to have a good sleeping bag; one that will keep you warm, and preferably is also lightweight and can be stuffed or rolled up to a pretty small size. Luckily, my mom bought mine, but I would have probably tried to pull a bunch of receipt scams to get the money to buy it if I’d had to, since stealing a sleeping bag would be hard for me. There’s something called a bivvy sack, which is small and expensive, that you can try to steal and return for credit at sporting goods stores— but only do that if you’re pretty confident about it. You can tie your sleeping bag to your backpack, but it’s much easier if you can put it *IN* your backpack. Pack lightly. I’ve found that it’s good to have at least 2 pairs of socks, one change of clothes, and a good

enough selection of clothes to suit you in different weather. For example, I take 2 pairs of pants (it used to be just one, until I dumpstered some really comfortable jeans), 1 pair of shorts, 2 sleeveless shirts (I only really need one), one thermal shirt, a hoodie, some tights (to wear under pants in cold weather), regular shoes, really lightweight flip flops, and a few pairs of socks and underwear— that’s including whatever I have on me at the time. You don’t even need that much, depending on what climate you’re in.

Squatting is the act of reappropriating space (abandoned buildings, lots, even unused storage rooms in public buildings, etc) to sleep in. It can be adventurous and fun. Scope out your place during the day, then go at night. Make sure that there’s no alarm system or people inside or around the building, and figure a way in. Abandoned buildings are usually boarded up; get a screwdriver and get the boards off. If you have to break anything, try to keep it quiet; holding a sheet over a window and breaking it through the sheet helps keep noise down. If you’re squatting in a residential neighborhood and have any intention of staying there for a while, get to know your neighbors, tell them what you’re about, etc. Keep a flashlight and a weapon (just in case).

Rooftops are good places to sleep, too, if it’s not too cold out. In the backs of most strip-mall-type buildings you’ll usually find a ladder to the roof. The bottom 8 feet or so may be locked; you and your friends can help each other, as well as use objects around you, to get past that. After getting up there there’s not much else to it. Just don’t stand up while you’re up there during the daytime if you’re in an area where anyone might see you. Roofs are fun, and sometimes you have easy access to billboards from there. Can you say “spraypaint”? (Just don’t be stupid and stick around a billboard you’ve redecorated! Find another roof to sleep on after that.)

If all of this sounds scary, well, it’s really not too bad, and it doesn’t take someone super-strong or smart. Skills develop as time goes on. You will probably make a lot of friends along your way who will be more than happy to help out ambitious youth with a place to stay, eat, shower, etc. If that makes you feel like a freeloader, you can help them out by cleaning, bringing them food and cooking, or doing whatever else you can do to give back.

Now there are a few ways of getting around for free, and I think they’re all more fun than driving would be. Within your surrounding area, you can walk (one to ten miles, depending on what you’re used to and what shape you’re in), skateboard, or bike (two to eighty miles a day, depending on those same conditions). Bikes are pretty easy to obtain; my friends here just got two for \$10 and \$6, respectively, at the local thrift store. If you like taking the bus, you can do that, but to get very far I wouldn’t recommend paying up to go Greyhound— that’s costly. For longer distances, there’s hitchhiking and hopping trains, neither of which are obsolete, as many people seem to think they are. I have no train hopping experience, only tips and knowledge passed to me through friends and e-mail contacts, so I will leave it up to you to find out more about this if you’re interested (check the internet for train-hopping discussion groups and message boards to get your questions answered and pick up on the scene). As for hitchhiking, I can tell you that I’ve never had any negative experiences with that; in fact, I don’t think I’ve ever had to wait more than half an hour for a ride. I’ve always gone with one male friend, though, and I wouldn’t recommend traveling alone as a woman.

(One interesting tip I heard for female hitchhikers is to never shut up; keep talking about anything, to keep them from getting to bring up sex.)

For every single gallon of gas burned, the average car produces 20 pounds of carbon dioxide the main cause of the greenhouse effect.

