



- Home
- Archive
- Columnists
- Video
- Blogs
- Discuss
- About
- Search
- Donate
- Advertise

100 WORDS FOR 100 DAYS
 YOUR VISION FOR OBAMA'S FIRST 100 DAYS IN OFFICE.

18 22 23
19 30

SUBMIT YOUR 100-WORD ESSAY to AlterNet

Environment

Too Much Stuff! America's New Love Affair With Self-Storage

By Martin John Brown, AlterNet. Posted June 4, 2008.

Americans are putting more and more stuff into self-storage purgatory. It's now a \$22 billion-per-year industry, but what does it mean for the soul?

Tools
[EMAIL](#)
[PRINT](#)
[79 COMMENTS](#)

Get AlterNet in your mailbox!

E-mail address

ZIP/Postal code

- Advertisement
- Advertisement
- Advertisement
- Advertisement
- Advertisement

AlterNet Your turn

Support AlterNet

Do you value the information you're getting from AlterNet? Please show your support with a tax-deductible donation.

Feedback

Tell us how we're doing.

Search:

- Advertisement
- Advertisement

A strange new shadow land has grown up in America. It's a world of cinderblock villas and plywood hallways, garish under halogen security bulbs. It clings to the underside of Western towns like Roman catacombs, pushes up funereal fault blocks in urban centers, and festoons suburban freeways with palaces styled after castles and forts. If you could peer inside those locked rooms, you'd see, well, practically any object you could imagine: a pair of skis, five toadstool-style cookie jars, twelve years' back issues of *Martha Stewart Living*, a single broken bed frame, all waiting like Egyptian tomb dressing to serve in some afterlife. But you'd rarely see a person, because all these new, gray places are for stuff.

The "self storage" business started small three or four decades ago, as a few "mini-warehouses" around military bases in the Southwest, according to industry legend. Now it's a \$22 billion-per-year industry, and maybe a whole way of life. Like VCRs and cell phones, self-storage is a product Americans didn't need until they discovered it, and now they can't live without.

The numbers are astounding. According to the Self Storage Association, an industry advocacy group, square footage of rentable storage has increased 740 percent in the past two decades; a *billion* square feet of storage space was created between 1998 and 2005; and there are now 6.8 square feet of storage for every man, woman and child in America. Chris Sonne, a storage expert at Cushman & Wakefield Inc., estimates there are 45,000 storage facilities today compared to zero 50 years ago.

"That's a pace of two or more self-storage facilities opening every day for 50 years," he says. "That beats McDonald's."

It's been a great ride for savvy investors, who watched the business produce impressive rents from inexpensive buildings. Industry giant Public Storage Inc. had total returns of 41 percent, 33 percent, 25 percent and 47 percent for the years 2003-2006, according to Morningstar. Though growth has slowed recently, due to high supply and tight credit, it hasn't stopped, with new development continuing in little-served areas like urban centers. What the hell is going on? Why do Americans crave all this space when they apparently lived fine without it 30 years ago?

There aren't many answers in the press. Storage tends to make the news only when something criminal or titillating happens -- like when a murderer stores body parts in his unit, or Paris Hilton forgets to pay her rent, and her purported party photos and Amsterdam drug notes are auctioned off to the highest bidder.

I walk into the office of a Public Storage facility and talk to "Jack," the manager on duty. (He tells me he could get fired if I used his real name.) With his beard neatly trimmed and his shirt tucked in, he seems grounded and efficient. I ask why demand for his service is so big.

"I guess there are just a lot of pack rats out there," he says without skipping a beat.



storage

Share and save this post:



Also in Environment

Confessions of an Evangelical Tree Hugger
Matthew Sleeth

Environmental Spill Disaster Devastates Tennessee; 48 Times the Size of Exxon Valdez
Matthew McDermott

Breaking the Consumption Addiction: Can You Be Clever?
Gwen Schantz

Maybe Tom Vilsack Isn't the Agricultural Antichrist After All
Kerry Trueman

5 Ways to Usher in the New Green Age
Kevin Danaher, Alisa Gravitz

It's Official: We're Just a Few Years from Peak Oil
George Monbiot

More stories by Martin John Brown

- Environment RSS Feed
- Main AlterNet RSS Feed

Get AlterNet in your mailbox!

... that's the same initial reaction I got from the majority of the 20 people I talked to for this story, from Wall Street analysts to everyday customers. But draw those conversations out a bit, and those pack rats "out there" start looking like everyone you know. The problem isn't just with the crass and slavish mob; more thoughtful types use self-storage too.

E-mail address

ZIP/Postal code

Advertisement

Building on Inertia

Part of the storage boom comes from use by business: Self Storage Association President Michael Scanlon says that perhaps 30 percent of customers are businesses storing records, equipment, inventory and the like. Still, the lion's share of the expansion has come from plain old folks storing their possessions. And every one of them has a story when they show up at Jack's desk.

"When people come in here, they are stressed out," he says. "Maybe their grandma died and left some furniture. Maybe they're moving. Maybe they got a new job."

