

[Guest Post] Freedom Fighter Interview #2 - Steve of Think, Save, Retire

Today we have the 2nd of a series of interviews. During this series we will be showcasing other Freedom Fighters from around the world. I am excited to introduce you to our second guest, Steve from Think, Save, Retire. Read Steve's awesome story below. And if you would like to be featured in the Freedom Fighter interview series then be sure to check out the Guest Posting page for more information (it's open to anyone that is willing to share their fight for freedom: Time Freedom, Location Freedom, and Financial Freedom).

Now I will turn it over to Steve...



1. Who are you and what do you do? What is your story? How are you fighting for your Freedom?

My name is Steve. I live with my lovely wife in southern Arizona and we have a goal

to [retire in 7 years](#) before I hit the ripe old age of 40. Thereafter, our plans increasingly revolve around travel. We want to travel the world, starting with the United States. Around the states we go, starting from Washington, then over to Maine, then down to Florida and back over towards California. Then, our nation's heartland - hopefully during summer thunderstorm season so I can come away with some truly wicked photography.

Then, the world is open to us. Maybe we'll see South America first. We hear Costa Rica is beautiful and cheap to live. Perhaps we will crash there for a few months before moving on. My wife wants to visit Spain. Me? It's Italy. However you slice it, and where ever we go, our post-retirement plans are filling up quick.

My story, which I have described [in some detail on my blog](#), is fairly typical of the average early retiree. I started off life as your traditional American. Though I had a budget, I generally spent every penny that I earned beyond my budget. Thus, I generally designed my budget to narrowly meet my savings needs because, naturally, I knew that anything beyond that would turn into cold, hard spendable cash.

Fresh out of college, I was the dude driving around in a Corvette convertible - over the years, I slapped a supercharger in that bad boy, outfitted it with new wheels and tires, a loud exhaust, race camshaft, super loud straight-through mufflers. I mean, damn, this thing was sick. But, it was also entirely impractical. Towards the end of its tenure with me, I most affectionately referred to it as my "drivable money pit".

A year ago my wife and I finally decided to prioritize our future instead of our immediate selves. We gave the proverbial "FU" to living like typical Americans and setup an aggressive savings schedule and an achievable goal of retirement by 40. My wife will be 37 at that time.

We are around half way there, give or take. However, since we started just a year ago with our aggressive savings schedule, that doesn't mean that in a year from now we'll be done - since we are already half way there. Both my wife and I had some cash to devote to our long term savings investment accounts at the on-set, so another few years will bring us up to the point where we are looking to retire, once and for all.

2. What is your favorite Quote or Mantra that you live by?

Life is all about attitude. The better your attitude, the better your life. My dad taught me that mantra from a very early age, and I have found it to be truer than I ever cared to admit as a kid. The [art of staying positive](#) is how I ground myself in everyday life and keep focused and motivated towards our goals. Try it, it works. If you expect things to go right, things probably will go right. But conversely, if you anticipate that everything will go horribly wrong, then like magic, things most likely will. Stay positive!

3. Where in the world are you from?

Originally I hail from Charleston, South Carolina. Though I did not get to see it much as a child (dad was in the military, so we moved quite often), I did get to see some of it later in life. It's a lovely city, would love to go back and visit for a couple months, especially during the fall.

Today, my wife and I live in beautiful and sunny southern Arizona with our two adorable rescued dogs. We love it here. Though it does get quite warm in the summertime, virtually every other time of the year is as close to perfect as you could reasonable expect. 75% of the year, the weather is absolutely perfect, and you can't get much better than that. The cost of living is low, too, which always helps the ol' savings accounts.

4. What is the worst financial decision you have ever made?

My worst decision was a decision I made straight out of college. I decided to live the lifestyle of a typical American and spend the majority of my earnings every year. Though I had a budget, that budget only ensured that I possessed the bare minimum of what I would consider a savings. In fact, I budgeted based on two paychecks a month, but I worked at a company that paid every two weeks. That means two times a year, I actually got THREE paychecks in a single month rather than two. So what happened to the money from that third paycheck? That's right Johnny, it got spent! I considered it free money, almost as if it was completely outside the budget.

It was a train wreck. Luckily, I never got myself into a position of being saddled with mountains of credit card debt. Even back when I lived a more irresponsible lifestyle, I always paid off my credit cards every month. But still, my savings was minimized and my spending maximized.

