

FOR THE LOVE OF MY WIFE

By Ken Hegan

Email: ken@voiceofreason.net

I was having sex with my wife the other night when it suddenly occurred to me that I should buy her a cottage. "Why not?" I thought to myself. "She's nice, funny, and smart as a whip. She's a straight A university student who makes a mean margarita. Hell, she *deserves* a cottage."

But not just any cottage. My wife deserves to have the cottage experience that she never had as a girl in suburban Burlington. She should have the cottage experience I had as a boy, when I spent entire weeks at my cousin Jason's cabin on Shuswap Lake near Salmon Arm, BC.

I remember the 'Thwak' of the screen door. Drinking Koolaid on vinyl-covered couch cushions. Bunk beds. Disneyland shot glasses. A big red compass design on the vinyl flooring. And on the wood-panelled wall across from the giant stone fireplace, I distinctly remember a big framed photo of a nude young African American couple.

Mostly I remember burning the soles of my feet as Jason and I raced down the scorching hot sand. We spent whole days on the beach playing 'diver down' with our Big Jim and Big Jeff action figures. As the waves lapped the shore and the warm breeze blew through the forest, Jason and I would take Big Jim & Jeff on harrowing undersea adventures that would make even the Hardy Boys die from envy.

Big Jim & Jeff dove out of helicopters, landed on the dock in perfect handstands, then back-flipped into the cool green lake where they swam to the bottom, rescued submerged airplanes and submarines, and saved the lives of tens and tens of their grateful fans.

After each mission accomplished, they'd shout "Great job, Jim! Great job, Jeff!" Then we pressed buttons on their backs to make them karate chop each other in the guts. That was a great cottage experience - until it all ended in tears. After Secret Mission #210, Big Jim & Jeff's karate arms wouldn't move anymore because sand chunks were jamming their vinyl arm sockets. To stop Jason and I from bawling, my Aunt Bobbi returned Big Jim & Jeff to Sears and somehow talked the clerk into replacing them for free.

"Ahhh, sweet childhood," I thought, as I rolled over and immediately drifted off to sleep. In that moment, I vowed to search for the perfect cottage for Sarah. I would buy her a waterfront cottage surrounded by gently swaying pine trees, an action-packed dock, history, soul, and, most importantly, a hot tub to 'inspire' us to make our own little Big Jims & Jeffs.

But if I'm going to find a dream cottage like that one, I'll have to snag it for super-cheap. I'm broke as hell and I haven't had a real job since my Internet company folded like a cheap tent. I'm abusing my credit so badly, two of my Visas refuse to swipe anymore and my MasterCard broke *itself* in half. Unless I sweet-talk my way into a bargain, my only hope of owning a home is if I invade one.

The next morning, I ask Sarah what her dream cottage is like. "Well, I'm petite so I don't need or want a monster mansion," she says. "Just a small cabin by warm water. Weird art on the walls, mismatched old dishes, margaritas on the porch, a dog and a dock. That's all I want."

Inspired, I thumbed through the pages of these helpful how-to books:

- Negotiating for Dummies: The Fun and Easy Way™ to Get What You Want*
- The Art of War, The Art of War*, the Taoist tactics-for-idiots guide "compiled well over two thousand years ago by a mysterious Chinese warrior philosopher" named Master Sun Tzu
- Charms, Spells & Formulas*, a souvenir "Hoodoo magick" book that offers helpful instructions on how to acquire "health, money, luck, love and protection from evil"

Then I took a deep breath, pulled on my lucky pants, and emailed the owner of a cute little cottage we rented last December on the Sunshine Coast:

<http://www.trailsendcottage.com>

From: Ken Hegan
To: Kelly Allan-Lavigne
Subject: The Great One

Dear Kelly,

I love guzzling margaritas on the deck of your gorgeous beachfront cottage! As I'm sure you know, 'Trail's End' is located in "an idyllic location" with a deck and private hot tub (great for foreplay!) overlooking huckleberry bushes, sand, ocean, seals, otters, Alaskan cruise ships, and the "best sunsets on the coast."

My wife loved - and deserves - your mismatched dishes, Kelly. You'd like her: she's on the Dean's List at Simon Fraser University and will soon graduate with a B.A. in Communication. Our Prime Minister recently said that Canadians must do everything we can to help our post-secondary graduates because "the strength of our federation is directly linked to the opportunity everyone has to share in this nation's prosperity and its future."

So I'll cut to the chase: since you own multiple cottages, what would it take to get you to walk away and leave me the keys to Trail's End (forever-like)?

