



**CAPSTONE PROJECT FOR
UNIVERSITY HONORS IN
GRAPHIC DESIGN**

SPRING 2010

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PROPOSAL

DESCRIPTION

In this increasingly materialistic, fast-paced, information-overloaded society of the 21st century, a call for simplicity is greatly needed, especially among young adults. The generation coming into power holds the fate of the world in its hands and has the potential to make long and lasting changes to improve quality of life, environmental impact, and interpersonal communication. In order to do this, these young adults must learn to reject the mentality they grew up with that more and bigger are better, and learn to consume carefully and consciously. The "Living Simply" Campaign would be a resource for young adults to learn about voluntary simplicity. The campaign would teach people the horrors of our current way of life, the benefits of simplifying, and how to incorporate simplicity into the life they already live. By raising awareness about voluntary simplicity, the campaign can create a generation of conscious consumers, and perhaps alter the fatal, materialistic path we are currently on.

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

As E.F. Schumacher said, "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction." Voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice to minimize the "more is better" pursuit of wealth and material goods. Duane Elgin describes voluntary simplicity as living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich. It is the practice of separating wants from needs, removing the barrier of stuff that keeps us from other people and even ourselves, and a return to living and working environments that are of a more human scale. The motivations behind choosing a simple lifestyle range from markedly personal interests to important world-wide problems and include anything from a commitment to a more equitable distribution of the world's resources, to a spiritual need, to support for change in our current patterns of over-consumption, to frugality. Because the motivations are so wide-spread and over-consumption and materialism has become so ingrained in human nature, the issues surrounding voluntary simplicity are varied. Some include environmental concerns, anti-advertising and its negative messages, over-work and stress, lack of time spent with loved ones, unhealthy diets and an unsustainable food industry, and more. Choosing a balanced, fulfilling, simple lifestyle can help solve many of these problems.

IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCATING

The idea of voluntary simplicity has been around for centuries and advocated by some of the most influential historical figures, yet humans have continued to embrace materialism and pointless consumption, destroying their well being and that of the entire planet. Today, the human sense of self has nearly been destroyed, and who you are tends to be defined by what you own. This materialistic self-definition leads people to sacrifice their health and happiness to work more hours to buy more things, yet they remain empty and unfulfilled. On top of this, over-consumption is the underlying cause of a huge number of all the planet's problems, from pollution, to animal extinction; from wide-spread obesity to war. Great thinkers, such as Buddha, John the Baptist, Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau, and more, recognized this fatal pattern and studies show the benefits of voluntary simplicity. Those who choose to consume consciously live happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives and reduce their environmental impact.

IMPORTANCE OF CAMPAIGN

Unfortunately, living simply isn't simple. Popular culture, mass media, and advertising, the outlets through which many people get their information, don't tend to address the issue, and instead ask consumers to continue or increase their rate of consumption. Resources on voluntary simplicity are scattered, out-dated, or geared to an audience not appropriate for young adults. However, as previously mentioned, young adults are the most important demographic to target. This is especially true because, as the children of money-hungry, fast-moving Generation X, today's young adults have been bombarded with marketing since birth and forced to live a micro-managed life of optimum money-making performance. An outlet is needed to help young people find balance in their life and connect with who they are.

DETAILS & COMPONENTS

RESEARCH PAPER

To create the Living Simply Campaign, research must be conducted into the various aspects of voluntary simplicity. Possible areas will include anti-consumption/-materialism, anti-multitasking/ information overload, simple eating (local, organic), anti-advertising, freeing up time (this can include connecting with loved ones and friends as well as using time wisely to make an impact in areas that you love), and more. A detailed report will be written, from which, facts used for the campaign to create awareness about the negative effects of today's materialistic society and the benefits of living a simple life, will be drawn. Research will also be conducted to find advice on how to live more simply as well as personal stories for inspiration. It will be important to find examples that will appeal to the young adult demographic.

CREATIVE BRIEF

The project will include the development of a brand for the campaign. A detailed design brief will be created in which appropriate communication devices will be determined and the creative vision will be established. Collateral for the campaign will definitely include a comprehensive web site and most likely some kind of ad campaign.

IDENTITY

Using this design brief, a logo and visual identity for the campaign will be designed. The development of a visual identity is important as it will be carried throughout all the design components.

WEBSITE

The web site will be the biggest component of the campaign. It will include information about voluntary simplicity, tips and resources for simple living, and more. Site maps and wireframes will be created to ensure maximum usability, then the web site will be designed according to campaign's visual guidelines. Finally, the web site will be coded and uploaded online.

BOOK

After the research paper is completed, it will be designed and laid out to attract readers.

OTHER COLLATERAL

Other campaign collateral will be determined as more research is conducted. A proposal of the marketing collateral will be drawn up before design begins. An example of what may eventually be deemed appropriate would be a series of poster or t-shirts.

GRANT PROPOSAL

OBJECTIVES

In this increasingly materialistic, fast-paced, information-overloaded society of the 21st century, a call for simplicity is greatly needed, especially among young adults. The generation coming into power holds the fate of the world in its hands and has the potential to make long and lasting changes to improve quality of life, environmental impact, and interpersonal communication. In order to do this, these young adults must learn to reject the mentality they grew up with that more and bigger are better, and learn to consume carefully and consciously. The "Living Simply" Campaign would be a resource for young adults to learn about voluntary simplicity. The campaign would teach people the horrors of our current way of life, the benefits of simplifying, and how to incorporate simplicity into the life they already live. By raising awareness about voluntary simplicity, the campaign can create a generation of conscious consumers, and perhaps alter the fatal, materialistic path we are currently on.

Although this project can be completed in a hypothetical sense, it will be most successful if the designed components are actually created. If collateral such as a web site, posters, and brochures are made, the campaign will have the opportunity to spread the word about voluntary simplicity and inspire people to make changes in their lifestyle. Having real-world components will also allow the project to continue after my graduation and evolve as time goes on.

Funding would also be beneficial to attend conferences, talks, and festivals about voluntary simplicity, social marketing, and interactive design during the research portion of the project. Fortunately, there is an excellent opportunity in Washington, DC on October 10th and 11th to attend the Green Festival. Attending this event would be beneficial in many ways, including making contacts and finding alternate sources for research. The Motion Graphics Festival 09 will be held in Washington from November 18-22. This would be an excellent opportunity to discover new and innovative ways to create motion graphic components for the campaign. The Web 2.0 Expo in New York City would be another excellent opportunity to learn about interactive design strategies, and coincidentally, the topic of this year's expo is "The power of less."

DETAILS

WEB HOSTING

A two year web hosting plan and domain registration for livelifesimply.com This would allow for a real-world web site to be uploaded online. For more information visit www.qualityhostonline.com/personal_hosting.htm

\$149.95

\$29.00

PAPER

Text & cover weight paper as well as large paper for printing posters and sticker paper. For more information visit www.mohawk.com and [/www.staples.com](http://www.staples.com)

- 1 ream (500 sheets) text weight paper = \$61.99
- 1 ream (250 sheets) cover weight paper = \$77.99
- 3 packages (25 sheets) poster paper = \$11.97
- 1 package (20 sheets) sticker paper = \$13.24
- shipping & tax = \$24.71

\$49.00

\$189.90

and businesses showcase programs and products that restore the planet and all that inhabit it. Neighbor-to-neighbor connections are formed, and skills are shared to empower people to create positive change in the world. For more information visit www.greenfestivals.com.

MG FEST 09 PASS

MG Fest is the premier US Festival showcasing motion design. It will showcase explosive artists and motion picture creators, host a Persuasion in Media Panel, as well as offer hands-on workshops. For more information visit mgfest.com.

