

A Simple Kind of Life

Winner

By Reese Miller

Forward by Sarah G.

“A Simple Kind of Life” addresses the struggles of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. The writer goes from a child who rarely notices their environment to an adult who takes full advantage of their surroundings. This powerful essay follows the writer through her growth, and Emily, a tutor in the writing center, articulates the writer’s message as, “unique and interesting.” The use of descriptive language, a humble point of view, and a feeling of nostalgia all shine through in “A Simple Kind of Life.”

People don’t normally think of having less in their lives. For a lot of people, having a full life is like having the biggest and the best of anything you can imagine: big beautiful homes, fancy cars, the most advanced technology. Let's not mistake having the most in life for gaining the most from life.

As a young girl, I had an extraordinary imagination and would use it to create what my mom would refer to as a ‘huge mess’ in my bedroom. My brother, sister and I would always get ourselves into the most crazy predicaments. I remember colorful blankets of various sizes stretched over bed posts and little chairs, books piled on top of each chair to hold them steady; board game pieces and Lego bricks tossed about the room like chicken feed; And Teddy Graham crumbs and Goldfish dust on little tea set dishes surrounded by all my very favorite, stuffed party guests. This was the usual scene in the Miller house. Aside from making huge messes in the house us kids would spend a good amount of our time outside. We would build forts, take long treacherous hikes into the woods, and enjoy the freedom to just explore the land around us with little distractions, just simply taking it all in.

Having grown up with so much, and so many opportunities as a child was a privilege, which made becoming a teenager difficult. With all of the life-changing events that had taken place (moving around, graduating school, family issues, experimenting with various aspects of my life), I found myself clinging to material objects and items from my past, to feel more stable. I collected an abundance of trinkets, things I deemed

precious. And anything that was given to me from someone special, I always cherished. At first my collection was pretty solid; it was small and meaningful and I found comfort in having it. But in time my small collection grew to be quite big, large enough to fill an entire shed, and I started to feel overwhelmed by it all. I had gotten into a bad habit of thrift shopping and scrolling through Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist, searching for art supplies, things I thought were unique, or anything that could have been of use to me from the Free section.

One day as I was checking Facebook Marketplaces For Sale listings, I stumbled upon the best thing I could have possibly imagined finding. It was an old, tattered, canvas, cloth with a bundle of wooden lattice, a large plastic dome, and a door, better known as a Yurt. At the time I didn't really have a place of my own and was struggling to find a proper place to burrow. I even had an argument with my grandmother once over letting me turn the old playhouse my grandpa had built into a tiny house, but that didn't go over very well with her.

The 'glorified tent' was in pretty rough condition; it was nowhere close to perfect, but I knew it had some real potential. I could envision myself living in it like a witch in the woods, thriving off the pleasures of the land. It brought me back to building forts with my brother and sister and the joys of being a kid. I knew that this Yurt had the ability to bring back that enthusiastic child in me that I had somehow lost along the way. So I did the most logical thing I could do, and proceeded to buy the old worn and torn thing. Rebuilding the 12ft tall, 18ft wide, round structure wasn't easy, but I enjoyed the moments of hard work that went into it and the feeling of accomplishment after seeing what I had built.

The experience of buying and building my hobbit home has taught me a lot about how to appreciate the little things; like waking up to the morning light creeping in through the dome above my head and Wrens singing just outside my door. And with only enough power to turn on a light or charge a phone, no running water or shower and having to pee outside in the middle of the night, you learn a thing or two about how to be grateful for what you have. I no longer needed to fill a void to feel better or to hold onto those things that weighed me down. Because of my new found love for a more

simple kind of life, I got rid of a lot of the unnecessary baggage I had been collecting over the years. I felt lighter letting those things go and became more aware of my ability to find inner happiness and peace. A full and meaningful life isn't about how much you have; it's about enjoying what you are given in every moment.