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Reflections

on living with too much stuff

A few years ago, we visited the towns and farms of Pennsylvania Dutch country. The austere homes of the Amish made me wonder how those families manage their simple way of life when surrounded by the excesses of 21st century America.

Three years ago when I was preparing to move to Hays, a friend told me moving gives the unique opportunity to handle everything you own and decide how important it is to you. During my moving experience — and reinforced by my trip to Amish country — I came to this conclusion. I have too much stuff.

Maybe you have too much stuff, too. A friend once reflected she spent the first half of her life accumulating stuff, and the second half of her life trying to get rid of it.

It wasn’t always this way. Stuff used to be rare and valuable. Take the 1900s’ farmhouse where I grew up. The closets were tiny, and there were only two cabinets in the kitchen. Today, abundant storage space is a must-have in a modern home.

Many of us save and collect our own stuff. Some of it was given to us as a gift, some was inherited, some purchased for a costly price, and some bought as a bargain. What do we do with it all? We keep it, try to organize it, store it out of sight or sometimes the stuff piles up in a room, on a desk or countertop for all to see.
Regardless of where it ends up, taking care of our stuff requires resources of money, time, energy and storage space. Could these resources be better spent in other areas of our lives?

One author says the value of our stuff isn’t what we paid for it. It is the value we derive from using it. Take my set of “wedding china” as an example. I certainly wasn’t going to use it when my children were small — why, they might break it. So, a few years ago when I offered to pull it out for our family Christmas dinner, my college-aged son said, “No, I don’t want to be responsible for breaking those dishes. Let’s use the everyday stuff so we can all relax and enjoy our meal.” So, really, how valuable are those good china dishes to me and my family?

In order to break the stressful clutter cycle and reduce our stuff to the valuable things we love to use, it’s helpful to look at a few reasons why we accumulate stuff and what to do about it.

1. **This was a gift or an inheritance.**
   We often feel like we have to keep a gift out of obligation or to be respectful to the person who gave it to us. Instead, concentrate on the kindness and the intent of the gift. Then the focus becomes gratitude toward the giver and the good things about the relationship, and less on the material items. Ask yourself about each piece — does this bring me happiness or truly serve a purpose in my home? If not, find someone else who would really like to use it, or pass an heirloom on to another family member who wants it and appreciates the family story. Take a picture of the item as a keepsake, then you can still enjoy the memory of your relationship with the giver without owning the piece forever.

2. **I spent money on this, so I have to keep it to get my money’s worth.**
   When you spend money on stuff, often the more expensive the item, the more difficult it is to get rid of. You end up holding on to the item because of the “sunk cost” — the past cost that has already been incurred and cannot be recovered. You spent the money on the item and that is done. Now, it is time to focus on the other costs involved in keeping an item you are no longer using. Instead of just hanging on to it, try to recoup some value by selling the item to someone else who will use it. Or, donate it to a person or organization which will be able to get some usefulness from the item.

3. **I might need this one day.**
   The challenging problem is we don’t really know what we will need in the future. But, you can be pretty certain if you’re not using something now, chances are slim you’ll use it later. Ask yourself — do I really need this? Can I find satisfaction in living without bogging down today with the stuff I might need tomorrow? Remind yourself if you do need something in the future, you can figure it out then. You do not need to keep everything on the chance it might become useful some day.

Do you need more help and motivation to get organized and control clutter? See the fact sheet from K-State Research and Extension titled “Cut the Clutter and Get Organized.” It includes helpful tips to get started, including a list of 10 things to get rid of now. Reduce paper clutter by reading it online by visiting www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore and type “clutter” into the search box.
Smith Center home serves as bed and breakfast in north-central Kansas town.

Story by Diane Gasper-O'Brien
Photos by Jolie Green
SMITH CENTER — An entire block in this north-central Kansas town of 1,650 features several historic homes built by the same family.

So it seems only appropriate one of the oldest houses in town still holds a family name as well.

The Ingleboro Mansion, standing majestic and proud at the end of “Millionaire Row,” was built by J.R. Burrow, who had moved to Smith Center in the early 1880s and founded First National Bank.
The name of the two-story Victorian home on the corner of Main and Third streets is a combination of Burrow’s name and the maiden name of his third wife, Hilda Ingalls.

