

## Chapter 1: The Requirements of Life

I live just south the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel: the global demarcation in degrees which separates Canada and the United States; extending from the Pacific Ocean to the middle of Minnesota. For those that live here, climate change is exaggerating the difference in temperature between summer and winter, where we bake in August temps that exceed one hundred degrees Fahrenheit and chill out to thirty degrees below zero in January. The summer heat is tolerable although you find yourself seeking shade in the afternoon. In contrast, the winter cold can at times be intolerable if you are unprepared.

Because you can only remove so much clothing, dressing for the heat has limitations. Especially if you work with power tools or are welding something together as both practices can be less than pleasant when naked. During winter months the opposite is true, as you can dress in layers to keep warm, and in fact it can be very pleasant outdoors even if the mercury drops well below zero. The night sky in winter is extraordinary and provides greater clarity than the summer darkness as it is deeper and lasts hours longer, putting on its own light show with the Aurora Borealis streaming in waves of energy. Physical activity gets the furnace going inside, which requires you to adjust the apparel as the day goes on, shedding a coat or one layer of mittens as needed. You'll also notice your caloric intake has doubled, making foods rich in protein and carbohydrates a necessity.

The wind on the prairie is a fickle friend. In the summer a gentle breeze or strong wind cools the flesh and gives you a mental picture of summer that lasts throughout your life. A thunderstorm can become a bar brawl that removes shingles, breaks tree limbs, and creates a breathtaking show of light with its electric force reaching from ground to sky and back again. It becomes a demon when it shows up as a tornado, leveling the landscape by pushing over or ripping up what isn't concrete or firmly attached to it. But in the winter, it seems to have only one persona.

Wind chill is the phenomena whereby the effective power of cold to remove heat from heated objects increases in proportion to the wind speed. As an example, when twenty degrees below zero, your once heated car parked overnight will cool

down to twenty below. When the wind blows, it cools down to twenty below much sooner. The effect on continuously heated objects, such as people, houses, and automobiles that continue to run is that the wind removes the heat faster, requiring more fuel to keep the internal temperature constant. The winter wind is very cruel and unforgiving, and you can feel its threatening frost bite into your unprotected face and hands in seconds. If you are without shelter the outcome is an unpleasant, painful death.

Providing a description of the northern climate where I live gives a framework to the local needs of food, water, and shelter. If you have a vegan diet as I do, there is very little to harvest from nature between the months of November and May. If you include meat in your diet, then you may find food in the wild that is more cunning than you, but you can obtain it if you are persistent and capable. Although both are available from the local marketplace, if you're living "off the grid" as many YouTubers profess, you must prepare and store your garden bounty for the required five to six months and do the same for meat in case your hunting skills are not productive or regular in success. This can all be accomplished with some planning and effort, and doing so becomes one of the most rewarding parts of self-reliance and sufficiency. Can you get by with routine trips to the marketplace? Of course, but doing so only to supplement what you have accomplished by yourself is just as rewarding and provides you with confidence to reach even further. It needn't be thought of as primitive or uncivilized in any way – producing and keeping your own food is healthy both from the organic nature of your diet to the effort it takes in harvesting, preparing, and storing the bounty. And what you may have heard about the taste of fresh tomatoes is most likely an understatement.

Water is becoming a precious commodity in some areas as climate change creates droughts and wildfires, while in other areas it becomes reviled as flooding destroys homes and infrastructure. Cold climates create another perspective as it pertains to the state of matter you experience. It's hard to drink ice, and water doesn't pump out of the well when the pipes are frozen. If there is no snow on the ground, your access to water will be limited unless you've made plans to protect your water system from freezing or store sufficient water to make do through the winter and into spring. Maintaining a supply of water is less challenging than the supply of food but bears careful consideration if you're cut loose from civilization.

Maintaining your shelter is a multi-faceted problem that must be addressed on numerous levels. If you currently own your shelter and the land beneath it without a mortgage or other debt, your only financial obligation may be property taxes. If so, there must be a solution for paying the taxes if you are not employed or have a stash of money to use over the years. There are an endless number of property ownership challenges that surface as you consider a life without employment and resolving them all is needed before you give up the day job or it gives up on you.

Maintaining your shelter, and with it those mechanical troublemakers that provide transportation or garden and farm support, is as important as food. Having the furnace go out or run out of fuel in the middle of January is a difficult and life-threatening situation. Making your own diesel fuel for the tractor is out of the reach of most but making biodiesel is possible. Something that runs on alcohol (no, not you) could be fixed up with the idea that a corn or potato crop will produce enough mash for the gallons of ethanol needed. Firewood will keep the house warm, but what about the years ahead? If you don't have access to a forest of your own, a sufficient supply may not be available and purchasing firewood isn't cost effective when compared to other fuel sources.

Using the local climate as a backdrop, along with the above listing of just a few of the considerations for complete "off grid" living is meant to illustrate life in a minimalists' view. I doubt many readers would fully embrace this pursuit, but instead envision a hybrid of sorts whereby you do more on your own and require less from the day job or other activities that provide income. I personally subscribe to this possibility and believe that doing so satisfies the option mentioned previously where we look forward to social changes but want something else for ourselves. Instead, we become self-sufficient to the extent that our financial needs are minimized (and covered by selling eggs or our new-found stock in trade as a handyperson) but continue to enjoy life to the fullest.

I should emphasize that my intent is not to provide a bleak outlook of a certain dystopian future. It is based instead on the shifting nature of employment that will result from advances in artificial intelligence and automation. You may accommodate the shrinking need for human labor by working fewer hours in your current vocation or profession, or perhaps taking up a new trade. Your choice.