

**Finding happiness through simplification:
“Life may be sweeter for this, I don't know,
See how it feels in the end...”**

By Jill Matlow, Wall Street Dead aHead Family Member



Photo courtesy of pixabay.com

“We would all like to be able to live an uncluttered life, a simple life, a good life.”

Jerry Garcia did have a way with words, didn't he? He was so philosophical at times and before Marie Kondo's bestselling novel *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* hit the bookshelves, Jerry seemed to have his finger on the pulse regarding simplicity and living the good life. He was a true visionary in every sense of the word.

Recently, I found myself taking stock of my life contemplating how I could garner more joy by simplifying my world and ridding it of clutter. Speaking of clutter, it's no surprise that most New Yorkers live in apartments the size of a shoe box so clutter is not really an option. But clutter can be metaphorical—you can “clutter” your life with bad jobs and bad relationships too—none of which are healthy for you. It's only after you “free up space” that the light can come shining through.

I did eventually pick up a copy of Marie Kondo's book and it was "life changing"! She instructs her readers to discard or donate items which no longer bring them joy. It's really an emotional process which you could also apply to friendships, relationships and jobs. If someone or something isn't bringing you joy, it might be time for you to make a change.

With so many things spiraling out of our control these days, we should try to cultivate as much happiness and joy as we can in our lives. With that in mind, I wondered if my fellow WSDaH Family members were also fans of living a more simple life as Jerry espoused, or if they were having difficulty "letting go" of what was not really serving them on their road to happiness. Their stories will hopefully surprise and enlighten you...

"We would all like to be able to live an uncluttered life, a simple life, a good life."

"It's a tricky one isn't it? Even Jerry struggled with this one later in life with multiple women, children, and homes with their trappings. My biggest understanding about the Grateful Dead and especially Jerry is constant duality, yin and yang, simultaneously at all times. An uncluttered life? Jerry left one of the most cluttered estates only eclipsed by Bob Marley who didn't attempt a will. Marley said everyone will reveal themselves as they truly are after my death, paraphrased. We certainly did when Jerry died.

I'm learning from Jerry's successes and failures. I've struggled with depression and still do. As far as I experience joy I tend to go the opposite direction with or without drugs. But now, I'm much better at choosing my thoughts more carefully. Practicing meditation is a huge help. Let thoughts drift past and don't hold on if possible. Easier said than done. When I dedicate myself to a project I never quit and that's not good. Sometimes you have to 'unclutter' and let go of the dream.

My family and I recently moved to Asheville from Los Angeles. One of the biggest benefits of seeking a smaller life is having real friends and building a community. In a year and half of assimilating we routinely see a large group of people monthly at different times. We traded more surface exchanges within a 1-2 hour period for day or night long raves with everyone's family present.

Instead of being paid the six figure salary I used to earn, I use my music background as a volunteer for public radio station 103.3. I've just returned to my childhood and give my time for free in exchange for a radio show I can program and host. I used to play my favorite songs as mix tapes or 'Nathan Tapes' and interpret them through dance for my friends for free in Grateful Dead parking lots. Now I'm doing it again for a listenership of 10,000...a real community of music lovers who appreciate my wide range of tastes.

None of this joy in Asheville would have been possible if we didn't actively seek an uncluttered life, a simple life, a good life for our hearts, minds, and souls."

[Nathan D Duvall](#) - Publisher - Producer - Drummer - Resin '87 Dead Head!

“If a cluttered desk represents a cluttered mind what does an empty one indicate?”

“This quote was pinned to my wall throughout most of my life. In addition to a cluttered desk, I also considered myself a collector (hoarder?). I loved physical items that reminded me of good times: photos, medals from sleepaway camp, greeting cards from family/friends, RSVPs from my bat mitzvah, concert ticket stubs and so much more. For years I felt so much joy from all this stuff even if I barely looked at it. But life shifts and as George Carlin put it so eloquently: ‘That’s the meaning of life—trying to find a place to keep your stuff.’

You go to college and can only bring so much stuff with you. You graduate from college only to find that your mom is moving to AZ and you have to move in with your dad who you haven’t lived with since you were 9 years old so you hold even tighter to your physical memories because life is fragile and you are scared and you need those things to make you smile. You land your dream job in the music business, move to NYC and live in a pretty small room. Now you get to collect TONS of music memorabilia (yeah!) and CDs (FREE)! And from there it snowballs...roommates, boyfriends, marriage, kid and a storage unit. I filled that storage unit with the old stuff and new collectibles like Star Wars toys, Playbills, concert t-shirts, backstage passes and signed memorabilia.

My dad moved to NYC so I ended up sharing a storage unit with him for years. He unfortunately has not been well and frankly doesn’t know what day it is. Dad’s stuff was becoming an extra cost that no one needed, but the idea of letting go of my/his stuff felt overwhelming. It was time for me to clean out the clutter. I rummaged through tons of ‘stuff’ and suddenly realized and understood that the memories weren’t in those items. The memories were in my heart, my mind, my soul and who I am today. Musical memories stemming from listening to early rock and roll with my dad in his car or going to Broadway with my mom. Camp memories that continue on through my friendships with my camp friends and watching our kids play together. This massive storage unit was compressed into 9 bins of stuff, which I still plan on clearing out over the next 3 months. I feel so much lighter after purging these items and I know I’ve taken a burden off my daughter who would have had to deal with all of this stuff one day (as I did for my dad).

