

# **‘Urban Scout’ hopes to prepare us for civilization’s collapse**

Margie Boule

August 12, 2007

He calls himself a “flesh-and-blood superhero.” He walks the streets of Portland wearing a loincloth, his skin marked by mud camouflage.

If you ask him — and people do — why he’s dressed so oddly, he’ll tell you he believes the oceans are dying, the globe is warming and civilization will soon collapse. “I’m Urban Scout,” he will say. In order to be prepared when the apocalypse comes, “I hunt and gather. I’m living as though it already has happened.”

It’s partly true. But like more well-known superheroes, Urban Scout is living between myth and everyday reality. Batman hides behind Bruce Wayne (or is it the opposite?) Superman puts on glasses and becomes Clark Kent.

When he removes the mud and puts on regular clothes, Urban Scout becomes Peter Bauer. He’s 25 years old. He has no superpowers. But he says he really does want to save the world ... or at least help people learn the life skills necessary to save themselves.

Most superheroes have a back story, an explanation of how they came to be different. Peter Bauer did not come from another galaxy, get hit by lightning or drink chemicals. “When I was 16,” growing up in Northeast Portland, Peter says, “I read a book called ‘Ishmael.’ ”

In Daniel Quinn’s novel, a gorilla telepathically educates a writer about the damage humans have done to the planet, in the name of progress. The gorilla proposes a return to a sustainable lifestyle.

“I read that book and thought, ‘I don’t know how much I’ll value a high school diploma in 10 years if civilization destroys the ecosystem,’ “ Peter says. “ ‘I should probably learn how to survive and live off the land in a sustainable way.’ So I left high school and started training in survival.”

His parents weren’t pleased. “When you hear ‘dropout,’ your first image is somebody flipping burgers for a job,” Peter says. “But I’m a self-directed learner; I always have been. I followed my passion.”

The young man traveled to the East Coast and back, learning skills to survive outside “normal” society. He met others who shared his passion.

“There’s a whole underground scene of primitive skill-building booming across the country that people don’t know about,” he says. “Portland is a large center, but it’s happening all over.”

He also picked up a term to describe the movement: “rewilding.” “It’s returning to a more wild or natural state.”

Peter was convinced that as many people as possible needed to acquire the skills he was learning. After reading about the power of storytelling, “I decided I wanted to create a hero character. In mythology, heroes provide instruction about how people should live their lives.

“If Michael Jordan is your hero, then you play basketball. We wanted a hero that promoted a sustainable life.”

Peter and his friend Tony Deis, founder of Portland’s TrackersNW ([www.trackersnw.com](http://www.trackersnw.com)), created a nonprofit organization called Mythmedia in 2002 to popularize stories with an Earthfriendly message.

“If we want to create a sustainable culture,” Peter says, “art can be the Trojan Horse.” If they can share their message and the public thinks “it’s just a story, just a comedy, just a movie, they won’t even notice they’re being changed. Or maybe they will, but they’ll like it.”

Peter and Tony wrote a screenplay for a film about a new superhero: Urban Scout.

As they wrote, it struck Peter that “a good way to create a buzz for the movie was to have a guy walking around in a loincloth.” So Peter donned a loincloth and mud, and began “kind of living the Urban Scout character” all over town.

When people approached him with questions, “I’d make up stuff. They’d ask, ‘Where do you live?’ I’d say, ‘Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge.’ ‘What do you eat?’ ‘I hunt and gather. I eat things I trap.’ It was half fiction, half reality.”

One day Peter was walking downtown on the bus mall, in costume, “when a woman said, ‘Excuse me, sir, do you have a light?’ I said no. Then I realized I had a bow drill in my backpack.” A bow drill is a primitive way of making fire, similar to rubbing two sticks together.

“I went back to her and said, ‘Actually, I do have a light, if you don’t mind waiting a minute.’

“I pulled out the thing, and pretty soon there’s a crowd around me. A couple minutes later I have a flame. This woman and about five others light their cigarettes and everybody applauds.

I’m thinking, ‘Wow. There’s something to this.’ ”

Myth began merging with reality as Peter spent more time in costume. “It started feeling normal; sometimes I forgot I was wearing a loincloth. And people started actually calling me Urban Scout,” or “Scout” for short, which is what he prefers to be called today. “Everyone called me that, my friends and people I’d never met before,” who stopped him on the street and said they’d heard about him.

Peter/Scout was working to pay for food and Internet sites and rent. But when people approached him in costume and he answered their questions, “I was starting to feel guilty for lying” about who he was.

“I thought, what am I doing? This is how I really want to live. This hero character I’ve made up is the person I want to be. How cool would it be to live this way, and be telling the truth?”

So, last year he made a decision. “I’m going to do this. Maybe not at once, but I’m going to figure out how to live this way.” He created a blog ([www.urbanscout.org](http://www.urbanscout.org)) to record his efforts, and began his transition in April.

He can’t do it alone, he says. “It’s not about self-sufficiency. It’s about communal sufficiency.”

So, with others, he’s begun teaching survival skills and learning new ones. Through TrackersNW he teaches the Urban Scout Sunday School. Last week he organized a seven-day “Rewilding Camp,” with classes in such skills as how to make a bow drill, create herbal medicines, forage for greens, hunt with a bow, purify water and treat radiation exposure.

Every evening people gathered around a campfire for “a wild food potluck.” He’s already planning another.

Sometimes he has doubts. Sometimes he feels “totally stupid” in his costume. But Scout is committed to acquiring and sharing skills he believes everyone will need someday. “For some reason I keep doing this,” he says. “I can’t stop myself.”

The Ted K Archive

Margie Boule

'Urban Scout' hopes to prepare us for civilization's collapse

August 12, 2007

The Oregonian (Portland, OR), Page: O02. <[www.static1.squarespace.com](http://www.static1.squarespace.com)>

2007 Oregonian Publishing Co.

**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**