

kindred

nature. photography. art. off the grid

**A life within
nature.**

With Jeanette Aplin.

**Walking the
Te Araroa
trail.**

Elina Osbourne

**Connection to
whenua.**

With Jasper Brin

**As the bird
sings.**

Photography by
Rosa Long

Issue one
August/September



0 30000 29145 2



Within The Wilderness

Jeanette Aplin

Written by Isla Keast

Imagine. Bird song is embracing you, as you stand among the canopy of wild trees, with a pulsating hum reverberating under your feet. Is this a taste into the silence for you, in a world overrun by chaos? This silence is a reality for some individuals who have chosen to live a life among the wilderness. The people who have chosen this lifestyle get a feel into the way humans have lived since the beginning of humanity. How the pioneers felt, while they were settling into the land. A life within the natural world, rather than as a force working against it. The different human development epochs such as hunter gathering societies or the industrial revolution, have all led to a journey of change in how we have removed our lifestyles from the natural world. But how has this shift affected our consciousness?

Living this way has been a reality for Jeanette Aplin, her husband Pip Aplin, and their two children. When Jeanette was in her early twenties, her hus-

band Pip got a job working as a lighthouse keeper. So for nine years they moved around New Zealand living on rural islands in the lighthouse service. This was a life in the complete wilderness, rugged natural living. Often there was only one other family living on the island with them, so remote life became their normal. It was on these islands that their two young children were raised. After Pip finished his service, they moved to Arthurs Pass for seven years, which is a small township in the Southern Alps of New Zealand. Then in 1968, they moved to D'urville island for the rest of their lives. They've spent over 40 years dwelling on this island on a 26 acre piece of land consisting of mainly native forest. On D'urville they lived without power and off the grid from the modern land. Jeanette has close insight into a life among the wilderness, so one day I had a conversation with Jeanette over the phone, reflecting on her inspiring history.

Since meeting her husband Pip, Jeanette always knew that she would live a life among nature. To her it was an organic transition into something she perceived with wonder, it came from feeling that she drew from within her.

"We knew from day one that our life together would be somewhere 'in the wild.' It was part of our nature because we had been brought up that way and because it suited our personalities. But not everyone is this way inclined. Many are not raised to feel at ease with nature. And many are at ease and have no desire to understand it or to live with it. Some live with it as though they must conquer it, some know



"Tonight the beach is ours"

Circa. 1970

they must work with it, and some just bumble along with awe and wonder.”

This feeling, a longing to be inside the interconnected cycle of nature, is something which has drawn all kinds of humans throughout history. But is this purely in our nature, or is it a choice? Because of the developing cities and cultural shifts, more and more people are being raised without an awareness of the natural world. So there is less desire to move into this wild lifestyle, as it is simply just unfamiliar and unknown. But in contrast to this, there also seems to be an evolving awakening of people who do remember value of a life within nature. The significance of how it makes you feel, and what can be achieved within it.

Inspiration is a simple but crucial ingredient to living a fulfilling life, something that without, it can quickly become dull. Nature has been an endless muse for all manner of people, in many aspects of life. The great artists, architects, inventors, scientists, authors and poets. In essence, nature is something which has consumed and enlightened our souls. But it was interesting to find that Jeanette, who has lived in nature nearly all of her adult life, believes inspiration comes instead from the people and conversation around you. Rather than the nature you live in. “I’ve known so many people, and I think I’m one of them, who thought that if you go out to a place or to live on an island. You’ll be able to find inspiration in the natural environment, you’ll be able to write your books. But in actual fact, you don’t find inspiration for very long. You get very stale. But if you live with a group of people or in a society at large, you have all the opinions of other people around you, so you get to sift out what you believe and don’t believe. Having people around you also moderates and this is quite important, it moderates the way you behave and what you think. You can get very insular when

you’re on your own, you can start believing that yours is the only way. I think that’s actually quite an important truth. We actually do need input from everybody around us.”

Humans are fundamentally social creatures, we live in communities, communities that are essential for sharing ideas and influential beliefs. Constantly we are being bombarded with opinions, statements and questions from the media and society itself. So this influence naturally manifests into something which becomes belief. It turns inspiration into a colourful combination of multiple perspectives, rather than just your own circling thoughts. Without these external voices whispering in your ear, in isolation your own thoughts become amplified and monotonous. Whether this is for better or for the worst depending on the individual, it is and has always been a necessary act to communicate with others to motivate the creative mind.

Although there is an idyllic representation of living off grid. It is also not an easy way to live, conventionally there is far more struggle. Simple things like heating your home and cooking your food, become a practise of patience, which modern technology has cured for most of the Western world. Despite this, Jeanette didn’t mention those hardships, as they adapted to become her normal. Instead what Jeanette regrets about her lifestyle choice, was the loss for the community, the purpose that living within one gives.

“As well as loving nature, I think for me part of living nature is also loving and understanding how people function. One of my regrets about living an isolated life is I haven’t been able to perhaps do my bit for people. You can’t do that sort of stuff when you live in isolation.”

Nowadays, to be able to live a life wholly consumed by nature, one has to move out into the middle of

“Bread Baking is an Essential”



nowhere. Generally, the nature in these places are so pure, because it’s where little humans dwell. Despite the enlightening insight nature provides, living within it comes at a cost, and that is the loss of community, the loss of connection with humanity. Which is undeniably something which is imperative to our kind. The balance of human and nature has been lost, so there needs to be a way of living in nature that can come with community. For this to come to fruition, some fundamental cultural ideas need to be reinvented. So the entire circle of the human condition can be fulfilled.

Humanity has had multiple shifts throughout history, there have been times of collective awakening and times of global depression. There has been a journey to get to where modern humanity is now, but in order to modernise we have diverged from the natural world. And into something which has stemmed far beyond what once was. Since the new ecological epoch has begun, humans have put the needs of our development in front of the nurturing earth. This path away from nature has significantly affected our consciousness and what we prioritise. For so long we have been walking further and further away from nature. Yet recent studies from Harvard university (1), have suggested that living closer to nature can increase the longevity of your life. Not only does it nurture the health of our bodies, but it does so to our mind too. The “biophilia” hypothesis was proposed by renowned biologist and

naturalist E.O Wilson. Said by Howard Frumkin, this hypothesis expresses the idea that “that we as a species have been embedded in nature for over most of our existence, and something about that nature contact still resonates with us. It is soothing, and restorative and thereby good for mental health.” Mental health has become a developing issue for all ages of life, and returning to our natural roots could be one of the solutions to this. Perhaps as a species this shift is so unnatural it unsettles our very nature.

“By living off the grid I was thrown back onto my own resources, reaching deeply into myself. I am fortunate in that for me the natural world has been an inexhaustible source of glory. The interconnectedness of life, and of the whole cosmos fills me with awe.”

It’s a right of passage to remove yourself from your comfortable habitat, and place yourself into a whole new environment. Especially when it’s not a conventionally easy lifestyle. However, nature compensates. It expresses itself in a way which is enticing for humans, its artistry allures us like an enchantress. The feeling nature can provide is something to be remembered, something to be awakened by. As in essence, the very nature of life has been moulded from its creation, and ultimately in the end, will be what it returns to.

(1) Chelsea Harvery, Why living around nature could make you live longer. The Washington Post magazine, 2016



kindred