\$49.00

TOTAL

\$416.85

GREEN FESTIVAL PASS

Green Festival is the largest sustainability event in the world, where you can listen to talks from more than 125 renowned authors, leaders and educators, participate in great how-to workshops, see cutting-edge films. There is also a marketplace of more than 350 eco-friendly businesses. The Festival begins with finding solutions to help make our lives healthier—socially, economically and environmentally. Individuals along with business and community leaders come together to discuss critical issues that impact us at home and abroad. Organizations

CREATIVE BRIEF

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

The Live Simply Campaign is a new initiative to encourage young adults to practice voluntary simplicity. It seeks to raise awareness of the dangerous path our society is currently on and inspire individuals to make changes in their own life.

MARKET POSITION

At the moment, there are several organizations dedicated to helping people live simply and spreading the word about voluntary simplicity. One of these is the Simple Living Network which sells many resources and tools for simple living. Unfortunately the web site is difficult to navigate and almost everything is for sale rather than free. The Simplicity Forum is “a think tank of academics and authors, activist and artists, educators and entrepreneurs who seek to promote simplicity in our work and practice it in our lives.” Their web site has some valuable resources, but most are scientific journals and are not easily accessible. Alternatives for Simple Living is another great place for resources, but is based on Christian faith. Get Satisfied is a well-designed campaign run by Simple Living America, however, it is geared toward an older audience, requires membership fees, and revolves around a book rather than a web site.

The Live Simply Campaign is the first of its kind to be geared toward a young adult audience. It is also one of the few places where people will be able to learn about voluntary simplicity as well as find advice on how to practice it.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience of the Live Simply Campaign is the demographic sometimes referred to a “Generation Y” or “Millenials”. This group of young adults, now somewhere between the ages of 20 and 35, is characterized as delaying adulthood the longest out of any generation. Now that these individuals are older and free from their parents, they need to learn to form their own values rather than be content with the ones they were brought up with. From the beginning, Millenials have been pushed by their parents to excel, and now that they are on their own, they’re realizing they’ve spent their entire lives planning for their future, forgetting to live in the moment and determine what they really want and what’s truly important for them and the world. Many of these individuals are desperately seeking a

way to form their identity, and advertising often encourages them do so through consumption. This campaign would offer an alternative to this message and encourage people to find themselves by practicing voluntary simplicity.

Although some characterize Millenials as spoiled and lazy, many believe this generation has the potential to make long and lasting changes in the world. As the Washington Post explains, “About every 80 years, a civic generation emerges to make over the country after a period of upheaval caused by the fervor of an idealist generation.” The last three civic generations were under George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and FDR. Now, this fourth civic generation has the potential to take the ideals of the Baby Boomers and put them into practice. Young adults these days have already proven that they are concerned with making a change, despite the negative stereotypes that are associated with their generation. ¹

Sophia Yan, for The Oberlin Review, describes Millenials as laid-back, individualistic, resourceful, cynical, socioeconomically, ethnically, and sexually diverse. It says “Not roundly criticized as slackers, ‘Y’ kids are nonetheless characterized as apathetic, lazy, and spoiled. But unlike ‘X’—which was decidedly aimless, underemployed, and pessimistic about its economic future—‘Generation Y’ is pragmatic, worldly, materialistic, driven by technology, and optimistic about its prospects.” Most importantly, Yan claims, “ ‘Generation Y’ has an inbred mistrust of major brands [and] resents obvious ad campaigns targeting their psychographic.”² Millenials are also the first generation to have grown up with the internet and have been bombarded with advertising and marketing since birth.

CORE MESSAGE

The core message of the Live Simply Campaign will be that things don’t need to remain the way they currently are and that everyone can incorporate voluntary simplicity into their lives to better themselves and the world as a whole. The campaign will stress the negative effects of our current consumption- and ambition-driven society and inspire individuals to make changes to their lifestyle. It will underscore that young adults are the people who will determine the values of society in the very near future, and that by making small changes, they can forever improve the world. The Live Simply Campaign will emphasize that everyone’s idea of living simply is very personal and it’s up to them to determine what brings balance and cohesion to their own life.

OBJECTIVES

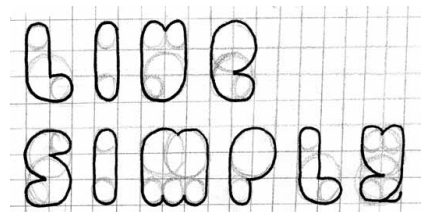
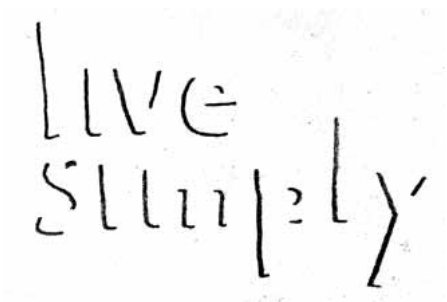
The main goals of the Live Simply Campaign are to raise awareness of the dangerous path our society is currently on and inspire individuals to make changes in their own life. Therefore, some basic objectives include attracting readers and viewers, then holding their attention with captivating and easily accessible information that will motivate them to make changes in their lifestyle and subsequently help them go through with those changes.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

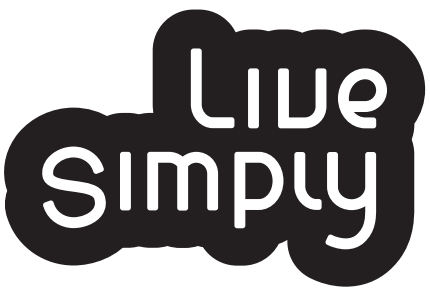
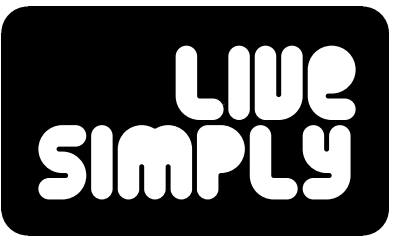
An important thing to keep in mind while developing the visual identity of the campaign will be that it is all about simplicity. Although the campaign will be multi-faceted and full of information, simplicity must always be brought back to it—whether it is through organization of the text or aesthetics. It is also important to think about the demographic while creating an identity, but understand that this demographic is against anything that is targeting them too obviously.

LOGO SKETCHES

Five rounds of logo sketches were completed before the final logo was chosen. These are just a few of the examples from the first five rounds:



