

# THE MONEY IN THE CHIMNEY

by Rutherford

Following our departure from New Zealand, in late 1988, we lived for a year in Twickenham, outside of London. Due to the reduction in funding for arts programmes imposed by the Thatcher government, I had been unsuccessful in finding a post as a lecturer in photography. Although my wife had a part-time job with THE BODY SHOP in nearby Richmond, Surrey, her salary was insufficient to cover even our modest needs. By the end of December, we had barely £200 in the bank and our rent of £650 was due in three days.

For years, my wife and I had had a tradition of sharing a bottle of champagne on New Year's Eve. On the morning of December 31<sup>st</sup>, I reminded her that we hadn't yet bought our champagne. Ever the pragmatist, she argued against spending money we couldn't afford on such a luxury. I pointed out (quite reasonably, I thought) that, even if we were to forgo our tradition in the interests of economy, we *still* wouldn't have the money to pay the rent. Still anxious, she acknowledged the logic of this position and so, as the holder of the only bus pass between us, agreed to go to town to buy a bottle of champagne.

While she was gone, our five-year-old daughter (who was then at the stage of development known to all parents of preferring the company of one parent to the other) played upstairs in her bedroom. After a while, she called down to me: "*Daddy, Come look! I've found some money in my chimney!*" Assuming that she had found some coins in the grate, or play money left behind by the child of the previous occupants, I acted the dutiful father and invited her to show me what she had found – while preparing to chastise her for disobeying our instructions not to play in the fireplace. Down she came, her arm black to the shoulder with soot, carrying a roll of bank notes in a plastic bag bearing the logo of a well-known offshore bank – from which I counted out £800 in £20 notes. (We later learned from neighbours that a previous owner of the house had been involved in "shady businesses", and had probably secreted this away for a rainy day, and then forgotten all about it.) When my wife returned home with the champagne, I put on my most convincing look of disapproval, and asked her to guess what "her" daughter had done in her absence.

We had a great deal to celebrate that year; and were able to pay the rent, in full and on time.

And we have never forgotten the lesson.

Sometimes we feel as if we are standing on the edge of a precipice and that, just in front of our feet, a chasm falls away to the ground far below. Across the chasm is the place we need to be, but the distance is too great and our own power is insufficient to get us to the other side. An optimist may hope that someone or something will appear to bridge the chasm, and a pessimist will admit defeat.



The finder of the money in the chimney

We have found however, that there is a third way. We call it "*Living as if*" – being willing to trust, to live *and to act* 'as if' we can trust in the benevolence of (call It what you will) to provide what we need. It means being willing to step off the cliff, even though there is no visible means of support. We have found that, as our weight shifts out into (what appears to be) empty space and we pass the point of no return, solid ground rises up to meet our feet. But if we wait for a bridge to appear before taking action, it never comes. It waits for us to act first. (Years later, I was surprised to find this very idea illustrated in [a popular film](#).)