

## ***How to Disappear***

By Stephen Rennicks



**The Tribe live in harmony with nature.**

**The Tribe build their own shelter.**

**The Tribe have their own fuel.**

**The Tribe grow their own food.**

**The Tribe use no money or substitute for it.**

**The Tribe have their own forms of medicine and education.**

**The Tribe make their own entertainment and arts.**

**The Tribe are not trying to save the planet.**

**The Tribe are not a utopia.**

**The Tribe is not for everyone.**

**The Tribe are not neurotic.**

**The Tribe have no leader.**

**The Tribe cannot be fully understood unless lived.**

**The Tribe have made a decision about time and how they use it.**

**The Tribe understand chaos theory in relation to human evolution.**

**The Tribe are becoming whatever they are meant to be.**

**The Tribe offer solutions, intrigue and inspiration.**

"The society of our dreams will never be attained unless we work to create it."

- Andrew Rigby

It all started in 2008 when I was out hill walking somewhere in the North-West of Ireland. Something made me follow a stream through a forest, and when I emerged I was above a sheltered valley and just below could see a collection of wooden and glass houses, pastures, animals and people. Some of these persons had already noticed me so I instinctively waved; they waved back and I went to meet them. This was how I stumbled upon a small group of four extended families which have since their transition period in the 1970s been living in relative harmony with nature. I learnt that they live a very contented, secure and simple life; most significantly without the use of money or any alternate system to it. They told me it had all started from one person, a wigwam and the desire to disappear. As I got to know them I asked if it would be possible for me to document them through an art project. They agreed as long as it didn't reveal their identities or location.

While The Tribe (only how I refer to them) did not choose this life for purely environmental reasons, I was more interested in how at the time when they were entering their transition period, concepts of sustainability, recycling, leaving no carbon footprint and so on, were just beginning to gain traction with the public. Today, these ideas are just part of a lifestyle choice which still includes working in jobs we don't much care for, using money and sending children to school to partly repeat this same cycle. But if these principles were followed to their logical conclusion you could have a ticket out of society as it now stands if you so chose. I'm interested in the paradox that we live in a capitalist system which yet can preach *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle*, and excited about the possibility that in the (very) long term, if enough people followed this model a silent revolution could occur which formed a new society; perhaps one which had these values as a foundation and not merely an accessory. In this context I see the tribe offering solutions, inspiration and intrigue. Beyond this, one of the things I'm suggesting with this project is that we may need to be taking a step back at this stage of human evolution to go forward. With some imagination, flair and inventiveness on our part it could still be a very rich life, one led at last on our *own* terms maybe. How to disappear: you already know how.

Examples, ideas and concepts like *Lebensreform* can help society mutate, which it has to do to stay alive, like any organism. As we live in a state of flux, both internally and externally, we are constantly in need of new strategies for living, even if they seem to come from the past. The return-to-nature concept of *Lebensreform* is already a well worn template but one that shows no sign of losing its appeal. As long as there are people who feel alienated from their urban centered and materialistic lives this will no doubt continue to be the case. Perhaps they are chasing just another illusion but the impulse is true enough. I would personally feel that it's something inside that needs to change as well. The Tribe have found their own mutation of this model, a strategy which works for them and their survival in this particular time and space. While they do not profess to be part of any movement they would certainly on the surface share many of the characteristics of *Lebensreform*, most obviously the back-to-nature aspect, organic food, natural medicines, no alcohol or drugs. They would more see themselves as living in harmony with nature but they are refreshingly not on a mission to save the planet. They simply

aren't thinking in those terms and just recognize that they are dependant on their environment for their existence and look after it. Their choice to not use money is the real overriding principle at work here, and for me, their distinguishing feature. They have identified money as a negative root influence on society and want nothing more to do with it. The original members also professed that they had indeed felt their previous lives in mainstream society meaningless and were alienated by most of its aspects. I think they were already lost in society, and had to disappear from it before they could appear to themselves.

I knew when they insisted I could not reveal their identities or location that the project now had the potential to become mythic. Looking back I don't think I could have done it any other way as myth will always be far more powerful than solid reality: the journey or search of looking outside for the answers within. I know The Tribe is a positive example of people getting on with the here and now. Another reason for the anonymity is that they are not interested in new people joining them *en masse* but would rather be seen as an example (if seen at all) for others. They also accept that their life may not be for anyone but themselves, but strongly believe in the right for anyone to pursue this or any other type of life or reality they so choose. They speak about how important this is for the evolution of Man as they believe that difference has kept us ever-ready to adapt to change and survive as a species. This does of course concur with the chaos theory view of the evolution of Man plus principles of Darwin. They feel justified therefore in taking their small part in this and there is no question of their feeling guilty at not playing their role in the nation. They have succeeded in creating a new space to live in both physical and mental terms. They have found themselves, and rediscovered wider freedoms in the process.

"We don't use money in heaven."

- *It's a Wonderful Life*

Text from *Lebensreform in Leitrim*, a book by Sarah Browne published in 2011.

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