



One minute **Claudia Chung** called a spacious apartment with multiple closets home; the next, she was moving into a Winnebago without wheels. In this new monthly column, she learns how to stop hoarding and thrive on a tight budget ... in an even tighter living space

Photograph **Ilona Lieberman**

I started this year with a move. A less-than-five-minute-walk move. But it might as well been over a mountain and across an ocean. I didn't move into a bigger and better apartment. Nor did I move because I am impossibly in love. I moved because I had no choice. Move or be homeless were my only two options. And with it, I had to downsize by a thousand percent. From living with a loving partner in a full one-bedroom apartment with separate kitchen, foyer, and two hall closets, I moved into a room. One. Single. Room. Alone.

In my new space, if I fall off the bed, I'm in my living room. From the front door, I walk straight into my kitchen, where shoes and coats coexist with my toaster oven and coffee maker. And my dining table also functions as a desk, vanity, ironing board, and entertainment center. Suffice it to say, if my new home had wheels, I'd be living in a Winnebago.

But living in a wheel-less trailer isn't the most jarring aspect of my current situation. It's the fact that I realize I'm extremely lucky to be here. In terms of work commute or wanting to stay in the same neighborhood, it couldn't have worked out better. And the absolute miracle is the fact that I can afford it without having to hook, deal, or work on Wall Street.

Whether you find yourself divorced, dumped, or abandoned, the nitty-gritty realities of going from a two-income household to one feel daunting, scary, and perplexing. But mostly it feels unfair. Then you tack on the psychotic nature of living in Manhattan – expensive, competitive, and, dare I say, cruel, you can't help but reconsider a polyamorous marriage. “So what if my husband is having an orgy in the next room. I get a washer and dryer inside my apartment!”

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For me, I can honestly say I never felt more like a despondent widow than when I first stepped inside my wheel-less Winnebago home. It screamed: “You're alone! You're poor! You'll die here!” I felt like a failure. I lost my financial cushion. I went from never having to worry about money to worrying constantly, and from buying without thinking to thinking before buying. Then talking myself out of it.

In the past few months, while I adjusted to trailer park living, I had to address how I'd live happily yet frugally without becoming a sugar baby or selling my eggs. Luckily for me, when you're attempting to move Grey Gardens into a filing cabinet, you come to see some personal defects that weren't as consequential when you had the space. Me? Surprise! I'm a hoarder.

I have a visceral, chronic, innate fear that I'll run out of “stuff” – all kinds of stuff, from tampons and lotions, to kitchen sponges and storage containers that hold my stuff. It's completely insane. But I regularly stock up on useful yet readily available items.

For example (spoiler alert future intercourse partners), I have a Steve Jobs-esque underwear practice. His

black turtlenecks are my black cotton string bikini panties. They come in a six-pack and I order them a few times a year from Amazon. In my mind, no matter what, I will always, always, always need black cotton string bikini underwear.

Most recently, I was clicking away on disinfectant wipes, club soda, prosciutto, and underwear, when I noticed I was ordering three underwear six-packs. Three six packs. I'd just mindlessly purchased 18 pairs of panties with my pork. That translates into buying 54 pairs of black underwear annually without even thinking. It's no wonder I find underwear in every single drawer, box, and container I own. More than once, I'd be looking for scotch tape and I'd find underwear.

So now, after years of mindless spending, I find myself the proud owner of a storage unit filled with clothes, shoes, lotions, foreign, and domestic condiments, coffee pods, cleaning products, hundreds of feminine hygiene products, and much more. Should there be an apocalypse or a second Trump administration, I can legitimately open up a general store.

Today, as I embark on this new journey of pinching pennies (forgoing any and all non-essential shopping), clever endeavors to add healthier chunks into my monthly savings (shopping at my storage unit regularly), and planting myself in soils I have yet to know or understand as a singular being (without losing my shit daily), I am grateful.

I am grateful to be sitting in a twee place where twinkly lights are strung around the windows and I can look outside and watch the world go by. But, mostly, it's a place where anything is possible. A place I now call my home.