

October 2005

***"Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint you can on it."***

**-- Danny Kaye**

The recent Hurricane Rita evacuation was an eye-opening experience for all of us here in Houston and the Gulf Coast. One "side effect" from the evacuation has been the same for many people I've talked too and for myself as well. Evacuating for the hurricane or moving things to prepare for the storm showed us all how many things we really have.

Most people don't think of how much stuff they have until something happens -- a move, marriage, a new baby, divorce, becoming empty-nesters, aging parents moving into assisted living, or deciding to work from home. Maybe you just want to live a simpler, more clutter-free life.

In the [book](#) *Scaling Down: Living Large in a Smaller Space*, authors Judi Culbertson and Marj Decker outline many tips for those looking to downsize themselves or others, merging two households into one, recovering from a divorce, or adjusting to a new lifestyle, such as clearing out a room for a new arrival or to create a home office. They even discuss the sticky issues, including dealing with inheritance and relatives.

### **Getting Started**

If you're moving, take photographs of every room. The authors point out that the photographs are "a validation of the space in which you lived for a number of years, and having a visible reminder of them is important."

Begin your downsizing and decluttering in an uncomplicated room, such as a dining room or guest room. It's a great way to get warmed up for the more emotional spaces.

Anytime you move, always ask yourself if the item will work in your new place and if it's worth moving.

When you're downsizing or merging households, ask if you'll be happy when you unpack and see it. If an item doesn't create a good emotion for you, then it shouldn't come to the new place.

### **Collections**

**Who loves you, baby?** If you don't love your collection anymore, then it's time for it to go. You can give it away or sell it on e-bay. You might be surprised by how much you can get for your old collection. A few months ago, a reader told me how she sold her ornament collection on e-bay and earned more than \$800 for the collectibles.

**Selling it.** E-bay and other online auction sites are a good way to determine how valuable your items are. For items that are truly antiques, get an appraisal from a reputable antique dealer.

**The Presents.** So you stopped adding to your teapot collection and told everyone, but they keep coming in as presents from your family and friends who "couldn't resist." It's quite alright to accept the item and then let go of it later. No one has to know. It will be our secret.

**Coffee mugs.** The authors suggest dividing your mugs into groups of three. As you go through each group, put the one you least like in a separate pile. By the time you finish going through all of the groups, one-third will be history. If you want to keep less, pick one out of every two.

**Not sure?** If you're not sure about downsizing a collection, remove the pieces you're on the fence about, wrap them up, and store it in a box. See if you miss it. You can always rotate the pieces a couple of times a year.

## **A Matter of Inheritance**

In an episode of *Mad About You*, the two main characters were summoned to his parent's house. His parents issued everyone yellow sticky notes and were told to tag everything they wanted. Being a sitcom, mayhem naturally ensued -- especially when his mother began questioning why people didn't choose some of her things. Of course, families can produce their own drama and sitcom moments without a script. The authors outlined several tips to use on dealing with inheritance issues:

During one-on-one time, ask each of your children, grandchildren, or other loved ones what they would like to have, and then give it to them as holiday or birthday gifts. The benefit is twofold. You can enjoy their reaction and save time, money, and energy on shopping.

If you don't want to do that, make a list of who will receive what item and leave it with your will and other important papers. You might want to discuss it with your executor.

Talk to your parents now about what they would like to have done. It's a difficult conversation to have, but it's important to know.

Keeping open communication is key to dealing with these emotional issues. At the end of the day, you have to decide what's more important to you: the stuff or the memories.

## **Those Little Extras**

Little things really add up without anyone noticing, and weeding out some of those overgrown areas is a quick, satisfying fix. You'll feel so accomplished. Some of those little things can be:

Make-up counter giveaways that you've never used.

Make-up that you haven't used in a while.

Lotions and shower gels you're not so crazy about.

Multiple copies of take-out menus and expired coupons.

That odd assortment in the junk drawer.

The pencil cup or drawer.

The refrigerator.

Copies of old bills.

## **Helping Hurricane Survivors**

Your downsizing can benefit Hurricane Katrina and Rita survivors. Charities, such as The Furniture Bank, Salvation Army, Goodwill, and St. Vincent's House, will take donations of furniture, rugs, appliances, and other household goods. Because some charities have been overwhelmed with donations after the hurricanes, call and ask the organization what items they'll accept for donations. Don't forget your tax receipt!

## **Cool Product**

Ziploc [Big Bags](#) are oversized storage bags that come in two sizes. The XL is 2 ft. x 1.7 ft (4 per box), and the XXL is 2 ft. x 2.7 ft (3 per box). The bags are sturdy, have a pleat on the bottom and a built-in handle. They're perfect for those bulky items that may not fit in a plastic tote and would be great for packing up items for a car trip -- or hurricane evacuation.

## **Hot Tip**

If you haven't done so already, it's time to make your holiday gift list and determine your budget. For tips from past newsletters on getting ready for the holidays, click [here](#).

### **Got Clutter? Organizing Expo**

**Mark your calendars!** This year's **Organizing Expo** will be bigger and better than ever! The Expo will be from **10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, October 18 in the Cancer Prevention Building 8th Floor Conference Center**, and 17 vendors from Office Depot, Compucom, several M.D. Anderson departments, the Waterfall Cafe, and the National Association of Professional Organizers -- Houston Chapter will be on hand.

**Got Clutter?** I have developed 15 minute, 30 minute and 45 minute presentations on organizing and time management. Moving to a new building? I also have a 15-minute presentation on preparing for a move for your department. I also do one-on-one sessions in your office and help you come up with a solution. To schedule a presentation or a one-on-one appointment, call 713-792-8061 or email [jsimon@mdanderson.org](mailto:jsimon@mdanderson.org).

### **Happy Organizing!**

#### **Links:**

Ziplock Big Bags: <http://www.ziploc.com/?p=b8>

Scaling Down: <http://www.amazon.com/Scaling-Down-Living-Large-Smaller/dp/1594860939>