

So what's this all about?

Polar ice caps are melting, **hurricanes swirl in the seas**, wars are heating up around the world, and the job market is in a deep freeze.

Whoa.

It's getting pretty ugly out there.

That's why one chilly spring night I started a tiny website called **1000 Awesome Things**. For a boring guy with a nine-to-five job, it became a getaway from my everyday.

I never imagined that writing about **finding money in your old coat pocket**, the smell of gasoline, or watching *The Price Is Right* when you're at home sick would amount to anything.

Honestly, when I started the site I got excited when my mom forwarded it to my dad and the traffic doubled. Then I got excited when friends sent it to friends and strangers started sending me suggestions: "**When cashiers open up new checkout lanes at the grocery store,**" "The smell of rain on a hot sidewalk," "Waking up and realizing it's Saturday."

It seems like maybe these tiny little moments make an awesome difference in many of our rushed, jam-packed lives. Maybe we all love snow days, peeling an orange in one shot, and **Popping Bubble Wrap**.

Maybe we're basically all the same.

Over the past year the website grew into a warm place where people around the world came to **curl up under a blanket** and think about the small joys we often overlook. With so much sad news and bad news pouring down upon us, it's fun to stop for a minute and share a universal high five with the rest of humanity.

What started on a whim has changed me for the better too. Now when I get the thank-you wave while merging, **hear the crack of ice cubes in my drink**, or move clothes from the washer to the dryer without dropping anything, I just smile and enjoy the moment.

So . . . that's the story so far. That's how we got from there to here. And now it's time to come on in. The fire's crackling and there's a seat on the couch here. Cuddle up and let's all get into it.

Let's all get onto it.

And let's all get a little bit

AWESOME!

The other side of the pillow

Have you ever found yourself lying in bed **wide awake** in the middle of the night?

You know how it is: **Clock's clicking** past 1:30 a.m. and you lie there with your eyes bugged open, chewing your upper lip, tapping the sheets with your fingers, completely frustrated. Your pupils have long adjusted to the dark, so your eyes are darting around the room over and over, trying to identify dark shapes or watching the moonlight shadow-dance around the walls. Maybe your thoughts won't settle down, you just can't get comfortable, **you ate spicy food** before bed, you have a presentation the next morning, or maybe it's just the frustration itself keeping you in a terrible, never-ending cycle of sleeplessness.

So you **play dead** and try to remain motionless as long as possible. You change positions back and forth, side to side, left to right. You get up and go to the bathroom or start reading a book. Maybe you try to remake the bed, since by now you've probably managed to twist your sheets and blankets into a completely unusable, tightly wound knotpile barely covering your legs.

On nights like this, when you just can't sleep, one of the greatest things invented is simply **Turning Over the Pillow**.

Yes, flipping over your pillow and checking out the other side cranks **Bed Comfort** up a few notches and is a simple and easy way to help you relax and get comfy.

The other side of the pillow, folks. Because it's flat when you're sagging, **fresh when you're stale**, and cold when you're hot, baby.

AWESOME!

When cashiers open up new checkout lanes at the grocery store

Though I hate to admit it, I am a slow, indecisive mess in the grocery store checkout lane.

Since I am an **extremely cheap person**, I watch the prices scroll up on screen like a hawk, often saying things like “Oh, I thought that was on sale,” or “Actually, I don’t really want that anymore,” forcing the cashier to call in price checks to the unresponsive produce department or find a temporary home for the pack of **melting Fudgsicles** I’ve decided to leave off my list last minute.

And because I’m watching the screen so closely, I start bagging my groceries late, fumble with my wallet, and awkwardly leave my shopping cart blocking the lane like a metal **crisscrossed castle knight** enforcing a firm “Thou shall not pass” law in its trademark silence.

Yes, I clog up the line and annoy everybody behind me. I’m one of **Four People You Don’t Want to Stand Behind** in the grocery line, together with:

- **Fidgety Grandma**, who on cue dumps a pile of warm nickels on the counter to pay and then slowly

counts them out by sliding them across the counter with her index finger

- **Flyer Guy**, who hands the cashier a dog-eared flyer from home, forcing her to manually tear out all the coupons while everybody waits
- **No-Math Jack**, who sneaks in piles of extra items into the Express Lane and acts like it's no big deal

Those tense, winding checkout lanes can be a pretty rough go sometimes. It's not easy out there. You have to watch the anxiety levels, take deep breaths, keep that blood pressure in check.

