



A Man Apart: Bill Coperthwaite's Radical Experiment in Living

By Peter Forbes, Helen Whybrow

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A story of friendship, encouragement, and the quest to design a better world

A Man Apart is the story?part family memoir and part biography?of Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow's longtime friendship with Bill Coperthwaite (*A Handmade Life*), whose unusual life and fierce ideals helped them examine and understand their own.

Coperthwaite inspired many by living close to nature and in opposition to contemporary society, and was often compared to Henry David Thoreau. Much like Helen and Scott Nearing, who were his friends and mentors, Coperthwaite led a 55-year-long “experiment in living” on a remote stretch of Maine coast. There he created a homestead of wooden, multistoried yurts, a form of architecture for which he was known around the world.

Coperthwaite also embodied a philosophy that he called “democratic living,” which was about empowering all people to have agency over their lives in order to create a better community. The central question of Coperthwaite’s life was, “How can I live according to what I believe?”

In this intimate and honest account?framed by Coperthwaite’s sudden death and brought alive through the month-long adventure of building with him what would turn out to be his last yurt?Forbes and Whybrow explore the timeless lessons of Coperthwaite’s experiment in intentional living and self-reliance. They also reveal an important story about the power and complexities of mentorship: the opening of one’s life to someone else to learn together, and carrying on in that person’s physical absence.

While mourning Coperthwaite’s death and coming to understand the real meaning of his life and how it endures through their own, Forbes and Whybrow craft a story that reveals why it’s important to seek direct experience, to be drawn to beauty and simplicity, to create rather than critique, and to encourage others.

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Editorial Review

Review

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"Many environmentally conscious consumers fantasize about going off the grid and living a sustainable lifestyle, but few are able to achieve that state. Bill Coperthwaite was an author, social critic, and architect who actually succeeded, living out his ecological ideals at a remote Maine homestead for nearly five decades, until he died at the age of 83 in a tragic car accident in 2013. In addition to his award-winning book, *A Handmade Life* (2003), Coperthwaite was famous for his design and popularization of a modern variation on the conical dwelling known as a yurt. In this loving tribute to Coperthwaite, Forbes and Whybrow have crafted an inspiring biography, complete with photographs and architectural drawings, of a man treasured as both a close friend and a mentor. Interweaving anecdotes of their own interactions with Coperthwaite, including the construction of a final, sunlight-filled yurt, the authors capture the full spectrum of this sometimes curmudgeonly man's gregariousness, resourcefulness, and optimism. Although Coperthwaite's dreams of worldwide cooperative and sustainable communities have not yet been realized, this reverent memoir will help keep his environmental ideals alive."

"William Coperthwaite was a man of vision and integrity, as well as a personal inspiration to Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow. His desire to live simply led him to a remote stretch of the Maine shore, where Coperthwaite's commitment to carving wooden bowls and building elegant yurts created human elegance answering to the beauty of his surroundings. Forbes's luminous photographs evoke this aspect of his achievement. Exceptional integrity can sometimes feel rigid or bruising to those whom it also attracts, however. As Emerson once wrote about Coperthwaite's predecessor Thoreau, "I'd sooner take an elm tree by the arm." A great achievement of Forbes and Whybrow in *A Man Apart* is to convey the complexity of this strong-minded life fully and honestly. Such an approach makes their reflections on love, struggle, and grief all the more powerful."--**John Elder, author of *Reading the Mountains of Home***

"This is a terrific book, honestly drafted and beautifully wrought. As it is with yurts, so it is with communities and with books?their lasting strength comes from the integrity of their parts and the genius of their joinery. Deep gratitude to Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow for their work of grace and love."--

Kathleen Dean Moore, author of *Wild Comfort*

"What a rare and important offering. Peter and Helen have given us a deeply honest portrait of a man. We are invited to witness him from above, from beneath, from the side, from within, in his light, in his darkness. This story is about building one last yurt without knowing it's the last; it's about how one solitary man's ethic influenced the lives of many; it's about the complexity, joy, and frustration of friendship. Bill

Coperthwaite once said, ‘Bite off less than you can chew.’ He was right! This book calls out to those of us seeking connection in our modern era. *A Man Apart* left me with the exquisite sense of having traveled somewhere and been transformed because of it.”--**Molly Caro May, author of *The Map of Enough: One Woman’s Search for Place***

“In this remarkable and deeply moving book, Peter and Helen tell the story of Bill Coperthwaite, a Maine homesteader, designer, and social thinker whose unique way of life and passionate ideals inspired all who knew him. Beautifully and sensitively told, the story explores the complexities of the relationship between them?the shared ideals, hard realities, disappointments, and joys of intensely interwoven lives. Bill’s life?a monumental testament to creativity, brilliance, integrity, and courage?invites the reader to reexamine the profound questions of how each of us chooses to live a life. *A Man Apart* is a riveting and intensely human story?a treasure to be revisited many times.”--**Olivia Ames Hoblitzelle, author of *Ten Thousand Joys & Ten Thousand Sorrows: A Couple’s Journey Through Alzheimer’s***

