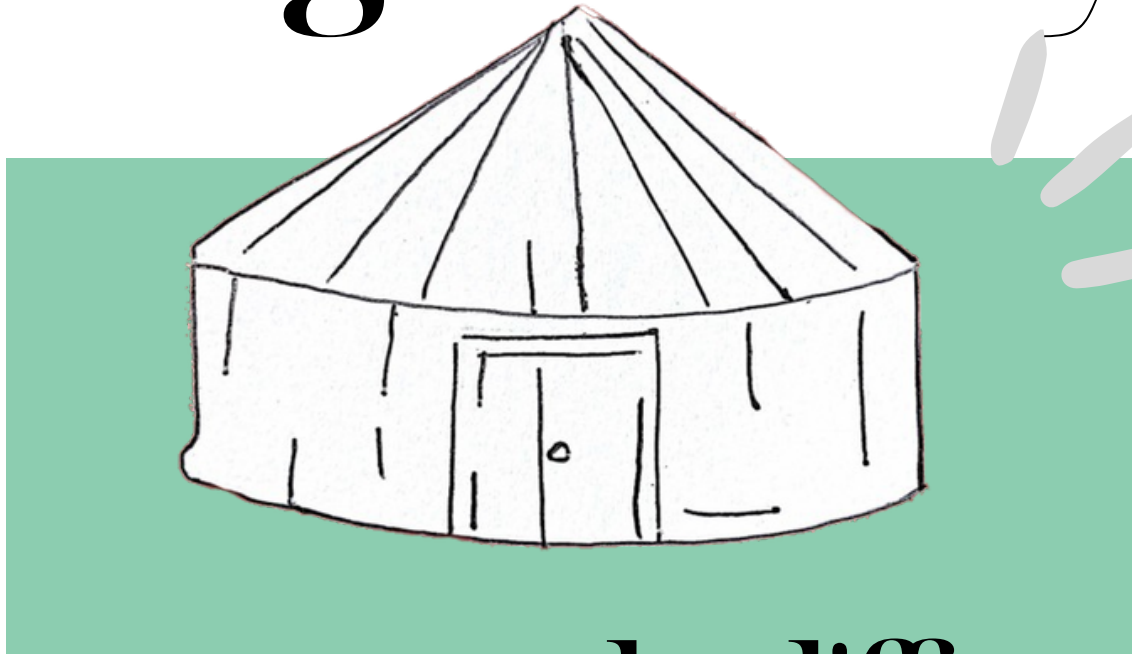


# Housing differently



## to work differently

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### The story of Marion and David

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I always believed that escaping the system to live in accordance with your values started with changing jobs.

Then I came across David Mercereau's blog: it was a real upheaval, a radical change in my perspectives around time and money. David describes how he and his partner, Marion, achieved near-autonomy in terms of needs. By meeting them in person, I was able to understand to what extent this choice influenced every aspect of their lives.





**M**arion's story is that of a life on the outskirts of Nantes, marked by studies in applied arts, a career in the cultural sector, then a transition to the non-profit sector. It is also and above all the story of a "deep desire to slow down". **When she dives into the non-profit sector, Marion no longer counts her hours, and the line between her personal and professional lives blurs.** It's the trigger, she needs to change.

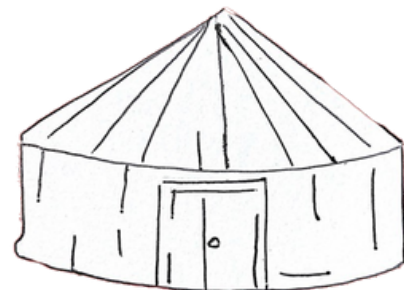
When Marion tells me this, I can't help but draw a parallel with the pace of student life: 35 hours of classes, personal work, internships during the holidays, jobs to make ends meet, etc. I completely understand what she feels: exhaustion and the feeling of a loss of meaning.

