

**Show Transcript
Deconstructing Dinner
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Title: "Slow is Beautiful"

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Jon Steinman: And that was the voice of author Cecile Andrews, our feature guest on today's broadcast of Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman.

It's not very often we choose to feature one individual throughout an entire broadcast of this program, but upon immersing myself in a book titled *Slow is Beautiful* - new visions of community, leisure and joie de vivre, I thought that this was certainly not a topic worth rushing through, that is the topic of slowing down, of becoming more mindful of our daily actions, about understanding the cultural forces that continue to speed our culture up to the point of being out of control, and a topic that emphasizes the need to build what author Cecile Andrews calls, a culture of connection.

Our culture is one that, especially in the case of food, continues to create more and more conveniences so that our daily routines can require less work and conduct themselves with greater ease. But why is it that even with all of these conveniences, many Canadians are finding less and less time to do the things that matter, while many more now have too much time on their hands and have sunk into an ongoing state of boredom. It's quite the dilemma and one that may become clearer following today's broadcast.

I just recently had the opportunity to visit the city of Seattle Washington to attend a wedding, but Seattle is also conveniently the home of Cecile Andrews, and I caught up with her at her home located in a neighbourhood of the city called Phinney, and my conversation with Cecile will be the focus for today's show titled *Slow is Beautiful*.

Now as is often the case with this program Deconstructing Dinner, sitting through an entire one-hour on a given topic is not always easy. Many of us do it all the time in front of a television, but immersing oneself in radio for a full hour is a different story. Well part of the reason why we choose to air an entire hour each week on the subject of food, is simply put, because learning more about our food can have significant impacts on our lives and those around us. And for today's show, it's probably *most* fitting to slow down, step back, and listen in on what I consider to be one of the most interesting conversations I've had on again, this topic of slowing down.

Often the first idea that arises when thinking of slowing down is the now recognized concept known as Slow Food – the name of an international organization founded in 1989 and one created to counteract fast food and fast life. But slow food is not the primary focus of today's feature book titled *Slow is Beautiful*. Published in 2006 by British Columbia's New Society Publishers, the book looks deeper into every facet of our lives, whether it be work, play, family and friends, or community.

Now I chose to focus on this topic for an entire broadcast because of how important such an analysis of our lives is in order to fully grasp the importance of food and the importance of deconstructing our dinner as we do every week here on this program. But food as Cecile Andrews will suggest is a metaphor for life, in that our relationship to food is also suggestive of our relationship to living and how we connect with the world around us, whether it be plants, animals, people.... or ourselves. Cecile's book is similar to the way *Deconstructing Dinner* educates listeners about food, in that *Slow is Beautiful* deconstructs our consumer driven society in order to understand how we perceive happiness, what factors influence this perception, and how it affects our ability to feel alive and live our lives as deeply as we possibly can. Now this is, needless to say, a big topic, and one that is about to explore much of what we have always believed to be true and is also about to suggest that the vast majority of us are not in control of our lives. This content you are about to hear will suggest that what makes us happy, may not really be making us happy at all, and may simply be part of a cycle of depression. It's a topic that may instill regrets, or suggest thoughts that question well "why didn't I think of that before, before I got caught up in this culture of speed". But on a personal note, I would suggest this, that as this show is about to present some very penetrating and philosophical questions, I would say that the discovery of such information should inspire, it should inspire each of us to begin to reclaim control of our lives, much like the way *Deconstructing Dinner* looks to inspire reclaiming control of our food.

This isn't the first time here on the program where we have explored this idea of slowing down our lives. One of our first shows that aired back in January of 2006, heard from Carl Honore – author of the best-selling book *In Praise of Slow*. But a more recent show airing back in September of 2006 addressed much of what today's show is all about, and that was a comment made by my guest Daveq, who part of an *intentional* community operating a restaurant here in Nelson, said this, "That the Breakdown in the food system is a result of a breakdown in the human relationship." and this comment is also suggestive of how interconnected everything is, and also one that would suggest that the breakdown in the natural balance that this planet requires in order to operate most efficiently is too, a result of a breakdown in the way we interact with each other. One of the most important points I took out of the book *Slow is Beautiful*, is that slowing down is in and of itself a step in the direction of becoming more ecological citizens. The book even goes so far as to suggest that happiness itself is a precursor to becoming more environmentally responsible.

So before we hear segments of my conversation with Cecile Andrews, perhaps a short introduction will get you into a more personal relationship with my feature guest for today's broadcast. Cecile is a community educator and spends her time working to create

lives that are more sustainable, joyful and just. She authored the book *The Circle of Simplicity* and has contributed to many others. She has her doctorate in education from Stanford University and has been an adjunct professor at Seattle University and a community college administrator. Her work has appeared on PBS, CBS, NPR, and in the New York Times, Seattle Times, Los Angeles Times and Esquire.

