

This book is like a bunch of life lessons explored in a narrative format. Our identities are shaped by the costumes we wear. **Our memories are not in our things—they are in us.** Everyone is attempting to buy what no one can sell. There is chaos inside me. If it's lonely at the top, then it is crowded and miserable at the bottom. I don't want *this* life. I want something different, a deliberate life, not some nightmare that I've been sold as the American Dream. According to the clock dripping time onto the nightstand, it's 2 a.m. now. Something has to change. Everything has to change. A scarecrow says, "You were going in the wrong direction." It's impossible for me to disagree.

Colin Wright: "Minimalist and Professional Traveler," is a 24-year-old Midwesterner. Travel is his passion, but not just any kind of travel: full submersion into a culture, learning everything from scratch. His blog readers vote on his next home country at his website—every 4 months. "I own roughly 50 things, all of which I carry in 2 bags—things that truly add value to my life.

"So, you really got rid of everything?"

"That was the entire point. Part of being a minimalist is not just having very little; it's about *owning* very little. The act of ownership is what stressed me out, kept me from feeling free." Our possessions possess us. "My dream had always been to travel, but I figured you had to make a bunch of money *before* you could travel. I had seen other people be very successful entrepreneurs, people who were doing similar things. They all share one thing in common: they never leave. Once you make a million dollars, a million is no longer enough. Eventually you've spent more than half your life simply trying to earn money. But for what? So, I did what 50,000 people did every day, I started a blog. I named it *Exile Lifestyle* and decided it would be the online documentation of my journey, a single place to capture all the travel I soon planned on doing. It was also a sort of online register to publicly record my change in lifestyle, from business man in LA to itinerant guy pursuing his dream of travel."

"I knew that if I was going to be traveling, then owning a lot of stuff would be a hindrance. It turns out that minimalism would've been the right answer even if I wasn't traveling. It would've helped me free myself from the chains of consumerism. I met people who were reading my blog who said, 'I'd like to hire you' and so the quality of my clients now is even better than my clients in LA."

I'm now able to learn constantly, which is really nice because I never feel stagnant. I'm *always* learning new things, always growing. I can risk more because I'm not spending money on junk I don't need. You realize what a risk it is to

give up your entire life just to be *normal*. It's like old-time prisoners forced to move stones from one side of the yard to the other, just to move them back again once all the stones have migrated.

There is more joy and fulfillment in pursuing less than can be found in pursuing more. Since the moment we were born, we have been told the opposite. We've been told this lie for so long that we start to believe it, our hearts start to buy into it, and it begins to affect the way we live our lives. As Americans, our consumption has transformed from necessary to compulsory. The first stream of discontent was that I was never happy with our finances. The second was with the focus of my life's energy going toward the *stuff* I owned, rather than the people in my life.

My neighbor mentioned that her daughter was a *minimalist* one day as I stressed over spring cleaning the garage. I ran inside to look it up. I found what seemed like a new world—all these people around the country and the world, who have decided to live with only the things they needed. I found that everyone who embraces the simple-living lifestyle has his or her own flavor of minimalism.

Our culture seems to be way too focused on "What do you do?" with very little emphasis on "What are you passionate about?" I hadn't read my first book until I was 21. Years later, when I finally experienced what great writing could do, I knew I wanted to take part in its creation. When done well, **literary texts are the only creations that impart an exchange of consciousness between author and audience**, conveying raw emotion and internal feeling far better than Hollywood movies or trendy apps or even great music.

Individual betterment has little to do with inbred talent. Progress requires practice and dedication and, to a certain extent, a healthy obsession. Hence, **passion is a mixture of love and obsession**. Excitement is different from the deep passion that drives and fulfills us long term. Passion isn't followed, it's cultivated. I'm starting to learn while peering at my twenties in the reflection of the blueish rectangle glowing in my living room. **My priorities are what I do each day**. These circadian endeavors are my *musts*. Everything else is simply a *should*. We have to figure out what doesn't work so we can find out what does.

I started small and asked myself: *What if you remove one material possession—just one—from your life each day for a month?* Pondering each artifact in my apartment, I'd ask simple questions like, *Does this thing add value to my life?* Once the excess stuff is out of the way, staying organized is much easier. *When did I give so much meaning to material possessions? How will I define my own success?*

So as my belongings fell by the wayside and I started facing life's tougher questions, I felt less bloated. I don't own many things now but everything I own adds real value. Every possession serves a purpose or brings me joy. *Stuff* is just the start. I ask it too in regard to relationships, internet consumption, food, and any other potentially superfluous matters.

I learned about my consumption and why I'd been drawn to it for so long. I played the role of the moth, lured by the flame of consumerism, pop culture's beautiful conflagration, a vacant proposition, leaving me empty inside, which further fuels my desire to consume. My vocal cords are but a candle in the sun; they couldn't compete with the chaos of New York City. With everyone striving to look--or be--different, they all become the same, homogenized by uniqueness. Bodies move through the streets alone in the most crowded place on the continent.

I developed a theory called the 20/20 Theory: Anything I jettison can be replaced for less than \$20 in less than 20 minutes from my current location. I've found that when I remove the just-in-case items from my life, I free up the space they consume—the physical and mental space they occupy. I no longer own piles of books, but I read more. **The real value was in the words—in the act of reading.** Once something's a part of your identity, it's hard to shed. As a former *collector*, I think the *act of collecting* is dangerous. Collecting material possessions is like hoarding. The word *collector* just sounds better. I wonder why so many of us collect things. What's the purpose?

