

A Life Less Throwaway

Introduction or Why I want my grandmother's tights

My grandmother's tights used to last forever. They were so strong, people could tow cars with them, and did! Granny got two pairs – one to wash and one to wear. But then the manufacturers decided to change the way their stockings were made, and not for the better. So today, when *I* reach for a pair of tights, it's like playing pantyhose Russian roulette. Which pair will break this morning?

It may not seem like a crisis to have a drawer stuffed with half-laddered hosiery, but I see it as a very small glimpse into a much larger problem. Our whole houses, our whole *lives*, have become stuffed full of things that let us down, cause our stress levels to skyrocket and our bank accounts to empty. But precisely *because* these things are poorly made or faddy, perversely we are compelled to buy more of them.

But couldn't life be different? What if we decided to surround ourselves with beautiful, well-made things that lasted forever, instead of 'for now' objects that soon need replacing?

That was the seed of an idea that came to me in 2013.

Before then I was a paid-up loyalty-card-carrying member of the impulse-shopper club who never questioned the things I bought. I'd always been a spendthrift. My mother says that as a child it never much mattered how much pocket money I was

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given, I was always broke, and this behaviour carried on into adulthood. Once I'd decided I wanted something, I 'needed' it right away, and so my life and home became filled up with stuff that was 'almost but not quite right'. Longevity wasn't one of my criteria, so I owned temporary things, poorly thought-through and soon-regretted clothes or hobby and fitness equipment bought in fits of short-lived enthusiasm.

My habitual impulse buying eventually caused credit card debts of thousands of pounds, leaving me feeling out of control, childish and angry with myself. I would come home to a chronically cluttered house, which was exhausting to tidy or clean, and stare blankly at my piles of fast-fashion clothes, wondering why I felt I had nothing to wear.

Like many people, I was stumbling through life believing that 'when this happens or when I have that, *then* I'll be happy'. Without a clear sense of self, I'd unconsciously mould my character into whatever I thought my partners wanted me to be. When my last relationship failed, therefore, I was left so lost, I had to spend some time on antidepressants. With my thirties looming, I felt as though I'd screwed my life up and chucked it away like a free hand wipe.

At the same time I'd managed to fall into the moral wasteland that is the advertising world. My job was now to write adverts for some of the world's biggest brands, trying to persuade people like me to buy more stuff, whether they needed it or not. Five years ago I had a full-on breakdown in front of my friends on holiday, and in the plane toilet on the way home, I looked in the mirror and vowed to make a change. I just wasn't sure what form that change would take.

The change came in the form of a pot – a baby blue Le Creuset casserole pot given to me for my thirtieth birthday. It came with a reputation for lasting for generations, and when I held it, it just *felt* like an heirloom. It was startlingly beautiful, and I reflected

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that owning it meant I potentially never had to buy another pot again. 'If only everything in my life was like this,' I thought.

Enthused, I set out to find more objects that I would never have to replace – objects that would work with me and grow old with me; beautiful, classic objects worth committing to and taking care of.

I assumed there'd be a website that sold a collection of lifetime products, but when I went looking for one, it didn't exist. 'Maybe I could be the one to build it,' I dared to think.

I had zero web-design skills, but the more I thought about it, the more powerful the idea seemed. If this website could release people from the constant pressure to renew and replace, it could solve some of the biggest problems the world was facing. It could ease the clutter, unhappiness and debt that came with overconsumption, it could lessen the environmental impact of our throw-away society and it could save us all money in the long term.

I started to make changes in my own life and uncovered the surprising practical and emotional benefits that come with choosing to bring only those objects into your life that reflect your values and will be with you for decades to come.

I knew that if I didn't at least try to build the website, I'd always regret it. So in 2015 I started a company, BuyMeOnce, and began hunting for lifetime items in my spare time. I cut my salary in half and lived on a minimum wage so I could split my time between work and building my business.

Painfully slowly, and after several false starts, the site started to come together. It was very basic, it wasn't monetised, and I had no idea if anyone would ever visit it. Most likely, I thought, it would remain a cluster of lonely pages on the sixth page of Google.

