



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 209

thesimpleshow.com

Segment One

Tsh: [00:04](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends! In this episode, I'm chatting with my friend and cohost Andrea Debbink, who's also the Managing Editor of The Art of Simple. As always on the show, we're talking about what we wrote about this week. I shared with you a list and review of all the books I read while I was on sabbatical in July. I read a lot of books. In this episode I deep dive a bit more into one that really resonated with me. It's called *The Tech Wise Family* by Andy Crouch and it's about how to keep technology in its proper place at home. I talk with Andrea here about the different steps my family is taking to keep away screen addiction and prioritize healthy relationships and personal wellness regarding our relationship with tech. Then Andrea share something a little similar. This week she wrote about a recent revelation she's had, is that her smartphone has become a barrier to her creativity. It used to be a portal for it, but now she says it's become a block. Andrea chats with me about why she thinks that is, what she plans to do about it, and the article written five years ago that changed her perspective on screens. We'll get right into it, but first, a quick reminder to make sure you're signed up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things because it's the best way to make sure you never miss an episode of the show or any of our weekly essays. Basically, you'll get links to five things from the week I either created or loved plus occasional news you'd otherwise miss because I don't share it anywhere else. The emails can be read and under a minute because I hate inbox clutter too. Go to fivequickthings.email to sign up for the free weekly email or just click on the links in the show notes of this episode. All right, without further ado, here's Andrea and me talking about our relationships with screens and technology.

Tsh: [01:59](#) As I mentioned in this week's post, I read a lot of books over my sabbatical, which was so fun. And one of my hopes it was that I would get a lot of reading time in. I was surprised at how much nonfiction I got in. I had this idea that I'd be reading tons of novels, but I think being away from screens and thinking so much about my work got me sort of in the mood for some nonfiction, some self development or whatever. I don't know. I don't want to over analyze it, but it was just a surprise. The first stop we made on our

sabbatical, I flew from London to San Francisco, we stayed with friends for a few days, old friends that we've known for a long time. I saw on their floor in their living room, this book called *The Tech Wise Family* by Andy Crouch.

I remembered, oh yeah, I have that on my kindle. You know how Kindle has those or Amazon has those random 1.99 sales or .99 sales. I had gotten it during one of those sales a few months ago and then totally forgot about it. Seeing it there, I asked my friend, do you like that book? And he said, I actually really love it and I was surprised how much I did. He didn't think he would as much as he did. And so I thought, all right then I'm going to go ahead and read that over the month. I read that early on in my sabbatical and it was really good. I thought along with lots of other books I read that were just fantastic in the nonfiction genre. I thought it would zero in on this particular book because it seems like a lot of us these days are talking a lot about screens and digital minimalism and just being thoughtful and much more intentional about how we use these devices in our lives. This book is all about that.

I'm gonna just go through it a little bit, a summary of it, but actually make it a little more applicable to me so that anyone listening might maybe think about how it might be applicable for them. The big thing with the tech wise family is that Andy says it's not about tech being bad. In fact, he makes a point in a pretty good case. Tech is actually really good. It's done so much good in the world. When you think about what constitutes technology, things that we plug in that can save lives literally all the way to just things that make life a little better, like air conditioning.

Tech is great. What he says is it all goes wrong when it doesn't stay in its proper place in our lives. It's just really easy in our modern world to let it slide into the wrong place really easily. Tech is only very good when it helps us become the people we're meant to be, is what he says. I really liked that. This book is about keeping tech in its proper place. It's not about shunning technology going to the closest body of water and throwing your phone in. He doesn't advocate for any of that. He even talks about how he uses tech all the time in his life. To me that's actually, that makes the book more readable and listenable because I respect the guy. He's not someone who just lives off the grid. He is a father of teenagers. He's looking at it on the end of the parenting and looking backwards and talking about some things that they did really well and he's glad they went through the effort and things that he wished he did differently.

I am a mom of kids in the middle. My oldest is 14 and my youngest is 9. We're in the messy middle of parenting and some of the things he suggested, I had a little bit of that, oh well that would have been useful 10 years ago. Oh, well too late now. But it was still really good to read.

Just to summarize what he says and I completely agree. He says tech is in its proper place when (and then he's got this bullet list). It says it helps us bond with the real people we've been given to love. What he means by that is when tech helps us do things like connect with friends and family and we do that over things like connecting with random celebrities and people we'll never meet. I'm thinking of Instagram being the obvious one, he's not at all saying it's bad to follow celebrities or it's bad to care about people you won't meet, but tech is in its proper place when it helps us bond with the people that actually matter in our lives. Far away friends and family or just people we want to keep up with on a regular basis.

