

On Land Rover Maintenance

Introduction: Self Reliance

Setting out to share thoughts of self-reliance in the age of artificial intelligence is probably a fool's errand. Not that self-reliance will fade away, but instead technology is advancing so rapidly (exponentially at times) that any definition of artificial intelligence I use within this writing may be questionable or simply wrong in the years ahead. To offset that eventuality, I'll surrender now and assume the reader will extrapolate my obsolete comparisons and considerations to whatever is at hand.

In contrast to ever-changing technology, the needs of simple living are relatively constant: food, water, shelter. These basics may be all that can be obtained should social existence descend into dystopia, but I anticipate we will refrain from reaching such lows and so we must also include art, leisure, and pleasant distraction in our list of wants. Food, water, and shelter are the basis of good health, as we cannot survive without the three basics, and it seems that obtaining the basic needs, along with our list of wants, is ever so much easier if we are in good health. It appears that our basic needs, list of wants, and good health are joined at the hip.

The above assumptions are greatly understated as living is much more complex than what is described in a single sentence. But creating a simple definition of our basic needs and wants becomes appropriate as technology is altering what was once the basis of our society as it applies to employment, housing, transportation, relationships, and perhaps most importantly, *our self-respect*. Many of us may find ourselves suddenly unemployed or without a gainful means of support that leaves us questioning whether our skills and knowledge have any value. If so, having our goals and desires distilled down to the simplest form may become part of our life's compass.

As an example, we may go from being a competent and capable tradesperson possessing visible pride in his or her vocation to something else or nothing at all. This potential exists for all humankind: farmers to physicians and most certainly

those who work on a keyboard. The change is created by automation and artificial intelligence, taking over much of what we now consider the primary vocations and professions because it will, in its own accord, generate the technical and physical prowess needed to do so. The impact will be felt throughout society, as it will change the needs of education, how we provide for ourselves, and the subsequent dependency on each other. Many will see within this the possibility of a worry-free life rich in leisure time and the ability to pursue happiness and pleasure.

Admittedly life described by this last paragraph may seem dreadful to some, but it takes a stab at getting the obvious out of the way: the historical concepts of employment, self-determination, and society are changing dramatically, creating a new age for large portions of humanity. This change will broaden the chasm between what is now western civilization and the third world to a point of unreality and disbelief whereby inhabitants of one will not recognize that of the other. Today, people of vision are working to bring the third world along with the rest of civilization through advancements in technology, but the road is long with much to accomplish.

I've attempted to set the stage for the remaining narrative by providing a simple and flexible view of things to come. I do believe the changes in society will be positive and result in people living longer, happier, and healthier than ever before. But there is always fear of change, and the transitions happening every day will be met with resistance and anger, racial hatred, xenophobia, and the willingness to believe in conspiracies and hidden centers of social control that are creating what is perceived as a forceful change in life. But it is also possible to acknowledge this change as positive and welcome, with options that the individual may choose instead that lead down a different path: one of self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

And how will Land Rover Maintenance fit into this exploration? For many, Land Rover is an undependable, expensive vehicle that can only be repaired by highly skilled technicians at a very fancy shop that has floors like a new kitchen. For me, it is an old, jeep-like vehicle designed for the average farmer who could keep it running with a few tools and fewer parts, crawling about the unpaved terrain doing its day's work. A vehicular poster child for self-reliance.

1.

I live just south the 49th 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. For most people living in this area, the summer heat is tolerable although you find yourself seeking shade in the afternoon, whereas the winter cold can at times be intolerable if you are unprepared. This condition sets up the bookends for the simple library of ideas contained within these rambling notions of self sufficiency as nature is often the boss of our efforts.

Because you can only remove so much clothing, dressing for the heat has limitations, especially if you work with power tools or weld metal 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. 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, an important consideration when deciding what foods should be preserved and stocked in the pantry.

The wind in this location is a fickle friend who adds or subtracts greatly from the conditions imposed by extremes of temperature. 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 malevolent 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, and for heated things (like people) it becomes much more difficult to keep warm. The winter wind is very cruel and unforgiving, and you can feel its threatening cold bite into your unprotected face and hands in seconds. If you are without shelter the outcome may become an unpleasant, painful death.

Providing a description of the northern climate where I live provides 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, you may find food in the wild year around, but that food may be more cunning than you and will avoid at all costs becoming a part of your supper. Although meat and produce 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, doing so only to supplement what you have accomplished by yourself is 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.