LIVE SIMPLY

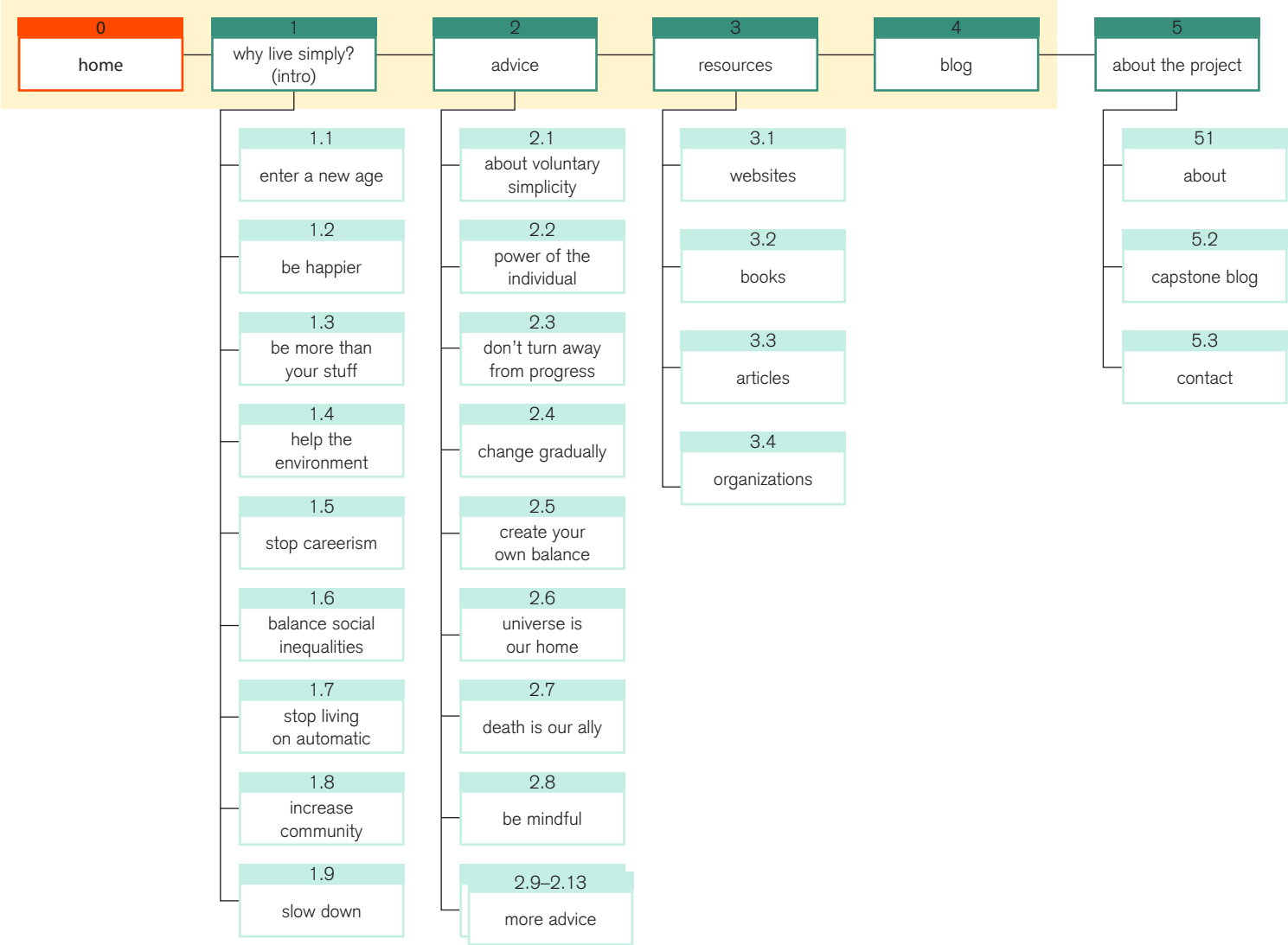


FINAL LOGO



SITE MAP

This is the third and final draft of the site map, which lays out the heirarchy and organization of the web site.



PAGE DESCRIPTIONS

0. HOME

The home page will include some kind of attention-grabbing element. This could be an image with a few lines of text, a jquery box with scrolling headlines & facts, a flash video, or another page item that will draw the visitor in, inform them about the project, and make them want to explore more. Because the home page will be designed to encourage visitors to delve deeper into the site, it will also include a description of the project, some facts, quotes, and tips, as well as a section that will list news related to the project. These will all contain action buttons that will bring visitors to another section of the site.

1. WHY LIVE SIMPLY?

The “why live simply” page will give a brief overview of the dangers of the current state of the world and explain how things can be changed. It will link to different topics that will go into more detail. Each topic will be like an individual blog post so that more can easily be added and will present the current state of the problem as well as how living simply can help.

2. SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

The “make the change” section of the site will include information on voluntary simplicity and tips on how to simplify one's life. This main page will have a brief introductory paragraph that explains voluntary simplicity. This page will link to tips and advice. Each tip will be like an individual blog post so that more can easily be added.

3. RESOURCES

The “resources” page will give links to places with more information about voluntary simplicity for those who wish to learn more.

4. BLOG

The “blog” section will include updates about voluntary simplicity in the news and on other blogs as well as about the Live Simply Project. It will also link to any new advice or reason to live simply that will be included in the web site.

5. ABOUT THE PROJECT

This page will describe the project. It will also include contact information.

5.2 CAPSTONE BLOG

A link to capstone blog will be included in the “about” section. It is currently being used to track the progress of the project and will be available for anyone interested in seeing the process.

WIREFRAME

This is the third and final draft of the wireframe, which roughly lays out what will go where within the site. Although some elements of the wireframe were changed during the design process, the basic hierarchy remains the same.

HOME PAGE

LOGO

Login | About | Contact

WHY LIVE SIMPLY? MAKE THE CHANGE MEDIA RESOURCES NEWS ABOUT

“Life is really simple,
but we insist on
making it complicated.”

- Confucius

GET INFORMED »

Learn more about Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nullam dui odio.

MAKE THE CHANGE »

Get help simplifying your life Ut dignissim sollicitudin mi euismod dapibus. Mauris hendrerit.

random reason or advice

random reason or advice

random reason or advice

RECENT NEWS

This Will Be a Headline About Simple Living in the News
READ MORE >

Another Headline About the Project
READ MORE >

One More Headline About Simple Living
READ MORE >

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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LEARN MORE >

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alternative to an aging industrial society

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reason

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reason

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balance social inequalities

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reason

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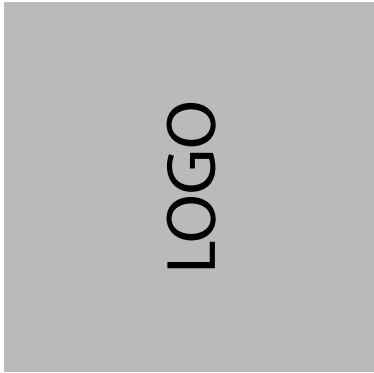
slow environmental degradation

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reason

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MAKE THE CHANGE



WHY LIVE SIMPLY?

alternative to an aging industrial society

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TODAY'S INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

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HOW LIVING SIMPLY WILL HELP

Maecenas vel lacus est non mollis nunc. Fusce id risus a nisl dictum consectetur Pellentesque

QUICK FACTS

Praesent vestibulum, leo sed rhoncus gravida, velit tellus. Vitae tempus ante urna non . Etiam aliquet accumsan nunc, ac congue tellus consequat.

