

Living Off-the-Grid

Off-the-grid. It is a phrase that has many meanings in contemporary society and, more often, is misunderstood. When one thinks of people living “off-the-grid,” there are many stereotypes that get repeated. In truth, “off-the-gridders” come in many stripes and colors. Yes, there is the hermit/miser who can’t live in real society. The “hippie” trying to, in the words of the great Joni Mitchell, “get back to the garden.” There are environmentalists who feel that human beings should live a simpler and more land-based existence. There are also people who have careers and hopes for the “American Dream” like anyone else. Along the line, for philosophical and/or even practical reasons, they chose to strive for a self-sufficient lifestyle.

In our research, we have found that even the most dedicated “off-the-gridders” are not completely self-sufficient. The climate of the U.P. makes cultivating certain crops difficult, if not impossible. Lack of sunlight in the winter can make it difficult for someone to rely strictly on solar power. And most people, even “off-the-gridders,” love to stay in touch with their family and friends through modern communication devices such as cell phones and the internet.

In this exhibit, we will look at several examples of people living “off-the-grid” in the U.P. We will also look at their lifestyle “ancestors,” if you will. The Anishinaabeg peoples who never had a grid, the early European settlers who with the help of the Anish learned to survive in this region, and the “shackers” who lived on the cutover lands of the region and eked out an existence. Today’s “off the gridders” owe a great deal to these early peoples.

The Beaumier U.P. Heritage Center would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals and organizations to this exhibition:

Tyler Dettloff, Elizabeth Fust, Dr. Troy Henderson, Dr. Martin Reinhart and Tim Williams for assisting with writing the narrative of the exhibition.

Molly Snow for her transcription of interviews. Riley Crawford for graphic design. The Beaumier Center staff for installation of the exhibit.

John & Victoria Jungwirth, George Lundquist & Julie Foster-Lundquist, Sue Robishaw & Steve Schmeck and Karen Valley for allowing us to visit their homes and make their stories part of this exhibition.


Center for Native American Studies for images from the Decolonization Diet Project.

Hans Ahlstrom at WNMU-FM, for helping to spread the word.

The Decolonizing Diet Project by Dr. Martin Reinhart

Many of the foods common to the contemporary American diet originate from Indigenous cultures of the Americas. Tomatoes, potatoes, and corn are among other foods common in the contemporary American diet that are all Indigenous to the Americas. These foods are key ingredients in American foods today like pizza, French fries, and corn bread.





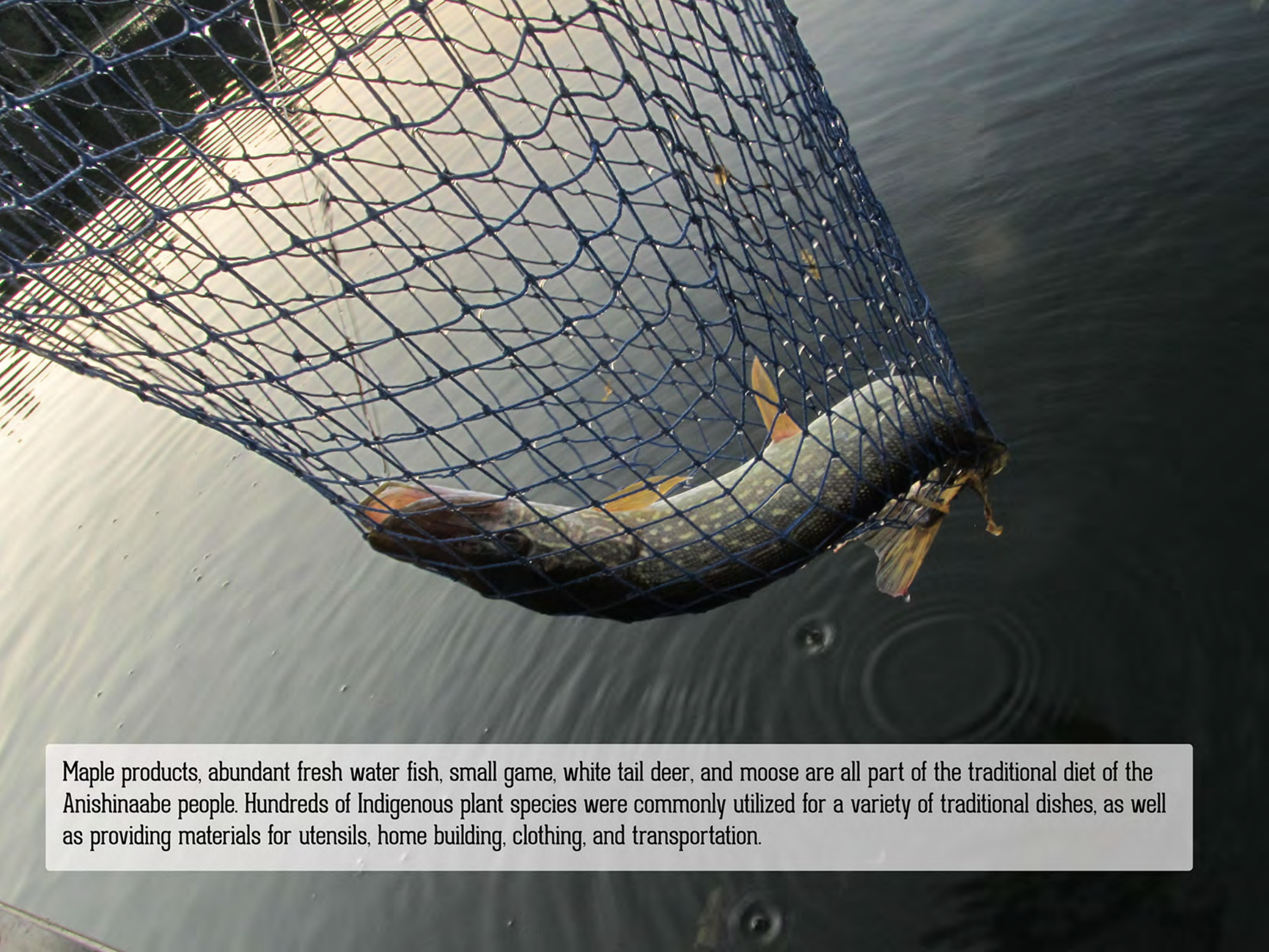
Corn, beans, and squash are often referred to as the Three-Sisters. When planted together, this triad creates an emergent condition that is mutually beneficial to each one. A fourth, less well-known sister is the sunflower which was often planted along the perimeter of gardens as a deterrent. The animals would stop and eat the sunflowers and pay less attention to the rest of the garden.

