

Podcast :

Why I Live a Simple Life - My Story by Sanna Vaara

Hello, my name is Sanna Vaara. I live in the far north of Finland in an old farmhouse in a small countryside village of 25 people. I create photographs, videos, and music inspired by this wild Nordic nature I get to live surrounded with.

In this podcast, I will share with you my story of how I chose to live this simple life in the north of Finland. This is a rather personal story, and I do feel a bit scared sharing this with you, but I hope so much some of you might resonate, even recognize yourselves in my story and find peace, inspiration, or courage to fulfil a life that looks like you and not a life that you are expected to have.

I was living in a city in southern Finland and was studying my dream career at the university. I loved the studying and did great in that, but I didn't quite fit into life in the city. The city environment and the working places felt too much for me. I felt extremely overwhelmed in very normal situations.

I started to feel unwell and get pain in the chest and the heart. The doctors said it was depression and anxiety and handed me some pills to get over it. I tried to get into nature as often as I could since I felt that only in there did the pain go away, but this was mostly on weekends. The weeks were the toughest to bear, and short periods in nature didn't balance the stress out.

During this time, I travelled a lot. Basically, I spent all the money I was earning to travel far away. Traveling was my getaway from everything—from the work, from the city life, probably from my confused, lost self too. I felt I was searching for something. I thought at the time it was experiences, new cultures, and new people. I thought I would find something the further I went.

I was running away from myself and from the fact that this life was not for me, and no amount of traveling could satisfy me. I was trying to fit myself into a shape I thought was expected from me: a great-looking life in the city, working in a good job, and traveling as a hobby. Trying to fit myself into a life that was not for me made me physically sick.

I struggled in this life for years and just kept feeling worse. Eventually, I had a spontaneous idea to leave my job, my family, and friends and move alone to a small cabin in the far north of Finland, in Lapland, to a place I had never been before.

This happened in the whim of the moment, and my friends and family couldn't quite figure out why I was doing this. I couldn't figure it out myself either, but I went for it. It happened so fast I didn't quite even realize it until I was alone in the north.

I quickly learned that things in the north are tough. No more easy city apartment life with central heating and ploughed sidewalks. No more supermarkets in every corner and

handymen you can give a call to fix everything. Everyday life got harder. I didn't know anyone in the whole north of Finland and had always been quite bad at meeting new people or asking for help. I had to learn a lot of things fast, and mostly by myself.

In the north, the summers are very short. Most of the year, it is snowy and very dark. In the heart of the winter, the sun doesn't rise at all, making winter seem like an endless night. I didn't expect I would fall in love with the hard conditions.

I started to forget the anxiety while working physically, maintaining the cabin, ploughing snow, and spending endless hours adventuring outside in nature that was now everywhere around me.

I also didn't expect that I would get something bigger in exchange for that hardness. I found a total new side of me. All my life, I had been told I was shy and timid and way too dramatic with my feelings. Spending a lot of time alone, I realized I am just highly sensitive, and suddenly the world made so much sense again.

Situations, especially in city and work life, that felt normal to everyone else had felt overwhelming to me because I felt them so differently. I saw, heard, and sensed everything at the same time, and life in the city was just too much for me and eventually made me sick.

In the vast nature of the north, I found my creativity—something I had had when I was a child but thought it was a thing that belonged only to childhood. Without anyone around to give me advice, judge, or disapprove of my ideas, I found total freedom to express myself.

I started to write about nature around me and my life in it in a blog I started. I started to photograph everything I thought was beautiful around me, eventually having photography exhibitions and starting my own web shop to sell prints of my photos. I started to film these videos. Being a quiet person always struggling to be heard in the noisy world, I had found my voice and a channel where I was heard and where my creativity could thrive.

I also found out I am not shy or timid. In the north, I found friends who became so close that eventually we started to call ourselves the Lapland family. We share the same interests and values and had found something in the vast nature of the north. In here, we have to overcome the same challenges, the same hard conditions, and that brings us together.

I also found my soulmate, my best friend, the love of my life, here in the middle of nowhere, where more reindeers live than actual human beings. With him, I started to feel myself again with all my dramatic emotions, overwhelming feelings, and weirdness. I didn't know until I met him that there could be another soul liking this Nordic nature and its harsh Arctic conditions as much as I do.

With him, we bought the house of my and his dreams and are getting married next summer. With him, we share a mutual understanding of a simpler life and can finally live like we want to. I have felt rootless my entire life. I now realize, with all the traveling and trying to fit in, that I was searching for my roots—a place and a life to belong to.

But what I didn't realize is that roots are alive, and you can grow them. I thought my roots belonged to a place I was born into, a life that was similar to others. I am forever grateful I had the momentary courage to choose to take my roots with me to a new place and start to grow them here, to clean the space for them since they need simple ground to thrive in.

I have found my way back to the simplest things—back to nature and back to my creativity.

I do not want to give you a false impression. I still need to work. I still need to do laundry, go to the grocery store, and put myself in situations that feel overwhelming and too much for me. I still get anxious and stressed at times, but now I have so much space and silence around me that they are in balance together.

I understand that I need all the space and time for my physical and mental health so that I can function in this world. I can work less now. I get less money, but here in the middle of nowhere, I have fewer things to consume it on. In exchange, I get more time. I have time to feel all my dramatic feelings, to go through the overwhelming situations in peace.

I have nature around that helps me feel rooted and stable in all situations. I have the right people around me who know all sides of me and help me with my struggles because none of us can make it alone.

I chose this simple life in the north to heal myself, to find myself, and to feel like myself again. None of it happened overnight, and most of it didn't happen consciously. I know that the phrase "listen to yourself" is overused, but it may be so for a good reason.

I don't think spontaneous ideas, dreams, and thoughts come from a void, but from some wise voice inside of us that is trying to tell us what we actually need to thrive. That voice might be worth listening to.

This is my story of why I chose this simple life. This may not be the story of your life, but I really hope this gives your ideas and inspiration to listen to that voice of your wise inner self that could lead you to the beginning of your story.