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THE SCOLD

Mr. Money Mustache's retirement (sort of) plan.

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

Mr. Money Mustache, the father of Mustachianism, isn't perfect. He allows himself occasional luxuries, gets drunk now and then, and admits to two regrettable "five-to-ten-dollar mistakes" in 2015. The first was buying his ten-year-old son, Simon, a mini-Rubik's Cube, which broke when they tried to take it apart. Junk. The other was putting several slices of leftover mushroom pizza in the same Tupperware container as some plain slices, which Simon, citing the mushroom taint, then refused to eat. There was a thirty-dollar mistake, back in 2010: Mr. Money Mustache built a rig for a storage box attached to the rear of his Scion hatchback, but the heat of the muffler melted a hole in the box. He modified the design, then wrote about it on his blog. The post, called "Turning a Little Car Into a Big One," was an ode to the ingenuity of his storage box and to the underlying good sense behind owning a cheap, small, fuel-efficient automobile. He left out the bit about the muffler. The central tenet of Mustachianism is "financial freedom through badassity." As the embodiment of badassity, and the exemplar to thousands of aspirants, Mr. Money Mustache must be as stingy with his counterexamples as he is with his expenditures. He has to be a badass.

Mr. Money Mustache is the alias of a forty-one-year-old Canadian expatriate named Peter Adeney, who made or, more to the point, saved enough money in his twenties, working as a software engineer, to retire at age thirty. We're not talking millions. More like tens of thousands, and then hundreds of thousands, which he and his wife diligently salted away at a time of life when most people are piling on debt and living beyond their means. He calculated a way to make these early paychecks last using a strategy of sensible investment and a rigorous, idiosyncratic, but relatively agreeable frugality.

On his blog, Peter Adeney presents thrift as liberation rather than as deprivation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL FRIBERG FOR THE NEW YORKER



He is, by his own reckoning, a wealthy man, without want, but he and his wife, who have one child, spend an average of just twenty-four thousand dollars a year. Adeney is a kind of human optimization machine, the quintessence of that urge, which is stronger in some of us than in others, to elevate principle over appetite, and to seek out better, cheaper ways of doing things. He presents thrift as liberation rather than as deprivation. Living a certain way is his life's work. "I've become irrationally dedicated to rational living," he says.

He created his Mr. Money Mustache avatar as a way to tell the rest of us, with meticulous and triumphal precision, about his finances and his life style, and about how bad at math and life the rest of us are. We are debt slaves, consumer suckas, car clowns, complainy pants. His goals, he says, are: 1. "To make you rich so you can retire early"; 2. "To make you *happy* so you can properly enjoy your early retirement"; and 3. "To save the whole Human Race from destroying itself through overconsumption of its habitat." The blog, which he started five years ago, is really an attack on consumerism and waste—a theology of conservation—disguised as a personal-finance advice column. The prospect of retirement is in some respects just a lure—the carrot, as opposed to the stick of his relentless polemical thrashing of anyone who thinks it's O.K. to buy lattes at Starbucks or drive "a gigantic piece of shit that can barely navigate a parking lot." He told me, "I'm really just trying to get rich people to stop destroying the planet."

That may be so, but for adherents of Mr. Money Mustache the delight is in the details—the work-arounds and the actuarial calculations—and in the semi-comical swagger with which he dispenses them. He combines the deductive discipline of Mr. Spock, the D.I.Y. proficiency of MacGyver, and the gleeful certitude (and knack for coinage) of Ignatius J. Reilly. The consumer-waste complex is his confederacy of dunces.

For years, Adeney kept his identity under wraps. He fudged his whereabouts and biographical particulars even as he performed a striptease of his earnings and expenses. "It's embarrassing to walk around in your monetary underwear in front of thousands of people," he wrote a few years ago, as a preface to one of these self-audits. He didn't really seem embarrassed at all. Still, he had the kind of mind—"engineerd," as he puts it—that finds the who and where less interesting than the how much and to what end.

Gradually, he divulged more, as he warmed to the persona and to the admiration of the masses. Now his adherents know that he lives in Longmont, Colorado, a half hour northeast of Boulder—a Mustachian paradise. The town was founded by Chicagoans in 1871 as an agricultural utopia, and later thrived on the production of sugar beets. The heart of it is a grid of compact but stately homes with trees on small lots. In the past several years, a tech-based Boulder boom has spread to Longmont, lifting prices and reviving a once moribund downtown. I heard Boulderites refer to it as “Methmont,” but now it’s a craft-brew town, full of gut jobs and fixer-uppers, which Mr. Money Mustache often finds himself working on—for fulfillment, of course, since he doesn’t need money. He gets around town on foot or by bike. He uses his car only when he has to haul a load of more than a hundred pounds. He and his wife burn just two and half tanks of gas a year.

