

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Possessions—how much “stuff” do you want?

I started to write on this life skill for this month and decided to resurrect a 2006 article on the subject. So, let’s revisit those thoughts and tips you may have forgotten in the past three years. Here’s your opportunity to pick up where you left off.

With many a trinket and treasure I care for, I often find myself asking, “Why did I buy that?” Whenever it’s *cleaning the clutter day*, that question again shows up. My answer routinely ends up being, “Well, it seemed important at the time!” Yet, as that possession accumulates dust, I wonder what I should do with it. Not certain, I just set it aside for another day.

Bertrand Russell so masterfully stated that “It is preoccupation with possessions more than anything else that prevents us from living freely and nobly.” Taking this to heart, I decided to again cruise through my closets, cabinets, and garage. It felt great to finally let go of things that in the final analysis I didn’t need anymore and didn’t add value to my life. The word “simplify” played a key role in deciding what to keep and let go.

Here’s my possession care routine that may work for you too:

1. **Commit to a routine review of possessions at least twice per year.** Set aside a designated day to give concentrated thought to a particular possession. Does it offer value, enjoyment in my life and relationships? Am I committed to properly

caring for that possession? How long has it been hidden away? If in view, am I ready for a change of décor or need to upgrade?

2. **Decide right then to keep or let go.** If you decide to let it go, immediately remove it from your home, garage or storage area. You just might be amazed at how good it feels afterwards. Remember, no regrets!
3. **For those possessions you keep, commit to routine care.** Move from one room to the next, then garage and any storage areas. Set dates on your calendar for routine maintenance and care of these items you may possess:
 - Clothes, jewelry (costume/precious), all personal care items (e.g. hair dryer, curler, cutter, brushes/combs)
 - Linens (e.g. towel sets, sheets, mattress pad)
 - Furnishings of all types (include pillows, coverlets; check mfg. care instructions for all furnishings)
 - Wall & window décor (e.g. prints, murals, bric-a-brac, drapes/curtains)
 - Valued Art/artifact possessions (e.g. paintings, weavings, sculpture, antiques; learn how to care for these items at the time of purchasing plus available literature on their care)
 - Library book collection (dust-free and humidity/mold protected, particularly for valued antique book)
 - Photo album, pictures, memory albums (acid-free protection)
 - Family mementos
 - Garage equipment (e.g. lawnmower, edger, hand tools)
4. **As you care for each possession important to you, be present in the process** of cleaning, fixing it, polishing it, refinishing it. Commit to doing what is

necessary to appreciate and enjoy the moment. Then display it in that spot convenient, and even special for you.

In caring for your prized possessions (whether functional or just beautiful to look at), remember to also enjoy and appreciate your friends, family, memories of those fun times together, the convenience of so many handy home gadgets, your health, and the time to enjoy them all. As the first Queen Elizabeth reflected over her life, "All my possessions for a moment of time." I encourage you to possess your time with those you love. A life that is simple is a life that is shared with others.

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Possessions & the Real You!

Why do you say that couch or chair in your home is your favorite place to lounge? Is it because it's so comfortable; is the one place you love to read your choicest mystery novel? Or maybe, if you are a teenager, when your boyfriend calls, you always jump into that favorite chair for a two hour "cozy" conversation. Possibly, that couch has been in the family for the past two generations, and you just can't part with it? You just keep saying, "It's a classic and never goes out of style!"

Then again, are you always finding your loving pet curled up in what is supposed to be "your" spot? Maybe there is something more to your attachment and loyalty to that furniture landmark in your home. I believe our "stuff" or possessions somehow reflect a bit of who we are. Here are some possible reasons you hang on and frequently hang out in your "spot."

- It was the first piece of furniture you and your spouse bought together.
- As a child you used to curl up in that chair with your mother when she read you a story. Or you, as a loving mom read to your own children in that chair when they were small.
- Your father bought that chair for you and loves to sit in it when he comes to visit. You just can't find a way to tell him you want to give it to the goodwill.