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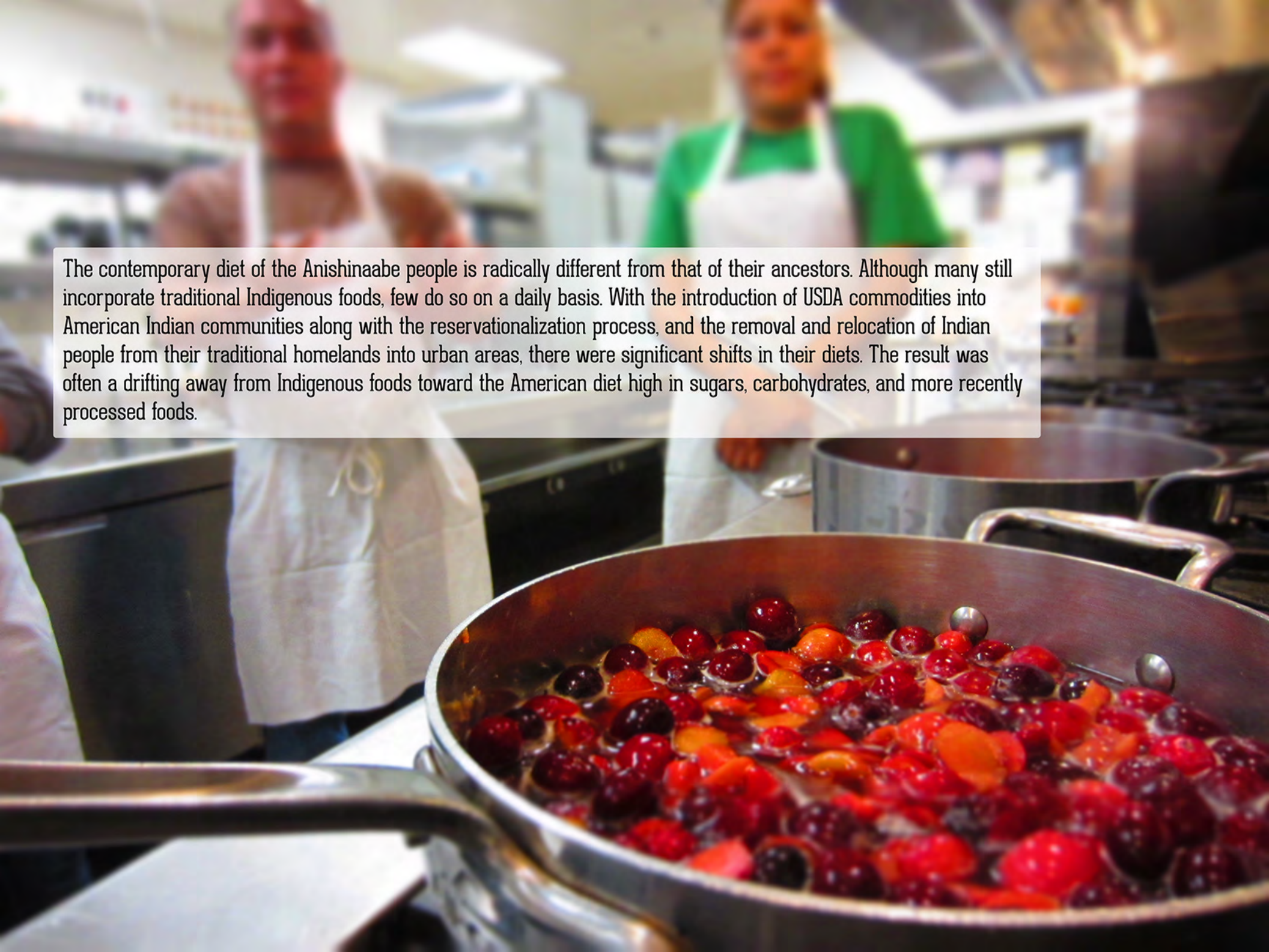
Here in the Great Lakes Region, manoomin [wild rice] has played a vital role in sustaining the Anishinaabe people during both pre-colonial and colonial eras. Manoomin is a prophecy food. It was foretold that the Anishinaabe people would come to a place where the food grew on the water and this would be their home. Manoomin is the food that grows on the water.



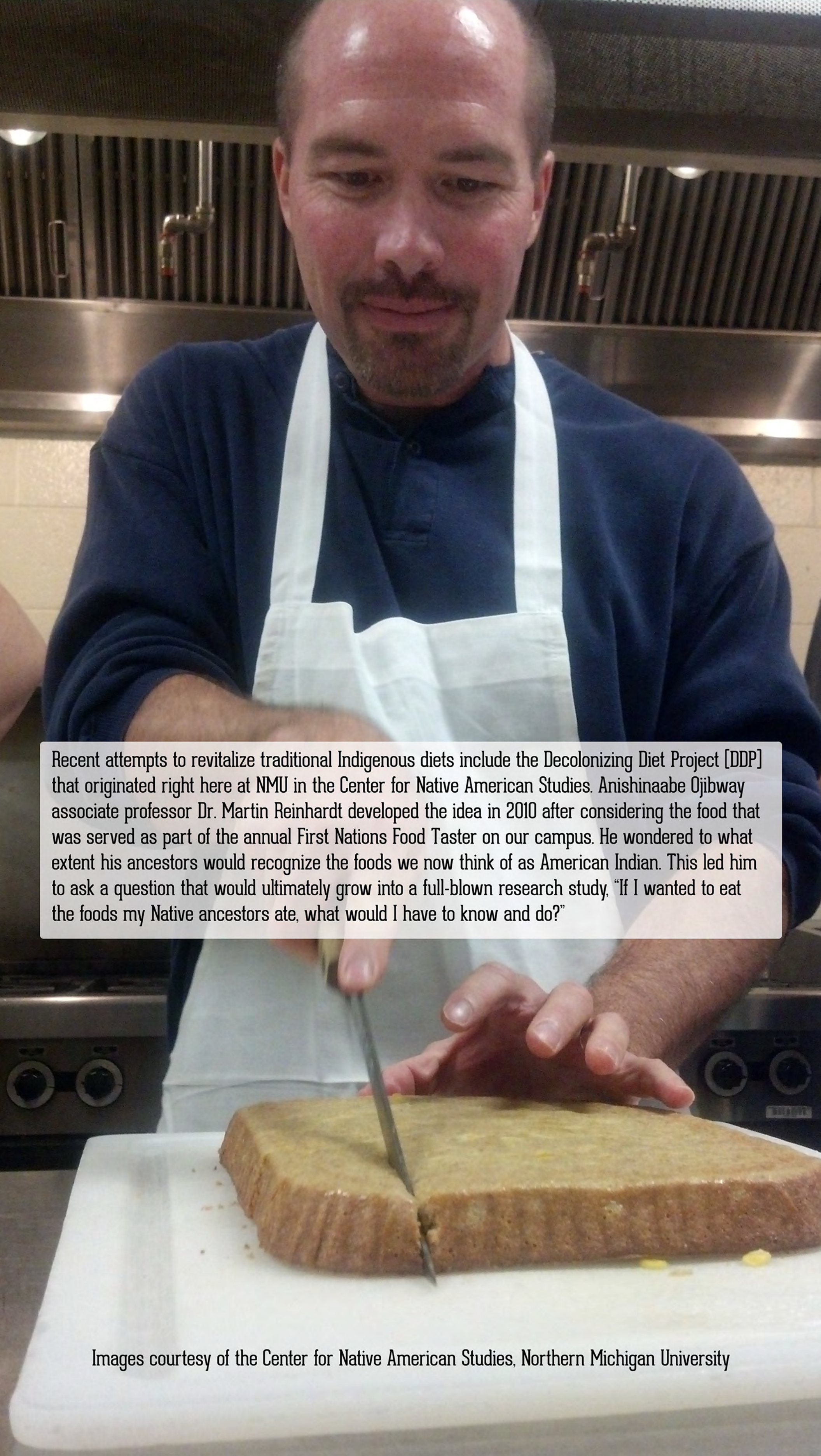
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Maple products, abundant fresh water fish, small game, white tail deer, and moose are all part of the traditional diet of the Anishinaabe people. Hundreds of Indigenous plant species were commonly utilized for a variety of traditional dishes, as well as providing materials for utensils, home building, clothing, and transportation.

A photograph of a kitchen environment. In the foreground, a large stainless steel pot sits on a stove, filled with a mixture of red raspberries, blueberries, and sliced orange segments. In the background, two individuals are visible, both wearing white aprons over their clothing. The person on the left is a man with a shaved head, and the person on the right is a woman with dark hair. The kitchen has stainless steel countertops and equipment. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

The contemporary diet of the Anishinaabe people is radically different from that of their ancestors. Although many still incorporate traditional Indigenous foods, few do so on a daily basis. With the introduction of USDA commodities into American Indian communities along with the reservationalization process, and the removal and relocation of Indian people from their traditional homelands into urban areas, there were significant shifts in their diets. The result was often a drifting away from Indigenous foods toward the American diet high in sugars, carbohydrates, and more recently processed foods.



Recent attempts to revitalize traditional Indigenous diets include the Decolonizing Diet Project [DDP] that originated right here at NMU in the Center for Native American Studies. Anishinaabe Ojibway associate professor Dr. Martin Reinhardt developed the idea in 2010 after considering the food that was served as part of the annual First Nations Food Taster on our campus. He wondered to what extent his ancestors would recognize the foods we now think of as American Indian. This led him to ask a question that would ultimately grow into a full-blown research study, “If I wanted to eat the foods my Native ancestors ate, what would I have to know and do?”


Images courtesy of the Center for Native American Studies, Northern Michigan University

On March 25, 2012, twenty-five people began a year-long adventure into the world of Indigenous eating. Data from this study provides insight into biological, cultural, and legal/political dimensions of these complex relationships. Regularly scheduled health checks, online journaling, video interviews, and photos were drawn on to paint a picture of this collective experience.





