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# Flight From The City

By Ralph Borsodi

## Chapter 1 — Flight From The City

In 1920 the Borsodi family — my wife, two small sons, and myself — lived in a rented home. We bought our food and clothing and furnishings from retail stores. We were dependent entirely upon my income from a none too certain white-collar job.

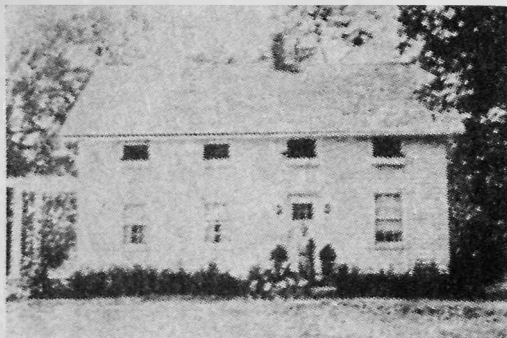
We lived in New York City — the metropolis of the country. We had the opportunity to enjoy the incredible variety of foodstuffs which pour into that great city from every corner of the continent; to live in the most luxurious apartments built to house men and women in this country; to use the speedy subways, the smart restaurants, the great office buildings, the libraries, theaters, public schools — all the thousand and one conveniences which make New York one of the most fantastic creations in the history of man. Yet in the truest sense, we could not enjoy any of them.

How could we enjoy them when we were financially insecure and never knew when we might be without a job; when we lacked the zest of living which comes from real health and suffered all the minor and sometimes major ailments which come from too much excitement, too much artificial food, too much sedentary work, and too much of the smoke and noise and dust of the city; when we had to work just as hard to get to the places in which we tried to entertain ourselves as we had to get to the places in which we worked; when our lives were barren of real beauty — the beauty which comes only from contact with nature and from the growth of the soil, from flowers and fruits, from gardens and trees, from birds and animals?

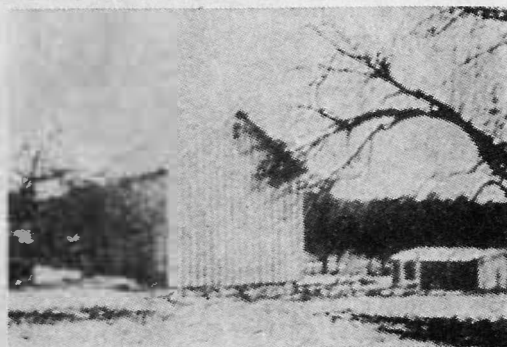
We couldn't. Even though we were able for years and years, like so many others, to forget the fact — to ignore it amid the host of distractions which make up city life.

And then in 1920, the year of the great housing shortage, the house in which we were living was sold over our heads. New York in 1920 was no place for a houseless family. Rents, owing to the shortage of building which dated back to the World War, were outrageously high. Evictions were epidemic — to enable rapacious landlords to secure higher rents from new tenants — and most of the renters in the city seemed to be in the courts trying to secure the protection of the Emergency Rent Laws. We had the choice of looking for an equally endurable home in the city, of reading endless numbers of classified advertisements, of visiting countless real estate agents, of walking weary miles and climbing endless flights of steps, in an effort to rent another home, or of flight from the city. And while we were trying to prepare ourselves for the struggle with this typical city problem, we were overcome with longing for the country — for the security, the health, the leisure, the beauty we felt it must be possible to achieve there. Thus we came to make the experiment in living which we had often discussed but which we had postponed time and again because it involved so radical a change in our manner of life.

Instead, therefore, of starting the irritating task of house and apartment hunting, we wrote to real estate dealers within commuting distance of the city. We asked them for a house which could be readily remodeled; a location near the railroad station because we had no automobile; five to ten acres of land with fruit trees, garden space, pasturage, a woodlot, and if possible a brook; a location where electricity was available, and last but not least, a low purchase price. Even if the place we could afford only barely complied with these specifications, we felt confident that we could achieve economic freedom on it and a degree of comfort we never enjoyed in the city. All the other essentials of the good life, not even excepting schooling for our two sons, we decided we could produce for ourselves if we were unable to buy in a neighborhood which already possessed them.



**SEVENACRES**, where the experiment began (pictures of the house and barn taken after they were remodelled). Chicken house back of the barn was the first carpentry work undertaken. After that, shifting the door on the house from the end and then replacing it with a window, building a pergola on one end, and putting up window boxes and side-lights became easy.