These are "life events" in the parlance of industry analysts, and they're a gateway into the self-storage universe. Whether the event is good or bad, its high emotions come loaded with the job of dealing with a small mountain of stuff. That's where Jack can step in. A big part of a storage manager's job is unlicensed crisis counseling -- talking the client down a bit, figuring out their plans for the next few hours or months, and getting their possessions off their hands so they can move on with their lives.

"When they leave the office," Jack says, "I want to make sure at least this one thing is resolved for them." Like all of the self-storage managers I met, he is a down-to-earth, no-nonsense person who seems truly interested in helping.

Getting into self-storage is so easy it can be a big relief to someone in the throes of a "life event." There is no need to bother friends or family. There are few, if any, credit checks, reference checks, deposits or long-term leases. The service looks cheap, with typical monthly rents from 50 cents to 2 dollars per square foot. It's getting out that can be the challenge.

Consider a customer like Raeven (yes, her real name), now a preschool worker in Portland, Ore. Nine months ago she was in Ann Arbor, Mich., having a "life event." Her marriage was going to pieces. She retreated to her parents' home in Salem, Ore., and got her stuff into storage there. After a few months, she moved to Portland to start a new life. Now she occasionally goes down to Salem to retrieve things. On a recent visit she extracted some kitchen gear, some books on Jewish studies and 50 pairs of shoes. (There are more.) Her idea is to extricate the rest of the stuff and be out of the unit in a few months. It's a typical plan -- and if Raeven is a typical client, she won't succeed.

"You start off by asking, 'how long do you plan on renting it for?'" says Scanlon. "Almost everybody says 'a month or two.'"

They end up staying a lot longer. Average tenancies nationwide are somewhere between one and two years, say Scanlon and Sonne, and some renters simply never leave.

"I have one renter who's been here since we opened -- in 1990," says Dawn Spencer, a manager at Clackamas River Mini Storage outside of Portland. "He pays automatically, by credit card, never comes in. Lives in another state now."

"It's an industry that builds on inertia," says Paul Adornato, an analyst for BMO Capital Markets. "People would much rather have \$150 withdrawn automatically out of their checking account every month than have to wake up on a Saturday morning, rent a truck, move out the stuff, do something with the stuff ... see what I mean?"

Incident in the Garage

One factor that does *not* explain the storage boom is lack of space in American houses. Over the last three decades, the average new American home has grown by about 900 square feet, according to Census data, while the number of people per household has declined slightly.

"Most of the people we rent to have a garage, an attic and a basement -- can you believe that?" says Scanlon. Seventy-five percent of them own their own homes, he says. They simply have

more and more stuff to manage. Rick, a real estate agent in Macomb County, Mich., is one such "premium residential customer," as Scanlon calls them. He's familiar with self-storage from his job, where he encourages customers to use storage to remove nonessential items and "stage" their homes for sale. He even plays a "decluttering" game with customers a few months later, after the sale, when they're ready to reclaim that excess. Can they even remember what's in there? Almost never, he says.

Rick had his own storage-inducing life event when he moved his father-in-law, who has "a touch of Alzheimer's," into assisted living.

"His house was a nightmare when we moved him out," relates Rick. "His basement was full of crap. His garage was full of crap. His extra bedrooms were full of crap. It's like, 'What do you need this stuff for?'" There wasn't room for it all in his assisted-living apartment, but Rick says his father-in-law couldn't distinguish between irreplaceable items, like old pictures, and replaceable junk like a prefab shelving unit. He wanted to keep it all.

Still, Rick and his wife couldn't exactly throw that crap away. On occasion, the father-in-law asked for specific things -- an old picture, or a book -- and they could hardly deny him such wishes. Rick didn't want to clutter up his own house. A storage unit was the logical solution. Getting a second unit seemed logical, too, when Rick's college-age son went abroad to study and left some things behind -- furniture for his future apartment.

Finally, there was an incident in Rick's garage, which was getting a little crowded with his own stuff. A pile of it fell over and nearly damaged his prized MG roadster. Rick broke the mental seal and put some of his own stuff -- some sports gear and old business papers -- in his father-in-law's unit.

"I've encroached on it 30 percent," he says. Then he works out some math about his storage expenses.

"There's a bit of me that says -- gosh, I'm paying, combined, about \$100 a month. ... I've been doing this for three years ..."

He trails off before he gets to the surprisingly large total.

I ask if the stuff in his two units is worth anything near \$3,600.

"Nope."

Will he keep a storage unit when his father-in-law passes on and his son gets an apartment?

"Probably," he says, after some fumbling. "Just a smaller one."

The Future Beach House

I can't help but get the impression that, like Rick, a good many Americans are in danger of literally getting pushed out of their houses by stuff. It seems odd in a time when eBay, craigslist, freecycle.org and charity pickup services make getting rid of possessions easier than ever.

Adornato has been thinking about those services too.

"All of that helps us to rotate our personal inventories," he says, "but ultimately, we like to accumulate."

