

News for Life after 55

5 Gifts from Intentionally Simplifying Your Life

Hi Everyone. In my last newsletter, I cited that over 50% of retirees live on \$25,000 or less a year. And almost all of us upon retiring experience a significant increase in time, but a loss or decline in our income. So living with "intentional simplicity" becomes a challenge and blessing for many of us. (And time is a key ingredient.)

So what is simplicity? What does it mean to live a more simple life? Webster's dictionary defines simplicity as freedom from complexity and pretentiousness and the ability to live with sincerity and naturalness. In addition, living a "simple" life according to Webster's means living a clear, intelligible, natural, unembellished, and ingenious life. Sounds kind of intriguing, doesn't it?

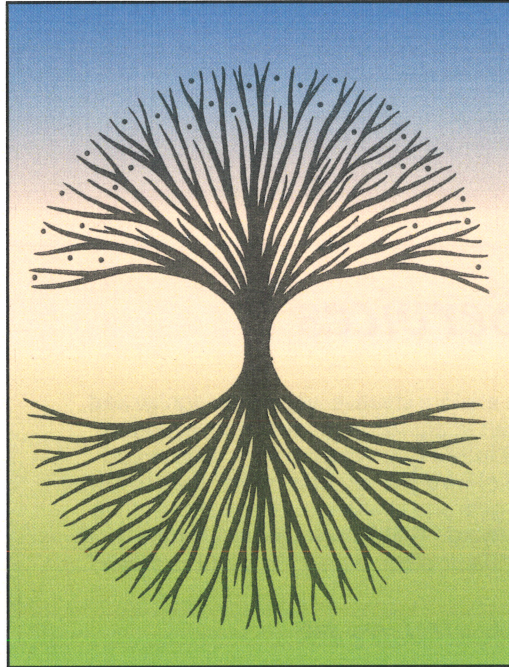
So "how" do we begin to live a more simple life? From the research I've done, "how to simplify" is a very unique and personal discovery process for each of us. But for many, embarking on this journey involves shifting our focus more from our *wants* to our *needs* (including our heart's desires)—identifying our essential needs and going from there. For me, it started with creating a list of my monthly expenses and identifying areas to target like clothing, food, and heating. I also reaffirmed my passions in the arts, creativity, and the search for truth.

In *Spiritual Simplicity*, David Yount talks about 29 ways to simplify your life including: (1) Buying a used car and keeping it longer (2) Taking free vacations (exchanging houses) (3) Moving to a more economical home (4) Pursuing your heart's desires (5) Eliminating debt (6) Keeping a weekly shopping list and buying in bulk.

The journey of simplifying my life has been a gradual, unfolding process. I thought it would be painful, but to my surprise, I have found some wonderful gifts in simplifying and as a result have chosen it over returning to the more affluent lifestyle of my 40's and early 50's. In reading books on simplicity, I have found these gifts to be true for others as well. So if you are just beginning intentional simplicity, continuing or returning to a more simplified life, here are some of the discoveries others have made.

Gift 1: Helps us "live simply so others can simply live"

A quote by Elizabeth Seaton (1774-1821) the first American-born saint, which has



become a popular bumper sticker. When we simplify our lives and live with more moderation, we are using less of the world's resources and shrinking the size of our ecological footprint. For example, you may find that you purchase more durable goods and less fad-driven clothing, buy less meat, and eat more fruits and vegetables. I found myself buying more expensive clothes from a consignment store in Aptos (proceeds go to three nonprofits) rather than from a department store and designing a wardrobe that I could build on year-to-year. I also eat out less, am relearning the joy of cooking, and volunteer on Wednesdays at Grey Bears, a recycling center and food forwarder, where I "shop" each week for a bag of groceries, (often selecting foods from Trader Joe's, Gayle's, and Nob Hill) and have cut my weekly food bill by about 35%.

Gift 2: Promotes trading and encourages community

My neighbor, Karen, has created the local Trading Post in her front yard (in front of her picket fence) where neighbors leave goods they no longer want or need and find treasures to bring home. I have found art work, gardening supplies, fresh bread on Fridays at times, and unexpected treats like chocolate chip cookies when I walk by each day with my dog. When I have things to let go of, I take them to the Trading Post like my electric heater (since I now use more passive solar and gas) and two miniature alabaster owls I gave my mother when I was a child. It's a way that the neighborhood comes together

and gives to one another. For example, Edith up the street periodically makes a couple of pies for everyone, a woman around the corner collects children's clothes to send to family and friends in Mexico, and a mother of three in the condos finds items to sell in her thrift shop. You might want to start a trading post in your neighborhood in person or online at www.nextdoor.com.

Gift 3: Changes our daily rhythms to those measured more by the sun and the seasons

In the introduction to *Voluntary Simplicity* by Duane Elgin (duaneelgin.com), Ram Dass talks about a village at the base of the Himalayas where life is directed by the rhythms of nature. The men plow the earth with their water buffalo while the women cut high grasses to feed the buffalo and gather firewood to cook the grains harvested from the fields. Everywhere there are children and dogs.

For urban dwellers, we too can find ways to align to nature's rhythms. Now that I am retired, I found a rescue dog named Zoey at the Capitola SPCA where I volunteered on Saturdays. Zoey and I take walks several times a day with the early morning sunrise, at midday, and in the evening under the stars. We follow the sun through the day and into the night. Zoey is getting to know the other dogs and their providers and is slowly learning kindness from the neighbors who stop to give her treats.