I sat down with Cecile in her Seattle home to learn more about this book and her inspiration for devoting her life to encouraging others to slow down. *Slow is Beautiful* begins with a story about a *road rage* incident that Cecile encountered while living in Palo Alto, California, and it was this that helped inspire her book and led her to believe that slow food is symbolic of everything it is that we are doing.

Cecile Andrews: Well, we were there in Palo Alto and we'd been there many years before, and Palo Alto is, of course, an academic town but it's gotten richer and richer in the past few years. And so we saw something happen that we hadn't seen before. There was somebody across the street from us. We were parked in front of Whole Foods and there was somebody trying to parallel park. I identified with her, this middle-aged woman trying to parallel park and this car, an SUV had pulled up behind her and wouldn't let her back into the space. And the car behind her just kept laying on her horn and honking honking honking, over and over. What was going on here? We hadn't seen anything like this before when we lived in Palo Alto. Well, finally, this young woman in this SUV pulled up next to her and let her back in. She pulled up next to her and rolled down her window and just started screaming at her and then we saw her reach over to pick something up, and we thought, "Oh no! We're going to see some real violence." We she picked something up and threw it at her and then she sped off. Well the woman came out and she was in tears and we said, "We got the license plate [number] and we'd be happy to be a witness." So when the police talked to us last night, they said they'd contacted this young woman and warned her that she couldn't do something like this and we said, "What did she throw?" and they said it was chocolate covered raisins, which is bizarre. So we started thinking about this and what was going on and we told people about this and then everybody had their road rage story. But one person said, (which surprised me because everyone else identified with the woman trying to parallel park) that the person she felt sorry for was the young woman. What kind of a life was she leading to be in a state of mind that just because someone slowed you down, you just went ballistic? The person to really feel sorry for was this young woman because she must have been living in such a state of stress that [this] just put her over the edge.

So for me, it became a symbol of what was going on in this culture. This fact that people are driven to distraction, they're up against a wall in terms of time, and that they just easily can go off. And so then, as I began thinking more about it, one, I'm thinking, "Where was I?" I was in this place of great wealth, so that connected with me as we'll talk a lot about. But I was also in front of Whole Foods. And it started me thinking, how did this change (Whole Foods is a corporation) but it's about people buying organic, good food. How did this happen? And so then, of course, I connected it to the slow food movement and that just got me thinking, wow, what if we looked at everything in this

society, if we had slow schools, slow neighborhoods, one man said to me that he was a slow husband, I thought “oh, slow families,” and so slow became, for me, this kind of a metaphor to challenge our corporate consumer society which is the fast society. And then I began to see in all sorts of different ways how slow food really is very symbolic of everything we’re doing.

JS: Now this road rage incident that Cecile speaks of is certainly a symptom of our culture of speed. It was even more ironic that the event took place in front of a Whole Foods grocery store where more conscientious foods are supposedly sold. But this grocery store is really no different from any other; in that it too is part of our culture of speed, where instead of taking the time to visit local bakeries, butchers or farmers markets, all products are available under one roof. But of course such a model is very much a part of our culture, and in many parts of North America, the only options of where to buy food are large grocery stores. And so here on Deconstructing Dinner we often look at the political, social and cultural influences that create this culture of speed where most of us don’t even have the time to think twice about the food we buy. This is important to Cecile Andrews, as she suggests that any effort to try and change and slow down and be more mindful of our actions and our choices is next to pointless, if we don’t understand the many forces causing us to go so fast.

CA: Well these forces are so great that unless you have some understanding of them, you’re going to focus your energies in the wrong places. The big thing is that everybody wants to be happy. But if we don’t understand what happiness is, if we don’t understand how our corporate society undermines it, everything we do just won’t work. What human beings are, are animals that must make conscious choices, and if we don’t understand the forces, we can’t make conscious choices. It’s just like you’re operating in the dark. I like to think about that example where somebody was outside and he was looking for something that he’d lost and was looking around the light. And someone says why are you looking there because you lost it over there? and he says “well I can see here.” So that’s what we’re doing. We’re looking for happiness and well-being in all the wrong places. And unless we realize what these forces are . . .

It’s interesting because it’s like the early women’s movement, that women had blamed themselves for low self-esteem and other problems. Then when they realized the societal forces, that it wasn’t something wrong with them, but there were societal forces, it somehow liberated us to go out and make changes. It was almost like it freed us from some kind of weight when we thought there was something wrong with us. So ironically, even though the forces became larger, we were liberated to make the changes. So I think it’s just such an important idea that you must understand the cultural forces.

