



# BE THE CHANGE

ROB GREENFIELD'S

*- Call to Kids -*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE  
*in a* MESSED-UP WORLD



ROB GREENFIELD AND  
ANTONIA BANYARD



*Rob Greenfield's followers from around the world, like the ones in these photos, are making positive changes every day to create a more sustainable world.*





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GREYSTONE KIDS

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To all the family,  
community, and teachers  
who raised me to be a  
good human. To all the  
teachers dedicated to  
educating and loving the  
children of the world. To  
all the people serving as  
positive role models for  
the younger generation.  
To all the children and  
young adults standing up  
for a better world. This  
book is dedicated to you.  
—Love, Rob

For S and B, always,  
and their generation.  
And the next one.  
And the one after that.  
And the one after that.  
—Toni

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—INTRODUCTION—

# How to Be the Change You Wish to See in the World

AS YOU READ THESE PAGES, you'll get to know me as the guy who walked around New York City for a month, wearing all his trash; biked across the United States on a bamboo bicycle; lived off the grid in a tiny house; dove into thousands of grocery store dumpsters... and ate food from them!

I'm an activist and adventurer on a mission to inspire positive change in the world.

But I wasn't always this way.

Growing up in a small town in Wisconsin, I loved to spend every moment I could playing outside with frogs and turtles, and fishing.

When I was about eight I learned that some frogs were growing an extra pair of legs because of toxic pollution. I remember photos of birds



My mom took me and my brothers and sister camping in the summers. These experiences inspired my lifelong connection to nature.



covered in black goop from oil spills. But I didn't see how my actions at home or school were really connected to these things. I thought my life was separate from the environment. I might have even thought I was living "environmentally friendly" because my mom taught me the basics, like recycling and conserving water and electricity.

## I want to really be the change I wish to see in the world.

Then, when I was about 25, I realized I had to totally transform my life. I was watching documentaries and reading books and I learned that my daily actions—the food I was eating, the shiny car I was driving, the clothes I was wearing, and all the stuff I had collected—were contributing to the destruction of the environment. I was part of the reason those frogs were mutating and birds were covered in oil.

So I set out to change my life. Rather than feeling overwhelmed and scared, I made a list of positive changes I could make and then committed to making at least one every week. I started with small steps, like eating more fresh fruits and veggies instead of packaged foods, and worked up to big changes, like getting rid of my gas-guzzling car. Every time I did something that was good for the Earth, it was also good for me. With these changes, I was becoming much happier and much healthier.

I decided to become an environmental activist. And that's when all the adventures began.

I want to lead by example, but I also want to live my message out loud. I want to really be the change I wish to see in the world, to quote the well-known expression by Gandhi. So I embark on extreme adventures that are designed to catch the attention of people and the media. My goal isn't to get anyone to do exactly what I'm doing.



Instead, I want to inspire people to ask themselves questions about the way they're living. And if they don't like the answers, I want to empower them to change for the better. That's where you come in.

In this book, you're going to learn a lot. The first four pages of each chapter will give you information about one aspect of your life, like trash, or food, or water, or energy. That information might get you thinking. You might even feel overwhelmed. But this isn't a book of problems. It's a book of *solutions*.

The next two pages of each chapter will tell you the story of my adventures. Perhaps my journey will inspire you by demonstrating what one person can do.

The last two pages of each chapter offer ideas about what you can do, or what other people are already doing to be part of the solution. My hope is that these ideas will give you the tools to be the change you wish to see in the world.

1

# STUFF

—WHAT'S THE ISSUE?—

## Clutter Culture

**OPEN YOUR CLOSET.** Look in your drawers, cupboard, backpack—everywhere you keep stuff. Do you need it all? Do you love it all? If you don't, you're like most of us. You have too much stuff. But we love stuff. And there's more of it available, often for less money, than ever before. Thanks to online shopping and big-box stores, we can buy more and more stuff anytime, anywhere. And while that sounds like a good thing, it's really not.





## More Stuff, Bigger Houses

So how much stuff do we really have, and how much of it is necessary? On average, American children receive 70 new toys a year, and while 10-year-olds in the United Kingdom typically own more than 200 toys, they actually play with only a dozen or so.

Where do we keep all that stuff? The typical American house is about 2,500 square feet (232 m<sup>2</sup>), almost three times larger than the average house in the 1950s, even though families are smaller than they used to be.

