



Life Cleaning

By Judy Arnall

Spring is here! And you know what that means! Yes, it's time for spring-cleaning! Time to clean out the winter dirt from our houses, and let in the sunshine and fresh air! We are making room for good things to come: the warm weather, long lazy days and relaxing times with our friends and family.

But why wait for spring? And why should we limit spring-cleaning to our houses? We can do LIFE CLEANING and we can start anytime. Life cleaning is about making room in our lives so we can concentrate our time and energy for those things that are important to us. There are three areas we need to look at when we are life cleaning. They are the **people** in our lives, the **obligations** in our lives, and the **material matter**, or what I call, stuff, we have in our lives.

Let's look at people first. We need to examine all the relationships in our lives and prioritize and redirect our energies to those relationships that give us joy. Now, I'm not saying that you have to dump your spouse because he annoys you from time to time. I'm saying that we need to look at the equity in your relationships. All give and all take is not healthy for you or the other person. It's not fair to you when you give 95% and receive 5 % back. We have to reevaluate those ties we are maintaining only out of a sense of obligation and duty.

For example, when Aunt Martha calls (and we all have someone like Aunt Martha in our lives) and complains for two hours daily, about her aches and pains and all the bad things that have happened to her and everything that's gone wrong in her life, and she spends five minutes listening to how you are. You can feel the life energy being sucked right out of you, and you hang up feeling drained. Put a boundary there. Give Aunt Martha 5 minutes of your most focused, empathetic listening and then say, "Sorry, I have to go now".

Remember, moods are contagious. Try to associate with positive people and you will have a more positive outlook on life. When we surround ourselves with people who nurture us, they feed our ability to nurture others. Remember, drop the "I should" and "I ought to". Focus on the people in your life that really matter to you. **Who do you want to make more room in your life for?**

Next, let's look at obligations. Again, prioritizing and redirecting where your energy will go. You should love your work 80% of the time, and if not, redirect your energies to what you really want to be doing. If you had 5 years left to live, would you be doing what you are doing today? A friend once told me that you should find out what you love to do and then find someone to pay you to do it. If you can, turn a hobby into a business.

As for leisure time, again, drop the "shoulds" and "ought to" and cut down on your commitments. When we are rushing from activity to activity, we become stressed and lose our patience. Who do we take it out on? We take it out on the people closest to us, usually our children and partner. It occurred to me one day while serving a fast food lunch to four kids in the back of the van. I was in the car swerving on the down a fast boulevard with the fries flying in the back seat. You could have heard me yelling in the other corner of the city when the ketchup dripped all over the upholstery.

Learn to say "No". When you do add a new activity, drop one you are no longer as much interested in, so you keep a flow through calendar rather than just adding and adding. We need reflection time and downtime as much as we need activity to keep balance in our lives. **What do you want to make more room for?**

The final area to look at is material matter. No, you don't have to get rid of everything, as my husband often fears! Just prioritize and redirect your stuff. If you move to a bigger house, you will just collect more stuff. If you buy more storage bins, you will just collect more stuff.

Have you ever come home from an exhausting day at work and seen dirty dishes, socks, papers, mail, newspapers, keys, cards, toys, sports equipment strewn all over the horizon of your house. Does this sight fuel your energy level or drain it? Don't you just feel like walking right back out the door?

We have too much stuff. The solution? Stop at the source – stop buying it! Imagine it as old and dusty while still in the store, because that’s the way it’s going to look in a few months in your house. Do you really want to buy it? Will your life be that much better if you own it? Can you borrow it when you need it or rent it?

Remember, The more gadgets you have, the more time, money and energy it takes to have to shop, clean, insure, maintain, store, move, and dispose of them.

I use the two-year rule: if you didn’t use it in the last two years, chances are you are never going to use it. Consider disposal: garage sale, trash bin, or pass along to someone who will love and enjoy it as much as you did.

Stop buying those Storage containers that just move everything around and get to a library where there are many wonderful books on the psychological reasons why we hold on to our junk and clutter. Don’t do your whole house in one day. Start with a drawer and keep going, by doing a little drawer, closet or room every week. Then start a plan to keep it up on a regular basis. Some people have a little box by their door, so whenever visitors leave they have an option to pick anything out of the box they might need in their house. Saves transporting to the dump, recycle bins and then you know that the person truly wants the item rather than having you foist bags on them.

I’m a sentimental person and I like to keep everything. But I’ve learned that memories are held in the head and the heart, not in material things. We can learn to keep the love, and let go of the stuff.

Where do you want more space for your life?

Do some serious life cleaning and you will reap the benefits: more time and energy for the people you love, things you love to do and more space to do it in. Feel the exhilaration, the sense of freedom, the enjoyment of a lighter load!

SPRING IS HERE! START YOUR LIFE CLEANING TODAY!

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