JS: This idea of understanding happiness is a significant focus of Cecile’s book *Slow is Beautiful*, and she suggests that it is imperative to understand happiness in a culture where happiness is being sold to us through our consumer-driven culture. Her comments connect directly to food in that today we seek happiness through all of the items we

purchase (from gasoline for our cars, to houses, to cell phones), and historically having more things did indeed make us happy, but what we really needed was food, and as food is now available in abundance, our drive to acquire more and more things continues.

CA: In this culture, science is the last word on everything. You'd think that we would understand this idea of happiness because we are human beings, but in this culture it's science. And so psychology has really done a lot of research recently, and it's come to confirm what the great wisdom sources throughout history have told us. Basically, human beings are complex people. My little dog is not a complex person and it's easy to see what makes her happy, treats, dinner, love, it's very easy to see. But we're complex and so we need to be able to think about happiness and so what we're given in this society is a very superficial version of what happiness is. But what happiness is, in our society, we think if we're rich, we'll be happy. If we have more stuff, we have more status, we have more money, we have more prestige, we'll be happy. What has psychology has found is that it is not true. That after a certain point, more money and more stuff does not make you happier. It just doesn't, and yet we go on, assuming it does and so we have devoted ourselves, particularly in this country to the pursuit of money, status, and it doesn't make us happier. Now what's interesting is, (and this is why it's so important to deconstruct things because in the past, in this culture, particularly in America and Canada because we are young cultures) getting more did make us happier because we began with very little. You wanted more so you could feel you had enough to eat, you had enough security, and so it used to work. But it doesn't work anymore. It's like our tragic flaw. The idea that cultures die when they keep doing what used to work and they don't stop to ask themselves, "Is it still working?" And it's not working in this culture. And so we're in a vicious cycle unless we stop and ask ourselves, "what is happiness? What is it that makes us happy?" We'll keep on going in the direction we've been going, which is happiness is on the decline. Depression is way up. Until we ask ourselves, "What's going on here?" we'll keep going in this really dangerous direction.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and today's broadcast titled Slow is Beautiful, the title of a book published in 2006 and authored by Cecile Andrews – who is the focus for today's broadcast. I recently visited the city of Seattle where Cecile calls home, and I sat down with her to discuss this idea of slowing down in our culture of speed. This understanding of happiness that Cecile focuses much attention on throughout her book sparked greatest interest when I came across a section that addresses our instincts that have evolved over time to operate within what is referred to as a feast-or-famine mode – whereby historically we would either have plenty of food or hardly any at all, and now in a culture where food is constantly available, we operate our lives with instincts and inclinations that no longer work in our modern society.

CA: I mean if you think back, and we think about people who are hunters and gatherers, which was the majority of our time as humans, maybe one day you would kill a deer and everybody would eat a lot. And then another day, you wouldn't and so you would eat

less. So we evolved to have this, every once in a while you'll get a lot of food, but a lot of the time you won't have it. And now we just have food available all the time. And so, again this is a lack of being mindful, a lack of thinking things through, a lack of acting without thinking [about] what you're doing. And so it's put in front of us and we just take it. And of course it's not just that, we're manipulated as well, into taking it. I also think, (and this isn't something he necessarily says but I think we would agree with this) is that food represents so much, your relationship to food almost is your relationship to life. People have a sense of emptiness and they're trying to fill it by constantly eating. And so food becomes the symbol of not stopping to think about the quality of what you have. So if I take in every little experience and don't even say, "Is this a quality experience?" it's not going to lead to happiness, particularly in a society that says it's an experience, usually of things and not of other people. Our recent thing, with the new iPhone, a piece of technology comes to us, particularly I think, in America, and we just go crazy over it. Now I heard (and I don't have any personal experience with this) but I read that the Amish, when a new piece of technology comes across, they will ask, "What will it do to our community? What will it do?" so they think it through. They reflect on it. We don't reflect. We gobble things down. Isn't it interesting, these words that come from food? We gobble anything that comes in our way. We just consume it. Essentially, someone can consume their food, is to gobble it down, to devour it without tasting it. That is what we do with food and that's what we do with life and maybe if people stopped to think about their approach to food. Think about our approach to food. So many of the books in this country are about dieting, about denying yourself food, this basic life form, and it's like denying yourself life. What do they take in instead? They take in some sort of chemical that's supposed to help them lose weight. It really is what you're using and exploring in our relationship to food is an incredible metaphor. It's not only in itself an interesting thing, it is an incredible metaphor. And so if people just stopped to think, talk about dysfunctional, our relationship to food. And so if you stop to think about, wow, our relationship to food, maybe change the rest of your approach to life.

