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living in the present

140 Square Feet Camper Trailer Life

Sometimes when I stop and think hard about the life I'm presently living, I feel a little like I'm stuck in the middle of a tug-o-war game. There is a group of people, in the generations that come before me, that are saying, "Hey Kathleen, You need to be working toward the future. Stop wasting time, go!" Then there's the internal voice that says, "I'm okay with the way things are right now. Can't I let things happen when I'm ready to?"

The U.S. culture encourages planning for the future with to-do lists and sticky notes. There can be pressure from the media or family and friends to save money for a large house and other big purchases. Oftentimes, it can seem like in order to be successful, you should have several expensive possessions.

However, there is a large group of people in the tiny house movement, like myself, that want to just live in the now. The majority of us want to capitalize on the present and we value the motto that "less equals more."

Six months ago my boyfriend Greg and I had a "plan" to build a tiny house. We decided to ditch our 1,000 square foot city apartment with a full kitchen, spacious living room and balcony in a neighborhood where you could walk to restaurants and grocery stores. By giving all that up, we choose instead to live in a 140-square-foot travel trailer in someone's backyard, with views of open space, but further removed from the city life we were used to. This decision would ultimately help us save money for the THOW build process. We found a couple to rent land from and naively thought the rest would be a breeze.

During our first month, we had to downsize and deal with being with each other in one space. I donated several items out of my wardrobe and gave a few away to friends. Learning I had to give up some of my furniture was harder for me. Some of the items had sentimental value, but ultimately, I realized that those items were replaceable. Holding onto items that I wasn't going to use might create more stress in the long run, so I had to suck it up and let them go.



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We bumped into each other a lot in that first month. Greg was more patient, but I often became frustrated and annoyed. I knew full well that we could get out of the situation at any time and often I would feel guilty thinking about what it would be like if we lived in a different space. But I have always been the type of person up for a challenge and I felt confident that Greg and I could work through anything if we really tried, so I tried to be patient and get out of his way, even though it felt like there was not a lot of space to escape to.

It was October and the 1969 camper we purchased was not insulated properly for the Colorado weather. So Greg had to work fast to make sure we stayed warm when winter hit, which ended up coming with a vengeance in November ahead of schedule.

Since Greg had previous experience living in a van in New Zealand for a few summers past, he knew how to insulate a small space. He cut up rectangle-sized blocks of insulation and covered them in radiant barrier, adding them piece-by-piece to our windows to block cold air and add some privacy. Greg also used insulation tape to secure areas where air was coming in. Oftentimes I would find him on the roof looking for gaps where he could apply roof sealant.

Just like any sized house, there are plenty of small home improvement steps you have to go through

when purchasing a new home. Everyone needs something different to feel comfortable. For us, it was being able to control the temperature and decorating the camper trailer with some of our favorite possessions.

After a few short months, we felt more content living in a smaller environment. We could shift focus away from home improvement on the camper to building a new tiny house. Using a program called SketchUp, Greg was able to design a 280-square-foot tiny house on wheels. We knew we wanted our house to be about double the size of our camper trailer to give us some extra space. We also wanted an area for guests that would allow them to feel some privacy from us while we were coexisting in the same space. We asked ourselves what things we would change about the camper trailer if we could and used that as inspiration for what our future house would look like.

I headed to a local lender to talk about options for buying land.

But when I left I felt less optimistic than I arrived. It wasn't going to be easy to buy an acre of land and get cracking on our plans. Land loans require a larger down payment than mortgage loans sometimes requiring as much as 50 percent down. And even if you have that kind of money sitting around most cities require you to disclose how you are going to use your land. They want to be certain you intend on building a house that meets their minimum square footage requirements, and usually these start around 500-square-feet. It can feel rather disheartening to realize all the hoops you have to jump through to build a tiny house.



And even though building it on a friend's land might be more convenient, you still have to hide to some degree from cities and their building and zoning codes. But beyond the legalities of it all there is something even more pressing against us.

Six months ago, we told our friends and family we were going to build a tiny house. Now today, we are faced with more social media followers waiting to see how our project is turning out. It's hard to face them and admit that we need a little more time. I can't help but feel like they're getting tired of waiting around and might pack up their bags and find a new tiny house couple to follow.

But to them I would say that we're already a part of the tiny house movement. Just because our camper trailer doesn't look like a house the same way a tiny house does, doesn't mean that we aren't living small.

We had to go through some of the same struggles other tiny house dwellers went through, and let's face it—140-square-feet is tiny.

What makes us unique is that most people starting their tiny house projects have goals to decrease their square footage. We feel that we would have to double our square footage, even though that number is still relatively small.

Knowing all that we do about the difficulties one faces when building a tiny house, we are going to take our time with it and enjoy the home that we have. It may not be exactly what we set about doing in the beginning, but life is good right now, so why change it?

Follow Kathleen and Greg's tiny house journey online at [Tiny House Tiny Footprint](#). Their photography can be found [on Instagram](#).