In the presence of such restraint, one can certainly start to feel like a dunce. I’ve got some tightwad cred. I’m a thermostat despot, with holes in my sweaters and duct-tape patches on my winter gear. I reuse paper towels and aluminum foil. But I also have a mortgage, a cable-TV subscription, a Burgundy fetish, an S.U.V. in a Manhattan parking garage, and a rented locker at the ice rink that costs about as much per year as Adeney has spent on gas during Obama’s second term. En route to Colorado, to see Adeney, I accumulated incidental Mustachian sins. Having forgotten a water bottle for the flight, I got one at the newsstand by the gate: \$4.50. In Denver, with a snowstorm looming, I allowed Avis to up-sell me a four-wheel drive, plus access to the toll-road shortcut to Boulder, and some inscrutable new fuel-reimbursement option. Piloting a giant gas-guzzler along an empty turnpike, I concluded that I was a victim of the predatory math of the travel-industrial complex. Sucka.

When I confessed these and other transgressions to Adeney the next morning, he was not amused. When I blamed some of it on Manhattan, he accused me of “excusitis” and kept up a running critique over the next several days. “Paying for parking is a sign from God that you’re in an area not designed for a car,” he said. “You are fighting the design of your city.” Although he maintains a comical tone on the blog and in everyday conversation, he takes all this stuff very seriously, and at one point I realized that he was almost angry at me for my half-witting participation in the destruction of the world.

I met him at his house. He had on his Mr. Money Mustache uniform: plaid shirt over granddad button-top thermal long underwear, old jeans, day hikers. Adeney is one of those people whose aura morphs. He has mild eyes, which

can make him seem gentle, and a ruddy complexion that reddens further when he gets worked up. His voice has a bellow mode, which he deploys mostly with irony—mock-bravado or command. When he dramatizes lame conventional wisdoms, he typically does it in the voice of the stupid adults and townspeople from “South Park.” He is fit, from all the walking and biking. He also lifts weights. When you play devil’s advocate—for instance, if you suggest that if everyone lived the way he does the economy would shrivel up—he can get riled, and you notice that he’s sort of ripped, in a ropy way.

The Adeneys’ house, on a cul-de-sac of non-Mustachians and car clowns, is a compact ranch-ish three-bedroom, with a big open kitchen/living/dining/working area. He has rebuilt much of it: new windows, siding, kitchen, fireplace. He redid the wiring and plumbing, and defied conventional wisdom to install his own boiler. “Once, on an otherwise beautiful day, I found myself in the crawl space in the basement crawling through my own shit,” he said. A D.I.Y. plumbing mishap involving a tree root had led to a sewer-line backup. “For me, that was a nice memory, a nice lesson: always cross your ‘t’s.”

It was a Wednesday. The Adeneys were all home. School day, weekday—it doesn’t really apply. Mrs. Money Mustache, a.k.a. Simi, is from Ottawa. She, too, had done well, as a software engineer in Boulder, and retired. Since then, she has passed the time and brought in some additional income by working as a real-estate broker, and then by making jewelry, which she sells on Etsy. Her own Mustachian credentials are strong, but she projects an air of slight forbearance. “People say I can’t be as hard-core as Mr. Money Mustache,” she said. “The other day, he was scrubbing the floor with a giant sponge. I said, ‘Why don’t we get a mop?’ ” He felt it would be a waste of space. She went on, “I’ve gotten used to it all, but he’s a weird dude.” He uses a woodworker’s vise to squeeze more juice out of limes. He stirs peanut butter with a power drill.

In an office off the kitchen, there was an acoustic guitar, a drum kit, an electric keyboard, a desktop computer, a medicine ball, and a washer with no dryer. The Adeneys hang-dry their clothes in the back yard, which faces south. When Simi’s mother visited, she didn’t want to hang her underwear outside. Still, Simi said, “My parents are proud of us. They know not to buy Pete anything. Whatever it is, he’s not going to like it.”

