

Raven

That was the year that cellphones started controlling external devices. Wireless bluetooth speakers were everywhere. Lenses that send their images to your phone... Microphones that amplify your voice but also save a copy of your performance to your phone...

Mechanical ants performed ballets controlled by a phone that year.

Robots in a warehouse made decisions in collaboration with a phone to fill an order.

Model planes in the sky performed elaborate tricks controlled by a phone.

That was the year I met Trickster Raven.

He was sitting down on the dock at Granville Island when I met him. Not busking, but hanging with a busker, a guy who did electronica with a solar panel.

"Pretty quiet," I said.

"Cloudy day," said Trickster.

Another time he was down at the water unloading a cargo from a radio controlled sea kayak.

"How does it move?" I asked him.

"Little propellor powered by an electric engine," he answered.

"Lithium cells," I said impressed by his array of laptop batteries.

"We have a bunch of kayaks I control from here," he showed a little map on his cellphone.

"So each of those little kayak images exists in the real world?" there were a couple of dozen boats spread out around the lower mainland. Up the rivers, in the inlets.

Sure, we do courier work, a little package delivery, run up the rivers, over to all the islands," he answered,

"People think it's a romantic way to send flowers," I guessed.

"Exactly," Trickster answered.

A third time he was selling scallops on the dock.

"Direct from Oyster bay," he shouted.

"East coast of the island up by Qualicum isn't it?" I asked Trickster.

"Never been there myself," he answered.

"How far do your boats go?" I wondered.

"Including dead zones, all the way up to Port Hardy," he answered.

"I guess they can sail unassisted through the areas where there is no service" I ventured.

"Interesting problem running a boat without a phone connection," said Trickster.

"That's how boats have always been," I thought but didn't say out loud.

"You need to know about the island network," Trickster said softly.

I let it go that time but it was going to come up again.

A month later I saw Trickster again on the street downtown. Granville and Hastings, and he looked so at home hanging with the street people, I hated to interrupt.

"So what is the island network?" I walked up to him and asked.

"Hey there, what's your name?" he replied recognizing me.

"Patric," I said leaving out my surname.

"Irish," he guessed.

"My grandfather," I answered.

"The island network connects squatters who live on little islands up the coast, north of Port Hardy, there are 500 klicks of uninhabited temperate coastline up there" said Trickster.

"Past cell service," I said.

"Each camp has a dish, hidden in the trees" said Trickster.

"And your Kayaks pass between them?" I asked.

"It turns out that small packages are big," said Trickster.

"Illegal packages," I said.

"Initially yes, but that didn't work. They kept getting ripped off," Trickster laughed.

"So what do you move now?" I asked.

"Mostly watts. We have a system of buoys that charge batteries out in the deep water," Trickster bragged.

"I've seen them selling them from a barge, down by Chinatown," I said.

"Renting them," corrected Trickster.

"And they come all the way down from Port Hardy?" I asked.

"In Cambodia 60% of people sit and watch TV at night powered by a car battery. Why not us?" said Trickster.

"Because we have plugs in the wall," I said.

"You do, my clients are mostly street people," Raven corrected.

"It's because of you that I see rubbies on the street watching tv." I said.

"There is a third world country inside Canada. The silent poor. I work for them," said Trickster.

A few months went by.

I was studying sociology at SFU not really thinking about Trickster Raven.

But while Marx and Engels were a lot of fun, I couldn't help thinking of the real world and Trickster trying to get power to the people on the street.

I went looking for him at Granville market.

He was sitting in a cafe with a GQ-ish looking guy in a business suit. Apparently they had smoked a joint together, because they were talking very fast and had red eyes.

"85% of the land in British Columbia is owned by the government. Crown land," Trickster asserted.

"And yet most people can't afford to own property," added the business suit.

"Patric, have you met Ryan?" he's my lawyer," said Trickster interrupting to introduce me.

"Associate," corrected Ryan shaking my hand.

"I thought it might be good to have someone with a law degree give Trickster a refresher on the land tenure system in BC," I said.

"We're here to help," said Ryan making a gesture like he was there for other reasons.

"A lot of our camps have legitimate tenure," pointed out Trickster. "Mushroom pickers, herring fishermen, Geoduck divers, a pretty fringe bunch," Ryan added skeptically.

"I think I'm going to do a paper on the island network," I interjected.

"My B.A. is in sociology too. Trickster told me," said Ryan.

"A test of your ability to put up with bullshit, I opined.

"And law school is a test of your ability to deliver bullshit," said Ryan.

"So you guys put up with and deliver bullshit, can you imagine people who eat promises? Masticate hearsay?" said Trickster.

Our chat went on until the cafe closed.

Ryan and I remain friends today.

It had been a full year since I had seen Trickster Raven. I'd finished my sociology degree and had taken a year off to decide on a topic for my master's thesis.

I heard that Ryan was now a full time lawyer working for the island network.