5. What is the best financial decision you have ever made?

The best decision was to prioritize my future self and start living a much more frugal lifestyle. What I found was that I don't need all that much stuff to feel happy. In fact, I find life to be much more simple and enjoyable with the LESS stuff that I have. Less crap to buy and throw away. Less stuff to store in closets or the garage. Fewer things to maintain. Seriously, even if I had no intention of retiring early, this "less stuff" thing is just damn wonderful.

6. Are you a morning or a night person? What time do you wake up and go to sleep?

I have always been a morning person. Just like with our ancestors, when the sun goes down, that to me is an indication that the day is coming to a close. I'm in bed by 9pm and up by 5:30 or 6am, every day - and yes, that also includes the weekends. Maintaining a consistent sleep pattern is critical to keeping a cool and consistent rhythm. This means that by noon during the week, my day is almost through. Every day, I get to look forward to an entire afternoon where I can do things that I truly care about, like work on my blog, or devote some time to a small startup business that I am involved with, or get some quality time in with my camera. In other words, my day job stops in the early afternoon, still plenty of time for me to get out and about with the sun still brilliantly shining.

7. What is your definition of Financial Freedom? And what is your FREEDOM number?

Financial freedom means [different things to different people](#), as I have studied on my blog. To me, financial freedom is the ability to live life to the fullest without the restrictive confines of a "job". Your *wealth* provides for your lifestyle and livelihood rather than a job. Only then are you truly able to free your mind and make the choices that will shape your entire future, a future that includes a ton of fun, happiness and excitement.

We do not have a freedom number. My wife and I believe that distilling our future down to an individual number does not appropriately define our ability to maintain our lifestyles for the rest of our lives. There are several variables that play into our decision to finally call it quits from full time work, and our future plans are always in continuous motion as we learn new things and talk to more people. For us, there is no way a number could possibly account for these variables.

8. What is your favorite Asset Class to invest in?

This will probably be my most boring answer of the interview. I don't have a favorite. In fact, I don't generally pay much attention to our investments on a day-to-day basis nearly enough to form an opinion on what I like better. Rather, I invest in Vanguard Targeted Retirement funds and remain completely hands-off. This makes our job of investment simple and straightforward. We don't pour over numbers. We don't analyze yields. We don't carefully inspect returns. We keep things simple in this household, and it's working out pretty well for us thus far.

9. What is your favorite online financial resource, paid or free?

We use [Mint](#) to manage our financial assets. We are aware of [Personal Capital](#) but have never tried that particular service. We're happy with Mint and will probably remain there. It accomplishes our needs and works well for us.

10. When it comes to building wealth, do you spend more time figuring out how to cut expenses or increase income? Why?

For us, it is all about cutting expenses and designing our lifestyle around this type of non-ridiculous living, and the reason is very simple. We do not want to find ourselves in a situation at the time of retirement where we immediately transition from substantial levels of income down to, I don't know, maybe half that, as we begin living off of our investments. That kind of shock will probably take an interesting and potentially frustrating toll on our lifestyles, and we are designing our lives around making the transition between job and no-job to be as seamless of a transition as possible by living a more frugal, save-centric lifestyle now - as we will then.

Instead, by altering our lifestyle so we spend less and save more now, our movement into retirement a few years down the road will seem like clockwork. Virtually nothing will change from a spending perspective. Ultimately, one's *lifestyle* post-retirement is much more important than the numbers themselves, and we believe that living the lifestyle **NOW** that we want to live **LATER** will better prepare us to make the retirement transition mindlessly easy. We have found that while maximizing your income is wonderful, an aggressive savings schedule is a much more safe, dependable and consistent way of ensuring the longevity of your future retirement, *regardless of income*.

11. How many hours a week do you watch TV? What's your favorite show?

My wife and I usually turn something on during dinner, like House Hunters, Fixer Upper, Income Property, Property Brothers, Departures or other similar programs. But aside than that, we watch almost ZERO television. In a given week, I would be surprised if we surpass the 7 to 8 hour mark, total, with television viewing. My wife loves to read and work on her personal knitting products, and I can usually be found in my office working on various projects. After all, our future lifestyle includes a lot of fun and excitement, and we have goals to meet. There isn't much time to waste in front of the television for us. That isn't very productive!

