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ONE MAN'S SEARCH FOR
NATURAL SILENCE IN A NOISY WORLD



ONE SQUARE INCH OF
SILENCE

GORDON HEMPTON
and JOHN GROSSMANN

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One Square Inch of Silence: One Man's Search for Natural Silence in a Noisy World (with CD)

Gordon Hempton , John Grossmann

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In the visionary tradition of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, *One Square Inch of Silence* alerts us to beauty that we take for granted and sounds an urgent environmental alarm. Natural silence is our nation's fastest-disappearing resource, warns Emmy-winning acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton, who has made it his mission to record and preserve it in all its variety before these soul-soothing terrestrial soundscapes vanish completely in the ever-rising din of man-made noise. Recalling the great works on nature written by John Muir, John McPhee, and Peter Matthiessen, this beautifully written narrative, co-authored with John Grossmann, is also a quintessentially American story—a road trip across the continent from west to east in a 1964 VW bus. But no one has crossed America like this. Armed with his recording equipment and a decibel-measuring sound-level meter, Hempton bends an inquisitive and loving ear to the varied natural voices of the American landscape—bugling elk, trilling thrushes, and drumming, endangered prairie chickens. He is an equally patient and perceptive listener when talking with people he meets on his journey about the importance of quiet in their lives. By the time he reaches his destination, Washington, D.C., where he meets with federal officials to press his case for natural silence preservation, Hempton has produced a historic and unforgettable sonic record of America. With the incisiveness of Jack Kerouac's observations on the road and the stirring wisdom of Robert Pirsig repairing an aging vehicle and his life, *One Square Inch of Silence* provides a moving call to action. More than simply a book, it is an actual place, too, located in one of America's last naturally quiet places, in Olympic National Park in Washington State.

One Square Inch of Silence: One Man's Search for Natural Silence in a Noisy World (with CD) Details

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From Reader Review One Square Inch of Silence: One Man's Search for Natural Silence in a Noisy World (with CD) for online ebook

Anna says

Gordon Hempton's message on silence is one that needs to be heard. I gave it three stars though, because the writing and storytelling skill doesn't match the passion for natural quiet. The pace is slow, which is appropriate, but the storytelling lags and meanders. Travels that have the opportunity to pull us in with the adventure of pursuing silence, read like a journal, documenting Hempton's morning ablutions, coffee breaks, and travel discomforts. Far too much of the book documents various sound levels. Rare was the page that didn't say something along the lines of 'ARMY JET = 110 dBA.' Travel anecdotes from strangers and friends Hempton encounters on his trip are poorly transitioned into the overall story. It is clear that Hempton has a natural skill for sound recording, but less so for writing.

That said, I learned a lot about natural quiet and noise. I have been noticing noise intrusions in my daily life more regularly, and I appreciate that there are folks trying to do something about that. I loved the message and cause behind the book, and I plan on supporting One Square Inch and sharing what I've learned. Hempton's experience with quiet, also gives him the ability to share drops of quotable wisdom sprinkled throughout the book, such as "Silence is not the absence of something but the presence of everything." Despite the flaws, definitely worth the read.

Sarah says

I enjoyed reading this, but it's kind of sad. There are almost no quiet places left in the US.

Elana says

I consider myself a fairly aware and in-tune with nature person and I like to think that I use all of my senses - sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing when interacting with the world around me. However, reading this book I realized how immune I've become to sounds around me. On a daily basis, I experience such a barrage of human-made sounds, many of which are loud and unpleasant to my ears, that I've taught myself (unconsciously) to tune them out. In this book, Hempton goes in search of silence which he defines as 15 seconds of natural sound uninterrupted by human made noise. 15 seconds is not a very long time and one would think that finding 15 seconds of Hempton's "silence" would be fairly easy to come by. Traveling from the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state to Washington DC, Hempton tries to find silence. He visits national parks and wilderness areas only to be met time and again with aural assaults on his ears.

In this age of "conservation" and "sustainability" Hempton demonstrates (in writing and with sound meter readings) the importance of adding natural quiet to these lists.

Easy to read, funny, and sometimes heartbreaking this book has changed the way I listen.

