

[Jonathan Bellows - http://gungy.livejournal.com](http://gungy.livejournal.com)

Basic Stats:

- What is(are) your name(s)? **Jonathan Bellows**
- What do you do for a living? **Whatever I please. When I started building my tiny house, I managed a skating rink. I'm also a museum exhibit relocation technician and, now, kind of a handyman.**
- How many people do you/will be living in your tiny house? **I designed it with one person in mind. It has since been modified to accommodate one 25-pound dog and its human handler.**
- What part of the country do you live in? **When I built my tiny house, I was in Flint, Michigan. I have since left it behind (temporarily!) to move to Eugene, Oregon.**
- How many square feet is your house? **Gosh, somewhere between 130 and 140, I think? It's on an 18-foot flatbed, if that helps.**
- When did you start your build? **That was so long ago! Looking back, it looks like June of 2009.**
- Is your house complete? **As complete as any house ever is.**
- Have you been documenting your tiny house build and if so, where can people find that information? **I documented it at <http://gungy.livejournal.com>. I've moved on to other things in my life, but there's a sidebar on the right that links to the tiny house specific stuff.**

Background:

- Why did you decide to build? **I had a bug to build a house going as far back as 2004. I initially wanted to build an earthen structure, but I didn't know how long I was going to stay in the area. I didn't want to build something and then have to leave it. The tiny house on wheels seemed like a good compromise.**
- What was your life like before your tiny house? Were you fairly active, have you always had 'projects' going on? Were you fairly sedentary and looking for a change? Did you tend to work too much? (This question is an effort at trying to figure out WHO gravitates to the tiny house lifestyle) **I worked a lot. I was in that phase where I identified myself by my work, so I didn't really do much else. I suppose I was fairly active – I rode my bike 20 miles a day in the summer and managed to lose 30 pounds on WiiFit the winter before. I wouldn't say I always had projects going on, but it wasn't unusual for me to decide to tackle one.**
- How did you come to hear about the movement, figure out it was right for you and and get started? **I don't remember how I came across mobile tiny homes originally. Like I said, I had the bug to build something for a while, so I was often searching alternative building techniques online at night. Perhaps I came across it then? But when I realized I could build a house without having to first pick a place to put it, I was sold.**
- What is/was your design inspiration? **I'm more inspired by woodlands and sustainability than anything. The design of my house wasn't really mine, though – I got the plans from Tumbleweed. The main personal touches are typically adaptations I made to make it more off-grid.**

Technical:

- How do/did you find the time to work on your house with a job, kid(s), relationships, AND building a house? Did you do anything special to keep the balance? **That one's easy – I quit my day job. I had a**

lot of money saved up from working a lot without having a social life, so it made it so that I could build without having to juggle an outside job.

- Have you run into any problems with your local codes? How did you solve them? **My big problem was with zoning.** I just wanted a couple of wooded acres out in the country upon which to put my tiny house. Every time I went to speak with someone, I was stopped almost immediately by “no, you can't do that.” When I asked what my options were, I was told “build a conventional house or go somewhere else.” I eventually bought land in spite of all that and tried to fly under the radar. My tiny house was reported by a neighbor 5 months later, so I decided to leave the state.
- Where did you get the tools that you use? Were they yours, borrowed, rented etc.? **I used most of my own tools.** I did borrow a pneumatic nail gun for framing, but aside from that I used tools that I had from my museum job or bought what I needed from Harbor Freight – not the best tools, but if you only need a tool once or twice, they're dirt cheap.
- How long did (are you expecting) construction to take? **It was about a year from the time I started until I left the build site.** A couple of those months I was gone for work, and there was stuff that still wasn't done (like the second pane of glass on my homemade windows) but it was definitely livable by then. I first started staying in it after 2 months, but that was even before it had power and plumbing.
- Have you/were you able to stay on schedule? **I didn't really have a “schedule.”** After a few months into it, I did receive a deadline, though. My landlord was selling the house I was renting, so I had to be out by May 2010. I wasn't about to sign another lease, so I made sure to have the tiny house liveable by then.
- What is/was the most time consuming portion of your build? **For me it was the windows – the freakin' windows.** I thought I would save money by building my own windows, and that turned out to be a mistake. I had 11 windows, and each window had 4 panes which were then doubled (with a spacer) to prevent heat loss. For each section I had to cut 4 pieces of trim on the front, 4 pieces of spacer in the middle, and 4 pieces of trim on the back. With 4 sections per window, that made for 48 pieces of trim per window, or 504 pieces overall (one window only had 2 sections) The first window was fun to build. The second was pretty neat, too. The rest were torturous. Also, with the price of the materials and the time I spent, turns out I didn't save much money, anyway.
- What is/was the most limiting factor for your build? **My most limiting factor was my patience.**
- Is your house on a trailer? If yes, how do you attach to the trailer? How do you move your tiny house? (Do you have a truck, do you hire it done?) **My tiny house is on a trailer.** There was a steel lip all the way around the bed of my trailer, so I actually had to build the bed up to construct on top of it. I made a 2x4 frame inside the steel frame and bolted it to the steel with 1/2” bolts, then screwed the middle down with what felt like 150 screws. Theoretically, I suppose if I take out those bolts and screws, the whole house will come off the trailer. It may not come off in one piece, but it should come off.
- Do you have accessory houses/dwellings that you use to supplement storage/working/living? **When I was building, I had a garage that stored all of my supplies.** When I bought my land, I had a barn that I could work out of.
- Where did you get your plans? **I bought my plans from Tumbleweed.**

