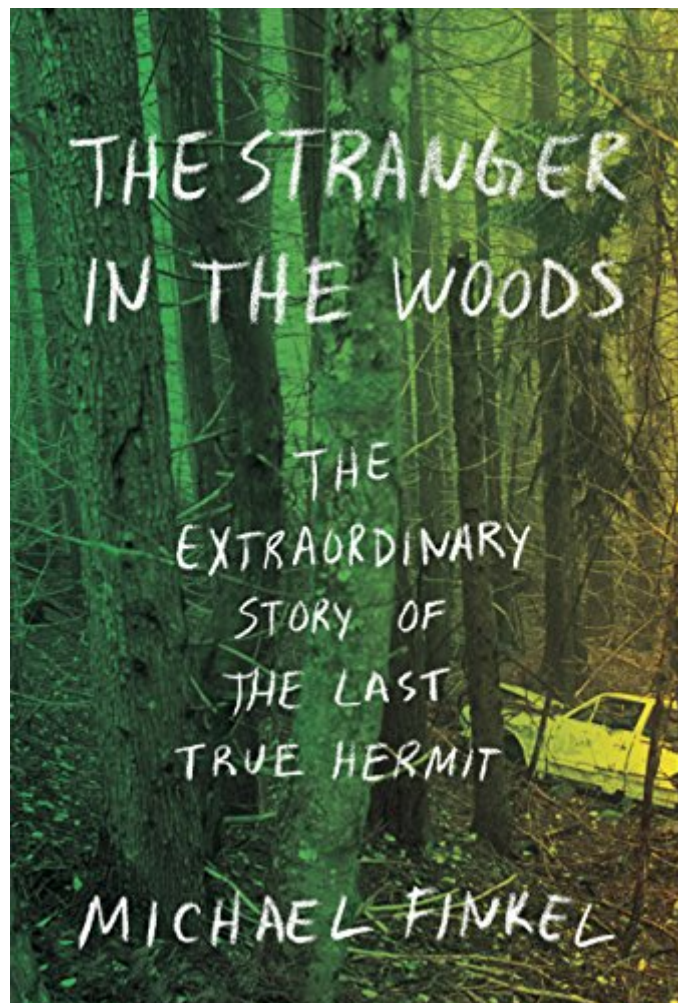




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The Stranger In The Woods: The Extraordinary Story Of The Last True Hermit



Synopsis

Many people dream of escaping modern life, but most will never act on it. This is the remarkable true story of a man who lived alone in the woods of Maine for 27 years, making this dream a reality—not out of anger at the world, but simply because he preferred to live on his own. A New York Times bestseller. In 1986, a shy and intelligent twenty-year-old named Christopher Knight left his home in Massachusetts, drove to Maine, and disappeared into the forest. He would not have a conversation with another human being until nearly three decades later, when he was arrested for stealing food. Living in a tent even through brutal winters, he had survived by his wits and courage, developing ingenious ways to store edibles and water, and to avoid freezing to death. He broke into nearby cottages for food, clothing, reading material, and other provisions, taking only what he needed but terrifying a community never able to solve the mysterious burglaries. Based on extensive interviews with Knight himself, this is a vividly detailed account of his secluded life—why did he leave? what did he learn?—as well as the challenges he has faced since returning to the world. It is a gripping story of survival that asks fundamental questions about solitude, community, and what makes a good life, and a deeply moving portrait of a man who was determined to live his own way, and succeeded.

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Customer Reviews

I wanted to read this book as the Maine woods have been a part of my life and I was unfamiliar with this story until I saw this book. I realized from the start that at the core of this story was an important topic I already have been worrying about that I feel American society either is unaware of or is purposefully ignoring: the neuro-atypical person and the challenge of how they will live (not thriving but suffering) in modern America. I found the book a page turner from the start. I did sneak to the Internet as I was dying to know more and found many videos online such as press conferences with the investigating local law enforcement and video of the now-disassembled camp site. The story was written in a way that was engaging and it moved at a pace that was just right. It's a short 201 pages and the personal details were provided in just nine hours of interviewing, limited by the "hermit's" choice to tell only so much and no more, keeping some things private, and sharing his opinions that are sometimes short and blunt (not pontificating). This is the story of a man who walked into the Maine woods with a small number of items who chose to live in seclusion, robbing lakeside summer camps (vacation cabins) for food and basic supplies. With no military or survivalist training other than reading trade books such as the Foxfire series, he devised systems and carved a life that allowed him to live for 27 years in the brutal Maine woods, sometimes in 20+ below zero winter weather. He only interacted with other people twice, once saying just "hi" to a hiker and once with hand movements and body language only. Knight was content and found peace in living that life until he was caught with the help of sophisticated surveillance equipment while robbing food from a nonprofit camp for disabled children (including kids on the Autism Spectrum). While telling the story of Christopher Knight's life as a hermit, Finkel weaves in his research on the related topics of voluntary solitude versus loneliness, the brain and what scientific studies have told us about the human need for social connection, the role of hormones, and about various (supposed) disorders that our society has invented and given names to. To a layperson Knight seems to have Asperger's, but that's a diagnosis that now no longer exists, it's been renamed and grouped under the broader umbrella term Autism Spectrum Disorder. From my own reading of the book *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnosis of Gifted Children and Adults* by James Webb et al I wonder if Knight's IQ is one that is so high that other neuro-atypical elements also are present. In the book it was said that doctors refused to make a diagnosis of Asperger's because Knight was too high functioning in daily life to