The grounds, which originally included a private park with a gazebo, a stream and deer, covered an entire city block.

Other residences eventually were built around the property, which served several purposes through the years. But the house, now a bed and breakfast, has been preserved and is for sale by owners Bruce and Bobbi Miles.

The Miles couple is retired and living on the Lake of the Ozarks, and still run the bed and breakfast under the direction of chef Tiffany Bohm.

They had moved to Smith Center in 2000 after staying at the bed and breakfast several times, then bought one of the historic Relihan homes on Third Street, named after the family that built the block of homes on Third Street also known as “Millionaire Row.”

“We just loved the little town, particularly the old Victorian homes,” said Miles, who added she and her husband had always dreamed of buying and remodeling an older home in Denver but that it was cost-prohibitive.

The Miles’ first visit to Smith Center had been by chance. They had landed their small plane to avert an impending storm.

And they were hooked.

After several more visits, they bought the home on Relihan Row, came to Smith Center on weekends to remodel it and eventually bought the bed and breakfast.

“We’ve gotten to meet the most amazing, wonderful people from all over the world,” Bobbi Miles said.

Anyone wanting to know a little more about Ingleboro has only to read the framed newspaper stories and articles hanging in the hallway of the main floor.

“I did a lot of research on the history of the home,” Miles said, and decided to put up a photo gallery for visitors to enjoy.

Overnight guests at Ingleboro are able to enjoy the conveniences of modern-day living, including wireless Internet access, and there is a dishwasher in the remodeled kitchen.
But they also are treated to a feel of what life was like in the late 1880s and early 1900s.

The home is furnished with numerous pieces of furniture of years gone by, which causes visitors to catch their breath from the time they step in the front door. An old wooden wheelchair sits in one corner of the gentlemen's parlor, which also features an antique radio, a Victrola and an organ. There also is a ladies' parlor which features two ornate fireplaces.

The radiators originally used to heat the home have long since been replaced by central air and heat. But they were left in the home to give it "a historical flavor," Miles said.

"It was state-of-the-art heating at the time," she said. "It was the first home in the region with that kind of heating."

After Burrow sold the house in 1905, Ingleboro was used for other purposes, including a hospital, a nursing home and a restaurant.

Each room in the three upstairs suites have their own identity, so named for the theme color in the room — grape, yellow, green, blue and pink — in addition to the former maid's quarters.

The rooms are rich in decorations and color, including a sleigh bed and a four-poster bed, with lace valances highlighting the wooden windows.

The maid's room still has "working" items such as a treadle sewing machine and an antique trunk and ironing board.

Some of the features in the bathrooms include pedestal sinks and a claw-foot tub.

A long table that can seat up to 12 highlights a dining room with a tall grandfather clock in one corner and a nook with an antique cooking stove as its centerpiece.

Even from 400-some miles away, Miles is protective of Ingleboro.

"We would like to sell it to someone who appreciates the history of it," she said. "We would like to see it keep going so the townspeople can enjoy one of the historic buildings of the area."

While the couple has since moved away, Miles said, "our hearts are still there."

"You invest a lot of your time and your love into it," she said. "It's a really cool old place, and the more time moves on, the less of those old homes there are."
Kayla Berry is a stay-at-home mom who enjoys creating, decorating and re-purposing old furniture and decor.

Painting is one of those things people don’t usually jump at the chance to do. Hence, why you can look up a painter in the phone book and pay them to paint for you. But if you don’t want to spend the cash to have someone paint a room, more than likely you will be the one doing it. I’ve painted a lot of walls and items in my 20-something years here on this earth and have accumulated some tips and tricks to make painting a little less painful and affordable.

- I’m always looking for ways to save money, and paint is one of those things you just usually have to shell out the money for — except if you can find some “oops paint.” They usually have “oops paint” at any hardware store. It’s simply paint they messed up on, or someone never picked up, etc.
There’s nothing worse than painting a room and then immediately deciding you don’t like it — and painting it a different color and then deciding you don’t like it again and then even possibly doing this a third time (not that I’ve done this or anything). If you are not 99.9 percent sure the paint color is what you want, then buy some samples. Depending on your lighting and the room, the color can look a little different on the wall than in the can.