The deluge of stuff springs from a combination of instinct and economics, says Cindy Glovinsky, a psychotherapist and author of "Making Peace With the Things in Your Life" (St. Martin's). Humans are programmed to hoard, she says, and "things have gotten cheaper, and more widely available, and more quickly available than ever in history."

It hasn't helped, she thinks, that so many households now have two wage earners. Homemakers used to have time to sort through things and edit them. "But when you work all day," she says, "it seems like a huge burden." Especially when those two wage earners might have completely different ideas about their possessions.

For Eden, a hi-tech sales rep in Boston, her life event came two years ago when she moved from Idaho to Boston so her husband could go to grad school. It meant downsizing from a big suburban house to a standard apartment. There was no way all her husband's things, including a full cocktail bar setup -- he is a mixing aficionado -- could come with them.

My impulse was to get rid of all that stuff and simplify, she says, "but he just has this gene that makes him accumulate stuff."

The compromise was leaving the bar, some furniture, tools and other miscellany in storage in Idaho, a place they weren't likely to live again, ever. It's still there today, rent prepaid, waiting to be rediscovered and reanimated. On some days, thinking about it bothers Eden a lot.

"People in third world countries couldn't even fathom this," she says. "Their houses aren't even as big as our storage unit."

Nonetheless, the storage unit has its usefulness. It prevents a major relationship crisis. And it makes a little down payment on a dream she and her husband have of building a beach house in British Columbia. When they get around to doing that, Eden says, all that stuff could be really useful.

People Substitutes

What's in storage, says Scanlon, doesn't often have great cash value. "It's mostly stuff people have an emotional attachment to," he says. "They think, 'I might need this someday, or the kids might want this.'... That's really what is motivating this."

It doesn't matter if such ideas are patently unrealistic, says Glovinsky: "Parents ought to ask, how much is the kid really going to want?" Rather, she says, they're powerful impulses, tied to instincts about survival and relationships.

"It's normal for people to be attached to objects," she says. "We tend to make do with them as people substitutes, like children with teddy bears, or Tom Hanks with his volleyball (in "Cast Away"). We all do some of that; it's really just a matter of degree."

The first step in addressing a problem with stuff, she emphasizes, is not hiring a dump truck, but acknowledging the powerful emotional interactions everyone has with things. Once you do that, it's easier to be selective -- to pick some objects that represent memories or people or plans for the future, and get rid of the rest.

The Ugly Un-American

It seems so easy to blame the ugly, consuming American for the storage boom, to see spending \$50 or \$150 a month to store junk as a spiritual failing unique to the United States. But Americans aren't storing junk, they're storing dreams -- of days when there will be a better house to move in to, of days with time to read all those magazines and make all those recipes; of kids who honor family ties by keeping grandma's dresser; of doing things they once did again, if only they could get interested again. And it could be those kind of dreams aren't American, they're simply human.

That's what industry pros like Adornato are thinking. The business is already firmly established in Australia and Europe, and Adornato has been talking with storage executives about the experience there.

"The executives said over and over again that once people are aware of the product, their habits were indistinguishable from Americans," Adornato reports. "That is, they like to accumulate stuff; they had more stuff than they wanted to keep in their residence; and they had the same inertia about taking it out."

Sonne is bullish on that mother of all markets, China. "One of the developers in China told me the idea of self-storage works everywhere, because people aren't that different." While it might take time to introduce the concept of storage to Chinese consumers, Sonne says, "once it gets in the psyche of people ... it sort of becomes part of their life."

That means on my next trip to Beijing I might be able to glimpse two Forbidden Cities. The ancient one, full of treasures of jade and calligraphy and hand-wrought bronze, is a museum now, open to the public. But the brand new storage palace, full of magazines and junky bed frames -- or the Chinese equivalent -- will be walled off and secret. I wonder what dreams will lie in state there.

[Digg This Story](#)

See more stories tagged with: **self-storage**

Martin John Brown is a writer and researcher specializing in historical and environmental topics. His work has appeared in Air & Space, Smithsonian, E/The Environmental Magazine, SAIL, Cat Fancy, American Spirit and elsewhere.

Liked this story? Get top stories in your inbox each week from Environment! Sign up now »

Story Tools: [EMAIL](#) [PRINT](#) [79 COMMENTS](#) [Environment »](#)

Advertisement

Advertisement

Comments

Turn comments off sitewide

[Give us feedback »](#)

Comments closed.

The comments for this story have been closed. Thank you to everyone who participated.

View:

Love affair with stuff, and not enough money for a bigger residence.

Posted by: aouie01 on Jun 4, 2008 12:21 AM
Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

[\[Report this comment\]](#)

As more people pour into places where rent or homes are relatively expensive, they settle for places not big enough for all the stuff they like acquiring.
Sincerely,
Aouie

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

- » **RE: Love affair with stuff, and not enough money for a bigger residence.** Posted by: Richard House
- » **You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: Prairie Waif
- » **RE: You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: Richard House
- » **RE: You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: Prairie Waif
- » **RE: You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: Richard House
- » **RE: You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: fork
- » **RE: You *ARE* reading the "Environment" Chapter. Go to. . .** Posted by: Richard House

Its simply part of the greed culture.....