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 or reduced 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 fuel oil for the furnace or tractor is out of the reach of most but making biodiesel is possible. Something that runs on alcohol (no, not you) produced using a still 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. Wind and solar powered energy sources have great potential, but the size and scope required for this type of equipment will be substantial if it is going to accommodate all your heating needs

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 last possibility and believe that doing so satisfies the option mentioned previously where we look forward to social changes but also want something more for ourselves. Instead, we become self-reliant 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. I personally believe that we should shift into a new career at times in our lives where we are physically and mentally changing into a person that may have different values, or perhaps have our values restructured to present those with the greatest importance as primary.

That time is here for me, or at least it is rapidly approaching as my seventh decade gets underway. That notion helps me better understand what I want to do in the years ahead, and in such a way that it invigorates my imagination and inspires me to reach out into new territory using the skills I've gained over the years. Although I frequently imagine various scenarios that provide me with meaningful vocation, I must also temper those aspirations with the reality of real life. As an example, I may wish to provide a simple fix-it services to those seeking someone that can make a widget work well again. Growing that idea from a weekend or occasional event to a routine daily experience has many questions regarding the available market for such an industry, along with a sustainable desire to do so.

Tying all this into the concept of Land Rover maintenance may seem somewhat psychotic to the reader, but I can assure you that the foundational aspects of both are well-aligned.

2.

I am of the age where my Social Security benefits and savings will soon take the place of my day-job paycheck. That's a big leap when you consider health care, utilities, food, clothing... The list seems endless. But I'm also prepared to exercise my ability to do things myself that once were accomplished by others. In my case, that's a well-worn path as I've been a skilled tradesperson all my life, alongside my professional career as a facility planner. Everything I own has my fingerprints on it. I have completed all my home renovations and improvements by myself and have constructed a shop which appeases my need to create things out of metal, as well as house various vehicles (including a clapped-out Land Rover.) Thanks to my day job paycheck I own all my property without debt and continue to maintain both the house and shop on my own.

Reading the above back to myself, it sounds terribly boastful. Forgive me if so, but my goal is to give you a frame of reference for who I am (an inventory, so to speak) and how I look at the challenges ahead, and not to crow about my abilities or what I have achieved. Something I have learned from a dear friend is that you must occasionally take an inventory of yourself to right your ship when needed. It helps melt away self-doubt and insecurity and gives you the confidence to meet the new day once again with anticipation. That inventory might draw from the indicators of success such as those Ralph Waldo Emerson enumerated years ago, such as growing a good garden or helping someone breathe easier. Often enough for me it is a new skill that has been mastered or at least learned to the extent I can be competent at it, or the satisfaction of running a few miles each day for exercise and peace of mind. With that consideration, the accomplishments I mention above are part of my inventory. I wish to share it, predicating that I am not special, but I managed to do those things, and I believe you can as well. And if you decide that the time is right to make a course correction in your life based on the changing fortunes we all face and your personal skills, then it is very important to take an inventory of your needs as well.

Finding equilibrium between income and doing it yourself can be easy to measure and the first step in undertaking greater independence. Add up the monthly bills that are part of debt, utilities, rent, mortgage, taxes or other unavoidable costs. Edit the list as much as possible to reduce the monthly costs, including a smaller apartment or home, cutting back on utility consumption, a more austere grocery list, and paying off the credit card. Where did you end up? That is your target income after taxes which must come from somewhere if not employment or savings.

Next, list the things that you routinely purchase which reflect a service or product. If you own a home, the services might include lawn care, snow removal, housekeeping, and other minimal skill efforts. This is a low hanging fruit that in general doesn't require a primer on how to accomplish each task. Take them on yourself to save money and get some exercise. You probably obtained them originally by telling yourself you were too busy and did not consider the cost of the service (when coupled with the loss of exercise) to be very expensive, especially if you elected to join a gym to make up for it.

If you're renting a home or apartment, your options are narrowed but not eliminated. If you are already living close to the bone as it were, your path upward will be financed by working outside of the day job. But if you do have discretionary income, a plan to get away from renting is paramount. Owning a home is the cornerstone of security, and maintaining the home yourself is the cornerstone of self-reliance and independence. Making the decision to buy is the most terrifying leap you may ever consider taking. But if you are careful choosing a home and have saved enough for a down payment, you will find yourself well ahead in a matter of months as you fix that monthly payment while rents continue to rise.