JS: In furthering Cecile's idea that food is a metaphor for life, I was struck by her reference to the way in which we gobble things down without even tasting them. Now this essentially is the way many North American's now eat, and as a result, much of the food we find on grocery store shelves today hardly tastes anything like the versions of such products created by small scale producers, or bakers, or fruits and vegetables grown by local farmers. Taste is essentially disappearing from our food supply. And so if food is a metaphor for life, does this suggest that we are also experiencing other parts of our life whether it be work, relationships or leisure, and not fully tasting those.

We have become so out of touch with where we live that most of us now seek pleasure from anywhere but where we actually call home. It's this perception of what makes us happy - this continual consumption and ongoing desire to go on distant vacations and purchase items produced thousands of kilometers away that is fueling our rapidly changing climate. And so now, here we exist at a time where more than ever, we need to redefine what makes us happy, we need to invest *all* of our energy to work towards a new future

and a new way of living. But as Cecile Andrews stresses in her book *Slow is Beautiful*, we face many barriers to realize such a vision, and she suggests that there is a lack of energy to do so because people are beaten down, overworked, stressed and depressed. And so I asked Cecile, how can people become inspired to work towards becoming more mindful of our actions and more in touch with our surroundings.

CA: First we realize what doesn't make us happy, then we have to realize what does make us happy. It's very very clear; once again, it's our relationships with other people, strong caring relationships. And Maslow's hierarchy of needs were always great. Our security, safety, a feeling of connection with others, self-realization, all those have to do with other people. You don't have any of those unless you have good relationships with other people. So this is very clear. If you're one of the people that I talk a lot about, the psychologist, Casser, if you're devoted to what he calls materialistic concerns, you care about status, you care about money, this doesn't lead to happiness, and because it leads you away from caring about people. You can't want to be famous and rich and at the same time be caring and kind and compassionate. It doesn't seem to work because if you want to be rich, it means you're got to beat everybody else out. So, if people come to realize that relationships with other people, friends, family, community are what make you happy, then you have to start asking, "Well, how do you get this?" and I do think (because we point out all the problems in this society, we're really very good at that) that we have to give people vision because that's what gives them energy. We have to have a vision of what's possible, of what makes people happy. Where do you get this vision? What I love to do when I give a workshop on this is ask people, I always get them in small groups so that they'll talk and really connect, I say, "When in your life did you really experience community?" Everybody has a story. Everybody can go back in their memories and remember something. And when I do this, and I'll do that with any size of audience, I'll feel the energy in the room just go up as people tell their stories of this memory of community. Then I'll ask them, "What was at the heart of the community? Give me one word, one phrase." So hands are going up all over. They'll say caring, kindness, intimacy, joy, laughter, security, and so that comes out. This is the definition. So creating this vision, one is having people we can still get in touch with. Maybe we're raising generations that are not going to have those memories. I hope that people still do, but it's going to be much harder. Even kids of today, the overscheduled kids, they don't have as many images of when they were young and hanging out and playing games and going to picnics because those things are disappearing. And that's the way we inspire people, is give them these visions of community.

JS: Following Cecile's suggestions of how we can find the energy to become more environmentally responsible and mindful of our actions, she also suggested one way through which people can begin to experience this vision right away, and her suggestion ties in to a recent broadcast of *Deconstructing Dinner*, and that is the experience of the farmers market.

CA: And one of the experiences of that vision is what's going on with farmers markets these days. My husband and I go to four farmers markets here in Seattle. We have one on Saturday, one on Sunday, one on Wednesday, and now in our own neighborhood here in Phinney in the north Seattle neighborhood, we have one in our neighborhood that's just incredible and the delight, the kind of joy people have in going to this. And this is, again, where the slow food movement was just, the vision, slow food starts with the vision of people coming together as a community and enjoying themselves and enjoying good food but then it connects it to social justice, you have to treat people well. And so you deal with small farmers instead of big corporations. And it goes to environmental concerns. You have to treat the soil well. You eat organic. And Bill McKibben and his new book, *Deep Economy* says that in farmers markets, there are ten times the number of conversations than you have in a supermarket. When we go up to our farmers market now, we see our friends, we see people we didn't even know lived in the neighborhood, we talk, there's people singing there. We have tables in the middle so you can sit and converse. So you can give people a vision of what's possible, and farmers markets give people that vision.

