

A Good Life - Review

Contributed by Lozzie

Lozzie's review of A GOOD LIFE - The Guide to Ethical Living

by LeoHickman

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I suppose I had better come right out and say it: I haven't read this book. It simply isn't that kind of volume - it doesn't seduce you into sitting down and ploughing through it from cover to cover in a single sitting, like a decent novel might. It is, after all, over 300 pages of pretty tightly packed (8 point?) text and life is frankly way too short.

Initially daunted by its size and density, I managed to persevere with the book (I'm a good little reviewer. Pat me on the head), and discovered that the best way to get the feel of the book was to flick through it idly like a coffee-table display book.

I was initially worried by a statistic that Hickman highlights inside the front cover of the book - about 12 million people in the UK using antidepressant drugs. I hope Hickman was not suggesting that these drug 'users' are part of an environmental disaster about to happen. Is the chemical regulation of one's mental health really on a par with obese children and polluting cars?

Further reading revealed the suggestion that depression is caused by people's inability to maintain the sort of over-blown consumer lifestyle portrayed to us all by the mass media as normal and desirable, all part of their relentless drive relieve you and me of as much money as possible. Were that the case, perhaps we could all be cured of our clinical depression by taking up Buddhism and renouncing material possessions?

Unfortunately, this led me to mistrust the book slightly in the early stages. A shame really, as it had obviously been researched and compiled to the n-th degree; the result of Hickman's work as a columnist for The Guardian newspaper with a special brief regarding ethical living, and the natural stable mate to his book "A Life Stripped Bare".

So I continued to persevere. Give me another House Point. And I am glad I did.

If you just browse through this book you will be fascinated and entertained by such erudite snippets of information as: driving an SUV instead of a 'normal' car wastes more energy than leaving your fridge door open for 6 years, or a television switched on for 28 years (surely that would be enough Coronation Street for anybody?).

The book is undoubtedly a superb resource for journalists, writers, environmental campaigners, dedicated Downsizer forum members or for anyone curious to know more about the issues that are becoming increasingly prevalent in the news these days - everything from battery chicken farming to the Peak Oil crisis. Literally thousands of facts and figures are clearly presented and thoroughly indexed. The book is divided neatly into sections, each with its own Directory of suppliers and organisations at the end (conveniently printed on contrasting colour pages - vegetable inks only, of course).

Twenty or so pages at the back of the book are devoted to attributions and credits, which would be handy if the validity of your claims were ever challenged when you are writing a letter to the editor of your local paper to complain about something.

Many Downsizers will, I am sure, find a lot of what the book contains to be not exactly news to them, but that is more a mark of the book's thoroughness than a criticism. For example, in the section of the book that covers water preservation ideas I am happy to say that I am already doing all of those things (and more!), but there were plenty of other hints and tips elsewhere in the book that I hadn't known about. As such, the book is a useful tool for those trying to find ways to live a more thoughtful and less impactful life, especially when it comes to making decisions about how to spend your money, with plenty of good old-fashioned frugal hints and tips too.

Ultimately, I found the book interesting, informative and profoundly depressing. Ignorance is bliss. But with this book weighing down your coffee table or your bedside cabinet, there is precious little chance of that. Which reminds me, I must to the doctor and renew my antidepressant prescription ...