

Chapter 40

Frugal Living for Our Collective and Mutual #Bestlife on a Distributed and Global Electronic Hive Mind

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ABSTRACT

What is not as commonly identified as an optimal life #bestlife is living #frugal, and yet, there is a global electronic hive mind about how to live sparingly based on highly variant local realities. There are blogs about living on a shoestring, stretching funds, cooking in, engaging in a DIY economy (bartering with like-minded others), living off the grid, taking low-cost and simple vacations, maintaining a food garden, raising food animals, and forgoing the more spendy aspects of modern living. The narrative goes that saving up and retiring early enables low-pressure and intentional lifestyles (and an ability to focus on family and friends), low-carbon footprints (with low impacts on the environment), and the embodiment of a frugal virtue. This chapter explores what a #frugal living EHM looks like and how it brings together people around shared values and lifestyle practices for personal peace of mind, social justice, and long-term sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Without frugality none can be rich, and with it very few would be poor. - Samuel Johnson

Many people take no care of their money till they come nearly to the end of it, and others do just the same with their time. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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In terms of most people's #bestlife (that leads to others' jealousy and plenty of FOMO) in the materialistic West, there are various sorts of selfie-shared (or paparazzi-captured) depicted acts:

- The pursuit of ostentatious and expensive pleasure (jets, parties, high fashion, luxury bling, spa vacations, and shopping sprees),
- Having the perfect family (well set and not a hair out of place),
- Dating up (and often),
- Experiencing various acts of daring (jumping out of planes, buidering, bungee jumping, and other risk-taking),
- Hanging out with friends in various exotic locations, and
- Simply being famous, among others.

And yet, there is a narrative of frugal living on social media that has attracted adherents from around the world. Some human behaviors involve personal decisions and actions at a ground level that taken together have a larger impact on the environment and on others. There is an “emergent” aspect to individual actions taken collectively and writ large. Sometimes, the individual actions are merely individual choices, and others are somewhat coordinated. Some electronic hive minds (EHMs) can speak into such collective spaces and encourage collective awarenesses and behaviors of various types (Hai-Jew, 2019). “Frugality” or a kind of resourcefulness and avoidance of waste (of money or material resources) is one of these phenomena. People choose how they want to use their moneys and resources, and their consumption affects others' livelihoods, the respective product and service supply chains, the natural environment, and other outcomes.

Being frugal (or frugal living) goes against some of the core assumptions of economics: that people's appetites are insatiable and unlimited in a resource-constrained environment. No amount fully satisfies people's appetites, so some constraints have to be applied—such as people's financial wherewithal.

There are some “stars” (personalities) and “models” in this space:

- A “zero-waste” young woman becomes well known for apparently being able to condense all her garbage for four years in a small glass jar (East, July 6, 2016). Everything else, she says, has been composted or recycled. She is working hard on maintaining a light “carbon footprint.” Her achievements have sparked a “zero-waste” movement with others working towards similar goals.
- Two young men host a podcast about frugal living in the finance realm. (They advertise themselves as “frugal dudes.”)
- Several different families share on social media about their living off-the-grid and simply, while raising children. For some of the families, they have a rental that they use for funding; others have a retirement fund, built up during years of intense and often lucrative careers (and ensuing burn-out). Their stories are similar in that they live in nature, raise their own food, hunt in-season, and provide for themselves through sparse resources.
- Some have stories of leaving high-powered careers in order to live off savings in urban environments, with some traveling globally and sharing their adventures.
- Others are living carefully off of their social media presences. They use advertising funds and company-provided funds for their travels and then provide reviews and evaluations to their huge populations of followers. Various world travelers visit different locales, and they share photos of

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