Posted by: Smiggysy on Jun 4, 2008 1:42 AM
Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

[\[Report this comment\]](#)

With the buy & shop till you drop greed culture we have today of course this is going to happen. Decades ago people would use & hang onto their toys & possessions for long periods thus getting more practical use out of them than they do today. Now we have an insane materialistic culture of replacement & disposal, but few actually dispose.

My grandparents owned the same car, white goods & furniture for over 30 years. If you needed a set of golf clubs, boat or an electric saw you borrowed from your friends & neighbors.

Today people change their household possessions every few years. They have 3 cars instead of one. They own EVERYTHING (cause everybody does) they don't talk (let alone socialise) with their own household neighbors.

Problem is also that most people do not cleanse themselves of their old possessions. They hang onto them. Collecting in the sense of a hobby is ok. Hoarding your old shoes, table & tv is not. Gotta put them somewhere.

Most people are too selfish to let go of their old possessions these days. Its a perfect reflection of the selfish society we now live in.

Greed & fear rule everywhere. I disdain these facets of modern western society.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

- » **RE: Its simply part of the greed culture.....** Posted by: richholland
- » **very true IF the corporations reduce their manufacturing based on lack of demand** Posted by: ptown
- » **RE: Its simply; another benefit of buying secondhand clothes: no chemical smell** Posted by: Beck
- » **RE: Its simply part of the greed culture.....** Posted by: TheDreamer
- » **What is a white good?** Posted by: benzene
- » **RE: This is a white good.....** Posted by: Smiggysy

» **RE: INIS IS A WHITE GOOD....** Posted by: astockton

Perhaps now would be the time to consideration true donations and frugality.

Posted by: maxpayne on Jun 4, 2008 5:47 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Why don't we just donate those extras ourselves to those countries we INVADE and RAPE and whose dictators gubbmint keeps financing with our taxpayer money. And let's avoid the middleman. Don't go through religious fundie organizations such as Salvation Army for donating as they are in bed with Al Quaida.

But for starters, let's donate our extras back to China. We could sure as hell use that idea to pay back the mounting debt we owe those poor souls who get sweatshopped to death thanks to the pols and "free" trade.

P.S.: My wife and I have been frugal so we never collected much. Plus, we love our house and don't let money tell us where to move unless my area is completely depleted of careers in our fields in which case we'd have no choice but to move up north.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Perhaps now would be the time to consideration true donations and frugality.**

Posted by: greenPuker

» **RE: Perhaps now would be the time to consideration true donations and frugality.**

Posted by: maxpayne

Dealing with clutter

Posted by: penstamen on Jun 4, 2008 5:55 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

There are a lot of emotional issues tied up with accumulating stuff. FlyLady has some downhome, sensible musings on this, and a plan to help us deal with our clutter issues. Her mantra is "you can't organize clutter" and that is only one of her gems of folksy wisdom. Yup, there's a website! Use your search engine.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Dealing with clutter** Posted by: vstar

Obesity of stuff

Posted by: solitarysherlockian on Jun 4, 2008 6:07 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Stuff is a grown up version, of toys. We play with our stuff. Use some it constantly, some only 'every so often'. But if we put the stuff away and don't use it--what is the point of that stuff? Go on a diet and let it go--save money (the cost of the storage and maybe, the energy if heated/cooled) and have the freedom not being encumbered by stuff.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

symptom of a problem- hyper-materialism

Posted by: Forrest on Jun 4, 2008 6:08 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

"It clings to the underside of Western towns like Roman catacombs, pushes up funereal fault blocks in urban centers....."

self-storage units- where stuff goes to die!

great article!

It reveals the chronic problem that exists in American Culture- hyper-materialism. No, it's not a human universal. The Pakot People of eastern Africa consider "civilisation to a matter of social responsibility", not the wheel, nor massive buildings as western historians would have us believe. Some peoples in different cultures actually judge strangers by their behaviour and not by their clothes nor by the vehicle they're driving.

Infinite needs.

Infinite greed.

materialism and capitalism have altered the very face of this planet earth. from clear-cut forests and open pit mines to artificial mountains of garbage. Alien archaeologists will be able to chronicle the rise.....and fall of "great" human "civilisations" by the garbage they leave behind.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

NEW?

Posted by: billgee on Jun 4, 2008 6:11 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **2** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

What are You Talking About.

*Overstuffed, overstaffed, overdocumented
Americans have been at it for years.*

The Time Has Come Today!

Do Something Now.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

I dont think so

Posted by: RedFoxOne on Jun 4, 2008 6:22 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

The heck with that. Find me a dumpster. I'll throw stuff out before I resort to that. That is crazy!

JT

<http://www.FlreMe.To/udi>

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Craigslist is a great way to give your stuff away ...

