

MINIMALIST MONDAY



ZEN HOME



— Lindsay S. Nixon —

(preview – excerpt)

Order the rest of this book at:

<http://happyherbivore.com/minimalist-monday-books/>

Copyright (c) by Happy Herbivore Inc. 2014

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Table of Contents

My Story

Introduction: The Minimalist Mindset

Step 1: Reject Consumerism

Step 2: Downgrade Your Lifestyle

Step 3: The Letting Go Process

Step 4: The Minimalist Rule

Where to Begin?

Closet Organization: Clothing

Closet Organization: Shoes

Closet Organization: Linens

Sentimental Items & Keepsakes

Books & Media (i.e. DVD's)

Mail, Receipts, Financials, & Magazines

Creating Clear Surfaces

Kitchen - Pantry

Kitchen - Cabinets & Drawers

Kitchen - Spices

Kitchen - Appliances

Kitchen - Cookware

Bathrooms

Furniture & Furnishings (creating zen rooms)

Hobbies

Bills & Expenses -- let's save money!

Cleaners & Cleaning

Storage & Organization

FAQ

Minimalist Stories: Jim, Courtney, and Alison

My (Minimalist) Story

We lost everything. That's how it felt at the time, anyway. What I'm trying to say is that I was forced into my minimalism initially. I would love to gush that I was touring a magnificent Buddhist Temple in Thailand when I suddenly realized possessions hinder the growth of the soul and thus immediately vowed to become a minimalist. Then, when I returned home, I donated nearly all my earthly belongings to charity, and consequently, lived happily ever after.

But that's not what happened. That's not my story. I was forced into my minimalism, dragging my heels and screaming, "Life's not fair!"

The short story: After I reported some unsavory workplace behavior to Human Resources, amazingly, the company I worked for started experiencing "financial difficulty" and had to lay me off *immediately*.

Meanwhile, the company that employed my husband was having its own (legitimate) financial troubles, and had already laid off some sixty of his coworkers. We knew another layoff wave was coming, and that my husband would most likely be in it.

It was a dark, dark time. We couldn't pay our rent. I couldn't afford to pay for the car I'd just bought to take me to and from the job I had just lost.

Worse still, the economy had been in a downward spiral for over a year and no one was, or had been, hiring. Unemployment was soaring all around us, and it didn't look good.

To make my burden even heavier, I had also amassed over \$150,000 in educational debt from law school a few years earlier. My loans were unwitting and relentless, and no amount of financial hardship seemed hard enough to grant me relief (or qualify me for a new payment structure). I had to cough up roughly \$1,800 per month in repayment dues before I had to pay rent, put gas in my car, keep the lights on, and eat.

I fell into a deep depression. Within thirty days we had to move out of our spacious two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment and into a teeny tiny studio that could fit in my previous dining room. (I'm really not exaggerating).

Given our reduction in space, we had to sell or discard the vast majority of our possessions. We also sold my car at a loss and let go of our other car when it broke down and we couldn't afford to fix it. (Truthfully, we couldn't afford the gas or insurance anyway.)

That was when my minimalist journey began, even if I didn't know it at the time.

Although I hated it initially, minimalism was something I sorely needed.

In less than a decade, I had paid off \$10,000 in credit card debt three times. *Three times*. Yes, I can pat myself on the back that I paid my debt off, but what I find truly alarming is that I got

myself into that situation in the first place, and then let it happen again. And again. I wasn't even living lavishly or beyond my means (but more on that soon).

To be fair, some of that debt was accumulated during periods of financial burden, such as when my husband and I were unemployed and living on credit & but still. Yikes!

Back to my story: After a few months of unemployment, my husband eventually landed a job through a friend. Unfortunately, his new job paid substantially less than his previous one, and while we had downgraded to a studio apartment, our new city was much more expensive than our old one.

I was still unemployed. After six months I stopped looking for full-time work and nabbed a few part-time gigs. I went from making \$70,000 per year as a lawyer in Los Angeles to less than \$30,000 a year collectively through three part-time jobs in New York City, one of the most expensive cities in the United States, if not the world.

