

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Graham Hill: Living with less

On Tuesday, we discussed my favorite 19th century philosopher, Henry David Thoreau.

Thoreau believed in simplicity, reflection, and an appreciation of the natural world around us. His book, *Walden*, described his two years living in a tiny cabin in the woods.

In this age of technologically savvy young people who develop ingenious internet businesses and sell them for millions, it's interesting to find one who also values simplicity.

He wrote about his epiphany in the *New York Times*, which I thought I'd share with you:

Living with Less. A Lot Less.

By Graham Hill (excerpts)

I LIVE in a 420-square-foot studio. I sleep in a bed that folds down from the wall. I have six dress shirts. I have 10 shallow bowls that I use for salads and main dishes. When people come over for dinner, I pull out my extendable dining room table. I don't have a single CD or DVD and I have 10 percent of the books I once did.

I have come a long way from the life I had in the late '90s, when, flush with cash from an Internet start-up sale, I had a giant house crammed with stuff — electronics and cars and appliances and gadgets.

Somehow this stuff ended up running my life, or a lot of it; the things I consumed ended up consuming me. ... We live in a world of surfeit stuff, of big-box stores and 24-hour online shopping opportunities. Members of every socioeconomic bracket can and do deluge themselves with products.

There isn't any indication that any of these things makes anyone any happier; in fact it seems the reverse may be true.

For me, it took 15 years ... to get rid of all the inessential things I had collected and live a bigger, better, richer life with less.

It started in 1998 in Seattle, when my partner and I sold our Internet consultancy company, Sitewerks, for more money than I thought I'd earn in a lifetime.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

To celebrate, I bought a four-story, 3,600-square-foot, turn-of-the-century house in Seattle's happening Capitol Hill neighborhood and, in a frenzy of consumption, bought a brand-new sectional couch ... a ton of gadgets.... And, of course, a black turbocharged Volvo. With a remote starter!

I was working hard ... and didn't have the time to finish getting everything I needed for my house.

So I hired a ... personal shopper. He went to furniture, appliance and electronics stores and took Polaroids of things he thought I might

like to fill the house; I'd shuffle through the pictures and proceed on a virtual shopping spree.

My success and the things I bought quickly changed from novel to normal. Soon I was numb to it all. The new Nokia phone didn't excite me or satisfy me. It didn't take long before I started to wonder why my theoretically upgraded life didn't feel any better and why I felt more anxious than before.

... Our fondness for stuff affects almost every aspect of our lives. Housing size, for example, has ballooned in the last 60 years. The average size of a new American home in 1950 was 983 square feet; by 2011, the average new home was 2,480 square feet. ... we take up more than three times the amount of space per capita than we did 60 years ago.

... Enormous consumption has global, environmental and social consequences. ... Many experts believe consumerism and all that it entails — from the extraction of resources to manufacturing to waste disposal — plays a big part in pushing our planet

to the brink.

Does all this endless consumption result in measurably increased happiness?

Though American consumer activity has increased substantially since the 1950s, happiness levels have flatlined.

...(Today) as the guy who started TreeHugger.com, I sleep better knowing I'm not using more resources than I need. I have less — and enjoy more.



GRAHAM HILL — Young self-made millionaire finds that less is more.