Posted by: ptown on Jun 4, 2008 6:26 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Craigslist is a great way to give your stuff away ... you can post "Free _____" and within a few hours, someone else will come and take all your extra crap out of your life. I usually do a once-a-year huge purge and give away lots of stuff. The general "rule" is this: if I haven't worn it, read it, used it, etc... in one year, it's out. This doesn't apply to some irreplaceable things (like old family heirlooms) but overall...yup. I prefer less to more.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Craigslist is a great way to give your stuff away ...** Posted by: toppun» **ha ha ha ...most of it is given to me.** Posted by: ptown**Bucking the trend**

Posted by: Sunfell on Jun 4, 2008 6:53 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I guess I am lucky- the prices for my little storage unit kept creeping up, and the combination of rising prices and financial difficulty made me clean out and close the room. I got rid of most of the stuff, but some of it still clutters my second bedroom. Bit by bit, though, I am sorting through the stuff in there and getting rid of it.

Every box out the door and out of my life is a breath of fresh air. I am learning how to get rid of things. And I am only replacing things that need replacing.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Bucking the trend** Posted by: wolfgangmo75**Self storage is hilarious**

Posted by: rfrancis@godisdead.com on Jun 4, 2008 6:57 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

So many people have so much stuff they never use.

This is why I don't help people move anymore, they so often have an enormous amount of stuff that they don't need. I am a minimalist (other than not getting rid of my old PCs, lol). Helping others move is always a loss for me since I don't have nearly as much stuff to move as others.

Knick knacks are one of the biggest examples of worthless stuff. Action figures and models are knick knacks for nerds.

Become a minimalist and get rid of almost everything.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

People who pay for self storage are fools.

Posted by: wolfgangmo75 on Jun 4, 2008 7:11 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I am advocating a change in thinking.

We own one car and one truck. Both are paid off and the truck only gets used for household construction projects the car can't and otherwise stays parked. We don't own a TV [which was a great move]. We recycle lots, reuse everything and apply a strict 6 month rule.

The 6 month rule works like this. With the exception of professional reference books [which we might only need once a year, but when we do our patients need that info NOW], if we don't touch an item every 6 months then it gets given away or sold. Period.

Adhering to that rule has made our life much simpler, happier, and more productive. We have more time for activities and more time for family and friends.

Just let go people. Just let go. Things have no value you don't assign to them.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **Ain't necessarily so.** Posted by: Artkansas» **RE: Ain't necessarily so.** Posted by: wolfgangmo75**SIMPLIFY**

Posted by: makeadifference on Jun 4, 2008 7:28 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I painted a sign in my kitchen with one word: SIMPLIFY. We have downsized from a three story 3,600 sq.ft. house with garage to a 1,000 sq. ft. apartment. (Due to job loss/lay offs) We are not happy about the decline in income but thrilled by our new found freedom from stuff. We continue to purge and it gets easier each time we sell. We offered "the stuff" to our kids, but they did not want to be tied down to it either.... probably because they saw what we were going through. We've sold collections,

expensive jackets, misc art, camera equipment (had a darkroom), and antiques on Craigslist. Closed out the storage unit and sold the holiday decorations too! What a relief. I highly recommend it!

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: SIMPLIFY** Posted by: medusa

» **RE: SIMPLIFY** Posted by: buzzsaw

Storage increase due to foreclosure?

Posted by: ccornett on Jun 4, 2008 8:07 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

As more and more people are forced to move or downsize it is hard to face loosing your possessions too. The hope that better days are ahead is what gets you through.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Storage increase due to foreclosure?** Posted by: VZEQICVA

Stuff has a life all it's own

Posted by: callejero on Jun 4, 2008 8:20 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

When a renter defaults, the storage company auctions it off only to be resold again at online venues and at FLEA MARKETS. It pains me to see stuff that once meant so much to a person or a family and, now, is "up for grabs."

People, sell your stuff instead of storing it. Sell it for cheap if you have to, but sell it!

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Stuff has a life all it's own** Posted by: ccornett

» **RE: Stuff has a life all it's own** Posted by: andabottleof_rum

» **RE: Stuff has a life all it's own** Posted by: littlemanintheboat

Nobody Knows Da Rubble I Seen...

Posted by: littlemanintheboat on Jun 4, 2008 8:28 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I was in the business of bidding on abandoned/lien sale, auctioned storage units for a few years.. ever wonder where some people at flea markets get all their stuff? That's where. Unbelievable what some folks pay to keep...it is a sickness. Of course, there is a verifiable mental illness called OCD that sometimes manifests itself in compulsive hoarding but it's more than that...it's a cultural sickness. I know it well.

I had to stop because I was getting too involved in these stranger's lives..baby pictures, misc memorabilia that I would feel they needed back.and sometimes I would try to track them down to give them back..but you know what? Very few I found wanted them back. I have found human remains (true)..human bones, ashes of loved ones (what a way to go.. abandoned in a storage unit!).. I would read letters and find out family secrets... they would invade my dreams... I had to quit that!! Weird country we live in... that experience changed me..I know live with only what I need, which is very little.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Nobody Knows Da Rubble I Seen...** Posted by: Sushi

Objects hold memories...sometimes we overload those memories.