I was down at the science centre one day, underneath the big aluminum geodesic golfball, by the Whitespot.

I looked down from the cement walkway and who should I see on the dock below but Trickster Raven talking on a cellphone.

I made my way down the ramp to see him, rehearsing all the things I meant to say if I ever ran into this guy again.

"Patric!" he called to me as I approached.

"My kayak gets here in a minute and I just called a commercial courier service, can you take a picture when the kayak gets here?"

"Good to see you," I offered picking out the camera app on my phone.

"Ryan was talking about you the other day," Trickster gossiped.

"My profs know him, star pupil," I confirmed.

"I hope we can afford to keep him," Trickster shrugged.

"How is business selling to street people with no cash?" I asked.

"This is high end flower delivery we're working on now." said Trickster.

The kayak arrived and I took a picture of Trickster retrieving the flowers from the front hold.

I sent him the image because his phone had printing abilities.

"The customer will love this," Trickster enthused pinning the image onto the flowers.

"What good is a romantic kayak delivery without proof," I pointed out.

In mythology, and in the study of folklore and religion, a trickster is a god, goddess, spirit, man, woman, or anthropomorphic animal who plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior. It is suggested by Hansen (2001) that the term "Trickster" was probably first used in this context by Daniel G. Brinton in 1885.

I got the text from Trickster just a few hours later. It was a quote from wikipedia giving me some background on his name.

"What about that carving?" I texted back to him. We had talked earlier about the Bill Reid carving in the Museum of Anthropology. Depicting mankind as albino crabs living in geoduck shells. The creation myth says Raven discovers man that way.

"My family name is more like Edgar Alan Poe's 'The Raven'," he texted back.

"But dad was doing acid that year I was born, and he named me after the Haida creation myth," Trickster confirmed.

The sculpture of The Raven and the First Men depicts the story of human creation. According to Haida legend, the Raven found himself alone one day on Rose Spit beach in Haida Gwaii (also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands). He saw an extraordinary clamshell and protruding from it were a number of small human beings. The Raven coaxed them to leave the shell to join him in his wonderful world. Some of the humans were hesitant at first, but they were overcome by curiosity and eventually emerged from the partly open giant clamshell to become the first Haida.

The courier showed up and took the flowers from us. Then Trickster said goodbye to me and was off on his ancient carbon fibre mountain bike.

I was left standing on the dock in front of the science centre, wondering what had happened.

Her name was Rainbow Streaming-Love-From-Heaven McGuire. A hippy child for sure. But not the lazy unclean variety. Hard working and attractive and Ryan fell for her when the Island Network had a convention in Campbell River. Nora was her colleague. Next island over. Some kind of mutant variety of a Willing Workers on Organic Farms volunteer from Oslo. The inside passage reminded her of the fjords at home. Nora reminded me that I had a heart.

And time would progress and we'd spend days at those camps. More likely to catch a seaplane up than Trickster's kayaks, we loved those girls in their 3 inch thick blue styrofoam huts. Dark green tarpaulins wrapping us in secrecy, deep in the woods, heating tape rather than campfires keeping us warm.

Secret mansions powered by arrays of laptop batteries like a Tesla Roadster and lit brightly with 5 watt LEDs. A composting toilet attached and on duty, and a cogenerating cookstove baking bread and heating the house.

Rainbow made us stir fry and wove tapestries.
Nora told us Viking fables of old.
Ryan showed his talents as a guitar player,
I did some baking.
Cinnamon buns all around.

Internet dishes and cell phone repeaters kept us in touch, and the fresh food arrived on kayaks each day from Port Hsrdy. We traded this cargo for charged batteries we'd collect once a week from deep ocean.

It was summer.

On the rare years when there are months of sunshine, the Central coast of BC is the nicest place in the world.

Sometimes Nora and I would't see Ryan and Rainbow for days. Bathing in waterfalls, although the hut has a perfectly working shower, Nora taught me about lovemaking, because I was a klutz. Then rainbow was pregnant and the winter began.

We still went up there, still loved our ladies, but with a child on the way and ice in the air we were more serious.

Of course Rainbow was a midwife and planned to deliver in her hut.

Still on Mondays the girls would don wetsuits to kayak out to the open sea and collect batteries.

Ryan and I would convene in a hut talking it out.

"She's absolutely insane having the baby up here," he'd argue.

Other time he'd update me on his legal work.

"So you've got this multimillion dollar Tidal energy company and they are finding it too expensive and labour intensive to keep their buoys bobbing in the waves.

Along comes Trickster Raven.

Back in the city for a few months it seemed like another world we had visited up the coast.

Ryan was in court arguing for a new category of land use. Wave powered generator keeper.

Trickster Raven was selling styrofoam sleeping boxes with heating tape and batteries to street people.

Of course the batteries were from the island network 'keeping the homeless warm because the government's too lame' system.

Nora skyped a lot, for a while there we thought she was pregnant too.

But only Rainbow was burdened enough with pregnancy to find the work on the buoys difficult.

