Blog
Spirituality



I have a fond memory of walking over the Brooklyn Bridge after work one day. A very nice stranger from Israel asked if I wanted a picture, and we became friends. (Sagi Avni)



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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This latest round of the series features volunteers in Orange, California; Nazareth, Kentucky; and New York City. Read more about Caileigh here.*

My mom laughed when I told her one of the tenets of my service year would be simplicity. The other tenets made sense for me — social justice, spirituality, and community — but she struggled to see me thriving when it came to simplicity.

I'll be the first to admit that I find happiness through things like shopping and keeping up with the latest fashion trends. I like the occasional lavish, pretty thing. I also love having new experiences, such as trying out new restaurants and going to big events like concerts, pre-pandemic of course. I've always worked hard to be able to afford these things that brought me joy.

Let's just say I've never thought of myself as a minimalist — and that's what I thought simplicity was: a lack of resources and physical things. My perspective on that has changed immensely throughout the course of this year.

Living on a stipend wasn't easy at first because I'd never done it; I never even had an allowance growing up. And New York is an especially difficult city to live simply in. It sometimes feels as if you're obligated to spend money as soon as you step outside. Prior to this year, I've always worked, mostly in the food service industry, and my checks have (almost) always reflected the hours worked, with tips bumping that number up. The incentive to show up to work and do my best was clear.

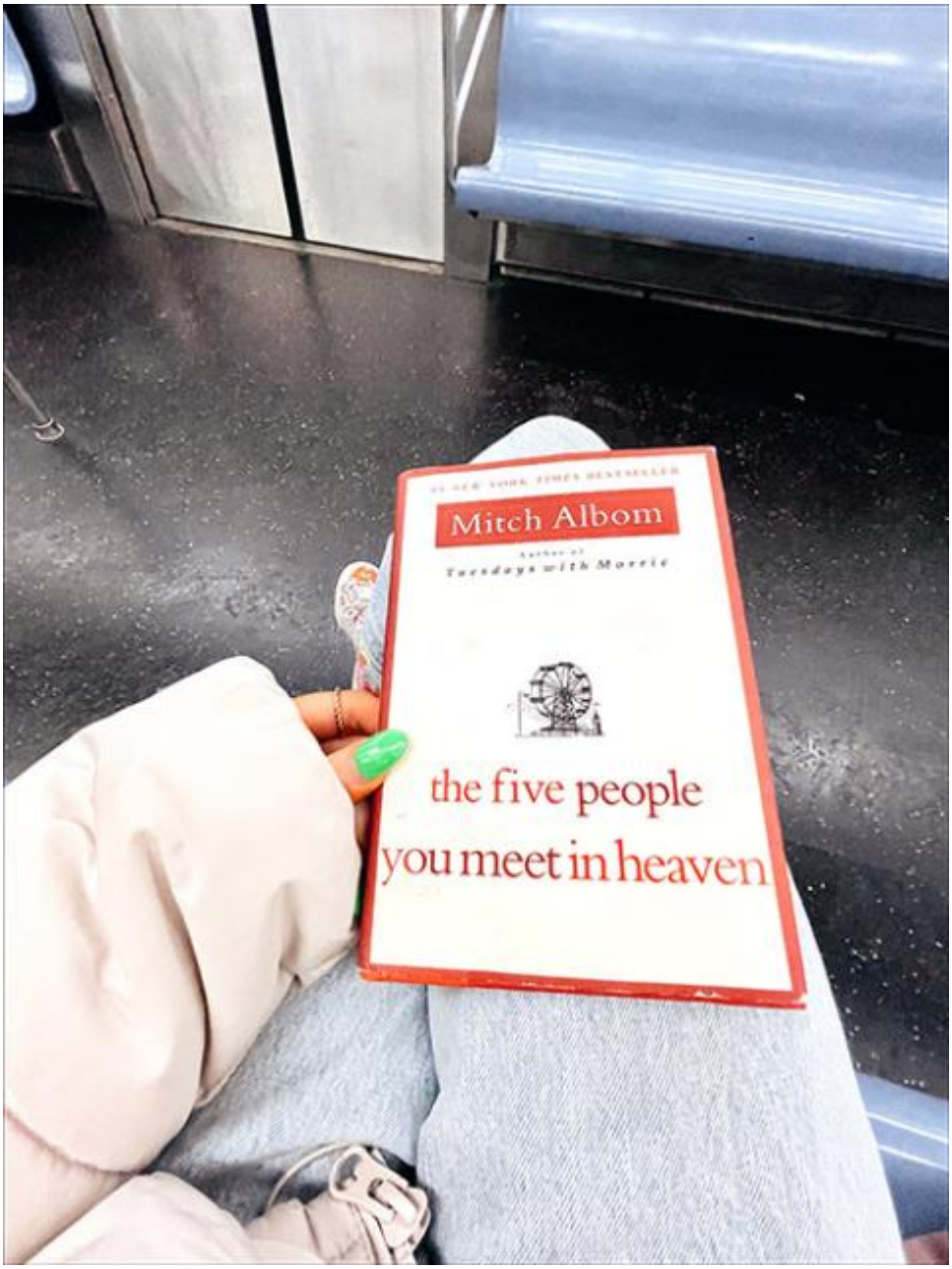
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I didn't know how much of a paradigm shift I would undergo this year. I wasn't working for a check anymore. Instead, I was working for the experience of learning

