

"It's the vision I have started, the initiator of this vision in this place, it's goal is to create a 'nature-based permaculture community' and those 4 words, that permanent culture, that culture is there. It's in that word permaculture that the meaning can be found and that western culture isn't a permanent one. It only has about 10 years left I believe because culture breaks down when society breaks down, culture collapses and becomes chaos and to fix that and to fix as much as possible and prevent as much damage as possible to plant the seeds of a culture is what we are trying to do.

That forest was on the shores of Loch Long, it's an estuary of the Clyde and it was a west-facing hill, beautiful oak trees, old, I wasn't doing it to separate myself from western culture, I had had enough of it, I had become a sociopathic naturalist, I wanted to create distance between me and that culture that was trapping me in unhappiness. Before that, I was an activist, non-violent direct action, blocking roads, de-locking vehicles, disrupting the machine that was destroying the planet.

I'm trained as a social worker, I did my draft first out of secondary school, I was the last before that ended, the last year in Belgium. It's a different culture, civil service is much more normal on the continent and we had a choice either to be in the military or civilian service. During that time I started to study to be a social worker and worked with just juvenile delinquents, teenagers in care, young boys who had lost their confidence and got into drugs and petty crime, that is what western culture does, good kids.

I'd already wanted to be an activist before that, the spark had been lit as a child, it was when I learnt that trees are so important and the Amazon is being burned and we are all going to fucking die unless we stop that. As long as I learnt there was an injustice I wanted to correct it. The beauty of civilian service in Belgium, the union type thing they had, we civilian servicemen were allowed to receive training to create peace, as well as soldiers being trained to kill. I was the last generation, I didn't have to go, I volunteered, no direct action as that is a way to protect your country too isn't it, first-aid and trained to non-violently resist. And my first arrest was with a group of people, we invaded an arms fair where they were selling arms to 3rd world dictators and managed to chase them out of the city and it was very liberating, I found role models.

I got arrested for the first time when I was 18 and since then have lost count, I have been arrested 30 or 40 times, won all my cases apart from two and been to prison twice. Activism was woven into my daily life, I had to have a job too but my heart wasn't in it and I didn't have any job or life satisfaction. At that time I realized I was wasting my life stuck in a dead-end job whilst biodiversity was falling apart, I wanted to use my life differently. I quit my job and cut all ties and wanted to leave the familiarity of my country, I looked at the map and saw that Scandinavia was best for me to go to but didn't want to learn another language so came to Scotland. I've tried England and Wales but always wanted just to come back to Scotland.

I came over to here in 2000, I went straight to the forest but only for non-violent action training for 2 weeks and got arrested a few times, it was a lot of fun and I just stayed, I lived in all sorts of places for a little while, communities, until I finally got permission from the owner of that forest and I went to live in the forest for 4 years. I didn't have all the skills, I had all the elements and the basic skills, I could tie knots, use an axe and make fire. I had a canvas tent and eventually with a wood-burning stove in it, it needed to be a temporary structure because it's a forest you can't build a house in a forest, it was right next to a military base. I would go shopping once every fortnight and it was a 37-acre forest and sometimes for a while other people would come and stay and make themselves a little hut for a week. So that separation from western culture eventually lead to where I am now. The sedation of western culture and getting to know myself in combination with that separation allowed me to see how damaging western culture is.

I've always been fascinated by stories from indigenous cultures and always have the call from them, I felt that was missing, it's all of them, it's also the western cultures before industrialisation. The Gaelic culture is fascinating, I'm interested in cultures that are about connection, indigenous cultures are connecting cultures, I would even go as far as saying that western culture isn't culture, it's about destroying culture, this underpins everything else, it's as important as breath and food and everything else we do is done within that culture of connection, we grow food and are connected to the land.

After I travelled around looking for my own land as I didn't own it, I wanted to build a deer fence as it is needed it, I wanted to lead a life that had meaning but wanted to build a deer fence but couldn't. The deer and sheep were eating everything, there was no regeneration, if I could have done that I probably would have built a proper home. After 4 years my time to be alone was finished and was looking for people to build a tribe and have a family and find a woman who wanted to live with me in the forest, it was a lot of boxes to tick. I don't believe in ownership but needed to be the custodian and have been looking ever since, that was 12 years ago. And I've been here for 4 years so it took me 8 years to find this land.

I didn't buy this land with a job, a mortgage or an inheritance, I needed to own land but saving up to own and mortgages are traps of the rat race. What I did instead was with money I earned, I sold plants and trees, I was self-employed, I invested, I took my reputation and experience and I designed positive feedback systems that could increase my income and well being and I saved it until I could afford this land. I bought it with a whole vast network with the people that support me, my wealth is from the people that support me. I didn't do any of this, I am just the magician that does things and makes things happen, I worked my arse off but I teach and we all benefit from the transaction, I work on a moneyless exchange, people work here and I teach them and feed them and in return, they learn.

When up was living in the forest I saw myself as a guest in the forest and I wanted to learn how to live in that forest in the most harmonious way possible and that's what permaculture does, trying to design an existence in harmony with nature. I met a woman who told me I should read the Earthcare Manual by Patrick Whitefield, and it's the first time I felt that someone else's ideas fitted mine, kind of like a homecoming. I did a course with him and then became a teacher straight away and made a humble living that way. I was doing permaculture before I came here but wasn't using the word, it's such a broad concept, based on those ethics I had been living but with a really low carbon footprint in the forest, being honest with people and trying to learn my own way.