Sundays are the Farmer's Market. There is always music (and CDs) and a gathering of neighbors, families, and friends. It is so exciting to see the week's fruits and vegetables out on display. It may not be cheaper than my organic market, but its freshness brings sheer delight. I like getting to know the farmers, buying from them directly, and seeing them from year-to-year. I miss the fat, juicy tomatoes of late summer, but the apples are crisp and crunchy this time of year. And thanks to the Farmer's Market, my eating is starting to be more attuned with the seasons.

Gift 4: Leads to a more gentle, humane, and creative lifestyle

In Duane Elgin's book, *Voluntary Simplicity*, those simplifying their lives talk about their experiences of living lives in more harmonious balance with nature that are less complicated and leave more time for other more interesting and creative life pursuits. In their own words we hear:

Voluntary simplicity is not poverty but search-



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Events & Services

Crafting Your Life after 55 Workshop — Come explore creative ways to recognize and align with your life purpose after retirement. Let your imagination guide you in exploring your dreams, gifts, and talents. Discover the top 10 fulfilling activities retirees pursue and orient yourself toward living a life that is expressive of who you are now (rather than who you were). Go home with a fuller understanding of the gifts and challenges of this stage of life and with the tools you need to continue moving forward. A **\$15 materials fee** is payable at the first class. A recent workshop participant said, *"Great class...one of the best I've taken."* \$53 Resident/\$60 Non-Resident

Sat. Feb. 1, 8 10:00 am to 12 noon, Capitola Recreation (831) 475-5935

If you would like Robin Everest to come teach this workshop at your organization, contact her at (831) 475-6475 or email reverestassociates@gmail.com.

The Artist's Way for Those 55+ — If you would like additional support in building a creative, meaningful life in retirement, come join us for this 12-week adventure. We will use "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron as our guide. Each week we will gather, share, and reflect on that week's chapter and our discoveries. The Artist's Way is for anyone who would like to use their imagination and creativity to bring a new life into being whether you are a retired/retiring teacher, artist, carpenter, librarian, nurse, business person, or any other profession. All you need is openness, curiosity, and a willingness to explore. Please bring a copy of "The Artist's Way" to our first class. \$183 Resident/\$198 Non-Resident

Sat. Mar. 7-May 23 10:00 am to 12 noon, Capitola Recreation (831) 475-5935

Robin Everest has taught successful "Finding Your Life's Work" courses throughout the bay area and led Artist's Way groups in Berkeley and Marin. She recently retired from teaching professional writing and career planning at Santa Clara University.

ing for a new definition of quality and buying only what is productively used.

The cost of material accumulation was too high and offered fewer and fewer rewards.

I sincerely believe that voluntary simplicity is essential to solving the global problems of environmental pollution, resource scarcity, and socioeconomic inequalities and in addressing the personal problems of alienation, anxiety, and the lack of meaningful lives.

I gave away a lot of things, eliminating the irrelevant and am leading a more peaceful and unencumbered life.

I fit easier into more ecological patterns, hence am more flexible and adaptable.

I can't call us living simply, but rather creatively and openly.

I wanted a simplicity that would include beauty and creativity—art, music, literature, an aesthetic environment—but simple.

In *Finding Real Wealth*, Dave Wann shares how 18th century Japan adopted a national ethic on moderation and efficiency as a result of decreasing natural resources. Over-consumption was seen as demeaning while advancing knowledge and the arts were lofty goals. Disciplines arose and flourished in such areas as fencing, martial arts, the tea ceremony, art, and literature.

Gift 5: Awakens us to the interconnection of all things

In the *Tao of Physics*, author Fritjof Capra discusses the passing of the old worldview or paradigm that sees the universe as a mechanical system where man dominates and controls nature and believes in unlimited material progress. With growing scientific discoveries, the new paradigm sees the world as an integrated whole not made up of building blocks but as a network or web of life that

is fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. It recognizes that we are all embedded in and ultimately dependent upon the cyclical processes of nature. Nowhere is this more apparent than with climate change. As CO₂ emissions increase and greenhouse gases increase, we see more fierce rains, floods, and fires around the planet.

As we step out of a life focused on satisfying *our unending wants* that implies a never-ending supply to meet our demands and step into meeting *our needs*, we move into a more integrated and sustainable life—where we discover a flow and network of relationships meeting our needs, in very unexpected ways. In the words of Goethe—*The moment one commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred.*

And there is an intelligence to the response that is no accident. Neale Donald Walsch in *The Essential Path* says, *The impeccability of the Universe's intricacy and the utter perfection in the way it is...is too flawless to be the result of sheer coincidence...Clearly something larger is at play.* This is why the journey of simplicity is such a unique discovery for each one of us because the universe responds to each of us individually. And with this journey comes a growing sense of belonging. Yesterday I saw Karen putting out the terracotta sandcastle she had in her front yard. She said, *I am ready for something new and know the perfect thing will come.* As for me, as I write this closing, the library is installing new color printers, which will save me over 30% in printing costs...such a blessing...be well...RE

All books referenced are available in the library (except *Voluntary Simplicity*).

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