Simon was in his bedroom. The Adeneys are homeschooling him this year. He’s a bright, sensitive boy—“high maintenance, high creativity,” as Adeney says—who composes electronic music on a computer that he and his father

One gets a sense of a family living under a benevolent dictatorship, where every act or decision is subject to review or scrutiny. The Mustachian mission is pervasive, like the “revolution” in Cuba. On walks with Simon, Adeney sometimes maintains a running critique of the instances of excess and waste they encounter along the way. He is aware that he is a handful. He imagines that his wife’s inner voice whispers, “Your relentless optimizations are a drain on my life energy.”

Adeney likes to portray himself as an outsider, an accidental anthropologist in a land with peculiar customs and values. It’s part sincere, part polemical shtick. He wrote on his blog that, upon arriving in America, “I heard about ‘Golf Club Memberships,’ a bizarre concept where you pay thousands of dollars in advance, for the privilege of paying hundreds of additional dollars each time you play golf at certain courses.” He makes Canada out to be a land of modesty and thrift, and the United States to be its opposite, an orgy of accumulation, ostentation, and bad sense.

He was reared in Caledonia, Ontario, a town of ten thousand about thirty minutes from Hamilton. Adeney remembers a complete absence of foreign automobiles, and no cable TV at home. His mother, Jane, was a schoolteacher and an artist who became a stay-at-home mom. His father, David, worked at an advertising firm that refused to do ads for alcohol or tobacco. “I did not approve of excess,” David told me. David and Jane divorced when Peter was fifteen.

“Dad was super-frugal, and Mom kept up as best she could,” Adeney’s older sister Kathryn, an electrical engineer in Ontario, said. “Even as a kid, Pete was relentlessly driven to optimize that cost function. He was ready to do battle. He was an amazing duellist.” (Kathryn is frugal, too, but her husband has a monthly anti-Mustachian lunch club, to splurge on shrimp and beer.) Adeney has another older sister, also an engineer, and a younger brother, an indie rocker of some renown in Canada, who performs under the name Wax Mannequin.

As a kid, Adeney earned five bucks every time he mowed the family’s half-acre of lawn. He soaked the bills in soap and water, then ironed them and put them in a photo album. These five-dollar payments became a base unit: when doubled, they became ten dollars. Later, he came to realize that, as he put it, “a millionaire is made ten bucks at a time.”

“Ten Bucks is a lot of money,” he wrote:

So you need to respect it. Ten dollar bills are not just food stamps or amusement park coupons that you fork over by the dozen to get restaurant meals, smokes, strippers, drinks, tourist attraction admission, and assorted domestic services. Each Ten is a critical brick in the Early Retirement castle you are building. If you save \$796 per week for ten years, and get a 7% compounded investment return after inflation, you'll have \$600,000 sitting around ready to party for you. . . . Let's say you've got two income earners working together. Now each one has to save only \$398 a week. There are 112 waking hours in each week. Each person has to make 40 successful \$10 decisions each week—or one \$10 decision every 2.8 waking hours.

When he was seventeen, after he'd been dumped by a girlfriend, he came across a forty-year-old book on his parents' shelf called “The Magic of Thinking Big,” by David Schwartz, Ph.D. It was here that he encountered such ideas as Mr. Success and Mr. Skid Row and excusitis. He began to try to train himself to think big. “Treating yourself like a dog actually works,” he told me.

He got a computer-engineering degree in 1997, and skipped the graduation ceremony to begin working at a company near Ottawa called Newbridge Networks. This was the early upslope of the dot-com boom. He started at forty-one thousand dollars a year, with no savings or possessions except “a bike, a backpack, and a diploma.” He made the rookie mistake (“what a clueless young man!!!”) of buying a sports car with a loan from his sister. He got his first raise soon afterward, to fifty-seven thousand and six hundred dollars. By the end of year one, he'd saved five thousand dollars. A year later, he had twenty-three thousand. By year five, a quarter of a million.

He moved to Colorado in 1999, at the age of twenty-four, after interviewing at tech firms around the country. He started at a company called Carrier Access, in Boulder, at seventy-seven thousand dollars a year, and then, when Cisco opened an office in Boulder, he moved there, to write encryption code. He'd always had strong opinions, but America was an accelerant. “The consumption, the incomes, people spending so much,” he told me. “I remember, fifteen years ago, I walked to the grocery store, and there was this tiny lady climbing into a

Toyota Sequoia, one of those S.U.V.s. I thought, Wow, that's weird—tiny lady, big truck. We're from Canada, so we're low-key about money and stuff. Once we had some, we were, like, 'What do we do with this money?' We thought we were living this fancy-ass life. We didn't realize we were supposed to spend all this money."