Posted by: ABetterFuture on Jun 4, 2008 9:04 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **4** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I have a .22 caliber rifle that my grandma received from her dad. We used to hunt rabbit, squirrel, and varmints with it. It's the only tie I have to my great-grandpop. I don't feel guilty about keeping it; I don't feel the least bit guilty when my family gets together once a year to have a family dinner, clean our old-folk's guns, and talk about our lost loved ones. Now, we get together other times and enjoy those occasions, also, but there is something just a little bit special about handling things your ancestors handled, while in the company of family. You don't believe me? I don't care.

Now, do I need to be holding on to two motherboards and two gpu's for an obsolete computer I will likely never build? Probably not. They'll go on ebay, whenever I find time to shoot pictures and write up the details.

Now, do I need the clothes I can't wear atm? Maybe...maybe not. I was a size 30" when I got my suits in Thailand. Now I'm 33", but we've downsized our family transport from two cars to one 4-banger Ford Fusion (paid for it outright last week) and a wal-mart bicycle (guess who's pedaling?). I'm hoping that the bicycle and a change in diet will get me back into suits that would cost me \$600 to replace.

"Stuff" isn't inherently bad, unless you're of the religious persuasion that it is, similar to the apple of sin. I don't buy into either philosophies, but neither have I ever owned storage space aside from whilst in the Navy and went from living in a small apartment to living on a boat for six-nine months out of the year.

I needed a place to hold my civilian clothes, computer, bike, etc. Naught wrong with that, in my opinion.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Thank Advertising

Posted by: jeffrey7 on Jun 4, 2008 9:23 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

If we have a junk abundance...Blame advertising. Thanks too themwe're indoctrinated into believing that if we don't have the latest,newest or coolest item up for grabs we're nothing as a persons, and we keep swallowing their garbage as if it came from God's mouth.

We hold on to alot of crap because we've been told to.We've been taught old things become valuable over time,but junk lasts forever. We need to make products of quality and not quantity. Unfortunately for us,the latter hold sway. Cheap poorly made and in great quantities,that's the manufacturing

more. Product demand is a created notion for a manufactured need. We used to produce in balance with our needs. Now we create a need and make useless junk to fill the need. All the while making products cheaper and of low quality, just so the Stock Market can make money. Stocks too are an overvalued product. So we're probably going to see new storage lockers just for stocks bonds and Anut Emma. Who lost her home because she bought so much junk she has no room in her house to live in it. We have made the country a garbage dump and alot of it ends up in storage lockers. Wow, how cool are we, we have alots of closet space, you just have to drive five miles to use the damn thing and pay hundreds of dollars a year to use it. By buying all this junk, then storing it, we are creating a country that will be too expensive to live in and we'll keep doing it so we can look cool in our new and latest forced item of interest.

Jeffrey7

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Golly Gee

Posted by: GollyGee on Jun 4, 2008 10:02 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Actually self-storage units can be a great way to reduce your possessions.

The vast majority of them really don't provide very good security, and when your stuff is stolen — notice I didn't say "if" — you'll have a tough up-hill battle to prove the storage company was negligent.

Often employees, or even the owners, of the units are in on the game, and I'm betting (no figures to back it up, just a hunch) in many cases pillaging the units brings in more per year than renting them.

A friend with inside info once advised me that if I ever rented a storage unit to put the cheapest, smallest padlock I could find on the door. An expensive, indestructible lock only announced valuables were inside, and thieves always hit those first. Hinges and hasps are usually such poor quality the strength of the lock doesn't matter.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **I've never heard a first-person account of theft from one of these places.** Posted by: just john

We have dreams

Posted by: PaulK on Jun 4, 2008 10:22 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

As people whose fathers, grandfathers and grandmothers were abused by rotten corporations, we dream of independence.

We dream of having our own carpentry shop in the basement, to be free of paying for carpentry.

Some of us aspired to be artists and we have all these artist tools. Some have lots of old computer gear, some have old college calculus books. Some carry around vast amounts of old papers from apartment to apartment. We either hope or fear that we may need these tools.

We dream of having our own boats, enough cars, trucks and other devices to feel self-sufficient. Some of us have fishing rods, some have kayaks or skis.

The people who remember poverty hang onto every old rag, just in case.

It's true that most of us can't release our stuff. That's because most of us can't release our old dreams and old nightmares.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Crap Keepers

Posted by: Sushi on Jun 4, 2008 10:34 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **1** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I know people who cannot afford to rent a 3 bedroom apartment because they are paying for a storage unit for all the stuff they could store in a larger living space if they only took that storage money and put it toward a larger unit. And probably in a nicer neighborhood too.

Some of the crap in storage is cheap plastic children's toys (their kids are teenagers now). It's nothing they want to keep in the house but they cannot seem to let it go.

Sushi

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

It works for me, for the moment.

Posted by: just john on Jun 4, 2008 10:43 AM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Going from a whole house to a single room, I had to ditch a lot. All the major appliances and 90% of the furniture, for instance. Anything that could be replaced at some point in the future, given the money.

That didn't include my LP and CD collections, built since 1972. They're most of what's in my storage space, a couple miles down the road from where I live. I go there to swap out a few dozen CDs at a time, so I can mp3-ize them.