He says tech is in its proper place when it starts great conversations. He didn't specify, but I assume he means both online and off. Great conversations online with other people. Maybe people you wouldn't otherwise interact with in real life because you don't have access to someone, say in another country or in that particular type of demographic or whatever. But also you take what you learn and you apply it to great conversations in your real life over just mindless talking and arguing. Tech is in its proper place when we're in great conversations and not in mindless talking.

Tech is in its proper place when it helps us take care of our fragile bodies. I liked that when I hadn't even thought of that before, but he talks about really practical things like, I don't know, the ones that come to my mind are like yoga videos on YouTube. I'm grateful for that kind of thing. Or finding recipes online or just learning about health and wellness. I've learned so much through the medium of technology over using tech for mindless escapism. When tech helps us actually take care of our bodies over letting them deteriorate. Apps that help us work out or audio books and then we go on a walk as opposed to just sitting there and finding distraction.

He also says tech is in its proper place when it helps us acquire skill and mastery. Taking classes or having access to education we couldn't find elsewhere. There are so many places around the world where tech is huge because of that. But even beyond that, just simple continuing education for us as adults, learning things by googling or flat out taking some of those classes that are everywhere now over passive entertainment letting it just pacify us with, I'm not, and he wasn't necessarily shunning things like Netflix, but we all know how easy it is to just become a really passive with a good old binge.

He says tech is in its proper place when it helps us cultivate care for creation. And Andrea, I thought specifically of our episode we did a few months ago where you talked about the app you used to identify plants and different things like that. I thought that was the first thing that came to my mind is like, oh yeah, things like that. Learning about creation in staying in awe of creation. He uses

the example of watching Planet Earth, that BBC series, stuff like that. When it helps us cultivate a care of a creation, leading us to learn more and be in awe that over staying inside. What he means by that is just pacifying ourselves with hours and hours of screen watching versus actually getting out there and going on a hike or walking around our neighborhoods.

Lastly, tech is in its proper place when it's used with intention and care. That's where he goes into the rest of the book, that we have to use it with an intention and care because it does not do this on its own. I don't even need to prove that point. I think we all agree that it's so easy to let tech slide out of place.

Andrea: [09:33](#) What's so interesting about that is, and you've spoken about this before in the blog, how it's designed that way. It's designed to take over our lives in a sense because of its addictive quality because of the way they designed the social media platforms, it's not going to just stay in one little compartment in our lives. It needs us to control it.

Tsh: [09:53](#) That's right. In fact, there is, there's another book I read on my sabbatical and it's *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now*. That's the name of the book. It's long and I feel like it's a little bit hyperbolic, it's supposed to make you feel a little bristly, and I don't necessarily agree with everything he says, but he does make a really compelling case because he's the guy who wrote this. He's a social media insider, early adopter. He from Silicon Valley. Not early adopter. I forget. He's in the tech world and he says, I know with evidential proof that everybody in Silicon Valley, we engineer these apps and these tools to be addictive. They purposely want you addicted so that you stay hooked so that they make more money.

Because of that, we really do have to swim upstream. It is not something that we can just say, oh, I'll be fine. I talked about this, maybe I talked about it last week's podcast, I talked about it somewhere. Maybe I just wrote about it? At the beginning of my sabbatical, I thought at first I'm just going to keep Instagram on my phone because I'm not going to bother posting or even worrying about that. I'm just want to keep up with other people. I think it'd be fun to keep up with what people are doing this month. By like July 3rd or so I realized, wait, what the heck am I doing? I don't need to keep up with people for a month and I'm not going to be able to do this. I will not be able to just stay on for five minutes and then get off. That's not going to work for me this month. I deleted it from my phone and I felt instantly better. But that's because they have engineered Instagram to be addictive.

Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, he says there's three fundamental choices we need to make. He's writing specifically to families and so therefore this book

is geared towards parents. But I would say just any adults can take a lot of takeaway from this. Even if you don't have kids, this is just as applicable.

The first one he says is choose character. For his family, they've gone pretty intentionally and have said that they develop wisdom and courage together. That's one of their life values, develop wisdom and courage together. What he means by choose character is basically life isn't better when things are easy and tech makes harder things far too easy.