He started telling his colleagues that he was going to retire soon. "They'd say, 'That's pretty neat. But I have three kids.' Or: 'I like horses.'" His co-workers continued to borrow money, to buy road bikes, granite countertops, and enormous TVs. He often lectured them, and at one point gave a PowerPoint presentation. About ten people came.

He retired in late 2005, with six hundred thousand dollars in investments, and a paid-off house worth two hundred thousand. He figured he could rely, conservatively, on a return of four per cent per year. He had determined that the family could live on twenty-four thousand a year in expenses. So he needed twenty-five times that amount.

There was a bump along the way—his so-called Big Mistake, more costly than a cheap Rubik's Cube. In 2004, he started a real-estate venture with a work friend. They built two spec houses in a New Urbanist development on the edge of Longmont, called Prospect New Town. With smaller streets and lots, it was a rebuke to car-dependent sprawl. The first house sold in 2006, for the asking price. The second, completed in 2007, got marooned in the housing-bubble collapse. A bruising fight with his partner ensued. In the end, the ordeal cost Adeney several hundred thousand dollars and untold hours of sleep. He finally closed on the sale of the second house last summer.

Retirement, in his hands, is a slippery term. It doesn't mean playing golf or sitting on the porch. It is merely the freedom to do what he wants when he wants. He likes some kinds of work, when they aren't jobs—carpentry, home improvement, the blog—but he disdains the idea of spending another minute of his life in a cubicle, in order to afford a dryer, or a Tesla. Some people have questioned his definition of retirement and argue that his premise is flawed, in light of how rich he got to begin with, relative to most Americans. Others cite the rental income he and Simi earned for many years from their first house, after they'd moved into another, or even the money he earns from the blog. He has now accumulated enough in additional savings to spend much more than twenty-four thousand dollars a year. But the point, for him, is to live lean and free.

In the days I spent with him, we went for a few hikes, visited a puzzle factory, ran errands, had meals, hung around the house. “I operate like a stoner, because I kind of am one,” he told me. One evening, he walked down to the marijuana dispensary. “It’s a retirement drug,” he said. He calls his vaporizer pen “my health stick.” He said that thirty dollars of sativa oil lasts him half a year. It was time for a reload.

In some ways, his gig is just being Mr. Money Mustache. “I wouldn’t even mind having a job someday,” he said. “I could be director of Mustachianism at Google.” For now, his ambition is to be “a proper life-style guru.”

Why “Mr. Money Mustache”? He delights in giving nonsense answers. “I used to have a nice roster of origin stories,” he said. In one, he was having trouble sleeping, on a hot, sweaty night, so he got out of bed and ran to the top of a nearby mountain, where, during a thunderstorm, a bolt of lightning left a mustache logo on a chunk of granite.

Really, it’s the result of “stoned musings.” He said, “ ‘Stache’ rhymes with ‘cash’ —you stash your cash. Mustaches are for bankers and gunslingers and Magnum, P.I.” Adeney had a modest handlebar when I visited. “It’s Movember,” he said. He recalled a math teacher from eleventh grade, named Mr. Vail: “You could see his mustache from behind, when he was at the blackboard.”

He needed to create a persona that conveyed extreme confidence. “Nobody listens to me in real life, but on the Internet everyone does,” he said. “People need to be told to get to work on things. They need a boss so they stop making excuses.”

David Adeney compared his son’s persona to Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard, an aphoristic embodiment of humor, sense, self-reliance, and thrift. “It’s moral instruction with a light touch,” the elder Adeney said. Other antecedents abound. There is Aesop, and Stoicism, which Adeney recently discovered in a book of pop philosophy. (Adeney boiled Epictetus down to: Learn to want what you already have.) There’s Thoreau and Keynes (who advocated a fifteen-hour workweek), and Joe Dominguez, a co-author of the 1992 best-seller “Your Money or Your Life,” whom Adeney calls “the original early retiree.”

