



Courtesy of Glen Van Peski

Ultralight backpacker Glen Van Peski shares lessons on purposeful living in *take less. do more.*

Bibliophile

The Ultralight Life

Trail-tested insights reveal how carrying less can create freedom and fulfillment

interview by Cathy Carroll

ENGINEER, ENTREPRENEUR, philanthropist and long-time ultralight backpacker Glen Van Peski of Bend believes the best way to move forward in life is by carrying less. In his award-winning book *take less. do more.: Surprising Life Lessons in Generosity, Gratitude, and Curiosity from an Ultralight Backpacker*, Van Peski explores how subtracting rather than adding can lead to greater freedom, purpose and joy. Drawing from decades of outdoor adventures and personal experiences, he shares lessons on generosity, gratitude, curiosity and resilience—from investing creatively in relationships to reframing life's setbacks and learning to embrace failure as part of growth. Through a philosophy rooted in simplicity and service, Van Peski encourages readers to live within their means, deepen connections and create more meaningful lives. He founded Gossamer Gear, a company dedicated to ultralight backpacking equipment in 1998, after he'd become fascinated by lightweight travel in the wilderness and started sewing his own gear. All profits from the book are donated to the Pacific Crest Trail Association.

» How has the “take less, do more” philosophy shaped your life off the trail?

On the trail, a lighter pack means less strain on your body, the ability to hike more miles, a deeper connection to the wilderness you are moving through and greater capacity to help others in an emergency. Off the trail, a life focused on less stuff creates margin for more of what matters. That margin—physical, mental and financial—gives me the energy and resources to engage more fully with people around me. It means I can notice and say yes to opportunities I might otherwise have been too busy to even see, or too depleted to pursue. With margin, my attention can turn outward to others, instead of being consumed by my own concerns.

» What's one experience that's emblematic of that philosophy?

When I finished the manuscript, I needed photos for a website and called a friend who seems to know everyone. He sent me to Bruce. We met at Sparrow Bakery (in Bend), and Bruce said I should really talk to his friend Gary, but not to wait because Gary had just received a terminal diagnosis. I set up another meeting at Sparrow. In the meantime, I remembered a hiker friend I owed

photography work, but I had margin in my schedule, so I kept the meeting with Gary. He had quit his job, not wanting to spend his last months working, which left little money for a few bucket-list dreams.

Because we consistently set aside funds in a separate account for this kind of thing, we were able to help him hike in Patagonia before

he died. Margin, created in advance, allowed us to do more than just offer sympathy.

» What do you think people discover about themselves when they spend multiple days outside carrying everything they need?

On longer backpacking trips, people usually discover a couple of things. First, all the little items that “don't weigh much” add up to a surprisingly heavy pack. Life is like that, too; many small commitments, each reasonable on its own, can accumulate until they overwhelm us and rob us of margin. Second, after hikers do the work of reducing pack weight, they realize how little they actually need—once they have the skills—to be safe and have fun in the wilderness. In life, we often relearn the same lesson: Our fondest memories are rarely about the stuff; they're about the experiences and the people we shared them with. ■

