The Quandary of Autonomy.

The man was feeling more settled than he had in the previous months. He had also, for the first time in several years, gone to dinner with neighbors. And he had enjoyed the several hours they spent together. However, his first stop after leaving their house was his deck, where he would enjoy the quiet he knew he would find there.

The man reflected on his long life: the years of turmoil, corporal and emotional punishment for not understanding obedience, the years of trying to find meaning in life through reading Nietzsche, Frankl, and many others as a young teenager, and then the years he found deep meaning while raising his two children by himself. The days passed slowly, the years went by quickly, and then his children were gone. Then it was just him and his dog, and, as he surveyed his life, he realised his deep meaning for living was gone.

His marriage had ended several years ago; he had sold his large home and downsized, but he felt he was living in the past because everything he was still doing was to provide for a family of three, and now he was only one. Now he believed he had more than he needed or wanted, and he remembered a line he had read as a young man: “When is enough, enough?” He decided to simplify his life.

A year later, he found himself living in a small house, a cabin really, in a forest in the mountains, and eight miles from the nearest town. He had sold his business, and he was finally enjoying a degree of autonomy he hadn't felt in decades. The man loved this new life, and he soon remembered that he had much to learn. He had lived like this before but gave it up when parenthood beckoned. Remembering autonomy was easy, and he quickly adapted to his new life. His dog grew old and died, and the man noticed that the lack of responsibility suited him. He didn’t get a new dog. More and more, the man sought time alone and time when he was only

responsible for himself. During his time alone, he found he didn't know himself very well. To help find this new him, he made several changes: he turned off his television, began writing another novel, and began withdrawing from what society wanted from him. He noticed that to belong to any group, he needed to agree to certain ideologies or beliefs, so he chose autonomy again. Days, weeks, and months passed, and several years went by. The man learned to sit in silence and listen to the quiet. Sometimes he heard himself talking in his mind, or he felt feelings, and he transcribed some of those moments. For instance, one evening, while sitting quietly, he felt what an early, smart caveman could have felt; he put that feeling into words and created a short story in his mind that he later wrote, The Intellectual Cave Couple (https://skeels.org/Intellectual%20Cave%20Couple.pdf). The more the man dedicated his life to finding deep meaning, the less the outside world meant to him.

The man kept his property mostly quiet, and he liked it that way. He adjusted his schedule and learned to say no to distractions to make the most of his quiet time. He tried going to parties and events he was invited to, but after the greetings, he found he didn't have much in common with those around him. He would happily talk about his life, but most people wanted to talk about their lives, a life he had already lived but had given up to get to where he was now. Sometimes people asked if he ever got lonely, and, while he often felt lonely when surrounded by people, he always answered no.

The man's son came to stay with him, but after nineteen months, he left after throwing a terrible and violent tantrum. The man's son immediately stopped talking to him, so he didn't learn why his son had exploded and left. The man was left stunned in every possible way, but he lived on. After several months of depression, the man, again sitting quietly, told himself that while his heart was certainly broken, he was not just his heart. He left his heart to heal as he would a

broken bone, letting it rest without rebreaking it. He decided to do the chores he had not done because of his depression, and he immediately began to feel better.

The man continued shunning most chances for friendships and relationships, whether with people or animals, because of his love of autonomy. The man was not mean, nor was he an elitist; he just couldn't find anything to join without the cost of responsibility. He remained humble because of his epic failures. He didn't belong to anything, and his motive for talking with strangers was to find out whether they were friends or foes. His acquaintances and friends had either already passed his tests or were in the ongoing process, most of them without even knowing there had been a test.

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