

## Simply Live and Share-It

In Marleburg, Germany, six women on a university volleyball team decided it was gross how much stuff so many people have that they don't use, when so many in the world don't have things they need. Seriously, closets, attics, garages and storage rooms are full of all kinds of things that people never use. It costs them money and worry, which causes stress, just to store and possess all that crap.

Over excellent German beer in the Rathhouse Kneipe, beneath the stone streets of the old town, they discussed economics and accounting, deciding: 1) every asset is a liability, 2) most assets' liabilities are not fairly counted, 3) when an asset's liabilities exceed the benefits of its actual use, it's in one's own self-interest to get rid of it, 4) when the benefits of others' use of an asset exceed the benefits of one's own use, it's to our collective benefit to give others the asset, and 5) we'd all be better off if we'd help people understand this and give away their inadequately used stuff to those who make better use of it.

They discussed how when you own stuff you incur real costs just to have it. You need space for it, and that costs rent money. If it's valuable, you pay to insure it against loss. To maintain its value, you have to maintain its condition, and that costs personal time and effort, even if we pay others to do that for us. It costs headspace to think about it and worry about not losing it. Many of us hide stuff away just to be able to avoid dealing with it, because that costs us thought, effort and energy. Yet, it's still in our heads and physical spaces somewhere, affecting us unconsciously. Putting things away in boxes is kind of like repressing an emotion or trauma. There are costs to that, even if we ignore them.

They talked about clothing, for example. A hundred years before, common people commonly only had a few changes of clothing: sleep clothes, work clothes, everyday not work clothes, and something fancy. That was plenty. They were all used regularly, and were often special and distinctive, something people put themselves into, with character and personal hand stitching. It all fit easily in one suitcase. Today, women commonly have 50 pairs of shoes and 100 outfits. Most aren't very special. We spend tons of time and money getting and managing it all, thinking about it and changing clothes. Is that better?

They tried an experiment together. Each would try to live 3 months with only three changes of clothing. At the end of that time, they joined again over beer and shared experiences. Kind of to their surprise, they discovered they really liked it. Life was so much simpler and easier. They found they took more care to choose clothing they really felt good in, and they really felt good wearing those clothes. Absolutely, nobody spoke ill of them for it. The guys didn't even seem to notice. (Gisela had asked a few guys about it, and they said, basically, they rarely even notice clothes. They notice the girl in them and how she radiates, her feelings, bearing and personality. (One admitted, honestly, if a little smirkingly, he secretly imagines what the girl looks like without clothes.) They felt amazingly liberated somehow.

They tried another experiment. During the long winter break, each would take only 3 changes of clothing and what would fit in their small school bags and travel by train in Europe for a month and see what that felt like, versus carting a big bag with all kinds of things in it. Afterwards, they met again over beer and shared experiences. Without exception, they loved it. It was so free. All they had to worry about was a little shoulder bag they were used to carrying around anyway. They didn't have to hurry to find a place to stay when they arrived in a new place, just to be able to get rid of a suitcase. So, they were open to exploring more beforehand and found better places to stay, often with people they'd met,

for no money. They didn't really care much if the bag got stolen, because it had so little in it, and it would be so easy to replace, so they were more open and carefree. In every situation, they had plenty.

They did other little experiments, like trying to keep it simple in the kitchen, with fewer implements, utensils and such, and clearing out what wasn't really needed in their rooms. In every case, they found they liked the simpler ways with less stuff better. It felt better, freer and easier. Together, it all added up to feeling much better about their lives. They had more time, needed less stuff, needed less money, had more clutter-free physical and head spaces, spent more time doing what they really enjoyed, and spent more time doing what they actually valued. They were and felt lighter and freer, which was good.

After graduating, they decided to do something with what they'd learned in these experiences. In 2021, they built a website and accompanying materials presenting the merits of simpler living with less stuff. They helped people conduct simpler living experiments in their lives and captured user experiences in stories and testimonials on their site or *OurStories*. That evolved and got better. It was like dieting for materialism, and it started snowballing. They called it *Einfach Leben*, like Simple Life, Let's Simply Live, or Live Simply. It spread as fashion through Europe quickly, and more gradually beyond Europe.

Looking back on it, it seems obvious, but they quickly started encountering challenges about what to do with all the stuff people were getting rid of. Some tried to sell it, but that was a hassle many weren't interested in. Some felt bad about just donating to something like the Starvation Army, because the stuff had been personal and important to them, and that seemed too impersonal and cheap somehow. Some just threw stuff away, but that was dumb, because most of the stuff was still good and useful.

It took a while to work it all out, but what they ended up with was a related site they called *Share-It* for listing things people were releasing, with descriptions and photos. People could list anything legal, and others would contact them to get it. It was all gifting, so there were no taxes. There was a challenge with profiteers trying to scoop up good stuff free to sell for profit, which went against the spirit of sharing abundance freely, but they found ways to limit that. Children's clothing and toys was a great category of stuff people got rid of when they no longer needed them, because their children had grown out of them, but which new families with financial struggles benefitted greatly from receiving at no cost.

Later, they encountered categories of things people didn't want to get rid of, for various reasons, but weren't using much. Like, many women didn't want to get rid of their wedding dresses, for sentimental reasons, but they'd never use that dress again, even if they married again. And, many women who couldn't really afford it were spending big money on wedding dresses they'd only use once. The site developed an ability for people to offer things to loan or share and return. Like, a woman could offer to loan a certain sized wedding dress, connect with a bride, loan her the dress, and create good feeling and relationship in the process. That aspect of the site took off also, creating lots of good win-win stories.

As all this developed, they encountered situations of surpluses of certain kinds of things people were wanting to gift that there wasn't enough local demand for, like common clothing, kitchenware and toys. They began helping people donate those things to people who needed them in other parts of the world.

Those women and their staff made enough money to support simple lifestyles, via sales of content helping people live simpler with less stuff. You don't have to be rich to live simply. They were happy. Their efforts helped others live simpler and be happier, freer and more fulfilled, and they helped needy people get things for free. That's the real wealth return. They're widely honored for their contributions.

In 2060, it's estimated \$600 billion worth of goods have been transferred through *Einfach Leben* efforts, with incalculable positive impacts through reductions of waste, consumption, excess production and energy use, positive uses, and through various intangible benefits of simpler living.