“What should I tell the Andersons

—*twenty
minutes?*”



In the grand scheme, Adeney’s idea of deprivation is secular and mild. “I’m pro-gentrification,” he told me. “If people say the world isn’t getting better, they haven’t looked at the beer aisle recently.” He’s no modern desert

hermit, like Suelo, the so-called Man Who Quit Money, who has forsaken society to live in a Utah cave, or latter-day Mother Ann Lee. Not for him the abandonment of family, property, and sex. Nor is he into the extreme home craft of *The Tightwad Gazette*, the newsletter from the nineties, which recommended that readers make their kids’ Halloween masks out of dryer lint. (For one, he’d need a dryer.)

“I’ve been mischaracterized as a cheapskate,” he says, or “cheap as fuck,” as another life-style-guru blogger, A. J. Kessler, charged. Kessler snickered at Mr. M.M. for rotating his bike tires and stocking up on rolled oats. He also wrote a blog post entitled “Being Frugal Makes You a Loser.” Provoked by the L-word, Adeney posted a Trump-ish response in Kessler’s comment section: “You forgot to mention my \$400,000 paid-off house and my 3 months of annual travel. Or my two cars, fleet of six nice bicycles, or the fact that I give a few tens of thousands of dollars of my time and money to charity and helping people out each year. But yeah, you are correct that I do like rolled oats.”

“It’s supposed to be a bit of a cult,” Adeney told me. “The rest of society oppresses us. We have our own symbols. The bicycle, the hatchback.”

About ten years ago, Adeney started writing out his thoughts in Word documents. He sent them to his father, who encouraged him to keep going. He launched the blog in April, 2011. Under a photo of himself, taken from below, so that his forearms looked huge, he declared, “WAKE UP DRONE PEOPLE.”

“I’d never heard of personal finance,” he said. “I didn’t even know there was a category.” At one point, after Adeney’s blog had a substantial following, he Googled “early retirement frugality” and came across a Danish nuclear astrophysicist named Jacob Lund Fisker, who lived in an R.V., on seven thousand dollars a year. Fisker is the author of a book, and a blog, called “Early Retirement Extreme.” “It’s super-analytical,” Adeney said. “I read his whole blog and offered him a guest post. It gave his site a giant boost.”

Adeney had errands to do. We set out on foot, crossing the street to stay in the sun: free heat. A storm the previous night had left a few inches of snow, and the streets dripped and gleamed with snowmelt. First stop, on the other side of town, was Wibby Brewing, a new craft brewery and pub, in an outbuilding of a decommissioned Butterball turkey plant. He had a plan to host a Mustachian meet-up there, a few nights hence. (He'd recently returned from an annual weeklong meet-up in the Ecuadorean Andes.) He had hired a local band he liked, the Interstate Stash Express—the pun was a happy coincidence. He needed to talk band-and-beer logistics with one of Wibby's owners, who was from Chicago, and who, it emerged, subscribed to many Mustachian principles, even though he'd never heard of Mr. Money Mustache. Adeney had a late-morning lager.

Afterward, we walked north along a broad avenue to a two-story clapboard house he was rehabbing with some friends, in a gentrifying neighborhood on the east side of town, fronting unfenced train tracks. Freight trains groaned by, night and day. The truck for the job, parked out front, was a friend's 1984 Nissan pickup, which Adeney had often used and made the subject of several blog posts. "I'm specializing in the plumbing and electric stuff," Adeney said, as he walked through the gutted house. "Mainly, I like doing whatever the other people are finding difficult."

The owner, a friend named Luc, used to live next door to Adeney and had encouraged him to go full Mustache. "He helped me move out of my caution shell," Adeney said. Luc was technically an entomologist, but his latest idea was a venture called Nature's Caskets: coffins made out of reclaimed wood from forests devastated by the mountain-pine beetle. "He's a guy who likes getting filthy and working hard," Adeney said. "I'm more a whiny, nerdy everything-is-terrible-I-can't-sleep person. I spent a lot of my life building up the protective structures to keep me from worrying." Still, he's Panglossian, by East Coast standards. When I made a sour remark about being in one's forties, he replied, "You may need to tune up the Optimism Gun."

Back home that afternoon, he and Simi made coffee with steamed milk and put out bars of fancy chocolate and nuts that had come from bulk bins at Costco. The sun poured in. "How could it be more luxurious?" Adeney said. A monitor by the sink indicated that the house was burning three hundred watts, or about three cents an hour. "It's still a lot," Adeney said. He blamed it on the refrigerator. He hadn't been able to devise a work-around for that.

