

Unlimited **R.A.M.** Publishing

117 E. Louisa Street # 444 • Seattle, Washington 98102

Living Without It All

by Ray Arthur Monigold II
the story of a hard life loved

Living in a place without running water, without an indoor toilet (or any bathroom at all), without a telephone, without a radio, or television, or stereo, or iPod, without ANY electricity, without neighbors, or a store less than a day's travel is what I call living without it all.

I've lived in a few places without it all, and I never really contemplated the enterprise before the act. I don't know that contemplation would have set me off the endeavors or changed their outcomes. I don't even know if the contemplation would have been possible.

"So what must it be like living without it all?" I was once asked after foolishly mentioning my recent escape from the life simple. So, still feeling a bit free of thought, I answered - something like this -

Imagine living without being able to get a drink of water from the kitchen sink, by just turning the handle next to the faucet. First, there wouldn't be a faucet or handles to turn and secondly, there may not be a sink at all - just a wash basin. No, all the water you might need would be carried some distance in buckets, pails or old plastic gallon milk containers, from a public spigot or good hearted far off farmer. And if you have a garden, considerably more time will be spent carrying and storing water for all the plants.

Continuing the notion of contemplation, let's consider the simple act of being woken in the middle of the night by an uncomfortably full bladder, or aching belly. Get out of bed, get dressed, put on shoes and locate the lamp that will need a match to light because flashlights cost money you don't have or can't spend. Then go outside - rain or dry, hot or freezing - stumble up the path toward the smell of festering human dung and ripe urine. Open the door, chase off the spiders, wave the flies, skeetos and bugs away, then empty your bladder and or bowel - be careful with that lamp as the methane gas that rises from the pile below isn't just part of the aroma that is near impossible to get used to, but methane, which is easily set ablaze. Methane, after all, is natural gas. Oh, and remember, no neighbors near means no fire department, hell, there's no 9-1-1 service of any kind.

Return to the house, get some water from the washing pitcher or bucket or keg's spigot and put a dash of Doctor Bonner's liquid soap on your hands and wash up. You may or may not rinse. Use a towel or rag to dry off - oh, did I forget to mention that you gave up on paper towels a while back because of the money, or inability to keep the roll clean, dry and bug free or perhaps it was the disposal problem that all those little crumpled squares of dirty paper presented - YOU are the "Garbage Man". Now take your shoes and clothes off and as you crawl back into bed you remind yourself that drinking beer past six at night will just not work any more.

Eventually morning arrives, way before you're ready. The place is cold, even in summer because you, or whoever built the cabin or shack or shelter, put it purposely under a small spread of trees that offered extra protection in the rain or snow or blazing sun. So you need to make a fire. And if you're hungry or not, you need to eat. You've figured out, after a near fatal waste of supplies, that two meals a day will get you by. The first eats are breakfast vitals, made and consumed after competing a number of chores, and the other meal is a very late lunch or an early dinner - you name it.

Some folks brag about banking a fire so that you wake to the comfort of heat and the convenience of a ready to use cooking stove. True, "banking" or stacking wood in a fire box with just the right positioning and mixture of moist and dry wood can keep a fire holding through the night. But it costs wood. And of all the chores that need doing, gathering, sizing, cutting stacking and moving wood is by far the most time consuming. It is constantly rolling around in your head. As a matter of fact, most all other chores and activities are gauged by how much wood they will take or how much time they will take away from the wood chores. And if you plan on keeping your cozy abode UNDER those protective trees, you have to travel farther and farther for wood collection. With the exception of clearing a half acer or so for the next most important possession you have - the garden - you dare not clear cut an area either. In the spring and fall, with rains, a clear cut area will allow water or mud or both to attack you. And if you live in an area where it snows, the snow will find a way to use it's power against you if you've cleared an area anywhere you can reach. No - getting wood for heat and energy and light without damaging your keep is far more difficult than it seems at first thought.

Once a fire is built, as the first job in the morning, you'll have time to get a few other things done while you wait for the massive block of cold steel lined with fire brick to come up to a temperature that is useable, let alone making the room comfortable. That is, of course, unless the beast needs maintenance. Like the smoke that leaked from the stack joints into the room last night, causing you to let the fire die before it's allocated time, so as to avoid a hazard. Or maybe the ash box needs cleaning, or the grates need service, or the clinkers need clearing (if you've been lucky enough to use a bit of coal), or the fire bricks need re-stacking. Some of these chores can be scheduled, but like a used car, even regular maintenance won't keep the occasional major inconvenience from occurring.

