



## Avoid the Stress of a Mess

Christina Myers, staff reporter

Can't find your keys? Don't remember where you "filed" last year's tax return? Still have your entire wardrobe from the summer of 1968 that you just can't part with? What about that stack of tins from long-gone Christmas cookies that just might come in handy some day, or the shoebox full of old birthday cards? The reason there are so many TV shows about de-cluttering, reorganizing and cleaning out the home is because, in today's world, so many people are finding themselves up to their ears in too much stuff: beauty products, knick-knacks, heirlooms, clothes, household goods and a never ending stream of mail and paperwork.

That's where Burnaby resident Susan Borax comes in - to help people wade through the piles and find a new way to make their homes work for them. Last year, Borax started Good Riddance, a company that offers professional organizing solutions. Along with a part-time partner, Heather Knittel, Borax goes into people's homes, and sometimes home businesses, to help "coach" people to de-clutter, organize, downsize and otherwise find calm in their chaos. "I had been doing this for friends and family for eight or nine years. I was thinking, 'This is great, but who would ever pay me to come into their house and help organize?' But it was an idea that slowly grew."

Borax had worked for many years in marketing and previously as a high school teacher. Combining the skills from those careers with her goal to start her own business, she took part in the BCIT Entrepreneurial Skills Training (BEST) program, which helps people develop their self-employment business ideas into a feasible plan. "Lo and behold, the world has caught up. It was good timing. You see it on TV shows, in magazines - sometimes our space gets so overwhelmed that we need some help and people are really starting to recognize that." Borax is quick to admit she's not a "natural" when it comes to being so organized. "It didn't come to me naturally, but it was something I found I was good at - so, if I can do it, I can help others do it in their own lives, too," she said with a laugh.

The problem with clutter isn't simply that it's, well, cluttered - it's that all that extra stuff takes away time and energy from the limited free time that most people have. "It's what I call the 'wanderings' - all the time you waste, it robs you of energy, looking for documents, looking for your glasses, trying to find things." Some clients have a tidy home but need a system for organizing all the stuff that's hidden in boxes, behind closet doors or in the filing cabinet. Others may be downsizing to a smaller home, combining households with a partner or finding a way to incorporate a new component - such as a home-based business - into their space. For others, a lifetime of accumulated trinkets and memorabilia, along with a pack-rat mentality when it comes to getting rid of things, can lead to an overwhelming amount of stuff to try and live with.

"I do find a common theme among many clients - people usually contact me when they're in a transition. "Someone's maybe been organized their whole life, and now they have a two-year-old and their time is limited. Or someone has just made the transition to working in the home, and they want to find a way to keep that separate from their living space. "One of my focuses now is with seniors. Many people, once they get beyond a certain age, may want to be moving into a smaller space, but they may have been living in the same house for 20, 30 years and they have all of the accumulated things from that time. They may not have children nearby who can help. "So I can scale things down to a manageable level. That is such a daunting time for people, it can be very emotional and having someone support them through that can make a real difference. "

Borax notes that people often need help deciding what things are important to keep and what things aren't necessary. "You have this whole lifetime of memories and you might feel like you have to keep each item to keep that memory. ... The value that I provide is a bit like being a coach, and walking them through the steps of dealing with that." Other times, the problem is a heavy-duty addiction to paperwork which, over many years, can grow out of control. "One thing I see is that if someone has left a career behind, or retired, sometimes even years later they'll have all this paperwork."

Not to worry, though - Borax isn't all about throwing things out. "These may be things they genuinely need to keep. If they are, then let's find a solution on the best way to store it and keep it organized if you have the space for it. "And there may be many things that they can make some money on if they consign it, or there may be things that make excellent donations."

One of the neat things about the work, she says, is it can be a bit of a treasure hunt for her and the client. "Sometimes people have boxes and boxes and boxes that they don't open, they haven't opened in years. "When you go down and start digging through those areas, you find things that people have been looking for years, or that they'd forgotten about." And jars of spare change make a frequent appearance too. "I had one client who had upwards of a couple thousand of dollars in coins once we put it all together."

So far, her services have been in demand. "It's a word-of-mouth business and it's getting busier." A quick glance at the testimonials on her website show that people have been happy with her work: "The results were amazing;" "Good Riddance totally transformed my life ... the stress is gone."

She also has other people she can call on to get involved if a project warrants it: handymen, a home-stager who helps get a home ready for sale, consignment businesses, a cleaning company and others. "Sometimes people don't know where to start, and I can help break that project down for them," she said.

And, despite keeping busy with the company, as well as being a wife and mom to a 15-year-old teen, Borax likes to help out in the community whenever she can. She recently teamed up with the Adoptive Families Association of B.C. in a fundraising garage sale, in which she held seminars in advance to help people de-clutter their own homes in support of the sale.

Originally from New York, Borax came to Burnaby - a place she calls a "great place to raise a child" - in 1992 after marrying a Canadian. "I'm really happy. It's interesting being self-employed, it's a whole different kind of time management and being organized myself, but it's always interesting. "And when you know you've really helped someone deal with a project that they didn't know how to even start with, that's great."

To find out more about Good Riddance, see [www.goodriddance.ca](http://www.goodriddance.ca) or call 604-421-5952.