But Will It Make You Happy?

She had so much. A two-bedroom apartment. Two cars. Enough wedding china to serve two dozen people. Yet Tammy Strobel wasn’t happy. Working as a project manager with an investment management firm in Davis, Calif., and making about $40,000 a year, she was, as she put it, caught in the “work-spend treadmill.” So one day she stepped off.

Inspired by books and blog entries about living simply, Ms. Strobel and her husband, Logan Smith, both 31, began donating some of their belongings to charity. As the months passed, out went stacks of sweaters, shoes, books, pots and pans, even the television after a trial separation during which it was relegated to a closet. Eventually, they got rid of their cars, too. Emboldened by a website that challenges consumers to live with just 100 personal items, Ms. Strobel winnowed down her wardrobe and toiletries to precisely that number.

Today, three years after Ms. Strobel and Mr. Smith began downsizing, they live in Portland, Ore., in a spare, 400-square-foot studio with a nice-sized kitchen. Mr. Smith is completing a doctorate in physiology; Ms. Strobel happily works from home as a Web designer and freelance writer. She owns four plates, three pairs of shoes and two pots. With Mr. Smith in his final weeks of school, Ms. Strobel’s income of about $24,000 a year covers their bills. They are still car-free but have bikes. One other thing they no longer have: $30,000 of debt.

“The idea that you need to go bigger to be happy is false,” she says. “I really believe that the acquisition of material goods doesn’t bring about happiness.”

So just where does happiness reside for consumers? One major finding is that spending money for an experience — concert tickets, French lessons, sushi-rolling classes, a hotel room in Monaco — produces longer-lasting satisfaction than spending money on plain old stuff. The Boston Consulting Group said in a June report that recession anxiety had prompted a “back-to-basics movement,” with things like home and family increasing in importance over the last two years, while things like luxury and status have declined.

*Stephanie Rosenbloom,* The New York Times*, 2010*

**Writing Directions**

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author’s most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.