Carry a knife or pepper spray, just in case. Always ask drivers who pull over where they’re going before you tell them where you’re going, and if they give you a vague answer then they could be up

to something. Be nice enough for them to trust you, but don't trust them too much, or let yourself become their therapist. Get their story; everyone has a story. It's interesting. Also, I prefer to just stick my thumb out than to make a sign stating where I'm going, because with a sign, drivers who could get you halfway there may pass you up. It's good to have an atlas or at least a map of the area. It's really pretty simple with some basic logic; just go out to an onramp, find a space where cars aren't going too fast and will have room to pull over ahead, keep an eye out for cars that might pick you up, and go! If you spot cops far away, try to hide before they see you; if they see you, you might get in trouble, being underage and all. It's up to you to devise a plan for what to do when you're stopped.

if your heart is free,
the ground you're standing
on is liberated territory,
defend it!

Self-defense

There's not much more to say about this than what I've mentioned throughout other subjects: carry a weapon and try to avoid being alone, especially if you're female. Pepper spray is a good thing to have, and things like boxcutters or swiss army knives can be useful for many purposes; but whatever you carry, especially if it's a real knife, *make sure you are trained and prepared to use it*. [One side note on carrying a weapon is that you shouldn't have one on you if you're going to steal, or else you can be charged with armed robbery.] Organize DIY self-defense classes; teach yourself through books at the library. Try to avoid looking like you have anything anyone would want to steal, and try to avoid looking pathetic and easy to take advantage of. It's also important to stay in good physical condition by eating right and excersizing— the natural kind of excersizing: walking and biking to get around, hiking, stretching, doing challenging things, running and playing around with your friends, climbing things, exploring, swimming, living a life that involves physical activity. Yoga is great for your mind and body, too; in my hometown, there's a great donation-based yoga class I used to go to. Keep a clear head, be wary of people, look out for yourself, and stay strong.

Beyond survival

With the present and future back in our own hands.

So let's say you've escaped those institutions that were after your life, you've broken free; you've found a new means of existence, with the help of some of my tactics, along with your own. Now what? Where do we go from here? A means of existence is just that: a means, not an end. Aside from making our methods of survival more liberating and fun, what can we do to really LIVE?

I'm not out to tell you how to live your life (although I know it might seem that way... but really, I'm doing this because I think the way many people are living is tragic in that it's not what they would really want to be doing, if they had a choice). But boredom is the enemy— boredom is school, work, TV, consumerism, monotony— it's a void. Boredom is death, and this is about life. You may not want to read this part, in fact, I HOPE you don't— I hope you have a hundred ambitions, a hundred ideas of your own. But in case you need some motivation— and after getting out of something that had sucked the very life out of you, who wouldn't?!— here are some ideas.

Take initiative. Sneak into concerts. Practice guerilla urban gardening. Skateboard. Write. Read. Build something. Learn to juggle. Scam. Travel. See how much you can get for free. Create dumpster art. Fall in love with strangers. Teach yourself an instrument. Teach yourself a foreign language by speaking it with people around you. Cook vegetarian meals for the homeless. Explore every rooftop and turn it into your own space. Organize music shows in obscure locations. Hang out in the sun. Play in

the sand at the beach. Go hiking. Try fasting. Learn to cook. Form friendships with all kinds of people, everywhere. Pick someplace far away and walk there. Do graffiti. Play hide-n-go-seek at midnight in parking lots. Play hacky sack, capture the flag, duck-duck-goose, thumb war. Wrestle. See how much fun you can have sober. Put “out of order” notes on ATMs and TVs. Rearrange orange cones in the streets. Sneak into hotel pools and jacuzzis. Splash water on strangers on hot days as a public service. Make a movie. Make your life like a movie. If you find a dead animal, leave it in the meat section of a supermarket (hey, what’s the difference?). Do’ DIY tattoos. Give out condoms. Draw on the sidewalk in chalk.