I am still proud of being the kid with the messy desk, but I am happier knowing that I have a lot less physical stuff and more space in my brain to relive those memories.”

[Hillary Zuckerberg](#), Director, Artists Against Hunger & Poverty, [WhyHunger](#)

“The International If I Only List”

“When I turned 30, I created what I refer to as the ‘International If I Only’ list. Each morning when I awoke, I would go to the kitchen to make my coffee. Before my first sip I would say the following, ‘I have everything on the International If I only List. My only problem is to find my dreams because I have no reason not to make them come true’. And then I would take inventory: I slept in a bed last night. With a roof over my head. I’ve never known real hunger. I have clean water to drink whenever I need it as well as whenever I want it. I’m luckier than most of the planet. I have my health. I have access to good medical care. I have an education. I have a job. I have a way to get back and forth to my job. I am luckier than most of the planet. I am not alone. I have friends & family who care for me. I’m luckier than most of the planet. I’ve travelled the world and had adventures people dream of, I’ve known love and survived tragedy. I’m luckier than most of the planet. I’m luckier than most of the planet. It’s really that simple. Take inventory of the good stuff. Put it somewhere you can access it easily. Use it often and take good care of it. You have to be ready to give everything for anything new you take.

Uncluttering has been a more difficult challenge. They say the first step to uncluttering is to stop bringing home new stuff and then purge what you don’t use. I’m good at getting rid of the tangible stuff. I won’t even bring bar-mitzvah giveaways into the house anymore but the real clutter that was wreaking havoc couldn’t be put in a recycle bin.

When I was young, I considered myself a fixer, always ready to help a friend, a stranger, a coworker. I would listen to their problems and try to solve them. Offering suggestions of what they could do would always end up as something I had to do. My life was cluttered with other people’s stuff. Emotional stuff they didn’t want, they didn’t use, they didn’t need and they were never gonna take back from me.

I stopped bringing in the new stuff when I realized that most people don’t want someone telling them what to do. The smart ones already know and when they’re good and ready they will get it done. Most people just want someone to listen and acknowledge that life is indeed tough. I focused on listening instead of doing. I got better at asking people if they wanted my suggestions before I volunteered any. I got better at asking people if they wanted help finding a solution before I took their problems home with me.

Just like with other kinds of stuff, once I started to let go of other peoples’ problems, I could find things more easily. Find better more meaningful relationships. Find better balance between work and family. Find some quiet spaces in my brain I never knew existed.

[Naomi Margolin](#), VP, National Sales, [ArmadaCare](#)

“David Wish, please go and take a seat in the hall!”

“I heard those words frequently in first grade. I had a hard time sitting still, liked to make the other kids laugh and when I didn’t like a lesson or an assignment, I tended to be vocal about it. My dyslexia diagnosis landed me in the ‘slow’ reading group. Progressive educators today would probably call a kid like me an active learner’. Less imaginative educators would likely chalk it up to Attention Deficit Disorder.

In any event, as my teacher sought a little respite from my antics, the hallway became a sort of a second classroom for me. It was in the hallway that I learned that my teachers and I didn’t always see eye to eye on matters of instruction or classroom management. I also learned that I was, in some respects, a little bit of an outsider.

School music classes during my youth were uninspired and de-motivating. My teachers were into nursery rhymes and classical music and I was into rock ‘n’ roll. I longed for instruments like guitars and drums and to learn music by feeling, not reading. However, as a public school music student in the seventies and eighties, the music that my community and I loved and to which we were meaningfully and authentically connected was nowhere to be found in my school.

Motivated by my love of music, I did short stints in our school chorus, orchestra and jazz band. Like most of my peers, I quit each within a year or two. I had two primary takeaways as a child from these experiences: 1). The music we were learning in school was ‘boring’ and 2). I lacked musical ability. This was validated by more than one music teacher.

I believed those teachers and felt deficient, a feeling that was already familiar to me as a student. I had failed the first grade long before I had ‘failed’ music class. The sting of flunking first grade was much stronger as it set me apart from all of my classmates. But it was a solace to me that most of my friends ‘failed’ music education as well. The majority of us became music education ‘drop outs’ and there was no stigma in it. Learning how to play guitar outside of school with my high school friends convinced me that I did indeed have musical ability.

I taught 1st grade for ten years and, along the way, began offering free guitar classes to children at my school. In it, I did the OPPOSITE of everything I could remember from my own music classes. I let the kids pick the songs and learn by playing instead of forcing them to read music first. This early work as an elementary school teacher providing an extra-curricular guitar club lead me somewhere I never would have expected.

Fast forward to 2002. I founded a nonprofit organization called Little Kids Rock in order to bring the transformational gift of music education to children who otherwise might not receive it. Since its founding in 2002, Little Kids Rock has brought the transformational gift of music education to over 850,000 children in over 400 cities throughout the US.

The irony of ME becoming a leader in the field of music education is not lost upon me. The empathy I feel for students who love music but may not LIKE music classes gives me a valuable outsider's perspective and helps me to lead efforts to make music education more democratic, representative and reflective of the kids it serves. This has brought simplicity, meaning and happiness to my life in many ways."

[David Wish](#), CEO, [Little Kids Rock](#)

So many diverse stories to inspire and motivate us toward a better life. Can you relate? Are you ready to do some "spring cleaning" to simplify your life? "*Feels like it might be alright...*"