A complete list of needs must also include those which are more akin to your self-image and may not be obtained financially but instead through behavioral sacrifice or adaptation. As you imagine the best you can be, is there anything in your routine behavior which does not contribute to a best you, or perhaps is something that lowers your self-esteem? The list of negative addictions in life is by far much longer than the list of positive addictions. Routine exercise is a very positive addiction, along with a healthy diet, good sleeping habits, and a positive outlook. In contrast to positive addictions, behaviors such as smoking, drug use, alcoholism, and similar others are a negative addiction which harms you physically, emotionally, and financially.

Getting back to finding yourself and a path forward, the inventory mentioned previously doesn't define who you are but does give you a basis for understanding what you must, might, or should do. The decisions you make in life are informed, or at least regulated, by the inventory of what you are. This may sound a bit cockeyed as making decisions about what to have for breakfast seems unlikely to reflect who you are on any given day. Okay, that seems fair, so let us refine the definition of who we are by those decisions which have a significant impact on others or ourselves. And as you make the leap to undertaking something new be mindful of how each step becomes part of your own inventory and your continued success.

You may admire people who see all things as black or white and make decisions accordingly. That has never been me, as the older I get and the more I learn, the more ambiguous the choices in life become. To that end, I am now suspect of

anyone who speaks in absolutes, and in some cases frightened of individuals possessing such certainty. It suggests to me that they have taken on beliefs that are absolute as well, perhaps to insulate themselves from those instances where decisions are difficult or impossible because you consider the possibilities endlessly. Instead, your absolutes categorize much of the world in the polarized light of good or evil and from there you act justly.

I include the above as I progress in this offering not because I believe you should emulate who I think I am but instead to admit my insecurity. That insecurity also drives my decision making because all too often it requires me to take a chance, and trust that those qualities, skills, and accomplishments I have included in my inventory will be capable of overcoming the adversity that may be ahead as the results of that decision. If what I suggest as a solution to becoming self-reliant and sufficient looks like a mountain too high to climb, run through that inventory and if you think it is lacking, take on something new and see how it changes your life.

The options (or perhaps solutions) in proceeding towards a more independent life are important decisions to make. I've suggested that doing so may be fraught with indecision and second guessing. Ultimately the will to go through with any decision is made by believing in yourself, and taking small steps is the needed practice for achieving that belief.

3.

My old Land Rover is a gym for developing self-assurance. Its presence suggests that if given a chance, it will go anywhere you point it with the prequalification that all its parts are working, and therein lies the challenge. Describing the Land Rover in automotive advertising terms such as "low miles", "original paint", or "dependable transportation for your college student" is wholly fraudulent. In Land Rover circles, "clapped-out" and "knackered" are most often overheard when describing the current condition of the vehicle. When first produced in the late 1940s, the Land Rover was conceived as an all-purpose utility vehicle that could fulfill many roles on the farm while being easily maintained with simple tools and a basic understanding of how it worked. Having a worn-out Land Rover was and is a testament to hard work, a symbol of pride not unlike owning a soft-from-use leather jacket.

It was originally manufactured by the Rover Car Company of England after World War II as a stop-gap product which would carry the company to prosperity again. Intended for the landowner (hence *Land Rover*) it was hoped to be a popular vehicle in both Europe and England for agricultural duties. Bringing the vehicle in for a tune up or oil change would be impractical so engineers at Rover Car Company put simplicity at the center of design. The philosophy worked, and landowners soon learned to maintain and repair the plucky truck and keep it working rain or shine, a concept that would certainly fit the needs of today's self-reliant individual.

Land Rover then embodies a concept that is important to the message in this writing whereby our ability to take care of ourselves requires that the equipment needed to do so be capable of the task yet serviceable by us. That requirement greatly limits the choices, with equipment wholly dependent upon microchip components now excluded from consideration, unless you have the skills necessary to repair such devices. Our discussion has acquired two bookends of consideration as it applies to sustainable self-sufficiency: Tasks we can accomplish by learning and doing; and tasks we cannot accomplish because we are unable to learn or do because they are very complex. The solution emerges as a compromise based on capabilities and the limitations imposed by complexity.

For those who learn for the sake of learning there is no boundary to the lessons. It provides us with a more comprehensive view of the world, sharpens our intellect, and hones our problem-solving skills. This exercise also gives us more confidence in being able to understand the unknown and solve the less complex problems found in repairing a broken window or leaking faucet. And as the simple problems arise, our understanding guides our hands in what has become a more tactile exercise, not unlike a surgeon repairing a torn muscle, but with less blood (let's hope.)

