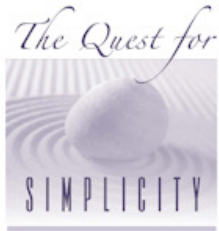


I, Packrat

by Jeff Davidson

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In a culture overwhelmed by complexity, it's understandable that now and then you get caught up in hanging on to pieces of the past—nostalgia is comforting! Packratism, now epidemic in society, and probably in your house, is not the answer. Careful consideration is in order, because you are the primary force preventing the complexity from engulfing you.

Here are some suggestions to keep packratism under control, but keep in mind that whether it's a collection or simply piles of stuff, consider anything you retain as potentially hazardous to a simpler life:

1. Separate your possessions by seasons. There's no need to have all of your clothes crammed into your closets all year long. If spring is coming, pack away all of your winter clothes. With the first frost, it's a safe bet that you can stow all of your summer clothes if you don't already engage in such practices. Likewise with garden utensils, athletic equipment, toys, and all else in your possession that you only employ during particular seasons. The hour or so needed to put your possessions into "seasonal holding bins" is then offset by the freed up space and sense of simplicity you gain thereafter.
2. Store frequently used items in multiple locations. If you wear contact lenses, you know the value of using multiple stations. Lens wearers know to keep extra saline solution and storage tubes at the various stations in life: your desk, car, health club locker. Hence, you are always prepared without having to carry these materials.

What else can you store at multiple stations, freeing yourself of the responsibility to carry or be concerned with it? Pens, note pads, calendars? What else is inexpensive, often used and easily missed, such as a comb or brush, note pad, or even the kids' medicines? Anything you need at various checkpoints in your life is best stored there.

Actually, placing small items in multiple stations is a variation on the theme of dividing and conquering. In the case of your child's medicine, it's as if you have a large container and decide to parcel out portions of the medicine into smaller containers to be stored in various appropriate locations.

3. Manage your environment to support you. Set up your home, car, office, or any other space to accommodate the way you sleep, eat, drive, work, live. Never mind how your arrangement appears to someone else. The noted psychologist Erich Fromm once remarked that it's important not to jump too hastily to the conclusion that you're mentally ill, when indeed, it may be the society all around you that is ill. When you manage your environment, it may not look conventional or "normal" to others. Big deal. Which would you rather have? Simpler ways of doing things, or more involved, more complex ways of doing things merely to meet the expectations of others?
4. Deal with knickknacks, bric-a-bracs, and thingamajigs. For some people it's Hummels. Regardless of what's taking up valuable space in your house, such as what's along the tops of mantles, shelves, tables, ledges, and other furniture, perhaps it's time for you to round up the excess and box it, and see where that leads. If you've been in your present home for as little as two years, and certainly more than three or four, chances are you've already begun to accumulate more things than what is comfortable, can be easily dusted, or add to the feeling of simplicity.

Get real about what you need to display. You don't need a memento for every other event in your life. Sure, some items had their moments, but this is now. By boxing up the excess and living without it in your visual field for several months, you've given yourself the opportunity to reclaim the spaces in your home, and contribute to the mounting realization that you can make your life simpler.

Make a timed revisit. After several months, again revisit the box and critically examine each item. If you can't bear to part with it, consider this written permission to reinsert it back into your home. You always have the option of retaining the items, boxed, and out of the way, having a yard sale, or simply giving the items away.

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