

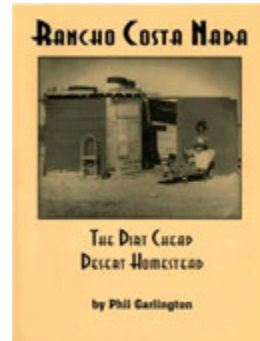
## RANCHO COSTA NADA

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### *The dirt-cheap desert homestead*

by Phil Garlington

This book and its author are another acquaintance I've made attributable to becoming the editor and publisher of one 'Bo Keeley,' or at least Bo's book on alternative remedies, then two more coming soon... having to do with world-class hoboing and higher-skilled racquetball, respectively. Bo and Phil are definitely 'six-sigma' sorts of fellows, meaning the area on the Bell Curve their personalities occupy is not much bigger than the hopscotch course on a gnat playground. [Of course, I'm considerably off center from the normal distribution, too, which is what at least puts me in the orbit of understanding such exceptional perspectives.]



Phil's book on alternative dwellspace for bright, sensitive, and caring—yet not outrageously hardworking—persons contains not only 1) a practical set of instructions for living off the grid semicomfortably, in one's own custom-built home, for long periods for practically nothing [hence, *costa nada*, get it?] but 2) paragraph after paragraph of the funniest—in a benevolent cosmic satirical sense—and most entertaining prose about an unlikely menagerie of real offbeat people and oddball circumstances on the planet. Garlington, a backslid San Diego journalist—while he was still conventionally, though tenuously, employed—started his adventure by purchasing 10 acres of 'worthless land' in the Colorado Desert for \$325. His motivation:

"This latest time [he serially basically gets himself fired for insubordination], for some reason, I felt loathe to start looking for another job. Other times, after getting frog-walked out of an office, I'd eventually start fishing around. But now I'm getting older, the bosses younger. I really didn't feel like taking orders from a recent high school graduate or some other junior widget. If I had a modest competence I could retire to a studio apartment in a geezer ghetto. Too bad I haven't been provident, and I never worked anyplace long enough to get vested in a pension: My 401(k) doesn't have much K in it."

— page 5

You can see Mr. Phil has some 'tude issues, bordering on crass cynicism, but they take the form of applying good ol' Yankee ingenuity to reach a decent truce with the world as he sees it. As his hogan (Navaho for home) proceeds into the idea stage, Garlington visits the 'neighborhood' several times and undertakes a number of preparations for construction, especially salvage. Some neighbors, the closest living miles away, including our own Bo Keeley (the Hobo), lend him a helping hand. I really appreciate the honest senior perspective on the poor average 'youngsters' he's leaving behind in 'Samland:'

"Hey, face it kid. You're screwed. Because of the aging population in Samland, in a few years there'll only be two of you actual wage peons to pungle up the ready for every codger sucking down Social Security

benefits. The burger flippers and the car polishers, the poor young mopes working for shit wages—all are going to have to carry on their backs the burgeoning population of venerable gummers. You can be damned sure that today's young Burger King- or McDonald-ite will never collect a dime of Social Security himself. He's been tapped to spend his greasy life paying the tab for the rest of us already on the dole...." — page 23

Such sterling passages of kindhearted commentary provide my main enjoyment from reading Costa Nada. There is none higher. Before I get to the insights of some of the other charming off-center characters in Mr. Garlington's desert menudo, let's talk a little bit about the actual building process. [He doesn't disappoint, but, frankly, his abode is so simply put together that it would probably only take one or two of the proverbial monkeys at the typewriter to codiscover his methods.] He winds up with a solid, weather-steady home with several comforts:

"I built a simple cottage of sand bags and scrap lumber facing a courtyard patio covered with a shade-giving ramada. A south-facing solarium heats the sleeping room on cool days. I spent about \$300, mostly for salvaged lumber and garage sale stuff, and for renting a truck to haul the stuff to the site. I had to go bottom dollar because I was broke after getting broomed from my last job. It took me a week or so of puttering to build the sleeping hogan, and then I tacked on the rest, at a leisurely pace, over the next month. I did the work myself with ordinary hand tools. Most of the measuring was by eyeball. And I didn't knock myself out." — page 3

It's a great story, the construction, and the living... the libertarian 'doing it' activity. Even though Phil's habitat is in the desert, built on waterless, worthless land, many of the construction techniques and problem solutions are applicable for anyone who wants to live independently. But the greater story, why this book should really find some promotion and wide distribution—especially in yet-small libertarian 'do-it' communities—lies in the sociology of the endeavor. Garlington, in his new neighborhood, has connected with a mother lode of part-disaffected, part-innovative, wholly compassionate American free spirits. Let me leave the review with an excerpt from one of his most colorful neighbor's (the Demented Vet's) grand tirades:

"... They're all the same. Some stressed out dude working twelve-five in an auto supply outlet in West Covina. On Friday night he hitches his trailer to the pickup and hauls his speedboat two hundred miles through the desert. He drinks his brains out, screams around on the water all day, then hauls back in heavy traffic to his crowded tenement in the air sewer. And starts over. He's had to cram his fun into a day and the rest of his life belongs to the straw boss. Serf dudes. But you know, Phil, you can be an ass-kissing, butt-sucking peon even if you're making two hundred grand a year.

"Who can tell me what to do? Who? The ranger? The deputy? I don't think so. They know better. See that Kalasnikov? They've seen it, too. I live by my own rules. But if you work for the Borg you live on your knees. You're in the world to please others. It doesn't matter how big a desk you

got, you're a grunt in the ranks. And it doesn't matter how hoity-toity you think you might be, pretty soon you'll start crawling on your belly like a reptile. You're always discussing the bosses. What can we do to appease them? 'Did you notice the way he spoke to me in a stern voice?' A bunch of cotton pickers spending the happy hour talking about the whip hand of the overseer. Why? Because most people really are serfs. They've been bred and trained from the cradle, by their parents and teachers, to take orders. They need to be told what to do.

"Oh, we're all infected in this culture. We've all been neuralized by the Borg. Incessant propaganda from the Borg Channel from Day One, telling us what to do. That's what the plutocrats want, Phil: a compliant, docile work force that will piss away its disposable income to buck up the economy. The Borg says buy. You don't need it, buy it anyway. The Borg Channel says buy a house, buy a new car, get a good job, spawn some brats who'll bleed you dry for the rest of your life. The Borg says stay at your bench except for a two-week authorized fun vacation. Unless we happen to need you to take time off to whack some foreigners. The Borg Channel says taking orders and working for others is good for you. What do you want? Who gives a fuck? Resistance is futile. The Borg wants you to fall in, and to sniff at anybody who doesn't line up on the guide-on. You need a bigger TV. You must pay your taxes, if you want to be a good citizen. It's your duty to spend your whole life under the thumb of some fat bastard."— page 93

I spent most of my Costa Nada page-turning time laughing out loud. Garlington is an engaging, often brilliant, phraser of the language. Even if you don't plan to build a cheap home off the grid, you'll get a charge out of his remarkable book... and the Demented Vet's penetrating analyses in the bargain. Nine stars (would be 10 except for no comprehensive picture or diagram of the entire homestead at a glance).

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