RELATED REASONS

reason 1

reason 2

reason 3

RELATED ADVICE & EXERCISES

advice 1

exercise 1

advice 2

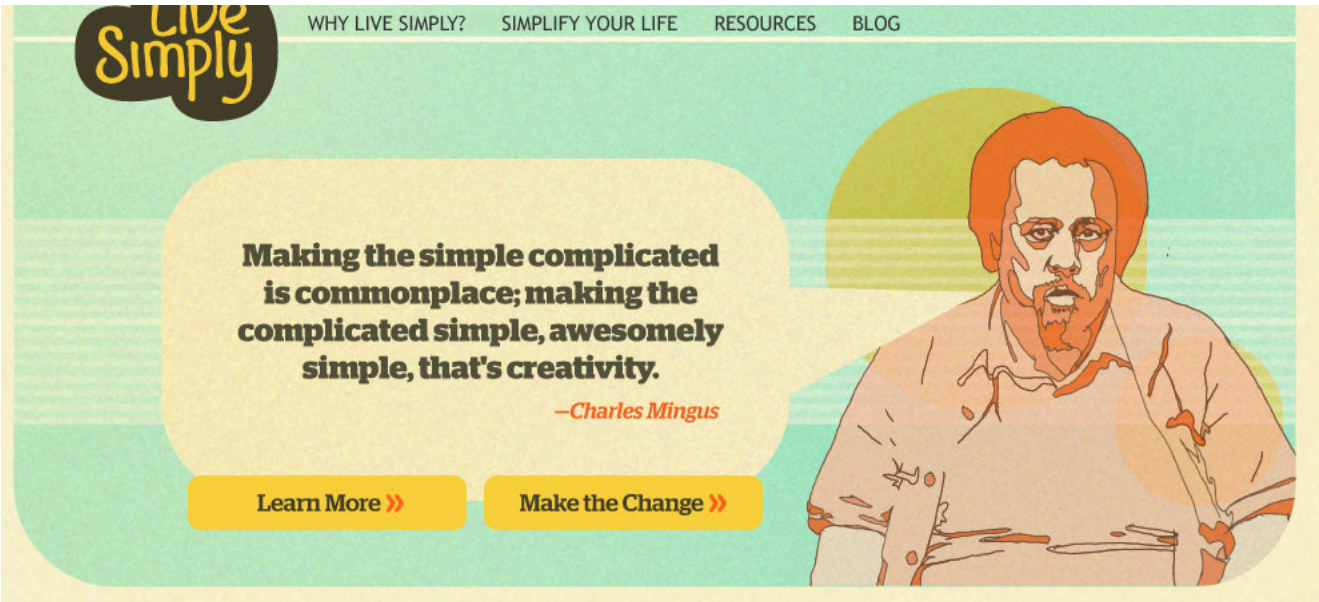
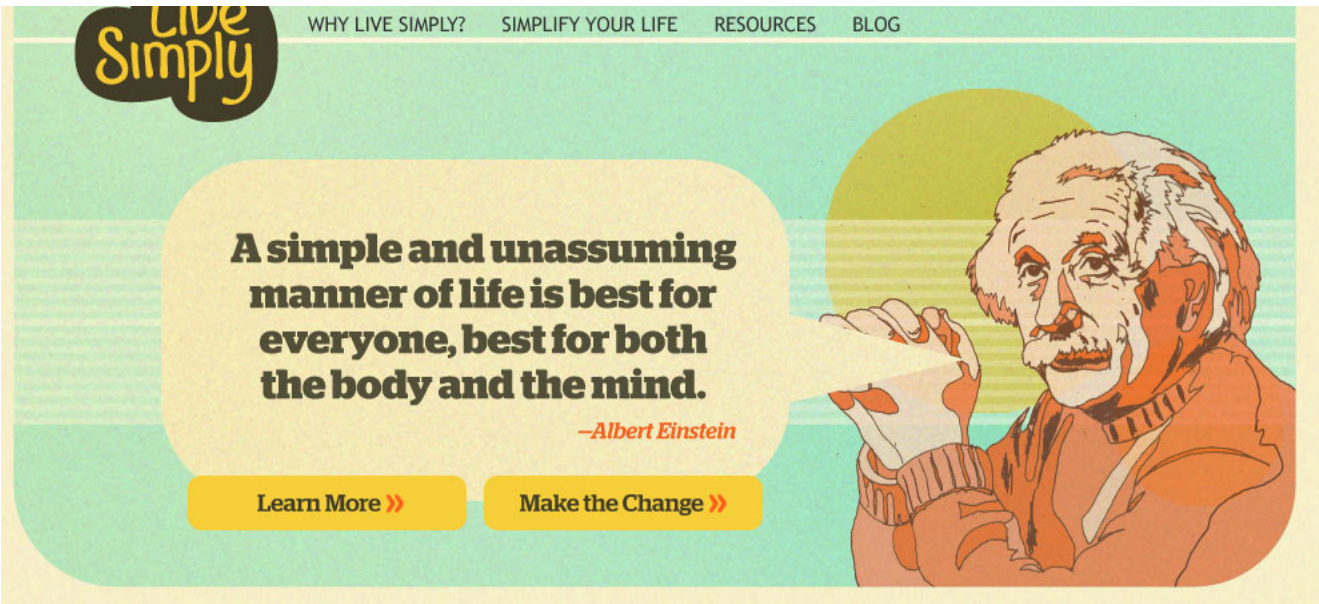
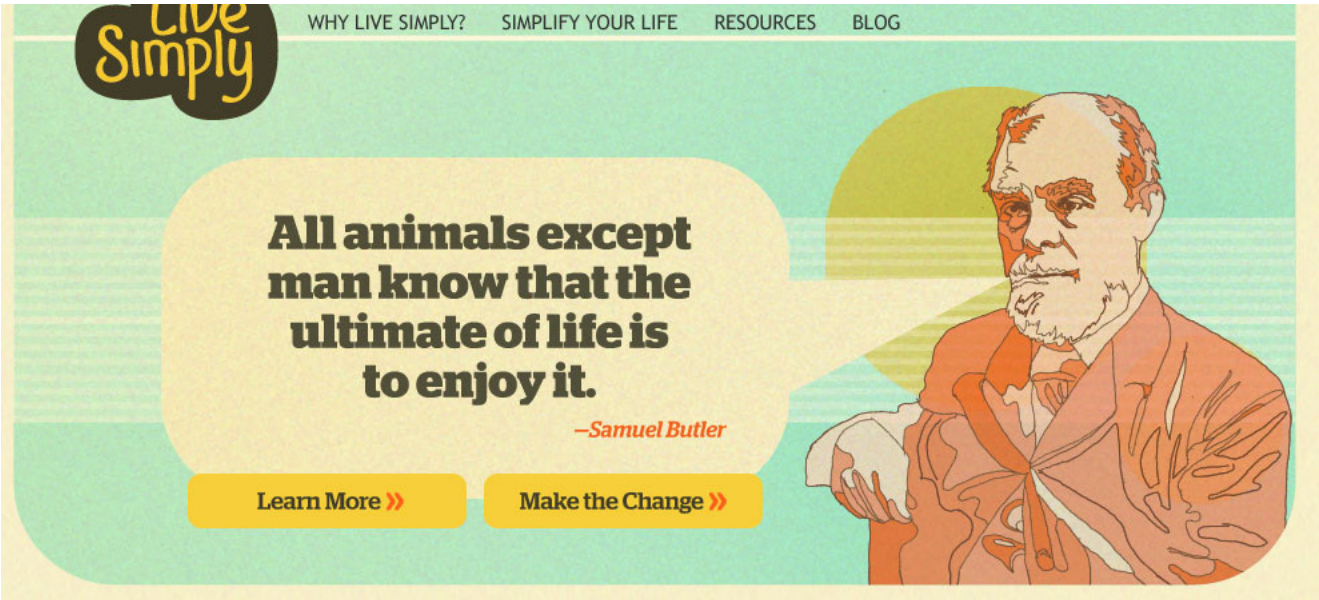
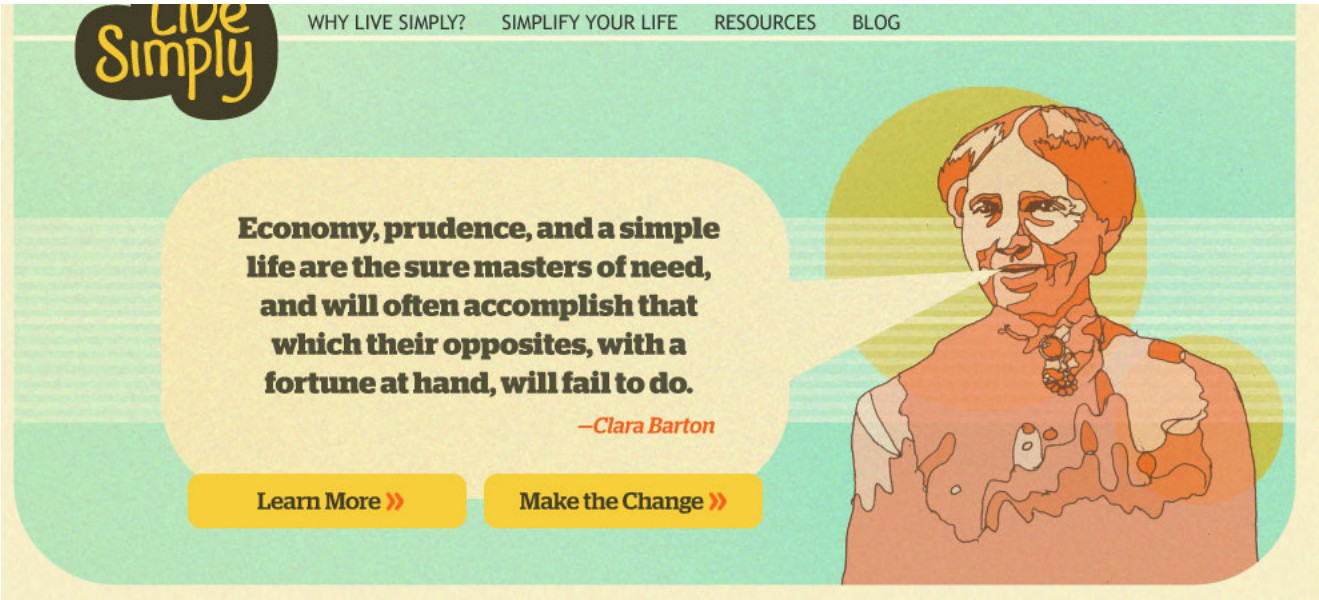
WEBSITE DESIGN

