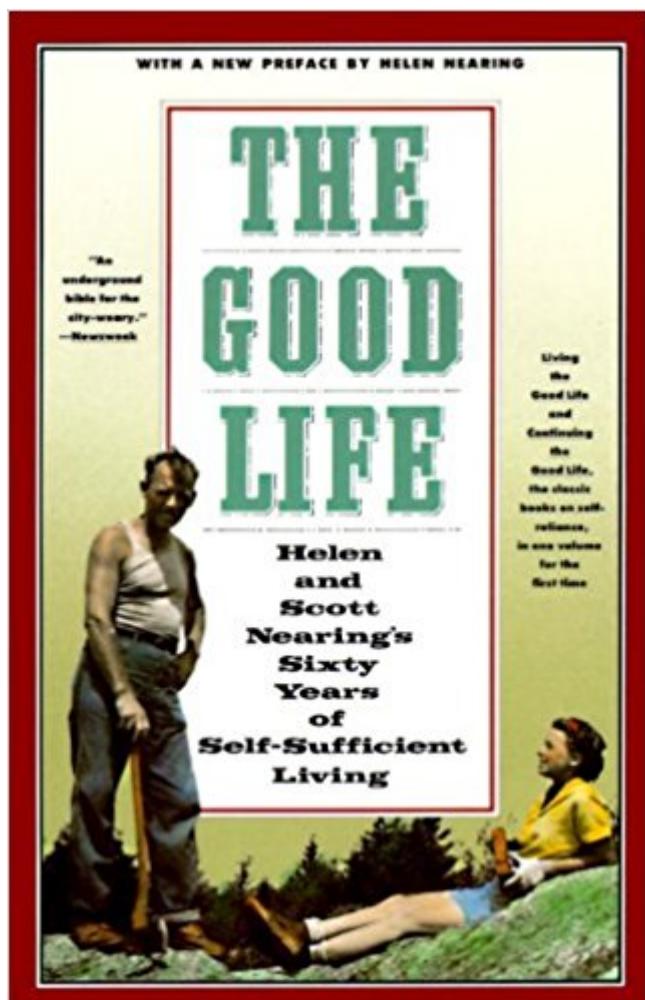


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The Good Life: Helen And Scott Nearing's Sixty Years Of Self-Sufficient Living



Synopsis

This one volume edition of Living the Good Life and Continuing the Good Life brings these classics on rural homesteading together. This couple abandoned the city for a rural life with minimal cash and the knowledge of self reliance and good health.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a reprint of two classics "Living the good life" and "Continuing the good life". In these books, Scott and Helen Nearing describe how they chose to live deliberately, and built for themselves a sustainable life and lifestyle in Vermont and Maine. In "Living the good life", they explain some of the circumstances that led them to stage a strategic withdrawal from New York City and relocate to a run-down farm in Vermont during the 1930s. They describe how they acquired and developed their land, how they built their house, and their garden and diet. A major focus of the book is explaining their philosophy of non-exploitation, and how they wanted to implement their ideas of social justice into their lifestyle. The Nearings believed so strongly in avoiding exploitation of any kind that they avoided resorting to animal labor or products on their farm. They arranged their days so that they could spend 4 hours doing bread labor, 4 hours working with the community, and had 4 hours of free time each day to pursue independent interests. They also describe how they earned cash income from maple sugaring on their property. Towards the end of this first section, they explain that growing crowds of visitors, combined with a general lack of cooperation in the community eventually convinced them to abandon their project in Vermont and move on to Maine. In "Continuing the Good Life," the Nearings describe how they built a second homestead in Maine.

