



MISSISSIPPI MADAWASKA LAND TRUST CONSERVANCY

Official Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S NATURE CORNER

By Howard Clifford

In late March a thrilling, unmistakable sound stopped Jean and I in our tracks and turned our eyes heavenward to sight Canadian Geese. Think back to the times you were mesmerized by the distinctive honking of geese provoking feelings of connections to eons of bygone ancestors equally mesmerized by the sound and sight.

Think too of how the haunting, primitive call of the loon makes you feel. How soulfully important these experiences are to us. To lose even one of these notes from the wilderness orchestra is too sad to contemplate. One cannot isolate or elevate one voice without decreasing the glory of the whole. Yet, we can appreciate the indignant trapper railing against the decision to honour the loon on our currency. "Where is the loon when I am trying to keep warm by a fire at -40°C. He is laughing his head off in Florida. Who comes to cheer me - the chickadee, that's who. He is the true symbol of Canada!"



How does such a tiny, delicate bird abide our winters? It is their remarkable capacity to lower their body temperature. To help survive freezing nights they each excavate their own cavity in rotten wood or some other cavity.

I imagine them kin to the wolf family, often in a pack, occasionally alone. When a loner finds me on the trail with a pocket of sunflower seeds, he seems to summon his social family to the hunt. They have a pecking order and the Alfa chickadee deals aggressively with out-of-line subordinates.

Each is unique. Some are timid and cautiously watch their colleagues take seeds from my hand. Some are cunning, appearing to be either sloppy or picky eaters spitting seeds to the ground but are later seen to be retrieving them. If I don't heed their call they fly in front of my face as if to say "I hope you are not as blind as you are

deaf!" They typically take a seed to a nearby tree where they hammer it to break through the shell. Braver ones have hammered the shell against my thumb. Some land on my hand, cock their head and eye me closely as if trying to decipher my soothing words. Their language is complex. Listen closely. As perceived threat increases they add additional 'dee' notes to their 'chickadee-dee-dee' call.

How do their small brains manage to recall a thousand or more caches containing a single seed? They do so by shedding brain neurons containing outdated information and replace them with new ones ready for action.

I have seen chickadees appearing to eat a dead chipmunk, but assumed they were scavenging insects off the body. However, this January Jean photographed a chickadee pulling off strips of meat and fat from a bone. A literature search indicated that 50 % of their diet in the winter and 60 to 90% in the summer consists of animal foods - insects, spiders, meat and fat from carcasses.

What I love most about chickadees is how wonderfully they reflect the healing and therapeutic nature of wilderness. Old or young never fail to have their spirits lifted when a chickadee land on their hand to take a seed. I don't have space to relate many wonderful experiences, so I will let this one suffice. A special needs child had a look of horror as a chickadee landed on my hand. I asked if she would like to try. She recoiled in fear, but observed closely as the chickadee continued to visit the outstretched hand of her mother. Finally she agreed to try. What a transformational experience! Instead of taking the usual 45 minutes to get to Blueberry Mountain, the engagement with the chickadees took an extra two well-spent hours. As a social worker I know no human therapist could have had such an impact on this child. A moment to be savoured. None of us remained unmoved. I know this transactional moment brought tears of gratitude to my eyes.

Erik Kafrissen Receives Certificate of Appreciation

by Howard Clifford

On November 12, 2012, at the Lanark Wild Food Club dinner, Peter Fischl, Glenn Drover, Erik Kafrissen and Barbara Gibson were presented with MMLTC's Certificate of Appreciation, awarded to individuals who have contributed in: Connecting People to NATURE, Valuing NATURE, and the Protection of NATURE. They join the ranks of Michael Runtz and Jeff Ward, previous recipients, along with an Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust Conservancy.



Chef Erik Kafrissen speaking at the Wild Food Banquet, November 2012

I continue to be amazed by the number of fascinating and interesting people who call Lanark their home, each with their own story. Erik is no exception. His parents, as part of the hippie movement, moved to Ontario from the United States and built a log cabin in the bush near Eganville, so the first years of Erik's life were literally living off the land. Foraging, hunting and gathering shaped his understanding and appreciation of the natural world.

His adventurous parents then took Erik and his sister to tour Europe in a VW camper which further expanded Erik's perspective of the world. Later his father, who taught rock climbing in Colorado with Outward Bound, was sent to start the first Outward Bound School near

Thunder Bay. Erik helped his father build the school and in return learned rock climbing, white-water kayaking and canoeing.

Erik started a biology club in high school which in reality was as much about adventure as it was about biology. Phil Davies was the science teacher at the time and was also a trapper. This combination of backgrounds led the club into a unique understanding of the natural world, so different and so much richer than what high school students experience today.

Anyone who knows Erik is aware of his expertise as a chef and his involvement with Fiddleheads Restaurant in Perth. He attended George Brown College in Toronto which launched his career as a chef. He started a successful catering business which he eventually sold.

Following somewhat in his parents footsteps he bought a 37-foot boat and spent three years sailing in the Caribbean - living off the natural world where eating fish, lobster, and shell foods was the means of survival. During this period he started a camp for youth offenders in the Cayman Islands.

1995 found him returning to Ontario where he built a log home outside of Perth where he continues to reside.

In 2009 he spent the next two years as part of the Heeb and Rob TV show. The show took him to Quebec, New Brunswick, P.E.I and Florida where he would be assigned a local foraging expert to assist in the preparation of their TV program. This deepened his capacity to combine his love of the wild with his culinary skills.

So it is no wonder Erik jumped at Peter Fischell's invitation to become a founding member of the Lanark Wild Food Club. He participates in the foraging outings and is one of the club's most enthusiastic supporters. Everyone attending the wild food dinner last November experienced for themselves how extraordinarily well he combines his love of foraging and his skill as a chef.



Wild leeks and fiddleheads are stir-fried in a wok to make a tasty dish

MMLTC is grateful to Erik and to the Club for the donation of the proceeds received from the dinner to advance the work of MMLTC. Erik states that the work of the Land Trust is extremely important and is well aware of the challenges ahead to preserve and protect nature for the good of future generations. Erik states that he is willing to lend his support to MMLTC by introducing people to the combined art of foraging and making it a gastronomical delight at one of MMLTC's fundraising events. MMLTC will certainly be taking him up on this exciting offer.