The first thing I did here was tidying up, moving back derelict buildings and landfill sites, I'd already had an Idea I was looking for a place to make a nature-based community based on permaculture and had tried several times before but land ownership was always the problem. It took 3 years to tidy up properly because of the people that were here before, and I wanted to build a community and get new members, building and practising. There is an application process and it is a slow one because the last step is to become an equal full member with the same sort of security as a tribe member has. That's because there is no landlord, they become the landlords of their own home, there is no rent to pay and no power structure that can tell them to leave and security of home equal to ownership, the process is down to the individual. The process involves filling in a form, a conversation and visit and taking part in the permaculture course, a village builders course and alongside that an optional series of conversations with a psychologist, a professional support network, personal growth and several layers of initiation, from student to village builder. On average it takes a bit more than a year. The first person is about to become a member now and quite often when people have taken part in the courses and completed them a lot feel the need to experience life on the outside with new eyes before they can fully come back. There are 6 people in line, in the process right now and the first one is about to graduate and there is space for more. This has been here for 4 years, permaculture is a slow process, it's one of the permaculture principles but the community is well-rooted in solid and strong structure and good foundations.

Being here is the culture again, it's growing your food and a long list of practical projects, never-ending, we are building a community. We have now done the tidying up and what we need is a hearth, the fireplace and we are going to physically build the community around that hearth, it's from the old languages, the hearth of the home, it's hidden in the language of cultures before industrialisation, we love those treasures.

To create a community where we can develop a culture and bring up the next generation in this culture so it can be fully human, so that means they can exhibit the 8 indigenous attributes of connection. Being truly helpful, a quiet mind, love and forgiveness, vitality...we will have as many people as much as the land can carry, 4 families, students and visitors.

Being alone is not the way forward, the way we look at problems in permaculture is that there is always a positive, when it doesn't go well we need to let go and see the way forwards. I won't be the sole owner much longer as otherwise there will be the same power structure and you can't create a community with one person in power otherwise that is a feudal system. The next stage is to develop a board of responsible people who take over ownership, we need to bridge, create an airlock to western civilisation and the board of directors will probably be a board of trustees and will take over my commitments. I pay for everyone here by crowdfunding and microloans with the land as collateral, a thousand pounds here and a thousand pounds there and they will take that over and I will become a normal member of the community which is what I want to be.

I am creating change here, real change and provide a real welcome to visitors, a lot of people in western society don't know what a real welcome is. The change is in permanent culture, the part that everyone knows is growing food in a permanent way but it's much wider than that, it's a culture, it's a life long study and a model that is based on indigenous wisdom and called the 8 shields model. I'm the one that brought the mixture of the two to Scotland. 30 years before me it was John Young and his team in the US, that was the reason I resisted it for so long as I thought the last thing we needed was a white man telling us about indigenous culture but when I saw a video of him I realized it is possible for a white person to be indigenous and I booked onto his course and was the last one, just in time. It brought everything that I was interested in together, peacemaking, permaculture, growing food in harmony with nature and nature connection journey, community and that indigenous culture that I was looking for, and there is much more that came out of that model. What I learned is that the worst thing you can do is not to try, I don't want to be that person that looks back on my life and says I wasted it, I want to make a difference, I am not alone, there are thousands of us and the numbers are growing every day.

And on a practical level, I am creating systems that can carry on providing abundance for the community in the midst of change, as an example, I can afford not to have any income in a year and take the time to adapt to the changes and am not forced to risk my health to feed myself, this pandemic was the best time of our lives during the lockdown. I've loved it, no tourists around, no ferries, no noisy machines, that work that comes along those economic activities to make money has been put on pause, it's not the end of the world and there is no employer who has the power that other people need to endure.

If you want to change and make change the first thing to do is start listening to the birds. Study bird language it's really easy, people need to be aware of their impact on birds, I get that question a lot, where can I start and the answer is always the same, follows the bird's guidance, let them be your teacher, observe how they react to your behaviour and the treasures that they share. Birds live in a dangerous world and have evolved to give the right correct level of alarm that corresponds to the levels of danger by learning but to distinguish those alarm calls birds become our mirrors and reflect back the impact we have on our surroundings, zen masters disguised as a bit of feathers and a song.

We share chores equally, cooking, cleaning and alongside that everyone has their projects, and those projects are chosen according to what people enjoy doing. When people come in I ask them 3 things, what are you good at, what are your skills and what is your passion, what makes you come alive and the third is what do you want to receive and I try to find the common denominator of those three and that is the only way we get the level of excellence we are trying to achieve by putting people in tasks that they most want to learn.

There is a lot of food growing here, we have nature connection exercise and sessions. I most enjoy the sense of rooting here and living on the land and the people around me that I can trust and love and be loved. Indigenous people need to become our teachers again and that then will empower them. The only way I can make the change is to lead by example and model it, I am not going anywhere, I feel as though my life's work is almost complete and can retire and not have the responsibility to run here anymore, I simply want to teach, plant seeds in the ground and listen to bird song. My pension plan is my community and I have already helped so many people's lives in some small way, my 'R number' is quite high, I have infected dozens and dozens with inspiration of change.

In western culture people are caught in a loop and keep on making the same mistakes, hopefully, people will start to learn as a trickle and then it will just flip and everyone will take it on board, now is an important time of change".

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