



Radical Decluttering Can Reveal Unexpected Joy

One of the best-selling books of the past year is Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* (Ten Speed Press). Kondo's advice is to touch each item you own and really look at it. If an item doesn't "spark joy," give it the ol' heave-ho. Easier said than done.

I was recently diagnosed with a relatively uncommon mold sensitivity, meaning my husband and I are now in the process of sorting through every single item in our home and weighing its value. Is this something we want to keep? If so, we have to go through the tedious process of meticulously cleaning it. There is a balance, because while we know we can't financially afford to replace everything, we also know the more we get rid of the more likely it is our house will stay clean after remediation.

The big difference between what we are doing and what Kondo suggests is that even when something we own *does* spark joy, we still might have to get rid of it, or at least store it away for many years before I can be near it again. The idea is that by then my immune system will be stronger and the mycotoxins fewer. At that point, we can have our things back.

Where to start? Almost anything can be cleaned, but some things are more difficult to clean than others. My doctor said it is easier to get rid of things that are porous than to try and clean them, so unless they have sentimental value, we should start tossing things like books and papers. She said this casually, as if books and papers couldn't possibly hold sentimental value. So while she might (quite literally) know me inside and out, she obviously doesn't know a thing about who I am.

It was easy to sell off our upholstered family room sectional and living room furniture once my doctor reassured us that the allergic response I have to these things affects only a small percentage of people, who wouldn't (or shouldn't) be buying used furniture in any case. I had more trouble letting go of my books. And papers? We're talking about my journals. And binders full of research notes and story ideas. Undergraduate and graduate papers (yes, I kept many of them). Publications for which I have worked. Cards and letters. That's a lot of paper.

But, for the most part, I've done it. I have a couple of plastic totes with the word "Hot!" written on them, ready to be put into storage. In them are the things I couldn't part with. A few favorite childhood books. Cards and letters and some of my kids' artwork. College papers and stories and articles I've written. They're my history and I want to keep them, even if I can't touch them for years.

As for the house itself, we have a plan. We're going to replace the family room sectional with an identical one, but we're holding off on refurnishing the living room. We've always had to push coffee tables and chairs aside to make space to do yoga. But now we're looking at that empty room and we see it as something we want to keep, at least for a while. It will make a perfect yoga studio. And honestly, the thought of that *does* spark joy. ✨

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