Finding information, being entertained, those kinds of things. He's not saying that's bad, but it's way too easy to live life. He gives lots of other examples and so he says character is developed when we wrestle with things and we struggle to learn and we fail and then we get back up. Sometimes tech just makes those things impossible. In fact, he says things get flipped and tech inadvertently makes natural things harder, so the opposite. Things like paying attention, not wasting time, connecting with people across the table from us, sleeping, all these things that are inherently not that hard actually become harder. Tech does this weird thing where it makes a hard things easy, too easy and easy things too hard.

For him he says, a good question to ask is, will this make me less foolish and more wise and will this make me less fearful and more courageous?

Andrea: [13:07](#) Oh, I love those questions.

Tsh: I did too. I liked them too. They're really broad and vague and so I can see how sometimes that's a little bit hard, before we press play on this Netflix show, you know? But I think that's actually wise it's to pause and actually think about, okay, what am I doing with my time here on this particular website? Is this helping me? We've all been there before where we click on this interesting headline and then before we know it, this is such a dumb thing I'm reading and I just wasted 30 minutes. Choose character.

He says the second of the three fundamental choices are to shape space. For him he says his family fills the center of their home with things that reward skill and active engagement. When he says shape space, he means literal space, like our houses, our homes. We get to arrange our homes to focus on the things we care about. He uses this analogy of a hearth versus a furnace. For most of human history we've had things like hearths, that's hard to say in plural, like a fireplace or a place generally where people would have to gather around to fully stay warm in a home and then eventually technology wonderfully provided something like furnaces that dissipate throughout the house. Before we're even aware of it, our house is heated because it's just there. We don't pay attention to the furnace and that's not a bad thing at all, but it does make us a little more

separated and it does just have a low grade, this is the MO in our family. He uses that analogy for technology.

Is technology in your home the way it's shaped, does it help you come together like around her hearth or is it just there and you can go anywhere in the house and do your thing? He uses really specific examples like, where your devices go. Do you have a home base for your devices and are they in more of a public, central location? I think that's really important for kids, for example. What is your furniture centered on? Our modern living rooms are all focused on the TV, but they don't have to be. I think more and more people are either putting their TV in a separate room that's not the main space or they are not even having a TV and they just use their computer screens. Where people go to relax. Is it easy to just go to your separate bedrooms and do your own thing? Or is there a central location where people can be together.

Tech is great in homes. We have our refrigerators and we have heating and air conditioning. We have Wifi, these are all good, but it's also important to keep low tech around the house. He uses examples of candles, they light candles for their meals at dinner and it just is nice and low tech. It connects them. Musical instruments. They're big into music. He uses that example of the piano and guitars out in the living room, board games, open-ended toys, which I've talked about many for many years on the blog when my kids were younger, things like just wooden blocks versus the toys where you push a button, that kind of thing.

He advocates making our homes easier to disengage from screens and easy tech. There's a really great quote from the book. He says,

"Find the room where your family spends the most time and ruthlessly eliminate the things that ask little of you and develop little in you. This is the central nudge of the tech wise life, to make the place where we spend most of our time the place where easy, everywhere is hardest to find."

I really liked that. He talks about tech being easy everywhere now and he says, just make it a little bit less techie. Maybe some more low tech and it'll feel less tempting really to always be online. Now some of you listening, you might think you're making it sound like we have all this space. We have a tiny house. We're five people and we live in 1400 square feet. It's not like we have a second living space. I know a lot of people do, but we just don't and we're great with that. That's actually, very intentional, why we picked a small house, but that means that we need to be more mindful about what we have in our main living area altogether when it comes to tech.

The third point he makes is structure time. For them, they turn off their devices one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year. I thought that was really

interesting. Especially the one hour a day thing, I thought, well sure, I put my phone down for at least an hour a day, several hours a day. But he means literally turn off, turn the button off. And I thought, well why bother doing that? And he says the reason they do that essentially is for them to remind themselves, who's the boss here? The screens are not the boss of them. They still have total control of the phones being turned off or not. For them they do that around dinner time, they turn off all their devices and have dinner for around an hour and then eventually they can turn their devices back on and that's all fine. I can see how this could turn a little bit into legalism, but to me it didn't sound like that at all from his family's experience. I thought that was just a really cool practice to remind yourself that you have control. Sometimes we need that reminder, I can do this.

Andrea: [18:30](#) That also probably shows you a bit like how much you're actually on. Like you, I would assume, oh, I probably put it down for it an hour and never touch it. But is that true? Maybe not. Maybe if I were to turn it off for an hour, I'd really notice because I'd go to grab it a number of times.