Laura says

I was kind of conflicted reading this... I totally agree that there is too much noise everywhere, and steps should be taken to reduce noise pollution. However, the author's only real suggestion is rerouting all air traffic away from all National Parks, which even he knows is impossible. So really the entire book was him whipping out his decibel meter at every sound telling you how loud it is, then complaining that there is human made noise everywhere. He complains about highways, trains, the music in bars, the sounds of major cities, a woman and her daughter talking at campground, Boy Scouts at the same campground (jeez, just be glad there are still kids who enjoy being outdoors), and even his colleague trying to get his own recording equipment set up... It's one thing to want National Parks to have no air traffic, it's another thing to want no one to ever make a sound (at the same time he is driving a noisy VW bus, and taking flights across the country). Maybe his non-profit will get some kind of legislation passed, but I hope he doesn't decide to write another book about it.

Jerry Hui says

I love the cause. The overall narrative of a cross-country search for quiet is promising, yet often the individual episodes are flat. The constant chronicle of noise level becomes repetitive. There are however lots of great research in science, history and literature that went into the book, and I'm very interested to read more by John Muir now!

Hans Gerwitz says

I really want to love this book. I strongly support Gordon's mission. But this is an interesting idea and a few good stories buried within page after page of reiteration and senseless descriptive narrative.

I highly recommend reading the first chapter or two, and learning more about the One Square Inch project; we even took the hike to visit it. But I cannot recommend reading this entire book.

Curt says

I love stories of obsession, however this one just left me wanting to stop at times. It bogged down in a couple of places.

Mark says

Five stars for the message, four for the messenger.

Dorothy Drobney says

A wonderful book for those who are seeking a small bit of peace and quiet in their day. Though a bit discouraging with all the efforts being made to undo what author is fighting for...

Mjrndd says

This book makes me want to go hiking in the Olympic rain forest. I remember camping here as a kid and waking up in the morning and everything was wet: outside of tent, inside of tent, any clothes inside of tent. The best strategy was stuffing clothes inside of sleeping bag so that they would be a bit dry and warm in the morning. Also remember the moss. Everything was covered in moss. Moss on the ground, moss covering all of the logs on the ground, moss hanging from the trees.

And I want to back to Canyonland NP. The most stars that I have ever seen!

The author seemed a little nutty, but in a kind of sweet way. I felt a little sorry for his daughter having to put up with his dedication (better word?) to this cause. But after reading this book I am listening more and am much more cognizant of my reactions to various sounds.

Bill Pritchard says

Our world is dominated by items to draw our visual sense. Wayside rests point to beautiful overlooks. National Parks are for the most part created to save a place of visual beauty. Gordon Hempton has made a life of recording sound scapes around the United States and around the world. You have undoubtedly heard his work - in the soundtracks to your favorite movies, to those CD's you can purchase of the "sounds of rain", etc. Years ago, Mr. Hempton began to recognize that there were less and less places in the United States where one can have a soundscape that is uninterrupted by human intrusion - our cars, planes, machines, lawn mowers, etc. In the 1980's the number of places he could find to record nature for longer than 15 minutes without an intrusion numbered in the 30-60 area. By the time he went across the United States in 2008 to try to create the first National Quiet Place in the Olympic National Park in Washington State, he could find only 4. This book has sections that read like Jack Kerouac's observations while on the road, sections that sing with the wisdom of Robert Pirsig's Zen nature involving the repair of his VW Bus, and at times the ringing cry of alarm of Rachel Carlon's Silent Spring. Natural Silence is our nation's fastest disappearing resource. To quote Booklist, there are many books that help us see the world differently; this one induces us to HEAR the world differently. It certainly accomplished that for me. Recommended.

Helena says

Profound.

A must-read - a book that has made such a huge impact upon me, having me in a state of high-alert as far as auditory observations since I picked it up and started reading.

Fascinating - and saddening, while at the same time encouraging!

<http://helenaroth.com/one-square-inch...>

Elyse says

A fascinating and thought-provoking journal of Gordon Hempton's effort to protect one square inch of quiet within a designated spot of the Olympic National Park.