Adeney has the behavioral-economics view that we should set our policies to encourage sensible behavior—the obvious example being a carbon tax. “It’s libertarian paternalism, or maybe it’s paternalistic libertarianism,” he said. “I am trying to improve the commons.” On his blog, he dispenses deep thoughts, product recommendations (credit cards, brokerages, laser printers), and D.I.Y. work-arounds (“How to Carry Major Appliances on Your Bike”—“It is absolutely ridiculous to buy even your first bottle of wine or restaurant meal if you do not yet have a good bicycle and a bike trailer”).

Being an engineer, he runs the numbers. Once, after his bike was apparently stolen (it turned out he’d left it at a friend’s), he ruminated on the wisdom of locking one’s bike:

This was the first theft in many, many years of very carefree living. The Craigslist replacement value of that bike was probably about \$500. What value do I place on a decade of the fearless freedom of leaving shit happily unlocked and not worrying about it? How about the value of my time saved in not spending my life fumbling with an enormous keychain? 90 seconds a day for ten years is 91 hours, or at least \$4500 of my time at \$50 an hour. I was still coming out way ahead.

He concluded, “If you can’t afford to lose it, you can’t afford to buy it yet—otherwise the object owns you rather than vice versa.”

His blogging pace has slowed in the past couple of years—what is this, a job?—and so his numbers have plateaued. He gets about three-quarters of a million unique visitors a month. The blog’s forum has nearly a million posts, on more than forty thousand topics. His readership is fifty-five per cent male. “More females than I thought,” he said. “They are mostly younger than I am. That’s also what I see at the meet-ups.”

He told me that his blog is now earning around four hundred thousand dollars a year. He was reluctant for this to become public, without his being able to provide a detailed explanation. He makes money from the products and services he recommends—Betterment, Lending Club, Geico, and numerous others. They pay him for every customer who comes to them via his site. He insists that he makes these recommendations based only on his own research and experience. He’s saving all this income and plans to give it away someday.

Making money off the idea of not needing money is perhaps mildly perverse but little different from a cleric who preaches poverty yet lives in a parish manse.

Adeney once did a review of credit cards and decided that Chase was the best. Whenever a reader clicked on Chase's icon on the page and ordered a card, Adeney got a hundred dollars. Many started doing this, and apparently someone at Chase took note and decided to have a look at his blog. Adeney's occasional profanities were a problem. Chase asked him to stop using foul language. Adeney told the company to bug off. This cost him thousands of dollars a month in the name of free speech.

He can be contentious with forum visitors and yet also has a sense of propriety. He wrote on the Reddit Mr. M.M. forum, in reply to a commenter he'd banned:

You're right that I did ban you from future commenting, and here's why. The blog is not a public space, it's my living room. People are there to be entertained, and if I'm lucky, occasionally learn something. But in this case, you barged into my living room and started being a big fucking asshole. You don't write words like "drivel" and "bullshit" to describe a person's writing in the comments section of their own blog. What kind of idiot does that? Do you talk to people in real life like that?

On the day of the meet-up, I rode to Adeney's house from my hotel, in Longmont's sprawling outskirts, on an electric bike he'd lent me the night before. He didn't want me driving the rented S.U.V. I felt sort of virtuous among the shopping centers, vast parking lots, and wide clogged boulevards, but also inconsequential. Resistance seemed futile. I zoomed up to the back terrace of his house, where Mr. and Mrs. Money Mustache were hanging laundry in the sun. He had on sandals, camouflaged cargo shorts, and a T-shirt that read "Coupon Pal."

Later, as night approached, he had a nip of tequila and got dressed in his uniform. He had a plan to meet three Mustachians in the park and walk with them down to the brewery.

They mustered at dusk—highly educated middle-aged professionals who claimed to have lived this way for decades. Ken, age forty-nine, was a medical-device marketer from Minneapolis. Four kids, two cars. Spent sixty thousand last year. “It’s not about being miserly. I grew up on a dairy farm. Money was tight.”

Christina, thirty-nine, an engineer who worked part-time at Ball Aerospace. Twenty thousand last year. “I grew up this way.”

Coy, fifty, wrote software for weather radars. “I figured all this out in my twenties. My focus has always been on time.”

They walked across town, talking optimization strategies. When they got to the brewery, dozens of Mustachians, many wearing name tags, were outside, clustering around patio heaters. The number soon grew to more than three hundred—young or old, fervent or merely curious. Adeney moved from pod to pod, revelling in like-mindedness and some measure of fame. ♦



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