Tsh: [18:45](#) Right. It's funny, whenever I was on my sabbatical I was really reminded of this, what it would mean to structure my time away from the phone or away from a screen. It's good to remember things like there are just natural rhythms to the day and seasons. For some reason this became more obvious when I wasn't on screens. I don't even know why, but it was like time slowed down and I just didn't have that mindless, I don't want to say mindless like I was always on, but there was still something ticking in the back of my mind that was screen related I guess. I don't know? Leaving the house without your phone is a big deal these days. But even doing that made the whole event feel different. It made me, like you said, a little bit more aware of how easy it is to pick it up mindlessly without even thinking about it.

Andy Crouch makes the point that tech brings far more leisure to our days than humans either need or require or is healthy, compared to humans history on earth. It's good to find what he says, a balance between toil, which is not good either. It's his point is pointless work is toil and leisure and sometimes tech really values both toil and leisure far too much.

For example, toil would be working far later than you even need to be working. We all get that point where it's I'm actually spinning in the wrong direction. I'm actually having a net negative now to my work. I just need to stop. Then obviously we already know the leisure. He uses the example of it's really good to take time to cook a meal versus microwaving a TV dinner and going low tech helps us better do that.

We're remembering a lot more of just the daily rhythm of our days, meaning what it takes to cook a dinner and being mindful of the seasons of the food and that kind of thing and going low tech helps that sometimes.

Those three things are his main points. Choose characters, shape space and structure time. He makes a few other good points such as wake up before your devices and go to bed before they go to bed before you do. That means don't grab your phone first thing and then end your screen time at least an hour before bed. That also does that same thing with the off button. It makes you feel like you're the boss, the phone isn't keeping you up, nor is it waking you up. Use screens for a purpose, meaning not mindlessly, you're getting on your laptop, you're opening your phone, you're turning on the TV for a reason, not just to kill time or just to see what's on or what's the latest chat on Twitter. He says, when it comes to families, use the car time to talk or listen. Use that for great conversations, listen to audio books, that kind of thing. I thought that's really one of those small little points that has been really true in our lives as well.

Ultimately, he makes this point too, discipline is necessary. It's easy for us to, I don't know, not like that word or be concerned that it would be too legalistic in our lives, but this is a great quote from the book. He says,

"In this area of tech as an all of life, the path toward real freedom, including the freedom to actually choose freedom, rather than imprisoning ourselves and our two small substitutes for real life, is to embrace discipline."

This is an area where both my family and myself as a person, we need discipline. We just do. My sabbatical reminded me of this and even just as a really hits home example right now, one of my kids is grounded from screens for stuff and it's a week long. He's only got a few days left at this point and he is so much more pleasant to be around this whole week. He is more helpful. He is sleeping better and it's just Kyle and I are saying, can we somehow like just toss out all the screens and not have the kids [inaudible] out? Because this is incredible.

We cringe at the thought of rules, but for us we just need parameters. Just like we need guardrails on windy roads, we just need them. I say we, meaning my family. Your mileage may vary those listening, but here's a little bit of what we do. There's no simple, easy to remember formula, I think for screen time or screen rules or tech in the family, I think it requires a lot of discernment and things change, right? Kids get older, your circumstances change. Everyone's houses are differently.

But for us right now, meaning three kids age nine to four and two adults working from home, here are the basic parameters we have in our family. One is no screen time for fun, this doesn't include work or school, no screen time until after

lunch and after these things have happened: play, read, outside time, and chores. When those four things have happened and it's after lunch, then there can be a little bit of screen time. We have found that just waiting until the afternoon mixed attitudes a lot better. When you have all those other things done, screens have less of a draw or less of an appeal. This includes Saturdays. We used to have Saturday morning screen time, but we found that the kids were bumps on a log for hours afterwards even when they turned off the screens. They don't get screen time till the afternoons. In the era of Netflix, we don't have Saturday morning cartoons anymore. They're not going to miss anything. They can watch anything whenever they want. That's a rule for us.

Another rule is, well this is a new one actually for this school year, we will see how it goes because we still have not started school yet, we do in a few weeks. No screen time at all at home, Monday through Thursday. The kids go to school Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. For us, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are their evenings where they need to go to bed early because we wake up early for school and then Thursday nights are our extra curricular activity days in our family. We're making this blanket rule of Monday through Thursday, no screens at all. Even if they're home and they've done all those other things, we're just not going to do them and we're not sure how the kids are going to do. We talked about it already and they said, yeah, okay that sounds good. I can see in the thick of it, when someone's had a hard day and all you want to do is watch YouTube and we say no, that could get a little hard. But we'll see. I could get into later why we're doing that, but it would be a whole other episode.