Outcomes of the DDP suggest that eating Indigenous foods at a commitment level of 25% or higher on a daily basis can result in significant losses in weight and girth. Eating at a level of 100% could also result in significant decreases in overall cholesterol, LDL, and triglycerides. Other implications are more focused on socio-cultural and legal/political factors. For instance, Reinhardt has continued to increase his knowledge of Indigenous plants and animals based on his participation in this study, and as a result has invoked his treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather more often.



For more information
about the Center for Native
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Europeans go off-the-grid



In the period of European colonization of North America, it would be accurate to say that all people technically, “lived off the land,” but there was a marked difference between the way Europeans and the aboriginal peoples of the continent lived. Europeans had a very structured financial system which entailed the creation of villages, towns, and cities. Here people could buy supplies that they needed, which meant that they lived “on the grid” in a certain way. For the First Nations, trade was important but most of the needs in life were collected, hunted, or made by themselves.

Land ownership was uncommon amongst the lower classes in Europe. This means that most peasants not only worked for land owners, but that their use of the land was regulated. Hunting for one’s own food was very restricted and the penalties for poaching were very harsh - capital punishment was not unheard of for such an offense. For many of the farmers and laborers who came to North America it offered opportunities to own land, which would provide lumber, crops, and game. Here the tradition of hunting amongst the French in North America began in earnest and is still a tradition that thrives in Canada and the United States [in particular in the Upper Peninsula].

Still, the original French settlers lived in village communities where there was a great reliance on the community. With the advent of the fur trade, this would begin to change. Soon fur traders, missionaries, and their voyageurs were heading off to the wilderness to trade with the Indians or to try and convert them to Christianity. The earliest expeditions were led by tribal peoples, since the French did not know where they were going or what they would be facing. Here, an added benefit was that they learned from their Indian guides how to live on the harsh climate and landscape of places like the Upper Peninsula. They were taught the foods that could be gathered and eaten, hunting and cultivation techniques, and how to build quick and stable shelters. Most importantly, tribal peoples taught the French how to build birch bark canoes which would make the entire fur trade and settlement of the Great Lakes possible. A new world was opened up to the French in North America, and the legacy of what they learned continues to this day.



Paintings of voyageurs by Frances Anne Hopkins [1838-1918].
Courtesy of the Library and Archives of Canada

Holing Up: Shackers in the Upper Peninsula

By Dr. Troy Henderson

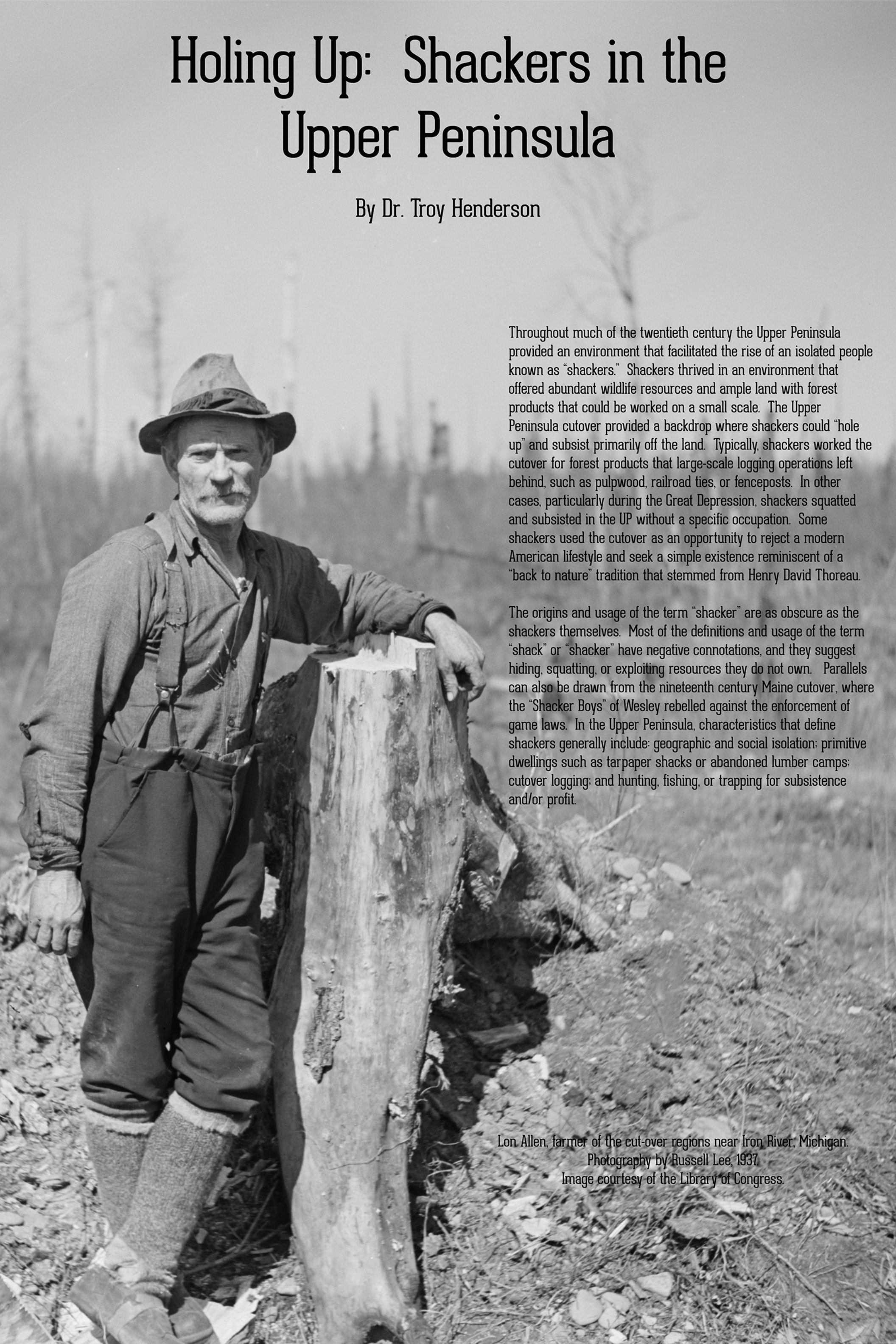
Throughout much of the twentieth century the Upper Peninsula provided an environment that facilitated the rise of an isolated people known as “shackers.” Shackers thrived in an environment that offered abundant wildlife resources and ample land with forest products that could be worked on a small scale. The Upper Peninsula cutover provided a backdrop where shackers could “hole up” and subsist primarily off the land. Typically, shackers worked the cutover for forest products that large-scale logging operations left behind, such as pulpwood, railroad ties, or fenceposts. In other cases, particularly during the Great Depression, shackers squatted and subsisted in the UP without a specific occupation. Some shackers used the cutover as an opportunity to reject a modern American lifestyle and seek a simple existence reminiscent of a “back to nature” tradition that stemmed from Henry David Thoreau.

The origins and usage of the term “shacker” are as obscure as the shackers themselves. Most of the definitions and usage of the term “shack” or “shacker” have negative connotations, and they suggest hiding, squatting, or exploiting resources they do not own. Parallels can also be drawn from the nineteenth century Maine cutover, where the “Shacker Boys” of Wesley rebelled against the enforcement of game laws. In the Upper Peninsula, characteristics that define shackers generally include: geographic and social isolation; primitive dwellings such as tarpaper shacks or abandoned lumber camps; cutover logging; and hunting, fishing, or trapping for subsistence and/or profit.

Lon Allen, farmer of the cut-over regions near Iron River, Michigan.

Photography by Russell Lee, 1937.

Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.



The Back-to-the-land Movement

Beginning in the late 1960s, America saw a boom in the number of adventurous people wanting a simpler and more wholesome life. Scorning the modern society and its glut-tonous abuse of both the planet and its inhabitants, these people sought to live more harmoniously and sustainably, and they moved out of the urban centers in record numbers. By one estimate there were as many as 750,000 to 1 million people who lived on communes during that time, and millions more who went back-to-the land independently.

The vast majority of those in the movement were both white and from a middle class background. America's economy at the time was quite strong, and it allowed those with the ability and will to experiment with different ways of life.

There were many different reasons that people chose to return to the land. Some found modern society to be repulsive and sick. They were disgusted by the daily rat-race, meaningless monotonous jobs, urban overcrowding, rampant corruption in the establishment, mindless consumerism, wanton destruction of nature, and pervasive advertising to buy things which they didn't need. These things and others made many long for a more simple life. There were also many who felt the need to redeem themselves because they had done nothing to deserve all the abundance they had enjoyed in their modern lives. Since its founding, America has had a longstanding tradition of equating hard work and moderation with virtue, and thus many romantically associated the simpler pioneering life with being the best for both society and the world as a whole.