And still, our bigger houses aren't big enough. So some people rent storage units. Since 2015, the self-storage industry has grown almost three times faster than the population has.

## The Clutter Blues

Surprisingly, all of our extra possessions are not necessarily making us happier. In 1957, just over one-third of Americans described themselves as "very happy." Since then, despite buying more every year, Americans are no happier.

Once our basic needs are comfortably met, more doesn't always mean better. You might notice that you don't love everything in your closet or on your shelves. If you had only one pair of jeans, you'd be very happy to have it, but your 50th pair won't make you 50 times happier.

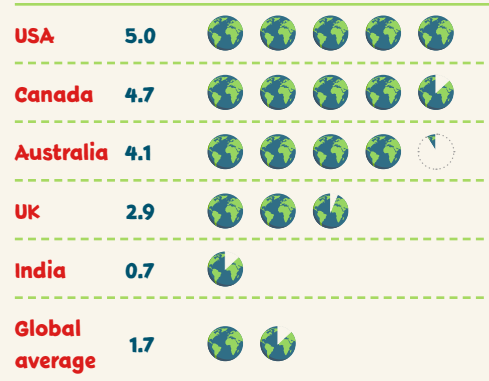
## One-Planet Living

All this getting and spending is not making our planet happier either. To make our stuff, raw materials are extracted from the Earth. Forests are chopped down by logging and mountains carved up by mining. Tons of electricity and fossil fuels (meaning coal, oil, and gas) are used to run machines and factories.

Raw materials and finished products are then shipped around the world. That shipping uses even more electricity and fossil fuels. Then we burn more fossil fuels to get to stores in our cars.

Throughout this entire process, pollution and toxic waste are created and dumped back into the environment—our air, oceans, and forests.

The average American will consume as many resources as 35 average people in India or 53 in China. This is how many Earths we would need if the world's population lived like:



We are currently using up more resources than the Earth can regenerate each year. That's a planet-sized problem. What's the solution? That's what this book is about.

## EXTREME COLLECTORS

Between 5 and 14 million people in the United States are compulsive hoarders, people who collect and keep so much stuff that it interferes with their daily lives or creates health hazards. Most children enjoy collecting something, like rocks, coins, or stuffed animals. But for some, the urge to collect can become uncontrollable, even in children as young as 11 years old.

People who hoard might get worried and anxious when thinking about what to keep and what to throw away. While some may also suffer from other mental illnesses, many live relatively typical lives. As well, hoarders can learn ways to resist the urge to acquire more stuff.

Some people hoard books, electronic files, or even animals.



—WHAT DID ROB DO?—

## Stuck With Stuff

**AS A KID, I LOVED STUFF.** I collected coins, rocks, cards, stamps, action figures, little cardboard milk caps called “pogs,” anything! My family was living below the poverty line, and I was embarrassed about that. I thought my stuff would impress my friends. The paint was peeling off our house and our car was rusty. But hey, I had the most Beanie Babies!



I had about 700 Beanie Babies, including 13 of the exact same monkey, Bongo. But this turtle was much more interesting.

trash the planet with my stuff anymore. I started to get rid of my things.

I went through everything I owned. I asked myself if each thing was bringing value to my life or taking away time and money. I considered whether I'd used it in the last six to twelve months. If not, I got rid of it. I took a lot to thrift stores or gave it away or sold it. What couldn't be donated went to recycling or the landfill (which was my last resort). I did this for a few years and continuously halved my stuff until I got down to 111 possessions.

### Big Stuff, Big Money

As I got older, my stuff got bigger and more expensive. I bought a car—two!—and a boat. To pay for it all, I worked long hours.

After college, I started traveling. For five months, I carried everything I needed in my backpack. And I learned I didn't need as much as I'd thought I did.

Around this time, I was also reading and learning about the impact of my actions on the world around me. I thought, “Hey, I'm spending all my time making money to buy more stuff.” It didn't make sense. I wanted to be free. I didn't want to

### Small Space, Less Stuff

I watched *The Story of Stuff* (see link in Resources), which is about how creating, transporting, and disposing of stuff is so destructive. That video really woke me up and motivated me.

Eventually, I got rid of my car. That was a big change. Without a trunk, I couldn't carry so much around.