Another one is screens together is better than individual screens. We've seen this happen with our kids countless times. When my daughter is on her laptop and my son has borrowed my phone and my other son is on the iPad and they're all playing a game, they get crankier than if they were to play a game together. If they were to play Minecraft together, if they were to watch a show together. For us on those days where we do allow screens, so basically Friday, Saturday and Sunday, only one hour is allowed for individual screens. The rest is for group screen time. That means family movie nights or like I said, group gaming like Minecraft or something. We'll see how that goes. One hour. It sounds like a lot, but it's actually really not.

Andrea: Are they all having their individual screen-time at the same time or is it a different time?

Tsh: It's easier for us when it's all at the same time and for the most part they are, but sometimes it varies. Some kid once it now the other kid wants it later, they're old enough now to at least understand reasonably that just because this kid is on it doesn't mean you get to be on, because you already had your screen time. They understand they're at the age now, but it's easier if everybody's on.

Then with that during the individual screentime, no screens facing walls. You can't be on a couch against the wall and we can't see your screen. If you want to be on the couch you have to turn sideways so we can see your screens. It's even preferable if you're just at a table or at the kitchen island and it's not because we're trying to hover or micromanage, it's because we need to see. Our kids are still too young to just get to hole up in corner and watch whatever they want and then everyone is in that common area. No screens behind closed doors like in bedrooms.

If anyone is curious, our family has finally found a pretty decent monitoring app. We have tried quite a few. Our family is currently using the app called unGlue. I'll put a link in the show notes. It is, I believe \$5 a month, at least the plan we're doing and it's really great. We can see all of their screens on what all they're doing at what time. We get a long list of, for three minutes she was on this site and then for five minutes she was on the site. We can set up parameters, like block sites or block devices or apps or whatever. Another thing we use is Google Wifi, so I'll put a link to that in the show notes too. These are basically routers. I don't quite understand how they work out. All I know is they're routers and you put them throughout your house and somehow they connect so that they help bring Wifi. I don't know how to explain it. They come in packs of three or you can just buy one. We only have one because we have a small house. I think one covers 1500 square feet. You don't need a lot if you have a smaller place. It's really cool, it's like a smart router because it allows you to turn off and on the Internet on particular devices so you can have WiFi in the house but turn it off on your kids phone after, you can set it up to where after 8:00 PM or something, the kid's phone no longer has WiFi or whatever it is you want to do. That's nice. We use those two in conjunction with each other.

The last rule we have as a family is all screens live in charge in a commons area. Even mine and Kyle's. We have one master charging station and everybody's phones are in there. Really and truly nobody has their screen in their room. In fact, like my daughter loves sleeping to a playlist or sound machine thing in a room. She has a Bluetooth speaker. She sets it up on her phone before she even goes into her bedroom and she plays her playlist from her device and it's not even in her room, she just has it on the speaker. Kyle and I can and do check them all the time. I see my daughter's group texts. I don't interfere. She's a good kid, and it's not because we don't trust them, it's because we don't trust the Internet. We've been around the block, it's just all too easy to hide things. We check them all the time.

Ultimately I think it's good to remember, Andy Crouch says this and it's this thing I even have to embrace as a parent. It's okay to say our family is different. Whenever your kids don't like the rules or think you're being an un-fun parent,

there's gnashing of teeth. There's all the eye rolls, just to simply say our family is different. Meaning, yes, that's okay for them. They're allowed to do X, Y, and Z, but not you. Just to say our family is different. That's definitely a short term loss, long term game that it's really worth it. He ends saying that, as teenagers, he's got I one out of the house and one that's maybe a senior in high school or something. He says it's been worth it to say that. Even the teens themselves say that. I think his teen daughter is the one that wrote the forward of the book and she talks about that. She says, that they were always a slightly stricter family and she's really glad for it now.

All that to say I've got the book in the show notes. Even if the book doesn't resonate with you could take the things that I've shared and maybe just extract a few takeaways for your own life and your own circumstances, whether or not you're a parent and just see how you can maybe put parameters in your life. I think down the road on the podcast, I'm going to talk a little bit about screen parameters for myself in work because I've had a number of people ask, okay, well that's all well and good to do that personally but you still work over the Internet. What rules are you setting up for yourself? I can talk about that maybe down the road. So anyway, that's me.