Make instruments out of random finds. Tag on everything. Express yourself. Make treasure hunts. Dumpster stuff and give it away. Go into college classes for free if you want to learn something taught in a class (you won’t get credit for it if you don’t enroll, but you probably won’t get stopped from going to the class, as they’re usually too big for everyone to recognize everyone else). Sleep. Dream. Stay up all night. Watch the sun rise and set. Climb trees. Build a treehouse. Play with dogs. Share stories around campfires. Steal cans from recycling bins and turn them in for money. Create art, flyers, and posters and glue them up around town at midnight. Toss money at people. Go into your old school and cause a ruckus. Get in trouble. Fight the law. Take risks. Love. Hate. Feel. Experience. Live.

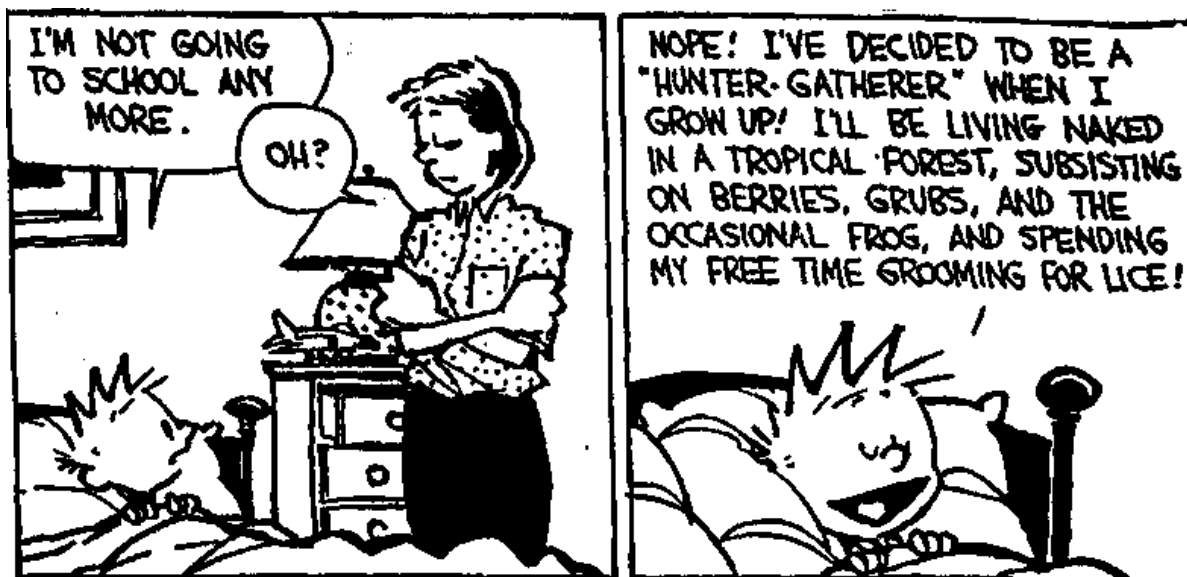
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I can see it on the tip of your tongue: that this may be fun for now, but what are we going to do for the *rest of our lives!*

And my response is, I have no clue— but I’d much rather have no clue than to have my entire future rapped out for me, knowing that I have to spend the rest of my life doing the same routine every day, following the same pattern so many people around me follow: going to school and putting years of schoolwork into getting into a good college, only so that once you prepare to get a good job, and doing that just to earn enough money to consume meaningless objects and do little things on the weekends and take little expensive vacations once a year, becoming incredibly jaded and feeling as if that way of living is the only way, preparing for retirement, during which one finally has time to do what she wants— or, rather, what’s left of what she wants, after the life (and health) has been sucked from her, and she’s just waiting until the day when her body gives up on her. Or what would be even worse is living that life halfway through, and dying unexpectedly (from cancer, a car accident, whatever) at a point in my life when I would be miserable, when the only thing I was living for was the future that never came. Let’s take today what tomorrow may not bring. We might not live another day.