In exchange, I can offer you:

- my mint-condition rookie-year Wayne Gretzky hockey card (O-Pee-Chee, framed in space-age plastic)
- three hundred and forty-five Canadian dollars
- rust-red '89 Chevy Cavalier (engine gurgles, battery's dead, could be fun to push off a cliff)

Thank you for sharing, Kelly! It will be a pleasure taking ownership of (y)our cottage.

Wishing you continued prosperity,

Ken Hegan

Kelly's response? Nil.

I couldn't figure it out. Using tips I found in *Negotiating for Dummies*, I 'created a mission statement', 'researched my opponent', and 'prepared for success'.

On the negative side, I negotiated like a dummy by making the opening offer without first hearing her (possibly lower) price. Damn.

So I tried again with the 'Hacienda', a gorgeous two-bedroom cottage in Tofino, BC that my best friend Jim recommended:

<http://www.tofino-bc.com/goldcoast/hacimain.htm>

Amidst "lush green cedars" near an old-growth rainforest, this beachfront A-frame boasts skylights, a claw-foot bathtub, wood-fired sauna, gas fireplace, satellite TV & stereo, and paintings from local BC artists.

From: Ken Hegan

To: Sulo the retired fisherman

Subject: virtual holiday

Dear Sulo,

My buddy 'Jim' likes to rent your Hacienda for all his sex vacations.

Now, I've seen Jim's photos and I think your cottage would be perfect for me and my wife Sarah, too.

Why not you let me take care of your cottage while you never come visit? My wife (straight A student, Dean's List, Millennium Scholarship winner) deserves your Hacienda, man. I'm sure you understand!

Get the papers ready because we'll be right over! Don't think of this as a 'cottage invasion', or 'annexing', or even 'Manifest Destiny'. Instead, you will be a Patron of the Arts, supporting me, an artist -- a 'man of letters' if you will -- as I entertain Canada's cultural elite (like you!) by writing articles and books and plays and operas about how this is the perfect cottage for my beautiful wife Sarah.

By not living there ever again, you will save yourself the hassle of cleaning our sheets, fixing our roof, clearing our raccoon nests, and all that soul-crushing, cottage drudgery!

Interested? Contact me soon, Sulo, because in the immortal words of Victor Kiam, "Procrastination is opportunity's assassin."

Warm regards,

Ken Hegan

Sulo's response? Nil. Utter failure. Maybe when he read that "opportunity's assassin" bit, he thought I was actually going to whack him.

Regrouping, I ask Sarah what she plans to do after she graduates with her Communication degree. She replies, "I'd love to run an artists' retreat on the Sunshine Coast. Screenwriters, actors, and directors would stay at the lodge and create new plays and scripts together. I'd cook and we'd live in a cute little cottage nearby." Eureka!

From: Ken Hegan
To: Angelyn Toth @ Xenia
Subject: Retreat!

Dear Angelyn,

It's come to my attention that you, Angelyn Toth, have a super-sweet cottage getaway. According to your web site, <http://www.xeniacentre.com>, you used to live in a treehouse on Bowen Island. But then you transformed "a dilapidated old sheep farm" into the "magical Sanctuary of Xenia", a peaceful 38-acre retreat where you run the Xenia Creative Development Centre. Woohoo! It sounds perfect for my wife Sarah!

Like all great retreats, yours features peaceful gardens, hummingbird feeders, cob-webbed dream-catchers, a circular 30-foot yurt, and a "Hopi/Cretan/Celtic" labyrinth. Your retreat is also "inclusive of all traditions, spiritual studies and cultures, eclectic, non-dogmatic and offer a doorway through which one can know one's true nature as a direct experience." Cool. When can we move in!

Come to think of it, your web site says: "You are invited to create your own Personal Retreat." And I accept! How about we retreat straight into your Creek Cottage, which is billed as a "charming, rustic cottage with fresh sheets." Nice touch, my friend. Sarah loves fresh sheets! Or perhaps we'll move into the Lodge, built in the 1880s, which currently makes it the oldest building on the island.

If you like, after you've signed over the ownership papers, you can still be the 'Virtual Owner' of Xenia. I'll send you a recording of Virtual Cottage Sounds (owls hooting, fire crackling, hippies playing bongos with their foreheads). I'll also send you Virtual Cottage Scents that you can plug into any wall socket.

Heck, I could even install a Web cam on top of the yurt, so you can see for yourself, 24/7, how happy Sarah is in this hidden chunk of paradise. After all, as you wisely say in your book, Yes & Now - Finding Grace in Everything, it's best to say "yes to whatever is arising in the moment. Not picking and choosing: good/bad, right/wrong, but embracing it all."

So please, say "yes!", embrace it all, and have your things out by Thursday.

Peace out,

Ken Hegan

Angelyn's response? Dream-crushing silence. I couldn't understand it.

