

Good Riddance

SHOWING CLUTTER THE DOOR

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT WE'D LEAVE IN THE FIRE

In the middle of the night, your home catches fire. You have only moments to escape. Your adrenalin is pumping. Close your eyes and visualize what would make you happy if it burned. Indulge your fantasies. What makes you cringe? Does the offending item belong to someone else in the household? Did it come from a dead relative you couldn't abide when she was alive? Has it been there since the Lusitania sank? Is it gooey, smelly or cobweb-infested?

Imagine how cathartic it would be to witness your husband's entire super-heroes comic book collection stored in the garage go up in flames. You could park the car. Envision that mountain of old textbooks reduced to a pile of ashes. Picture all the old crayon stubs, dead batteries, unread mail, the shattered fish tank and boom boxes the size of tractor-trailers vaporized. Dare to dream of a life minus the burden of CRUD: Completely Ridiculous Useless Debris.

The concept of life without CRUD tempts us all. Joan is a single woman living in the home where she raised three children. Retired and currently at a crossroads in her life, she contemplates downsizing to a condo while still in good health. Yet the idea of dealing with her possessions overwhelms her. Joan is a member

of the juggernaut Baby Boomer generation. Joan's mother and father, products of the Great Depression and the Second World War, suffered deprivation in their childhood; as a result they gave their daughter everything, creating a conspicuous consumer in embryo. Today Joan not only owns her own bountiful collection of furniture, art, electronics, tools, dinnerware, etc. but she's also inherited what her parents left behind. Additionally, Joan stores her adult children's memorabilia. In other words, she has it all.

As professional organizers, we've learned that, like Joan, for most of us the struggle to keep clutter under control has less to do with pathological underpinnings than the ordinary demands of living. While many people err on the keep-too-much side, they are hardly in danger of being evicted or discovered dead beneath mountains of their own personal debris.

What is remarkable is that although our clients come to us under vastly different circumstances, they have similar collections. Some have lived in homes for 30 years or more, finding they must move to retirement communities or small condos. Others are busy people with families and hectic schedules. Somewhere along the line they have neglected to take stock of what they own. Other people have been dealt serious blows with their physical, emotional or mental health. Many prospective clients contact us on behalf of people they live with because junk is causing conflict in their relationships.

Whatever their situation, our clients are tethered to an

almost identical list of possessions. We have spent more than five years toiling side-by-side with people who require comfort while disposing of unopened but expired vitamins. We've endured paper cuts and dried out cuticles sorting through acres of paperwork. We've driven thousands of miles to recycling depots with broken appliances and we've donated enough office supplies to outfit a contingent of accounting professionals.

We routinely encounter the identical 101 household clutter items responsible for congestion in our homes. That is what this book is about. What are they? Where are they? What do you do with them? These are the 101 you hope Godzilla will obliterate by stepping through your roof on his way to crushing a packed movie theater. It's the stuff you ignore, forget, hide, pile up or lose. Rigor mortis sets in each time you get close to tackling it, like examining one of those boxes from three moves ago. You tell yourself the kids will go through it when you die. But you are only 41. As our name suggests and our mantra advocates – Good Riddance to Bad Rubbish. Before you can get organized, you need to reduce.

This book will not concentrate on alphabetizing your spices, color-coding your files or hanging your wardrobe to resemble a full-spectrum rainbow. We will reveal what's holding your house and your peace of mind hostage. Think of *Good Riddance: Showing Clutter the Door* as tough love for your least valued possessions.

Chances are you've experienced a few failed attempts at reducing clutter. Perhaps you took a half-hearted stab at the entranceway to clear up the shoes, clothes, mitts, backpacks and flyers.

You may be an empty nester who would like to transform an adult child's former bedroom into a craft studio. The adolescent furniture is in there still, but now it has company like old window fans made obsolete by central air. You might have enlisted the help of a neat-freak friend whose own house emits the aura of a display suite. That didn't work for you. The stuff you bagged up for donation is in the garage, waiting for you to call for a charity pickup.

Success in taming clutter is dependent on commitment. Nobody can make you do it. You must reach the conclusion to de-clutter for your own sake, not to appease family, friends or co-workers. We can provide you with a rationale and a framework by which to approach a task so onerous it has tested the stability of marriages, induced nausea and driven people to drink.

If a three-alarm blaze is not your idea of a workable solution, we invite you to join us on a systematic search and destroy mission that identifies these 101 offenders and why they have to go. Once these worthless items are removed, clutter will cease to cause chronic dissatisfaction with your living space. Once you have emptied your home of the marginal and unwanted, maintaining your space will be relatively simple.

CRUD IDENTIFIERS

- Something that seemed important but now is laughable, such as an award for perfect attendance at school or a Cub Scout badge for carving a wooden car.
- Anything that needs to be assembled but never was.
- Any project you started but never completed, such as baby booties for your daughter who received her MBA this year.
- Gadgets that don't work and require batteries to operate.
- Gifts you bought but neglected to give.
- Presents you received but wouldn't be caught dead wearing or displaying in your home.
- Impulse purchases bought on the shopping channel during a bout of depression that you've never shown to anyone.
- Any box you are afraid to open.
- Items that require hand-washing, ironing, refinishing or reupholstering.
- Doilies.