qualify for the diagnosis. The heartbreaking part of this story is that the suffering that Knight endured was due to square pegs not fitting in the round holes of modern American society, his relief and contentedness was found living in isolation in nature, but this is not really allowed in America, and when possible it's only available to those who are able to financially support themselves due to an inheritance or some income stream that they are lucky to find that meshes with their talents and abilities. Also explored in the book was how other cultures around the world have places for hermit-types to go and to live supported for their basic need for food and shelter by society (not financially self-sufficient). Prior to the disassembling of the asylums in the United States, perhaps some of the residents were those who were square pegs. If you just want to hear the story of who, what, when, where, why and how, all that is here in a short easy read. I finished it off in under 48 hours reading between living my regular life. I could have finished it in one sitting if I wanted to stay up too late or clear my calendar for a morning. But this book provides more food for thought, for me at least, than just Knight's hermit years story. I hope this book is a catalyst for Americans to think about this issue, with the rising rates of Autism and mental illness, we have more people this decade than ever before who are not fitting in with the mandatory American public school system and who are not fitting in to work jobs as adults enough to support themselves independently let alone the issue of if a person is happy or content. When a person suffers now they are labeled as depressed, if they worry too much, they have anxiety. The rise in the use of psychiatric medications to try to help people who are not fitting in with American society's defined "right way to function and be" is not always successful in converting a person into being something we call cured. We don't just let people be, anyone found to be atypical is trying to be fixed. If relatives take in a family member with what we call a disability or mental illness, the cost of living can be so high that it's hard to afford it. This societal problem is going to get worse in the upcoming decades. But I digress. This book is a great read that informs and it was written with respect and portrays Knight with dignity. It's not sensationalized for entertainment purposes and it's not patronizing (thank goodness). Rating 5 stars = Love It. This NEEDS TO BE MADE INTO A MOVIE so it can reach a wider audience and that income perhaps can support Knight's ability to live the kind of life he needs to feel inner peace and contentment.

Michael Finkel, author of the true story of THE STRANGER IN THE WOODS: THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF THE LAST TRUE HERMIT, you have my utmost respect. Not only is this story of Chris Knight one of the most compelling that I have read in some time, but the lengths that you went to, to research his venture into the woods of Maine, to understand him, to get

to know him, clearly better than anyone else has, and to represent him with such dignity, astounds me. Having never heard of this story, I was riveted from the get-go. What would possess a person to want to leave society and be completely isolated from their family and all society for that matter. It wasn't until the end of the book that I truly understood Knight's yearning for this lifestyle. I'm not sure that when he set out to live as a hermit, that he knew yet either. While some, especially those whose homes were burgled, might still never understand what would cause a person to want to live in such extreme conditions let alone in solitude, far removed from the regular world, after reading the book, while I will never spend a night, let alone an hour in the woods, what drew Knight makes sense to me now. As the author quotes philosopher Merton, among others, "true solitary does not seek himself, but loses himself." This book teaches us so much about what it truly means to be with oneself. The deeply profound and intellectually stimulating thoughts that come from doing so, most of us will probably never know. It is not just a story about how a man one day walked into the woods and decided to leave his life behind and live off the land, and the pantries of hundreds of nearby cabins. It is so much more. So much more thought-provoking. It's not to say that after reading THE STRANGER IN THE WOODS that every reader will feel compelled to pick up and leave their jobs, families, and the comfort of modern society behind, but it sure does offer food for thought. Finkel points out "that most of us feel like something is missing from our lives, and wondered then if Knight's journey was to seek it. But life isn't about searching endlessly to find what's missing; it's about learning to live with the missing parts."

After reading a few chapters of this book, I was hooked immediately. I couldn't put it down. As someone who is drawn both to nature and seclusion, I was fascinated by Christopher Knight's retreat from modern, Western society, into the heart of Maine's woods. Many of us dream of secluding from the busyness of modern living • the fast-paced, noisy, cyclical nature in which life has become; yet many of us do not have the courage or tenacity to pursue such a dream, much less achieve this dream for the amount of time that Knight did. If you are like me • a dreamer, a wanderer, a hopeless romantic for escape • then this book will instantly capture you. You will be drawn into a story of a man that psychologists and therapists have no categories for. You will be drawn into a story of a man who survives the intensity of Maine's weather and the silence of isolation. I promise, whether you agree with his choices or

not, you will be drawn into this man's life, enthralled by his zeal for solitude, and his utter brilliance in the entire quest. On a practical level, Michael Finkel has written this biographical account excellently. The book is written well, leaving you wanting more and more of the story when the chapters end. The chapters are short so that one can read briefly each night and still make significant headway in a few weeks. The account of Knight's life is both formatted in narrative and in some ways, topically. If you are looking for a new book that will capture your attention, make you question some of your choices, and leave you desiring more out of life—please, pick up this book!

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