In 1973, the oil embargo and resulting crisis saw a huge increase in oil and gas prices. There were many who saw this as a sign that we had reached a tipping point with the finite supply of natural resources, and thus even more people began to make the shift to living simpler and off the land. However, many at this time were now motivated more by fear than the notion of virtuous simplicity. Believing that the capitalist system was in a state of collapse, these homesteaders wanted to build a new civilization based upon community, healthy food, harmony with nature, and avoiding toxic chemicals.

However, as the oil shortage of the 1970s faded into the oil surplus of the 1980s, so faded the strength of the back-to-the-land movement. Many abandoned their remote and difficult homesteads to instead return to the relative comfort of the cities and their modern careers. While certainly not dead, the back-to-the-land movement faded back into relative obscurity during the subsequent decades of the 1980s and '90s.



I pick medicine
by Tyler Dettloff

Part One Punishment, Featuring Wiingashk [SweetGrass]

Plucking stray grasses from sandy soil with my face buried in tomato vines I got my first lesson in foraging. It was probably a scuffle with my brother or the dogs that got me sent to the garden with a tall basket to fill with weeds. I'd start with the grasses, easiest to tell. Spikey stems shot from the soil. I'd dip my hand in, then grip the groups of roots and rip it up. Silence and the garden soothed my hand and built muscle memory.

I was nine when I picked the wrong grass. Big clods of soil arose with each fist-full I plopped into the basket. "Eh, what do you think you're doin'?" my dad yelled through menthol cigarette smoke from the deck across the yard.

Sweetgrass is red at the base; one side smooth and the other can shave the dirt off your fingertips. Aromatic like sugar and vanilla when the wind lifts over a patch. Wiingashk is how you say sweetgrass in Anishinaabemowin, the language that named the thing in this place that I live.

Ma always burned sweetgrass braids during our dog funerals at our graveyard back in our woods, the only place I've ever seen Dad cry, the edge of the Delirium Wilderness. I treated sweetgrass as a weed when I was young. Now I've grown a patch from seed. Somewhere in my parents' garden there is a bare patch of earth. Waiting.

Part Two: Structure, Fearuring Miinan [Blueberries]

Sweat dripped down my forehead to my eyeball when Fargo the dog got all up in my grill and spilled the bucket of blueberries i had gathered. That's what I told Ma. That hot July sun made the swamp smell serious, as serious as Ma was about picking a good crop of blueberries. She'd keep watch on my brother, cousins, and me to make sure we weren't eating the berries we picked for her jams.

That was hard work. Not so much being outside hunched under the sun, but resisting to taste berries that we labored over. I got struck with a few knuckles and funny stern looks from Ma when I tried to sneak a berry. I learned quick to delay tasting the harvest.

Every winter, around February, I open a jar of Ma's Delirium Blueberry Jam. I coat my toast with memories of sweating under the summer sun and know I can make it through the harshness of winter and seasonal depression. Miinan is how you say blueberries in Anishinaanbemowin, the language that named the things in this place that I live.

I was still young when Ma hollered out to my dog just before he spilled the blueberries. Or I let him. Not sure what Ma did to the dog, but I sure had to pick up every single spilled berry off the ground that time. That was a hard winter.





Part Three: Curiosity, Featuring Shkitaagan [Chaga]

Dad always wandered in the woods, and still balances on the edge of Delirium. It must have been his old age that got him interested in chaga, a unique mushroom that is celebrated as a folk remedy for illnesses, even cancers. It could have been his adopted father's death that sparked his sudden interest in health. Or his biological father's death two weeks later. The one he never met. Somewhere between those two passings, I heard my dad laugh that he'd wander Delirium's Edge to deal with his grief. But maybe he wasn't wandering, maybe he was searching. Maybe he wanted to find medicine.

During the daylight he'd scan all the white birch trees he could find in the woods for black charred chunks. He knew not to take all the chaga he found. He left the top pieces and thanked the tree before tossing each solid black and tan chunk into a faded blue tent bag he kept strapped around his waist.

Dad must have put in a lot of hours before he filled up half the tent bag with chaga. He knew it is special stuff and that it is medicine. But he didn't know how to use it, didn't even know where to start. Dad gave all his chaga to Daraka, my girlfriend, for her to barter for teachings around her reservation. I could see my dad give up when he handed off his bag of chaga. But Daraka and I knew how much my dad was offering up when he handed us the bag of chaga. Shkilaagan is how to say chaga in Anishinaabemowin, the language that named the things in this place that I live.

I've searched everywhere around the Marquette area for chaga since then and I haven't found any. But the last time I went home, there was a chunk of chaga on a birch across the road from my folks house, about knee high. I thanked the tree and gripped the squirrel-head size shkitaagan. It fell easily into my palm. After some asking around and research, I made five liters of shkitaagan tea. I hope my dad drinks the medicine he taught me to find.

Part Four: Enlightenment, Featuring Waabigwan [flowers]

Most of the time as a full-time floral gardener, I pick weeds. Between the flashes of the maze, salmon, and periwinkle that line US-41 highway that funnels travelers into Marquette, Michigan there are small weeds. Small weeds will become big weeds if not removed. Big weeds compete for the nutrients of the soil and sun and result in less impressive flower shows. Waabigwan is how you say flower in Anishinaabemowin, the language that named the things in the place that I live. Rarely do I stand back and gaze slack jawed at the flowerbed, then shove my face in some lemon gems and sniff hard. My lungs fill with hearty vegetation, the smell of photosynthesis, I'm told. But the weeds are the smartest of all the garden visitors. Smarter than me.

I was weeding a big bed of flowers when I came upon some stinging nettles. I might have grabbed the fuzzy green stem and got my hand stung, but I was raised to appreciate the identity of the plants I work with, to listen to their stories, to research their attributes. I read about the plants and weeds I encounter in order to listen to them. "This bed is soggy, no drainage," says mouse-eared chickweed. I tell my supervisor that we ought to cut back the irrigation schedule. "I'll sting ya real good," says stinging nettles. My muscles remember childhood techniques and reach into the soil to grab the roots of the weed, avoiding the stinging bristles on the stem and leaves, I toss the defeated stinging nettles on top of the pile of weeds in my bucket.

Moments later, my left hand is splayed out full to compress the heaping weed bucket. Like sticking a fork into a wall socket my palm was jolted by the plant's bristles. The stinging venom crept into my hand and raised sore red marks on the lines in my palm. In a fervor, I remembered that chickweed can be used as a poultice, a soothing topical ointment for cuts, sores, and rashes. I spotted the nearest patch of chickweed and snagged a handful, crushed it to a pulp in my right hand, and rubbed the green juicy wad on my left palm. Instant minty relief.

Medicines are all over this place. If knowledge is the key to using medicines, then curiosity is the doorway to medicine. I am grateful that my parents cultivated my curiosity of not only plants and place, but my curiosity in language. Mashiki is how you say medicine in Anishinaabemowin, the language that named the things in this place that I live. Both common chickweed and stinging nettles are invasive species, and I don't know if they have names in Anishinaabemowin. But bakwajibdoon is how you say, "pluck it" or "weed it" in Anishinaabemowin. I'm learning that every time I pluck something from the earth--my favorite berry, an elusive mushroom, a stingy or sacred weed--that nibakwajibdoon mashkiki: I pick medicine.