Such is the nature of an easy-to-maintain simple life. Our choices in how we live are esoteric to the extent the audience is limited to ourselves. A simple life does not reflect a lack of knowledge, the opposite is most likely true. Instead, making choices that allow us to be independent with skills that blend our knowledge and craftsmanship are akin to playing a musical instrument, making fine pottery, or photographic print making. We can certainly understand the principles of how

the old Land Rover makes its spark plugs spark, but being able to apply that knowledge for a successful tune up is even more rewarding. And now that we've got that taken care of, we can have a cup of tea and read up on how the scientists at NASA solved the turbulence problem on the Saturn V engines.

Mastering simple tasks and the use of tools shouldn't be underrated. Do you recall the flat tire episode in Christmas Story? Recall how the father approached misfortune as an opportunity to exercise his skills at replacing the tire, and would judge his success by the time taken to do so? Doing things quickly can be rewarding with tasks that have limited aesthetic results, as would changing a tire. But the mindset to establish a reward in even the most mundane undertakings reflects a higher degree of understanding. As the cerebral requirements for a task are lowered, the opportunity for meditation rises and subsequently the time set aside for the task is devoted equally to the work at hand, as well as the serenity gained.

For me, this is the essence of a simple life and is perhaps the single most difficult accommodation. Why repair when I can replace? Metal siding requires no repainting, so why take up the brush? Why trim the sides of the path shoveled through the snow? Because I gain more from repairing, painting, and snow sculpture. What makes it difficult is sustaining that relationship after living in a disposable culture which values new and shiny as the attributes of desirable status symbols. This culture has been fueled by disposable income made available by premium employment or entrepreneurial opportunities which will be threatened by artificial intelligence and automation. As a result, the culture of rewards made possible by the excesses of disposable income faces an uncertain future, along with its appurtenances. Is it easy, or even possible, to leave this lifestyle behind?

That choice may not be ours for many in the years ahead. At the same time, the loss of high-end salaries has a trickle-down effect with significant economic impacts throughout the income strata. We are starting to hear the pushback on artificial intelligence and automation from more than factory workers and truck drivers, as the voices of the wealthy and near-wealthy are seeing a potentially dramatic shift in fortunes. With a similar fate, our universities and other institutions of higher education will have to embrace the meta-university concept

as envisioned by Charles Vest in his book “The American Research University from World War II to World Wide Web”. In it he describes how universities must transition to creating opportunity, but to whom and for what? The answer changes, and now it points to something other than what we have been accustomed to, such as professional engineering, accounting, law, and medical vocations; all shifting because of artificial intelligence.

I’m not certain of the outcomes, but I do believe we can best prepare for the future by simplifying our lives today. Perhaps the role of higher education will be to refine our critical thinking skills and apply them to everyday life. Judging by the spread of online learning and the ability to share it across the globe at little cost suggests a democratization of university education, a concept proposed by Charles Vest as well, but without the competition for prestigious diplomas in professions with limited membership. It’s not my desire to suggest a shift towards socialism, but it is hard to discern some other outcome that retains our current social stratification. Leaving aside any further speculation on that aspect, I believe that simplifying our lives can do no damage, and if the future remains the same as it is today, we can at least choose to live so with less stress and uncertainty.

4.

If I were to prioritize my chores based on urgency or importance, I would most likely put heating and shelter at the top of the list. Although the chance of furnace failure is remote when you’ve been maintaining the equipment on a regular basis, the possibility remains and will keep me, and my paranoid conscience, awake at night. My home is of 1912 vintage, a craftsman style bungalow, mostly original in appearance both inside and out. It receives a paint job every 6 years on average, a task which consumes most of the summer unless some serious replacement work requires more time.

The electrical and mechanical systems have been replaced, the result of a flood some 27 years ago from the time of this writing in 2024. Water filled the basement but remained away from the main floor of the house, essentially sparing it from the wrecking ball. The basement was scraped clean of everything, including the water heater, furnace, electrical panel... You get the picture. After two years of steady work, the basement was refinished as living space with a new

darkroom, bathroom, and other improvements including a new concrete floor and buried plumbing. Being 43 at the time, my work experience to date was limited to millwrighting (a type of mechanic) but had never undertaken a complete home renovation project like this.