This is the sixth and final draft of the design of the web site. These photoshop comps were used to create the images and determine sizes during the coding process.



HOME PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

Images were created for the rotating section of the home page. These are the third and final round of those images, in which illustration was used to make the group more cohesive.



Why Live Simply?

Simplify Your Life

Resources


Blog

Life is not complex.
We are complex. Life is
simple, and the simple
thing is the right thing.

—Oscar Wilde

Learn More »

Make the Change »



Live Simply


WHY LIVE SIMPLY?SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFERESOURCESBLOG

Be content with what you have.
Rejoice in the way things are. When
you realize there is nothing lacking,
the whole world belongs to you.

—Lao Tzu

Learn More »

Make the Change »



ICONS

Icons needed to be created for each reason to simplify and all the tips and advice. These are the fourth round of complete icons, although several went through many more rounds to make them fit in with the group.



enter a new age



balance social inequality



power of the individual



universe is our home



be happier



stop living on automatic



change gradually



be mindful



be more than your stuff



increase community



embrace past progress



create your own balance



end careerism



slow down



mortality is our ally



websites & blogs



help the environment



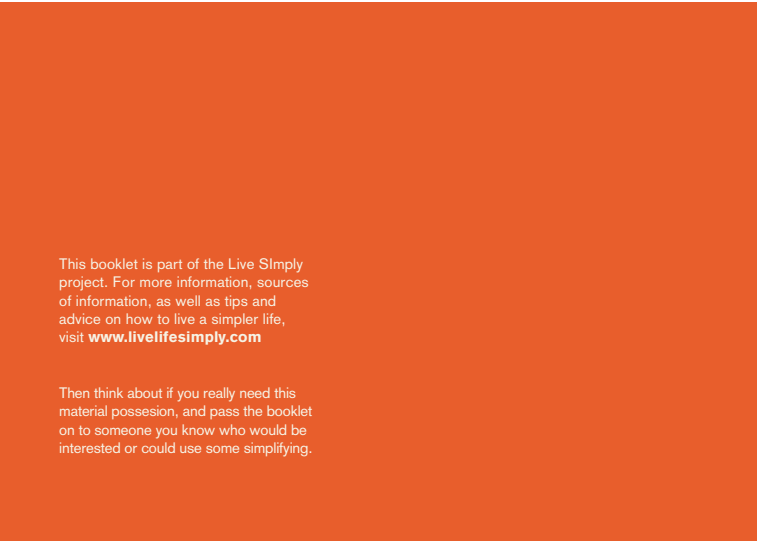
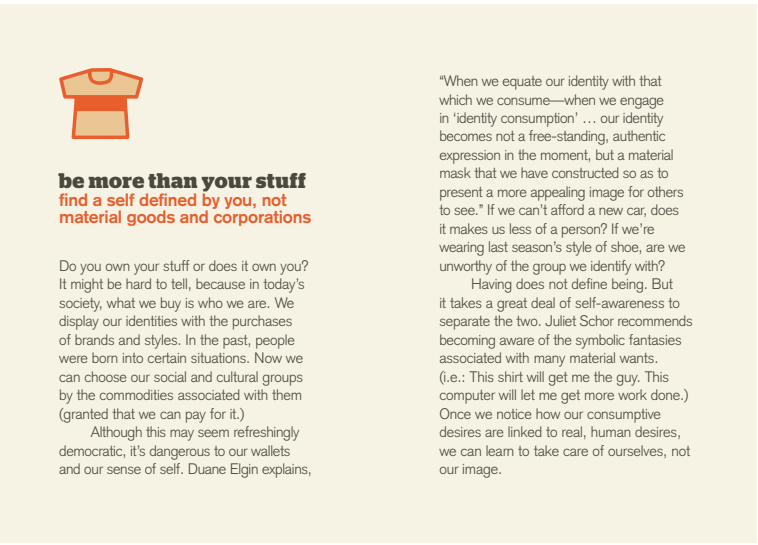
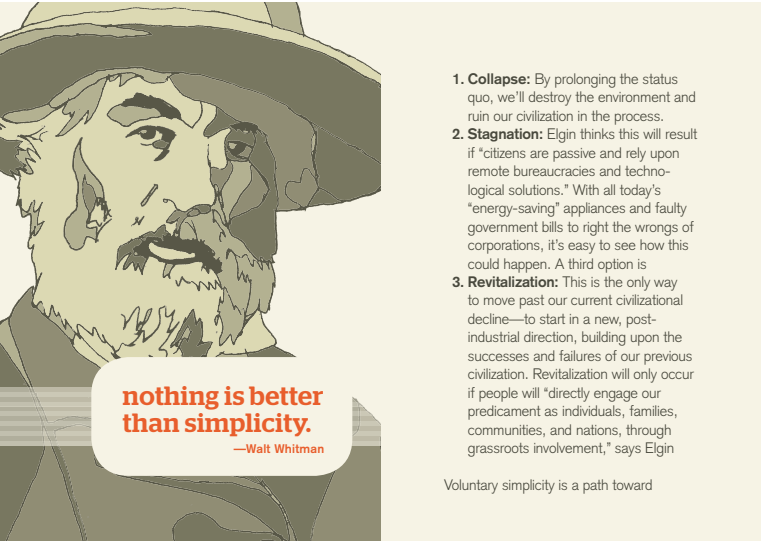
ignore advertisements



books & articles

BOOKLET

The booklet includes the “Why Live Simply?” portion of my research. These are images of a few example spreads.



RESEARCH

What follows is the text that is included in the web site and booklet. Because the research was taken from scholarly journals and books, writing with a friendly, colloquial tone appropriate for the web was challenging.