from and supporting others. It was a major switch to have to rely on intrinsic motivation alone, and I wasn't expecting to find it so difficult.

I was also in a new space I'd never had to navigate before — the ever-feared, over-an-hour commute to work. I wrote in a previous post that all the jobs I'd ever had before I could walk to. So an hour-plus riding the A train every morning and evening gave me surplus time that I didn't know what to do with.

I quickly noticed that what I lacked in financial surplus, I definitely had in my free time. Granted, I was limited to a subway car, but this was a chance for activities I'd always put on the back burner. Things I had never prioritized as important to do for myself.



This is a book I've been enjoying on the subway recently. It follows a man who goes to heaven and learns the value of life and connection. (Caileigh Pattisall)

I found reading and listening to podcasts to be some of my favorite pastimes on the train. One day I decided to listen to a podcast episode on simplicity from the Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon. Narrator Bethany Allen breaks down this topic in a compelling way in "Simplicity and Contentment." I highly recommend it.

Allen explains how our society, in the United States especially, is obsessed with the feeling of immediate satisfaction from obtaining material goods. We love to feel

happy, or a similar feeling known to us as gratification. And it's easy to feel satisfied in the short term through this process of buying things that we think will make us whole.

She goes on to say that "owning and consuming things cannot supplement meaning in our lives." That really stuck with me. It makes sense because this entire concept, this cycle, is what drives capitalism. Our own economy relies on these consumptive patterns that in turn fuel our egos and self-worth. Americans have a satisfaction problem — and I have absolutely fallen into that.

I quickly realized that this shift from working for a check to working for learning and growth was so difficult because it was completely opposite thinking from the way I've been socialized in this world. This also helped me understand how I was finding my happiness this year.

Since listening to this podcast (Bridgetown Audio Podcast has a series of episodes on simplicity), I've been reflecting a lot about what gives me short-term satisfaction and what drives my passion. What brings meaning and joy into my life? And what I've discovered is that simplicity isn't about a lack of physical items; rather simplicity is how you choose to approach life to make yourself feel the most whole.



My New York community drove down to Asbury Park in New Jersey before our social justice and simplicity retreat. We played on the rocks and listened to the waves. (Gabby Kasper)

I personally find the most joy in making memorable moments — the ones you look forward to and the ones you can look back on fondly.

I look forward to the time I get to myself on the train. I've found time to journal almost every day, which was a goal of mine this year. I've also found time after my

workday for myself and to explore my city — for free.

About a month ago, I got out of training at my worksite early, and the sun hadn't set yet (which is very exciting in December). I made a plan to get off the train before I got to Manhattan and walk across the Brooklyn Bridge, something that had been on my bucket list since I'd moved here. The views and sunset ended up being so beautiful, and a nice stranger even offered to take a photo of me with my new home. I carry that memory of spontaneity with me.

Just this past weekend, my New York community traveled to the home of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Wickatunk, New Jersey, for a social justice and simplicity retreat. Since we got the day off work to travel, we decided to leave a few hours early so that we could road trip down to the New Jersey coast.

It ended up being so much fun. Next to the freezing ocean, we skipped around on the rocks and soaked in the calmness of the crashing waves.

I'm still growing into my own and learning not to crave insatiable happiness, but to strive for consistent contentment and peace. There are times I still struggle, but I do think I'm on the right path, and I'm excited for the memories I have yet to make on this journey to live simply.

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.