Painting can seem daunting, but it’s the cheapest and quickest way to give a room a whole new look. There’s nothing like a room with a fresh coat of paint.

Is there a room you’ve been avoiding painting?

My advice: Just do it, and you will be so happy you did. (After you’re done painting, that is.)

Check out my blog: Berryberryquitecontrary.wordpress.com for more painting ideas.
It’s been nearly 17 years since John Lackey retired from teaching at the Beloit campus of North Central Kansas Technical College.

But come mid-May each year, Lackey, who will turn 82 in May, still can be found at one of his favorite activities of the technical college — the auction of the home built by the carpentry/cabinetmaking class.

Fresh off earning his master’s degree in vocational education from Pittsburg State University in 1963, Lackey got in on the ground floor — literally — of the start-up of a trade school that was named North Central Kansas Area Vocational Technical School.

He has been watching the progress of construction on a new home by student workers since.

The house-building program Lackey started in the school’s second year hit an all-time high in the 1970s.

When enrollment in the program ballooned to as many as 30 students, Lackey split up the class and worked on two separate houses. They are built on campus, and the buyers are responsible for moving them.

“We never lost money on any home,” he said. “We made enough over the years, and the program just kept going.”
A nursing program started a satellite campus of the vo-tech school in Hays in 1974, and a carpentry program soon followed.

After five years of building a house on the Hays campus as well, that program was dormant for 25 years before it was resurrected by Doug Marrs in 2009.

Now, students in Hays are working on house No. 3 in this decade.

Marrs, who coincidentally taught the last 1980s’ carpentry class in Hays, saw several changes in those 30-plus years, particularly in size.

“The last one in 1984 was 1,420 square feet,” he said, “and the first one back (in 2013) was 1,860.”

This year’s home in Hays is 1,920 square feet.

“This is as big as we’ll ever build; we’re stretched to the max,” he said in reference to the maximum size of a house for moving.

Soon after the home is moved off the foundation on the college campus — the school was elevated to technical college status in 1994 and renamed North Central Kansas Technical College — it’s time to start thinking about the next one.
Students who come into the class in the fall begin by designing the home they will build.

“It becomes their house then,” Marrs said, adding it gives them some ownership and pride in their work.

Marrs said the program gives students “a taste of everything.”

“They’re not professional carpenters when they get out of here. That takes experience,” he said. “I can’t teach experience, but I can get you the basics.”

Marrs said one of the most rewarding times for him as an instructor is when “kids start to progress. It’s exciting watching their skills develop.”

He said that is evident whether working in the school’s woodworking shop or on the home itself.

“We spend two and a half months building those cabinets in the shop, and it becomes one box after another,” he said. “But when we load them up and take them to the house, it finally hits home. Within two hours, the upper cabinets are hung, and (students) are all back there taking pictures with their cellphones.”

“It’s an experience, Marrs said, the students will never forget.

Ditto for the instructors.

Three particular auctions still stick out in Lackey’s mind.

One year, a tornado had gone through the area, “and there was a high demand for houses,” he said. “So that one went pretty high.”

Another time, during the years when the Beloit program was building two houses each year, the auctioneer asked the first bidder which home he wanted and the buyer said, “I’ll take both.”

Then two years ago, two bidders matched each other bid for bid at the Beloit auction before the house went for a whopping $206,000.

The loser was so adamant about getting one of the NCK Tech homes he drove the 100-plus mile trip the next day for the auction on the Hays campus and won that bid.

Those kind of competitive auctions are commonplace in Beloit, and something Marrs hopes can develop into a tradition in Hays.

“It’s a social thing for them,” he said of the Beloit auction. “They get their lawn chairs and coolers out and kick back and watch the bidding. It’s fun to see what it sells for and to watch the people bidding against each other.”

As many as 200 people come to watch the auction in Beloit, a town of 3,000. One of those usually is the program’s founding father, who still has a stake in the activity, as well as the technical college.

“The thing I liked about vocational education, you could teach a kid a trade and get him to working right away,” said Lackey, who still keeps busy in retirement, working in his own woodworking shop at his home. “He could get out and earn a decent living for his family. And that’s what life’s about, isn’t it?”