JS: And this is *Deconstructing Dinner* where we are listening to segments from my conversation with Cecile Andrews, author of the book *Slow is Beautiful*. One recurring comment received about the content of *Deconstructing Dinner*, is that a lot of the information learned on the program of what is going on behind the scenes of our food system, can make one feel guilty, maybe sad, maybe angry. Now it would appear that what this is, is a fear of being mindful. But Cecile Andrews would disagree that such fears should even exist, in that being mindful is indeed a necessary step to becoming happier. It's an interesting idea, that there is a connection between ecological responsibility and social-well being – that before one can truly embrace life and be happy, one must first become more mindful of one's actions, and then happiness too will encourage more mindful living. Who ever thought that happiness was a green way of living?

CA: Theodore Roszak, who has done many books that I really love, says that now the needs of people and the planet are one. As we pursue happiness, we become more ecologically mindful because we're not focused on the consumer society. And the consumer society destroys. It's interesting, the word consume is a very destructive word. The fire consumes something, somebody's consumed by jealousy, nobody's consumed by happiness. Even though I can never believe how we let ourselves become consumers it's really a very good description. Because that's what we're doing, we're consuming nature. The same mindset that destroys nature also is destroying personal relationships. I always like Martin Buber who talked about I/Thou vs. I/It. That I/It is when you objectify, when you make people into commodities and nature into commodities, and what you want is an I/Thou relationship that you want a real connection with people, with the planet. Mindfulness is a lot of different things. One, it is very conscious decision-making. But mindfulness is also going through your day in a way that you notice things. That you connect with it. And if you're going fast through your day, you're not noticing

anything, you're not experiencing happiness. Here we are on this beautiful sunny day, and I've been sitting out in my backyard and this is so beautiful. And the word again from food, when we talk about savoring our food, we're talking about savoring our lives, savoring your day as you go through it. When I used to work full time as a community college administrator, I'd rush through cleaning my kitchen and I'd think, "Oh god, I've got to get through this, it's been bugging me." And now, when I do it mindfully, it's like "oh, wow I really love this kitchen and aren't I lucky to have this kitchen and it's so nice and a sunny day and isn't it great to be able to sit in this backyard and the birds are flying around and a hummingbird comes up and, you can't do that if you're rushing through your day. So mindfulness lets you get in touch with nature as well. When you care about nature, you want to save nature. If a person has to spend their whole day in a corporation and a corporate setting, they're not outside, they're not having anything to do with nature, they're not going to love nature as much. But if I get a chance, if I have the time to connect with nature, I would want to save it because I've had an experience and I realize that experiencing life is also experiencing nature. It's the universe. It's savoring, it's being mindful, it connects you with everything that our rushed lives take you away from.

Music

JS: And that was musician John Tracy and this, is Deconstructing Dinner a weekly one-hour radio program and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman. You can learn more about this program and podcast or listen to an archived version of this show by visiting our web site at cijly.net/deconstructingdinner. On today's broadcast we are listening to segments of a conversation I had with author Cecile Andrews upon my recent visit to Seattle Washington. Cecile released her book *Slow is Beautiful* just last year in 2006, and for the full one-hour of today's broadcast we are exploring this idea of slowing down our lives, what factors influence our culture of speed, and what positive impacts more mindful living can have on our food, and our happiness.

Now in just a moment we will begin to explore two more very important topics on this quest to understand how our culture of speed impacts our happiness. The first is the current state of the workplace and the second, the growing gap between the rich and the poor, both of which are topics necessary to deconstruct when trying to understand how it is we can begin slowing down our lives. But first we come back to Psychologist Peter Whybrow who Cecile refers to rather often in her book. And Whybrow suggests that the way we currently live looks like the clinical definition of mania, whereby the short bursts of happiness that we do find on a daily basis may not be happiness at all, and instead is just part of a cycle of depression.

CA: Well, Peter Whybrow is a psychiatrist at UCLA's, the head of their institute; I think it's the Semel Institute of Neurological something-or-other. He really understands physiologically and psychologically these issues. And he does look at it from a physiological point of view. That mania is always (it's a manic depressive) mania is always that you're going up before the fall. So it begins with maybe pleasure and

excitement but then it gets out of control and you just start going faster and faster and faster, and then you crash and go back down. And actually, I did hear, I remember reading something that said Canadians think all Americans are manic-depressives. That we go up and then we go down. And that we get really excited, but there's a crash that always comes. So he's looking at it physiologically, but I think that we can see that in our everyday lives. We are going faster and faster. We're like that young woman in the road rage, she's going faster and faster and that was a crash when she was slowed down. She became furious. Then it evolves into anger and destruction and then it goes into depression and apathy and a lack of energy. I think that we can see that clearly in American society and I just wish everyone examined American society because there are still so many cultures that think, let's get rich, the recent president Sarkozy being elected in France said "we want to work more and earn more. There's no shame in being rich." Well there is shame in being rich. There's real shame in being rich. But that's what Reagan said to us, and that was a turning point for us after the sixties when Reagan came back in just about the time John Lennon was killed we began a descent. I think we began a descent . . . well maybe we were kind of manic then, we began our mania and maybe we're just becoming depressed now that Bush is here. But people should look at this society. We are manic depressives. We're running toward the cliff. We're lemmings going toward the cliff. What will stop us from going over the cliff, which is not just individual, personal destruction, but it's destruction of the environment?