In my budgeting, I lump it in with my rent. And if/when I get on my feet enough to rent an actual apartment (I miss having a kitchen, SO MUCH!), my comparisons will include having enough space to move my stored stuff there with me.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

ITLER BURDEN says:

Posted by: DR. LARRY MITCHELL on Jun 4, 2008 11:05 AM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

"The things you own, end up owning you."

[\[« Reply to this comment\]](#) [\[Post a new comment »\]](#) [\[Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5\]](#)» **Yeah, but he also told us ...** Posted by: just john**Take a moment to evaluate what is important**

Posted by: robbie.seal on Jun 4, 2008 12:23 PM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

My family has moved around ALLOT, so we have picked up a few too many items in our day. When we got to the point that we could not traverse our garage, we realized that we had filled it with stuff. Stuff we thought we had to keep, but stuff we had not used in months or years. We sold some of it to others that needed more stuff, but we still ended up with too much stuff. Stuff like antique shrunks from Germany. They just needed some minor repairs and they would be gorgeous. Then we realized that with my job, I was not home enough to repair them, AND once repaired, we wouldn't have room for them. That's when we started donating it to Good Will, Red Cross, Homeless Shelters, Battered women's shelters, Habitat for humanity, churches... The list goes on and I still have a bunch of stuff. You know what I find when I have emptied a large portion of garage? ROOM for more stuff... Just kidding... I find that I enjoy life a bit more and don't miss my stuff like I thought I would. Now instead of filling my garage or some storage place, it is helping someone who REALLY needed it. So, folks, simplify your lives and get rid of the stuff you haven't used or looked at for more than a year. You'll feel better AND its tax deductible... How cool is that?

[\[« Reply to this comment\]](#) [\[Post a new comment »\]](#) [\[Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5\]](#)**I believe it was emerson...**

Posted by: undgrndgirl on Jun 4, 2008 1:19 PM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

who warned us about becoming slaves to our things.
...or what it thoreau?

[\[« Reply to this comment\]](#) [\[Post a new comment »\]](#) [\[Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5\]](#)**WTF?**

Posted by: g50 on Jun 4, 2008 1:57 PM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Three years ago, I was moving out of an apartment that my friend had set up. I was moving into another apartment already settled, and he was in Germany. Container storage was practical for storing his things in this situation. Another example, four years ago my boyfriend moved across the country. He hired a storage container to hold a number of things. Though he thinks most of it is crap and that he should probably move it to a friend's house, he's been living across the country and working in the 50-80 hours per week range. Both of these seem reasonable uses of container storage without these ridiculous attacks on what other Americans do. Maybe there are fewer attics, basements and sheds these days - places where the storing used to happen.

[\[« Reply to this comment\]](#) [\[Post a new comment »\]](#) [\[Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5\]](#)» **Nice wild guess, sucker.** Posted by: Coleman» **RE: Nice wild guess, sucker.** Posted by: g50» **RE: Nice wild guess, sucker.** Posted by: bouyant**world traveler**

Posted by: world traveler on Jun 4, 2008 2:11 PM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

In 2005 my husband, daughter and I sold our house, cars and anything that didn't fit into our 10 foot by 10 foot storage unit. We did this so that we could take a year and travel around the world. It's amazing how little things mean to us, when forced to reckon with how much it cost to store it. Is this dining table we got from the classifieds worth the \$10 a month to store it? Nope, on craigslist it goes. While traveling we bought enough to fill 44 boxes that we sent home. And we've replaced much of what we've sold. But--and this is where I draw the line--I wont let having stuff stop me from doing something I really have dreamed about doing. The memories of the trip we took outweigh everything stored in all the storage units at our storage company.

[\[« Reply to this comment\]](#) [\[Post a new comment »\]](#) [\[Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5\]](#)**Please do not count music and any kind of reading materials as "stuff"**

Posted by: realmuzik on Jun 4, 2008 2:20 PM

[\[Report this comment\]](#)Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

The only "stuff" I have are books, "good" magazines (for example: Maxim, Playboy, Cosmopolitan, US, Star, and The National Enquirer are banned from my household; The Nation, The Progressive, Utne Reader, Bitch and Bust are more than welcome), music, videos/DVDs, and this computer with a printer/scanner. This computer is a tool of democracy, not a place where "Second Life" is being played all day long. Music that is considered "stuff" is anything "American Idol" ever churned out. It, too, is banned from my household where precious melodies by the likes of Wilco, Emmylou Harris, Nanci Griffith, Indigo Girls, Neko Case and the now late-lamented Sleater-Kinney can sing their hearts out whenever I want to turn them on.

What's the point I'm trying to make here? There is "bad," "frivolous" stuff that too many people are obsessing and focusing on ... and "good," "QUALITY," "soul-feeding" stuff that should be thriving and that we as a populace should be focusing on instead. We need to redefine "stuff." Yes, we are a stuff-obsessed culture that's prohibiting us from striking meaningful conversations with our "household neighbors." But we can strike conversations if we do not sit around and obsess over the frivolity that is prohibiting us to participate in a democratic society, making it better for the future generations that will be forced to pay for the frivolous "stuff" that we are presently obsessing over.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

symptom of deeper sickness

Posted by: spanky on Jun 4, 2008 3:33 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

As others have pointed out, we have developed a culture of greed and pathological materialism. Our very identity is wrapped up in our car, our address, our clothes, our consumer electronics, etc etc.