Segment Two

Speaker 4: [35:11](#) Andrea, you have similar, maybe not similar thoughts, but you have a similar topic to talk about. What'd you write about this week?

Andrea: It's interesting. I think this is a topic that you've talked about before on the blog, the whole idea of being more mindful of our tech use and our screen time. I would definitely say that you're one of the people that's gotten me to think about this more over the past couple of years. Especially your post, I'm trying to think of when this would be now, two weeks ago when you talked about your screen free break. It got me thinking all over again, maybe I need to reevaluate the place of tech and screen time in my own life. I started reflecting specifically on how screen time was affecting my creativity because this whole idea of digital overuse is something that I've been reading about for a few years. I remember the first time that I read about it, it was actually an article in Outside Magazine. In 2014 there was an article called, "Reboot or Die Trying". It was written by a writer named David Roberts. Have you heard of him?

Tsh: I have, but I can't remember why.

Andrea: I actually haven't read anything by him since this article, but at the time in 2014, he was a political reporter for grist.org and most of his life was spent online. His

professional life was on Twitter and on social media and he was an extreme social media user, I would say. He said at the time he would tweet 50 times a day.

Tsh: Oh my goodness.

Andrea: He actually reached the limit for the number of tweets you could have in a day. I didn't know there was a limit on Twitter, but apparently there was, at least back then. He would max out the number of times a person could tweet in a day.

Tsh: I had no idea.

Andrea: He was really, really deep into his digital overload. And as a result, he decided to take an entire year sabbatical off not necessarily his phone, but social media, emailing, texting. I think he said that in the article, he goes into it a bit more, he talks about how he used it for like GPS to get around and would make phone calls, but it was like the break that you were talking about where it wasn't social media, that was totally off his phone. Then he just reflected in that year the effect that it had in his life physically, socially, mentally. The result was good. I mean he realized what a problem it was. It was around that time because of reading that article that I decided to deactivate my own Facebook account I had since college when it was the fun new thing on the Internet and then gotten to a place in my life where I realized the bad that this is bringing into my life, it's actually outweighing the good that I'm getting from it so I deactivated at that time and instead focused my attention on Instagram, which at that time was pretty different from Instagram as we know it today.

That was before the algorithm really came into play when posts would go up chronologically. There just wasn't the insta stories feature. There wasn't video. I actually get a little bit nostalgic about 2014 Instagram because I liked it.

Tsh: I personally remember 2014 Instagram because that's when we left on our trip. I remember that feeling really just simple and warm fuzzy and I can look back now and see how I would use it so differently with 2019 Instagram anyway, keep talking.

Andrea: [38:40](#) Yes. It was also for me at the time, a way to connect with other creative people, people who are doing similar types of creative work, whether that was writing or painting or photography. Overall just I remember the vibe on Instagram being pretty positive. It really wasn't the play by play of everybody's lives that it is today. In addition to that, I was also working in a job that restricted pursuing my personal writing outside of work and other creative activities outside of work. Instagram really did become my creative outlet and it served that purpose for a long time. But then this past summer, I feel like I've been

going through this shift where I've suddenly realized, oh, social media is not fulfilling the role that it used to fill in by life and it's not actually my creative outlet anymore, even though I've been calling it that for a long time and actually having some negative effects.

Tsh: [39:37](#) Sure.

Andrea: My time and relationships and things like that, but specifically on my creative energy and creative time. In my post this week, I talked about a few ways that social media and specifically Instagram, has become harmful to my creativity. The first, and this is something that you've talked about before, is it shortened my attention span which is really hard if you're a writer and you're writing longer form things like books or even a blog post. If you're used to writing really short Instagram captions or you're used to having fragmented attention, it's really hard to sit down and just focus on writing long form. That's something that I've seen. The second thing that I've noticed is that it fills up my daydream time. Which is essentially my thinking time, the time when you think for thinking sake.

Tsh: [40:26](#) Right. I've actually heard, and this was maybe in the same vein, how things like social media is taking away our ability to be bored. I think daydreaming is sort of the epitome of being bored in a good way. Right? We can just sit there and be with our thoughts and it's like we can't do that anymore. We don't know how to be with our thoughts.

Andrea: [40:43](#) Right. I think about even when I'm waiting in the line for groceries, which is what, five minutes or less? I take out my phone. Because I can't stand not being entertained for the five minutes I'm in a grocery store line, which is awful.

The third thing that I realized is that, this is another obvious one that I've heard people talk about a lot, is it stirs up comparison and envy. Back in 2014, Instagram was a place of inspiration. Now it's placed where, oh, that person is more successful than me. Oh, they're working on a cooler project than me and it just really taps into my envy in a way that I don't know like.

