

English

Atlas Obscura

Paperclip Cottage Cafe

Kipling, Saskatchewan

A cozy cafe tells the remarkable story of how one man started with a little red paperclip and wound up with an entire house.



In 2005, Kyle MacDonald was working at his desk when he saw a little red paperclip. He was reminded of a game he played as a child called “bigger and better,” where each player starts with a small object and tries to trade it up for something bigger and better, without spending any money. Whoever has the most valuable object at the end wins.

Typically, the end result will be something on the level of a toy car. But this time, MacDonald wanted to go further: He wanted to trade a paperclip all the way up to an entire house, no matter how long or how far away it would take him.

So, he put the paperclip on Craigslist to see if someone would trade for it, and days later, exchanged the object for a pen shaped like a fish. That same day, he traded the pen for a doorknob with a face on it.

From there, he travelled all the way from the West Coast to Massachusetts, where he found a man who needed a knob for his stovetop espresso maker. In exchange, MacDonald received a camping stove. Months later, he traded the camping stove for an electric generator, and the generator for an “instant party” kit, complete with a neon sign, an empty keg, and an IOU to fill it up with beer.

He traded the party kit for a used snowmobile, the snowmobile for two tickets to the Canadian Rockies, and one of the tickets (he used the other for himself) for a used box truck. He traded the box truck for a recording contract, the recording contract for a year’s rent in Phoenix, and the year’s rent for an afternoon with Alice Cooper. That

afternoon, he went onstage with Cooper, holding a giant, 10-foot red paperclip above his head.

A week later, he made the controversial decision to trade an afternoon with Alice Cooper for a KISS snow globe. The online community exploded: “This is probably the dumbest decision I have ever seen anyone make... ever. Except for the people on Jerry Springer.”

What they didn’t know is that MacDonald had been contacted two months earlier by Hollywood producer Corbin Bernsen, who owns the world’s largest snow globe collection —over 6,500 globes — and needed a new addition. MacDonald gave his KISS snow globe to Bernsen in exchange for a contract for a speaking role in the director’s upcoming film, *Donna On Demand*.

At last, nearly a year after making his first trade, MacDonald traded the speaking role to the small Canadian town of Kipling, Saskatchewan, in exchange for a two-story house. The small town had a giant celebration of MacDonald’s feat, and there were live auditions for the movie role, which ultimately went to Nolan Hubbard, propelling his career from minimum-wage worker to Hollywood star.

And that’s how Kyle MacDonald traded a paperclip for a house. Since acquiring the house in 2006, MacDonald has traded it (not sold, of course) to a restaurant owner, who has converted the house into the Paperclip Cottage Cafe, which to this day sells coffee and pastries to the 1,140 residents of Kipling. Next to the cafe lies a sign claiming the world record for trades, and in the centre of town sits a giant, red paperclip.

Source: [Curious and Wondrous Travel Destinations - Atlas Obscura](#)

Comprehension questions:

1. What was Kyle MacDonald's goal when he started trading a red paperclip?
2. What was the first item MacDonald traded the red paperclip for, and what did he exchange that item for next? How many trade items do you remember?
3. Why did people criticize MacDonald's decision to trade an afternoon with Alice Cooper for a KISS snow globe?
4. How did MacDonald ultimately achieve his goal of acquiring a house, and what did he trade for it?

Talking point:

1. How does Kyle MacDonald's journey of trading a paperclip for a house demonstrate the power of persistence and creativity?
2. What role did online platforms like Craigslist play in helping MacDonald achieve his goal? Could this be done without the internet?
3. Discuss the reactions of the online community to MacDonald's trade of an afternoon with Alice Cooper for a snow globe. Were their criticisms fair?
4. How did MacDonald's trades benefit others along the way, such as the man who traded the camping stove or the town of Kipling?
5. What do you think of the transformation of the house MacDonald acquired into the Paperclip Cottage Café? How does this add value to the story?

Vocab revision

Try to remember the things being traded and solve this 'strands'

[Play \(customstrandsny.com\)](https://www.customstrandsny.com)

Topic related video

<https://youtu.be/s5Dr80SRDFA?si=8l7u3S502YctBfeR>