Our world completely changed. We didn't just sell off most of our possessions, get rid of our cars, and downgrade to a smaller apartment. We had to let go of living the way we had been accustomed. *That* was the cold reality. *That* is where my minimalism was truly born.

If you had asked me two weeks before I lost my job if I lived a lavish lifestyle I would have told you no. I would have told you that I lived modestly and within my means, and that was true. I wasn't living large. I wasn't spending excessively. I had

purchased a used car for Pete's sake! Yet when I started living with less, a lot less, I looked back in awe.

That line between "want" and "need" (and my perception of it) totally changed with my circumstances.

Two weeks before I lost my job, I would have said (and completely believed) that we had little, if any, unnecessary spending. That everything we spent money on was something we needed (or my favorite, we "deserved").

Less than a month later I was suddenly living without all my stuff and most of my expenses. Clearly those items weren't so necessary as I once thought!

My new scrumpy and scrappy lifestyle also helped me find the happiness and satisfaction I had always been longing for, as well as the financial health we never had.

In realizing this, **I embraced what I came to call minimalism — the belief that less is more.**

This journey — my minimalism — has been awesome and all-encompassing, touching and benefiting every aspect of my life: my career, my relationships, my finances, my spirit, and my dreams.

Everything that I said was impossible became possible when I made my priorities *priorities*. Which brings us to the central core of minimalism: Everything that matters, nothing that doesn't! More zen, less chaos.

Introduction: The Minimalist Mindset

Before we begin: I don't purport have all the answers. This isn't *the* book on minimalism, and it's safe to say I'm not the best example of a minimalist because I still have work to do. I'm still on my own minimalist journey, and I think minimalism is just that — *a journey*. I refuse to believe there is a one size fits all definition for minimalism.

I also don't think you can truly define minimalism. I see minimalism as more of a feeling, and a philosophy, than a text book definition. "You're only a minimalist if you own one hundred items" just isn't realistic for me & not right now & certainly not when I started!

For me, minimalism isn't just about living with less but also living with intention and purpose. I seek less stress and more happiness, which is why my minimalism extends beyond material things and bank accounts.

Yet I find most people are attracted to minimalism because they want to de-clutter their home, or get out of debt, or both, and that's totally fine. De-cluttering (and downsizing) was where I started with my own minimalist journey and finding that happy, zen space at home is exactly what this book is about! *But*, as I soon discovered (and I hope you do too), a de-cluttered *home* is not the same as a de-cluttered *life*. **There is so much more to minimalism!**

The good news: Becoming a minimalist is easy! All you have to do is decide to be a minimalist and poof! You are. Right then in that very moment. (*Welcome!*) Nothing else is required to be a minimalist. Accepting that you are a minimalist and owning that new mentality, identity, and ideology, is the first step. (It's the journey *after* your decision where the real work takes place — but you're still a minimalist from Day One!)

Because there is no one size fits all definition for minimalism, you don't have to *do* anything (in the physical sense) to become a minimalist. You don't need to pass a test, meet an arbitrary guideline, throw out three pairs of shoes, or pay dues to qualify for membership. Everyone is welcome, everyone starts at a different place, and most importantly: everyone ends at a different place too.

Actually, that last part is a lie because there is no end. Minimalism isn't a place you arrive at and stay. If you are a perfectionist like me, this thought can make you batty, until you accept the path for what it is — a *journey!* Minimalism is a marvelous voyage that never ends because there is always room for improvement. It's a train you don't ever want to get off!

That said, there are some core ideas and principals behind my interpretation of minimalism and you need to wrap your head around those before we tackle the clutter and overdraft fees. (Cleaning can wait another ten minutes, I promise.) Before you can de-clutter and downsize, you have to first reject consumerism (and embrace minimalism) and think about your possessions (and bills) in a new light. Next, you need to adopt

one very simple (but very important) rule that makes minimalism possible. After that, it's all up to you!