There's more to tell regarding this adventure, but in keeping on topic, I'll stay on just keeping warm. The new furnace I installed in 1997 is now 27 years old and has performed perfectly and reliably other than on one occasion. When renovating the house, I incorporated a gasoline-powered generator in the works, which would power the home during an outage. I learned this lesson during the flood, when we were out of power for almost 30 days. A few years later, a power outage caused by an ice storm during heating season initiated the use of the generator, and power to the furnace and other necessities was restored. The generator was modern for its time but did not provide the precise 60 cycle current and specific voltage needed by electronic devices which can be damaged otherwise, such as the ignition board in the furnace. As a result it was good-bye ignition board, hello getting cold.

I ordered a new ignition board which arrived in a few days, and in the meantime was able to keep the house warm using the electric stove and a small gas fireplace in the newly remodeled basement. This was made possible by the moderate outside temperatures of November, but if it occurred in January, a much different outcome would have been probable. Of all the components of the furnace, the ignition board is least repairable, and today after 27 years a replacement they are very difficult to locate.

When I first purchased the furnace, it was at a time when I was learning much about residential wiring, gas piping, and basic sheet metal work. The internet was in its infancy, but I searched for and found volumes of information on the installation and maintenance of utilities and forming duct work. Once I understood the basic concepts and gained confidence by doing the work, I ventured out on the limb farther, and replaced all the wiring, plumbing, and gas piping within the house. During the power outage and subsequent failure of the furnace, I learned even more about circuit boards and their vulnerability to reduced voltage and current, as well as how pervasive their use has become in everyday life.

The lessons learned from the flood, and from the knowledge I gained in restoring the house, became the foundation for continued learning and understanding. It whetted my appetite to take on even greater challenges, but what stands out in my memory is the creation of confidence. Not the kind of confidence gained from knowledge, or the overconfidence fueled by arrogance, but instead a sense of resiliency that perseveres during crisis. I may be frightened, but I must go on.

All of this leads to a level of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, but something unexpected grew out of this lifelong experiment in learning that has changed me from a person who rushes through my undertakings to someone that considers each assignment a voyage in discovery – a discovery of the meaning within our labors, assessing what we feel and cherish, to winnow away the fruitless efforts which were undertaken by a venal and pedestrian desire and discard them along with the other useless claptrap that clings to us like mussels fouling a ship's hull.

I start the furnace replacement as a voyage of discovery, gathering all the pieces and parts needed into a box that accompanies the new machine from the shop to the house. With tools in hand, I disconnect the electrical power, gas, and other items that remain in place, and because I'm now 27 years older than when I first installed it, dismantle the furnace into smaller parts that I can carry up the stairs. Bringing the new machine into place and making it operational brings a calmness and sense of accomplishment to me, not unlike how I feel after going for a run in the morning.

There is also a more subtle change affected by the project whereby I feel a reduced level of anxiety about tomorrow. Although I can feel confident about completing other projects, there is always a level of doubt raised by realizing I'm growing older and less capable. That doubt is tamped down after physically doing the work and seeing it through to completion, even though it may take a bit longer than anticipated. And just as I must maintain a level of running activity to feel fit and capable, so must I continue to undertake new projects on a regular basis to feel hopeful about the future regardless of what happens around me.

Each journey is one leg of life's voyage for me. Although I resist looking back, the results of my work efforts seem to bear testament to the quality of my life. Some older projects need to be redone, as they don't reflect what I wanted to accomplish and suggest I hurried through their completion to somehow put it

behind me as soon as possible. Aging corrects that behavior, and you soon realize how the results and the memory of each endeavor define you, give you courage and confidence, and (to borrow from the Eagles) “a peaceful, easy feeling.”

5.

The previous section provided insight into my personal approach to living in a modern age self-reliantly. The example is meant to serve as a background for how I approach projects, hopefully defining a practical task that can be visualized by the reader, followed by describing the state of mind which conjures up the details used to fill in the sizeable gulf that exists between an idea and the resulting reality.

Contemplation (or meditation if you will) is an extraordinary ability we all have, and for me that gift surfaces when I’m running along a well-groomed path or paved roadway. So, it seems logical that most of my ah-ha moments have come at that time, when running and contemplation are blurred together by how our bodies stir those two ingredients together. Ralph Waldo Emerson often wrote of how walking was essential to the notion of self-reliance as it gave the person a chance to think through an idea without the intrusion of daily life. Running takes that effect and puts it on steroids, where not only do the cares and concerns of living disappear, but you also find yourself in a tunnel of self-absorption.