We finally bought a place located about an hour and three-quarters from the city. It included a small frame house, one and a half stories high, containing not a single modern improvement — there was no plumbing, no running water, no gas, no electricity, no steam heat. There was an old barn and a chicken-house which was on the verge of collapse, and a little over seven acres of land. There was a little fruit in the orchard — some apples, cherries, and plums, but of the apples at least there were plenty. An idea of the modesty of the first Borsodi homestead can be secured from the picture here, which shows it after we had spent nearly two years repainting and remodeling the tiny little building. Yet "Sevenacres" as we called the place, was large enough for our initial experiment. Four years later we were able to select a more suitable site and begin the building of the sort of home we really wanted.

We began the experiment with three principal assets, courage — foolhardiness, our city friends called it; a vision of what modern methods and modern domestic machinery might be made to do in the way of eliminating drudgery, and the fact that my wife had been born and had lived up to her twelfth year on a ranch in the West. She at least had had childhood experience of life in the country.

But we had plenty of liabilities. We had little capital and only

a modest salary. We knew nothing about raising vegetables, fruit, and poultry. All these things we had to learn. While I was a handy man, I had hardly ever had occasion to use a hammer and saw (a man working in an office rarely does), and yet if our experiment was to succeed it required that I should make myself a master of all trades. We cut ourselves off from the city comforts to which we had become so accustomed, without the countryman's material and spiritual compensations for them.

We went to the country with nothing but our city furniture. We began by adding to this wholly unsuitable equipment for pioneering, an electric range. This was the first purchase in the long list of domestic machines with which we proposed to test our theory that it was possible to be more comfortable in the country than in the city, with security, independence, and freedom to do the work to which we aspired thrown in for good measure.

Discomforts were plentiful in the beginning. The hardships of those early years are now fading into a romantic haze, but they were real enough at the time. A family starting with our handicaps had to expect them. But almost from the beginning there were compensations for the discomforts.

Before the end of the first year, the year of the depression of 1921 when millions were tramping the streets of our cities looking for work, we began to enjoy the feeling of plenty which the city-dweller never experiences. We cut our hay; gathered our fruit; made gallons and gallons of cider. We had a cow, and produced our own milk and butter, but finally gave her up. By furnishing us twenty quarts of milk a day she threatened to put us in the dairy business. So we changed to a pair of blooded Swiss goats. We equipped a poultry-yard, and had eggs, chickens, and fat roast capons. We ended the year with plenty not only for our own needs but for a generous hospitality to our friends — some of whom were out of work — a hospitality which unlike city hospitality, did not involve purchasing everything we served our guests.

To these things which we produced in our first year, we have since added ducks, guineas, and turkeys; bees for honey; pigeons for appearance; and dogs for company. We have in the past twelve years built three houses and a barn from stones picked up on our place; we weave suitings, blankets, carpets, and draperies; we make some of our own clothing; we do all of our own laundry work; we grind flour, corn meal, and breakfast cereals; we have our own workshops, including a printing plant; and we have a swimming-pool, tennis-court, and even a billiard-room.

(continued next month)

## The Time Has Come For A Third Force In The Explosive World

The International Foundation for Independence (Utoquai 55, Zurich, Switz.) is the outgrowth of suggestions made by the social philosopher Ralph Borsodi, while on a lecture tour in India, to Jayaprakash Narayan at the *Gandhian Institute for Studies* in Benares on Feb. 16, 1966. In discussing the critical situation in India with Shri Narayan, Mr. Borsodi suggested that conditions called for the internalization of the Gandhian movement. Consisting today of 20,000 constructive village workers, it is a movement for nonviolent social reform, originally launched by Mahatma Gandhi, developed in India by Vinoba Bhave, and now being led by J. P. Narayan.

The time had come, Mr. Borsodi suggested, for the movement to become a "third force" in the world by offering the masses of peasants and villagers in all the underdeveloped nations a constructive alternative to the American program of A.I.D. to their governmental establishments on the one hand and on the other the Chinese program of peasant guerrilla organization for revolution.

### Plans Developed

The idea of establishing such an international foundation so impressed Shri Narayan that he called a meeting of the leaders of the movement to consider the matter. This took place at the Indian International Center in New Delhi on Feb. 27, 1966. Shri J. J. Singh, formerly president of the Indian-American Society of New York, presided. Shri Narayan and Mr. Borsodi jointly presented the three specific suggestions which they had discussed in Benares:

1. **Internationalize the Gandhian Movement** — the only viable movement of any size which is working at the "grass roots" level in an underdeveloped nation — by organizing an International Independence Corps of dedicated leaders and workers. Recruit both the local village supervisors and the international leaders and organizers from volunteers representing all races, religions and nationalities who believe that the right way to deal with the critical situation in the developing nations and ensure a peaceful transition from a world of exploitation to a world of justice must begin, not with the industrialized and urbanized authorities, but with the rural masses which con-

stitute 70 to 80% of their populations.