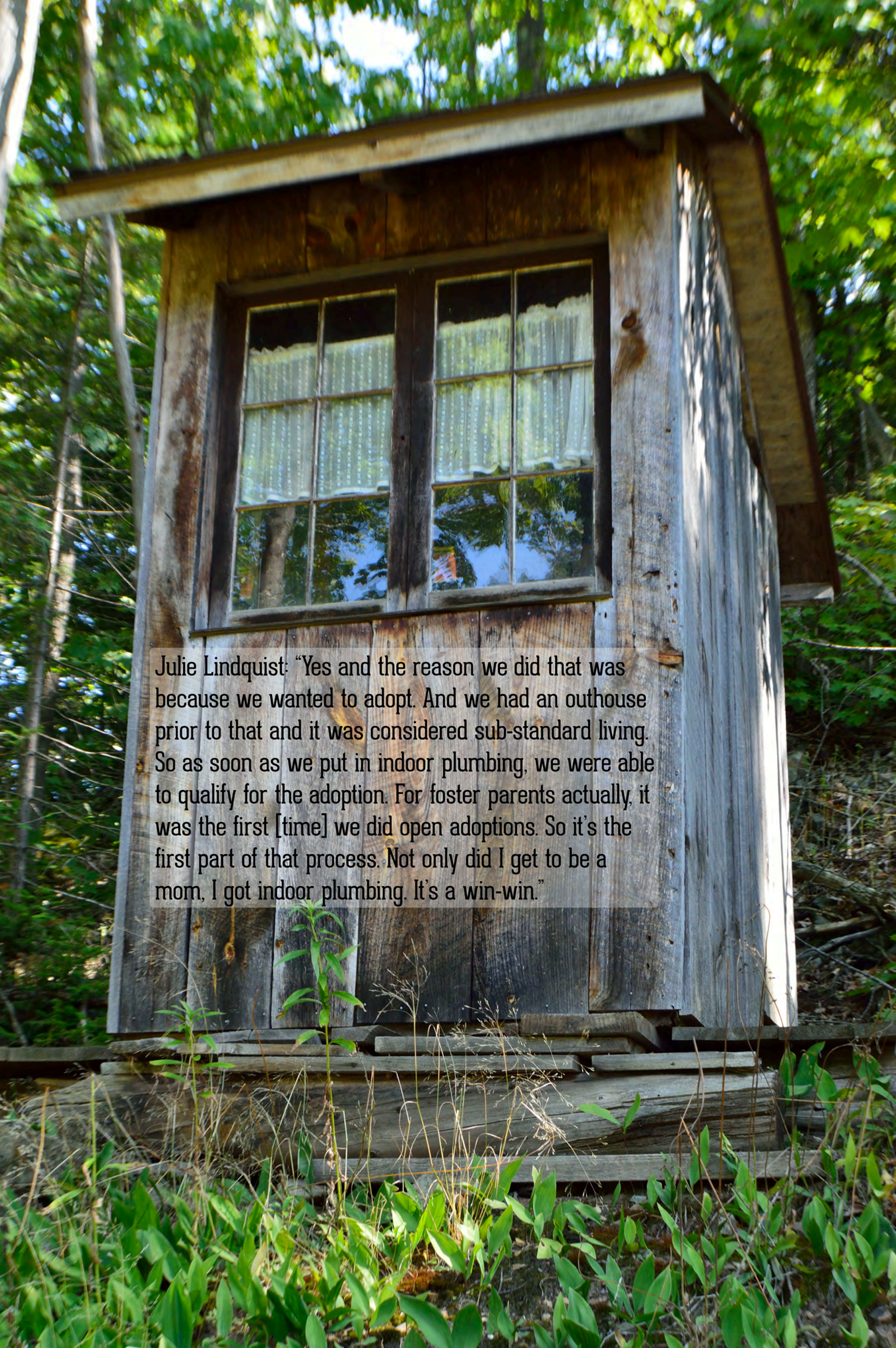
Tyler Dettloff is from Kinross, Michigan. He received his B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from NMU. In addition to writing prose, Tyler is a noted musician and songwriter in Marquette, having played with several groups, including Lost Dog & The Big Hustle and The Cannonball Drag. He is of Anishinaabe, Irish and Italian descent.



George Lindquist
and Julie Foster-
Lindquist

In 1979, George Lindquist bought a wooded parcel of land that hadn't been logged since the 1930s. There, on top of a hill in a clearing where they originally intended to build their house, he and his wife Julie were married. Throughout the next several years they lived in a 24' x 24' cabin. They moved away from the area for a short period but never stopped working on their dream home. In 1989, they returned to live full-time and began upgrading and making additions to their house.




A rustic wooden outhouse with a multi-paned window, surrounded by dense green foliage. The structure is made of weathered wood and has a gabled roof. The window is divided into several small panes, some of which are covered with white lace curtains. The outhouse is situated in a wooded area with many trees and bushes in the background. In the foreground, there are some green plants and weeds growing around the base of the structure.

Julie Lindquist: “Yes and the reason we did that was because we wanted to adopt. And we had an outhouse prior to that and it was considered sub-standard living. So as soon as we put in indoor plumbing, we were able to qualify for the adoption. For foster parents actually, it was the first [time] we did open adoptions. So it’s the first part of that process. Not only did I get to be a mom, I got indoor plumbing. It’s a win-win.”

George Lindquist: "We've had this wind generator on the hill for a good eighteen years now. And I don't [know] of any others in the U.P. that have been in operation that long. We bought that before the big tax incentives or anything came out. That came out years later. Before any of that we set that up. I set that up and a lot of this stuff we would either do ourselves or hire a neighbor or a friend and we'd work together."




A tall, slender antenna tower with numerous horizontal elements extends from a corrugated metal roof into a clear blue sky. To the left of the tower, a large satellite dish is mounted on the roof. In the background, a tall, dark evergreen tree stands prominently, surrounded by other green foliage. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the tower and the sky.

Julie Lindquist: “There actually used to be quite a community of people out here. There’s still a few left, but many of the originals are no longer here. ... I would say you have to want to live out here. You have to be a little different.”

All of the work done on the Lindquist's property was done themselves and with the help of friends and neighbors; they never hired a contractor to do any work. The Lindquist's home is set up to be efficient and easily maintained. They have substantial insulation to keep the house heated without having to burn unnecessary wood in their wood stove. Their wind generator powers the batteries that run their electricity and they recently added solar panels to supplement their power supply. The Lindquist's property has satellite internet and their phones have evolved throughout the years from radio phones, to CB radios, to cell service with a tower not far from them.



A green manual water pump stands in a grassy field. The pump has a long handle and a spout. A red hose is connected to the base of the pump. In the background, there are trees and a wooden structure. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

The Lindquist's property has always featured gardens and though they were isolated from typical food sources, they participated in food co-ops in the Marquette area. On their property they grow iconic Michigan apples. For George, hunting and fishing was an essential part of his growing up and now a part of their life-style.

Julie Lindquist: "So living out here, that was living off the land..."

George Lindquist: "[it was] Part of it. That's part of the reason why I wanted the land."

Julie Lindquist: "I think when we were younger it was a great adventure: I think that was a lot of it..."

George Lindquist: "We've got a pretty nice set up here now. Most people come in and go 'wow'... and don't realize that we're even off the grid. In that respect, we're fairly independent, now with the solar panels, wind. We're kind of redoing our energy system here. We're in pretty good shape. I get to do stuff out in the woods, I've got different habitat projects I've worked on. It's a never ending thing, of course. But that's part of it too. ... doing your own work and doing your own project, and making it your own."



Sue Robishaw

and

Steve Schmeck



With an army shovel in hand, Steve Schmeck and Sue Robishaw looked at prospective properties, checking for good soil on which to start their next adventure. After deciding to move from Boston to the U.P., they settled on a piece of land that was half clear of woods and at one time had been a potato farm.

Though he didn't have any real building experience, growing up Schmeck had spent time in his parents' wood shop and drawing houses. By the time they were ready to build, he knew what he wanted.



Steve Schneck: "The whole point [of the house] was to make it so you don't have anywhere on the roof that the water can puddle. Everything has to be sloped someplace. If there's a force on one side, you have to create or leave the same sort of equivalent force on the other side so the Earth doesn't push it one way or another. ... We really don't have an equivalent offsetting force from the front, but all the bracing in the house is aimed and so it's going to get pushed back."

Like many others who live off the grid, Schmeck and Robishaw are vegetarians, partially because of the impracticality of storing perishable food.

Steve Schmeck: "We haven't until recently had refrigeration. Except in the winter we had the roots that are always cooler. So a lot of things didn't make a lot of sense to keep. Leftovers and meat were not good things to keep."

Sue Robishaw: "We grow all of our vegetables. But we still have to buy grain, sweeteners, and oil. I'm saying 50-75%. We could eat off the land; we tried that once, for two months and it was fine, but we missed oil."

Steve Schmeck: "Popcorn parched instead of popped."


Sue Robishaw: "It was interesting."



For Schneck and Robishaw, many things have changed over the years. Their electrical system has grown which allows them to use electricity instead of propane for many of their day to day activities.

Steve Schneck: "We've just got four solar panels out there. [The main ones and a couple little ones]. It did allow us to do some stuff; normally we would go through two twenty pound cylinders of propane a year with that little burner. We haven't gone through one yet and it's over a year now, just because we have that little hot plate. I feed us breakfast every day, I make oatmeal. I use that thing if it's going to be sunny. So it's a home meal, 365 meals a year that doesn't get cooked on propane. Little things do make a difference."