WHY LIVE SIMPLY?

Today’s world is increasingly complicated. The problems we face range from small to large, from local to global, from personal to population-wide. We’re stressed out, work too much, are in debt. We feel obligated to look a certain way, to buy certain things, to live a life that benefits corporations and masks our authentic self. Along with these personal problems, the environment is deteriorating, millions live in poverty, and community interaction is disappearing. Industrialization, which has promoted consumption, competition, hyperactivity, and profit for the last century, is no longer the answer to our problems.

What can we do? All these issues seem too daunting to be solved at once, especially by an individual – and they are. But by taking small, personal actions to balance our own lives, we can all move our society in a post-industrial direction that will help the entire world. These small life changes can be summed into one over-riding endeavor: Live Simply. Simplifying our lives frees us from the pressures to consume. We’re left with more time, more freedom, more happiness, and we’re allowed to live our lives as we see fit. In doing so, we limit our impact on the environment, help balance social inequalities, and potentially nurture community. Follow the links below to delve deeper into several of the benefits of simple living, or get advice on how to simplify here.

ENTER A NEW AGE: we’re living through the end of a dying industrial civilization

We’re living through the end of a dying industrial civilization. Our world once thrived on innovation and technology. Industrialization brought us to new places, taught us new things about our world, and helped us connect with fellow human beings more than ever. But its time has run out. Today we’re left with an endangered environment, bureaucratic complexity, and unhappy people. We consume for the sake of consumption in the guise of helping the economy or increasing happiness. We’re busy for the sake of looking busy, a trait admired in a hyper-productive industrial society, and it leaves us stressed out and lonely. Instead of recognizing that these and other problems are connected, we’ve been stagnant for years, trying to solve them each individually

with the industrial mentality and technology that created them in the first place. We’re all waiting for some big change, yet don’t realize that it needs to come from us.

Civilizations come and go. The end of our industrial society isn’t the end of the world. In fact, the end of industrialization could save the world. But it’s important that we move on constructively. We can’t hold on to what isn’t working any longer. Duane Elgin, author of Voluntary Simplicity, believes there are three possible paths ahead for humanity:

- 1. Collapse: By prolonging the status quo, we’ll destroy the environment and ruin our civilization in the process.
- 2. Stagnation: Elgin thinks this will result if “citizens are passive and rely upon remote bureaucracies and technological solutions.” With all today’s “energy-saving” appliances and faulty government bills to right the wrongs of corporations, it’s easy to see how this could happen. A third option is
- 3. Revitalization: This is the only way to move past our current civilizational decline – to start in a new, post-industrial direction, building upon the successes and failures of our previous civilization. Revitalization will only occur if people will “directly engage our predicament as individuals, families, communities, and nations, through grassroots involvement,” says Elgin

Voluntary simplicity is a path toward revitalization of our civilization. Living simply confronts the problems of industrialization and moves us forward constructively. It shifts the focus from consumption to conservation competition to cooperation, and from technology to nature.

BE HAPPIER: money and material goods don’t lead to a meaningful life

We all know that money and things don’t bring happiness. But it’s hard not to imagine that a little more money could change our life. For example,

- When interviewers asked what hampers the search for the good life, the most common answer was, “We’re short of money.” When

- asked what would improve life quality, most people answered “more money.” (Myers, “Wealth and Happiness: a Limited Relationship)
- The number of college students who agreed that a “very important” reason for their going to college was “to make more money” rose from 1 in 2 in 1971 to almost 3 in 4 in 1998. The proportion considering it “very important or essential” that they become “very well off financially,” rose from 39 percent in 1970 to 74 percent in 1998. (Myers)
 - The world’s people have consumed as many goods and services since 1950 as all previous generations put together. (Durning, Title)
 - Between 1980 and 1990 in the US, per capita spending increased by 21.4 percent. During that time, spending on luxury items rose and personal savings rates fell. (Etzioni, Voluntary Simplicity: Responding to Consumer Culture)

- Our society assumes that more, bigger, and faster is equal to better, healthier, and happier. We mold our lives around earning and accumulating more. But we’re consuming more than we could ever need, and making ourselves unhappy in the process. Despite huge increases in consumption, people today are generally less satisfied with their lives than they were in the past.
- Although per capita disposable income almost doubled between 1960 and 1990, only 32 percent of Americans reported that they were “very happy” in 1993 – almost the same number that did in 1957 (35 percent). During the same period, rates of depression, violent crime, divorce, and teen suicide have all risen dramatically. (Durning)
 - Studies have found that the level of one’s socioeconomic status had meager effects on one’s “sense of well-being” and no significant effect on “satisfaction with life-as-a-whole.” (Etzioni)
 - Within countries where nearly everyone can afford life’s necessities, increasing affluence matters surprisingly little. For example, teens from upper-middle class backgrounds report less happiness than those from the lowest socioeconomic class. (Myers)

Although we know money can’t buy happiness, many of us still look for satisfaction in material goods or a higher paycheck. We won’t be happy until we have the newest computer, a faster car, a bigger house. But as Cecile Andrews, author of Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life, explains, “If more is always better, that means you will never have enough, so you will never be satisfied. You’ll never really enjoy what you have. You will be bored and cynical. You’ll always be yearning for something you don’t have.” Once you’ve bought a new computer, a faster car, or a bigger house, there will be a newer computer, a faster car, and a bigger house. The upward creep of desire will never be fulfilled.

If our stuff isn’t making us happy, why do we continue buying? With the dawn of industrialization, economists believed people had a fixed set of needs, and worried that nothing would motivate people to work once their income allowed them to fulfill them. But, as we’ve seen, consumeristic needs can be easily expanded. Amitai Etzioni explains that an “artificial fanning of needs” created by the media, our peers, and cultural pressures keeps us consuming. In today’s world it’s easy to confuse wants and needs. We need food. We need shelter. We want a new pair of shoes to replace last season’s unfashionable pair. Unfortunately, in many social situations, the “need” for a new pair of shoes may seem real and more pressing.

Voluntary simplicity is about differentiating between wants and needs and stripping away anything unnecessary for our own satisfaction. Doing this allows us to explore other, more authentic and lasting forms of happiness, but first we need to find out what things we truly need to feel fulfilled, and what things we can let go. This balance is difficult to find and each person must determine their own. But once we notice the artificial pressures to consume, like style of peer-pressure, it’s easier to resist them.

BE MORE THAN YOUR STUFF: find a self defined by you, not material goods and corporations

Do you own your stuff or does it own you? It might be hard to tell, because in today’s society, what we buy is who we are. We display our identities with the purchases of brands and styles. In the past people were born into certain situations. Now we can choose our social and cultural groups by the commodities associated with them (granted that we can pay for it.) Although this may seem refreshingly democratic, it’s dangerous to our wallets and our sense of self. Duane Elgin explains, “When we equate our identity with that which we consume – when we engage in ‘identity consumption’ ... our identity becomes not a free-standing, authentic expression in the moment, but a material mask that we have constructed so as to present a more appealing image for others to see.” If we can’t afford a new car, does it makes us less of a person? If we’re wearing last season’s style of shoe, are we unworthy of the group we identify with?

Having does not define being. But it takes a great deal of self-awareness to separate the two. Juliet Schor recommends becoming aware of the symbolic fantasies associated with many material wants. (i.e.: This shirt will get me the guy. This computer will let me get more work done. This new car will make me more confident.) Once we notice how our consumptive desires are linked to real, human desires, we can learn to take care of ourselves, not our image.

END CAREERISM: focus on improving your life, not on advancing your career.