(pages omitted from sample)

Step 3: The Letting Go Process

Most of the items cluttering our home are not junk per se. They have some utility, given the right place or time.

This often makes de-cluttering and downsizing difficult, because it's all too easy to justify why we should keep something.

I haven't worn this shirt in a year, but, maybe if...

I haven't opened this science textbook in three years, but maybe someday I'll need to reference...

To downsize, de-clutter, and create a zen home, you have to shift away from this thinking. It's not a matter of "someday" or "maybe if" but "today."

Thinking about it another way: We need to stop turning our homes into storage facilities.

Go ahead and face your fears: What's the worst thing that can happen? You wear a different shirt? You go to the library to reference a textbook?

The likelihood that either of these events happening is slim to none and if they *do* happen, no big deal. It's hardly worth all the clutter and stress in the meantime.

Having a cluttered environment is stressful. Having things you aren't using is stressful.

If you've ever walked into a hotel room and felt a sense of tranquility, that's why. The clean surfaces and sparse furnishing make you feel calmer, more zen. Just cleaning off your counter tops can make a world of difference in your home (more on that later).

Unused items, even stored in an organized fashion, can become an energy drain unless you know *exactly* where each item is.

Here's an example: I tore through my entire house looking for a spare dog collar. I knew it existed—*somewhere*—I just couldn't remember where I put it. I pulled dozens of boxes and suitcases out of the closet. (Their contents then exploded all over the floor so I could dig through them too). At one point my husband came home, found me ripping through a box and said, "Oh, Hurricane Lindsay came through today, I see."

I never found the collar (which was even more stressful) and by the time I gave up, I'd not only wasted all that time looking for it—I was going to spend at least half an hour cleaning up the mess I'd made in the process. *What an energy drain!*

Keeping all that stuff for a rainy day seemed so harmless. After all, it was in a closet we never used and organized in boxes, plastic bins, and suitcases, but all it really did was make it much harder for me to find what I was looking for. I'd have been better off just buying a new dog collar when the old one broke which I ultimately did anyway after unsuccessfully retrieving my spare.

I came to realize that one "what if" coming true in the future did not justify saving a hundred other things that I would never call on. Those things did nothing except create clutter, chaos, and turn my home into a storage facility.

Most importantly, keeping my stuff stored in an organized fashion proved to ultimately matter little. No time was saved on my end. The truth is, no matter how well you organize something, when there is a lot of it, you can't remember where each and every item is, especially as days, weeks, and years pass. And if you don't know *exactly* where the item you want is, Hurricane Lindsay happens as you frantically try to retrieve your lost item.

Remember that the goal with minimalism is to live with less, thereby only retaining items you actually use. You may not use every item every day, or even every week, but the goal is to get

away from holding on to items that you don't really use at all (and therefore, don't really need).

It's not a matter of "someday" but "today."

Questions to ask yourself going forward:

When was the last time you used it?

Can you identify a specific event in the near future that will require it?

Is it a multiple? (Meaning you already have something else like it?) For example, you do not need two blenders, even if they both work. Keep one and donate the other. Or, if you have a printer that also works as a scanner, and a scanner that you don't use or hardly use—donate the scanner.

If you feel pain giving perfectly good items away, try to envision how donating your item will help someone else. For example, after my business suits sat in my closet for two years unused, I had to finally accept it was time to donate them. I couldn't keep justifying I might need them, or I might use them—I knew I wouldn't.

I had left my life as a lawyer behind and I didn't want to be a lawyer, but my goodness—*I'd spent hundreds on those suits!*

It felt like a huge waste of money to let them go, but I later realized it's not. Keeping those suits around, or even wearing them once more, did not put the money I spent back in my pocket.

In my heart I knew my suits could serve a better purpose outside of my closet.

Ultimately my suits went to women who were trying to get back on their feet and needed business attire to go on job interviews. I like to think my suits had a teeny tiny hand in helping change their life for the better.

Similarly, about a year ago, my husband and I gave away nearly all our household furniture to a family in need. I will never forget how their eyes lit up or how many times they thanked me.

