

turning tiny

the small-living paradigm that's reshaping
the way we think, live and dream



Chapters by over 60 tiny house movement luminaries
Compiled and presented by Darin Zaruba

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Preface

Every successful organization has to make the transition from a world defined primarily by repetition to one primarily defined by change.

—Bill Drayton

Have you ever wondered what makes the tiny house movement an actual movement? Have you longed to hear the stories behind some of your favorite non-traditional homes? Do you wonder if the movement is more of a shift in thought rather than a blip on the architectural screen?

Turning Tiny is your direct-access pass into the minds and lives of tiny housers in various arenas including design, building, community planning, and the emerging business around it all. It's a collection of stories from 60+ contributing authors of how and why they turned tiny.

It is no secret that tiny housers exist in all walks of life. Our interests are in raising families in tiny houses, defining a tiny house, figuring out where to park a tiny house, assimilating into a community, the future of the movement, and much more. In the following chapters are the answers to those questions, written in the words of tiny housers themselves. Each chapter is written by a different tiny house enthusiast from their personal perspective and provides a microcosmic look into an issue directly impacting them.

Read on. By picking up this volume you recognize that the old real estate American Dream has failed America. It is neither attractive nor sustainable and that living on a smaller scale is becoming the new paradigm. So indulge. Allow yourself to turn tiny with each page turn!

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Part 1

The Tiny House

There seems to be no lack of attempts at defining the tiny house. There is the tiny house on wheels. There is the tiny house on a foundation. There is an argument that tiny houses by definition must be less than 400 sq.ft. There are groups of people that think tiny houses are only those built in the style of the original Tumbleweeds. A growing number of people recognize RVs, park models, live-aboard boats, converted cargo containers, sheds, treehouses, and a number of other unconventional domiciles, as tiny houses. The fact remains though – despite the conventional thoughts surrounding such – that a tiny house is nothing more than a moniker; a term relative to the person living within. It is as much a philosophy as a measurement. It denotes a shunning of traditional American home values, and seeks to empower the person within giving them equal parts freedom and grounding. But more than anything, a tiny house is a story. It is a collection of walls made up of laughter, love, anger, pain, smiles, and sadness. These are the stories of the tiny houses.

From Alienation, to Collaboration, to Community

A Tale of Finding Home in 140 Sq. Ft.

Vina Lustado



Vina Lustado is the founder/owner of Sol Haus Design, a design firm specializing in sustainable building in Ojai, California. In December 2012, Vina manifested her dream home in 140 sq. ft., a self-sufficient dwelling loaded with functionality, style and charm. Since then Vina's home has captured the imagination of the tiny house enthusiasts from all over the world and has appeared in countless media publications.

My love for simple living started at a very young age when I was growing up in the Philippines. My fondest memory was the big family gatherings at my aunt's nipa hut, located in a tropical jungle setting. Surrounded by palm trees, fruit trees and lush vegetation with a babbling stream nearby, this place was paradise to me. In our native language, we called this place the "linang."

I have a large extended family, which is typical of Filipino families. My parents had raised ten children. My siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles would pack the mules with straw baskets straddled on their backs. The baskets would be filled with food supplies for the journey. We would walk two miles on barefoot into the jungle. Sometimes it was seemed like the entire town was coming along because there were so many of us. Once arrived, we would go swimming in the stream and then prepare lunch and dinner. Since we didn't own bathing suits, we would jump into the water with just plain shorts and t-shirts. We would wash our clothes in the stream with a wooden paddle and beat them against a rock.

Food preparation was the center of activity. We picked fresh jackfruit and bananas from the trees. My aunt, Tia Estelita, would climb the coconut tree barefooted. In her 30's, she was a spinster and a beloved member of the family. Her long flowing grey hair was past her knees. And she never wore under-

wear. To go to the bathroom, we would dig a hole in the ground and use guava leaves for toilet paper.

The rest of the day was about being together, playing in nature and cooking. The meal was always cooked in a big pot over an open fire. We would eat with our hands. We made a dessert called minukmuk, made with a big wooden bowl, and mashed with boiled bananas and gabi (taro roots) and mixed with coconut milk to make it sweet. I remember cracking the coconut open and straddling a wooden bench with a grater to shred the coconut meat. Then I would put the shredded coconut in water and squeeze the liquid out to create the coconut milk. When the food was ready to eat, we all gathered together to eat by the stream.

