

Living Large

- From SUV's to Double Ds, Why Going Bigger Isn't Going Better
- by Sarah Z. Wexler
- ©2010, Saint Martin's Press: New York, New York
- Summary by Douglas W. Green, EdD
- DGGreen@STNY.RR.Com

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

|

If you like this summary, buy the book

The Author and The Book

- Sarah Wexler is a staff writer for *Allure* and has written for *Wired*, *Esquire*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, *Popular Science*, *Marie Claire*, and *The Ladies' Home Journal*. In *Living Large*, she shows how American life has become super sized in many ways from houses, to churches, to malls, to weddings, to cars, and debt. It is well researched, contains humorous and incisive prose, and fascinating facts and statistics. In addition to being an enjoyable and interesting read, it provides insight into our society and ourselves. It's an excellent resource for educators and great supplemental reading for students.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

2

If you like this summary, buy the book

The McMansion Expansion

- Since 1940 the number of people living in an American home has dropped from 3.7 to 2.6 while the average size has increased from 983 to 2,349 square feet. Also known as starter castles, garage Mahals, or McMansions, many have become impossible to pay for or unload. They tend to be uniform on the inside and contain more space that is used for storage than for living. Once we recover from our record foreclosures, will we rebuild more sensibly, or continue to build big houses with big closets?

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

3

If you like this summary, buy the book

Inside the Megachurch

- They are non-Catholic churches with at least 2,000 members for weekly services. They feature hired musicians, amplified pop-style music, projectors, comfortable seats, and charismatic ministers. They fight for the 3rd place in your life after home and work. They feature small group intimate support for everything from divorce recovery to age-group ministries. They are an alternative to pop-culture and second chances. They tend to be in suburban areas where people have more money and are more likely to be white. It may seem more like Dr. Phil, but people seem to be helped.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

4

If you like this summary, buy the book

Saline and Silicone, Supersized

- To do the research for the chapter on breast implants, Sarah had a consultation with a provider as if she was in the market for this most common type of cosmetic surgery. Anyone thinking about implants needs to read her story. She is told how larger breasts will improve her self esteem and that the pain and possible complications are worth it. She wonders if the procedure will make her happier, sexier, and more secure. The average implant size in the US is 350 cc. (Doug: for comparison, the largest head on a driver is 460 cc. I looked up average base cost, which is about \$3,400. Be prepared for the bottom line to be much higher.) One concern is that the number of women 18 or younger getting implants quadrupled from 1992 to 2004.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

5

If you like this summary, buy the book

What Happens in Vegas

- For this chapter Sarah visits the largest hotel in Las Vegas, The MGM Grand, which has 5,690 rooms, a seven-acre pool complex, three theaters, a 20,000 square-foot nightclub, and two lounges. There is also a casino the size of four football fields. Even though business is down a bit, she was surprised to find that it still seems crowded. She found it easy to get lost in the place and suspected the high return rate was due to the fact that people didn't want to learn how to get around in another monster hotel. As usual, her observations are humorous and interesting.

The Ring Bling

- The average engagement ring costs \$4,435. A typical American wedding hovers at \$28,000. Today's guidelines declare that a man spend three month's salary or more on an engagement ring. Eighty percent of engagement rings are purchased by couples. The average honeymoon costs \$3,800. The average wedding features 175 guests. In the UK, 70% of women did not want their partners to propose until they had saved enough money to buy the ring of their dreams, and 28% would turn down a proposal if the ring wasn't to their taste.

Shopping Inside the Box

- The American symbol of large store shopping is embodied by Walmart. Sarah follows a Make-A-Wish recipient on a \$3,000 shopping spree as he becomes the focus of her mega store story. Statistics that stand out in the narrative include: Walmart accounts for between 8 and 10 percent of all US retail, 20 percent of grocery spending, 25 percent of toy spending and health and beauty spending, and it is our second largest pharmacy. While Walmart's prices save shoppers money and provides many jobs, there are fewer total jobs and Walmart jobs pay less. Inexpensive Walmart products also result in manufacturing leaving the US.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

8

If you like this summary, buy the book

The New Barbie Dream Car

- Once again Sarah puts herself in the middle of the research by shopping for, and test driving a Hummer. She also outs herself as a liberal by admitting to having an inner hippy, that is dormant, but still exists. The idea of a Sierra Club member test driving a Hummer is amusing no matter where you live on the political spectrum. Her old friends are anti-Hummer people, but they are also likely to have tattoos on their necks. I have to respect anyone who lets you know their political bias and then makes fun of their side. She also gives credit to conservative Hummer drivers who engage in charitable activities as part of club activities.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

9

If you like this summary, buy the book

Mall of America

- Wexler visits the Mall of America in Minnesota, which contains 520 stores and sees more tourists than Disney World, Graceland, and the Grand Canyon combined. She comments on malls in general and “retail therapy.” This refers to people to shop to make themselves feel better, at least temporarily. Six percent of Americans are considered to be “overshoppers.” She points out that malls are having a more difficult time keeping their space occupied by high end stores. As a result, you might find dollar stores, office space, medical centers, and community colleges in your local mall. The last new mall was opened in 2006.

All Wrapped Up In Debt

- At 60%, more Americans than ever have credit card debt. People commonly have \$8,000 or more in such debt. Wexler uses a classic Barbie game to illustrate the fact that our country has gone from earn, save, pay to buy now, pay later. It is too easy to over-borrow in our bigger is better culture. She also sees this attitude as a result of the fact that children and young adults today grow up not knowing how to do much for themselves. We are lucky if we can sew on a button.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

||

If you like this summary, buy the book

This Landfill Isn't a Dump

- Sarah visits a land fill near Los Angeles that is so big it has its own exit off the four-lane. She reminds us of how much each of us throws away each day (4.8 pound/day) and of the fact that it has to go somewhere. While some localities are recycling more and using waste for fuel, others with more space just pile it up. Reading this chapter should help each of us to improve our ability to recycle and reuse more as we throw less somewhere else. (Doug: If Earth is a spaceship, we must understand that there is no “away” on a spaceship.)

Meet the Freegans

- Freegans are people who try to gather up what grocery stores and restaurants discard and they are not all poor. Sarah hangs with some as she researches this chapter. The main point is that our society is so affluent that many can live off of what we throw away. The rationale the freegans use is that it is more environmentally friendly to eat discarded food as it lowers demand and saves space in the landfills. If you have an interest in joining this group, go to freegan.info and try to avoid meat, as it is the first food to spoil.

For more go to DrDougGreen.Com

13

If you like this summary, buy the book

In Conclusion

- The stories in this book are captivating. Sarah does a great job of taking a compelling story and wrapping it around the content of each chapter. By putting herself in the middle of the research process, she makes the story come to life in ways that do not happen in most ethnographic studies. She also does it in such a way as to not change the story by being part of it. This book is important for all Americans and is available to educators, parents, and students alike. Her final hope is that we can somehow “right-size” our consumption in the best interests of everyone.