I tell myself, “If it’s not serving me, let it serve someone else.”

If I’m ever the person on the other end, I sure hope there is someone like me who parts with an item they aren’t using that I need very much.

If you still struggle with purging, here is another way to think about it, a tip from my friend Katharine, who herself struggled with downsizing: “Instead of asking myself, ‘Am I going to wear/use *this* again soon?’ To which my answer was usually yes, I asked myself, ‘If *this* were gone because of a fire, would I spend my money to buy another?’ Usually my answer was no.”

I find letting go of your possessions is one of the hardest hurdles of minimalism, but also the most rewarding. Reducing your possessions not only results in a less cluttered and more zen home space, but the act of letting go is very freeing—you’ll feel a welcomed sense of relief.

For more information and tips for dealing with the emotional turmoil of letting things go, see the project in this book for mementos and sentimental items.

Lastly, if you’re still plagued with “what if,” remember that if you end up being wrong, and you do need it, you can go buy exactly what you want—but I have yet to meet anyone (any minimalist) that has had that experience!

(pages omitted from sample)

Where to Begin

Starting is always the hardest part, but once you get the ball rolling...

If you've ever had to move, I'm sure you've had this experience: You stand with a box in one hand, tape in the other, look around at your house and think, "Where do I begin?" After several waves of panic you inevitably put some item into a box, and then another, and then you're on your way. Minimalism is a little like that. You just need to start!

Find a small project you can complete today and in under twenty minutes. Pick a drawer in the kitchen (or your desk).

This micro project will give you a chance to try out and work through your Letting Go questions (and emotions) while also fueling you with a sense of accomplishment. Not to mention you'll experience first-hand just how wonderful a zen, clutter-free space is instead of reading about it!

Closet Organization: Clothing

Trust me ladies (and gents!) down-sizing your closet is amazing!

Here are the benefits:

- 1) stress-free mornings
- 2) more disposable income
- 3) easier laundry
- 4) no more lost time looking for things
- 5) packing for trips is a breeze
- 6) getting more use out of your clothes
- 7) being content with your wardrobe

In our spacious two-bedroom apartment, my husband and I had two walk-in closets, as well as two regular closets, and still another hall closet and two linen closets (one in each bathroom).

We didn't come close to filling any of them completely, so I was in denial about how much we really had. As we prepared to move into the studio I paired down some of our linens and tried to pick over our clothes and shoes, but whatever I donated wasn't nearly enough.

Even with ultra-thin hangers, our studio closet was filled beyond capacity. We also had more clothes and shoes in suitcases under the bed and still more in trash bags in the basement.

I tried to keep everything organized but that was a fool's errand. Our closet was complete chaos. I felt like I was always looking for my missing left shoe or one of my husband's belts. I would frequently tear through the closet, dumping piles of clothes on the floor or ripping them from their hangers, looking for a favorite sweater or pair of pants. Of course I wouldn't find it until five

months later in the middle of the summer when it was of no use to me.

Worse still, most days I would stand in front of my overstuffed closet and pout that I had nothing to wear. At best, I wore twenty to thirty percent of my wardrobe and yet I couldn't seem to part with any of it. *What if I might need it?*

That all changed when my husband's job transferred us abroad for a year. We were only allowed four total suitcases and at least one suitcase needed to carry non-clothing items like paper records, a few books, family pictures, and so on.

Basically, I had to pack my entire wardrobe for a year into a suitcase and a half.

Straightaway, I reached for those clothes I wore the most, but I also had to think about utility. Given such a limited amount of clothing, I needed to pick versatile pieces—basics I could dress up or down with a few accessories.

I also gravitated toward a particular color palette so I could switch my tops and bottoms around to create an array of different outfits.

Once I was done packing, I looked at all the clothes and shoes that remained. What was I going to do with all of it?

My first thought was "storage unit" but after getting a few sobering quotes I had to wonder if that was how I really wanted to spend our money. Did I really want to spend our hard-earned money to store something I wasn't going to use for months and I didn't even really use then? (And if I'm completely honest with myself, I probably wouldn't use in the future?)

