

So I'm Writing

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Dreams of Awen

Tales of a sailboat,
a cabin in the woods,
and a quest for sustainability

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I haven't posted much on my blog recently, and there's a reason for this ... I've been writing.

Currently, I've got two writing projects on my desk – one nonfiction and one fiction.

The first is an account of our adventures during the building of our homestead in Port Neville Inlet. At the moment, I'm calling this book "*Dreams of Awen: Tales of a sailboat, a cabin in the woods, and a quest for sustainability*".

The second is a series of science fiction books which are falling under the general heading of "*The Ellendri Chronicles*". This is a story idea that dates back to my very early writing days, long before I'd become an oceanographer.

As it turns out, several friends asked me if I was going to take my blog posts and convert them into a book. Indeed, I had been thinking of doing that, and so that's how *Dreams of Awen* started. However, while I started to really enjoy writing, I was finding that the autobiographical work was tough going, even though I had much of the material already in preliminary form. Thinking to have a little fun, I picked up some of my old science fiction ideas, played around with them ... and got hooked.

So, unfortunately for those who were asking about the story of our personal adventures, this book will probably be a year or two in coming. In the meanwhile, I'm hoping that maybe by late winter, I will have the first of my science fiction books up on Amazon. Possibly someone will even read it!

As a part of my writing efforts, I will occasionally post a teaser (but not a spoiler) from one of my books here on my blog site.

So, as a start, and for those who have asked, here is a excerpt out of *Dreams of Awen*:

We're off-the-grid – or living in the bush – or off our rockers. There are lots of descriptors that can be used to describe people like us. The trendy term for it is being OTG, and nuts like us are referred to as OTGers. Compared to most OTGers, we are way out there – not only off-the-grid, but with a 15 mile boat ride to get to the nearest paved road that goes to anything that could be called civilization. The nearest grocery store is another hour's drive along that paved road to Campbell River. In the winter, when the weather is dark and gloomy and the days short, we get out shopping once every month or two.

We tell our friends about what we are doing, and most of them smile and nod, and look happy for us. I think some of them feel, deep down, a little tugging, like maybe they might like to do something like this someday, but then ... life's really too busy for all that simplicity stuff. Others, although they're too polite to say so, think we've just gone plain mad, loco, berserk; whatever type of strangeness you want to call it. So, what makes a couple who lives and works in the city and

who, on the surface, seems to be as much a part of the normal human culture as everyone around them, suddenly give up their careers, sell everything, and head for the bush? What makes people answer the call of the wild? Indeed, what makes some people hear the call of the wild in the first place?

I've pondered that question a lot in the past couple of years. I suspect that each one of us who has made the great escape will have a slightly different story to tell, and our motivations and reasons may vary, but I believe that there are some commonalities amongst us. Probably the most obvious thing that we all share is an extreme degree of individuality. I mention this first, since for every other point I make, there will be someone living out here who will say "That doesn't apply to me." And they're right – we are all unique.

Many of us have lived "normal" lives before we came out here. But I think a lot of us, underneath that thin skin of normalcy, were struggling with the status quo, the red tape, the muzzles, the mortgages, the environmental damage, and the spend-to-you-drop attitude of our modern society. Inside our skins, we weren't normal at all – we were all hot and scratchy and bothered. This provides motivation for transition, but by itself, it's not enough. Lots of my friends are bothered and worried by the current state of our culture, our country, and our world, but they're still part of the system, and we've made the break. Why?

To truly hear the call of the wild, you have to know the wild. Most of our city friends are essentially afraid of the wild – of the wolves, cougars, and grizzlies, of living more than ten minutes away from a hospital, of traveling by boat in less than ideal conditions, of mile upon mile of remote shoreline with no one else in sight. Most city folk are also missing many of the skills necessary to live out here, like gardening, animal husbandry, engine repair, carpentry, wilderness survival – the list is endless.

So how do you get to know the wild? Some of us are lucky. I grew up on a farm and Kennard grew up on a lighthouse. We learned many useful skills during our childhoods, and we also learned not to fear the wild. Both of us improved on our skills as we went through our lives. Kennard was a commercial fisherman for many years, traveling up and down the BC coast and fishing on his own. He learned how to navigate a boat in all types of weather, how to repair just about anything with a string and a piece of chewing gum, and where all the beautiful places and handy hidey holes were on this coast. I became an avid wilderness traveler, hiking, climbing, cycling, and paddling all over BC. I learned how to survive in the wilderness, and more importantly, I learned how to love the wilderness as a second home.

Others of us are very brave. Although it doesn't happen all that often, I have known people with very little homesteading or wilderness savvy who have just "done it" – grabbed the bit in their teeth, as they say, and run for it. I admire them, although occasionally it may appear that they have more guts than brains.

Even knowing the wild is still not enough. Whether you learned to know the wild as a child growing up in a remote setting, or whether you learned it as an adult through determination, wild abandon, and misadventure, most people still live “on-the-grid”. Furthermore, most people these days live in the city – the rural parts of Canada are seriously depopulated compared to a century ago. In fact, most country kids live in the city, including myself until two years ago. I think knowing the wild gives you the ears to hear the call. Being “un-normal”, uncomfortable with the status quo, opens those ears. But it takes a crisis to finally make you answer the call of the wild.

Looking back, I realize that my entire life was a build-up to the final “crisis” moment when I heard the call and answered. In my early years, I grew my ears. I learned the skills that made me comfortable getting dirt under my fingernails. I learned how to be self-reliant. I learned the laws of cause and effect. I learned the connections that bind us to the land – the rich smell of soil freshly turned in spring, the lazy days of summer when you can hear the plants growing and all of the animals are busy with their young, the colors of fall and the fall harvests, the quiet times of winter when everything sleeps waiting for spring. We humans are part of that cycle, although most of us can no longer feel it move through our blood. In my later years, I heard the call. I learned to understand the land, as a biologist and a person. I learned to travel through the land and be one with it, to take joy in its beauty, in the wild splendor of sun and storm and rainbow. And finally, after many years, I was ready to answer the call.

What kind of crisis finally drives a person to leave the trappings of civilization behind? I think it varies from person to person, but maybe some of the bits and pieces are similar. Our crisis was complex, and I think this is more common than not. There was an underlying increasing concern about climate change, human environmental degradation, population growth, and the general lack of sustainability of our human societies. For me, this was reinforced by my years spent as a scientist – both as a biologist and an oceanographer. Changes in government legislation had a negative impact on the business that Kennard and I operated. This added some financial fuel to the crisis. Issues with the health system made me realize that the so-called “safety net” that we all believe is going to be there for us when we need it really wasn’t there for us. This realization broke many of the ties that were holding me to civilization. After all, if you can’t get medical care when you’re living in the city, what difference will it make if you decide to live far out in a rural area? Opportunities to learn about permaculture and simplicity opened my eyes to new possibilities. The death of a family elder, and the unexpected impact that had on our already limited monetary resources, brought the crisis to a head. I did some calculations, realized that we would be unable to support ourselves in the city once we retired (and that was coming soon for Kennard), and decided we needed to take some immediate actions. We heard the call of the wild, and we answered.