I used to think of well-adjusted people as *anchored*. As a couple of anchored guys, we both have a lot of anchors, right? We have a lot of things that keeps us from being free—stuff that keeps us from being happy. I sat down and cataloged all of my personal anchors, all the circumstances that keep me from realizing real freedom—mortgage, car payment, most of my bills, and all my debt. Massive, terrible debt.

**You can't change the people around you, but you can change the people around you.** We've associated with folks based almost entirely on propinquity. We typically don't share similar values or beliefs and values--and beliefs are the bedrock of any meaningful relationship. Meeting people should be more deliberate. Different is great. But long term, it's hard to grow with someone if you grow in opposite directions, which you will inevitably do if you don't have similar values or beliefs. So, you need both: the right balance of differences to keep the relationship from becoming boring, and enough in common that you have a firm foundation.

All of my newfound relationships have in common 2 things: we met because of the internet, and we see the world through similar lenses. Our common interests allow us to forge bonds predicated on something much more meaningful

that proximity. We're no longer forced to find a soulmate or a friend at the corner bar.

Because most of the time we develop relationships out of convenience, many are bound to fail. They lack the traits necessary to build a successful bond with another individual, important traits like supportiveness and trust and encouragement. It's easier to stay in old relationships because they are convenient, and starting new relationships is difficult—it requires work.

Careers are dangerous because people invest so much of themselves to establish an identity and social status based on where they work and what they do for a living. Now, before I spend money, I ask myself am I going to get more value from the thing I'm about to purchase, or am I going to get more value from my freedom? **The best way to give yourself a raise is to spend less money.** These days I know that every dollar I spend adds immense value to my life. There is a roof over my head, the books or music I purchase add unspeakable value to my life, the few clothes I own keep me warm, the experiences I share with others add value to my life and theirs.

Real security is found inside us, in consistent personal growth. Once we extinguish our outside requirements, we can shepherd our focus toward what's going on inside us, no longer worshipping the things around us.

When we make changes in our lives, we're often afraid of what people will think of us, particularly those closest to us. We used to have precious interstitial zones in which we could find momentary solace: airports, checkout lines, waiting rooms, and other places were transient sanctuaries in which we could bask in reverie. This is no longer the case. I've discovered that stopping and thinking during these moments is more productive than fiddling with my phone. My phone usage will be more intentional than it was before; it will be a tool, not an appendage.

I also elected to rid myself of (gasp) my goals! The corporate mantra by which I lived for a decade-plus was *You can't manage what you don't measure*. But then I realized that goals were never as powerful as internal motivations. Thus, **when you discover your true motivation, you don't need an arbitrary goal.**

Leo Babauta said there were 3 things that significantly changed his life: establishing habits he enjoyed, simplifying his life, and living with no goals. I decided to live with no goals for a while. I didn't know how long, because I didn't make it a goal. Breaking free from goals changed my life: I am less stressed, more productive, and happier. I now make choices, but don't set goals. Living goal-less has changed my life, adding layers of happiness I didn't realize were possible.

I exercise only 18 minutes a day, alternating between pushups, pullups, and squats until I'm tuckered out. I've found

ways to make exercise a daily reward instead of a dreaded, tedious task by doing only exercises I enjoy and finding other ways to do cardio: I walk or do bodyweight exercises that incorporate cardio. The thing that has made the most noticeable difference has been the variety of my daily 18 minutes. I don't do things I dislike, but I do a lot of things that force me to feel discomfort. I either find a way to enjoy it (folding laundry is actually meditative for me), or if I absolutely dislike it, I'll hire someone to do it for me.

I write, read and exercise daily. But I don't have a daily routine; I no longer need one. I do, however, have habits on which I focus every day. To put it simply, I am more productive by doing less. I get more done by focusing on only the important stuff first.

When you stop paying attention to everything that's important, when you lose sight of the happiness that's right in front of your face. When you search for it through supposed accomplishments and accolades and recognition, it's not appreciably different from searching for happiness through material things. **You can skip the pursuit of happiness altogether and just be happy.**

Every relationship has an Us Box. For the relationship to work, both people must contribute to—and get something from—that Us Box. If you just give but don't get, you'll feel used, exploited, taken advantage of; and if you only take but don't give, you're a parasite, a freeloader, a bottom-feeder. In reality, I wasn't growing as much as I once was because I was no longer contributing as much as I once was. I was selfish and inattentive, not realizing that **you can't grow unless you give**. Happiness + Growth + Contribution = Success.

Ryan, during one of our book tours, whispered to me that these people aren't here to see *us*; “they're here for the message”. Consumption is an unquenchable thirst. Gift your time. The best present is presence. Gift experiences, not stuff. Ask for better Christmas gifts; ask others to donate to your favorite charity in your name. Sometimes we need to contribute to help ourselves.

This life is well worth it. Worth it because the message is spreading. Worth it because people who've never even considered the simpler side of life are now asking better questions, seeking better answers, and pursuing contentment outside of material things.

I'm driving slowly, careful to avoid speeding through life—my life—no longer wasting my summers waiting for snow, my winters waiting for sun, taking each season as it comes, appreciating the warmth of the sun, the cleansing of the snow. We built an audience on our own, and thus didn't have to answer to anyone but ourselves. We are entering the age of the Authorpreneur. Ultimately, you've won when your dreams have broken past your fears.

I realized that I didn't control my time, and thus I didn't control my own life. For the first time in my life, **I could see happiness getting closer as I walked away from the stuff I thought would make me happy**. My failures make up the best part of me.

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