That's why there are few things better than a **sprightly new cashier** hopping onto the scene, grabbing the "Next lane please" sign from the end of the belt, flicking on the light-bulb above her station, and offering a loud, beaming "Next customer, please!" to the scowling, stressed-out masses.

When that cashier bulb goes on, a **bright warm glow** showers down on everybody waiting. People like me feel less guilty about holding up the line and folks at the end win the big front-of-the-line jackpot. Yes, it's **one giant mood swing**, one massive swelling of goodwill, complete with buzzing chatter, a few laughs, and even the occasional crinkly plastic sound of a tightly wound frown turning upside down.

AWESOME!

Wearing underwear just out of the dryer

Now tell me: Is there anything quite so nice as wrapping yourself up in a pair of steaming skivvies just out of the dryer? It's like skinny-dipping in a hot tub, jumping on a horse that's been in the sun all day, and lying on a warm, sandy beach . . . combined! Sure, the moment doesn't last long, yes, there may be some static cling, and it's true, you'll have to get changed really quickly in the laundry room to pull it off.

But dang, girl.

Hot undies, they is fine.

AWESOME!

Old, dangerous playground equipment

Slides used to be dangerous.

After climbing up those **sandy, metal crosstrax steps**, you got to the top and stared down at that steep ride below. The slide was burning hot to the touch, a stovetop set too high all day under the summer sun, just waiting to greet the underside of your legs with first-degree burns as you enjoyed the ride. It also smelled like hot pee, years of nervous children with leaky diapers permanently marking it as their territory. Lastly, to top it all off, there were no cute plastic side rails or encapsulated tube slides, which meant that if you went too fast or aimed your legs poorly, your shoes would **grip-skid on the metal**, and you'd spill over the side, landing face down with a sickening thud in a bed of pebbles, cigarette butts, and milk thistles.

It wasn't just slides either. Everything in the playground was more dangerous. And it was different and unique, seemingly put together by the **neighborhood handymen** who in a burst of creative energy one Saturday morning emptied their garages of old tires, two-by-fours, and chains and just nailed them all together.

There were wooden tightrope beams suspended high in

the air, daring the confident, athletic kids to attempt a slow, heart-pounding high-wire walk while other kids encouragingly showered them with handfuls of sand and **pinecones**.

There were fire poles two stories high—just cheap, simple poles planted deep in the ground that were popular **and educational**, quietly introducing children to concepts like gravity, friction, and badly sprained ankles. There was a certain Fire Pole Form too, a kind of arms-on, cross-legged, spider-wrap maneuver that was both awkward and majestic at the same time.

And of course, there was my favorite: the **Big Spinner**, also known as a **Merry-Go-Round**. This was just a giant metal circle that lay a foot off the ground and could be spun, usually by someone standing beside it. If you were lucky, you'd get a pile of kids on there and somebody's mom or dad would kindly whip you into a **World of Unimaginable Dizziness**. A couple kids would fly off from the *g*-forces, but most would hang on, teeth gritted, eyes squinted, cheeks flapping wildly against the wind, until the Big Spinner reluctantly came to a slow stop and finally let everyone off. Kids would walk away in different directions, some hitting tree trunks head-on, others falling down nearby hills.

These days those classic playgrounds sure are hard to come by.

Everything is plastic now, unaffected by temperature, easy to disinfect, and bendable into all kinds of **Safe-T-Shapes**—the sharp, rusty nail heads of yesterday replaced

with nontoxic washable adhesives poured from a cauldron of polymers and Purell. Now not only are our kids getting lame **baby-approved fun**, but just think what we're doing to the tetanus shot industry.

Seriously though, new playgrounds sure are terrible. Some experts say that that playgrounds have become so sterile and boring that kids just walk away from them, preferring instead to hang out in the weeds by the railroad tracks or **throw bottles** in the alley behind the pizza place. Children could actually be placed in more danger by these lame plastic netherworlds that encourage more video game time instead of fresh air and bruising. Another blow to childhood struck by overprotective parents and pesky lawsuits.