JS: The materialism that plagues our culture is as Cecile Andrews suggests, not much different than a drug, in that the happiness we find through the short bursts of excitement we receive from buying things or experiencing short-lived escapes from our daily routines, is in fact not enjoyment at all. As such an idea questions the very fabric of our North American culture, I asked Cecile to explain what is it we are instead enjoying during these short bursts of happiness, and she uses food as an example of how we approach our lives with such short term vision.

CA: We've thought that happiness is an easy subject. It is very very complex in a sense and one of the things, when you have a fast society you take short-term instead of long-term. So happiness and enjoyment always have to do with the long-term. It's easy to give drugs as an example and so much of what we do in this society is kind of like drugs as well. Going out and just shopping until you drop is kind of like taking a drug until you have a bad effect from the drug. It's kind of like manic depression. This whole thing of enjoyment is that you have to be able to sit down and ask yourself, "How am I feeling?" And again you don't have any time to consult your feelings when you're rushing around. I think of enjoyment as when you wake up in the morning, do you feel excited about your day? Do you feel like today, "I'm going to get to do . . . wow and then I'm going to get to do, oh that's great!" And then at the end of the night you have this sense of fulfillment, you have this sense of peace, a kind of inner peace, of peace of mind, and it's a vitality. I always say to people, "Does what you're doing give you energy or does it sap your energy short-term and long-term?" It's obvious that if we just stuff ourselves, that in the long term, with food, that it's going to hurt us. Not only is it going to make us fat, it

doesn't taste as good. I can't believe when I go to restaurants and look at the huge size of what, again particularly Americans, are eating. If you don't eat as much and you have smaller portions, and you focus on them, you enjoy it more. And you don't go away feeling awful. You don't go away feeling, "Oh I'm so stuffed I killed myself." Again, this enjoyment is looking at short term and long term and asking does it increase your vitality and energy or does it take it away? Does it make you feel like life is good? Does it make you feel caring to other people?

JS: As Cecile suggests we need to examine North American society more critically, in doing so we also arrive at wealth inequality - this growing gap between the rich and poor. In the case of food, often one of the greatest barriers to purchasing foods that are grown and produced using more environmentally and socially responsible practices is that of affordability. But upon further analysis, we also find that by supporting the dominant food system by purchasing foods that may be more affordable, we are essentially encouraging the widening of this gap between the rich and poor, and this is the gap that continues to make foods even more unaffordable. It is often made clear here through the content of *Deconstructing Dinner* that the only winners in the food system are the large multi-national corporations, who are of course behind the wealth inequality that we see today. And as the food we choose to purchase is also a significant determinant of health, wealth inequality is beginning to be seen as a determinant of health as well. And Cecile Andrews describes her findings.

CA: This, to me, is one of the biggest ideas that I've come across in a long time. It's something that I didn't suspect and in fact, very few people understand now. It's really on the edge and there's research [that's] been done by Harvard people, Yale, it's just so much research. But it isn't . . . even with Michael Moore in his new movie *Sicko*, I don't think he even made the link as much. What it says is that the biggest predictor for the health of a country as measured in longevity which is a traditional way of measuring health is the gap between the rich and the poor. The size of the middle class, the wealth distribution and that the bigger the gap, the more it affects your longevity. The United States, in the fifties, used to have the greatest longevity. We had the biggest middle class. We had strong unions. We had progressive taxation. People were taxed at the top. 91% is an incredible taxation rate. And then gradually, particularly with the Reagan years saying, "Alright, the trickle-down economy, let's take away all controls, let's not tax the rich." it began to go the other way. And now of the industrialized nations we're at the bottom of almost every measure of well-being. Certainly in longevity, in terms of health, in terms of infant mortality, child welfare, prison, all of these things, we're at the bottom of these measures of well-being and we have the biggest gap between the rich and the poor. Now, you think whoa, you know the poor are suffering. We know the poor have poorer health than the rich and we think it's because they don't get as good health care. That's part of it but that's not the only thing. What happens when you have this big gap (the easiest way to describe it because it's complex) is social cohesion is destroyed. Social trust is destroyed. People are pitted against each other. And it comes back to this; the most important thing is your relationships with other people. We have such a

