

# Isolation in the stranger novel



Isolation can be seen as beneficial or detrimental. Isolating one's self can reboot and unwind the brain, improve concentration, increase productivity, provide opportunities to discover yourself and find your own voice, provides time for you to think deeply, help you work through problems more effectively and enhance the quality of your relationships with others. On the other hand, people who live in seclusion perceive stress more strongly than social people, are more likely to become depressed and have worsened social interactions.

The author of *The Stranger in the Woods*, Michael Finkel, has tried isolating himself before, but could not withhold social interactions for more than a few hours. Finkel believes that isolation is beneficial, but interacting with humans is necessary.

So, what is the essential nature of humanity? Is it to cooperate or dominate? It depends on both the goal, and the individual. How do humans evaluate all things, in order to make decisions? Emotional value, which is determined by a combination of our genes, our experience and knowledge, the environment, our physical, mental, and emotional states, and more. Most of these factors are constantly changing, which changes many emotional values. Humans, by will power alone, cannot alter the emotional value of anything. If we could, then we would choose to be happy all the time. We'd be able to enjoy the foods we hate, and enjoy the company of people we dislike. However, lies, half-truths, rumors, and the opinion of others, can and does alter the emotional value of most things.

The effect humans have on each other is part of what makes up the essential nature of humanity. The relationships we build, along with the opinions we develop, are what creates social patterns, behaviors, etc. After reading the biography of a man, Christopher Knight, who was a hermit for twenty-seven years, one might think that the essential nature of humanity is enhanced when alone, but in fact, it is weakened. Without human interaction, Christopher Knight had deficient social skills. Along with this, Knight was forced to turn to committing crimes in order to survive.

Knight committed more than a thousand burglaries for food and other supplies, and was caught by Terry Hughes, a determined game warden. Knight was forty-seven years old when he tripped over a surveillance sensor when stealing food from a camp for disabled people. This act lacks morality and ethics. This lack of morality and ethics could be linked to the absence of social interaction and isolation Knight has experienced for so long. Knight's punishment should not be withheld or lessened primarily because he was a hermit. Knight was a hermit by choice, and therefore should face the consequences that come with his actions.

Knight's living quarters included a tent covered by tarps suspended between trees, a bed, propane cooking stoves and a battery-run radio, which he used to keep up with the news and listen to talk radio and a rock station. All of the said items in Knight's living quarters were stolen from Maine residents' cabins. Knight did not lack all morals though, he made sure to do acts such as repairing doors and refused to steal any item of value. Even with these intentions in mind, Knight still managed to steal personal items that had sentimental value, such as the camp facilities director, Chelsey, son's

timepiece. Though this timepiece was not valuable, it held sentimental meaning, for it was given to him by his grandfather.

Mass amounts of emotional distress came with the robberies committed by Christopher Knight. Maine residents lost the feeling of safety within their own homes due to the fear of returning to a missing item, or even worse, a home invasion while residing in their cabin. Residents set up surveillance cameras and left offerings for the hermit, but he would never be captured on camera or take the offerings. Again, these acts of invading people's homes and robbing them of their personal items is illegal and should not be overlooked. Taking into account that being a hermit does lessen the essential nature of humanity, Knight chose to be a hermit, so has no excuse for the crimes he committed.

In fact, Knight didn't use any excuse for the crimes he committed.

Christopher Knight admitted he was guilty and denied any bail money he was offered. Though many people all over America considered Knight a hero, Knight was a criminal. Knight showed signs of morality when he denied innocence and rejected help from others. When he was initially arrested, the jail was a circus, according to Chief Deputy Sheriff Ryan Reardon. People offered to repair cabins Knight had broken into, a woman wanted to propose marriage, someone offered to let Knight live in his cabin, free of rent. Songs were recorded and restaurants named dishes after him. Many cultures have long considered hermits fountains of wisdom (page 31), explorers of life's great mysteries (page 31), but other cultures regard hermits as cursed by the devil (page 31). Finkel explains Christopher Knight as someone to be respected and astonished by. Finkel believes that isolating yourself lets you dive into

your inner depths (page 33), that may be profound or disturbing (page 33).

Addressing the hermit, Christopher Knight's, perspective, the author, Michael Finkel believes that Knight didn't want his life to be remembered.