

# Logs Wind and Sun

Handcraft your own log home . . .  
then power it with nature

Rex A. Ewing and LaVonne Ewing

AN INSPIRING, HANDS-ON GUIDE TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY



PIXYJACK PRESS<sub>LLC</sub>

## PROLOGUE

### ~ the contagious dream ~

Years ago, in a past that seems far more distant than it really is, I owned a small spread with a rich, verdant pasture, a hay field, and far more Thoroughbred horses than any man in his right mind ought to own. I was a rancher and a businessman—a manufacturer of nutritional supplements for horses. And I was a farmer.

My father, driven man that he was, took precious little delight in any of my antics, but even after I was grown he enjoyed telling new acquaintances the dialog he and I used to have when I was four or five. “Rex,” he’d say, way back when, “what’re you gonna do when you grow up?”

I’d stand up straight as a rod (so he’d say), stick my lip out resolutely, and answer with a certainty that would make anyone believe I could fly, if I so intended, “I’m gonna get \$500 and be a mountain man.”

Anyone who ever heard this story would laugh at the little boy in rolled-up Levis and red cowboy boots who seemed to know his mind so well. But not me. I was serious. I was serious then, and I was serious later, when I bought a small acreage and build an octagon log home and a small log guest house. It cost more than \$500, but it was worth every penny. Then, as fate would have it, it was all whisked away to the four

winds, and I returned again to the flat, dusty plains of eastern Colorado.

There I raised horses, made supplements, wrote articles for horse magazines, and harvested hay. And fought back a yearning to return to the mountains. Finally, when I could fight it no longer, I bought more land than I ever thought I’d need, in a place I rarely ever had the chance to go. But, whenever I did get the chance, I’d head for the hills and enjoy a day or two of heaven. I built a small frame cabin that encouraged the faraway dreams I nurtured, and when I wasn’t there, I daydreamed of the wonderful things I would do, if I were.

It wasn’t until I met LaVonne, however, that I even dared to rekindle the long-held dream of a life far above the hay fields and horse pastures. There was so much to leave, it seemed, that I could never in a lifetime leave it all. But lifetimes, I’ve since learned, are far more expansive than the petty things that somehow seem to cling to the mind’s coattails, demanding—though hardly deserving—constant attention.

Besides, the baler was getting moody, the hay swather was held together with good intentions and questionable welds, and the horse herd was in serious need of thinning.

And whenever LaVonne was alone and outside, her eyes would drift to western mountains.

I knew what was going through her head.

She was dreaming about getting \$500 and becoming a mountain woman.....

Dreams; it always starts with dreams.

Every beautiful thing ever wrought by the hands of humankind began as a dream, growing of its own volition from formless and fluid places, where things can exist, without contradiction, in impossible relationships to one another.

Dreaming is something we all do too little of in a tight-minded society, where the rules simply must be followed, even though no one is quite certain why. Dreams are, after all, just intangible wisps of errant energy. How ironic, then, that dreams—most of which are never nurtured to fruition—are exactly what keeps the lid from blowing off the pressure cooker we call humanity. If we can entertain, in our minds, the possibility of better days and better places, then the rat race becomes a little less ratty, and the rays of tomorrow's sun can find a way through, to brighten the gloomy environs we inhabit today.

If you are reading these words, it's because you are a dreamer. You dream of living where you don't, and doing things you've never done. Compelling as it is, it's a frightening thought. But so is life; it's a risky business. And yet you push on, regardless. You weren't born knowing how to run a chainsaw, set a log, or wire a solar module to a charge controller. But neither were you born knowing how to run a computer, or thread your way through rush hour traffic in a rolling steel cage at 100 feet per second. If you can do the one, you can do the other, as long as you hold tight to your dreams. The trick is in not letting your self-prejudices hamstring your abilities.

This is a book for dreamers, it's true, but only

those who are ready to cast their airy aspirations to the fertile earth and nurture the seeds with sweat and toil. You may end up doing all the work yourselves, or you may simply use this book as a guide for determining the best way for others to proceed. Whichever path you follow, once you make the commitment, you're halfway there.

LaVonne and I created this book with one idea in mind: to write the book we wished we'd had before beginning our adventure into uncharted territory. And what an adventure it's been! I thought I knew a thing or two about this business before we set out on this latest foray into the unknown, but I was mistaken. If *Logs, Wind and Sun* were a comprehensive personal memoir of the knowledge we've picked up in the past three years, it would not come close to fitting within these pages.

But, though we unabashedly relate a number of personal experiences—the good, the bad, and the comical—throughout the book, *Logs, Wind and Sun* is certainly not a memoir. It's much better than that. It's a hands-on, dirt-under-your-finger-nails guide to making your dreams a reality.

This won't be the only book you'll buy to help you through the journey ahead, but with enough common sense and practical knowledge, it could be. It was written to be used by skilled people whose experience allows them to fill in the gaps, as well as those less steeped in the trades who want to know how it all goes together, and what to expect of the crews doing the actual work. We can't all be builders, plumbers, roofers, cement workers, solar and wind installers, or electricians, but we can—and should—know enough about each of these facets of construction that we can direct those who are doing the work.

*Logs, Wind and Sun* was written and compiled in a logical, orderly fashion. For that reason, it can be used as a reference book. But it's more than

that. I find writing to be too much fun to restrict myself to the same, plodding style used in all the boring text books I so despised in school. So, while this book was designed to be used, it was written to be read; to make learning a pleasure, and knowledge a joy.

*Logs, Wind and Sun* covers all the major aspects of building a log home and powering it solely with electricity derived from the wind and the sun. This is the how-to part. By the time you finish reading it, you will know how everything works together as a cohesive whole, and how to make it all come about. Some things are covered in greater detail than others. The sections on foundation and log work, as well as those on wind and solar energy, are described in detail. By reading those sections, you will know how to build a home log by log, and how to install your PV/wind system, component by component. You will also know what's hard, and what's easy, and why. And, just in case you might feel left out in the woods all alone, you'll learn about many of the successes and foibles LaVonne and I have experienced, walking the same path you are about to set foot on.

Other areas are less comprehensive. Heating and water pumping are covered in a way that presents the systems you may want to consider, and those you definitely want to avoid, without actually telling you how to install any of them. These subjects are both too expansive to be covered in detail within the scope of a single volume.

Plumbing is a can of worms we peek into from time to time, without giving any of the worms a chance to slither out. It's not that I don't know anything about plumbing; I actually know quite a bit. Mostly, I know enough to discourage anyone who isn't already a plumber from trying their hand at it. Just the same, plumbing issues unique to log homes are clearly addressed.

The point is, I don't drone on about things I'm not good at, or things I know little or nothing about. It wouldn't be fair to you. I wouldn't be able to write it with authority, and even if I tried, you wouldn't enjoy reading it. No one knows everything about this business, and if they did, I'm sure they wouldn't be any fun at parties.

So, take a breath and get ready for the adventure of a lifetime. By the time you finish your new home, you'll be satisfyingly amused at the person now reading these words.

And that's the way it should be.



(photo by Mike Fox)