I also think there is a deeper sickness at work here - a compulsive need to buy and involve ourselves with things in order to block out the emotional pain caused by such an empty existence. Many people are living like mindless automatons, programmed to buy much and experience little.

And because material things cannot provide any lasting or meaningful happiness, people must constantly acquire in order to maintain the high, hence the typical garage or storage box filled with shit. It's not the stuff people want, it's the high they get from buying.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: symptom of deeper sickness** Posted by: TheDreamer

» **RE: symptom of deeper sickness** Posted by: spanky

Hoarders

Posted by: bookie on Jun 4, 2008 3:57 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

My husband was a hoarder. He wanted to keep everything right down to broken bits of wood and screws. After he passed away 4 years ago, I wanted to move into a smaller house. It took me and my daughter a month of hard work getting rid of all the crap. I was astonished at some of the stuff I found tucked away in odd places. But we did it, made the move and never used a storage unit.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

the no spin zone

Posted by: hvannes on Jun 4, 2008 4:34 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Call it what you will, make it as positive sounding as you want, but no matter how you spin it, its still just JUNK!

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Alternet:

Posted by: Joe on Jun 4, 2008 4:37 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **3** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

finding something new to complain about everyday.

im always in a strange position on this site. i probably live more frugally than 95 percent of the people that complain on this site. just travel to urban liberal cities then travel to rural country conservative towns and see who are the wasteful ones.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **"Liberal" cities? Newsflash, country bumpkin...** Posted by: Coleman

» **RE: Alternet:** Posted by: Ahimsa

» **Rurul country conservative towns? The ones dotted with junk cars?** Posted by: JLPearson

stuff as a symptom

Posted by: particle61 on Jun 4, 2008 4:44 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

ney news ians-

the bank run blog did a post recently regarding the dramatic up-swing in the value of storage companies stocks, relating it to the economic crisis in America, otherwise becoming known as 'foreclosureland'

see post...

storage stocks steady as suburbanites stash stuff

the bank run blog focuses on the current financial crisis and its economic and social consequences, drawing stories from disparate media to shed a much needed light on the plight of Americans who are facing the ravages of the mess left by the carnivorous classes who destroyed the world economy.

Published by the folks at redstateupdate.net- funny, frightening, free since 2005

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Do the Math

Posted by: magna carte on Jun 4, 2008 5:38 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

I just today went to the storage space my mother has been renting since she moved in 2000. I told me dad at the time he could buy a storage shed for their property for what it will cost to rent the space. At this point we could have bought two of the damn things. And everything in it I am simply going to throw away or give to the Salvation Army. The items, beds, a couch, 2 upholstered chairs had sentimental value as they had belonged to my grandparents or they were what we grew up with. My advice is to NOT to put things into paid storage. I do not think my family's experience is uncommon. Sentimental value gets expensive. \$90 x 12 x 8 years

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

"A Shadow of its Former Worthlessness"

Posted by: zayantemike on Jun 4, 2008 9:20 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

Magic formula :

1. Look at your stuff stacked in boxes.
2. Spit on same.
3. Pronounce Magic Words: "A Shadow of Its Former Worthlessness."
4. Poof.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Don't worry about my soul, worry about your own

Posted by: PGR88 on Jun 4, 2008 10:08 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **5** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

The author's hectoring tone is typical of many I see here - YOU are BAD and I will fix you!

Don't worry about my soul, my greed, or my accumulation of clutter. Worry about improving yourself first.

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

» **RE: Don't worry about my soul, worry about your own** Posted by: VZEQICVA

divestiture

Posted by: hurricane hugo on Jun 4, 2008 10:11 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

...not just for pension funds anymore.

jdfu!

[« Reply to this comment] [Post a new comment »] [Rate this comment: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5]

Love/Hate Rrelationship with Self-Storage and Clutter

Posted by: Lily H. on Jun 4, 2008 11:33 PM

[Report this comment]

Current rating: **Not yet rated** [1 = poor; 5 = excellent]

When my family became homeless 25 years ago, we placed our household items in a self-storage unit, and we paid vastly more than the items were worth. My then-husband lost a box of my high-school yearbooks, never getting a chance to show them to our children (son was only six, daughter yet to be born). As a single empty-nester, I had to downscale from a cramped 3-bedroom house to an even more cramped 1-bedroom cottage (with patio). After I moved in, I had to pitch box upon box of household items I had no room for, giving away some

Presently, my patio has been pared down to a respectable level, but my home has two bookcases and a desk - all alley finds, which because I work at a library, find books to fill them. I'm also a magazine junkie, and have stacks of Martha Stewarts and Oprahs on a table in my tiny living room (I use the actual living room as a bedroom and the bedroom as my living room - my home has an odd entryway).

