

Sensory Delights

Get Real

by

Brooke Bessen



Living in my cramped fishbowl

I come from a long line of packrats; collectors who have managed to elbow extraordinary sums into their cozy nests. My grandparents left a copious basement cache: bags of spare buttons, one Shirley Temple doll, decades of baseball scores and every bank book they ever tallied. They even safeguarded the cardboard sarcophagus of their beloved parakeet, Bay Boy.

My mom relishes collectibles. Oh yeah, and those nifty Popsicle sticks with riddles on them. My dad has enough steel beams

rusting behind his tractor shed to assemble a decent replica of the Astrodome. And using remarkable foresight, my 83-year-old uncle saves Paul Newman salad dressing bottles for the celebrity value they are certain to acquire.

Tracing the dynasty of Paragon teacups and Cherished Teddies, one might presume this "saver" trait is a familial one, but I am quite the opposite. Too much clutter can make me dizzy.

I keep possessions to a minimum and avoid knick knacks like the plague. I love lists, filing cabinets, and

see-through plastic storage containers. I am so organized that I can actually direct you to any item we own. Need purple construction paper? Office closet, third drawer down, behind the Elmer's... you get the picture.

When life gets messy - and it always does - I appreciate structure in my surroundings. I sooth frustration about issues I cannot control by neatly arranging the things I can (and between you and me, in times of trouble, folding underwear can be very therapeutic.)

I may not keep books aligned alphabetically or label shelves in my pantry but I could easily nab a Good Housekeeping award for my toiletry cabinet savoir-faire. And I do rotate my clothes closet seasonally. Every year, saßy summer tops flirt for prime hanger space only to be bullied out by winter's burly sweaters.

Yet, no matter how well-arranged, storage inevitably poses a problem. Closets eventually are brimming

and kitchen cupboards bulge. Twisting, nudging and stacking, we long for more room. Humans are like goldfish - our growth is in direct proportion to the size of our aquarium and mine is getting tighter.

Many items are initially jettisoned to the garage, a place nearly impossible to keep tidy and in constant need of additional shelving, even for those of us who color code boxes for content. As mere concrete docking stations for the Mothership, anything relegated to their inhospitable territory rarely returns to the warmth of the living quarters.

In these mini junkyards, leisure suits, old tax records and broken ice skates wrestle decay as they await final disposition.

Alas, successful storage requires three things: space, organization and... a big trash can. It's the sacred trinity. Whatever cannot be used, sold or donated should be thrown out!

Don't misunderstand; truly sentimental property should be preserved at all cost. I keep real treasures buried in two discreetly marked bins. Can I really be expected to throw away the plaster arm cast I wore in the eighth grade, the one with well wishes scribbled in a kaleidoscope of colored marker? I think not.

Someday I might need my exacting notes from Chemistry 101 or that sparkly tiara. And if I ever decide to start playing the flute again, it's nice to know I won't have to rent.

You smirk? Other people's

belongings may seem strange and unnecessary but to store or not to store is a deeply personal decision.

One friend tosses anything not used within six months. Another abides The Law of Shoe Equilibrium: for every new pair in, an old pair must go.

My mother proudly follows family tradition and keeps everything! The growing jumble does not overwhelm her at all. On the contrary, she says the objects she has gathered from her life (and the lives of a dozen ancestors) bring her comfort.

She carefully tucks "special things" away in "special places." Sometimes she does forget where the "special places" are, but who's to question the kind of magic that can fit 20 clowns in a Volkswagen?

As for me, I fall somewhere in the middle. I get rid of what I can, keep what I must, and organize, organize, organize!

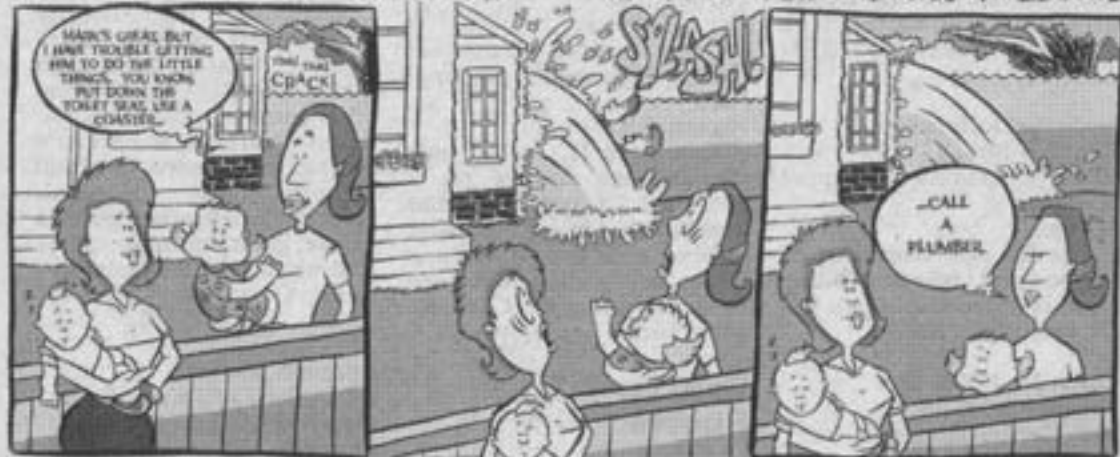
But the race for space continues and our house is filling fast. So, my mission: to explore new systems, seek out new nooks and crannies, and boldly put things where no storage has gone before.

And if the situation reaches critical mass, I may just have to start wearing that tiara.

Scottsdale resident Brooke Bessen is the author and illustrator of the children's book *Look Who Lives in the Desert!*, a humorous-but-educational look at desert wildlife. It's available at all book retailers, including Gridleys of Fountain Hills.

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NEELY'S DINER

by Crawford



Lileks releases *Worst* book yet

Humorist James Lileks' newly released book, *Mommy Knows Worst*, treats readers to a visual feast of past parenting neuroses. It also gives insight into why concerned moms and dads were driven to buy "delicious" baby laxatives, douse their baby in oil and put him in the sun, and strap Junior into a car seat that bore a strange resemblance to scrap metal.

If you're a baby boomer who lived through this childhood torture, well, we're sorry. But if humor really is the best medicine (rather than bicarbonate of curd

and mustard plaster, as was previously recommended for childhood ailments), then *Mommy Knows Worst* is cheaper than therapy.

Photographs, advertisements, magazine articles, and government-issue parenting guides, which seemed so helpful in their day, are given a whole new slant.

Lileks is a columnist for the *Star-Tribune* in Minneapolis. He is the author of *The Gallery of Regrettable Food* and *Interior Desecrations*. His Web site, lileks.com, is among the most popular humor sites on the Internet.