“Not many know that *Walden* is not just the product of a brilliant experiment in living: Thoreau spent two years penning six painstaking revisions to arrive at the classic book. In Bill Coperthwaite, Forbes and Whybrow discover a ‘Walden’ of a man, only to uncover gaps, in him and in themselves, between brilliant solitary achievement and the kind of touch needed to ground and guide a viable community. Many revisions, much pain and forgiveness, and only partial fulfillments follow. But if there is another way to move from our anti-culture into communities ruled by loving intention, I don’t know what it is. ‘Explore your misunderstandings to your advantage,’ advises Zen master Dogen. *A Man Apart* does exactly that. This is a beautifully raw account of loving grief, instructive failure, and steadfast allegiance to an utter planetary necessity: major cultural transformation.”--**David James Duncan, author of *The River Why and The Brothers K***

“What is a good life? The models offered by our celebrity culture are mostly shabby and shallow. To find worthier examples you need to look elsewhere?to books, for example, where you can meet Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Gary Snyder, Barbara Kingsolver, and Wendell Berry, among others. To that lineage of American rebels you can now add Bill Coperthwaite. In this eloquent portrait, Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow document the search for integrity, wide-ranging competence, and high purpose, not only in Coperthwaite’s life, but in their own. This is a wise and beautiful book.”--**Scott Russell Sanders, author of *Earth Works: Selected Essays***

“Two remarkable people writing about a third remarkable man?and full of lessons for the ordinary rest of us. This is a lovely and important book.”--**Bill McKibben, author of *Deep Economy***

“A loving tribute to Bill, a wonderful man who inspired all of us with his dedication to indigenous building, natural materials, and above all else, use of human hands.”--**Lloyd Kahn, author of *Shelter and Tiny Homes: Simple Shelter***

About the Author

Peter has become a leader for the American conservation movement by creating a life in conservation as photographer, writer, and storyteller about the relationship between people and place. For the last fifteen years, Peter has focused his energies on bringing together and strengthening the worlds of environmentalism and social justice and offering those professions his experience with story, facilitation, contemplative practice, and relationship to nature. Peter is always learning and innovating across the boundaries of profession, culture, and home, and this has made his work influential to the different fields of leadership development, sustainability, philanthropy, and conservation. You might find him teaching spoon-carving on a city street, or giving a keynote address on courage at a national conference, or helping to heal a fracture within a community, or photographing a lost art. What he cares most about is strengthening people’s connections to one another and the land that sustains them, the most visible and important example being his family’s farm and tapestry in the Mad River Valley of Vermont. He is the co-editor of *Our Land, Ourselves*, author of *The Great Remembering* and *What Is a Whole Community*, and co-author of *Coming to Land in a Troubled World*, and collaborated with William Coperthwaite as the photographer for *A Handmade Life*. You can learn more about him at Peterforbes.org.

Helen’s life as an educator, farmer, and writer follows a career in book publishing, where she was most recently an acquiring editor for W. W. Norton and the publisher of their Countryman Press imprint. She left publishing to cofound, with Peter Forbes, what became a nationally recognized place of learning and change-making?Center for Whole Communities?at their home place of Knoll Farm in central Vermont. She now manages their organic family farm and consults for Vermont Farm Viability and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont while also homeschooling their daughter and continuing her writing life. She is the editor of *Dead Reckoning* and co-editor of *Our Land, Ourselves* and *The Story Handbook*, among other works. You can learn more about their farm and ongoing projects at www.knollfarm.org.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eric Frances:

Reading a publication tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With reading you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. Using book everyone in this world could share their idea. Publications can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire all their reader with their story or perhaps their experience. Not only situation that share in the publications. But also they write about advantage about something that you need example. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book that you can get now. The authors these days always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some study before they write with their book. One of them is this A Man Apart: Bill Coperthwaite’s Radical Experiment in Living.

Pablo Bussey:

Exactly why? Because this A Man Apart: Bill Coperthwaite's Radical Experiment in Living is an unordinary book that the inside of the publication waiting for you to snap that but latter it will jolt you with the secret this inside. Reading this book beside it was fantastic author who else write the book in such amazing way makes the content within easier to understand, entertaining way but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of rewards than the other book have such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking way. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I have been you I will go to the book store hurriedly.

Cora Conte:

Do you have something that you prefer such as book? The publication lovers usually prefer to decide on book like comic, quick story and the biggest one is novel. Now, why not trying A Man Apart: Bill Coperthwaite's Radical Experiment in Living that give your fun preference will be satisfied by simply reading this book. Reading habit all over the world can be said as the opportunity for people to know world considerably better then how they react to the world. It can't be explained constantly that reading behavior only for the geeky man but for all of you who wants to possibly be success person. So , for all of you who want to start reading through as your good habit, you could pick A Man Apart: Bill Coperthwaite's Radical Experiment in Living become your personal starter.

Gerald McMullen:

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