My friend who’s working on that book is here next to me right now. He’s 25, and he’s been living adventurously and work-free since he was 18. I’ve talked to him about this before. The way he sees it (and this is my own paraphrasing, of course), sleeping on roofs, pulling scams, stealing, and dumpster diving are now his well-learned means of existence, just like working and consuming are a means of existence for most people; the difference is that he spends less time acquiring the food and shelter he needs to survive (since those 40+ hours a week most people work, along with the time they spend shopping and paying bills and driving, is all just what they do to pay for their food, shelter, etc), and his ways of doing that are more adventurous and diverse anyhow; plus, he’s completely free at any time to go wherever he wants and do whatever he wants, and he’ll still be able to get by. Beyond existence, he is able to explore his passions freely; he can go to libraries or colleges and learn about anything that interests him; if he so chooses, he can settle down in a permanent space, or get a job, but why would he want to? He’s really interested in writing at this point, and is learning about that; he can do whatever he wants. We all can. I think that eventually, if we get tired of traveling and exploring and living for free with no particular aim for the future, whatever particularly interests us will come to us, just like my friend has slowly discovered his interest in writing. And by then, we may have a good squat set up where we can work on our projects. And we’ll be free at any time to decide to do something else, if we so choose.

I'm not sure of anything. I don't think it's very realistic to plan too extensively, or to put one's faith in the idea that they can predict the future. All I know is what I want to do right now, and I'm going to trust that. Our present desires are all we really have.



Recommended Reading

I haven't read all the classics. I know very little about all the philosophers. And I prefer to do exciting and challenging things than to live vicariously through reading about or watching others doing them. But there are a few readings I want to mention.

Days of War, Nights of Love and *Evasion* by the CrimethInc. collective. Days of War is an awesome collection of short essays and other fun stuff that has blown away myself and many of my friends.

I can't do it justice with a short description— you'll have to check it out. *Evasion* is the book that my friend will soon be done with; it was originally a full-sized, hundred-page zine, written in '98, until CrimethInc. got in touch with him about turning it into a book. It's all about adventure, rejection of work, beating the system, dumpstering and stealing, etc. Both books are highly recommended. Check out www.crimethlnc.com to order, and for other fun stuff.

Industrial Society and Its Future, a.k.a. *The Unabomber's Manifesto*, by Freedom Club (FC)/Theodore Kaczynski. Incredibly radical, and much more focused on what's actually going on in this world than either this zine is or, to a much lesser extent, than the above-mentioned books are. While this zine and those books focus on how to break our chains and live our lives against all odds, the Unabomber's manifesto details with frightening clarity the truths that we attempt to deny about what exactly it is that we're escaping from, what's going wrong, and how urgent it is that we stop it. He is able to see past the reactions of many of us (<COUGH>liberals<COUGH>), still mentally enslaved in one way or another, against a force that is much larger and deeply-rooted than we may dare to recognize, and dares the reader to face up to the fact that we have to take some huge and painful risks in order to truly "save the world". This is a very serious piece of literature, to say the least, and yet the larger picture it has made me see has enabled me to focus on living a liberating life, no matter how small mine is in the grand scheme of things.

Aside from those three things, I have no specific recommendations. I encourage you to explore the literary world and read whatever you want to, but remember not to fool yourself into thinking there's any point in reading anything that bores you.

THE END

of this zine...
and the beginning of the
rest of your life.

Props to Kaczynski and all prisoners, CrimethInc and the Evasion kid, dropouts and the unemployed, subverters everywhere, disgruntled workers, all of my anarchist comrades from my hometown, anyone who ever made me think or feel anything, whoever wrote *Fight Club*, and all of my past, present, and future friends and lovers.

oh yeah, and anyone who's let me crash at your house, or eat your food — thanks!

Please copy and distribute this as much as you like. Use it for whatever purposes you want.

Send hate mail, ideas, stories, scams, poetry, etc., to cavegrrrl@excite.com. Or send donations to my buddies at

CrimethInc.

P.O.Box 1963

Olympia, WA 98507

'til next time,

cavegirl

I'm sixteen years old.

I don't attend school.

I don't work.

I don't live at home.

I don't know where I'll be one month from now.

I don't worry.

I have \$82, a sleeping bag, and a journal to my name.

And I love life like never before.

Taking today
what tomorrow never brings

The Library of Unconventional Lives

cavegirl
Dropping Out
(for students)
2001

<<https://crimethinc.com/zines/dropping-out>>

thelul.org