In memoir fashion, Hempton describes a little of his pilgrimage experience to the quietest place within the park, as well as his journey across country (from West Coast to Washington, DC) hoping to advocate for less human-generated noise ~ at least in designated parks and wildernesses.

I learned a lot about the generation of human noise, how it impacts humans, and how starkly it adversely impacts other species. Having read the book, I'm now more aware of the noise around me.

As much as I enjoyed the reading, I was disappointed that a self-identified acoustic ecologist wasn't more self-reflective about his own noise generation. 1) He drives to the shore to body-surf as a way of cleansing before he goes into the forest. He drives in the opposite direction in order to prepare to protect the quiet?! 2) He drives a VW van, which has its own problem with noise generation. Then he admits that he has a second, much newer SUV. Seriously?! Two big polluters in terms of sound! 3) He takes the VW on a two-month pilgrimage, which is noise enough. But then he blithely takes a commercial flight back to his home twice during that trip, in order to attend some family celebrations. Yet there is no mention of how much noise his own convenience causes.

The other issue I have with him from an ecological standpoint is that he uses "silence" and "quiet" interchangeably. Only humans generate noise? And reducing human noise leads toward silence (instead of a quieter ecosystem where other natural sounds can be heard? That's just like describing a piece of land as a "vacant lot," when in fact it is quite robust and thriving with grasses, small mammals, insects, and worms ~ it isn't vacant ~ and to say that it is vacant is only to perceive it with respect to human usage.

If he had been just a little more self-aware about his own lifestyle generating noise ... and just a little more sensitive to using language that isn't entirely anthropocentric, this would have been a 5-star read.

penelopewanders says

A number of years ago I read an article in Sun Magazine either by or about Gordon Hempton, and the whole concept of appreciating and preserving quiet struck a loud chord in me, so to speak. I am blessed by the privilege of living in the mountains - the Swiss Alps - and we all cringe and cover our ears (or at least I usually do) when the Swiss Air Force erupts through the sound barrier. For years my profession as a conference interpreter meant that my ears were my most important working tool. The advent of omnipresent earbuds made me almost laugh - just like tight shoes, removing the headsets at the end of a long session was such a relief - who would inflict that on oneself voluntarily! In the 1990s the French television equivalent of "60 Minutes" aired a section titled "La Musique qui rend sourd" (The Music which deafens), and when I

began working at a boarding school with teenagers, I used some connections to get a copy of the film. So this book was probably preaching to the converted. I bought it more as a tool for a talk I hope to give here at the school where I continue to work - both about protecting and preserving silence and protecting and preserving hearing. The book itself was perfect in many ways, although I found the beginning intensely irritating. I had to close out some of Hempton's voice which I've read other Goodreads reviewers qualify as "whiny". Likewise the vision of Hempton continuously whipping out his decibel meter was a bit off-putting, and I was almost glad when at some point he describes an event and only later realizes he forgot to take a measurement. At the same time I do understand and appreciate the value of actually documenting the decibels. I'm still a bit fuzzy on the technical sides of decibel measurement, but I'm very clear on the value of silence and the need to stop filling everything up with background music. Years ago, watching a film production of King Lear, it was only in the very last scene that I realized that part of what I had experienced as the intensity of the film was the absence of background music. The final scene, with Lear walking alone on a beach, bereft but for the sound of the waves, the wind and the screech of gulls, was immensely powerful. Just last summer, setting off on a hike with a group of teens and young adults, I quite shocked one of the young men, when I asked him to turn off his portable music appliance. He had difficulty imagining that everything was not necessarily better with music being played along. I had no issues with live singing, just didn't want to have to listen to background music while hiking through the woods. Some parts of this book were quite poetic, and I felt the writing improved as it progressed. I consider it an important book, mostly because of the preciousness of the message it conveys.

Israel Montoya Baquero says

Realmente interesante esta suerte de viaje "sonoro" en busca del silencio en EEUU. Un libro ameno, inspirador, y que me ha hecho pensar, y mucho, en los paisajes sonoros que nos rodean en nuestro día a día y, ante todo, en si alguna vez volveremos a ser capaces de escuchar el sonido del silencio en este mundo cada vez más avasallado por la mano del hombre.
