

THE SIMPLICITY MOVEMENT:

Living on less and liking it

A small but growing number of Americans are saying "Enough!" and scaling back, paring down, doing without.

BY TOM McNICHOL

RANDY AND SHERI Padal had everything a successful young couple is supposed to have these days: two well-paying jobs, a big house with a lawn, a guy to cut the lawn for them, and two healthy kids.

Everything, that is, but the time to enjoy it. Between commuting to their jobs at General Motors near Chicago, shuttling the kids to day care and maintaining their five-bedroom home, the Padals say, they had no time for simple pleasures like riding bikes or reading.

"We were being sucked dry," says 27-year-old Sheri. "We said, 'This is crazy.'" The couple found an answer in "voluntary simplicity," a growing grass-roots movement that encourages people to do more with less.

Two years ago, the Padals moved to a much smaller house across the street from the school of sons Theodore and Benjamin. They pared down their possessions, getting rid of nearly two-thirds of what they owned. Randy left a \$55,000 GM position to join a start-up mail-order firm, a job that pays \$15,000 less but offers more flexible hours and a short commute. Sheri began working the night shift — 10 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. — at GM so she could be home with the children during the day.

That may sound like more work, not less, but the trade-off is family time vs. rush-hour commutes and the day-care shuffle. "We're reading the whole *Little House on the Prairie* series to our kids in the evening, and they're

loving it," says Randy, 29.

The loosely knit voluntary simplicity movement began in the early '90s in the Pacific Northwest. Now an estimated 10-12 percent of U.S. adults practice some form of voluntary simplicity, and that number will rise to 15 percent in the next two years, says Gerald Celente, director of the Trends Research Institute.

"People of all ages and income levels are asking, 'Is my life only about making more money and spending it?'" says Celente. "And a lot are answering, 'No. This is insane.'"

SIMPLE — NOT SACRIFICIAL

Voluntary simplicity has its roots in 18th century "Yankee frugality" and in Henry David Thoreau's urge to "simplify, simplify." Today, that message is gaining a foothold in bookstores, where titles such as *Simple Abundance*, *The Simple Living Guide* and *Your Money or Your Life* are top sellers, and on TV, where the PBS special *Affluenza* spawned a sequel this month, *Escape From Affluenza*.

It even has caught on among those whose lives seem enviously uncluttered. By living simply, Seattle resident Alan Seid saved \$75,000 — enough to take an extended sabbatical from his job as a Spanish-language interpreter. He and

wife Tricia King, a student, also see planetary benefits in cutting consumption. "On a global scale, we don't live very simply, but compared to the people you see on TV we do," says Alan. "A lot more people my age are finding time to do the things that matter to them."

Still, their group home is by no means barren: They have a color TV,

a drum kit and a 1995 Honda Civic.

The Seids and other "simplists" insist simplicity is not austerity. It means buying the things you really need rather than the things you think you want. "I don't deny myself or live a monastic existence," says Peter Mui, 36, of Berkeley, Calif. "But I don't do lavish things on the spur of the



Group housing: Alan Seid and wife Tricia King, both 26, save on rent by sharing this Seattle house with three others and shopping for bargains at consignment stores. After five years of living simply — accumulating \$75,000 — Alan has taken an extended leave from his job as a courtroom interpreter.