FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Self-Help

**Small Pleasures: Finding Grace in a Chaotic World**
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The fact that so many of us feel overwhelmed by day-to-day demands has become almost a cliché. Author Justine Toms steps in to help us appre-ciate the little delights that we so often overlook.

Co-author with husband Michael of *True Work: Doing What You Love and Loving What You Do*, Toms is also a co-founder and managing pro-ducer of New Dimensions Media/World Broadcasting Network. In this little volume she offers fifty meditative essays organized into five categories: “A wider landscape: how we see ourselves and the world”; “Animals and nature as teachers”; “Be an activist without driving yourself crazy”; “Circles and friendships”; and “Celebrations and rituals.”

The essays cover a broad range of subjects. In the animal and nature section, the author shares her transforming experience of being close to mother and baby gray whales in the San Ignacio Lagoon wildlife preserve off of Baja, Mexico. From that encounter she invites readers, “Close your eyes and let yourself go back to a moment when you, too, felt delighted awe and boundless, exuberant ecstasy.” She also highlights Julia Butterfly Hill, the tree-sitter who resided in a thousand-year-old redwood tree for 738 days to protest the logging of old-growth forests. Remembering a weeping willow tree from her childhood, the author is reminded that we are all drawn to trees throughout our lives.

Some of the author’s commentary is unique, such as her discussion of circles, which differ from an acquired circle of friends by being more intentional or formal. Her Spider Lodge circle, for example, was comprised of a dozen women who would meet regularly, sometimes for several days, for the purpose of exploring the idea of shared leadership among women. Her main women’s circle, the Owl-Eagle Lodge, currently focuses on community service, including public drumming circles and theatrical fundraisers for women’s shelters. From these experiences, the author concludes, “I learned that if the intention of the circle is strong enough

to hold differing opinions and views, and if the members are willing to grapple with diversity, the rewards will be immeasurable."

Incorporating ideas from Buddhism, Feng Shui, and other traditions, the author writes from no single faith or philosophical perspective. These essays are based on Toms' particular experiences, and their underlying messages can be applied to readers' individual lives. While this approach might seem a bit loose to some readers, others will be intrigued by its wide-ranging accessibility.

*Beth Hemke Shapiro*