I once lived in a place where the back roads were dusted with coal gavel at the first sign of snow. That weather would set me on a night long journey walking to, then up and down those distant roads collecting the fist size pieces of coal that had escaped the crusher while the coal was being loaded on the trucks. This coal meant not just more warmth, but fewer logs that had to be burned. There was a downside to using supplemental coal, the soot would build up much faster, especially if you got impatient and tossed in the coal before you had a throbbing bed of wood coals that would instantly turn the coal chunks into a red blob of nearly soot-less heat energy. Otherwise it meant extra maintenance, and usually a thorough cleaning of the stack pipes in the middle of winter. Because a stack that is carboned up due to a cold fire, WILL catch itself a light when the first HOT fire is cultivated. And a throbbing red glowing smoke stack inside the house or on the roof is scary. It WILL find all things combustibile within reach and burn them. It can take years to learn the subtleties of a perfect wood stove fire, but it only takes one rapidly extinguished stack fire, in a blizzard, in the dark, that leaves the cabin icy cold for days while repairs are made to teach you the value of waiting an hour for enough heat to toss in that fat log or lump of coal.

So while waiting for the morning fire to heat up there are the lamp wicks to trim, or replace and the glass chimneys to clean. And of course, bring wood in from the outside pile to the wood box indoors, which may require moving some logs over to the splitting pile and maybe even splitting some logs before breakfast. And there is the kindling pile. Staring a fire with no paper does take technique, but it's soon gained after you run out of paper and decide the hand full of books and magazines put up a good enough fight in your mind for their survival and escape fire starter status. They, after all, are your ONLY source of entertainment, no matter how many times you've read them.

Remember, we still haven't had breakfast yet. But after a few weeks your body has come to terms with the schedule and will have banked away enough energy from yesterday's final (second) meal to keep you going for a bit longer. But when you do have breakfast it won't be bacon and eggs, or ham and eggs or steak and eggs. Notice the theme of no eggs or meat? Chickens take time. Time that's better spent in the garden or preserving the food you've grown in the garden from being attacked by the chickens. Growing food for YOUR life that you've managed to keep from the gophers or bugs or birds or rabbits or deer or bear or frost or some blight that scoffs at all of the enemies you might use to fight it.

Live animals at a self sustaining retreat are way too expensive. They cost the only currency you can never replace - TIME. Once a minute or hour or day or - heaven forbid - a week is gone, it can never be gotten back, nor can the chores that were left incomplete. So animals are out. They present even more effort than wood or gardening demand. Animals can and DO get sick, or need to be killed, gutted, skinned, then eaten within a few days or preserved without refrigeration, usually by smoking - with wood - MORE WOOD! Cows need milking, goats need corralling and chickens will stop laying eggs or surprise you with overproduction. Hard boiled eggs are a sure way to experience the dreaded middle of the night trips to the outhouse. And how will you feed animals in the winter? What about warmth? More WOOD ! ? Gawd - NO !!

So your breakfast will probably have potatoes and beans and squash and corn. Remember, YOU have to stay alive or the whole enterprise goes bust with your last breath. PROTEIN - think protein. Consume complete proteins and you can live with nothing else but water. Complete protein can be had with equal parts of legumes (beans) and corn. THAT's your crop. Beans and corn. Potatoes, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, beats, carrots, watermelon and such are only needed to provide variety and a few treats. Becoming a vegetarian is so easy when you live in the woods, without it all.

I haven't even begun to share all the pitfalls and potential drawbacks of living a life of simplicity. But I also haven't shared the reasons I've done it a few time, either. The cloudless nights filled with the vast Milky way. The Aurora Borealis (in Alaska), with it's occasionally accompanying sounds of whooshing and howling. The beauty of a fresh winter morning with a blanket of white covering the ground. A morning where everything goes so right, the stove is clean and lights with one match. A morning when all the chores can be put on hold for a bit. A morning when you celebrate with a cup of that coffee that you've been hoarding for just such a day. You boil water in a sauce pan and toss in a spoon full of the almost black coffee and watch as the swirling water reaches up to swallow the powder and mix it around releasing a smell that fills the place right to the brim.

Times when you sit outside at night and watch as the sun pulls it's illumination from everything, leaving shadows that turn to the moments-old memory of your labors. The joy of a splash bath taken in front of your hot stove that dries you clean while you dress in your freshly hand washed clothes smelling of the sun where they flapped in the breeze all day.

Carving something from a piece of wood you found and gathered and cut. The joy of reading a book all alone in the quiet company of a hoot owl while the lamp light glow brings depth to the words on the pages. Breaking into boisterous song because your soul simply can no longer contain the joy of being. These are some of the reasons I still hunger for the suffering of a wilderness existence. A life of living without it all.

© 2006 - All Rights Reserved
 Ray A. Monigold
 Unlimited R.A.M. Publishing
 Founded in 1946
 117 East Louisa Street #444
 Seattle, WA 98102
www.INSIDETHEBOOM.com