

## On my 44th Birthday

When I was young, I used to try and imagine my future life. I would do this, either while staring out of the window at school, or standing on the landing at home looking out over the park, or lying in bed at night.

I did a great variety of things with my life (none of them involved being an artist!), but all my future lives ended at age 38 ~ this was an age so old that I just couldn't imagine beyond it. I just couldn't imagine being as old as my parents, and certainly not my grandparents ... but more importantly, together with most of my generation, I couldn't imagine beyond the year 2000.

As a teenager my dreams changed radically. Being a member of one of the most dysfunctional communities on the planet (the military boarding school, Wellington College), I dropped my visions of applying my scientific skills for the good of my Country, and threw myself into a life of creative community endeavour.

But one thing didn't change, has never changed, and that is my love of nature, and my love of open spaces, and my yearning for freedom.

One of my earliest memories, from when I was about 4, was visiting an old uncle:

After what seemed a lifetime of being on my best behaviour, we all went out to the park. In my memory "The Park" was a vivid green hillside, so vast it seemed to go on forever, finally disappearing in a green haze on the edge of the world! This, for me, was heaven, and all I remember of it was running and running and screaming with joy ... and the memory just seems to go on forever too!

This is a feeling that has always stayed with me ~ a feeling of ecstasy so overwhelming that I almost dissolve into my surroundings ~ it's a feeling that underpins most of my writing, painting, music and ritual ...

But it's not just about a love of nature, and it's not just about a love of life. The more I look at it, the more complex it becomes: It's something about being alive, fully alive, within nature. It's about freedom, the freedom to run, to shout, to sing, to dance, to disappear over the horizon, and then to return at will!

This is one thing I really want to bring to the world: The feeling of freedom, a kind of inner emancipation ~ the ability to challenge received wisdom, defy convention, to choose a way of life built on our own inclinations, not on other peoples' expectations and demands.

So much of what I've done over the last 25 years has been about emancipation: Even my years trying to build intelligent robots were based on the hope that factories could be run by robots, leaving everyone else ... well ... free. Naive, as the true challenge is not the creation of wealth, but its distribution, and when I realised the folly of that path I came to Oxford, and started to build the life I now live.

But what of the year 2000? Oddly enough, my life did kind of end in 2000: Because that year I realised the last of the things that I *really* wanted to do before I died. Suddenly, much of the angst went out of life, and youthful enthusiasm returned - No, I hadn't done everything I ever wanted to do, but all the *really* important things. Things like:- Playing in a band, travelling in snow-capped mountains, living in a (functional) community, trying out life without mains facilities for 3 years, holding my new-born son ...

For me, this is middle-age. A kind of contentment that runs very deep. I know that when I reach 50 I'm not going to be worrying about why I wasted 30 years earning money I didn't need, and what happened to all my dreams. I'm sure I'll be having some kind of crisis at 50: concern about old age.

That bothers me even now, not having a pension, the prospect of being toothless, doubly incontinent, unable to walk or see, all these things send a shiver of cold down my spine. But I'm not in my Autumn yet. At 44 I'm definitely in my mid Summer: The fruits are still growing on the trees, and the sun shines brightly; I'm still free to follow whatever path I choose, for as far as it takes me, over the horizon and beyond ... free to follow the clouds on their mysterious pilgrimage to unknown lands ...