I realized because storage was "free" at home, I stored it. It was *paying* for storage that made me second-guess my storage habits.

In the end we did rent a storage unit, but one of the smallest possible sizes. We calculated that it would be cheaper to store our furniture, as well as a few other items like dishes and lamps, than to re-buy all of it again in a year. Still, those key items took up almost all of the space of our small unit, so anything else that went in—be it clothes or shoes or books—had to be our absolute favorite.

When going through my items I asked myself, “Would I re-buy this item when I came home?” and if the answer was yes, I would save it. Turns out the answer was no most of the time and I ended up donating over eight trash bags worth of clothes and shoes to the local Goodwill.

Although there were several outfits and pairs of shoes in those bags that I still liked, I came to accept it was better for me to give away those items to someone that would actually use them. What good is having twenty-five pairs of shoes if all they do is collect dust under my bed? (And far too many pairs were dusty!). If I’m not using it, I guess I don’t like it all that much!

Perhaps what surprised me the most was the amount of variety I found in my new minimalist wardrobe. I rarely felt like I wore the same outfit twice, partly because so many items were interchangeable. I kept creating new outfits, amazed at the seemingly endless options. I also wore every single item in my closet, so it could take weeks before I circled back to a certain skirt or top.

My mornings also became stress free. I was no longer wasting time looking for lost or hidden items, and gone were the days where I felt like I had nothing to wear. I simply wanted to wear everything.

As the months wore on I had to face another certain truth: I could now go weeks without doing laundry, waiting until I was down to the very last outfit. Meanwhile back home, I was doing laundry every single week. Not because I didn’t have enough clothes to wear but because despite the insane amount of clothes

I owned, I kept wearing the same few outfits. I didn't really need all those extra clothes.

When we finally moved back to the United States, unpacking the boxes in our storage unit felt a little like Christmas. I'd forgotten most of what was in there, especially when it came to shoes and clothes. What a difference from the year before when I was sobbing over green flats I never wore! I couldn't remember what I had kept, let alone what I'd parted with!

Today my inner minimalist tries to keep our wardrobe in check. Not only do I faithfully practice the one in, one out rule, I make sure that we actually use what's in our closet.

An easy practice is to switch all your hangers around. When you wear an item, turn the hanger in the other direction. At the end of the year (or the end of a season) it'll be all too clear what you haven't been wearing and what needs to go in a donation pile. (Note: if hangers facing the other direction will make you batty, try adding a mark to the hanger or a twistie tie—some other indicator that works for you.)

In my interpretation of minimalism, I don't feel I need to cap myself off at a total number of pants or pairs of shoes, but that might be how you define your minimalism. A lot of minimalists limit themselves to forty to fifty hangers.

For me, the goal of minimalism isn't necessarily about having too few things but making sure that I actually use everything I have, and that I use it with some frequency and regularity. (I find this notion indirectly forces me to have less rather than more, but at least I'm not imprisoned by an arbitrary number.)

So what does a minimalist's wardrobe look like? His or her favorite clothes and nothing else. Everything in the closet is worn and enjoyed. Remember, your house is not a storage facility and those threads can serve a better purpose than languishing in your closet.

Before you start going through your closet, consider picking out a color palette and actively wearing fewer colors. Most of us already have a handful of colors we like to wear more than others, so you won't be limiting yourself as much as you think. Pick a palette of your best or most beloved colors and stick to those. Having a color scheme will make pairing down a lot easier, especially when you get to shoes, belts, handbags, and other accessories. Plus as I learned living abroad, it will ultimately give you more options!

When sorting clothes, shoes, and accessories, create four piles: keep, sell, donate, or discard.

If you come across clothes that are too big (with the exception of maternity wear if you are a woman planning another pregnancy) donate it. If you come across clothes that are too small but you want to keep them for after weight-loss, pick a small suitcase's worth (donate the rest), and box them up. They'll be waiting for you when you're ready, but they won't clutter your closet in the meantime.

