THIS WAS
TOMORROW

REE

Resident at Tinkers Bubble

In conversation with Enrico Policardo
Tinkers Bubble, Somerset
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Edited from the recorded conversation.

01 Who are you, and what do you do here?

My name is Ree. I'm a resident here at Tinkers Bubble, and I do a lot of the animal care and timber extraction. Muck in with whatever else needs doing. Raise a child. Jump for joy. I train horses and look after them, and I'm training people to look after and work the horses, so they can carry it on if we move about at some point. And raising chickens.

02 How did you get here?

With a horse and wagon, about three years ago. I meant to visit anyway, because I knew they appreciated working with horses, and we have working horses. It seemed a good place to spend a bit of time, and to put down some roots so my child could make some friends. Travelling, it was hard to make friends.

03 How would you describe this place to someone who knows nothing about it?

It's a Luddite's paradise. And I'm a bit anti-tech myself. I don't like smartphones, and I'm not on social media at all. I don't think it enhances people's lives very often. For some people it does, and it's really good for them. But I feel quite strongly about it.

04 What makes it unique?

Everyone working for a common cause, and agreeing that's what we're doing. There are other places around the world that do this, but I don't think there's anywhere in England, to my knowledge, where you cook on fire, everyone agrees to try to reduce their consumption, and we work together to grow

food. And we're all getting on, which is really nice. I think that's quite unusual for a place that's trying to do something against what the rest of the world is doing - actively against the practices out there.

I was living like this anyway before, so for me it's not that different. It's just nice to do it with people. It's lovely to go out into the world and feel I'm looking forward to coming back and seeing everyone here.

05 What makes you really happy?

Being with the horses, and seeing my child happy. Being in nature. Birds, or beasts in the air.

06 What's hard about being here?

Actually, the rats are doing my head in at the minute. I'm getting quite upset about them.

The other thing is that I've found sharing food quite difficult. When something nice has been made, or someone's brought it in as a gift, people aren't very good at sharing it equally. It doesn't get shared very fairly, and I find that tough. It brings out the worst in me, actually. I think I like to be seen to share - but actually I don't really want to. If I've got something delicious, I want it for myself and I don't want anyone to know. And with communal things, I very rarely get any, because I'm sorting out the animals and I'm not the quickest up to dinner, so I miss the best bits, and I get a bit rattled. And I'm very grateful if anyone puts some aside for me.

I like to provide well, though. Giving good food feels like a gift. I like people to be well fed, and I want to see that. I haven't really unpicked my thing around food properly. It's come up since being here - I didn't have it before, because I've never really lived with people much. Maybe I hid my treats. And I don't feel guilty about it - I feel entitled to have something for myself,

which is interesting. I see other people do it too. Maybe it's our culture. You just don't want to end up with nothing tasty. Chocolate and cake, anything fatty and tasty. There was this delicious hot lime pickle on the shelf, and I was so looking forward to it, and then it just vanished.

[…] I definitely get more upset when the rodents do it.

07 Is this the future you were dreaming of?

You know, it almost is. I'm pretty happy. The only thing I'd tweak is having more resident children, so she's got that - playing and squabbling, whatever it is. It's very uncommon here. It could be what takes us away one day, to find more children to play with. Sometimes we feel a bit isolated. The residents are very kind at pitching in, but we're all adults, and that's boring for a kid. We can never quite replace what a child brings to a child. Parenting is quite intense.

08 Was being a parent something you always wanted?

[…] I always wanted to work with horses. Everyone said, you can't have horses, you haven't got any money, how will you look after them? But I stubbornly did it anyway, without any land. I kept horses anyway - on grass verges, bits of land, whatever.

09 Do you come from a horse family?

Slightly. They kind of are now. My granddad was a firefighter in London and loved the fire brigade's horses. He was useless with them, and you didn't swap jobs back then, so he could never work with them. But when my mum was born he got her a funny little pony, because he was obsessed with horses. He kept pigeons, and he kept a horse in the garden, in a stable made out of

doors. So my mum learned, and then she got us a pony when we were little. It's in the family. My other granddad was a land worker, and my dad works the land. It's in there. Peasant stuff.

10 What would you tell someone who wants to live more connected to the land?

It's probably good to go and volunteer to start with. That's what I did in my early twenties. This was actually the first place I came across as a volunteer, and it was very inspiring. I kind of led my life in parallel with it the whole time until I came back round. I'm not very good at advice.

11 Letting go of phones must be hard.

It's very hard. I don't know what comes first. Here, you almost get pushed out of it - you can try to have a phone, but it's very hard. And there are more interesting things to do. I think trying to shed your stuff first might not work. You might need to just jump in. I had a friend who decided to live in a tent, wild camping on the seafront, for a few years. It did him quite well. There are lots of ways to do it.

12 What inspired you?

At school you think you have to get a job and focus on learning something, and I didn't know what to do. I went to college, and I was deeply affected by seeing how the world was going - rainforest destruction, and the destruction that's happened here. I had a tutor whose main thing, the thing that stuck with me, was: we just need more peasants back on the land. And it struck me: well, that's what I already am. Why am I even here, in this classroom? It was quite helpful. I did a lot of work for free, helping conservation people, and learned a lot of forgotten stuff. What you get taught at school is just the opposite of what you need to know to be properly alive.

We've been disabled from it. Completely. We've been lied to. Everything's been separated from us. We don't know how food is produced. We don't know how to look after ourselves. We don't know what to do if the electricity goes down. We just don't know.

When I was no older than seven, I saw somebody at the side of the road with a horse - travellers. And I just knew that's what I wanted to do. Seeing it being done meant I knew it was possible. I feel that's more inspiring than a lot of things: seeing it done, by ordinary people, and knowing you could do it too.

I grew up in a nursery, actually - a council-run plant nursery. […] But the plants - it was really nice, growing up with all those polytunnels. In the morning it smells of pure oxygen.

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