Well, we can't change the world, so let's just enjoy the good news: Old, fun, dangerous playgrounds are not completely extinct. Yes, the Safety Conglomerate hasn't killed all the buzz with their rocking horses two inches off the ground, pillowy-soft imitation sand, and **stationary, bolted-on steering wheels**. Old, dangerous playground equipment can still be found. It's out there.

So please, when you find monkey bars taunting you from ten feet off the ground, extended **seesaws** that allow for maximum elevation, and rickety, sagging rope bridges with planks missing, run around like crazy, bump your head a few times, and twist your ankle. Because tell me something—is there anything quite like it?

AWESOME!

Intergenerational dancing

Have you ever felt too old or too young on the dance floor?

Maybe you and your husband signed up for a Saturday morning **ballroom dancing class** and noticed everyone else arriving on a shuttle bus from the old folks' home. Or maybe you surprised your wife with a romantic date night on your tenth wedding anniversary and accidentally stumbled into a local college hotspot full of **white baseball caps**, bead necklaces, and Jell-O shooters. Or maybe you just found out the hard way that All-Ages usually means All-Underagers.

I mean, if you've ever found yourself saying "Man, I feel old here," or "**Does anyone else smell Ben-Gay?**" then you know what I'm talking about. It's not that people of different age groups don't socialize, it's just that they don't often groove to the same beats is all.

I think that's why wedding dance floors are a real sight.

They're a breeding ground for that amazing intergenerational dancing that's just so rare and beautiful to see.

You've got grandmas slow-dancing with their **five-year-old grandchildren** to "What a Wonderful World," old men crowd-surfing over a pack of sweaty teenagers, snaking conga lines of all shapes and sizes, and circles forming around anyone who happens to be doing something interesting—

whether that's a father-and-daughter team waltzing in circles or a slightly inebriated bridesmaid **shaking her booty** with a ninety-year-old great-grandpa in a wheelchair.

Yes, intergenerational dancing is a rare and wonderful thing. It's a magical moment where boundaries are broken and the thumping **power of music** sort of sweeps us all together into a tiny little place where everything's just cast aside in favor of living for the moment.

AWESOME!

Strategic trick-or-treating

Trick-or-treating ain't no game.

No, it's a life lesson in goal setting, planning, and tactical execution. Kids who master trick-or-treating go on to become successful world leaders. Kids who don't could possibly do the same but have less chocolate to show for it. The point is that chocolate is delicious, and you should fill your pillowcase with as much as possible. You just have to master the **Four Rules of Strategic Trick-or-Treating first:**

1. **Mo' money, mo' problems.** In terms of **where** to go trick-or-treating, there's always a lot of chatter about driving over to the rich neighborhood for the big score. People would have you believe that the rich enjoy lavishing children with giant cakes and full cases of root beer. But that's a lie! Rich people got rich by being cheap, and their massive front yards will just slow you down. That's right, you'll be navigating wrought-iron fences, duck-shaped hedges, and koi ponds instead of ringing doorbells. Aim for the new neighborhood with little kids and the all-important densely packed homes.
2. **Dress for success.** Trick-or-treating is a race against

the clock, so set yourself up for success by wearing running shoes and avoiding masks that hurt your visibility. No ballet slippers, high heels, or sandals. No robes, capes, or togas. And none of those cheap plastic masks from the dollar store that attach with a thin elastic and a couple of staples. Basically, keep simplifying your costume and timing yourself running up and down the basement stairs until you've found a winner. If in doubt, go as Carl Lewis.

3. **Partner up.** It will be tempting to form a trick-or-treating posse and move from door to door as one big, shifty amoeba of fluorescent tape and face paint. **Resist that temptation.** The amoeba will cause two problems: First, the group will travel at the speed of the slowest member. That means one kid with flat feet and asthma ruins everyone's night. Second, a big group triggers the rationing instinct in the people handing out candy. They become overwhelmed and default to the "One for you, one for *you*" candy-for-everyone technique. You don't want that. So instead, you need to pick one partner. Qualifications for that lucky someone include a low resting heart rate, winning smile, and really cute costume. The last one is key. The costume should trigger the "Aren't you adorable!" reflex that inspires extra candy. Gold standard here is a

fit toddler in a ladybug costume with new Reeboks.