- It's a classic style that works with all your other furniture.
- It fits perfectly in the corner where it calls you every morning with your cup of coffee.
- Even though it has coffee or coke stains on it, that stain reminds you of a very special Christmas you had all your grandchildren at home together; and how much you are loved and blessed.
- It's the one chair you allow your little ones to sit in, play in, make a mess in.
- You actually just can't afford to purchase a replacement and feel that the chair works just fine for you.

What do these few examples say about you? They say you treasure memories, know a comfortable chair when you sit in one, don't want to hurt the feelings of those you love, and know how to create the best "feng shui" with your "fav" chair while sipping on a cup of coffee. You want your kids and grandkids to feel comfortable and at home. You also are a classy person with a classy chair! And let's not forget, you are a very thrifty person!

So, the next time you visit your "fav" spot in your home, check out that piece of furniture you land in. What comes to mind for the Real You? At some time in the near future, you can always consider, if your generational chair gets a bit more ragged, those Good Housekeeping's tips on doing a makeover of that favorite chair while keeping your fond furniture memories intact.

(<http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/renovation/chair-makeover-sep06>). For those who are thinking right now, "Who cares! I'd rather go shopping anytime. Out with old, in with the new is my motto!" If so, keep this article around for the next five to ten years.

After you settle in to your new décor in those years, then read it again to see what nostalgia and memory makers get hooked to your not so new “fav” chair. You may likely discover anew how your possessions reflect the Real You.

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Come one come all—Preserving Legacy the Artful Way!

Have you ever seen the care of your possessions as legacy? As discussed in the last issue, many of your personal possessions, such as your favorite chair or couch that has been in the family for generations, are definitely part of your legacy story. Think about why you hold on to that somewhat ragged piece of furniture or just love the house you and your own children were raised in.

Memories fill your life connected to your possessions and say something very special about who you are. Your generational possessions can also be considered today to be a unique form of art or artifact—representing family stories and memories of the past 50-100 years or more. Are you among those families who want to preserve your legacy the artful way?

Well, this coming week end you have a exceptional opportunity to be with other like-minded families preserving their story at the “**Living History Festival**” and enjoying the creative cluster of children and adults having great fun with “**Art in the Park**”—all on the same day, May 16! So, drop everything you are doing and head out to *The Herff Farm* and *Art in the Park*. The living history festival is being sponsored by the nature center (www.cibolo.org, (830) 249-4616) as well as many other like-minded

organizations. *Art in the Park* is annually sponsored by and organized by the Cibolo Arts Council, our Texas Hill Country partner and source for the arts in Kendall County (www.ciboloarts.org) – in partnership with the Cibolo Nature Center.

At the Herff Farm, you will see a *blast from the past* with the Herff Family and celebrate your own story too. So, come share your legacy, watch the Vintage Base Ball, train history, cowboy tales, listen to all kinds of music, and grab some great food! Then be sure to bring your kids and neighbor over to the Cibolo Nature Center for *Art in the Park* creative activities of all kinds. If you were there last year, it's going to be another winner! Enjoy an all-around good time by all. See you at both fun events!

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Is the Outdoors calling you?

How did you like that rain shower that covered us this last weekend? Except for stopping two great events, *Art in the Park*, and *Living History Festival*, who wouldn't want the showers! Those of us who were at these events felt like kids playing in mud puddles again. And for a few days, I bet we are all definitely enjoying a reprieve from the hot sun beating down on us. So, while we can bathe in the coolness of day and night, is the outdoors calling you?

It is surely calling me. Who wants to work anyway! Right now, my husband and I are building another rock garden with native plants and a few sculptures around the greenery and color. And since this month is about possessions, we have decided to add a pond to our backyard. Inspiration has come from friends who already have ponds and the beautiful one at the Cibolo Nature Center. My husband being a native plant lover, I'm sure the layout will include a modest waterfall and places for wildlife to visit, even a frog or two.

