

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## To pack or to pitch?

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By Ellen Scolnic and Joyce Eisenberg

Cleaning out our parents' and in-laws' apartments and houses — when they've downsized, moved, or died — has made us vow not to put our kids through the same task. It is so difficult to sort through a lifetime of possessions. Why did our parents save all this stuff?

Some of it is "valuable" — the breakfront filled with Waterford crystal dessert bowls and sets of bone china. The shelves lined with Lladro figurines, candlesticks, and souvenir plates from their travels. Then there are the books: stacks and stacks of paperback mysteries. Glossy coffee-table books on baseball and spies. A book of golf jokes. A set of encyclopedias from 1964, in case you want to look up the Soviet Union, typewriters, and cassette tapes.



We already have more than enough. We each have three sets of dishes. We don't have an empty wall on which to hang their art. When we get flowers, we have 10 vases to choose from. We do want to keep the photo albums, the vegetable dish we always used on Thanksgiving, and the candlesticks from Israel, but we don't need another dining-room table.

When we called in a clean-out service, they gave us depressing news: Only a few items had resale value. Would we take a few hundred dollars for the entire lot? They would be willing to haul everything away if we "donated" it.

After these sad chores, we were determined to reevaluate our "treasures." We, too, have too much stuff, and we set about to sort it. We started by offering some of the items to our adult children. We were overjoyed when one child found space in his tiny apartment for the teak kitchen table that had been waiting for him in the attic for 23 years.

We were sure none of the kids would want the old set of encyclopedias and we could safely throw it out. But then one son thought he might like to cut out and keep some pages, like the one with flags of countries that no longer exist.

But not enough of our stuff has found a home with our children. What can our daughter do with a crystal vase and Lenox china for 12 in her apartment? Our kids aren't sure what they'll want in the future. "Hang on to that bookcase," they tell us. It's our decision to keep that old bureau, because down the road it will be perfect for a grandchild. That's why we put it in the attic.

We've pared down the children's books we're saving to one plastic tub of much-loved favorites. The kids forced us to hold on to their Beanie Babies — waiting for the collectibles market to rebound. When we came across the electronic chess set in the basement, which still sported a \$99 price tag, we wondered: Throw or keep? We found it on eBay for \$2.50, so we're proud to say we put it in that week's trash.

We look forward to the day our children have established homes of their own. We imagine we'll pack up their stuff and ship it to them — "Honey, a package arrived for you. Did you order Boy Scout badges, meteorites, old baseball cards, souvenir Playbills, and some old textbooks?"

It's easy to understand why our parents kept all their stuff. It's hard to pare down a lifetime of memories. Although not valuable, each item has value because of the memories attached. When one of us decided to clean out the attic, she was sure the clutter belonged to her husband and kids. It turned out that the charity-run T-shirts, the suitcases, and the newspaper clippings were hers — mementos of her travel, work, and accomplishments.

We've made some progress on the clean-out front, but there's definitely more to go. We'll admit that we're never going to move into a Tiny House or get joy from living simply with only 100 possessions.

After all, the children's photos on the mantel and their grade-school ceramic projects number at least

47. This doesn't include the file we keep of their hand-drawn Mother's Day cards. This is valuable stuff, and there's still room in the attic.