

On Woody Harrelson
Robert S. Griffin
www.robertsgriffin.com

Actor Woody Harrelson first came to prominence as the bartender on the hit television series “Cheers.” He has gone on to an active big screen career, including starring in director Oliver Stone’s film “Natural Born Killers.” He continues to act in both lead and supporting roles in films, and has become an environmental activist (“I just got back from Kentucky. I was working with a scientist on a new invention that will revolutionize how we clean up sewage.”). The 2004 documentary film “Going Further” depicts Harrelson and others’ bus trip down the California Pacific Coast highway, with public appearances along the way to promote the modification of our personally and environmentally damaging consumption habits. The following quotes from Harrelson are drawn from a book based on the bus trip and an article in *Men’s Journal* magazine: Frank Condron, editor, *How to Go Further: A Guide to Simple Organic Living* (Toronto: Warwick Publishing, 2005); “Good to See You Back, Woody,” *Men’s Journal*, vol. 17, no. 3, April 2008, pp. 90-94.

The whole time I was growing up I had a chronic runny nose. I also fought an ongoing battle with acne and blotches of red discoloration on my skin. [After a young woman on a bus, told me I looked lactose intolerant,] I made the effort to cut dairy out of my diet—no milk, no cheese, no ice cream, no cream in my coffee. Within a day I started to notice a difference. My runny nose was gone. My sinuses were clear for the first time in years, so my head stopped feeling like it was packed with cotton. I could even hear better. I could breathe a lot easier, and my energy level and stamina increased. After a week, my skin lost that red, blotchy look and the acne started clearing up. If dairy had been having that big an effect on my health and wellbeing, I thought, what the hell was eating at McDonald’s and all that other negative shit I was doing having on me? For the first time in my life I started treating my body like the temple it should be. I started to wake up to the fact that there was a gap between the life I was experiencing and the optimum life I could experience.

I picked up a package of M&Ms and read the ingredients for the first time: red dye #5, artificial flavor, artificial color, methylparabin, petroleum products. What is this shit? If Mother Nature didn't make it, it probably shouldn't be in my body.

Becoming a vegan, someone who eats no animal products at all, really came from a desire to get more energy in my life, because eating dead animals was just zapping me.

I'm proud to say that I eat a totally plant-based diet—no meat, no dairy, one hundred percent organic, and the fresher the food the better.

The vast majority of people are more interested in food that “comforts” them than food that nourishes them.

I've come to believe that the easiest way to change the planet in ways that you can measure is to take a good hard look at your own life and figure out what positive changes you can make there, starting with what you eat.

You say you want to change the world? That's great. You can start by changing your diet.

I encourage everyone I meet to try yoga, because I want people to realize themselves more fully the way I think I have. I want people to feel something more than they are used to feeling, because I know there is so much more than that.

Regardless of the particular yoga style, they all incorporate three central elements: exercise, breathing control, and meditation. The exercise aspect of yoga, or *asanas*, comprises a series of positions you put your body in and hold. *Pranayama*, as it is called, is a clearing of the mind and releasing of tensions. The focus is on breathing control. Once you gain mastery over your body and mind, you'll find that you can do some amazing things you never would have thought you could do. Your body and mind is the vehicle that has to transport you through your life, and you're not going to get very far if your vehicle's got two flat tires and no gas and gets pushed around in every which direction.

One of the most important lessons I've learned in my life is that personal transformation equals planetary transformation.

I backed away from the hedonism/narcissism to hang out with the "fam" [his wife and three children] for five years in Maui. Best decision I ever made. It's really an amazing community of people. It's off the grid, there's no power lines. Most of the people here, including us, run their vehicles and their tractors and stuff off of biodiesel. A lot of things are ideal. We all get together for Thanksgiving, different holidays, and look after each others' kids. It's a real community, like one I've never been a part of in my life.

I sit on the grass under a tree dreaming of the way things used to be before the rivers and oceans and skies were polluted, back when the buffalo roamed and the Indian's home was the forest, and God was nature and heaven was here and now.

What needs to happen in the world more than anything is an evolution of the heart, and that evolution has to start within each individual. That evolution starts with loving yourself, by taking care of your body by eating right and exercising, and then extends out to touch your family and friends. It doesn't stop there, though; if you really want to transform your life you have to make an effort to love your fellow humans and love the planet. You do that by taking responsibility for the choices you make as a consumer and as a citizen of the world.

Unfortunately, in the decades since the '60s, the people who were never "on the bus" have worked very hard to dismiss the idea that anything that came out of that time was any good. Mostly it's the people who have a vested interest in society remaining asleep at the wheel—the politicians and the corporations. The "Pranksters" used LSD and Day-Glo paint while we use yoga and raw food, but the main idea is the same: there are other ways to live. You should be aware of the alternatives and not be afraid to explore them. [The "on the bus" and "Pranksters" references are to a 1964 cross-country bus trip author Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; Sometimes a Great Notion*) and his friends, who called themselves the "Merry Pranksters," took to have a good time and

promote the search for freer, happier, more personally expressive, truer ways of living. Read journalist Tom Wolfe's account in his book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.]

Inside my circle of family and friends, I feel great about everything. But, you know, there's so much fucked about the world, most particularly about the industries that make up the world economy being the puppet masters to all the politicians, and then us, below that, saying what the hell are we gonna do? And that I feel so intensely frustrating.

It's like we're all on the Titanic, and it's a wonderful party and the violins are playing. Yeah, we feel a bump, we may even have heard somebody shout, "We've hit something," but it's the Titanic, we can't go down. Listen to some more music, drink some more wine. I'm all for that. The party of life. But on the other hand, I would seriously have to be lacking sensibility to not be aware that we are in major trouble right now. Either we turn things around or we're going to eliminate a lot of species along the way, and it won't be long before we eliminate our own.

Once you pull back from your life and really look at the impact of the choices you make, an amazing thing happens: You start to see yourself as part of the environment, because you know you have the power to hurt it. Instead of closing yourself off in your own little world, you start to think about your place in the whole world, and that changes you. Soon, the layers of crap you don't need start to dissolve as you begin to question each choice you make. And when that happens, you are on the way to personal transformation.

There's one word that scares the forces trying to take control of the planet more than any other: sustainability. Sustainability is a dangerous concept because when consumers focus on sustainability --meaning to actually stop and think about every dollar they spend--the spell is broken and they get a chance to clear their heads. And it's when people start to see the world with clear eyes that they begin to see alternatives. It won't take much time to stop the slide either; if we all scale back on our wants a little bit, I bet that will do it. Then from moderation we can begin the shift to

sustainability. That's when we start pushing back in the opposite direction and begin to take our rock back.