In my memory, the excursions to the linang stand out as the most joyous occasion during my childhood in the Philippines. Even though I left the Philippines at a young age, the memory is still vivid and dear to me. I am grateful that I was exposed to this quality of life. It shaped my values and deeply influenced my later years.

My family and I immigrated to Los Angeles when I was seven years old. It was a big move for such a large family. We were five boys and five girls. My parents did not have a lot of money and had to work very hard to assimilate us into the American culture. They both worked long hours to support the family, so they didn't have much time to spend with the children. My eldest sister, Rosie (or Ate Salinda), took the role of caregiver. She finished nursing school and immediately started working to help support the family. In many traditional cultures, such as the Philippines, it is typical that the eldest child takes responsibility for the rest of the family.

As the third youngest, I felt I didn't get the same attention as my older siblings. By the time I was born, my parents already had six children. My parents provided as much as they could given the demands of a new environment and a new culture. I think during the development stages of a child, growing up in a large family and then immigrating to another country at such a young age, I didn't have a deep sense of belonging.

As a "third culture kid" or TKC, I didn't fit in with a specific crowd in school. I lived in LA where it was a melting pot of different ethnic groups. I became good friends with kids from Korea and China and Mexico. I learned how to build relationships with other cultures easily, but lacked a cultural

identity of my own. “Cultural homelessness” is typical of third culture kids, and I was one of them. This lack of identity and not feeling like an important part of my family left me feeling lost and alienated.

In many ways, I was a black sheep of the family. I wasn’t like my brothers and sisters. While most of them established a stable job, got married, bought a house and had children, I wanted to go to a university, travel the world, and have life experiences.

While adjusting to the new American culture, I worked diligently in school, got accepted to UCLA, then to USC for an architecture degree. I saw architecture as a balance of creativity and function, and a way I could make a difference in the world.

After my architecture studies, I developed a desire to visit the buildings I studied in person from around the world. This led me to my first trip to Europe as a young single female traveler. Being on my own for three months, I was changed forever. Architecture was a lens into different cultures and different ways of thinking. I learned how to make connections and was inspired by different ways people live, work, and play. I also learned that people are inextricably shaped by design.

With all my worldly possessions in my backpack, simplicity, mobility and freedom became very important to me. Living simply became my mantra connecting me to my modest childhood in the Philippines. At this time, I also became addicted to the travel.

Throughout my career, I traveled abroad to re-assess my direction at pivotal points in my life. I traveled to Alaska for Habitat for Humanity, to Italy to help build an artist residence, and to South America to trek to Machu Picchu. Either for personal or professional reasons, I welcomed the opportunity to experience other cultures and other ways of seeing the world.

My architecture career also prompted me to live in different parts of the US: LA, Chicago and San Francisco. After more than a decade of climbing the corporate ladder, I became disillusioned with the architecture profession. I started to see that architects catered primarily to wealthy clients with big budgets, and even worse, contributing to projects that polluted the Earth.

I learned that the building industry is largely responsible for environmental degradation: greenhouse gas emissions, depletion of natural resources and major contributor to waste in the landfill. After years of working in that

world, I yearned for something different that would fill my soul and make a positive impact in the world.

In 2002, I pursued an opportunity that would give me one of the most valuable experiences: an international fellowship to research ecological and affordable housing in Germany. For three months, I lived in Cologne to research residential projects, interview architects and residents, and compile information for research. The German way of life gave me invaluable perspective on a lifestyle that was inherently aligned with the environment. During that time, I learned that sustainability must be a mindset that pervades culture and way we live our lives.

Upon returning to the US and after completing the fellowship, I felt a renewed sense of purpose to pursue projects with environmental stewardship. I found employment in a small architecture firm in Ventura, California where I worked on small residential projects with an environmental focus.

At the height of the recession in 2008, after traveling to South America for three months, I forged my own path by starting my own business, Sol Haus Design. It was a huge risk, but I needed to take responsibility for my own financial stability in my profession.

