

Somewhere in an Oregon Valley
Book Reviews

Gregg Gomer:

Jon Remmerde writes of his experience of voluntary simplicity- life lived in our current time, with only the basics, in a remote valley with his wife and two young daughters. The Whitney Valley in northeast Oregon at 4200 feet is where he and his family set up a life with kerosene lamps for light, wood cookstove and wood heater for heat, a pitcher pump by the sink for water, and an outhouse out back.Ⓒ

He shares his appreciation for the solitude and silence, the land and water, the wildlife and waterfowl, the flow of the weather and the seasons. You can feel his enthusiasm for meeting the challenges of raising a family in this setting: providing food, shelter, warmth, education, livelihood and safety- all from the hard work, ingenuity and wits of the family group. We are also introduced to some local characters as Jon works with them to cut hay, log firewood, fix machinery and generally have real life adventures.

I learned a lot that I didn't know about wildlife and appreciated the warm and genuine tone of the book. It was exciting and suspenseful in parts and humorous in others, and philosophical at times. All in all an interesting and pleasant read that carries you into another world- one many of us would not choose but one which Jon makes interesting and accessible.

Glenda Jones:

This book is a compilation of scenes, feelings and love within a family who lived 8 and a half years on a ranch in Eastern Oregon with no electricity or running water.

Jon does a very credible job of bringing the reader into his family's daily lives. We are right there with them, whether it be mushroom hunting or cutting firewood. We meet the animals, both domestic and wild, who received respect from this family.Ⓒ

What a treat it was for this city girl to become a part of the environment Jon so beautifully describes. I saw the soft moonlight reflected on the snow and shivered at 10 degrees below zero, heard the quietness and the coyotes singing...

I highly recommend this book for all ages.

Amanda MacNaughton:

Okay, I can't review this book without making a full disclosure: I'm one of the characters in it. Jon Remmerde is my dad, and he wrote this book about our experience living in Whitney, Oregon, a ghost town in Baker County that is now a 1200 acre cattle ranch.

Reading the book now, though, I find myself enjoying it just the way I'd enjoy any memoir. It's a story of life in a hundred-year-old house with a

pitcher pump and kerosene lamps, of work fixing fences and digging irrigation ditches while observing wild animals and birds close at hand, of home schooling and free range kids, of real danger like wildfires and felling trees, of a life lived in a way that most people might consider "old fashioned" or "alternative" but that to us was just normal life.

You'll meet characters like 18-year-old Jim, who said he learned to ride a horse before he learned to walk, Jewel, the milk goat who didn't like men, and old Guy across the road, who migrated each season just like the birds. Stories of life and work are mixed with pithy observations and humor: "Jim never had decided to quit swearing, so he was handier for a lot of the mechanical work..." "I guess anything is entertaining when you're stuck in one pasture all summer on your way to becoming supermarket beef."

You'll like this if you, like so many others right now, enjoy reading about homesteading or the so-called "simple life."

Jack Richards:

He sure knows how to spin a tale. I've been in some of that Oregon country he writes about. When I read these two books (*Quiet People in a Noisy World* and *Somewhere in an Oregon Valley*), sometimes I felt like I was there again. I met him and his wife and girls up in that country, but it was before I knew he wrote books, and we just talked about living up there.

I read both his books twice, maybe three years apart. I dreamed about some of this stuff when I was reading these books, it got in my head that much. I'll read both of them again, another year or so goes by. I usually don't read books twice or more except Louis L'Amour. Not saying he's as good as Louis L'Amour, I don't know about that, they write about way different stuff from each other, but he holds me to the story until I get it finished like Louis L'Amour does, and I feel like I've read something worth reading when I finish.

(Titles of books in parentheses added by the author for clarity.)

Patt Saunders:

Stepping onto the pages of *Quiet People in a Noisy World* and *Somewhere in an Oregon Valley*, I sensed something significant. These books are brimming with authenticity, values realized and a commitment to ideals. Each story illustrates conscious choice, and a core awareness of and reverence for the grand design.

Remmerde's eloquent words are offered with humility, humor and intelligence. His writing mirrors his life; it has all the essentials clarity, beauty, and substance - nothing frivolous or trivial. Environmentalism, higher education, self-reliance and hard work reveal handpicked and practiced values. This style of living is not for the faint of heart or body, but for those with determination, strength and resolve.

One of my favorite chapters is "Wildflower Fire Watch" in *Quiet People in a Noisy World*. The author illustrates his keen awareness of the grand scheme of things and his aim to honor nature's sacred gifts. I could feel and sense the region he's describing; it's painted with vibrancy, affection,

familiarity, and hope.

In our frenzied world today, we often hear about progress and the development of fresh ideas. This remarkable family elects to simply and gently steward each other and their environment. Their approach is one of reverence, wonder and gratitude. Mindless choices are easy; life portrayed in these pages is anything but. Integrity, love and joy are naturally woven into every fiber of this family's being.

Reading these books left me with questions. How conscious am I? Do I share my light? Have I made a difference? Am I leaving things any better? Remmerde's words whisper, "Be true to yourself"

Barbara Kelso:

A comfortable, calm book to remind us of another world to experience. An antidote to the strident and sometimes violent environment many of us live in daily. In short bursts, we are reminded that many of our "necessities" do not have to determine our lives-- in fact, are not really necessities at all.

Many of the interactions with the natural world reminded me of my own experiences in the high wild places. Jon caught the essence of those encounters and touched a familiar chord in my being.

It is not a book to sit and read cover to cover in one great gulp. It is, rather, a book to carry around and read in short sips and then think about as we go about living life as it is handed to us.

There are small moralistic comments included that are probably open for discussion, but reflect the author's right to literary license. The chapter describing the girls' adjustment to the "outside" world was particularly interesting. Would others do as well in adjusting and what influences contributed to this?

This is an account by a man, husband and father, who is in complete harmony with a life in the out-of-the-way places. Are his interpretations of his wife's and children's reactions a reflection of his own contentment or really the attitudes of the whole family?

Warren Howe:

Jon Remmerde's *Somewhere In An Oregon Valley* describes 8 ½ years of the author's family of four living and eking out a living on a section of a cattle ranch in a remote mountain valley in northeastern Oregon. Without electricity or potable running water in a small, drafty, ramshackle cabin, enduring hot summers and bitter cold winters, the author spent long days mowing hay and feeding cattle, maintaining irrigation ditches, mending fences, repairing mechanical breakdowns, and cutting firewood.

He also helped his wife home-school their two young daughters.

And the whole family experienced daily, delightful encounters with wildlife--coyotes, eagles, elk, beaver, snakes, deer and killdeer, and sand hill cranes--in sun and rain and snow.

Not an idyllic life, to be sure, but one filled with human warmth and love and fulfillment. No, not an Eden, but they grew a vegetable garden, and they had not even a complete disconnect from the outside world: machines are needed for the work, and sometimes the machines unavoidably destroy

the wildlife they love, as, for example, mowers kill snakes and voles and ground squirrels as they cut the hay for cattle feed. The needs of the industrial society," as the author puts it, are still given their due. Yet, despite the urgent need to work the ranch, much time is spent in play, drawing, reading, writing, play-acting and poetry making, swimming in the river, enjoying the abundant wildlife and the occasional, remarkable humans who pass by or stay a spell.

The book's 30 chapters are filled with meticulous detail of these experiences. The chapters are essentially self-contained units. So the book may be taken in short sessions at a sitting or as a continuing narrative. Whichever the approach, there are rewards for all readers in this honest tale.