The difference is that Marion took the plunge. Admittedly, not as easily as David, but she did it. When she meets David, who has just left his job as a network administrator, the question of **housing** quickly arises. This may seem surprising, or at least marginal, but it has impacted their entire lifestyle. Indeed, David, accustomed to rural life in his childhood, dreams of building his home in the countryside. For Marion, it is more complicated. She, who has lived her entire life in the city, must now project herself towards a life in the countryside, "lose her bearings".

That's why they first **consider shared housing, while keeping the goal of building their own home.** But the challenges of the collective – endless meetings and extended deadlines – push them to opt for their own reversible home. Their decision allows them to "test" this new life while remaining flexible. And from there, the whole shift accelerates.

**D**uring a construction camp, they discover **the yurt: it's love at first sight. It's decided, they will build their own!** They immediately get started, accompanied by

the collective *Ateliers de la Frêne*, which provides them with valuable support for this first construction. In just two months, the work is completed and they install their new 40 m<sup>2</sup> home in a "piece of field" that they rent for a small sum.



**After two years spent in their yurt, the birth of their child, the desire to "fit into the legislative mold", as well as the desire to invest in a stable place, led them to seek more security.** They then decided to buy land in Rouans and move to "permanent" housing.

Built during a participatory project for around twenty thousand euros, their **straw hut ("paillourte"), almost entirely autonomous, allows them to focus only on their essential needs.** The initial absence of water and electricity pushed them to adapt their comfort gradually. They started with minimal solutions: a water container with a foot pump to rationalize their water consumption and solar panels for prudent energy management. Little by little, they improved their comfort, but always with particular attention to the ecological and economic implications. They decided, for example, not to have running water in their shower, thus avoiding overconsumption of water.



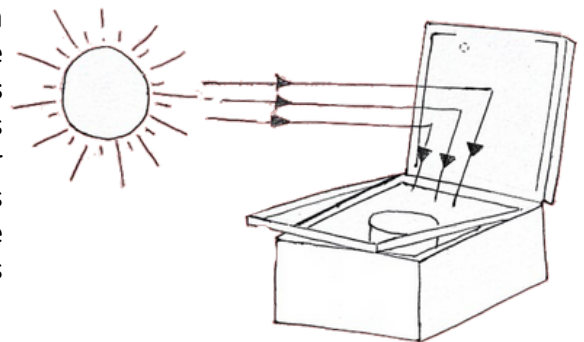
**T**heir great commitment to simplicity has allowed them to free themselves from a major financial constraint, thus offering more time and freedom. This autonomy in terms of comfort and management of resources has transformed their daily lives, pushing them to think about their real needs and their standard of living. This freedom is also reflected in their professional activity.

**"Marion is now a traveling seamstress. And I am self-employed, I am in an activity and employment cooperative. I do several things. I still do a bit of IT on my own, sometimes electronics, sometimes balloon sculpture and a bit of training around solar energy too."** explains David. And when Marion talks about it, it's true that it makes me dream, especially the **absence of hierarchy**: *"I spend my time dedicated a lot to sewing because I like to take my time, I'm someone who is not at all productive. And I'm fine with having a job where I don't have anyone behind me to tell me « you're not working fast enough, you have to rush. » So I don't rush myself."*



It is their unusual approach to income that allows them to vary their activities so much: **after assessing their basic needs – mainly food – they set a monthly salary, €600 for David and €400 for Marion.** Once this amount is reached, David simply says: *"That's it, I'm stopping."* and thus devotes himself to his other activities such as participatory construction sites, multisport or music.

In addition to his involvement in two associations - one a purchasing group and the other fighting for the emancipation of open source tools - **David also spends part of his time trying his hand at low-tech**, as evidenced by the recent construction of his solar concentrator cooker. His passion for DIY - as well as his technical knowledge, particularly in physics - have allowed him to surround himself with various objects that contribute to the family's energy savings.



Once a low-tech solution is built and tested, David documents it in his blog - and there is something for everyone: heating, cooking, waste management (household, food, etc.). He even helps people interested in installing dry toilets.

