

**From the Principal's Pen  
April 2021**

**Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School**



We had brunch at a good friend's house a few weeks ago. They are "over 40" parents of two pre-school boys. Valentine's Day had just happened, and they were remarking about how stunned they were at what "a big deal" everyone had made over this day. "It was like Christmas," they were saying and they were telling about gifts that kept arriving from grandparents and cousins, all for Valentine's Day. They said the same thing had happened at Halloween...the children had Halloween gifts. They were anticipating the same for Easter....not just the bunny, not just the basket, but gifts coming from relatives outside of their home.

"When did it become this big thing?" they were asking.

When did it?

When my children were small, they began attending birthday parties. Oftentimes, they would come home with "loot" bags. I remember thinking, "oh, I guess that's what I do..." So then, when I was planning my children's parties, I would pull together some special theme items to send everyone's kids home with...even though I wasn't 100% sure it seemed like a good idea. Ultimately, we all were doing it, and all the while, filling our homes with useless trinkets and more and more and more stuff, and spending money unnecessarily. After all, isn't the party supposed to be for the one having the birthday?

Because of the Covid19 guidelines, we had to scale way back on what happens for Valentine's Day...just cards. And guess what? It was still joyful and special and fun, and children left with little loving cards from their friends...no candy, no trinkets, no toys, and it was all okay.

Maybe this pandemic has created a bit of an awakening. Maybe less is more.

I recently helped my daughter move into a new house. As I was lugging box after box after box after box into her house, I began to notice a few things. One of the boxes was packed full of....guess what? All of the stocking stuffers I had painstakingly chosen, wrapped and stuffed into her and her husband's Christmas stockings. There were all of the items, shoved into a box. This happened with more than one box I was unpacking.

My husband and I watched a couple of documentaries in the last few weeks. Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things, and another one: The Minimalists: Less Is Now. I've thought a lot about them since watching and I feel ready to make a change.

In the "Less is Now" documentary, (sorry, spoiler alert) one of the directors literally packs up every single thing in his house and for six weeks, he pulls out only the things that he absolutely needs. At the end of the experiment, he keeps only those things he needed, and ships the rest off to either: donate, throw or sell.

These documentaries were kind of a “wake up” for me. I have been “on the hunt” my whole adult life...looking for the deals, the bargains, the latest this or newest that...but what has the result of all of that been...wasted time, wasted money, and more stuff.

Prior to Christmas each year, I would always have my children put one item into a donation box each day for the month of December. Knowing they would be receiving loads of new toys for Christmas, I would prepare their rooms by eliminating stuff to replace with more stuff.

This May I am going to take the Minimalists Challenge. You may want to as well. In the month of May, beginning with May 1<sup>st</sup>, you eliminate one thing. You either throw it, donate it, or sell it. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, you do the same only with two items. By May 31<sup>st</sup>, you eliminate 31 items. The great thing about this challenge (compared to my Christmas process of elimination) is you are not replacing these items with anything...you are simply minimalizing.

In preparing our classrooms for school this year, we had to create space. I watched as the teachers worked to eliminate “stuff” from their classrooms. They hauled out furniture, books, toys, and tons and tons of “stuff”. What we learned: no one missed the things they hauled out. The extra space was extra breathing room. The elimination of hundreds and hundreds of items was replaced by peace and freedom to move about.

All of this makes me question: over time, do we own all of this stuff, or does it own us? One fall I said to my husband, “All I do is move things. I move the summer furniture out, and then move it back in. I move the winter stuff out, and then pack it away. Summer clothes, fall clothes, winter clothes, in-out, up-down, pack-unpack. All of the seasons are marked by the bins I use to decorate. What if I just... didn’t?”

There’s a reason for the saying: *Less is more*. I plan to find out.

Maybe with fewer things, our lives will actually become more full.

Join me in Minimalizing in May!

Educationally Yours,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of the Atwood Primary School

**Dates to Note:**

**No School: Friday, April 16 to Sunday, April 25! Spring Break!**