Ryan and I found a few sunny days in November and flew up. Rainbow was showing and trickster had put her on a special 'high vulnerability' list that meant she got extra food for storage and batteries for warmth.

Ryan did the 'I'm a little insane', expectant father thing and fixated on a wood stove for Rainbow.

"She can't burn wood because the island network is still a stealth operation.

If I won my case and she had tenure then she could burn wood. No counting on buoys out to sea for warmth in the winter, My child deserves better."

At Christmas the girls flew down to the city. We made merry at my apartment, with muld wine and sausages.

"Cheese and crackers," said Ryan when I took his picture.

He had reason to be smiling. He'd won his case. Rainbow was going to get her wood stove.

In fact January and February were the construction months, totally unusual to build in Winter.

Ryan paid to helicopter in a team of log builders from Port Hardy. Took a few weeks before the weather broke.

So near to the ocean and under the forest there was only a foot of snow on the ground when they got there.

They felled some trees right near her styrofoam box and built a small cabin with a wood stove in 50 days.

A reason that things went smoothly was that Nora and Rainbow provided food to the workers.

That supplies arrived in unmanned electric sea kayaks was a testament to the quiet efficiency of Trickster Raven.

"I'm a diabetic," Nora was crying on Skype.

"Trickster has been sending me insulin, but for some reason it didn't arrive this month."

It was all coming horribly clear.

There was a huge storm.

Rainbow was ok in her new log cabin giving birth.

Nora was at her place feeling things she hadn't felt in years. Since the last time she'd missed her shots.

Slipping into a diabetic coma.

Ryan and I caught a ferry to Nanaimo from Vancouver and drove the 6 hours up island to Port Hardy in 3.

And there we stood. Watching the storm at the dock, out over the ocean.

Helplessly feeling our women in distress.

"Rainbow is fine, she's going to chastise us for worrying," Ryan said.

"He'd just had a facetime call on his phone.

"I reached Nora too," I said in a scratchy voice.

"I don't think she's going to be offering any assistance," I added. We both looked down at the package.

I insulin I'd procured from a pharmacy in town.

"This is the part where the overweight sociologist paddles courageously through the storm to bring his girlfriend Insulin," I whispered.

"Don't do it man, we called search and rescue," Ryan pleaded.

"They won't go out til the storm is over." I said resolutely.

"That might be good enough," argued Ryan.

"She could barely talk for fuck sakes, she's only got a few hours."

I walked away crying.

"Where are you going?" Ryan shouted after me.

"Sometimes you have to risk death if your going to live with yourself," I shouted back.

"It was a bit odd how just as I was paddling away in a rented Kayak that one of Trickster's boats showed up. Of course Im better off in this, If I pass out for some reason the little engine will get me there."

"I'm doing this for you Nora, because you need me and it seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

"The guy at the rental company said a Kayak was best in big water. Of course he looked like a bit of a surfer dude."

"This is big water. This stretch is before the Inside Passage. Rollers direct from Japan. I think I'm getting altitude sickness."

"This is fucking far. If the Ferry to Bella Bella takes 14 hours and you are half way, I have about a 20 hr. paddle ahead of me,"

"Phosphorescence! Every time my paddle hits the water there is a splash of green light."

"I had a visitor. There was what the locals call a 'sucker hole' in the clouds and a native guy in a tarped off zodiac and twin 80 horse mercs came out to see me. I gave him your insulin and told him how

to find you. Probably he thought I was headed back to Hardy, but In heading to you, Rainbows going to have her baby,I have to make sure you are ok..."

"Dolphins! I was surrounded by a miraculous school of dolphins. There must have been salmon running underneath because the mammals were partying at the surface. It was magic. I was witnessing life at its grandest. Maybe 1000 animals.

I may fall asleep and let the little engine get me there. It's beautiful when it rains out to sea. Ocean calms down and becomes a sheet of raindrops. You're close now Nora,I hope I see you on waking.

Weather kicked up again. Just when I was quietly cruising to you Nora I was suddenly paddling again. Hours of labour in whitecaps unsure of direction and unable to check. Just staying alive. My survival suit got hot with sweat as I battled the storm with paddling. A disappearing took place, as reality folded into one next paddle,one stroke more, and nothing.

I saw your face in the mist. I probably passed out.

Ryan got to Rainbow's cabin almost a full day before I arrived. Caught a seaplane from Hardy in the sucker hole.

He spent 8 hours keeping Nora alive before Charlie the guy who had the insulin remembered he had an old cell phone in the glove compartment of his boat and called her styrofoam box for directions.

He must have been close to get service.

The insulin worked just in time because Rainbow was giving birth. I arrived just as baby Connor was hitting the scene. An 8 pound boy.

I often wonder if Trickster Raven was involved in bringing Nora and I together.

The missed shipment of Insulin, the Kayak that showed up just in time.

I like the idea of a prankster behind everything. Nora my wife does also.