

resilience

It all makes eco sense



by Ann Baird

Twelve years ago, my life as an Island Gal began. When I was 32, my first husband dumped me for a Harley and left me with the comment that I wasn't very feminine. After a brief stint wearing leather miniskirts and spiky boots, I tossed out the push-up bra, left Vancouver and began my new life on a tiny Gulf Island.

For five years I lived alone and communed with nature and power tools as I completed an off-the-grid, solar powered eco-home. Unplugging from media, stores and the endless messages of who I should be enabled me to blossom into the woman I am today ... and always was. I simply gave myself permission to be me.

This is when life became interesting. My days were busy with the hard work of finishing my house and I worked part time on a neighbouring island as the financial manager of a local organic food co-op. Commuting through all weather in a 16-foot aluminum boat I lovingly named *Brutus* gave me confidence and independence. I had spent five years as a self-proclaimed sea hag when my new husband, Gord, found me shopping ... online for a man.

It was a match made in cyberspace, and within three months we were engaged. Three months later, we were married on the beach in front of my completed off-grid home, and I became stepmom to two very young, beautiful children. Now, there's a challenge!

I moved to the big island and struggled with life in the city of Victoria, yet continued to fall fully in love with my new family. Gord and I brainstormed ideas for a shared vision for our new family's future. We jumped at the craziest idea we could come up with: create "The World's Greenest Modern House" and live what we call a reasonable life. So, with our newlywed passion and blind optimism, we set out on our journey ... and just to make it a bit more fun, my parents joined us. Oh my! In six months, our new, blended multigenerational family had moved into two travel trailers on seven acres in the Highlands, near Victoria.

As a biologist and bookkeeper, I became a relentless dot connector between

ecological and economic systems and often subjected my family to passionate rants on the day's revelations. Creating an affordable home that truly functions as part of the ecosystem required a new level of systems-thinking and dot-connecting. This achievement was only possible through the full and equal engagement



of the female and male perspective ... not to mention perseverance.

Now, at the age of 44, I am no longer shy and insecure. My focus is the issue I'm interested in and not what others might think. Leading tours of our home, speaking in front of cameras, and giving slide presentations and tours to groups of architects, engineers or politicians has become my new normal.

I am driven by a deep concern for rising energy and food costs, and a dramatically changing climate. What does this mean for the future ...

self worth

my future, my kids' future, my human community and my ecological community? These are complex, interconnected issues with no simple solutions. I believe that it is our role and responsibility as women to become fully engaged in the creative design possibilities for the time ahead.

Whatever our individual gifts are, we need to apply the female perspective to co-create an equitable and ecologically sustainable future based on sharing, caring and cooperation.

Ann and her family walk the talk of sustainable living in their multi-generational home. Eco-Sense, as they call their home, is the greenest modern house ever rated on the greenest building program ever created in the world. Features include passive solar design, solar PV with grid tie, net zero electricity, use of 90% less energy and water than the average B.C. home, solar thermal hot water, composting (no flush) toilets, rainwater harvesting, grey water reuse, a living roof, earthen floors and natural finishes, all integrated into their exceptionally beautiful, modern and affordable version of earthen architecture. The home is surrounded by fruit trees, vegetable gardens and chickens. Eco-Sense has been featured in hundreds of media reports including documentaries, magazines, newspapers, museums, TV and radio.

Ann's background in ecology and financial management facilitates her passion for integrated sustainability. She believes that all design should mimic natural systems in form, function and beauty. Ann and her husband Gord teach that "if it isn't affordable, it isn't sustainable," and live their motto: Less life stuff ... More life style!

The Bairds offer tours of their home and provide consulting and educational services in sustainable building. For more information, go to www.eco-sense.ca or email Ann at ann@eco-sense.ca

