

Keepers or "Crap"?

By Laura Willis



My sister shared a book with me recently called "Crap at My Parents' House" by Joel Dovev, and though the title may be a little crass and put-offish, it's a very fun and engaging book, which I could relate to as I have been going through the process of both down-sizing or cleaning out a few times now. And to those whose homes we might be cleaning out (not to mention our own) it's more about treasures of memories, fun moments captured, reflections of someone's personality, livelihood or the simple passion and love of collecting that we might be dismantling. For me, the first clean-out experience ended up with a large storage unit of the stuff we thought we'd sell in a big yard sale. That never happened for one reason or another (frankly the idea of dealing with it all was overwhelming) so when we went to sell the whole lot it seemed that the dealers or shop owners that came to look, didn't seem to have any respect for the fact that my parents' lives were in that storage box and at that time, to me, it wasn't "crap". We ended up donating the whole lot to a non-profit that came with a big box truck and loaded it all up for the big yard sale they were having to benefit their organization. Frankly that was more fulfilling than any small amount of money I might get otherwise.

That was several years ago and now there are many more options available for help in this task. There are cleanout companies that will donate and repurpose as much as possible to those in need, organizers that can help you sort through the stuff, or if you feel the need to go through it all (like we do) to relive the memories and work through the letting-go process, I've discovered several places to find new homes for a variety of things and pass them along to someone that can make use of or appreciate it.

Most of the non-profit organizations will give you a receipt for tax deductions, but you'll still need to keep a cataloged list of the items donated in order to estimate dollar amounts and claim on your taxes. You can find some indications for what items are worth online, or you can visit a local thrift store to get an idea of resale value. If it's a large quantity, you might get a personalized letter from the organization (most are happy to oblige) that will give a rough inventory and a dollar amount you may agree on when they take the goods.

Here are a few suggestions for "recycling" and donating. These are just a few that I am personally familiar with. There are many more you can find with just a little research:

Clothing: New or gently worn

St. Vincent DePaul Society (on special weekends they'll have a truck at my church. In some areas they have their own thrift stores)

Salvation Army/Good Will/Savers

Some will pick-up at your home (You must contact them for pick-up, and items must be bagged, marked and put outside for pick-up - they also take other household items): Vietnam Veterans Association, Multiple Sclerosis(they even send plastic bags!), Big Brother/Big Sister, Diabetes Association.

Friends of the Homeless: Will take clothing and other household items.

Interfaith Social Services (Quincy), Rosie's Place(Boston)

Some senior centers, elder services, and even assisted living or nursing homes will accept clothing for clients or residents who perhaps don't have family or financial means.

New items you might want to "re-gift": There are often giving trees around the holidays (so we missed it for this past holiday season) at local malls or in many churches that collect gift items for those in need. They are very grateful to accept new items. Again, check with your local church or senior center any time during the year. They can probably point you in the right direction or accept donations at any time.

Vintage clothing: There are people out there who love vintage clothing and since a lot of it has been tossed or eaten by moths, there is a decent market for it. A couple of options: auction houses that will include vintage clothing in their auctions or they may specialize in it. Consignment shops: (Wish List Consignment, Hanover, MA, Garment District, Cambridge, MA, Circa Vintage Wear, New Bedford, MA)

Craft Items: Check your local Senior Center, they love craft stuff! Also, some day programs for Mentally Challenged and Adult Day Care facilities also welcome craft materials. (NEV Industries Day habilitation Program in Hanson, MA)

Non-perishable Food Items: Local food pantries (Note: expired food items will not be accepted)

Collectibles/Antiques: Check with vintage antique shops or auction houses. If you have a large quantity, some will come to your location. It's good to do a little homework on what you think might have more value. And there will be different commissions if you sell via auction or sell the items to a shop outright. Shops will typically pay about 1/2 what an item is worth since it will take time, effort and overhead before they will sell it. (I will typically take a look around a shop to check out prices first before asking about items to sell.) Of course there's the estate or yard sale option. If you have the energy to organize, advertise and do it yourself, great! There ARE some businesses out there to help with this as well. They can organize, price, advertise and run the sale for you, for a commission, of course.

I personally haven't had a lot of high-end antique items, so my efforts have been focused on donating and recycling.

If there are items from your family clean-outs that you want to keep, there are some unique things you can do so they become a true treasure for you. Personal photo organizers can help you convert those boxes of photos into either physical photo albums or digital ones. You can have old movies and videos converted to DVD. I also came across a woman who makes jewelry out of old china, literally cutting out a flower or other piece of a design right from china (www.dinnerwearjewelry.com), so I had a couple of pieces made that I wear and think of my mother every time I do.

Of course it's better to clean out on a regular basis so it's not so overwhelming all at once. And now I face the chore of cleaning out my own home since I've kept a few too many mementos from all the downsizing I've done for others. I look back to the book "Crap at My Parents' House" and question why I'm holding on to so many things, only to be someone else's chore down the road when they have to clear out my "crap".

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