



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Stuff

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Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. A few years ago, I rented a large RV and traveled around New Mexico, spending some of the time in the backyard of my brother's home in Lea County. I emphasize large. The RV had a sign on the back bumper warning, "I make wide turns."

The experience was relaxing, and I appreciated using my brother's electricity. The only problem was navigating the highways and fighting the winds that created a sail-effect on the sides of the RV. At times, I thought I was steering a large ship

Many people do not like RVs. They consider them elitist, because they require a fat wallet to pay for their gas consumption. I am not so sure about this put-down. The RV parks around America are not exactly five star establishments. Most of them have shared shower rooms, and feature mangy BBQ pits with picnic tables spaced a few feet from your neighbors. RV camps are close-knit suburbs, disguised as country get-aways.

So why do many people own or rent RVs? The answer is *stuff*. An RV can hold as much stuff as a large Public Storage locker. We can't divorce ourselves from our stuff, not even for a few days. The RV allows us to take much our stuff with us when we leave our stuff-filled homes.

People are addicted to stuff. They can't get enough of it. Given the dictionary definition of stuff, it makes no sense: *Material things generally, especially when unidentified, worthless, or unwanted.*¹ Heavy duty stuff about stuff, yet we continue to collect stuff, even though we may never use it.

One more definition is needed to complete our discussion about stuff; the definition of a vacuum: *A space completely empty of matter but not achievable in practice on Earth.*¹ Why is a vacuum not achievable on earth? Because earth is stuffed with earthlings and earthlings stuff vacuums.

Humans are wired to hate emptiness. Before long, there will be no empty space between Los Angeles and San Diego. OK, poor example, because there is already no empty space between Los Angeles and San Diego. I'll try another space, so to speak. Before long there will be no empty space between Phoenix and Palm Springs because the heretofore empty space will be filled-up with RVs, which in turn, will be filled-up with stuff.

We hoard stuff we rarely, perhaps never touch or see---except when we move old stuff to another closet or a recess in the basement to make room for new stuff.

See any empty space in your house? I'll bet not, the space is full of stuff. An empty closet? Get real. An empty closet rejects emptiness. Vacant drawers? Nope. Blank shelves? None. It's the Law of Stuff in action: *Every empty space on this planet will eventually be stuffed with stuff.*

¹ Microsoft, Encarta, 2006. 1993-2005, Microsoft Corporation.

This idea of stuff hit home a few years ago. We sold our home in the Shenandoah Valley, where we had lived for 12 years. It was a large place, with many spaces. Those spaces, like a magnet pulling-in metal filings, sucked-in stuff. They became Black Holes for Stuff. Whoosh! The spaces filled.

And once sucked in, Reporterette and I never looked at the stuff again until we looked for stuff to fill-up the RV. Later, we pulled stuff out of the crevices and closets of our home to move the stuff into similar crevices and closets in our new home---never to see the light of day until our next move.

That's the nature of stuff. You don't know what to do with it, but you can't do without it.

But why? Maybe we need to collect stuff because our ancestors never had much stuff to begin with. Maybe we stuff our larders with old hats and ill-fitting clothes in the hope that these stuffings will somehow mutate into fat for next winter's food.

Maybe we save discarded Coke bottles, empty tin cans, *National Geographic* magazines that go back to the Pleistocene age, every book we have not yet read, Christmas cards from unknown people, ties we will never use, shoes we will never use, and so many things that we will *never ever* use...but think we just might use----because they might prove to be useful in the future.

Maybe we save them because they give us comfort about our past. Or maybe we gather stuff as a badge of success. *I have more stuff than you do. After all, my second home is filled with stuff.*

I'm a saver. I'm a stuff victim. I've put away notes and mementos for many years. I'm thankful, because they have provided references and anchors to my past; stimuli that have re-sparked a memory about a time that would have otherwise passed across possible recollections.

However, in my defense, I think I am a recovering stuff addict. As I headed into retirement, the last few years of downsizing provided an eye-opening view of how much stuff that had accrued in my basement: Tons of irrelevant stuff. But now: *Lord, I've seen the light! I know I'll be tempted, but one day at a time. I'll forsake even one ounce of stuff to keep me cured from storing tons of it.*

Enough stuff about stuff. Unless you have stock in STUFF-IT! Inc/Ltd, it is too depressing. Oh, you have not yet bought shares of STUFF-IT!/? Really, and you are reading a stuff expose? A vicarious window shopper of stuff, is that your game? Fine then, a brief "I'm OK, You're Not" tutorial might mend your stuff-filled soul but stuffless heart.

STUFF-IT! is an off-shoot of Dr. Phil's television program that focuses on habitually dysfunctional people. Unlike Dr. Phil, who deals with people who are pro-self and anti-everyone else, STUFF-IT concentrates on the pro-stuff addicts who cannot throw away a newspaper they have either read or have not read. Their residences resemble caves whose floors, ceilings, and walls are lined with every conceivable ornament of life.²

² I had a dart-throwing buddy who whose home was filled with stuff. My wife and I had dinner there. We had trouble finding a place to sit, because every room was filled with stuff. During dinner, I asked my

Snowbirding in Quartzville

Back to RVs and a town I passed through twice during my meanderings around Southern California: the city of Quartzville.

On the first pass, I thought I was seeing a mirage in the desert. There, miles away, appeared to be thousands of RVs and trailer houses. Not scores, not hundreds, thousands. The image would not have looked so weird if there had been a few houses and other buildings in the mirage. But there were few stationary structures in the city.

Figure 1 is a collage of snapshots I took as I passed through Quartzville. The trailers and RVs are cookie cutters; just like the cookie-cutter houses we escape in order to hit our *Easy Rider* highways. But we can now take our stuff with us. Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda had to leave almost all their stuff at home, except for the stuff they thought that really mattered. Stuff-wise, they were minimalists.



Figure 1. Ambulatory Stuff.

Most of us are Easy Riders. We may not be as adventuresome as Dennis and Peter. Nonetheless, we seek the freedom and thrill of escape from the day-to-day lives that have crept upon us during our modern world's march toward the larding and lording of stuff.

If you play the stock market, I recommend purchases in the storage locker industry. It is a no-lose bet, because we cannot discard our stuff.

Your on the Street Reporter

friend where in his museum of stuff I could find a collection of string. Ignoring my joke, he promptly replied, "Oh, it's downstairs in the basement!"