12. If you had to recommend 1 book, what would it be? And why?

Truthfully, I am not much of a reader, but if I absolutely had to recommend a book, I would probably recommend Tim Ferriss' "[The 4-Hour Work Week](#)", which I [reviewed on my blog](#). I absolutely hate dry, instructional books. But, this book is anything but dry. If you can look past the sensational title (which even Tim Ferriss admits was designed purely for marketing purposes), the book does a wonderful job at showing you how to maximize your productive hours in the day doing the projects that you truly care about - even if you have a full time job. I learned a lot from his book, and I am confident others can as well.

13. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received or what advice would you give to the readers?

It's simple: *You don't have to live just like everyone else.* I fell into this trap, and it is costing me YEARS of additional reliance on working a full time job to provide for my lifestyle. Had I understood what truly makes me happy straight out of college, I would probably be retired now at the age of 33. But alas, I am not. I can't change the past, but I sure as hell can change my future, and I'm doing that now.

I will admit this piece of advice is much, much easier said than one. Virtually everyone around you will probably work until 60 or thereabouts. The average retirement now in the United States has climbed to the mid-60s. Sorry, but that just sounds horrible. It does not have to be this way.

Early retirement is achievable by nearly everyone. It takes consistent drive, determination and the ability to just say "no" sometimes. Believe it or not, saying "no" can be much tougher than it seems.

14. What does living life by design look like to you? A typical day, week, month, year, or whatever?

To my wife and me, the design of our lives involves a good amount of travel, seeing different parts of the world and experiencing as much as we can while we are still young, active and energetic. We are not content with merely “existing” in this world. We want to do things and get involved. As we get older, we want our list of accomplishments to get increasingly expansive. For me, it’s photography and taking in the landscape. For my wife, it’s more about being out in nature and getting to touch and feel how beautiful our world truly is, sample the food from different countries and living in different cultures and observing unique lifestyles. Most people, me included in an earlier life, do not get to truly see the world that they live in. Their faces are too buried in cell phones, or minds too wrapped around the latest episode of Bones and whatever the latest crime drama is these days.

15. What is holding you back from living life by design?

Truthfully, **nothing**. We are already living our life by design, but to a smaller degree due to how many hours of the day are currently being taken up by our full time jobs. After retirement, that drain on our time will be eliminated and we will get to maximize our life’s design to the fullest and experience everything that it has to offer.

16. Where can we find you online? If you’re a blogger, this is the perfect plug to talk about your blog and why it’s great ☐

I blog at ThinkSaveRetire.com. It is my little place on the Internet where I track my progress with the personal finance community, post ideas, offer tips and techniques and generally just get as involved as I can in this whole early retirement business. In the future, the web site might be turned into a travel blog as my wife and I spend a few years traveling around the United States and the world, but for now, it is my place to talk about my goals and to keep me honest.

My wife and I blog about a variety of topics, including [how we budget](#) and a fairly in-depth look at the [numbers that will govern our future retirement](#). But more than that, I like to talk about the “softer” topics too, how to approach happiness and **THINK** about what truly makes you happy and how to look at life. I have written about the virtues of [slowing down a bit](#) and taking some time for yourself to get your mind right. I also talked about [turning your life into a black and white photo](#) by

simplifying your existence and ridding your environment of the unnecessary.

In other words, the blog is about more than just the numbers. I talk about how to THINK, then SAVE, then RETIRE. ☐



Gen Y Finance Guy

Hey, I'm Dom - the man behind the cartoon. You'll notice that I sign off as "Gen Y Finance Guy" on all my posts, due to the fact that I write this blog anonymously (at least for now). I like to think of myself as the *Chief Freedom Officer* here of my little corner of the internet. In the real world, I'm a 30-something former C-Suite executive turned entrepreneur turned capital allocator. I am trying to humanize finance by sharing my own journey to Financial Freedom. I believe in total *honesty* and *transparency*. That is why before I ever started blogging, I decided that I would share all of my own [financial stats](#). I do this not to brag, but instead to inspire motivate, and also to hold myself accountable. My goal is to be a beacon of hope, motivation, and inspiration for *you*, the reader, by living life by example and sharing it **all** here on the blog. My sincere hope is that you will be able to learn from me - both from my successes and my failures! [Read More](#)