Once again, they explain how they constructed a house from stone, and how they developed a case income, this time based on blueberries. Gardening and diet is also given more space in this volume than it had in "Living the Good Life". This book is rich with both inspiration and practical details. Scott Nearing was a well published academic in the field of economics before he started the adventures described in these volumes. As a result, his style of writing is rather academic, and his chapters contain quite a few footnotes. It's a little strange to read this book out of context, to dive right in without knowing anything about the Nearings beforehand. This is what I did the first time I read the book, and I found the premise of the adventure rather preposterous - two city people going off to establish a commune in the mountains during the 1930s. They mentioned that they earned some money from traveling and writing. Without further explanation, I thought they were travel writers or something. It wasn't until I read John Saltmarsh's book *The Making of a Homesteader* that I began to get the full picture. In that book, Saltmarsh describes how Scott Nearing had been a very successful economics professor in the first decade of the century. However, he was a very outspoken pacifist, and lost his teaching positions because of his politics. He was living in New York City, separated from his wife, when he met Helen, his soul mate. Because of his political stances, Nearing was recruited by the Communist Party as an educator and politician. However, he was too much a freethinker for the communists, and was soon expelled from the party for continuing to voice his independent ideas. It was at this point, when he was about 50, when he and Helen began their Good Life experiment in Vermont. With this background in mind, Nearing's comments and opinions stated in this book make a lot more sense.

I first became aware of the Nearings (Helen and Scott) as a university student in the late 1960s, when they were considered the elder statesmen of the Sixties counterculture's back-to-the-land movement. As such, they prefigure by decades all the current flood of authors counseling a return to basic human values, lives of simplicity and a turning away from lifestyles of mindless consumption. The thread of truth running through their decades of rural adventures and struggles to live their lives with quality, public service, and dignity is an American classic, and one the present generation could learn much from. Simply put, this is a classic volume that describes the Nearings' lifetime experiment at establishing and maintaining a more meaningful alternative lifestyle, one eschewing the waste, rampant materialism, and corporate subjugation so common in today's mainstream society. After reading this book, one will chuckle quietly at the pathos inherent in the sight of all these busy, self-important yuppies driving proudly down the highway in their hard-won BMWs, doing their deals and talking on their cellular phones while driving in traffic, going nowhere fast with such

innane but self-absorbed intensity. There is a much more meaningful and satisfying way to approach one's life, and it is described in detail in this book. Buy it and be prepared to be educated and amazed. It has profoundly changed my own life and the way I approach the future, and I recommend it to anyone who has even a mild degree of discomfort with the rampant greed and materialism characterizing contemporary American society. Cheers!

Some books speak to us where we are, others inspire us with what we may become. Not everyone will respond to the Nearings' vision of the good life, and some of you who do have dreams of living beyond the sidewalk may not find their account entirely useful--but it's still a consolation to know such a life can be lived. Society could not solve all of its ills if everyone tried to live like the Nearings, but who could doubt whether making their aims ours isn't a step in the right direction: reducing wants, cooperating with Nature, neither exploiting nor being exploited. *Good Life* is often called the *Walden* of the 20th century, a comparison both helpful and misleading; it's more like an expansion of Thoreau's first chapter. And remember, the Nearings followed this course of life to the end of their days. The Nearings include a great deal of practical advice, all of which is fascinating to read but not all of which may be useful to prospective homesteaders--even those in New England, where Scott and Helen made their home (twice). The best anyone in a different region can do is to use the Nearings' account as a model. Absorb the spirit of their activities, if you cannot follow them in substance. Live locally, in tune with the seasons, and meet your needs with your immediate resources. And count on working hard, your own labor being free and in virtually endless supply. One important lesson to be learned from the Nearings (also the advice of many homesteaders) is that you cannot expect to live entirely off the land. Some income is necessary, some inputs may have to come from the larger economic sphere. The Nearings sold maple syrup; other homesteaders retain some sort of workworld employment. If you like this book, you might also wish to read Scott Nearing's autobiography, "The Making of a Radical." Scott was a university professor in economics nearly a century ago who lost his position when he spoke out against child labor. Finally, let me note that I am not a homesteader, though books like *The Good Life* have inspired me to find simpler and healthier solutions to many of life's challenges. May you too!

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