competitive society, in America particular. In school, you have to compete. In sports, it's reinforced. We see people competing for good looks on our commercials. It's everywhere in our society and so it carries over into the way we treat each other in every aspect of our lives and so social trust . . . I mean, our essential view of life in this country is it's a dog eat dog world, you better get the other guy before he gets you, use any tactics you can to get ahead because if you don't you're going to be trampled. That's very bad on your sense of well-being. You don't feel cared for. You don't feel caring. You don't feel safe. You don't feel loved. That is at the essence of this gap between the rich and the poor. Other people have looked at it. Status Anxiety is another book that Alain de Botton says it's also the way people treat you. Others have said that it gives you less control over your life. A feeling of control over your life is very important. They're really beginning to try to figure out why this gap between the rich and the poor is so hard on your health. Canada still does, Canada still lives, in the Cascadian part from Alaska down to northern California we're all kind of a similar bioregion, a lot of things similar, that people in Vancouver live two years longer than people in Seattle on average, and this is because you still don't have as big of a gap between the rich and the poor as we do. I just think that this is an incredible idea. It says that equality works best.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and today's broadcast titled Slow is Beautiful where we are listening to segments from a recent conversation I had with author Cecile Andrews at her home in Seattle Washington.

We've been speaking a lot about the definition of community here on today's show and it is a recurring theme on many broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner. But what we rarely explore here on the program is where much of our modern day sense of community now exists, and that is in the workplace. For most North Americans about 2/3rd of our waking hours during the 5 day work week are spent with those in the workplace, and so much of our lives are essentially spent with people who we often don't really choose to spend time with. And so it is essential when exploring this topic of slowing down that we understand how the workplace affects our happiness, how it affects the time we have to focus on our relationships with those outside of work, and how much time we have left to pay attention to our food.

CA: One of the things you want in life to feel joyful is to have balance. And if you work too long, you're just going to be exhausted. And there's a high correlation they have found between people who watch a lot of television and people who work long hours. Because as you come home, you're exhausted, all you can do is turn on the television. Most of us would agree that most television is not very high quality. It does not give you a sense of joy and vitality in your life. In fact, somebody said when you're watching a sitcom apparently you're in a mild state of depression when it's over. I'm not sure exactly why, because basically you're having a shallow experience. But it isn't just working long hours, which is something that I work a lot, but the quality of our workplace and again this comes back to the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of status. That's what our workplace is focused on now. And because we have very few safeguards

. . . the point is when you have this big gap between the rich and poor, what it means is your government has not put safeguards on. So everybody is very afraid in the workplace that they're going to be laid off. I was just visiting some French friends the other day and of course they're undergoing a challenge to their system, but my friend said it's very hard to lay people off in France. Not just in the government. For us, in the government, it's not as easy to lay people off. But in a corporation, particularly now that unions have disappeared, you can lay anybody off. So everybody is afraid of being laid off. What that means is that people don't have much power in the workplace. Not only are they very anxious in the workplace, they're afraid to speak up; I've got a book that I probably won't read called *Speechless-The Decline of Free Expression in the Workplace*. What you have then is you go to work, you feel scared, you feel anxious, you're afraid to speak up, you might be treated badly, but you have no recourse. In fact, apparently the most important part of satisfaction at work is your liking the other people, your sense of community. And that's being destroyed as people start getting laid off more. And then a lot of people at work are just doing stuff that doesn't seem important. They're making products that aren't important; they're involved in doing stuff they don't believe in. I worked in a community college for many years and I saw what I thought of as the corporatization of the community college. And it was much more, how can we benefit corporations, how can we get them to support us, than the idea of education for democracy. And then there's a lot of backbiting at the workplace. And then as it speeds up, you don't get to stand around the water cooler and have conversations. The workplace, unfortunately, is our main source of community these days because that's where you see people. But that's being destroyed as you have no time, as you communicate with email. If I could change anything it really would be the workplace. This is one of my biggest themes. We don't have time for the things that matter.

JS: The suggestion that we spend too much time in the workplace is certainly not a new idea. In fact it was back in 1932 that well-known educator and writer Bertrand Russell wrote the essay *In Praise of Idleness*. In it he emphasizes how much a labour force could produce and he looks back to World War I when a significant population of the workforce was off in combat, yet the remaining labour force nevertheless was able to produce enough to satisfy the basic needs of society. Russell used this example to suggest that we should have adopted a four-hour workday.

And so with that said, Cecile Andrews suggests that the workplace and culture we now embrace, is not so different from slavery. And she points to the writings of Roger Gottlieb who makes connections between Nazi Germany and our modern day workplace. He points to the many Nazi workers who were so willing to conduct such atrocities, and goes on to suggest that even today, we remain as willing slaves, working in industries that are destructive, conducting our lives without much thought, and doing so in order to acquire things we don't really need.

