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Autobiography & Memoir

Cottage for Sale Must be Moved: A Woman Moves a House to Make a Home
Kate Whouley
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When the author, forty-something, single, and an admitted “compulsive reader of the classifieds,” spies a notice of cottages for sale, she is immediately intrigued. The thought of adding to her very small Cape Cod house with a ready-made addition appeals to her on several levels. Personally, she needs an extra room in order to finally move her crowded office out of her bedroom-her printer off her dresser.

Professionally, as a designer of independent bookstores, the challenge of blending an old cottage with her present home fits precisely into her area of expertise. And environmentally, she knows that adapting an existing structure, rather than using new materials, concurs with her espousal of preserving natural resources.

She takes two friends with her to find the cottage that is “just right.” The one that “calls” to Whouley has a purple bedroom and crooked Mexican tiles in the kitchen - a “cottage with personality” - one that has been loved.

From that day, Whouley takes the reader step by step through her nearly year-long odyssey to the finished product. With a large dose of chutzpa and the help of friends, she gets a building permit, presents her case to the Conservation and Health Departments, finds a house mover (his motto: Save a Tree, Move a House), tears up her patio, moves shrubs and perennials, adds a basement so she can move her furnace out of her kitchen, and finally reaches the day when she can “commute” from her kitchen, through her birch-floored hallway, to her new office overlooking an ancient cranberry bog.

Whouley has authored several books of nonfiction in her field of retail bookselling, and is working on a novel set in Paris. She has injected this memoir with warmth and humor, adding an
unexpected dimension to the myriad fascinating details of construction in which she immersed herself for a year.

The reader rejoices in her compliance with the Title V Septic Systems Regulations, and pulls for her successful presentation at the Conservation hearing, where she requests a small encroachment into the buffer zone surrounding the bog. “I’m a good person,” she tells herself. “I don’t intend to build a strip mall.”

Woven into her narrative are side plots revolving around the author’s loyal friends, her interest in astrology, and her brief crushes on several members of her construction crew. She waxes philosophical about the “vision” that she and everyone involved shared, and the coming together of the separate threads to create a satisfying whole.

Whouley’s is an engaging saga that should appeal to anyone who has actually accomplished such a project, or simply longed to do so.

Deborah Donovan