Did you ever consider that your flora and fauna are also possessions? Sure, for us who lean more toward the natural habitat landscape, we prefer both our flora and fauna to be fancy free. Yet, we all know that with urban and even suburban living in a fast-growing community, wildlife management is a vitally important part of responsible stewardship, even in our own backyard. The care and methods of management of our

own backyard can be gleaned from many sources, both locally and nationally. Those who understand the Texas landscape, weather, and eco-friendly pest management practices are always available to you. Here are a few resources to check out:

Texas A&M AgLife Extension, <http://kendall-tx.tamu.edu/>

Kendall County Soil & Water Conservation, <http://www.kendallswcd.org/>

Native Plant Society of Texas, <http://npsot.org/wp/>

Cibolo Nature Center, www.cibolo.org

As you design and create your own native-friendly backyard oasis, keep your ears tuned to the outdoors calling you. One in particular coming your way June 9 is among Kendall County's most favorite outdoor events, its 2nd annual *Boerne Adventure Fest 2009*. If you really want to expand your horizons, be sure to mark your calendar for this one. And check out the detail at the Boerne Visitors & Convention Bureau <http://www.visitboerne.org/WhatsNew/12383.aspx> or the Kendall County website at <http://www.co.kendall.tx.us/node/304>. In addition, don't miss getting a glimpse of last year's special time had by all at You Tube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKAeRfS4ukk>. Aren't we so lucky to live in Kendall County and our beautiful Texas Hill Country. The outdoors is calling me. So, goodbye for now; and see you at Adventure Fest June 6!

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Possessions, Time, Money—making the connection

First out of the gate is a previous issue CORRECTION OF EVENT DATE—
ADVENTURE FEST is JUNE 6, officially! Don't want you to miss it! Oh, the dismay of a writer's misspellings, wrong dates, places, and times! Now, let's move on to this month's lifeskill, *Possessions*, the "stuff" you love to buy and maybe care for most of the time.

Caring for your "stuff" may not be on the top of your "I love to do" list. We all know how much time and money is saved, with much less frustration, when we commit to routine care of our home, car, yard, appliances, computer, you name it. Yet, you may have a comeback with, "I just don't have the time or the money." See the connection?

So, we are not going to focus on specific care tips as much as reflecting on how to free up some time and money to keep your car running smoothly, your roof from leaking, and your washing machine lasting an extra ten years. And for those who tend to have a "shop till you drop" mindset, it's time to rethink that time and money-draining habit.

We all deal with the realities of what I call "controlled chaos." We all eventually burn out trying to live a "catch up" existence. Much of life's joy and motivation can be

lost along the way. Time and money will just then float away as you “muddle” through life.

Here are some questions to answer to help you embrace conscious choice in gaining the time and money needed to care for your “stuff”; thereby, saving you more time and money in the future.

1. What is most important to you in where you spend your time and money?
2. How do I show how much I value my possessions?
3. Where are your daily hours and dollars going? How would you like to shift the way you use your time and money to make sure your “stuff” lasts throughout the years? (e.g. commuting, shopping, errands, hobbies, dining out, movie rental overload).
4. What kinds of discretionary commitments (to reduce or eliminate) you have can garner you more time for taking care of your car, home, yard, etc.? (e.g. discretionary time used with iPods, MP3 players, cell phones, computer games/browsing/chat rooms, TV watching).
5. When you look over your checkbook log, where do you see your money going? Any place you can redirect to caring for your possessions?
6. How do you pattern your day and travel time? What specific way can you use some of that time in maintenance and repair of your “stuff” instead of going back and forth over the same territory?

As you go over your responses to these questions, share your thoughts with your family or close friend. Then choose one action you will start this week to shift your time and money to a specific possession needing your attention. If this possession requires routine repeated maintenance, put an alert on your calendar when care is needed

again. Consider doing this calendar routine with all the “stuff” needing routine care. And if you are not the only one, assign some of the care to those in your family with the skill to handle washing the car, changing the oil, replacing the refrigerator water filter.

Start caring for your possessions in a way that says they are important to you. You will then see your time and money become your friends again in the way you live your daily life. Life involves more than just one area, your possessions (check out my lifeskills manual available on my website to see how twelve practical daily lifeskills fit together).

Transforming your journey and celebrating your best life involve making the connection between your core values in relationships, the way you use your time, choose your career, manage your money, take care of your possessions, keeping records, never-ending housekeeping, the best of health & wellness, your meals together, the care of your children, how you have fun with recreation & entertainment; and don't forget how you reflect on all of the above, and celebrate your journey to the best life possible.

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