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homefront

From garage to kitchen and everything in between, organization keeps home humming

I GREW UP IN A HOME where everything had its place. My stay-at-home mother was active in her children's schools, volunteered every week at a VA hospital, helped Dad keep his business' books, maintained the yard and house, and chased four children. She could always lay her hand on whatever she needed. She simply didn't have time to waste.

I didn't inherit the gene.

Perhaps it's the "stuff" factor that separates us. Mom was raised in the Depression and didn't desire useless items, so there was never junk to fill our Norfolk home. On the other hand, I grew up circling toys in the Sears Wish Book catalog come Christmas.

Still, my toys resided in one huge box with a lid that easily closed, so no Barbies created kiddie clutter in the den. Were it not for the toy box itself – a huge wooden one crafted by my maternal grandfather and easily able to hold two children – you couldn't tell young ones lived in our home.

Flash forward 30 years. My kids fill the playroom with enough toys and electronic gadgetry to stock a Toys R Us. Try as I might, the goods overflow from the room's shelves, bins, baskets and cabinets designed to contain them. They spill into the den, where PlayStation wires and controllers explode from the entertainment cabinet, and Barbie furniture alone fills two hampersized baskets. (Note to well-meaning friends and family: Abby does not need any Barbie or Bratz paraphernalia for her birthday or Christmas, thanks.)

And then there are the kids' bedrooms, with even more toys, plus a zoo full of stuffed animals. Do these things mate at night? For weeks now, I've been nagging the kids to pare down with the enticement of selling the toys at a yard sale. They'd get to keep their profits.

With all of this on my mind, it struck me that this week's Home has an overriding theme: the importance of organization.

In this issue, we meet Nancy Watson, a professional organizer who relishes helping others with their "stuff" and the deep-seated reasons why they have so much of it. I had the pleasure of interviewing Nancy for this week's House Call and learned plenty from her. Check out what she says on Page 20.

In this issue, cover story writer Jeanne Mooney also helps us get organized – this time before and after the storm. Jeanne's gleaned good advice and tips galore on preparing for Mother Nature's fury as we ride through hurricane season. Again, we learn that organization is key to preparation. Make sure to take in Jeanne's story, Page 10.

And that's not all. I learned a lot from our handy-dandy story featuring designers' how-to tips on conquering clutter in the home. You can learn more, too, by flipping to Page 16.

Throughout this issue, too, you'll find even more ideas on organization and planning. I'm so inspired by all this advice that this weekend's designated for downsizing our stuff.

Do I feel a garage sale coming on? Maybe, if I can lay my hands on our "How to hold a garage sale" book.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Hecht".

victoria hecht home editor

HOUSE CALL - Nancy Watson

By Victoria Hecht, The Virginian-Pilot, September 20, 2008, Section: Home; Page 20



NANCY WATSON'S seen the havoc that disorganization – or worse, hoarding – causes in people's homes. Friends and family aren't invited for visits because there's nowhere to sit. Grandchildren can't play there because the house isn't childproofed for safety. Spouses bicker nonstop over mounds of stuff and the inability to locate items.

At that point, it's about more than things. It's about quality of life, said Watson, The Joyful Organizer (joyfulorganizer.com). Honing her skills since 1982, the Virginia Beach resident and retired Navy commander launched the business in 2002.

The goal: to help others turn chaos to calm, she said. It's imperative to get to the root of the issue. Her specialty is working with the chronically disorganized. Tackling a home's office can take 10 hours or more. A house – weekly or biweekly sessions over months. She even does garages.

"Take bins and just put stuff in them and label it? That's not me," she said.

Watson's completed two levels of study with the National Study Group on Disorganization and this month will finish her third, achieving "attention deficit disorder specialist" ranking. She's also guided by the ethics of the National Association of Professional Organizers.

To really dig into a job, she dons her signature blue jumpsuit with razzle-dazzle earrings for personal flair.

What attracted you to professional organizing?

I was raised in a chronic disorganization (CD) home without birthday parties or sleepovers. I have not been to my brother's home in more than 25 years because he is so ashamed due to all the stuff. I know firsthand the negative impact a CD environment has on children, families and relationships. I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder myself. CD clients deserve a chance to recover. I joyfully assist them in this journey to achieve a peaceful home in which families love and live.

Is organization about more than just "stuff?"

Yes. The stuff is a symptom of the real unresolved issue(s). When I was growing up, there were no professional organizers or specialists in CD. Now you have professional organizers who specialize in CD.

Tell us why you call yourself "Joyful"?

Because I am absolutely passionate about what I do. Working with clients is so much fun. Each client and family holds a special place in my heart. Seeing a family host a Thanksgiving dinner for the first time in 10 years or have a visit with their grandchildren because the home is now safe – to know that I had a part in that transformation where they experience joy makes me joyful.

What do you think has been the greatest innovation in organizing this decade?

Disorganization has caused individuals problems for decades but was not openly addressed until the last 10 years. Oprah's show that focused on a woman in Baltimore who got rid of 75 tons of clutter, as well as community hoarding task forces, the Internet and printed media, have given permission for families who need help to request help.

The nonprofit National Study Group for Chronic Disorganization's (www.nsgcd.org) mission is to explore, develop and disseminate to professional organizers and related professionals organizing methods, techniques, approaches and solution that will benefit chronically disorganized people.

What was the most satisfying job you completed?

I derive great satisfaction working with all my clients, but one stands out as a favorite – a family of two professionals with small children who were situationally disorganized due to their complex lives.

The Joyful Organizer completed a whole house organization, added storage, upgraded appliances, home repairs, got rid of the unnecessary clutter and worked with the children, teaching them organization skills and setting up individual study areas. They have maintained their home, continue to be organized and are thriving as a family.

What's the favorite aspect about your own home?

My office that I designed purchased and installed from Ikea.