

There are many reasons why people gather clutter

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Over a month, they uncovered five TV sets, old car parts, guitars, weights, old tires, lamps, furniture, a broken dresser and the like.

Janzen also dug out old photos and cheques she shared with a former boyfriend, who is now married with two kids it's been so long.

She put her shredder to work and by the end had enough paper bits to stuff her sagging bean bag chair.

Every item was scrutinized and she kept only those that

were most important to her, including a selection of her childhood books, her first knitted dress and only her favourite baby toys.

As an added bonus, everything else nobody wanted she sold on Craigslist and earned \$600 for her efforts.

Why we clutter

Lynne Davidson says there are numerous reasons people keep things they don't need.

Often it's a product of family background. If they were poor while growing up,

Pack rat or hoarder?

Dr. Ingrid Sochting says there's a fine line between the average run-of-the-mill pack rat and someone who hoards.

Essentially, once clutter intrudes heavily into a person's living space and it interferes with their daily lives—picture pathways between the teetering piles—then the person suffers from hoarding, a subset of obsessive compulsive disorder, said Sochting, who treats many such patients. Some hoarders have had difficult childhoods and end up putting emotional attachments on inanimate objects to compensate for a lack of comfort and nurturing in their earlier years.

Hoarders typically account for less than one per cent of North Americans. But many of the reasons they give for keeping stuff also apply to everyone else faced with clutter issues. In both cases, insight into the underlying issues is necessary before anything can be done about it all, Sochting said.

they might want to surround themselves with more than they need.

Stuff can be used to enhance a person's identity. For instance, skis and a ski jacket

that are never used remind the person of their skiing prowess back in the '70s. Or an ugly purse or blouse that is never worn is kept because its status symbol brand name

makes the person feel better about themselves.

Books are a common source of clutter. Davidson said people either see a perceived value in them because

of what they paid for them, or having books makes them feel smart, whether they ever got around to reading them or not.

Often there's a fear that losing an object will cause them to forget the memories associated with it.

Then there's guilt, as in "what would my late mother say if I got rid of that vase?"

"At this point, your mother won't care," Davidson replies.

"Sometimes all an organizer does ... is give permission to get rid of things."

And there's the fear of making the wrong decision, something most common with paper clutter. Davidson said most paper is never looked at again after it's filed.

Most of it is available through the Internet or other sources in the unlikely event it's ever needed again.

As for organizing, she stressed the need to cull belongings first. "Never organize your clutter."

Stuff to keep

In addition to his own stuff, Jack Cooney had to clear out his parents' home after his father died and his mom was to move in with him and his wife Christine. He recalled sitting in the living room of the old family home having a tough time disturbing the items that had been there for the past 40 years.

As for his trains, Jack Cooney sold off his collection but the old locomotive that his grandparents gave him all those years ago is among the few pieces he kept.

It now has a place of honour in their house—in the china cabinet beside the dining room table.

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