CA: But what really struck me about reading about Nazi Germany was that people were very anxious to get the approval of the people above them. And a lot of the things people

were doing . . . it meant so much to get other people's approval which is another way of looking at status. And this whole thing of coming back to . . . again, all of these things are vicious cycles. If you are raised in a very caring setting, if you have parents who accept you for who you are, who listen to you and you feel valued, you're not just there to impress other people for them. So many parents, it's like their kids are these commodities to show off, it's like, "Oh look, I've got a kid going to Harvard and I'm so special." Well then, what you do, if you don't have caring, you grow up wanting other people's approval all of the time. And it really is a form of slavery in a sense because you're not free. You're not free to be who you are, to pursue who you really are. The person who's work I was exploring on that, (who now I can't remember, you'll have to add all that) I was just struck by his description of Nazi Germany and well, "I ran a good department and I got approval from my boss. I pleased the people around me," it was a kind of banal evil. It was evil that just masqueraded as just being a good worker. So that was very frightening. Now, I think there were so many ways that we can fall into Nazi Germany, and of course one of the books I used is *They Thought They Were Free*, and it happens in little ways. That you just gradually give up little freedoms. I right now, feel very hopeful. I think that there is a turn, at least in this country, of recognizing what Bush and his people are doing. People are starting to say "no, I'm fighting back; I'm not going to go along with this." And maybe we can say, one of the things Bush has done is he's gotten liberals to get out and get active again. But we do have a history of democracy. We do understand freedom of speech, freedom of the press, even if we don't feel we have it. We have it more than they certainly did in Nazi Germany. As I say, I do feel hopeful. But our weak spot is the workplace.

JS: In closing out today's broadcast featuring author Cecile Andrews, our conversation ended with suggestions on how we can begin slowing ourselves down, and she uses one example of a campaign that was launched as part of the Phinney EcoVillage called Stop and Chat. Cecile is the cofounder of the Phinney EcoVillage in her Seattle neighbourhood. In providing this example she stresses one thing, that the effort must be conscious.

CA: The thing I like the best in our Phinney EcoVillage is our Stop and Chat campaign where we encourage people to just step outside their doors and talk to their neighbors. Before, you go by, you see somebody in their yard, you avert your eyes, you're in a hurry, you don't have time. But now you stop and chat. There's something about feeling like you belong in an area by stopping and chatting with people. It affects your feeling of being a part of the human family if you know you can just step outside your door and chat with people. And in a rushed, fast, competitive society, you can't do that. This is very exciting and everybody can find meaning by trying to create community. It's something everybody can do. We can't get rid of Bush that easily. But we can do something about our food. We can do something about our community and it gives you a sense of hope and excitement. But this idea of being out, and you're communicating with people as you go through your day, it's hard to do that in today's society so it has to be conscious. So when I talk about slowing down, I do mean physically slowing down and

that there's several levels of the slow life. One is moving in a leisurely, unhurried, calm, reflective manner, that you are observing life, you're experiencing life. The next thing is to have times of leisure, of big chunks of time when you can read, you can do art, you can sit and do nothing, we need that. The third level is creating this counterculture and to work to change the policies. But it's having this belief system that we have to work on. So when I say slow, you have to think always of an acronym. I think of slow and not just less speed, but I like the acronym which I've come up with, Sustainable Lives Of Wonder. But it always has to do with the sustainability and with a sense of joy, that those things have to go together.

JS: And that was Cecile Andrews, author of the book *Slow is Beautiful* – published by British Columbia's New Society Publishers. I sat down with Cecile at her home in Seattle Washington where this interview was recorded, and you can learn more about Cecile by visiting her web site at cecileandrews.com. And if this topic of slowing down is of interest and you would like to learn more, you can check out our January 26, 2006 broadcast titled *Paying the Costs of not Paying Attention to Eating*, which featured an interview with Carl Honore, author of the book *In Praise of Slow*. That show is archived on our web site.

CA: Well I think all of the forces in this culture are basically forces of sterility. To compare again going to a farmers market and going to a corporate supermarket. You go into the supermarket and it's a sterile place. Everything is in plastic. You don't talk to the people. There's sterile muzak in there. You don't hear nature. You're separated from nature. It's always a very clean place, but it's sterile. In my farmers market, I take my dog, I can touch things there, I can talk to people. If feelings and emotion are not important, which they're not if money's the most important thing then everything does become sterile. You're not going to ever experience joy and happiness and gaps and connection in the corporate society.

JS: That was this week's edition of *Deconstructing Dinner*, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant John Ryan.

The theme music for *Deconstructing Dinner* is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

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Till next week.