Has your career taken over your life? For most people today, it has. To keep up with our over-consumption, Americans are working more than ever:

- On average, Americans work nine full weeks (350 hours) longer than those in Western Europe do.
- Working hours in America are longer than those that existed before the Industrial Revolution. In fact, we're working more than medieval peasants did. (www.timeday.org)
- Unlike a generation ago, most families now require two breadwinners to maintain their standard of life.
- We've let our work invade our free time as well. We need to take time to get dressed for our jobs, to travel to our jobs, to take vacation to get away from our jobs, to zone out in front of the TV for an escape from thinking about our jobs.

How did we let this happen? Unfortunately, high-paying careers are valued in our society. Taking part in the rat-race and earning a position like a CEO is more important than becoming a teacher or a scientist. We're led to believe that a higher-paying job will make us happier – but at what cost? This careerism is damaging to relationships and personal well-being. A lot of people spend all their time working for higher titles or more pay, just to buy things that they'll be too busy working to enjoy. Our society infuses us with the sense that a high-paying job is all-important, and we sacrifice our lives in the pursuit of one.

Living simply is a withdrawal from what Mark A. Burch calls the "achievement-neurosis" and pressures of careerism. We can get out of the cycle of work and spend by determining our own needs and earning only what we need to get by. Doing this frees time for more pleasurable activities. We can spend more time advancing our lives than we do our careers.

HELP THE ENVIRONMENT: save the world while you're saving your well-being

By now we all know that the environment is in danger. Global warming, pollution, decreasing resources, and species extinction are just a few of the concerns that get a lot of attention in politics and the media. We know that our way of life is damaging the sustainability of a harmonious cycle of life.

Yet few of us feel personally responsible for making changes that can help the environment. It's hard to sacrifice as our neighbors buy bigger and better things, pressuring us to keep up and do the same. Luckily, you don't need to be an environmentalist to be a voluntary simplifier. Living simply is actually more self-centered than the dogmatic sacrifice of environmentalism. Although the health of the world is taken into consideration, voluntary simplicity focuses on simplifying for personal

gain and fulfillment. Environmental benefits just happen to be a side-effect. By cutting back on consumption and working less, living simply inherently uses less resources and creates less waste. Focusing on mindfully enjoying life's non-material pleasures could lead our society in an environmentally sustainable direction.

BALANCE SOCIAL INEQUALITIES: use less and share your resources with those in need

If you're reading this, chances are you're more privileged than the majority of the world's population. Despite enormous growth in the world economy, there is more poverty now than ever before. In fact,

- The richest 1 percent of adults alone owned 40 percent of global assets in the year 2000, and the richest 10% of adults accounted for 85 percent of the world total. (United Nations University, World Distribution of Household Wealth)
- The top 10 % of the US population has a combined income equal to income of the poorest 43 % of people in the world. In other words, the total income of the richest 25 million Americans is equal to total income of almost 2 billion people. (Branko Milanovic, "True World Income Distribution")
- The wealthiest 20 percent of the world accounted for 76.6 percent of total private consumption in 2008. The poorest fifth just 1.5 percent. (Global Issues, Consumption and Consumerism)

There's a discontinuity between our morals and the systemic evil that is created by our action or inaction. We call want to help those in need, but it can be difficult to find ways to do so. We talk about helping the poor. We send aid to those in developing nations. We want everyone to have equal opportunities. But the problem starts here, with us and our overconsumption.

Living simply helps balance the social inequality we inadvertently support by participating in mass consumer society. By using fewer resources, we free some for those in need. And by working less, we create jobs for the unemployed. Practicing voluntary simplicity is like sharing with the people of the world. By taking a smaller portion of the economic pie – even when we know we can afford a larger one – we leave more for others. Mark Burch explains that living simply is an indirect way of refusing our support for the dominant economic system. In doing so, we "weaken its power to project systemic evil elsewhere in the world." Voluntary simplicity lets us match our actions to our morals.

STOP LIVING ON AUTOMATIC: be more aware of what's around to live life to the fullest

How often have you arrived at work without remembering your trip? We all run on automatic more than we're willing to admit. Consciously observing ourselves as we interact

with the world isn't as easy as zoning out and going through the motions. Duane Elgin, explains that we don't notice when we're running on automatic because we live in a state of mental distraction. He says, "Our minds are constantly moving about at a lightning-fast pace, thinking about the future, replaying conversations from the past, engaging in inner role-playing, and so on." We're absorbed in our own mentally constructed reality, which distracts us from truly encountering the world, others, and even our own selves.

When we're stuck on automatic, we're not conscious of all the decisions we're making and why we're making them. Our thoughts and actions spring from an extremely complex socially-constructed reality that we don't usually notice. It often seems as if we haven't made a choice at all. For example, do you choose to bathe daily, or does our society mandate it? Due to the influence of media and advertisement, we rarely make authentic personal decisions. Like in the case of bathing, our socially-informed decisions can benefit our well-being and that of those around us. Unfortunately, many of the choices we make automatically are harmful to our health and happiness. For example, by "choosing" to dress "appropriately" we spend time and money on new clothes and are rarely happy wearing the functional things we already own.

To get out of living automatically, we need to live more consciously. We need to be aware of ourselves as we move through life. This includes the actions that we take and the way that we think. We must be present in all that we do. We must be mindful.

Rather than doing things habitually, living consciously allows us to review each decision we make to ensure that is aligned with who we are. Mindfulness allows us to live and encounter life more fully than running on automatic ever could.

Becoming mindful is a demanding process to learn, but with practice, and an open mind (no pun intended), it can be cultivated. For more information on mindfulness, see here.

INCREASE COMMUNITY: take back what's missing in your life—real human interaction

A sense of community has all but disappeared in our industrial society. "Most Americans are emotional destitutes as poor in their family connections as are Afghans or Sudanese in money," Edward N. Luttwak claims. We hardly know our neighbors and time spent with family is diminishing. Many of us socialize more online than we do in the real world. Our society's obsession with convenience, economy, and anonymity has replaced any social cohesion. We can see this in the shopping malls, highways, and corporate chains have replaced corner stores, local restaurants, and neighborhood theaters. "These are the things that help

create a sense of common identity and community in an area," explains [name] Durning. Without them we have no roots or connection to our world.

Through our overscheduled lives and the resulting quest for convenience, we've let one of the most essential elements of humanity suffer. Although our society values the individual, we've reached a point of becoming selfish. We drive to work alone in our car. We don't speak to each other when the television's on. This social alienation isn't natural for our species. We need the ties of family and neighbors to live a fulfilling life. Without them we're left isolated, lonely, and empty. Luttwak goes as far as to believe this lack of community and family interaction is why we feel the need to consume. We "buy ourselves gifts" to try and replace the human interaction we're missing.

Living simply can't force social cohesion. But simplifying requires working together. It also frees time, allowing us to focus on participating in our community and to create real human bonds rather than superficial social status.

SLOW DOWN: life today is too fast-paced for our own good. take a break.

When 's the last time you did absolutely nothing? No eating, talking, surfing the web, reading, driving, housework, etc. Just nothing. These days we always feel as if we need to be doing something. The frenetic, over-achieving, busy worker is a status symbol in our hyper-productive society. We complain about being overworked and overwhelmed but feel lost of left out when we're not doing something. How awkward is sitting in a doctor's waiting room, even with the distraction of magazines?