2. **Organize An International Agency** with ample financial resources to provide all the credit needed to realize a program of rural renaissance and a revival of village and township prosperity in these nations. Include on the Board of Trustees not only public spirited men and women already concerned with the problem but also bankers and businessmen who would help ensure that the funds were used as a permanent Revolving Fund instead of merely as a one-time charitable contribution for temporary relief.

3. **Initiate Raising of Funds** for Shri Narayan to tour the U. S., under the auspices of a national committee of distinguished Americans. This tour will begin in the middle of March, 1967, and last for two months. Engagements are planned in universities and with civic groups in New Hampshire, Boston, New York City, Montreal, Washington, D. C., Philadelphia, Columbus, St. Louis, Kansas City, Lansing, Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. His tour is being organized by the India Council of the Asia Society, assisted by national and local committees now being organized to welcome him.

(continued next month)

## A Way Out Supplement No. 1

Editor's Note: This extra two-page insert appears for these reasons:

1. Some readers write that "there's never enough of *The Green Revolution*." We're trying these extra two pages for November and December, and will continue if response warrants.

2. Several readers have asked for Borsodi's *Flight From The City* in paperback. We start it serially here and hope to reprint later in pamphlet form.

3. This is an experimental trial for providing our second journal, *A Way Out*. Mimeographing or producing it too often lands back at Lane's End, where time and energy are not available for this added job. Many readers and your editor want to continue *A Way Out*, for its discussion of principles of living. We believe we need both practices of living (*The Green Revolution*) and principles. It is School of Living's function to integrate both. We were sorry when they got separated, via conditions hard to control, into two papers. Such separation follows and emphasizes the "split" all too common in the world today, and is something we want to help correct. Hence we bring principles and practices of living together again in one paper. We will experiment for two months to discover the work, costs, and reader response. Let us know if you think this a good solution to School of Living's continuing publication problems. Might send along an extra contribution when you write. — M.J.L.

## City Housing Pay For Country Living?

By Clayton C. Bauer  
Spencerport, N. Y.

Will Carroll, the sunny Californian, has a bully money-making tip for School of Living groups, tax reformers, and other altruistic groups with near-empty tills. (*Green Revolution*, April 1966, letter on page 2). But it is no get-rich-quick scheme.

His idea — I've long entertained the same notion — is for investments in city housing to pay for homestead living, or what you will. Any income property, even singles, will do as a starter. Will suggests a duplex. Actually, the investment group should buy the most units available for their money. Four units, say, under one roof is cheaper to maintain, as a rule, than four singles under four roofs.

### Active Demand for Housing

Housing is scarce for low income families in most populous areas. Zoning laws copied after some antiquated model fashioned for some snooty, upper-crust township prevent builders from constructing cheap but adequate mass housing. Zoning boards are too often made up of persons who would legislate the poor out of their sight and sound.

Nearby Rochester, N. Y., for instance, has had a big influx of poor Negroes from the South. Housing for them is critically scarce. They find it difficult to penetrate beyond the invisible barriers of the slum wards. They must pay far more for quarters, comparably, than whites pay.

Already there exists in Rochester a group, church allied, which encourages friends of the Negroes to buy, renovate, and then sell on easy terms basically sound but run-down city housing to poor Negro families. To me this sounds like a thoroughly Christian action. It happens, likewise, to be a type of generosity that can pay off.

The Astors, the Goelets, the Rockefellers have made fortunes in income properties. Even the Dutch Reformed Church is one of New York City's richest landlords. It seems to me the School of Living has motives every bit as worthy as these; I would dare to say worthier.

The profits stem not from ownership of land, but from property management. No stigma attaches to these profits so long as the group keeps offering better housing at a fair price.

### Cooperative Plan

Let's suppose a group of 25 potential homesteaders. Every one has at least \$100 but not enough to buy a homestead. Every one could contribute to an investment pool \$10 monthly. The group then could pool, as a whole, \$2500. And this would be enough to buy a basically sound but sad-looking duplex, say. A bank would be willing, as a rule, to pony up the three times as much, or \$7,500, which with your \$2,500, or \$10,000, would

(continued on page 4)