OK, sure: maybe that web cam bit was *kinda* weird. Plus Angelyn's bio says she was "married recently to her Counterpart," so maybe I offended her by using the patriarchal term of "wife."

Or maybe she thinks 'He is not ready' because I denied my "yes" by *asking* to live on her commune instead of just seizing her damn property like a butt-kicking god of war. Man, this cottage-buying stuff is tricky! If I don't smarten up soon, I might *never* find Sarah the weird wall art that she deserves.

Seeking tactical guidance, I crack open *The Art of War* and find this pearl of wisdom: "The individualist without strategy who takes opponents lightly will inevitably become the captive of others."

So far, my opponents have taken me very, very lightly. But according to Master Sun Tzu, this means I will soon take them (and their cottages) captive. It's inevitable!

Reinvigorated, I vow to find Sarah the perfect isolated cottage through www.privateislandsonline.com :

From: Ken Hegan
To: Mark Lester
Subject: Eye for a Bargain

Dear Mark Lester,

I understand you are selling "the only private island on pristine Bridge Lake":
<http://www.privateislandsonline.com/bcrainbow.htm>

Rainbow Island is located 500 km north of Vancouver, which is just far enough away from the Xenia Creative Development Whatnot, which I didn't want anyway because of all their noisy forehead-bongo parties. My wife deserves to drink her margaritas in peace and quiet!

So I want to secure your 68-acre property and its "rustic, charming" 18 X 30 foot cottage on the north shore. I understand it's in "good condition," has a "large fire place, a wood/propane cook stove, a propane fridge, and running water."

Sounds great! The only problem is your asking price (\$785,000) is way too frigging high, man.

I mean, come on, it doesn't even have a little invention called 'electricity"! Where's Sarah going to plug in her blender? A knothole in one of your "majestic virgin fir trees"?

My counter-offer:

1) You sign Rainbow Island over to me, right away, so my wife can have her dream cottage which, if you met her, you'd realize she totally deserves.

2) In exchange, I'll give you a mint-condition rookie-year Wayne Gretzky hockey card PLUS I promise you won't suffer from 'The Evil Eye' spell found in "Hoodoo magick" books like *Charms, Spells & Formulas*.

The ancient Celts believed those possessed with The Evil Eye (a.k.a. the Glance of Malice) "could blight whole crops at a glance, or make cows dry up and no longer give milk."

[or make entire islands sink into Bridge Lake overnight, rendering the entire property worthless, hmmmm?]

What do you say, Mark? We love your island paradise and it'd sure be a shame if it turned from waterfront to watertop property in the blink of an evil eye!

All best wishes,

Ken Hegan

Mark's response? Nil, nothing, zero, *de nada*. This guy's another tough negotiator. I'm starting to suspect that all these people own copies of *The Art of War*, too.

On the positive side, I tried to follow Master Sun Tzu's advice to flatter and weaken the enemy by praising the cottage property. But on the negative side, I foolishly revealed the title of *Charms, Spells, and Formulas*, which also contains easy-to-make *antidotes* to The Evil Eye such as The Crossbones Amulet. To ward off my glance of malice, all he needs is a few chicken bones, Power Oil, and a little Gris-Gris Faible Incense. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

Frustrated to no end, I decided to do the next best thing: I borrowed my cousin's keys to his cottage on Shuswap Lake and drove Sarah up there so she could see for herself how perfect her cottage could be.

Unfortunately, when we got there I discovered the lake had changed since the '70s, and not for the better. Jason's cottage used to be nestled in the woods with only a few small cottages dotting the shoreline. There were so many spruce, pine, and evergreen trees, you'd sometimes see bears loping across the dirt driveway, only to vanish into the dense forest.

But now the cabin is sandwiched between a noisy marina and a white-trash campground. By day, jet skiers roar up and down the shoreline. At night, there's a new million-watt 'security' light flooding the woods, which used to be so dark you could see beyond the universe.

In bed that night, I wept as I caressed Sarah's face. "Honey," I said, "I love you so much and I am so sorry I haven't found your perfect cottage. I love you more than anything on the planet, even more than pumpkin pie. You're my one true love. Every morning I wake up, look at you and whisper 'You make me Ken plus ten.' I love you completely. If anyone deserves an ideal cottage, it's you. You're good and loving and funny and thoughtful. In fact, when I was a kid, Jason and I would – "

She placed her finger over my lips, smiled, and whispered, "That's OK, sweetie. I love you, too. And why don't we talk about this after we're finished."

Ken Hegan is a Vancouver writer (Rolling Stone, GQ) and filmmaker who has won three National Magazine Awards for Best Humour Article. Visit Ken online at www.voiceofreason.net