I’ve enjoyed recreational running for over fifty years, including the occasional organized run where everyone walks around before the start, trying to stay warm on a cool morning as the loudspeaker blares out rock and roll music. The runs have varied in length from five kilometers to twenty-six and two-tenth miles in a marathon. I have not always enjoyed the organized road races as their nature precludes contemplation by placing you in a pack of other runners and exposes you to the nervous chatter of the participants for the first mile or so. The effort does have benefits, as you may have trained over the previous months in hopes of covering the distance in a personal record time. Training becomes a part of life over time, and you often feel a letdown after the event has concluded, regardless of how well you’ve done. The appearance of the letdown tells me that the

process was more important than the goal, which applies to much in life when self-reliance comes to mind.

One of the most puzzling aspects of running is how I seldom look forward to the end. I may somewhat dread getting started on a January day when the temps dip well below zero and the wind is howling from the north, but once underway and the furnace has kicked in to keep me warm, you descend into the tunnel of self-absorption in just a few minutes, completely oblivious to the winter weather. All manners of subjects come and go, and the time goes by quickly, perhaps too quickly when you find yourself back in the comfort of home a bit sooner than you wish. The grip of “the tunnel” and the presence of mind it creates tells me that the combination of meditation and physical exertion are powerful forces within us. And like training for a marathon with its eventual letdown, you realize that through running and meditation your life is a process, not a series of goals.

Not surprisingly, the notion of mixing meditation and physical exertion is not a new concept and has been practiced for ages throughout the world. My understanding the impact of the mixing is best described by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose essay on self-reliance set in motion a new age of intellectual freedom in my country. As I understand his writings, the notion of self-reliance wasn't especially concerned with chopping your own wood, but instead it emphasized that as human beings we have the capacity to understand all of nature by looking into ourselves: no outside input or reference is needed. The emphasis was in many ways our dependence upon European thought at the time, which in Emerson's view was insufficient for the new world. Instead, long walks (up to forty miles!) would be the crucible to look deep inside himself and bring forward an understanding of life unique to our young country.

Moving ahead from Emerson's time to today provides a new perspective on self-reliance, by extending the definition not only to free thinking, but also to simple living, whereby the tasks of maintenance include repairs to our physical surrounds and our soul. And not surprisingly, undertaking either type of maintenance is more rewarding when viewed as a recurring process and not a goal or chore that begs to be completed. Comprehending how these various notions may fit together in your own world helps explain some of our uneasy feelings at times. An example of this struggle might be found in the time taken to complete some of

the more mundane tasks we might want to hurry through instead of completing them as a voyage in life. How we interpret the task as a voyage requires taking a step back and asking why we are undertaking this assignment, and what benefit does it have? Placing value on what we do, whether mundane or exciting, becomes the sum of our days' worth. If we approach a task as we would a prison sentence, we are devaluing our life and subsequently creating a void that lacks only a change in perspective to fill. My own method of pushing back on the lack of interest in a chore is to understand why the chore must be done, and what is the consequence of not completing it? In most cases I return to the realization that it adds to the quality of my life and makes me appreciate how that quality is earned through my labor.

I've noted how I refer to my contemplative running experience as "tunnelling" or shutting the outside world away and focusing on my thoughts. Throughout the years of running, working, and thinking the tunnelling has resulted in a reduction or narrowing of what is important. Perhaps it is best said as a simplification of life to the greatest extent possible, whereby I do my best to remain connected to those things which are within my ability to control, and the avoidance of things that are beyond my grasp. It is in some ways an enforced humbling of who I am, because who we are is a simple reflection of what we've accomplished, and in the big picture I've not accomplished all that much. A good house, a machine shop, a few mechanical things to work on and a brace of cameras to keep the darkroom busy.

Note that this is not self-deprecation, but further exercise in shaping a personality that is closer to whom I have become as result of what I call the "Narrowing". Narrowing is not a path of minimalism. It is instead a path of identifying in your life those bits and pieces that are important, rewarding, and can withstand the scrutiny of critical meditation. As an example, my shop space is spacious and residing within the walls are gadgets, tools, automobiles, and equipment which I've acquired over the years. A routine practice is to question the need for a particular resident, and it may be that after enough 5-mile therapy sessions I will decide I can and should live without it. This has resulted in rehoming of things I once considered very important necessities for a life that I only imagined. The reality check which cancels a project or desire has become more proactive in use thanks to the repetition provided over the years of running. Shaping my

personality and character has helped me realize what is important, and to value my time in effort by not chasing a foolish pleasure or ambition. The wanting and having are truly different.

