Walden, or Life in the Woods (1854)
From *Where I Lived and What I Lived For*
By Henry David Thoreau
Retold by Sara Simpson

I went to live in the woods because I wanted to slow down, pay attention to nature, and learn how to live a full life. I did not want to look back on my life when I was old and dying and discover that I had not lived. I did not want to live a fake life or just give in and keep myself busy pretending to want to like buying every new thing or spending time with people I did not like just to be accepted. I wanted to spend time paying attention to what is really important. I wanted to live deep and suck all the marrow out of life. I wanted to live as simply as I could; I wanted to get rid of anything I did not really need so I could finally understand the world. If I found out that the world was wonderful, I would write about it; if I found out the world was cruel and terrible, I would write about that, too. In church, people ask themselves what the purpose of humanity is. In church, people learn that glorifying God is the purpose of life, but I do not think most people live their lives in a way that glorifies God.

Most of us barely survive and call it living. We are more like ants than like people; we work and work our whole lives and never take time to relax or enjoy the world around us. We spend our whole lives paying attention to tiny details that do not matter. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! We do not need more and more material possessions. Instead of worrying about trying to do a thousand things, we should focus on two or three things and actually do them. You should be able to keep your accounts on your thumbnail. Simplify, simplify. Instead of eating three meals a day, just eat one. Instead of having 100 dishes, just have five. Our lives are superficial. We have so much stuff that we don't appreciate any of it.

The only way to get back to living instead of just surviving is to get rid of all the extra ideas and belongings in our lives we don't need. People think that buying things is the only way to live. They think

if they have more things, their lives will be better. People think they can't live without ice cubes in their drinks, talking on the phone, or riding in a car that can go 30 miles per hour.

People spend all their time working at their jobs, but they do not spend any time working on becoming better people. If we do not spend time working on ourselves, how will we ever have the creativity or energy to work at our jobs? People think the world will end if the railroad doesn't expand farther and farther. It's an interesting idea: if we spend more time taking care of ourselves, we'll have more energy for building railroads, but if we are happier with ourselves, we will not need to take train trips to escape life and make us feel happy. We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Every piece of wood used to build the rail lines represents a living, breathing person who spent his whole life working so you could ride the train wherever you wanted to go. The railroad tracks we love so much were built at the cost of human lives.

When the railroad is built in a new place, the people who ride the trains are happy, but the people who build the tracks are sad. It takes a lot of workers to make life convenient for the rest of us, and it isn't worth it. I hope that someday the people who are being worked to death for the sake of progress will realize they deserve to live and will stand up to the railroad companies.