Tsh: [41:20](#) I'm curious if you have any thoughts because it's not necessarily the numbers you're talking about. I know you're also talking about the content itself, the things being posted, how it can stir up envy because it absolutely can with me, but have you, about how some countries, including Canada, they're toying with the idea of doing away with numbers, where you can't see the likes on numbers where you can't see people's follower counts or something like that.

Andrea: I haven't heard of that.

Tsh: Yeah, they're trying it right now in Canada and I want to say Singapore and one other country. When I read that I was like, that would make Instagram so much better. I would love that.

Andrea: It would.

Tsh: I would love to not see how many likes anything has. That would be fantastic

Andrea: [41:59](#) It would be interesting to see how people's use of it changes because of that

Tsh: I know, right? People would probably post differently and it wouldn't be a likes game, it would be a, I actually want to post this. That to me is my big soapbox about Instagram.

Andrea: [42:14](#) Yeah. Then number four, I've realized that social media, it turns me into a passive consumer rather than an empowered creator. I'm just scrolling. I'm just taking things in. I'm just being sold to, I'm not really putting good creative work out there via my social media platforms, I guess. The last one is it's caused me to devalue the creative work I actually want to do.

Tsh: Oh, okay. Tell me more about that.

Andrea: Yeah. Which for me is long form writing. One of the reasons I quit my job back in January was to focus on writing books and writing books is not an instant gratification art form.

Tsh: It's a slog.

Andrea: It's a slog. There's nothing you can really say about it while you're in the middle of it. You and I were talking earlier before we started recording this, that I started working on this book this past week and it's not going to be released until spring 2021 and in social media time that's an eon from now. It's so tempting for me when I have Instagram to just focus on creating these little short bursts of a beautiful photo or this short Instagram caption. I would rather put my creative energy there because I get affirmation right away. I get likes, I get comments, I get feedback. I don't get any of that with the long form writing that I'm doing.

Tsh: [43:42](#) That's right. Or even from somebody listening, I heard this about it makes you not even want to clean your house cause nobody's clicking like for the clean counter in your kitchen. You're like, why bother? I'm not getting affirmed.

Andrea: [43:52](#) Yeah. That's been interesting because when I really stop to think about it, I want to spend my creative energy and my time on this type of writing, not

social media stuff. I have to make that conscious choice. I have to put that, for me, the social media stuff aside for awhile so I can really dig into the longer slog of long form writing.

Tsh: Yeah. That's good.

Andrea: It's interesting. I actually ended up taking a month long break from Instagram completely unintentionally.

Tsh: Did you? Okay.

Andrea: [44:32](#) I got uninspired and stop sharing anything. But it's interesting because now I've realized, oh, now I don't actually have a lot of motivation to get back on and start sharing things. It's like what you were saying, once you get out of that habit of doing it, you don't have as much excitement or pull to get back into it. One way that I've noticed this is we've gone on camping trips and hiking and I've seen a lot of beautiful things this summer. Normally I would be taking a lot of pictures and then I'd share them online or put them in an Instastory and I haven't done that. That has actually changed my experience of those things because I'm not living those experiences with a mind towards how can I share this online. It's been really good. There's been a number of times just this past week where I've walked by this beautiful prairie near where we live. I remember all the pictures I've taken over the years of the flowers that are blooming this time of year and I'm walking by this past week and it just felt so freeing to realize usually I'd be taking lots of photos of that and I'm choosing not to, I'm just choosing to be here and see them with my eyes and enjoy it in that way.

Tsh: [45:46](#) Yeah. On our month long trip or time in the Pacific northwest, we saw tons of beautiful things and I did not take photos of them at all. I didn't even take photos just for the heck of it. I just sat there and enjoyed it. It was such a different experience than it made me realize how often we document things for the purpose of sharing. I just wonder why culturally, how we come to that point where we feel the need to share everything or that it's almost like it didn't happen or it wasn't as meaningful unless we shared it. I think that's just so strange.

Andrea: [46:17](#) Right. I actually just saw an interesting short video that I think was produced by the New York Times of kids confronting their parents about "sharenting," just the term they've created for sharing pictures of their kids too much online or whatever. A girl was confronting her mom about the fact that she overshared about her online and her mother said something to the effect of, but if I don't share photos of our vacation, it didn't happen. This is a woman who's our age saying this in real earnestness, but I think there's a real truth to that. We

feel like, well, this doesn't count, what I did, doesn't matter unless I'm sharing it and getting someone to notice that it happened.