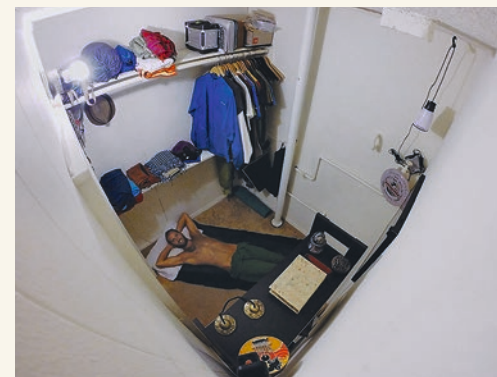
Then I made my living space smaller. I moved from the largest bedroom in my apartment into a closet. It was a challenge to see if I could fit into a space that small.



Here I am in 2020 with my 44 possessions. Sometimes I have more, sometimes less, depending on where I live or what I'm doing, but I always aim to live with less.

Not everyone can or wants to live with only 111 possessions. We're all unique. But is there one thing you could live without? Or two, or a hundred?

Will you find freedom in owning less, like I did? Only you can answer that question.



### SOMETIMES THE LITTLE THINGS ARE THE HARDEST



One of the hardest things to get rid of was small—my smartphone. It was a great tool, but I knew I had an unhealthy relationship with it. I started leaving my phone at home when I went out. That felt good.

At home, though, my phone and I were still connected at the hip. So I did an experiment: I put it in a drawer for a month. And yes, I could live without a phone! Finally, I canceled my cellphone plan. I felt free!



—WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?—

## Keep It Simple

WHEN ROB WENT TRAVELING AND lived out of his backpack, he discovered he didn't want to be trapped by his stuff. If you think the minimalist life is for you, how do you simplify?



- **Create a place for everything.** If you have a box for games, a shelf for books, and a bin for craft supplies, they'll be easier to find when you need them.
- **Put on a clothing swap** with friends. Donate any unclaimed clothing to a thrift store.
- **Stay positive.** Even if you can only part with one thing today, that's a start.

When you look at your stuff, ask yourself if it's useful or makes you happy. Have you used it in the last six to twelve months? Are you likely to use it soon?

### One Step at a Time

Decluttering will take time and energy—and no, it won't always be fun. It's best to have a plan. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **You might love to spend a whole day** clearing your room and power purging. Or maybe you can only handle half an hour at a time. Try it both ways to find out what works best for you.
- **Set goals**, even if they're small ("I'll declutter one shelf in my closet").
- **Focus on clearing out** what you no longer use, what's broken, or what you've outgrown. No one's asking you to part with your favorite things.



Volunteers for the Little Free Library movement build public bookcases. By the end of 2019, there were more than 90,000 Little Free Libraries across 91 countries.

MAKE  
the **BIG**  
CHANGE

### LIVING WITH LESS

Buying less stuff is just as important as getting rid of your excess. How can you resist the temptation? Start by avoiding the mall. Instead, look for other places to meet with friends. Next, really think about what you have before you buy—and then wait 24 hours before you purchase. You might change your mind.

If not, you probably won't miss it. Could someone else in your family use it? Could you share it with a friend? Maybe you can rent or borrow sports equipment or tools that you only use once in a while.

Not sure you want to get rid of things that were given to you as gifts? Think of it this way: instead of being neglected in your house, the things you donate have a chance to find a meaningful new home and bring value or happiness to someone else. Your unused musical instrument might change someone's life.

Did you find some craft supplies you'd forgotten about? Were you inspired by what you found? It's amazing how clearing up can spark creativity.

Once your room is just the way you like it, find a way to celebrate. Then each time you get something new, get rid of something you already have. That way, your stuff won't pile up again.



—MINIMALIST TEEN—

ISABELLA SYREN'S family committed to living a zero-waste life when she was nine. They slowly made changes, like buying organic food and not using plastic. And even though they live 10 minutes from downtown San Diego, they grow most of their own food. Isabella helps her parents in their backyard garden. She also keeps her stuff to a minimum, including her clothes. "It has taken a few years," she says, "but my friends have come to like my minimal style."

### You Are Trendy

Congratulations! You're now part of a growing trend toward less. Declutter experts and minimalists are popping up everywhere, proudly showing off the mountains of trash bags they're dumping.

Wait a minute! Where's all that trash going? The answer to that question leads us to...