I wanted my company to address social issues facing the world, such as affordable housing and environmental impact. Unlike most architecture firms, I wanted my target audience to include people of modest incomes. My solution to provide affordable housing for the masses was a guesthouse pro-



To read more from this chapter by Vina Lustado,
as well as chapters from dozens more tiny house luminaries,
visit *Turning Tiny* on the web (link: www.turningtiny.com)
and order your copy today.

Notes

1. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p60-245.pdf>
2. Quote from Anne Lamott's *Traveling Mercies*: "I think I already understand about life: pretty good, some problems." – Sam Lamott, at (age seven)
3. One successful session of meditation was during my week of framing and sheathing. The structure was framed, and exterior sheathing was being affixed. It was incredibly loud inside the shell, with 8-10 people hammering on the outside. I put earplugs in, laid down, and was transported to a space to which I've never been able to return. It was literally as though my house was cradling me.
4. MAGIC Camp – Mentor a Girl in Construction – holy smokes. It was a partnership with NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) and in 5 days we and 16 area high school girls with construction professionals as their mentors built the sub-floor, and framed, house-wrapped and sheathed my house.
5. I chose the title "luminary" for myself in 2014 when I was designing my new business card for my position with Jay Shafer and we were all about being offbeat. One of the definitions of luminary, according to Merriam-Webster, is a person of prominence or brilliant achievement; a body that gives light. What I liked most about that definition is the part about giving light. It's a recurring theme for me – in my intentions that I wrote for MAGIC Camp, I wrote that I hoped my house was a "glowing orb of light." I like light. I like sharing my light, and shining light on others.
6. David Friedlander, "Talking to Jay Shafer About Making The Universal House," 30 May 2014, TreeHugger, 30 May 2014 < <http://www.treehugger.com/tiny-houses/jay-shafer-makes-the-universal-house.html>>
7. That is, in the increasingly likely event our wages and cost of living don't balance out.
8. Hey, I was a good worker but not *that* good.
9. Local NIMBYs like Mark Rayavec of the Venice Stakeholders Association and nationwide critics like talk show host Steve Harvey come to mind as those who most vociferously oppose our lifestyle in the media.
10. Not her real name.

11. www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2013/10/dignity_village_residents_fight.html
12. www.huduser.org/portal/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptions_Study_final.pdf
13. <http://www.homeforward.org/landlords/what-is-section-8>
14. <http://thetinylife.com/tag/infographic/>
15. <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/ahar-2013-part1.pdf>
16. http://mynorthwest.com/11/2914928/Seattle-police-face-constant-rejection-in-efforts-to-help-homeless?google_editors_picks=true
17. http://media.wix.com/ugd/bd125b_286951ebcfad4362954cdccd20dea940.pdf
18. <http://dignityvillage.org/services/village-intake-committee/>
19. The Boneyard Studios concept was conceived of in late 2011 by Lee Pera and Brian Levy who were shortly thereafter joined by Jay Austin and Elaine Walker. Boneyard Studios was incorporated as an LLC in late 2012. By Fall 2014 the houses owned by Jay, Lee, and Elaine had all left the property where Boneyard Studios began. Boneyard Studios still exists as an entity in DC hosting events and education around tiny houses. Minim Homes owns the property where the tiny house community once resided and now operates a showcase space for small designs there.
20. It's really hard to find contractors who will do a small task here or there on a tiny house. Ironically building an efficient space like a tiny house is not an efficient process because you don't have the economy of scale
21. "How Long it Took" <http://danwebb.squarespace.com/writing/2015/5/1/how-long-it-took.html>
22. The Rent is Still Too Damn High – And Getting Higher (Zillow.com/research/jan-2015-market-report-8951)
23. The Housing Affordability Gap for Extremely Low-Income Renters In 2013 (The Urban Institute)
24. "Metro Phoenix needs more affordable housing" (The Arizona Republic, Catherine Reagor, March 27, 2015)
25. The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), Part 1 (The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development)
26. Statista.com – 183657
27. Forbes.com – #67719e334295
28. Forbes.com – #67719e334295

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interesting stories in the tiny house community.
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