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Coaching for a Decluttered Life!

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You and Your Stuff: An Introduction

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What is it about humans and their relationship to the inanimate? From monuments to religious fetishes, we have the frantic desire to imbue *things* with greater power than we grant ourselves. As if we're not worthy, capable, strong enough to carry that meaning, so we must give it to something else. Humans are, for better or for worse, creatures of symbols. But what happens when the symbols you've been carting around through your life are things you'd like to get rid of but feel like you can't?

Ask yourself if you've ever given big power to an object. It could be something you wear around your neck, the rabbit's foot you carry, a paper diploma, a stuffed animal, a pair of shoes, a golf club. Do you have something you'd be devastated to lose? An item that you feel carries the weight and significance of memory and meaning better than you can? Ask yourself if you could perhaps part with that museum flyer, ticket stub, graduation cap, or mouldering stuffed animal and still remember the day or period of your life just fine.

If you're afraid of losing the details and feelings these things help you hold on to, sit down now and write a paragraph about the moment or value that you're using a thing to remember. Maybe the words will feel inadequate, but stick with it.

You could start a file on your computer of remembrances, and as you go through your things, sit down and write a few lines about the item you're holding on to and why it commemorates something important. Some of us don't like to write, so holding onto the thing is an easier shortcut to memory than committing it to words. If that's the case, take a photo of that thing and paste it into a document with the title of what and why it is.

You could even make a scrapbook of these possessions, and then, blissfully, let these items pass from your life. And as you go through your things, why not also consider these two phrases:

- 1) You can't take it with you.
- 2) Hang on tightly; let go lightly.

More on these expressions next time, but what do they mean to you today?

— Emily

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Rachel Pero
2 years ago

This is a interesting concept. Especially for those of us who are collectors. I can see value in letting go. My house is filled with things I think I might use one day (but most likely never will). But what about the things you collect for the pure esthetic value?

The art, carvings, sculpture, books? These are things that do get dusty and perhaps even clutter both mind & home. Ahh, but the rediscovery when cleaning, leafing.... they also nourish....



Emily Soares Proctor
2 years ago

I am so glad you brought that up, Rachel! You know that I, too, have collected and held on to things that I love and enjoy looking at and using. And you are so right—those things can nourish us and even inspire us, which is why I see them as different from the items that we carry around forever, not because we like them, but because we think we *should*. Sure, collections can get out of hand and become their own kind of burdens, and we'll talk about all that here and in the book we're working on too. Thanks for your comments; please keep them coming!
Emily



Hi Emily,
I really love your article. Who knew that decluttering could be a creative/emotional exercise?
From my own experience, a lot of the process is very gratifying and liberating

Nily Dar Steinberg

2 years ago

when you really are getting rid of the junk that gets in the way of living. However, after the loss of my mother over sixteen years ago, the process of sifting and letting go of her things has happened very gradually. Some of her things, like her art work are treasures that I love, value and hold dear. Some objects like certain clothing or scraps of paper with her writing on it, I couldn't part with early on, but later found that they didn't carry the weight that they once did.

All the best, Nily



Emily Soares

Proctor

2 years ago

Hi Nily!

Thanks so much for your comment, and I'm really glad you liked the article. I'm very sorry to hear about your mom. Inherited things are often the most emotionally charged and hardest to feel good about giving up for sure. I've been dealing with my dad's belongings now for 23 years. I like what you said about things that seemed so heavy with your mom's memory finally becoming objects that you could part with. Possessions that belonged to others often have their own schedule in terms of what we can do with them. I've been able to get rid of some of my dad's work-related stuff and digitized a bunch more recently to be rid of stacks of tapes! But there are other things, like his saxophones, that will just have to stay with me for a while longer. I wonder if maybe my son will show some interest in one, but if not, I know that I'll finally be ready to make what used to feel like an impossible decision to pass them on. It is so freeing to reach that guilt-free and peaceful place with these things!

This is a topic close to my heart and one that Suellen and I will tackle here and in our upcoming book. It seems like almost everyone is touched by the burden of things that represent someone we've lost.

Take care!

Emily

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