

This has been one of the harshest and snowiest winters on record in Wisconsin, think of what it would be like if you spent the entire winter living outside in the middle of the woods with no electricity. A group of hardy souls is doing just that as part of month and year long opportunities at a wilderness camp in northeastern Wisconsin. The Teaching Drum Outdoor School is open to individuals, couples, and families, anyone who wants to learn the skills necessary to live in nature across the four seasons.

We spoke to Chris Bean, a Program Guide at the Teaching Drum. Bean is 43 years old and has been with Teaching Drum since 2000, when he experienced his first full year of living in the wilderness. He started out talking about the switch he made from teaching in public schools to teaching in nature.

I was feeling more and more disconnected with seeing our children grow up and not really have a clear idea about who they are as people. And I was really fascinated by that and interested in that. I recognized that I wasn't really going to tap into that by continuing on teaching in the public school system. And I started searching for finding more of a connection on what it meant to be human. And I ended up coming across the Teaching Drum School, finding out about this yearlong program of living out in the wilderness for a whole year, that captured my imagination and so I went for it.

It's so radically different than what we are used to. No houses, no indoors of any kind, so you're really living outside 24/7. So that exposes people to a tremendous amount of change, and learning to adapt to that. And learning the ways that the native people lived. You're living with a group of people the whole time, so you'll have 4 to 6 campmates. There's the interpersonal skills, learning how to relate with each other and how to communicate in a new way

in which everybody is working together and getting into a flow that you need to have in order to support each other.

We purposefully put people together in a group that will be able to compliment each other and also create enough friction so that people can look at what their role is in the relationship. And that comes up right away. You can have, let's say two people who are very energetic and outgoing. It's not hard for them to go out and gather food every day. And maybe there are two people in the group who are like that and maybe two other people in the group who are aren't very physical and perhaps more reflective and spend more time away from camp. So that is potential for conflict when for example the group has to build a winter shelter within a certain amount of time before the winter really sets in.

I would really like to stress how important the relationship skills are. Without knowing who we are as people and how we relate to the circle of life, we really don't have a sense of who we are. And that is probably the single most important thing for us to be able to reconnect as a species, a human species. To recognize how we should fit into the world. And I think that is vitally important right now for us to think about. And that's what given in this program. It really helps people to really reconnect to a core part of who we are as people.

So did you see any of your friends and family during this whole year?

The program is open for visitors to come. I had a couple friends who came during the year and spent a week with me. But I didn't see my direct family for the whole year, although we stayed in contact through letters and phone calls once a month.

I understand there's also month long programs for people who can't make the whole year commitment. Could you tell us how that works?

Sure. It's called the Wild Moon Immersion. It's people staying a whole moon phase at our wilderness camp. The program is \$800. You basically sign up and join us in living in our camp with 3-4 people who are graduates of the yearlong program, who are living the Native Lifeway and practicing all the skills that they learned in the yearlong. And each moon in the program has its own unique flavor. For example this next moon we'll be tapping trees for maple syrup. So people coming for this moon will be having that experience and learning how to do that and how the natives did it. We just started the program and it's been a great success already.

And what kinds of foods do you eat when you're only eating from nature around you?

During that time is mostly in the summer because that's when we have enough available to us. For example fish, and any other animals that come our way which could be anything from raccoons to deer. There are probably 30-40 different plants in our diet throughout the summer that grow in our area. So that would be a lot of greens, nuts, sometimes eggs during the springtime, and a lot of berries during the summer months. So it's a very simple diet. With no sugar or spices or anything that we're normally used to.

So when you come back and have a doughnut does it just blow your senses away?

It does. It's really amazing how in touch we become to our bodies and what we feel when we clean our diet out for a specific period of time like that. It's amazing how our senses are enlivened and how much more acute our senses

become. And as people finish the program for a month that doughnut that they've been craving really spins them out. It's a really enlightening way of learning about what sugar does to us and how these different things in our diet really affect us.

And that was Chris Bean, a Program Guide, with Teaching Drum. The yearlong program begins May 1st and the month long Wild Moon Immersion run throughout the year.