Strangely, sociologists and economists have found that, across the world, the more people value time and make an effort to save it, the less they are able to relax and enjoy it. By documenting everything from walking speeds to talking speeds in several countries, (Durning 133) determined that the pace of life accelerates as countries industrialize and commercialize. Economist E. F. Schumacher also declared, "The amount of genuine leisure available in a society is generally in inverse proportion to the amount of labor-saving machinery it employs." Although our iPhones and RSS feeds may seem like they're saving us the effort of keeping in touch or getting information, this infinite access to media and total interconnectivity can be stressful. In fact, countless studies have found that multitasking actually hinders productivity, and worse, can lead to health problems associated with stress like weight gain, sleep loss, and elevated blood pressure.

By taking away the value of hyper-productivity, voluntary simplicity helps us get out of the mindset that we always need to be doing something. As cliché as it is, we're able to focus on our journey through life rather than our destination. We can look at the big picture rather

than distracting ourselves by moving from task to task. By freeing ourselves of obligations and working less, we get time to do nothing, to mindfully contemplate and honor our true wants, and to simply be.

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

ABOUT VOLUNTARY SIMPLCITY

Living simply is the elimination of everything unessential, both physical and mental, to the achievement of our personal goals. Because of this, every person's idea of simplicity is unique and individual. Those who choose to live simply often do so to find an alternative to the fast-paced, superficial life of industrial society, so goals are about living life more freely, without distractions of status or superficiality. Voluntary simplifiers make the choice to cut down on consumption and careerism to find other, non-material sources of satisfaction. Doing this involves a constant evaluation of our activities to determine that they fit with our goals. As Duane Elgin, author of the influential book Voluntary Simplicity, says eloquently, "It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions."

Simple Living has been promoted by some of the most influential leaders, artists, and philosophers throughout history, including Jesus, Buddha, [...]. Today there are a lot of people who are fed up with the competitive industrial society we live in and want to take control of their time and their life. Living simply isn't easy, but it brings fulfillment and benefits that mass consumer culture can't. Continue reading to discover advice that will help you change the way you think about your world. Below are tips to keep in mind when trying to simplify your life. They aren't rules, just advice that can lead you to live more simply.

POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL: your everyday actions aren't small—they can make big changes

Although you may feel small, you shouldn't treat your everyday actions as such. Small changes that don't seem to matter are hugely significant when made by a large number of people. These changes can accumulate and transform our entire way of living. As Duane Elgin explains, "The character of a whole society is the cumulative result of countless small actions, day in and day out, of millions of persons. Who we are, as a society, is the synergistic accumulation of who were are as individuals. A society cannot move toward great frugality any farther or faster than we, as individuals, will support in our own lives." We can't wait from someone else or our government

to make a change. It's up to us. We are responsible, and we must take charge. One by one we must restore the balance in our own lives, and by doing so, hopefully return balance to the entire world.

EMBRACE PAST PROGRESS: living simply isn't a return to a simpler time

It's important that we don't equate living simply with returning to a simpler time, before technology and science helped us discover so much about our world. "We desire a renewal of the human bonds we associate with the past and we deplore the loneliness and danger of modern cities," explains Mark Burch. "But most of us would not choose to gather nuts and berries for a living." Voluntary simplicity is not about turning away from progress. It's a careful balance of old and new. Instead of completely forgetting about the industrial era, voluntary simplicity is an attempt to use the skills, knowledge, and technology we've gained to move beyond it and enter a new era of frugality and human fulfillment.

CHANGE GRADUALLY : simplifying your life can't (and shouldn't) be done overnight

Making the change to simple living can't be done overnight. Simplicity isn't a condition that can be reached. It's an ever-changing, life-long process of balance. Unfortunately, (and ironically) this balance isn't simple to find. In fact, many authors on the subject talk about the turmoil, uncertainty, self-doubt, anxiety, despair, and soul-searching that can be associated with cutting out conspicuous consumption. Amitai Etzioni mentions the "psychological vacuum" that needs to be filled when consumerism is restrained. The consumptive mentality of industrial civilization is difficult to get rid of. But the pursuit of simplicity is a joy in itself, and with support, feelings of doubt and anxiety can be replaced with a fuller experience of life.

CREATE YOUR OWN BALANCE : no one can figure out what's right for you but yourself

When trying to live simply, it's essential that you create your own balance. No one but you can determine what is enough and what is unnecessary. Although the example that others set can help you to discover what you need and what you don't, no one can force simplicity upon you. There is no ultimate simplistic lifestyle to achieve. You've begun to live simply with even the smallest changes. Mark Burch describes voluntary simplicity as a "general direction for decisions that lead to an ever-increasing lightness of being." With each choice we make, we must discover why we're making the decision and make sure it fits with who we are and what we truly want.

Voluntary simplicity is not about living with less for the sake of living with less. It's about stripping off the

unessentials so that what remains gets our full attention. It's about living without burdens, physical or mental. Living simply also doesn't require you to withdraw from the mainstream or from the life you currently lead. In fact, it thrives if you stay in it. By making small changes, little-by-little, you realize that simplifying doesn't interrupt your life - it enhances it. And by staying in the mainstream, you show others how rewarding a simple life can be.

THE UNIVERSE IS OUR HOME: our human world is part of something much bigger

It's easy to get caught up in our human world with concerns of status and style. It's not easy to remember how small this world is in the scope of the entire universe. Our small solar system is just one of over 100 billion in our galaxy that is only one of over another 100 billion galaxies. The size and mystery of our universe is beyond our comprehension and forces us to retreat into a socially-constructed world that we can control. Duane Elgin describes it as a "thin slice of reality that we can more readily comprehend because we're the architects of that reality."

But if we embrace the mystery and size of the universe, and recognize our place within it, we can see how trivial some of our concerns about style, status, money, etc. are. Embracing the universe as our home also allows us to recognize and appreciate the connectedness of all things. It's hard to be angry at someone moving slowly in line when we appreciate how closely we are related. It's hard to care what a co-worker thinks of our outfit when we realized how small all of us really are. Embracing the huge and connected universe can help you drop the unessential from your life.

MORTALITY IS OUR ALLY : only by embracing our death can we learn to live fully

It's easier to live fully when you embrace the fact that you're going to die. Our society shys away from talk about our mortality because death is a scary thing. Unfortunately, it's inevitable for every human being. Do you want to spend this short time you have worrying about how you look or what someone thinks of you? If you embrace the fact that time on this Earth is short, it's easier to ignore the pressures of social status and material desires and to confront the reality of our existence. Duane Elgin says that by embracing death, we awaken from a "social sleep to the reality of our situation." Our lives are infused with a sense of immediacy, perspective, and proportion. We can focus on what it truly significant in our lives and eliminate the trivial and unessential.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Live Simply project started as a Capstone project at American University. Disappointed by my materialistic and over-achieving generation (myself included), I wanted to research alternatives to the way we were brought up. When I stumbled upon the concept of voluntary simplicity, I felt like all my questions were answered. This way of life found solutions for all the areas of life that I know are out of whack as well as the problems in the world that I feel strongly about. Voluntary simplicity was an alternative to the rat-race I felt I was about to enter as a college grad, to the impersonal online connections my peers and I have come to prefer, to the constant state of distraction we need to have, to the piles of stuff we have laying around. It was a way to connect more with nature, to find time to figure out who I am and what I want to do. And with all these personal benefits, learning to live more simply helps the environment, the under-privileged, and pushes our society to a post-industrial culture.

I wanted to share this way of life with as many people as possible, and as a graphic designer, I chose to do it the way I know best – through visual communication. I spent a year developing the look and feel of the Live Simply project as well as the content for the web site. I was fortunate to receive a grant from the American University Honors Program to buy this domain and host the site.

The Live Simply project is a continual work in progress. If you have any suggestions or questions, please contact me.

