

Shelf Motivation

I am in my rec room. The rug is littered with piles of games, puzzles and magazines. There is at least seven years worth of photographs and negatives creeping out of plastic bags. The many collections piling up include coins, stamps and memorabilia. The cupboards that they came from are still half full and I can almost hear them groaning in fear at the possibility of being filled up again. It's been thirty minutes since I took everything out and I still can't decide how it is all going to fit. I am sure all of these items have a value to them. Maybe not right now but some day they could be worth millions, right? Others are definitely priceless from a sentimental point of view. So how do I part with any of them?

Well, my high school teachers always said to do the easiest questions first, so with that in mind I tackle the National Geographics. Breaking the cardinal rule of organizing, that is to say, do not keep anything that you do not use, I don't even go through these. They are never used but I know my husband's affection for them so we will be keeping them. Old complete sets of these magazines are collectors' items. They get packed into small cardboard boxes and put away. I emphasise the word small because those suckers get heavy very quickly.

The temptation is very high just to throw the boxes in a closet as they are, even though I know labelling them will save me from staring at the boxes in six months time and wondering what the heck they are doing there. So I pull out the big black magic marker and inscribe not only the name of the magazines but the years the box holds.

I look at the coin collection and realise that it will be really easy too. This is still an ongoing interest of ours, so it all stays. The ten year old books telling us the value of those coins need to be got rid of and the way the collection is stored leaves something to be desired. There are coins wrapped in tin foil, coins scraping together in plastic bags and coins piled up in boxes. One box will house the collection until proper sleeves and binders can be purchased. I add that to my "to do" list.

Next come the other magazines. These are a little tougher because they need to be gone through and agonized over. They get sorted into three piles; one is for the "keepers", one is for recycling, and one goes to Goodwill. Since a lot of these are my husband's, much against my better judgement I ask him to go through them too. I am mildly surprised when he is willing to let go of some of them. In fact he cannot remember why he kept them in the first place. A definite sign that says it is time to let them go.

Now we are getting into the heavy stuff. The games we have played over and over for many years. The ones that taught our children how to count and showed them reading could be fun. The puzzles that we have done so many times we know them by heart or the ones that look so hard we haven't even opened yet. One by one they are all whittled down. Nothing goes that even one person still wants but many questions are asked before it is decided that any of them will stay.

And the worst gets saved to the last; the photographs. This pile is downright scary. There is way too much to be done all at once and so this will have to be tackled as a job in itself. I figure if I break it into steps like I did the other stuff it will be manageable, just.

Now happiness reigns. My husband is happy because we do not have to buy any more cupboards, the kids are happy because they have room for more stuff and I am happy because all the items are not overflowing onto the floor. And the cupboards are no longer groaning under the weight.

-Cherri Hurst, Professional Organizer, helps busy individuals relieve stress and feel better about their lives through private, confidential organizing assistance. She has a background in art and production and also draws on her personal experience of being a homeowner, working mother of three and a community volunteer. For a free half hour consultation please call 416-241-7618 or email churst@ica.net.