

Approaching the Natural: A Health Manifesto

Sid Garza-Hillman

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“Think of your body as an incredibly well-designed car—mine would be a 1967 Porsche 911. Put dirty oil and gas into the car and it 1) will not run well; 2) will eventually break down; and 3) (most importantly) will not be fun to drive.”

It was while driving that Garza-Hillman came up with the idea for this book. In an epiphany he realized that he was “sitting inside a machine that I was controlling with my hands and feet, blocked from the sun, and covered in clothing and shoes.” In other words, he was disconnected from his natural self. And so his philosophy of grounding oneself to the natural in our daily lives was born.

Garza-Hillman’s manifesto is lighthearted, but urgent. In order to live healthier, longer, and more fulfilled lives, we need to get back to nature. The author’s constant question as he approached the book was, “If we behaved less in conflict with our nature, could we achieve greater health and happiness individually and as a species?” His answer was yes: “Just become more like the thinking human animal you are and your life will improve.”

Approaching the Natural is a self-help workshop in a book. The compact size makes it easy to tote in a purse or bag, and Garza-Hillman’s natural (pun-intended) voice guides the reader from topic to topic (how to live naturally in the way we eat, the way we move, the way we learn, the way we socialize and the way we create) with relevant anecdotes, interesting facts, and humor. Some of the humor tends to the corny—speaking of meditation, he states, “I love it. I’m not going to marry it or anything.” That aside, Hillman’s message is serious. What are we doing to our bodies, our minds, or families, our planet when we live counter to our nature?

Garza-Hillman’s revelations certainly aren’t new. Few of us don’t already know that eating whole foods rather than processed foods is healthier. We get that taking a multivitamin isn’t as good as getting natural sources of those same vitamins. And intellectually, we’re aware that texting while having a face-to-face conversation with a friend isn’t really connecting. But his emphasis on being “holistically self-interested” and living a “grounded, connected existence” makes the book relevant for a well-rounded approach to living as nature intended.

Garza-Hillman is a certified nutritional consultant and has a B.A. in Philosophy from UCLA. He is the staff nutritionist and Programs Director at Stanford Inn’s Mendocino Center for Living Well. He teaches a course on basic nutrition and offers private nutritional counseling. *Approaching the Natural: A Health Manifesto* is his first book.

Why read Garza-Hillman’s manifesto? From time to time everyone needs a friendly, non-judgmental reminder why our unnatural actions are counterproductive. Reading *Approaching the Natural* is just the friendly, non-judgmental reminder we need. And who wouldn’t rather be a fun-to-drive 1967 Porsche 911 than a neglected, run-down relic of a classic?

JULIE HARTHILL CLAYTON (December 10, 2012)

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