



A Man Apart

Bill Coperthwaite's Radical Experiment in Living

Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow
Photographs by Peter Forbes

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“ **A story of friendship, encouragement, and the quest to design a better world.** ”

On a winter morning in 2013, six people paddled the body of their close friend across a bay to a wild homestead on the coast of Maine where he would be buried in a hand-dug grave.

Among the paddling mourners were Peter Forbes and Helen Whybrow.

A Man Apart is the story—part memoir and part biography—of their family's longtime friendship with William Coperthwaite (*A Handmade Life*), whose unusual life and fierce ideals helped others examine and understand their own. It is also a story about the power and complexities of mentorship: the opening of one's life to someone else to learn together, and carrying on in their physical absence.

A Man Apart is also a remembrance of the life, and death, of Coperthwaite—a homesteader and social critic in the lineage of Henry David Thoreau and Scott Nearing—and an account of his decades-long experiment in living outside of the pressures and conveniences of modern life on a remote stretch of Maine coast.

Plenty of people can put out their ideas for reform, but only a select few have designed their lives to reflect their ideals as closely as possible. Bill is one of those few uncompromising souls, unblinded by convention, unsocialized, living what some would call an experimental life but proving it real for nearly fifty years.

Coperthwaite lived out his ideals about society, education, and design on his Maine homestead, Dickinsons Reach, and over the years challenged and encouraged Peter and Helen to do some of the most important things they have done with their lives.

In *A Man Apart* the authors explore and reveal the timeless lessons of Coperthwaite's experiment in intentional living and self-reliance, as well as describe the revelations and tensions of mentorship. Their story is told through the adventure of building a home with him—Coperthwaite's last concentric yurt, and the design for which he was best known—on a stretch of coast accessible only by boat.

While mourning his death and coming to understand the real meaning of his life and how it endures in their own lives, Peter and Helen handcraft a story that reveals the importance of a life that seeks out direct experience, is drawn to beauty and simplicity, creates rather than critiques, and encourages others.



Peter Forbes has focused his energies for the last fifteen years on bringing together and strengthening the worlds of environmentalism and social justice and offering those professions his experience with story, facilitation, contemplative practice, and relationship to nature. He is the co-editor, with Helen Whybrow, of *Our Land, Ourselves*, author of *The Great Remembering*, *What Is a Whole Community*, and others. He collaborated with William Coperthwaite as the photographer for *A Handmade Life*.

Helen Whybrow cofounded with Peter Forbes the Center for Whole Communities—a place of learning and change-making—at their home place of Knoll Farm in central Vermont. She consults for Vermont Farm Viability and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont. She is the editor of *Dead Reckoning*, and *The Story Handbook*, among other works.