Then, in 2016, miraculously and quite unexpectedly, the world found it. The site went viral, thousands of e-mails flooded in, BuyMeOnce was featured in almost every major newspaper in the UK and I was suddenly being asked to be on TV in America. I hadn't realised it, but I had tapped into something that

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people all around the world were feeling. They were tired of our throwaway culture.

By this stage, my life had completely turned around. My spending was under control because I was living by my new-found philosophy. I sadly hadn't morphed into a 'naturally' tidy person, but after giving away over half of my wardrobe and countless boxes of clutter, any mess I made was easily dealt with in a couple of minutes. Owning items I loved for the long term also meant I naturally started caring for them better and lost things less regularly. I'd also stopped worrying about keeping up with the Joes or Janes, and reconnected with the person I really was. This, together with doing something I truly believed in, had raised my self-worth and allowed me to enter into a relationship based on a joyful connection rather than neediness. I had found my best friend – a kind, funny, bespectacled man who made me happier than I had imagined possible. As I write this, I'm looking forward to marrying him in six weeks' time.

I've now been given the opportunity to share with you what I believe is a life-enhancing way of thinking and behaving. My hope is that this book can be helpful to you on a personal level and, if it falls into the hands of enough people, helpful to the planet.

WHAT CAN ONE LITTLE BOOK DO?

This book tells the story of how we've sleepwalked into a world where our lives are focused on a constant churn of items with little lasting value.

I'll also reveal how we're being manipulated to feel that our current possessions (and by extension ourselves) are inadequate, and how this drives us to constantly upgrade our wardrobes, homes and technology. After ten years in the advertising world, I'm able to take you behind ad-land's glitzy curtain to reveal the tricks of the trade and arm you against its devious tactics.

Overbuying habits are often linked to low self-worth, so this book also contains sections to help you to value yourself. No

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object can make you more or less of a person. Once you've truly understood that possessions don't have that power, you're able to choose which ones to bring into your life with much greater ease. As an added bonus, by the time you've worked through the exercises of this book I would expect the clutter of your home to be greatly reduced, along with your stress levels. 'A life less throwaway' becomes simultaneously a simpler *and* richer life, because the focus is off consumption and on what really matters.

As my company name, BuyMeOnce, suggests, living a life less throwaway *does* involve buying certain things, but this lifestyle isn't about buying beautiful stuff to gloat over, it's about buying only those items that will support a functioning and fulfilling life.

MINDFUL CURATION

I call my method 'mindful curation', which might sound as pretentious as bringing your own tablecloth to KFC, but is the best term for it. It is 'mindful' because it is done with purpose and thought. And it is 'curation' because, like a curator putting together a collection in an art gallery, it's about picking only those things that will work together to form a home and a life that uniquely reflects you and your needs.

It is comprised of several steps:

1. Understanding the benefits of mindful curation.
2. Understanding the pressures that promote mindless buying and developing tactics to free yourself from them.
3. Investigating your life's purpose and the long-term priorities that will help you meet this purpose.
4. Identifying which items you need to fulfil those priorities and to live comfortably without being swayed by status.
5. Identifying your true tastes and sense of style so you can buy future-proof items.
6. Identifying your values and the brands that reflect those values.

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7. Taking stock of the items you already have to understand your present tastes, priorities and buying habits.
8. Letting go of the clutter and the superfluous.
9. Developing a healthy attitude towards money.
10. Choosing each new item with your long-term priorities and tastes in mind.
11. Developing the skills to take care of and keep the things you've chosen to bring into your life.

This book contains practical exercises on how to put all these steps into action. Skipping straight to the exercises may leave you with a shallower understanding of why they are important. However, if time is short and you just want to get cracking, go ahead – there's a list of exercises on the next page, or simply flick through the book for them. You'll find every page with an exercise on it has a square in the top corner so you can tick them off as you go along.

This is above all a book on how to be happy in the ultra-commercial world we live in right now. It's meant to be useful, so please use it in the way that's most helpful to you.

Let's get started!

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