



Twelve by Twelve: A One-Room Cabin Off the Grid and Beyond the American Dream

William Powers

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They say it's the journey, not the destination that matters. *Twelve by Twelve* is the story of one man's journey from living in what he calls the "Flattening World"—a world of increased globalization, environmental destruction, poverty, and corporate control—toward a more meaningful personal existence aimed at supporting environmental and social justice. His journey is facilitated by several months of living in a twelve-foot by twelve-foot cabin off the beaten path in the American South, without running water or electricity. During his time at the cabin, Powers wrestles with questions of his own role in transforming himself and the world, while interacting with an array of organic farmers, free-running farm animals, handmade furniture crafters, ATV-loving teenagers, and the stench of industrialized chicken houses.

Refreshingly, the author goes beyond addressing environmental issues to get at the social and spiritual dimension of the current global dilemma. He nudges the reader to think about participating in a system that upholds social and environmental well-being. This "soft" economy is local, and thrives in the context of a rich and interconnected community of people supporting small organic farmers and handcrafting artisans; it provides "living well" for everyone. Powers speaks with the authority of one who has seen the ramifications of the flattening world. Among several experiences working as an aid worker, he cites examples of deforestation and cultural disruption in Bolivia due to resource demand in the global North. Students of environmental and globalization ethics will be just as interested in Powers' journey as the activist or layperson exploring how to motivate self and the world to move towards sustainability.

Powers is interested, it seems, in being in a correct relationship with the world by having an appropriate attitude towards the earth and other people and demonstrating personal action. Although he never seems to fully arrive at his destination of a fully balanced relationship with his world, he is still on the journey of discovering how to live a "soft" existence in an ever-flattening context. However, it is a satisfying to see him mature into a person better connected and increasingly knowledgeable about himself and the world he navigates. Readers part ways with him at the end of his stay at the twelve-by-twelve cabin, but they get the impression that it is an experience he carries with him the rest of the way.

GABRIELA WORREL (May / June 2010)

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