A solar still is shown outdoors, mounted on a wooden stand. The still's large, reflective metal funnel-shaped body is open, revealing a rectangular glass chamber inside. Two clear glass jugs with handles are placed side-by-side in the chamber, each containing a light-colored liquid. The still is positioned in front of a wooden building with several skylights. The surrounding area is grassy.

Steve Schmeck: "We can't pump when it's freezing. We hope for a day or two with wind and above freezing temperatures so we can top it up. We probably could get through but it would be, we'd have to go into conservation mode in March, if we didn't get a few days in the middle of the winter that were warm. The whole place is like that. It requires presence, not real serious attention, but to be here to make sure everything is working. Not a lot of automatic stuff."

Schmeck and Robishaw's project started in the 1970s. It took eight years of working in spurts for their earth house to be livable.

Steve Schmeck: "It's real interesting. We don't have any real long term goals; we've enjoyed life all the way along. Truly have. Since I've retired and Sue has been retired for a while, we've had a lot of time. So we can do what we want. If we have a goal it's to refine our lifestyle to the point where we're doing things we like to do. If it's playing music, we want to do it well. ... If it's building boats, gardening, or whatever, we want to do it as well as you can."





Sue Robishaw: "I think it's nice the homestead itself has refined too as we've changed it. We've done it where we don't have to spend as much time on it. It seems like we are building it for so many years. Now, it's pretty much done. A lot of changes to make it easier, make it more self-supporting of itself. The gardens don't take as much time as they used to. We want to fit in the boating, kayaking, dancing, and music. ... We're always learning to do something."

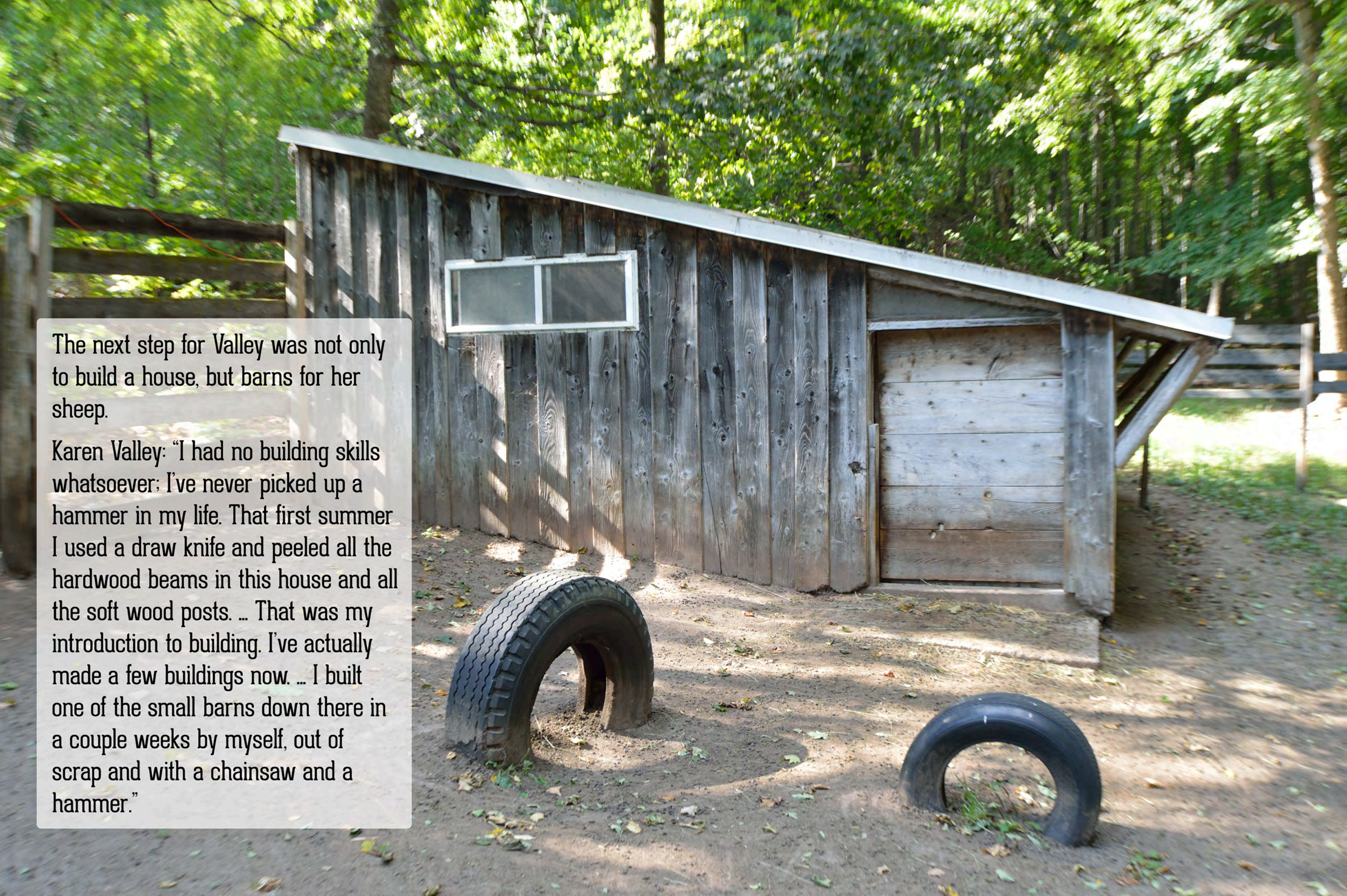
Karen Valley

Karen Valley always wanted to live in a cottage in the country and raise some animals. Her dream was originally to live in Upstate New York where she had gone to school, but instead, she found herself in the Upper Peninsula. Though her family had driven through on vacation and been to see the Soo Locks, she was not familiar with the wonders of the Upper Peninsula. Karen Valley was able to find the perfect spot and create her own paradise, where she raises sheep, spins wool and knits items to sell at the Marquette Farmer's Market and beyond.



Karen Valley: "I just walked out and it was spring. There were no leaves on the trees. It had been logged over. There were stumps and brush everywhere. There's water running in all of the wrong places. I just knew this is where I was supposed to be. I could envision exactly where the field would be, where the house should be, everything was mapped out in my brain. I'd felt like I'd come home. So I thought, okay, this was the place. It is mess but this is where I'm supposed to be."





