

COLUMN

Materialism: A Cycle Of Dissatisfaction

by Justice Wehrmeyer

Clothing, shoes, electronics — Americans love to buy things. After all, we live in a materialistic world. Rather than investing more into life's experiences, many of us spend time and money on acquiring objects that we believe are tangible indicators of our happiness. However, the truth is we are simply distracting ourselves from what's important — relationships and experiencing what life has to offer.

"Retail therapy," as author Anne Lamott calls it, is when people consider material possessions to be physical comfort. In other words, people sometimes buy items to make themselves feel better.

The idea of shopping to ease an emotion sounds silly, however, according to Health Line, an online magazine, studies verify that shopping actually causes the brain to release more Serotonin: a chemical that makes us feel good.

I will admit I like material things as much as anyone. But I want my space to be small and my life to be big; I don't want to rely on possessions. To be materialistic means to have

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values that put a high priority on making a lot of money and having numerous possessions, as well as a prestigious image. Anyone who is obsessively focused on money or cares deeply about owning luxury goods can be described as materialistic.

Unfortunately, materialism relates to compulsive consumption — excessive, inappropriate, and unruly consumer behavior. Shopping and spending money is anticipated this time of year, especially on Black Friday, making it clear that Americans have a bad reputation for both materialism and compulsive consumption.

With the holiday season coming up, a lot of people are thinking about gifts to buy their family and friends. Instead of buying material gifts this year, consider crafting homemade gifts or buying personal experiences for one another. For example, tickets to a game or concert are always fun to receive! The holiday season is meant to bring people joy: it's the thought that counts.

Material objects will never fulfill our search for long term happiness — materialism is simply a cycle of dissatisfaction — material things truly afford us much less pleasure than experience does.

From Rags To Riches

Fort Mill Family Battles Poverty, Makes Comeback

by Bethany Houston

Note: Names in this article have been changed for privacy reasons.

"I was 7," Amy prepares herself to tell a long, emotional story. "It was Christmas," she begins. Mom, what's for dinner? she recalls asking her mother. And then came the bitter words that no child wants to hear on Christmas day: *There's cereal in the kitchen.*

Amy is a senior at Nation Ford. Over time, her family has come to live the "American Dream." However, the journey to success for their family has not been easy.

Amy was born in Denver on the floor of her first home. She had one sister at the time, Grace, who already knew the struggles they would soon face. Their father was a policeman, and their mother worked at Walmart.

By the time Amy was 2, she had a new little sister, Carly. They moved into a small apartment but were quickly evicted; their family of five was left on the streets.

"At the time they kicked us out, we didn't have wheels on our car... and all of our stuff was in storage... They stole it and threw the rest of it out, so almost all of my baby pictures are gone," Amy explains.

She begins to fidget with a blue bracelet on her right arm.

"It took a while... we left [Denver] when I was 1-and-a-half and moved into my grandmother's house when I was 3."

It took Amy and her family a year and a half to travel from their apartment in Denver to their grandparent's home in Illinois.

"[In the time between] we were homeless and living in tents," Amy answers solemnly.

Grace recalls the hard times she had on the streets:

"It sucks growing up some nights when you don't know where your next meal is coming from."

Grace says that if she could have changed anything from her past, she would have given them a better childhood.

One of her earliest memories was also during this time.

"A massive storm hit. We had to take shelter in the bathtub, and we sat together with candles and Spam sandwiches just trying to enjoy each other while staying calm," she said.

The events are hard for Amy to recall as she was so young when they occurred, and her family is sensitive about the subject now. She tries hard to remember every detail she has picked up from conversations over the years.

It took a few years for her family to become somewhat stable again. Amy's mother worked at the Walmart in Illinois, and her father got a new job with Continental.

The family was eventually able to move into a home of their own, but this didn't do much to help them progress financially.

"[When I was] around the age of 6, we got our first house there [Illinois], which was like one room, and it was infested with ants," Amy recalls.

Amy says that the only memory she has from this home is going to play with one of her toys and having a swarm of ants come out as she picked it up.

Eventually, her family had enough money to leave the ant-infested home for a more stable one that "had two floors and a basement."

It was at this time that Amy began noticing the side effects connected to her family's financial instability over the years.

"I didn't have a birth certificate until I was 6 because I was born at home. I don't know the time I was born, I barely know the day... so my birthday could be untrue."

Amy emphasizes her last point, noting that her "birthday" is in the next few weeks.

Just when things seemed to be getting better, a new challenge arose for Amy and her sisters.

"I was home alone at the age of 8 or 9 with Carly and Grace while my dad was traveling, and

"It sucks growing up... when you don't know where your next meal is coming from."



my mom was [on vacation] with her boyfriend."

It took the family nearly three years to come to the realization, but Amy's mother had started a new life for herself, and eventually she left Amy with her father and two sisters.

Amy takes a deep breath. "I was 11 or 12 when we bought my grandfather's house... me, my two sisters, and my dad moved into that house away from my mom."

At this point, despite everything that seemed to be against them, Amy and her family found their way to financial stability. As it turns out, Amy's mother was an alcoholic, so without her in the picture, there was a lot more money to be used for food and a home.

"Not only would she constantly cheat on my dad, but she would blow through all of our money with alcohol and smokes," Amy blurts out.

Even with more money on hand, it still took a while for Amy's father to get back on his feet.

"We were always at ends meet... we still don't have savings," Amy said. "It was hard to get out of each rut; every time we would make some money, something would happen. When I was 14, we ended the year with \$37... We came so close so many times."

But, Grace feels thankful for their struggles in some ways.

"My past has made me more generous with money," she said. I remember when we used to struggle, and knowing what that's like has made me jump on the chance to buy or pay for something for others."

"I didn't have a birth certificate until I was 6... so my birthday could be untrue."

Recently, Amy's family was financially stable enough to move from Illinois to South Carolina. Amy's father earned a promotion at work that required him to relocate.

The family specifically chose Fort Mill because of its school system. They wanted to come to a place where they could start over.

Now, sisters Carly, Grace, and Amy have grown. "I feel as though [Amy and I] have grown closer and argue much less," Carly says. "She [Amy] is very mature, very wise, and doesn't let things get to her easily."

Grace agrees: "when we work through a challenge, it brings us closer together as sisters."

Moving to Fort Mill gave the family an opportunity to create a life for themselves where they could be happy and safe. Now the family has a stable income, lives in a secure home, and has friends and family members they can rely on.

They have made a comeback — proving all they really needed was a second chance.