- Have you consulted any 'professionals'? (structural, mechanical, plumbing, design etc.)? **A buddy of mine used to wire homes back in the day, and he was a big help early on in the process. He had a much better eye for levelling things than I did, too. As for consulting, though, nah – none of that.**
- Are you insuring your house? With who? **Insurance would be nice, wouldn't it? But no, currently I have no insurance. I really should look into that...**
- Have you been using any sponsorships to help fund your house? How do you go about finding that sponsorship? **Sponsorships? You mean people will pay ME to build my house the way I want to? Dang... I missed out!**

Specifics:

- What sort of items do you have for cooking? **I have a 2-burner gas stove. That's... that's about it, really. I'm a single guy – most of my food comes in bags from drive-thru windows. :(**
- Are you tied to the power grid or are you off grid? **I redesigned my house to be off-grid. I initially wired most of the lights and the pump for DC, swapped in a DC ceiling fan, and wired in a small inverter so that I could run off of a solar powered battery bank. My water was harvested rainwater, and my toilet was a composting toilet. I lived in my off-grid tiny house for 5 months before I had to move.**
- Are you going to have a washer and/or dryer? **No – and that, my friends, brings me to the single most frequently-asked question I receive about my tiny house: "How do you do laundry?" The simple answer is, when you live in a tiny house, you save SOOO much money on mortgage and utility costs, you don't NEED to do laundry! When clothes get dirty, you can just throw them out and buy new ones! Or, you know... you could use a little thing called a laundromat.**
- Where does your water come from? **My water comes from the sky. Seriously, I harvest rainwater, complete with gutters, a first-flush diverter, and a storage tank. I have an 18-gallon internal water tank that I manually fill about once a week – I bought a pump to automate the process, but never had a chance to hook it up. The house itself was built with a direct line into the water tank should I wish to hook a hose up, too.**
- What kind of toilet are you going to have? **My current toilet is a sawdust toilet. To use properly, it either needs a compost pile to add the waste to, or a waste facility to which it must be ported.**
- What do you use for a heat source if anything? **I use a tiny gas fireplace from Dickinson Marine. It was expensive, but it's so cute! I also have a ceiling fan to distribute the heat.**
- What are some of the space savings tricks you used? **I honestly wasn't that big on "space saving." In fact, quite the opposite – I didn't want any of my furniture to "fold out" or collapse or anything. I didn't want the illusion of a "temporary space." I wanted it to feel like a full, regular home at all times. Only, you know, tiny. That being said, I do have tiny shelves between the beams under my loft and little footlockers on either side of my bed. I also have a small "shed" above the trailer's tongue for storage.**
- What do you have for insulation? **I just used regular styrofoam insulation between the 2x4's – one 2" sheet and one 1" sheet in each cavity. My tiny house is pretty under-insulated.**
- Where are you planning to park your tiny house? **I still want to find a couple of wooded acres with a pond or a stream. I'm hoping I'll find public servants who are more willing to work with me here out west. We'll see.**
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Personal:

- How much will/did your tiny house cost? **I bought everything new, including the DC-powered fridge, the custom trailer, and all of my lumber. I want to say that it ended up running about \$17,000.**
- What is/was the most expensive part of your house? **The trailer, really. \$3,200. After that it would be the appliances.**
- 'Best' injury story (worst injury)? **Nothing serious that I remember, really. A buddy of mine cut his hand pretty badly and bled all over my insulation, but that's about it.**
- What has been your biggest accomplishment with your tiny house? **I'm actually quite proud of both the plumbing manifold I built (having never worked with copper pipe before) and the DC power system I rigged up, what with the solar panels, charge controller, fuses, appliances, and all.**
- What is/will be the biggest benefit to living in a tiny house? **For me, the fact that I won't have to accrue massive amounts of debt just to have a place to sleep.**
- Is there anything you'll miss about living in a standard house? **There are times when having a big empty floor to lay things out on is nice, but I suppose that's what outbuildings are for.**
- What has been the scariest part about building your own house? **The scariest? I suppose, initially, not necessarily knowing what I was doing was pretty scary. I got over that hurdle really quickly, though, and decided that doing it was more important to me than doing it right the first time. After all, I've built the whole thing, so if I need to go back and fix something, I know exactly how it all went together. At this point, if there's anything that's "scary" it's the fact that it draws attention, and people like to walk right up and peek in when you're trying to take a shower. Privacy, people!**
- If you could change one thing about your house what would it be? **Right now, I'd put dormers in the loft. Oh, and rerun the plumbing to make access to certain parts easier – but if I had to pick one, it'd be dormers.**
- Did you have cash in hand to complete your build, pay as you go or take out a loan to construct your house? **I had cash on hand. Gosh, those were the days...**
- Have friends and family been skeptical or supportive of your ideas? **Before I started my build, I was renting out the second floor of my sister's house. I asked her if I could build the tiny house in her driveway, and she said "sure, go nuts." When I pulled in with the trailer a few days later, she said "Ohhhh... you were serious..." Aside from that brief moment, though, everyone's been relatively supportive, if only because it's neat to see a project like that come together.**
- Is there anything else you would want other people to know about your house and build? **Only that having a bigger house doesn't equate to having a better life. When I told one zoning official that I had a 130-square-foot house, he told me the minimum was 960. I told him I didn't WANT a house that big, and he actually said "why live in something that small? You must not be very ambitious." That still infuriates me to this day. My house empowers me – I am the master of that space not because I bought it, but because I MADE it. I know how it works, I know how it's built, and I know the efforts that went into it. And yes, even if it falls apart tomorrow, it'll still have been worth it.**
- I do believe that my tiny house and the associated off-grid lifestyle I've made with it is better for me and for the environment. I'll make it available for others, but I don't intend to force it on anyone else. All I ask is that others don't keep forcing their overconsumptive lifestyles on me. Let me live in my tiny house.