**T**his approach seems dizzying to me, especially in our societies where, as David explains, *"even in left-wing circles, **money is the driving force behind our security, having capital makes us safe.** It's like having agriculture, having secured crops and having food, it makes humanity safe."* As for saving, Marion is skeptical: *"Why put money aside? Because you never know? No. **The day we need to, we'll manage. We are full of resources.**"*

However, despite all these efforts to reinvent their lifestyle in order to live more freely while limiting their impact on the planet, **David and Marion have their contradictions, like everyone else.** Marion confides for example: *"There is one point that I would clearly like to improve and constrain myself, but which is still complicated to put in place, especially with my professional activity: **to do without a car completely in the countryside.** But it is more the question of comfort that holds me back than fear"*. It is reassuring, I admit, that even she is not completely perfect in terms of sobriety.

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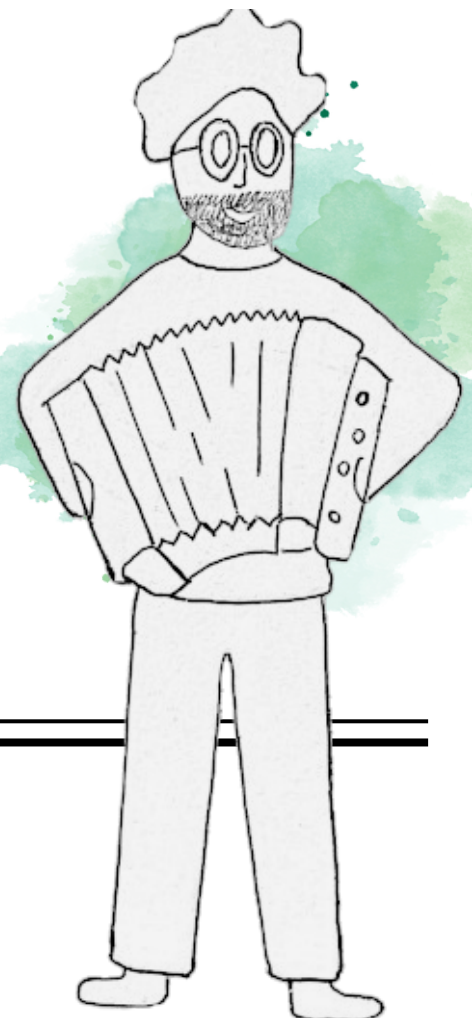
I f Marion and David display such confidence in the future, despite some moments of worry that they do not hesitate to share, it is partly thanks to their **strong cohesion, both within their family and in their community**. This is what makes them strong. In particular, they have their "group of friends" with whom they can freely discuss their lifestyle; David emphasizes that they have never been seen as "*the babos in the yurt at the back of the field*", but rather as integrated members of local life. Marion volunteers at the library, while David regularly plays the accordion and actively participates in community events. This involvement also allows them to discuss with people from more distant circles, less familiar with their life choices.

Some of their life choices are not shared by all of David and Marion's close friends. Indeed, while they are rather calm, they have had to address many fears of their family members, and in particular Marion. She describes **her aunt and mother's concern about their decision not to seek gainful employment**. While this did not slow her down in her desire to break out of the model, it resonates with what I can feel on a daily basis: the fear of going off the beaten track due to my anxiety towards worrying my parents or worse, disappointing them.

However, the story of David and Marion is particularly inspiring to me, a real breath of fresh air. I think it is partly because it reassures me for my professional future. I thought I was condemned to work full-time or more, without finding any meaning in my activity. But I have glimpsed another path here: David works in a small company, on an ad hoc basis and practices free pricing. **He does not define himself by his work, it is only a very small part of what makes up his weeks.**

So, David and Marion have built their own reality, based on sobriety, resourcefulness and a strong connection with nature and their community. Their approach to work, time and money is as destabilizing as it is inspiring. They show us that security and happiness are not necessarily linked to a well-stocked bank account or a prestigious career. On the contrary, **their serenity comes from their ability to live with less.**

