

Life in Colour

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I let the warm air fill me, the birds sing into my ears, and the blades of lush grass tickle my hands. Satisfied by what seemed like a truly immortal moment of ease, I opened my eyes and marveled at the sight before me. The summer sun lit up the field a glowing emerald, the summer breeze made the creamy roses dance, and the air made everything shine, as if happiness had a colour too.

Colour is too often taken for granted. Would this memory smoulder into my mind, in all its Technicolor, if the grass was a desiccated brown or if the dead roses crunched beneath my feet, cracking into pieces of tan? If life was devoid of vibrant colour, would life itself lose its lustre?

I pondered this for the rest of the afternoon, too distracted to resume reading on my picnic blanket. I was too shaken to think of anything else besides the image of a dying Earth, an Earth drained of all its natural beauty because of the human folly of arrogance. As a species sharing the same planet with so many others, it is selfish to take and take and take and not give in return. So this summer, I consumed articles and documentaries voraciously, learning about what I can do to manifest my sudden shift in principles into action that can make a change. It became a personal goal to improve my lifestyle, and perhaps even influence those around me.

After my summer-long crash course on the environment and my footprint upon it, I came across movements that aligned with the same sentiments that I held. My first drastic lifestyle change was to go vegetarian. According to the WorldWatch Institute, 51 percent of total annual greenhouse gas emission is caused by livestock and its byproducts. That trumps the amount of exhaust released by all forms of global transportation combined. While this diet change is

environmentally sound, it is also ethically compliant with my long-time desire to veer from an animal-based diet. As I said, we share this earth with other animals, and this continuous exploitation is something I could no longer agree with. Soon, I will transition into veganism and will cut out animal products altogether.

Although I could not convince my Filipino family to change their diets (a seemingly impossible task, considering our ethnic cuisine), I was successful in asking them to limit energy use at home. According to the David Suzuki Foundation, all forms of electricity are harnessed through resources that contribute to environmental destruction, “from air pollution and global warming to habitat loss and nuclear waste.” We promptly changed our bulbs to energy efficient ones, changed our shower heads to water-conserving ones, and sealed up drafty crevices around the house. A little more challenging was changing our rates of consumption. We vowed to unplug any devices that were not in use, were mindful of which lights we actually needed on and which we could forego, and cut down on using plugged-in devices in general. While I cannot fully attest to my brothers’ online gaming habits, I found that mindful “unplugging” has left more time for me to pursue my creative passions, like art, reading, and writing.

Finally, I discovered the budding lifestyle movement of minimalism. While definitions vary from blog to blog, and minimalist to minimalist, the general sentiment conveys the need to cut down in many aspects of one’s life that put up the facade of “value.” What most newcomers to the movement take from it is that minimalism is connected to materialism and the admonition of it. As a capitalist society, we put too much value on owning things. We are too often emotionally dependent on the brands we wear, the model of car we drive, the bag we tote. We work for our money and “treat ourselves” for working so hard. However, minimalists point out that this feeling of satisfaction is fleeting in the long run.

I stepped back and analyzed my life and saw that I was proving every single tenet of minimalism correct. I had once-worn clothing overflowing from my drawers, cheap broken shoes lying around, and stress every morning trying to figure out what to wear amidst an overabundance of stuff. I thought I was happy, earning and owning all these things. But they didn't make me happy; none of it did. I realized that spending time with family and friends brought me joy, that these memories, like lounging in a lush field on a summer day, are the memories I would remember.

So I began to live life minimally. As I took these nascent steps, I realized the environmental impacts of my actions. I no longer contributed to the ludicrous system of fast fashion, an exploitative industry that sells low-quality products at the expense of sweatshop workers' wages and lives. If I required new additions to my closet, I shopped secondhand. By doing this, I no longer contributed to the squandering of fertile lands for the demand of cotton for new garment production. My grocery shopping ways also faced a paring down. I insisted that my parents reduce their consumption of packaged foods, and instead opt for reusable produce bags and fresh fruits and vegetables. Plastic clamshell containers and paper cartons seldom find themselves in our bins these days.

It would be a bleak life to live without colour, and that might just happen if we don't treat our planet right. This earth blesses us with the breathtaking greens of forests, the infinite shades of ocean blue, and all the colours in between. As temporary tenants, we have an obligation to leave our home in the same state we entered it; as human beings preceding countless other generations, we must have the compassion to leave it in a better state.