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Review: Radical Simplicity: Creating An Authentic Life

By Dan Price

Reviewed by [Victoria Carchidi](#)
Washington, DC, USA

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Dan Price. *Radical Simplicity: Creating an Authentic Life*. Philadelphia: Running Books, 2005. 176 pp. \$12.95. ISBN: 0-7624-2492-3; softbound.

"Find your bliss," urges Dan Price in this account of his 14-year effort to find simplicity in a meadow in Oregon. Renting two acres for \$100, Price builds huts and sweat lodges and experiments with paring his life down to essentials. He wants to be free to do the things he loves: observe the world and record it through drawings and photographs (this book is decorated with many such illustrations), as well as through his insights and those of writers such as Thoreau. (Price is the author of "Moonlight Chronicles," *Utne's* 'Zine of the year (2004); and two other books.)

Loosely chronological, with handwritten comments and drawings, the account reflects Price's interrogations of contemporary American society. Are we de-evolving, he wonders, citing Jared Diamond's view that children in natural environments are more alert than American children playing computer games (p. 19). He seeks to nurture his spirit by living closer to nature. Impressed by Nez Perce Indian life ways, Price first erects a tipi, keeping a motel room for his publishing work. By the book's end, he lives year-round in a "hobbit hole," with a shed built of junk 4x4s and covered with local stone as the pressroom. Along the way, he dumps much of what he originally considered essential. The TV goes when he realizes that he watches so passively he doesn't recognize programs he has already seen.

The book invites us to reconsider our lives and assumptions. Price himself could delve deeper into some of his own ideas: for example, are authenticity, primitive, and harmony synonyms for "free"? He learns to work with the meadow, not to be "free" of it. Similarly, he writes that he improved the meadow by clearing fallen trees and weeds, and planting grass seed. Later, he recommends only small lawns, and seems to value true meadow—which is made up of many "weeds"—but does not explicitly revoke that earlier assessment of "improvement."

Price's relationship with his wife and children also raises questions. He clearly loves them, but his separation from them leaves "the endless tasks and financial black holes of keeping a full-blown household up and running" to his wife (p. 9). This, and a warning to husbands about their wives' "to do lists" (p. 152) show he has not freed himself from stereotyped views of

heterosexual nuclear families.

Oddly listed as Self-help/Reference, *Radical Simplicity* offers the general reader an engaging story of one man prospering by turning toward a less materialistic life. It illustrates that the result is not deprivation, but an increased awareness of the plenty that surrounds us and to which we are often blind. For examples, see <<http://www.radicalsimplicitybook.com>>.

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