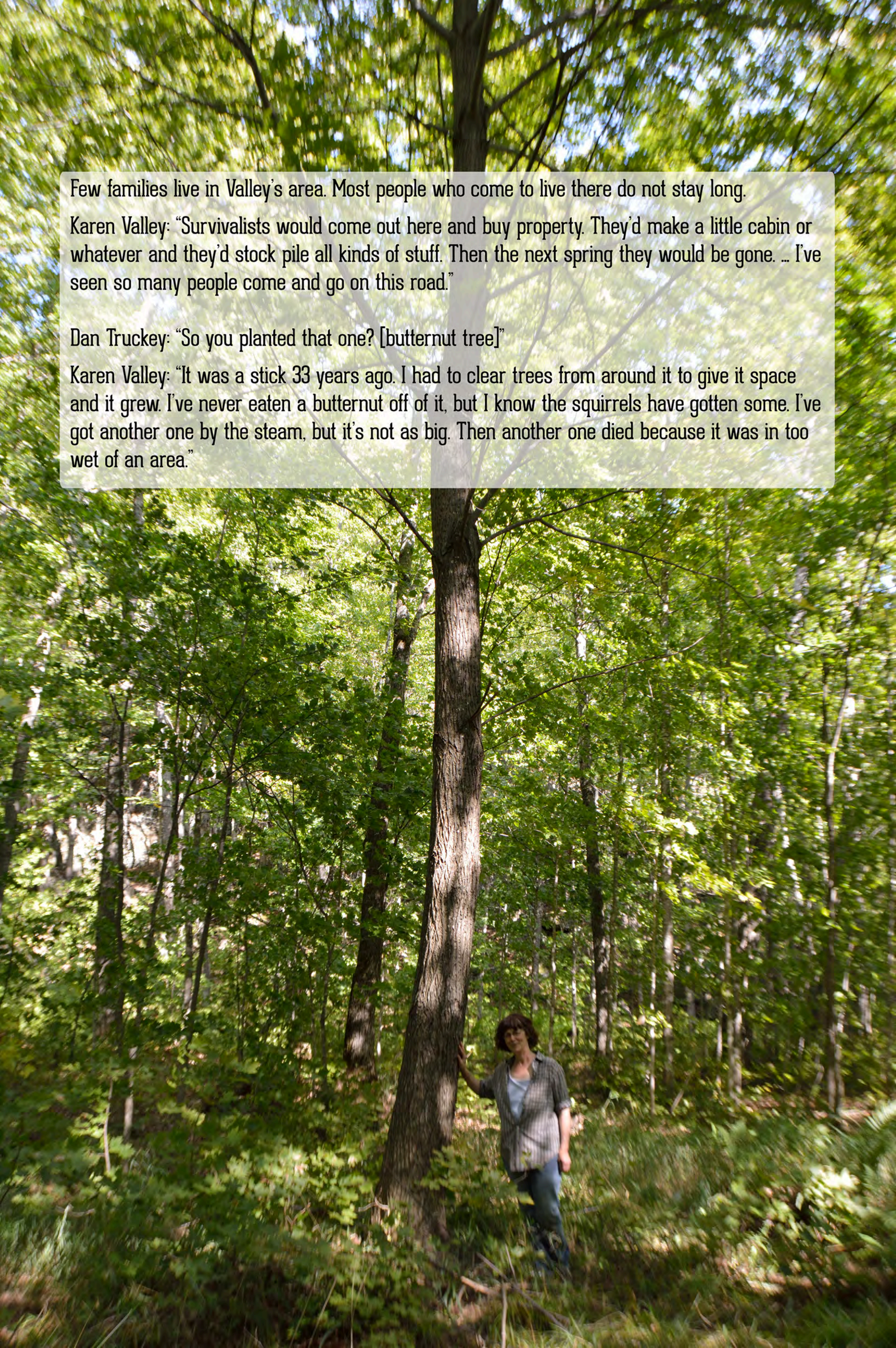
The next step for Valley was not only to build a house, but barns for her sheep.

Karen Valley: “I had no building skills whatsoever; I’ve never picked up a hammer in my life. That first summer I used a draw knife and peeled all the hardwood beams in this house and all the soft wood posts. ... That was my introduction to building. I’ve actually made a few buildings now. ... I built one of the small barns down there in a couple weeks by myself, out of scrap and with a chainsaw and a hammer.”

She and her partner lived in tents for months while they built their house. When the house was livable they were able to get out of the constant rains of that summer. Now Valley's days are devoted to her herd of sheep that she raises in the four barns she built herself.

"People ask if I ever dog herd my sheep and I say no. I just call them and they just come. I was on a program where a USDA vet had to come up and inspect the flock once a year. So the first year he pulls up down there in a van with four vets from Poland. He goes, 'We're here to check out the sheep.' I said, 'Okay, wait right here.' I went over the hill, called them into the barn, closed the door, walked back out and said they're ready for you. He [was] like, 'I thought we would have to catch them out in the field.' All the Polish vets [we're] laughing."



A woman with short brown hair, wearing a grey and white plaid shirt over a blue top and blue jeans, stands next to a large, mature tree with a thick trunk. She is smiling and has her hand on the tree. The background is a dense forest with many other trees and lush green foliage. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Few families live in Valley's area. Most people who come to live there do not stay long.


Karen Valley: "Survivalists would come out here and buy property. They'd make a little cabin or whatever and they'd stock pile all kinds of stuff. Then the next spring they would be gone. ... I've seen so many people come and go on this road."

Dan Truckey: "So you planted that one? [butternut tree]"

Karen Valley: "It was a stick 33 years ago. I had to clear trees from around it to give it space and it grew. I've never eaten a butternut off of it, but I know the squirrels have gotten some. I've got another one by the stream, but it's not as big. Then another one died because it was in too wet of an area."

Valley's only source of water for her home and farm is a stream that runs through her property. During the warmer months, she uses a sump-pump to send the water to the house. In the winter, she has to cut a hole in the ice and carry buckets of water to the house and the barns for her animals.





"The one year plan becomes the 20 year plan. If it never gets done it's no big deal plan. I've learned that because it used to be, I'd have this list of things I just thought had to be done. It turns out, when the snow hits, it doesn't really matter. It's not going to get done. ... I adore winter because it means I can stop thinking about what's under the snow until spring. When it comes in, everything shuts down and I can go in and work on my projects in the house."

Karen Valley: "I didn't envision living off-the-grid ..., but that's just the way it ended up. I ended up being much more comfortable not having all the things that I had ... I made the choice to do this and to keep doing it because I like the simplicity of it and the fact that it's pretty much set in front of you. If you don't get firewood in and you don't put it in the stove, you won't be warm. It's a real simple concept. It's much more physical, but I have much more control over what happens each day."



John and Victoria
Jungwirth



John and Victoria Jungwirth come from two very different places but had the same destination. John grew up in the Detroit area dreaming of living in the woods. Victoria grew up in Suffolk, England and wanted to live off-the-land. They met at a farm in the “Thumb” of Michigan and fell in love. For years they lived in different communal communities but in 1989 they decided to strike out on their own and purchased some undeveloped land in northern Marquette County. There, along with their two sons, they made the home of their dreams become a reality.

Dan Truckey: "So the shed was the first structure?"

Victoria Jungwirth: "Yeah, then the bridge. Everybody told us, all the old timers told us to build our sauna first." [Pictured below]

John Jungwirth: "We were just living in an old mobile home."

Victoria Jungwirth: "And of course we didn't listen. But we should have built the sauna first. It would have made living in a trailer a lot more bearable. It would've been good building practice too. It was the shed, the bridge, the house, outhouse, sauna, workshop, and boatshed."



John Jungwirth: "There was nobody out here originally. We're still the farthest people out here. We all moved here about the same time, within a couple of years between each other. There have been other little families that have come and gone. We're the only ones still here after all this time. We're the neighborhood."

Victoria Jungwirth: "We're our own neighborhood."