Because I never return from the run with malice towards another, it also acts as the great arbitrator, restoring my integrity and humanity, one or both of which may have lapsed for a brief time on the bike path or city streetside. The result is acceptance and understanding of who I am: someone attempting to live a simple life, and less concerned over my status as witnessed by others. That battle is repeated quite often due to a nagging sense of self-doubt and inadequacy, a perception that I am a fraud. The result of arbitration and narrowing contributes greatly to the notion of self-sufficiency in me, not as a direct result of any day, distance, or quality; but instead as a form of evolution that your character has undergone in terms of self-understanding and improvement. I should note that although the changes affected in me have been reduced in magnitude as I age, fine tuning is still occurring daily.

Not surprisingly, fine tuning has been focused on the previously mentioned perception of myself as a fraud. It may be as well that I'm mistaking what I have termed "fine tuning" for simple aging, but finding the correct definition is akin to picking fly poop out of pepper. Regardless of how it is termed, the result is that I carefully edit my self-image so that it reflects an honest inventory, leading me in a full circle back to humility. Creating for ourselves a persona or impression for others to evaluate is a heavy burden best left behind, as we should reserve that capacity for more pleasant tasks, as creating a persona often requires us to rely on being smart instead of being pleasant. One of my favorite movie quotes (I have many favorite movie quotes, few of which can be useful for this writing) is from the film "Harvey" starring James Stewart in the role of Elwood P. Dowd who has a best friend that is an invisible, six foot three-and-a-half-inch tall rabbit named Harvey. I should mention that the characters Elwood and Harvey often enjoy trips to the local pub, where a scene unfolded to a point where Elwood explained to another pub patron how his mother would tell him that "In this world, you must be oh so smart or oh so pleasant. Well, for years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me." Although simple fare, Elwood's advice carries with it the essence of wisdom all of us might adopt and apply to our daily lives.

The arbitration, narrowing, and fine tuning (or aging) that takes us to that person we see in the mirror should be someone we admire. If you could imprint qualities on that reflection, who would you see? Is that person self-confident yet humble? Does that person harbor hatred for others or see the many and varied occupants of our Earth as lesser beings? Is that person willing to help others so they might breathe a bit easier? Becoming who you wish to be may require leaving the unsavory parts of your character behind, and running is one way to do so, although there must be equally effective alternatives to running. I consider the refinement of my character a critical part of becoming self-reliant, as the road is one you do not want to look back upon with regret, so go into it with your eyes wide open and clear about who you are.

It is possible the simple life we desire can be obtained without drastic change, especially if you are currently comfortable living in your own skin. Unfortunately for me, I am not that type of person out-of-the-box and have over the years taken on baggage that I must now leave alongside the tracks. Doing so became the catalyst for additional preparation, including the building of self-confidence. In the previous section I reflected on how taking on tasks with growing complexity and difficulty gave me the confidence to do more, and once I felt sufficiently knowledgeable regarding both the technical and practical aspects of the task, I took on even greater challenges, which may as a result require more study and research. Learning life-long is a natural and necessary part of self-reliance as the changing landscape of living requires routine updates on a host of topics, and doing so helps retain or boost your confidence when undertaking any task. You may find as I have that your abilities do not go unnoticed, and soon friends and acquaintances seek your assistance. Sharing and helping seems to be a natural extension of self-reliance as we are gregarious creatures who do better if we are not constantly alone. Crafting a network of like-minded souls often becomes a valuable resource of information when preparing yourself to live simply. Most notably, the information others may have and share regarding local resources that can be applied to your vocation as a self-reliant individual, such as gardening tips, finding bargains on home improvement materials, or the location of a good used tractor that needs just a little bit of work.

Establishing the network of valuable friends and acquaintances could be on the top of your list should you choose to, or can, remain in your day job for the

foreseeable future. Having a blueprint based on their experiences and accomplishments removes some of the self-doubt in your own abilities when you witness how something is done, instead of having to speculate on what is needed. Because everyone responds with the skills they have, it is no surprise that those seeking a more self-sufficient lifestyle will start out from a wide range of competencies. I can attest that the initial efforts are often the most difficult, and as a result cause many to reconsider and perhaps abandon their goals. Having someone who will mentor and encourage you to keep going can make all the difference. Being able to pass on that encouragement from the perspective of knowledge and experience gained becomes a way to pay forward and invest in a future partnership or friendship or both that has mutual benefit.