4. **Timing is everything.** The last rule is all about the three key stages of Halloween candy collecting. Times may vary depending where you're from, but they go something like this:

- **The 4-6 p.m. Start Up:** You must be very active and running around here before the street gets too busy. This is your time to hit houses at the peak of their inventory levels, when people may hand out more because of excess supply or poor foresight.
- **The 6-7 p.m. Rest Up:** Streets are at their busiest. Don't get caught in other people's amoebas. Now's the time to go home and dump out the pillowcase and refresh the face paint. Also, it's a good time to hit your local fast food joints. McDonald's is usually pretty generous.
- **The 7-9 p.m. Clean Up:** Now it's all about picking up the scraps. Some houses will be left with too much candy and people will start giving handfuls instead of fingerfuls. Others will feel guilty about running low and start handing out creative treats from their kitchen, like pudding cups or boxes of

Jell-O powder. The Clean Up stage is a real test of your cardio-fitness level, as many houses will have their lights turned out by now, forcing you to zigzag the street in search of the remaining bounty.

Now that you've got a game plan, just remember to keep it clean out there. Under cover of night and **camouflage face paint** some folks venture into the murky trick-or-treating ethical gray zone. Stay away from these folks, because while they're telling people that today's their birthday too, collecting a second bag for a "sick sibling at home," or body-checking toddlers into bushes on their way up the walk, you can rest knowing that you came out to play by the rules.

And you won.

AWESOME!

Seeing a cop on the side of the
road and realizing you're
going the speed limit anyway

Stress level goes up.

Stress level goes down.

AWESOME!

Illegal naps

You know what's even better than lying on a hammock in the backyard on a sunny Saturday afternoon? Better than catching a few winks after classes before a long night out at the bars? Better than falling asleep on the couch with the baseball game on the radio? You know what's even better than all that?

I'll tell you what: **illegal naps**, my friend. Sneaking them in when you ain't supposed to.

Napping any time you know you shouldn't be napping has a bit of an edgy, dangerous feel to it, like sneaking into a movie, sharing a free-refill soda at a family restaurant, or coming through customs without declaring the new sweater you're wearing.

I'm talking about driving away from work at lunchtime, parking in a nearby parking lot, tilting back your driver's seat, and sneaking in a little siesta before an afternoon full of meetings. I'm talking about waking up groggily at 11 a.m. after a long night, chomping on handfuls of cold popcorn while surfing the Internet for an hour, then going back to the bedroom to crash all afternoon, building toward that exotic and sinful **Day o' Naps**. Yes, I'm talking about the naps you pull off in the bathroom stall at work, the ones at the

back of the bus just before your stop, and the naps you take in the middle of a big bout of procrastination before a deadline, when you convince yourself that a quick snooze will give you more energy to finish that big paper due in a few hours.

So come on! If you're with me, then you agree **life's just too short not to sleep when you feel like it**. So lower those blinds, unplug that alarm clock, and nap strong, nap long, and nap proud, my friends.

AWESOME!

When you get the milk-to-cereal ratio just right

Things could go a few different ways near the bottom of that cereal bowl:

1. **Drowning in white.** You poured too fast and over-filled the bowl. Now after you spoon up the soggy O's, you're left with an inch of **sloshy, super-saturated, sandy-colored syrup** at the bottom. Well, the damage is done, so I say bottoms up to that. Just tilt your head, tilt your bowl, and say hello to a peppy morning full of jitters and fast talking.
2. **Cornflake beach.** Here's where you end up with too much cereal and not enough milk. You first notice it when you're halfway through your bowl and those flakes seem **a bit too crunchy for their own good**. So you look down and notice you're swimming in the wading pool, my friend. Assuming you're out of milk **or are very lazy**, you have to frantically start rationing, aiming for just enough milk in each spoonful to get by. Let's hope you make it and don't end up with a fat lump of slightly damp