Questions to ask yourself about shoes:

1. Are they comfortable?
2. Could I walk around the mall in them?
3. Are they dusty?
4. How many times have I worn them this week?
5. How many times have I worn them this year?
6. Can I name five outfits I can wear these shoes with?
7. When is the next time I'm going to wear them?
8. Do I really love them? Is this my favorite pair of shoes?
9. Is this a duplicate pair? (i.e., Have I already set aside another pair of black dress shoes?)

10. If I lost these shoes in a fire, would I buy replacements?

Questions to ask yourself about clothes:

1. Is it damaged or otherwise needing repairs?

2. Does it fit well?

3. Is it trendy or a basic piece?

4. How many times have I worn this item in the last month?

5. How many times have I worn this item in the last year?

6. Can I make five outfits with this item?

7. Is this a "just in case" or "what if" item?

8. When is the next time I'm going to wear this?

9. If I lost this item in a fire, would I buy a replacement?

10. Do I really love it?

11. Do I get a lot of compliments when I wear this?

12. Is it a duplicate? (i.e., Have I already set aside another black dress?)

What to do with your old clothes:

- Resale (or Trade)

Crossroads Trading (crossroadstrading.com)

Second Time Around (secondtimearound.net)

Buffalo Exchange (buffaloexchange.com)

Beacon's Closet (beaconscloset.com)

Swapstyle (swapstyle.com)

Dig N' Swap (dignswp.com)

ThredUP (thredup.com)

(Also check for non-chain resellers and local consignment shops in your area)

Freecycle (freecycle.org)

(Also check for clothing swaps in your community—search online or try the local paper. You can also host a clothing swap party with your friends or organize one through your place of worship).

- Donate

Donate My Dress (donatemydress.org)

Nationwide Directory (donationdropoff.org)

Goodwill (goodwill.org)

Salvation Army (www.use.salvationarmy.org)

Out of the Closet (outofthecloset.org)

Many donation places will come pick up your clothing or furniture for free—you don't even have to make a trip!

- Recycle

My husband had a lot of old t-shirts from college that were sentimental but not wearable, so we turned them into a quilt. This is a great idea for old t-shirts as well as baby clothes.

Old clothes can also work as rags for cleaning!

If you're crafty, check websites like Pinterest for ideas how you can turn old items into new projects.

Final thoughts

Just to be clear, I still enjoy my clothes and take pride in my appearance. Since becoming somewhat of a public figure I've made a good effort to look more stylish too. Point is, you don't have to dress like a monk to be a minimalist!

That's not the goal. The goal is to wear everything, and love your clothes. You *can* be a stylish minimalist!

In some ways, being a minimalist has made me a better dresser. I'm much more careful and thoughtful about my purchases. If I don't like any of the jeans the store has, or none of them fit me well, or perfectly match my wardrobe at home, I'll wait. Another store, another day.

I also pick quality pieces that cost a little more but last a lot longer (which means I buy and spend less in the end). As much as I used to love H&M and Forever 21, their stuff never held up for me. I finally got to a point where I'd rather have two nice items that last years than a bag of clothes for the same price that last a few washes.

Another discovery: I find sales racks (and cheap items) increase my compulsion to buy, and to buy something I probably wouldn't normally buy—a la "But it's a deal!" or "But it's only \$5!" This is what got me in trouble in the first place. I was a glutton for BOGO at Payless and ended up with far too many pairs of shoes I never wore. Remember, sales racks are designed to convince us to buy something we normally wouldn't!

Lastly, minimalism (and living abroad with fewer items) has helped me come to accept I am not my wardrobe. Yes I like to look nice and feel sexy but shoes don't make this girl. Confidence looks better on me than any designer dress. (Speaking of which, don't buy, rent! Renttherunway.com).

Keep working at your closet. It might take a few go rounds at the rodeo before you totally wrangle it all in, but that's okay—progress not perfection!

(End of this sample)

Enjoy the preview?

Order now at:

<http://happyherbivore.com/minimalist-monday-books/>