

In God's Country

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I live in a cabin on a lake in a forest. In God's country.

There are no noise bylaws in God's country, aside from the near-universal eleven-to-eight restriction, so pretty much from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, April to December, you hear nail guns, power drills, circular saws, compressors, chain saws, generators, lawnmowers, weed trimmers, leaf blowers, snowmobiles, ATVs, dirt bikes (with mufflers modified or removed), jetskis, and speedboats. Here in God's country, the garages are bigger than the houses.

And because sound travels remarkably well across water, you can hear the forementioned nail guns, power drills, circular saws, chain saws, compressors, generators, lawnmowers, weed trimmers, leaf blowers, snowmobiles, ATVs, dirt bikes (with mufflers modified or removed), jetskis, and speedboats even if they're being used a couple miles away.

Furthermore, because there is no division between residential and industrial in God's country, you can also hear quarry machinery (the whoosh of the furnace, the clatter of the conveyor belt) and logging machinery (the repetitive whine of the swinger, the low-frequency thump of I-don't-know-what).

You may also hear some loons. And, if you stay up late, an owl.

However, if you do stay up late, intending to sit down at the water to enjoy the lovely dark, the moonlight glimmering on the lake, the stars brighter than in the city, know that people in God's country haven't heard of light pollution, so every hundred feet or so, there will be cluster, or runway, of solar lights. The halogen ones are especially bright and, when attached to docks, look like cars parked with their high beams pointed straight at you. And since the clever guy who invented solar lights didn't include an on/off switch, they're on all night, every night. Even when the people whose property they're on are sound asleep. Or back in the city.

(Here in God's Country, even environmentalism has yet to take hold. People cut down trees that are a foot from the shoreline. They put in sandy beaches. Erosion? Habitat destruction? What are you talking about?)

Many people who own property here in God's country rent it during the summer. And people who rent are going to get their money's worth, goddamn it! It doesn't occur to them than anyone actually lives here, that they've just temporarily moved from their own neighborhood into someone else's neighborhood. (You can't really blame them, since the tourist associations, representing only those locals who own a business, and want to make

more money, call the area 'recreational' not 'residential'.) (The real estate agents call it whatever the buyer wants.) So behavior that would be unthinkable in the city occurs without a second thought here. Such playing bongo drums, outside, at eight o'clock in the morning. Renters think God's country exists just for them.

Within God's country, there are lovely forested back roads that are a delight to walk along. There are so many ads grabbing your attention, it's a little like taking your tv with you. Many signs advertise that a specific person's home is up ahead a mile or so (then a half mile or so) (then just around the corner). Others advertise a business, essentially calling out to you every time you pass by — buy my stuff! There is, apparently, no need for a permit for signage here in God's country. (And yet when you ask the township to put up a speed limit sign, as a much-needed reminder, it will take them five years to do so.)

Once you get back to your cabin, you may want to sit for a bit and just bask in the view, the sun sparkling on the lake, the reflected light rippling through the trees, it's all so beautifully blue and green — and red and white. People who don't publicly proclaim their tribal allegiance in the city do so here. Every second property has a national flag flying on it.

Another odd thing is that people who don't sit around an outdoor fire at night when they're in the city do so here. Being in God's country seems to bring the primal brain to the forefront. (Except that our ancestors didn't have a radio on when they sat around their fire. Enabling all of us to hear the perpetually-hyped-up announcer and sex-love-moaning vocalists. Here in God's country.)

Here in God's country, there are miles and miles of crown land, nothing but beautiful forest, breath-taking lakes, woodsy trails — it's a hiker's paradise. The thing about crown land is that everyone has a right to access it. Even the forementioned snowmobiles, ATVs, and dirt bikes (with mufflers modified or removed). They don't even have to stay on the 42,000 kilometres (26,000 miles) of designated snowmobile trails. (Which have been given over by our government for their exclusive use. So I guess I'm wrong when I say the thing about crown land is that everyone has a right to access it.) They don't even have to stay on the undesignated trails. To judge by the empty beer cans, bungee cords, and cigarette butts.

And since the prevailing view, here in God's country, is that no one owns crown land, people can load their garbage into a little cart, hitch it to their ATV, and take it into the bush. (Unless they've already burned it, in an old oil drum, making thick, putrid, billowing smoke, on a day the people living downwind have their windows open.) Some people toss their plastic bags full of whatever down steep ravines, where only other people's dogs can get at it; others choose the convenience of leaving it at trail entrances. (See, here in God's Country, the prevailing view is if there's no sign saying you can't do something, you can.) (Actually, here in God's Country, the prevailing view is you can do whatever the fuck you want.) (So my neighbour said.) (Just before he tried to run me down with his pick-up.) (Here in God's country.)

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