

# How I Lost 2,840 Pounds

By CO2NNIE YOUNG

I've been on a lot of diets in my lifetime, but none has been as challenging or satisfying as the one I'm on right now. To date, I've lost 2,450 pounds and I still have 2,550 pounds to go. You see, I'm participating in a Low Carbon Challenge and I'm losing pounds of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. I belong to a small study group, called a Carbon Ring, which has been meeting regularly since June. We are joining forces with other California Unitarian Universalists and friends to lose 1 million pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by Earth Day 2009.

While the larger purpose of this program is to reduce one of the major factors contributing to global warming, many of us are participating for reasons that are close to home as well. The same human activities that contribute to global warming also cause pollution, environmental degradation and the depletion of our natural resources. We're all concerned about our poor air quality. We're frustrated when local crops are allowed to wither and die for lack of water, while our streets and sidewalks are well irrigated. Carbon Ring member, Darcy, reported that her recent trip to the coast was spoiled by beach closures due to bacterial contamination of the ocean. Will this be our legacy for future generations? Though these problems seem overwhelming, we're determined to try to make a difference. Feeling helpless and doing nothing is no longer an option.

Guided by the book, *The Low Carbon Diet*, we've taken actions ranging from the easy and inexpensive to the more complicated and costly. By simply pushing the "air dry" button on her dishwasher, Patti (another Carbon Ring member) will save 200 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Most of us are taking shorter showers (300 lbs), hanging our clothes out to dry (260 lbs per drier load), and replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL's) for 100 lbs saved per bulb. By turning down his thermostat in the winter, Pat will reduce his annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 1,400 lbs. Patti replaced her old washing machine with a front-loading Energy Star washer and lost 500 lbs. Not only is she saving water, electricity and money, she also received generous rebates from PG&E and the City of Fresno water conservation program. Even the "greenest" among us have found new ways to shed unwanted pounds.

We all are inspired to do more. Leslie will get a kitchen composter to reduce the amount of garbage she throws away. I will be riding my bike to work more often. Kathy and Ed, who have long commutes, plan to buy a hybrid car (up to 10,000 lbs, depending on the vehicle). Several of us will purchase carbon offsets to make up for the carbon dioxide generated by air and auto travel during summer vacations.

We all feel a welcome sense of relief that we are doing something to make our world a better place. Pat hopes his grandchildren will be able to enjoy the breath-taking splendor of nature that he has taken for granted. Mary now feels empowered instead of helpless. Patti is satisfied that she is part of the solution to climate change. Leslie is proud that she is doing her part and making environmentally responsible changes. Theo has a newfound sense of optimism.

New Carbon Rings will be forming at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Fresno in late August. They consist of 5-8 households, each of which pledges to lose 5,000 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> over 3 months. Anyone is welcome to join a Carbon Ring or to form one of their own. Both faith-based and secular groups can participate in the Low Carbon Challenge, as its two study guides are not religious publications. An informational meeting about the Low Carbon Challenge will be held at the UU Church on Thursday, August 21, 7 - 8pm. The church address is 2672 E. Alluvial, between Chestnut and Willow. Information about the Low Carbon Challenge is available at [www.uufresno.org](http://www.uufresno.org) and at 322-6146.

So what would you give to have cleaner air and more than an occasional glimpse of the beautiful Sierras? How important is it to you to ensure enough clean water for our families and farms? What are you willing to do for a better future for your children and grandchildren? In other words, what have you got to lose?

-August 2008  
(Published by the FresnoBee)