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STUFFED—WHEN THINGS TAKE OVER YOUR LIFE

BY VICKI NORRIS

A sign outside the storage unit facility near my home reads: 'If you can't find your lawnmower, bring your garage clutter here!' In a world where we too often fall into the trap of over consumption, we are being encouraged to ignore our excess by simply relocating it. However enticing it might be to put our overage out of sight, relocating our surplus doesn't bring freedom. Over the last 13 years, working as a professional organizer, I have had a front row seat to thousands of people's relationships to stuff. At times I have literally been up to my waist in people's possessions! I can tell you, from first-hand experience, that the acquisition of more and more stuff only leads to unhappiness and stress.

How did we get here? We have become a culture of collectors. Our society, particularly in the United States, encourages accumulation. We are continually told, through advertising and social norms, to get the latest gadget, the replacement appliance, and the upgraded versions of our toys. Without a clear definition of what 'enough' is, we don't know when to stop. It is difficult to identify when 'enough is enough,' so we just keep adding to the pile.

We're told we deserve a break, a treat, a reward. We may be looking for relief or reprieve from the stresses in our lives. This can lead to us going about life with a mindset focused on what we feel we need, rather than what we

can give. When we create habits of focusing on what we need and want, we no longer are thinking about how we can build, create, and contribute to those around us. The vicious irony is that once we have accumulated all the things we think we need, our possessions can actually begin to negatively affect our lives: becoming overwhelming and hindering the way we actually want to live. Whatever we collect we must save, dust, store, protect, inventory, and insure. Having stuff that we need and love isn't wrong, however, when we have too much it can negatively affect our lives. When we stop stewarding, using, and appreciating what we own, then our possessions are no longer a tool for better living, they are an obstruction.

Reclaiming Our Lives. Whether we've been implicit or active participants in a life of overconsumption, there's only one thing to do: simply stop. To create a lasting change in our behavior, we must start with a shift in thinking. Here are a few suggestions about how to start thinking about your consumption differently:

- **Prune out the overage** in our schedules, eating, commitments, and shopping, so we can create more mindshare for the things that matter
- **Examine the attitudes and beliefs** we have around stuff and activities that cause us to over-commit and over-consume in the first place
- **Defeat the consumerism** giant by writing checks to our creativity, families, growth, and culture rather than to the companies and causes that break down those things

There's really no need to live life stuffed. If we engage with life realizing we are already complete, we won't feel compelled to spend ourselves trying to become full.

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Contributors |



Adam Klein

Adam is a certified Integral Coach and is on faculty with New Ventures West. He specializes in working with people who are keen on finding meaning in their work. He also leads user experience development for Slavery Footprint. Previously, he was a Director at ReIMAGINE, a Bay Area Center for Integration; he still remains an active participant in the community today. He loves pushing the limits of his body. Adam received a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Santa Clara University. He, his wife, and daughter, live in San Francisco. Learn more about Adam online at: <http://activelystill.com>



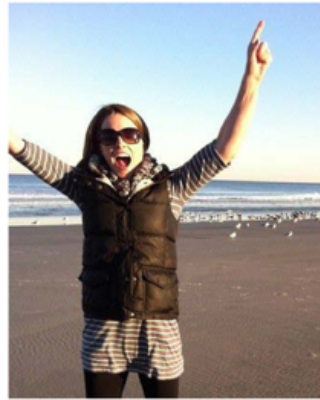
George Hsia

George, who writes about his experiences in Kyrgyzstan in 2009 and 2011, lived and worked in Silicon Valley for twelve years in the tech industry before he quit his job to pursue his passion for photography. George traveled the world for several years, covering issues that he is passionate about, including homelessness, street children, human trafficking, and housing rights in Kyrgyzstan, Peru, and Turkey. George loves hiking Yosemite during the off seasons but this cannot be compared to his love for gravy. He admits to pouring it over anything and everything, including oatmeal and salad. George currently lives and works in Taiwan and is back in the tech industry. You can view more of his work at www.georgehsia.com



Vicki Norris

Vicki is president of Restoring Order—a company established to help people order their lives at home and work. She is an expert organizer, business owner, speaker, television personality, and author; Vicki inspires people to live out their priorities. Vicki is a regular on HGTV's nationally syndicated Mission: Organization, and is a recurrent source and contributor to national lifestyle publications including Better Homes & Gardens and Real Simple magazine. Vicki is also author of Restoring Order™ to Your Home, a room-by-room household organizing guide.



Megan Lathrop

For the last 11 years, Megan has worked in the financial industry as a Financial Advisor, Certified Financial Planner, and a Certified Money Coach®. She is passionate about empowering people to view their money as a tool that can be used, on a global scale, to change the world for the better. Megan believes that we should focus our attention on our relationship to money, rather than only focusing on returns. She owns more colorful wigs than many of us have shoes, and enjoys living by the water. Stay tuned for Megan's upcoming book on investment strategies for women.



Tamira Jones

Tamira, who shared about her experiences working in Jamaica, is a non-profit program manager who currently lives in Oakland, CA. A native of Mendocino, Tamira served in the Peace Corps in Jamaica, from 2004 to 2006, where she worked for a local environmental conservation organization. Tamira has traveled throughout Central America and the Caribbean and is passionate about place-based environmental conservation solutions, social justice, and faith-based community action. She enjoys diving, loves cuttlefish, and likes to eat popcorn for dinner at least twice a week.



Jessica Hastings Munro

Jessica, who writes about Green Toys, is the founder of Entrepreneurs by Design, which equips young people with the tools of entrepreneurship and innovation. Jessica has been an advocate for design for good since her IDEO days; she initiated Design for Social Impact (which has grown into IDEO.org) to tackle tough global challenges, like access to clean drinking water in developing countries. She spent two years in South Africa coaching future leaders from across Africa to launch various social enterprises; one of these was an edutainment math DVD series that sought to inspire township youth. Jessica lives in San Jose with her husband and infant. Motherhood has motivated her newfound interest in safe, green children's products.



Travis Vanstaaveren

Travis, who started GiveTokens.org/Sanctity of Hope in 2003, writes about his passion for helping the homeless in his hometown of Portland, Oregon. GivingTokens.org believes strongly in connecting people to people, is looking to partner with other non-profits to expand the program to metropolitan areas across the country. Travis' favorite travel destinations include Quito, Venice, and anywhere in Turkey. He also loves astronomy and would likely have been a physicist in another life.