Within the marketplace of ideas and products that reside among the self-reliant, there lies an economy of fair trade which precludes currency. By nature, we all seem to possess many of the skills needed to get by with less, as though certain skills were inherent to being human. Those basic skills fulfill a large share of our needs, with those remaining needs part of the compromise (buying some service) we create to live as independently as possible. But just as we all possess many basic skills, we also possess some special ability that creates something unique and valuable in the self-reliant marketplace. Using that skill as barter for something lacking in your own can be one of the most rewarding experiences the self-reliant person may have, and perhaps the most consequential in your life. There exists an example within Land Rover history that reflects this approach to self-sufficiency. In the early days after the end of World War II, the economy of England was in disarray as their foreign debt bill was staggering, and the only hope for liquidating the debt was to export goods and materials for cash. The Rover Car Company manufactured excellent cars, but due to the limited exportation from England, they suffered from a lack of modernity which made their automobiles unpopular elsewhere. As steel supplies were short, only those companies having exportable products would be provided with the metal needed for production. Rover Car Company seemed doomed until the head engineer, Maurice Wilkes, struck upon an idea while clearing storm debris from his rural home in Wales.

Using a Rover sedan to pull heavy tree limbs away from the yard proved difficult with the auto, and understandably so. Car suspensions were made for comfort,

and power plants were not designed for heavy towing. Maurice had managed to secure a Bren gun carrier, but the tracked vehicle was somewhat slow and ponderous, and not something that could be used elsewhere on the property, that is unless some armed rebellion showed up at the door. Maurice's neighbor was a retired army officer and had in his possession a left-behind U.S. Army Jeep. They agreed to a trade, and after a brief period of use, Maurice determined that Rover Car Company could make a similar vehicle, although he had ideas on how to improve it and create more of an agricultural workhorse than a military vehicle.

The die was cast, and soon the plucky Land Rover brought Rover Car Company out of the doldrums and back to a time of prosperity. The eventful trade made in Wales spawned jobs and revitalized a portion of England's economy which thrives to this day. Although I doubt every barter transaction may result in such widespread success, it does speak to the power of a transaction that is not couched in currency, but instead the mutual desire of two parties to obtain something which fits better than what it replaced. From that type of transaction, another form of success may grow, one where a change is affected in ourselves as we improve our lot not with money, but directly with our skills for which we don't ascribe a cash value and instead place a more personal gain on our efforts. Imagine a similar situation for yourself, where you trade something that you made for something made by another. What value would you assign to your new acquisition? Would it be in the form of currency, or would the value be in something less tangible? You would have to be careful in undertaking this type of barter, else you may end up with a value system that is not based on money.

After reflecting on the benefits of running and maintaining good health, along with a good inventory of who and what I am, this writing calls for another important aspect of self-reliance that is unlike the meditation experienced in running, but similar in how it tends to change who we are. I'm not a religious person by any means, nor do I have any belief in gods or other unseen beings having a hand on the wheel of life. My scientific nature has made it impossible to accept something that requires an absolute, which is what religion and the accompanying belief in deities require. But I am a spiritual being, or at least someone who has a moral compass to guide him. Dr. George Sheehan, physician, and philosopher of running wrote in detail about how spirituality is an important part of our existence. He focused on a Greek term, Arete, which in his opinion

was the structure of a complete person, a good animal. He based the definition of Arete on the three components of a complete self: Spiritual, Intellectual, and Physical. I subscribe to that same definition in consideration of the self-reliant person, where preparing for a simple life requires the same ingredients as any complete person should have, but perhaps even more so as we consider the journey. Taking on what life may offer without the security of a job has a different meaning when you choose to do so rather than have the eventuality of unemployment catch up to you. If you are suddenly faced with a lack of income, your choices become critical, especially if you have a family to care for.

Here is where the compass becomes important. If you are to succeed, being fully ready for the task is the most important step. Today you can begin a process whereby you leave behind the excess baggage and prepare the person in the mirror for an uncertain future. You might very well remain employed for a long time, and if so your efforts to take care of yourself will put more money into the bank. Staying healthy will make each day better because of it, and you will find that your approach to living becomes leaner and more meaningful. You accept yourself as complete, and suddenly the compass needle is pointing towards a true north for you, a type of spiritual reckoning. And as you practice new skills, undertake more projects, and find yourself more knowledgeable than before, the direction given by the compass is not only achievable, but also desirable.

Being a witness to the ever-changing capacity of new technology suggests that we as human beings have reached a milestone of epic importance. Our definition of living is moving away from the modern-day standards that define who we are as part of a new age civilization that embraces, and takes for granted, that we will no longer be chained to some form of employment.