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### COLUMNS

## Confessions of a clutter queen

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by Diane Feen

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Does your life seem like one big in-box? Do you spend more time looking for things than enjoying them? Do you feel more disorganized after you organize? Then you might be suffering from a malady known as chronic disorganization. Like many pop dysfunctions, there are treatments and cures for this disorder. And like most disorders those afflicted have to face their inner demons and pledge to change their self-destructive ways.

If you're like me you envy those in pursuit of environmental perfectionism, but continue to cling to your creative chaotic ways. Even though being messy isn't a high priority for outpatient care, I am beginning to see the benefits of a clear and concise life.

Organizational expert Julie Morgenstern says that mess and clutter can zap your energy and may be symptomatic of a fear of failure or success. Boca Raton Feng Shui consultant Mark Jacobson also stresses the downside of disorganization. "If you're home is disorganized, then you're life will be as well."

So, after years of suffering from being over stuffed and under disciplined about parting with my stuff, I am ready to pare down and fess up. I knew I was a recovering clutter queen when I paid heed to the new "Organized Living" catalogue that mysteriously found its way into my mail box.

I wondered if someone from New York had tipped off the marketing department of Organized Living about my penchant for wayward paper. Or perhaps it was a group of former boyfriends comparing notes about me in a chat room for former beaux of disorganized professional women. There you have it, I confess, I suffer from chronic disorganization. I am a hopeless stuff junkie, loathing my sinful habit and forever seeking redemptive willpower to change my messy ways.

If William Bennett can condemn the lust and moral ineptitude of the common man, then I can publicly condemn my messy comrades who have let their underwear drawers and storage spaces go awry. And after speaking with organizational professionals around the country, I have learned that there is a method to the madness of changing ones disorganization into a perfectly poised path of organization. For \$100 an hour, anyone can call in an expert to pull their life into fine focus and organize their material stuff into regimental order.

"It's my passion to help people go from clutter and chaos to order and efficiency," said Palm Beach County Organization professional Susan McKemy.

McKemy, who has a B.A. in math and a Masters Degree in System Engineering believes that sufferers must not only learn to de-clutter, but they need a maintenance system to insure that clutter doesn't return after she leaves. "I set up a system known as FAT, that stands for file it, act on it and toss it."

That may be easy for pros like McKemy, but for clutter queens like myself, it's a painful endeavor. However, I am beginning to see the benefits of a clear and concise homeland. "Every place you go drains your energy, and your household should be a re-charger to re-vitalize you with positive energy," said Leslie Jacobson, of Feng Shui Consultants of Boca Raton.

Good point, and a good reason for clearing ones clutter. And with an Organized Living store in Boca Raton, it's a shoe-in that I should probably pigeon-hole my socks and clearly define my pumps from my platforms. But is that what us overstuffed under themed folks really want?

"Every time I pass the Organized Living store my husband and I always laugh. We really want to be organized, but we're always too busy searching for our things to have time to get organized," said fellow clutter couple Jerry and Catherine Biehler, who work together as financial consultants at Salomon Smith Barney in Boca Raton.

Although the Biehler's have a good excuse for their clutter, I can't claim the same defense. As a freelance writer and chronic assignment seeker, I am close to home 24/7. But after forking over \$5000 to Public Storage for taking custody of my wares (that were delivered moldy), I am now repenting for my years of un-repenting collection.



Although Public Storage had a ready defense, "We are not responsible for atmospheric changes." My defense seems to be one of material attachment; a malady that National Association of Professional Organizers President, Barry Izsak says is normal for the times. "We are bombarded with messages to go out and buy stuff. After buying it we come home and put it in the closet. Before people realize it they are buying more and more stuff, and then they're buried in it," said the trainer for the organizationally challenged.

I knew I had a problem with stuff after I packed four suitcases to go on a 10-day trip to California. And it was only after I suffered a rotator cuff injury from lifting my carry-on bag that I yearned for a 12-step program for over-packers. If alcoholics and gamblers can find redemption in 12-steps, then why can't stuff junkies find camaraderie and a cure under one roof? If my need to take six black T-shirts to La Quinta Resort and Spa is any indication of the degree to which I suffer, then I say 'find a cure quick.'

Although I missed the Beatnik era, I am not going to be left behind in the Neatnik era. And with stores like Levenger and Organized Living specializing in gadgets for gathering, it's a sure bet that us clutter types will have to mend our ways.

The new Organized Living store in Boca stocks over 6,000 items to make anyone's life the focus of high function. Their 30 different drawer organizers and 27 style trash cans are tempting to those of us who consider shopping a high priority activity. Levenger, the classy catalogue merchant to the intellectually inclined, has an outlet store in Boca Raton.

They also mail out 25 million catalogues with beautiful items for storing stuff. Their virtual files have a non-skid bottom for travel, and their classy cabinets, bookshelves and notebooks are enough to make anyone devote their remaining days to de-cluttering.

But don't worry, if all this commerce and coaxing isn't your style, there's a simple solution for reform. Take the advice of Online Organizing.com creator Ramona Creel, "When you look at your things, ask yourself: is it beautiful, useful or loved, if not get rid of it."

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