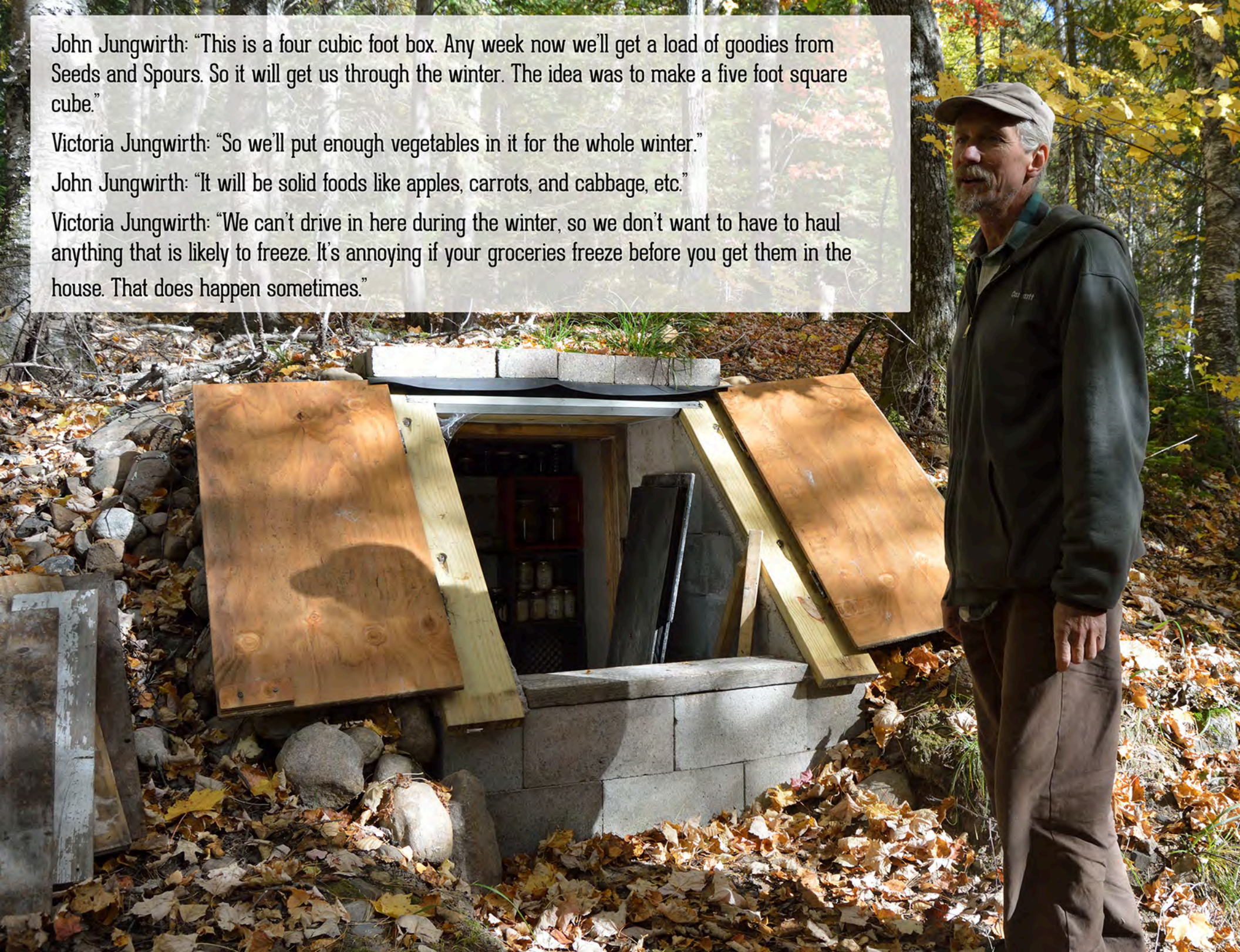


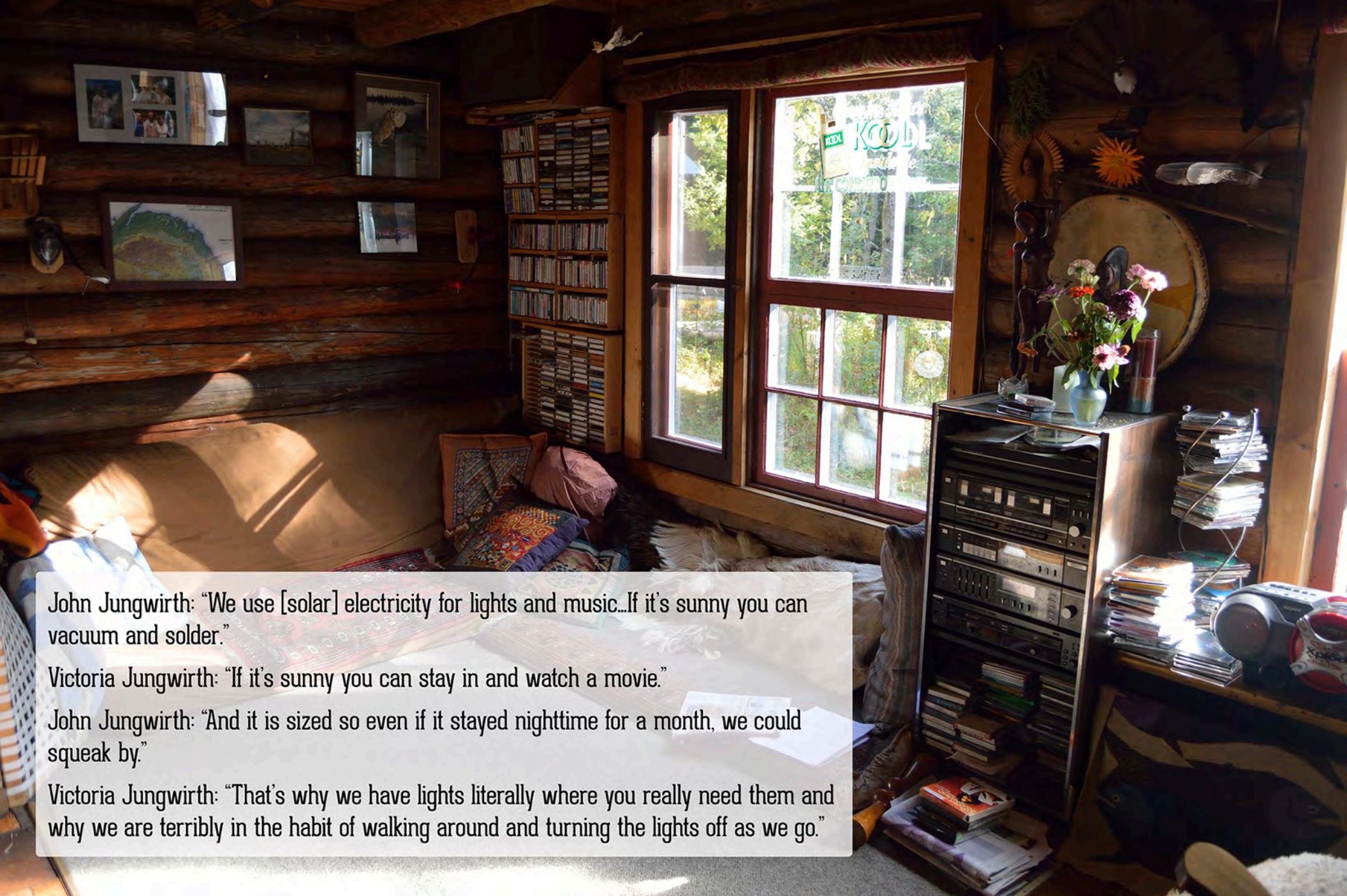
John Jungwirth: "This is a four cubic foot box. Any week now we'll get a load of goodies from Seeds and Spours. So it will get us through the winter. The idea was to make a five foot square cube."

Victoria Jungwirth: "So we'll put enough vegetables in it for the whole winter."

John Jungwirth: "It will be solid foods like apples, carrots, and cabbage, etc."

Victoria Jungwirth: "We can't drive in here during the winter, so we don't want to have to haul anything that is likely to freeze. It's annoying if your groceries freeze before you get them in the house. That does happen sometimes."





John Jungwirth: "We use [solar] electricity for lights and music...If it's sunny you can vacuum and solder."

Victoria Jungwirth: "If it's sunny you can stay in and watch a movie."

John Jungwirth: "And it is sized so even if it stayed nighttime for a month, we could squeak by."

Victoria Jungwirth: "That's why we have lights literally where you really need them and why we are terribly in the habit of walking around and turning the lights off as we go."

Victoria Jungwirth: "We have a lot of free time at home. We probably camp and fish more too."

John Jungwirth: "It's still our favorite thing to do."

Victoria Jungwirth: "We also have to be ready to go at the drop of a hat. You can't always plan when fish are going to run or when the berries are going to be ripe."

John Jungwirth: "If you snooze on it, then something that you really like to eat the rest of the year...There's 101 ways to make every single critter taste wonderful."

Victoria Jungwirth: "Takes a long time sometimes to find those ways."

John Jungwirth: "All the mammals are good. All fish too."

John and Victoria Jungwirth make a portion of their living making birch bark canoes. For more information on their business visit their website, <http://birchbark-canoes.com/>.





John Jungwirth: "A lot of this stuff, we tore out of our old camp down on Lake Huron when my folks retired to build their house, and we brought these things from my grandmother's old house in Detroit and were brought out to camp. My dad was bathed in here [the sink pictured], I can remember being bathed in here, my sons were bathed in here and we just put our granddaughter [in the sink] about three weeks ago."

John Jungwirth: “My playing field in the back of my mind is I’ve made myself fair with this place I live in. I can’t change that anymore. I think everyone who lives in town is tough because my mind wouldn’t do well there. I probably would’ve been a drunk and died long ago for whatever reason. It’s a lot less of the things that I don’t like out here.”

Victoria Jungwirth: “It’s definitely a fair balance. We’ve given up a lot but we’ve also gained immensely. I think everybody without even realizing it is doing that to a certain extent in their lives. We all have to constantly make compromises with our lifestyle choices. We drive a truck and we wish we didn’t have to do that. Just trying to find that balance that works for them. We certainly feel grateful that we found ours.”



SOLAR POWER



Sunlight hits the specially fabricated silicon solar panels



Photons from the sunlight mix with the atoms, the photons knock off electrons



Is converted from direct current to alternating current [usable energy]



Powers household

Light travels from the sun to earth, 8 minutes

One 200 watt solar panel needs 6 hours of sunlight to power a 1200 watt coffee pot. [coffee]

An average home with thirty 60 watt light bulbs would need 10 hours of sunlight on one 200 watt solar panel to power them. [light bulb]