



Cherie Burke, DNP,  
MSN, CRNA  
Member of AANA Health &  
Wellness Committee

## Simplicity or Complexity: The Choice is Yours



**W**ould you prefer to live a life of simplicity or a life of complexity? Well, that might depend on your views of simplicity. Simplicity does not necessarily mean absence of luxury or doing without. Instead it is a matter of making choices.

In her book, *Choosing Simplicity: Real People Finding Peace and Fulfillment in a Complex World*, Linda Breen Pierce discusses “voluntary simplicity and simple living” as an active choice.<sup>1</sup> Voluntary simplicity or simple living is different for each person or family. Some may envision simple living as moving to the wilderness and living off the land, while others may picture a small dwelling in the middle of a city.

In her research, Pierce found that many who simplify continue to live conventional lives, working for a living, raising families, exploring spiritual interests, connecting with their communities, and enjoying leisure time. Living simply does not require the rejection of material comforts, but it does involve unburdening and living more lightly with fewer distractions. It means letting go of anything that interferes with your view of a high quality of life.

### Discover What is Most Important

CRNAs are fortunate to be compensated well for the hours we work. Unfortunately, this can be a double-edged sword. The more we work, the more we make; the more we make, the more we spend. That requires us to work more, and the cycle is hard to break. Outwardly we may have the appearance of having it all and being successful, but inside we may feel a void and an unsettled, hard-to-fill emptiness.

Choosing a simple life requires time and energy to discover what is most important to you, what brings you happiness, and what you really want. It is a process of mindful reflection and collaboration in coordination with those you cherish most. It requires you to slow down and focus on your path. Where do you want to go? What will help you reach your destination? For some it may be enhancing relationships and finding inner peace. For others it may be a major life change. What is wonderful about simple living is that it does not have a one-size-fits-all definition. Once you find your bliss, then your focus shifts to achieving, and life becomes more joyful and less stressful.

A movement related to living simply is minimalism, where the focus is on living with less, compared to simplicity, which strives for living a less complex life. The two work quite well together; practicing simple living takes you on a slower and gentle path toward contentment.<sup>2</sup> For more information, see the new documentary “Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things” available on multiple streaming platforms (<https://minimalismfilm.com>).

### The Journey to Simplicity

Living simply is more about the journey than the destination. Most people do not wake up one day and make a simple life. It is an evolution that occurs over time. I first encountered the idea of simplicity by happenstance. I was working as a per-diem CRNA and was in the anesthesia workroom reading the postings on the bulletin board while waiting for a case. There was a copy of a list from a book. It was

short, only 10 items, so I stood and read it. I had no idea where it came from but found it fascinating. Some of the items resonated with me to the point that I can recite them 10 years later. I made a copy to take home and Googled for more information and found it in Linda Breen Pierce's book *Choosing Simplicity*.<sup>1</sup>

Since reading Pierce's book I have slowly evolved through conscious decisions to simplify. Although I do not follow all 10 steps outlined in the prescription for a simple life, I have incorporated many into my journey. The first step I took was to spend at least an hour a week in a natural setting, alone and away from distractions of people, traffic, and competing demands for my attention. This small step has helped me to appreciate my successes and allows me to reflect and refine my journey to achieve a simple life. I began a journal to remind me of my goals, to reflect on my journey and destination, to chart a path to overcome obstacles, and to celebrate my successes.

Five years after beginning to simplify my life, I was able to take a big step and downsize my dwelling. One of the prescriptions for a simple life was to "live in a home with only those rooms that you or someone in your family use every day."<sup>1</sup> My husband and I have been empty nesters for the past four years, and we were only using one-third of our home. Not having the responsibility of maintaining, cleaning, and furnishing rooms that we no longer used has been energizing. Along that line, Pierce suggests not allowing "any material thing into your home unless you absolutely love it and want to keep it for the rest of your life or until it is beyond repair."<sup>1</sup>

Although materialism and consumerism are a large part American culture, they have been linked to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Happiness comes from being content with what is sufficient and seeking enjoyment from non-material pursuits. Voluntary simplicity requires the characteristics of mindfulness and material sufficiency. "Through bringing mindfulness to our daily lives, we seek the maximum of well-being achievable through the minimum of material consumption."<sup>3</sup>

Remember, there is no concrete prescription for achieving a simple life, and each of us will take our own unique path. I do not think there will come a time where I will wake up and say "YES!! This is it! I have achieved it!" What I do know is that since my encounter with *Choosing Simplicity*, I have a renewed passion for my work, my interactions with my colleagues and patients are different (in a good way), and I have stronger sense of fulfillment.

Steve Jobs is quoted as saying: "One of my mantras has been—focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains."<sup>4</sup>

I challenge you to focus, discover your view of a simple life, and live a more joyful and less stressful life.

*"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication"*-Leonardo da Vinci<sup>5</sup>

## References

1. Pierce LB, Robin V. - Carmel, CA: Gallagher Press; January 2000.
2. Gottberg, K. Simple Living vs. Minimalism – What's the Difference and Which are You? [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-gottberg/simple-living-vs-minimalism\\_b\\_6413670.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-gottberg/simple-living-vs-minimalism_b_6413670.html). Accessed January 16, 2017.
3. Burch, M. Voluntary Simplicity and the Steady-State Economy. Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy. <http://steadystate.org/voluntary-simplicity-and-the-steady-state-economy/>. Accessed January 8, 2017.
4. Nale S. The 100 Greatest Steve Jobs Quotes. <http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2012/10/steve-jobs-quotes/>. Accessed December 21, 2016.
5. Leonardo da Vinci's famous quotes. <http://www.leonardodavinci.net/quotes/jsp>. Accessed December 23, 2016.
6. The Merriam-Webster dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster; 2004. Dictionary.
7. The world's favorite online thesaurus! <http://www.thesaurus.com>. Accessed December 20, 2016. ■

According to Merriam-Webster, **simplicity** is: 1: the state of being simple, uncomplicated, or uncompounded; 2 a: lack of subtlety or penetration: innocence, naiveté b: folly, silliness; 3: freedom from pretense of guile: candor; 4 a: directness of expression: clarity; b: restraint in ornamentation: austerity. If that is simplicity, then what is complexity? The definition of **complexity** includes: "something complex; the quality or state of being complex."<sup>6</sup> Synonyms for complexity include: complication, intricacy, convolution, ramification, involvement, entanglement, multiplicity, and elaboration.<sup>7</sup> Simplicity and complexity are antonyms.