Tsh: [47:01](#) That's interesting. Okay. I have another essay and podcast I have in the works, but I think so much of this as not necessarily about a vanity, it's much more about loneliness. I think we want to connect. We feel the need to connect. I think it comes from a good place. We see this beautiful sunset and we think, oh, I want other people to enjoy this with me. But I think it really goes to a deeper level. It's more about being lonely and wanting and craving that community more than just feeling the need to overshare because I don't think any of us want to overshare.

I have to ask, when did you take your break from Instagram? What month or when was this?

Andrea: [47:42](#) It's really just been, I think I posted something on our anniversary in July, early July and I haven't posted anything since and I haven't really gone on. It's funny because I actually do post for Art of Simple, I post our content, but as far as my personal, it's been over a month and it's weird. I just don't feel a motivation to get back on and start sharing my life in that way.

Tsh: [48:08](#) The reason I ask even is because I haven't noticed, I follow you on Instagram and I haven't noticed. I'm not on it very much anymore, but I think that that illustrates a bigger point too, if sometimes we think people will notice and when we just stop, people will be okay. There's not going to be this void on the Internet because we decided to stop posting for a couple of months. I think that illustrates that point.

Andrea: [48:30](#) As I've had all of these realizations and I've been rethinking and my use of social media and how it affects my creativity, I've also become aware of how there are certain things in my life that need to change if I'm going to plan to unplug in certain ways. Unplugging is a good thing to do. But the problem with that is as you encountered so much of our lives, it's wrapped up in our phones. In some ways our phone, I call it in my blog posts, our phones are like our digital Swiss army knife where they do everything. If you leave it behind, you're not just leaving behind your phone, you're leaving behind your camera, you're leaving behind your notes app and everything. I've slowly over the past couple of years, actually started replacing certain tasks that my phone would do with other things in my life. A couple of years ago I got a clock radio alarm clock. I longer to have my phone in my room. It's been incredible.

Tsh: [49:32](#) Same with me. I have a tiny little analog phone and it's all good. I wake up when I need to wake up.

Andrea: [49:38](#) It's great. Sometimes I wake up to static because it's a clock radio. At the same time it really helps with what you were saying earlier, I don't reach for my phone first thing in the morning because it's not there. It's physically not in the room and that helps a lot. The other thing that I've doing is I started a physical, a writer's notebook where I write down all my ideas where I do free write rather than doing it on the notes app on my phone or drive or whatever on my phone, just to have this physical notebook that I bring along wherever I go has been really helpful for getting me off the phone and that way. The other thing that we did a couple of years ago is we actually bought a camera that's just a camera.

Tsh: What a concept!

Andrea: [50:25](#) It's not a really fancy camera but we did this a few years ago when we were going to go to Colorado on vacation and I was realizing I don't want to have to bring my phone everywhere on this vacation. We ended up getting this camera and honestly I should probably use it more instead of taking our phone. But it's just separating the two tasks. You depend on your phone for the camera and your phone is with you anytime you're taking photos too, which can be good, it can be bad. Those are just a few very minor things that I've just been noticing in my own life. Hey, if I can replace this with another thing that's not my phone, it helps me to unplug from it more.

Tsh: [51:01](#) I think those things are simple, but the impact that they have far outweighs their supposedly simplicity. I think a notebook. It's surprising how much just having things like a notebook and like what we were saying, the alarm clock really feels like you're more in control of your life instead of at the mercy of this Swiss army knife that you so well put it. I know you've also talked about physical books and real cookbooks and I am totally there too. The only thing I was bummed about with *The Tech Wise Family* is that it was on my kindle. I really wanted a hard copy of *The Tech Wise Family*. In fact, maybe I'll put one in my shopping cart now because I like that book enough to get a paper copy, but there's something just really great about holding analog materials and supplies and using them to do one thing only.

[52:05](#) You can find Andrea at AndreaDebbink.com and on Instagram and [Andrea.Debbink](https://www.instagram.com/Andrea.Debbink), and keep up with me, I'm on twitter [@Tsh](https://twitter.com/Tsh) and Instagram [@TshOxenreider](https://www.instagram.com/TshOxenreider), and of course at theartistsimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Andrea's. Head to the show notes of this episode number 209 at thesimpleshow.com where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars per month as well as how to connect with Andrea and myself. The show was produced by Chad Michael Snavely, and thanks also

to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink and my furry intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening. I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.