Their story is for me tangible proof that we can get out of the traditional paths available to us, that we can consider alternatives that break with the dominant capitalist model that stifles our quest for meaning. Marion and David are therefore for me a form of **gentle but determined resistance against the system.**



# Conclusion

Being happy in my daily life

Being consistent with my values and being able to transmit them

Doing things I'm proud of

**The ingredients of a beautiful life**

Being surrounded by people I love

Do things that leave a little mark

Doing things that make sense, without feeling trapped and killing myself doing it

*"Just being consistent with my values and being surrounded by people I love and with whom things go well is already great!"*

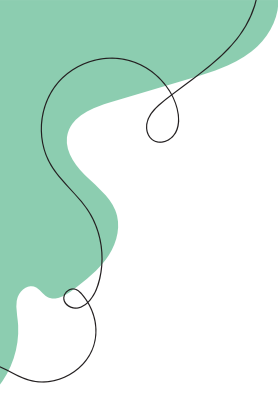
Marion

*"It's having a bit of all these ingredients, having this **balance of freedom** that, for the moment, makes me happy."*

David

*"I don't particularly want to go on vacation, because I think **I'm fine in my daily life here and now**. And I see a lot of people who run away every weekend to go away; in any case, I analyze it as a kind of headlong flight, and I think it's because you're not 100% fine in your daily life either."*

David



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# Food for thought and advice

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Here is the discussion that Marion and David had when I asked them what advice to give to people who, like me, are in dissonance with their studies or their daily activities, who are questioning themselves and looking for their way:

David: I have a little warning: I still have the impression that **our way of life is a little idealized**. I think it doesn't suit everyone. When you watch a YouTube video and then when you're there in real life, it's different.

Also, **if there is a desire, you have to take the time to try**: it would be a shame to reach 40, start thinking and regret it. And there is a beautiful adage that says that "it is by planting that we take root".

And then, it's sure that the difficult side is the family side because at the beginning it's the family that provides security. **When you try to emancipate yourself, you have to find a certain material security to be able to dare to try**. Afterwards, I find that in France, we are still a bit well off in the sense that you still have a bit of unemployment, a bit of stuff, and you have to try to tinker with that.

And then I think that **studies should not be seen as an end in themselves**. The fact is that typically, if I take my class of computer scientists in vocational baccalaureate, there are not many people who work in IT anymore: there is a carpenter, there is a guy who makes brioches... and yet they are not all hippies, on the contrary.

Marion: I quite agree with this study thing, not to do an activity related to my studies at all: I'm still very happy to have done them. It's a whole moment where you are nourished by lots of influences, no matter if they are in the field you are going to explore or not, they still feed your thoughts. Taking this time, if it is available, is a great opportunity. At the same time, **don't deprive yourself of getting your hands dirty either**.

In fact, **do things that you like!** Find something that makes you want to get up in the morning, whether it's an intellectual activity or not. And then you have to take the time to find it.

David: Well, **the path is not immutable, it is not fixed**. We went through a phase of pause, of "ok, let's take our time", and then it brought us to this step by step.

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# Some resources to go further

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## David's blog (<https://david.mercereau.info/>)

In particular, the following articles:

- Human and financial assessment of the construction of the straw hut (<https://david.mercereau.info/fin-de-chantier-2019-bilan-humain-financier-2/>)
- Study of the ecological and financial interest of autonomy (electric here) (<https://david.mercereau.info/lautonomie-electrique-solaire-cest-rentable/>)

## Other interesting resources

La Frênaie: a cooperative focused on practical ecology with which David and Marion built their yurt

## Oxfam 2015 report on the link between inequality and CO2 emissions:

*“The correlation between income (simply earned because even if this money is not spent, to obtain it there was production of wealth...) and greenhouse gas emissions is no longer to be proven. Earning a French minimum wage propels us into the richest 9% on earth, who emit 50% of carbon dioxide emissions.”*

David

