

From the Heart. . .

. . . Lifeskills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Who dibs for cleaning the toilets this time?

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When it comes to cleaning your house, do your kids, even your spouse, promise to do any other chore rather than the bathrooms? They even are willing to double up with their chore list in any other part of the house and yard! Or are you one of those ever faithful, sacrificing parents, Moms in particular, who end up with that yucky chore? If so, you probably view the job no differently than when you were the one who changed and washed your kids diapers too! Boy, does that show my age! When was the last time anyone washed diapers in this disposable age?

Now before I get too graphic here, let's just agree that there are a number of housekeeping chores we all just as soon pass to someone else, even hire out. Yet, most of us don't have the extra cash to be relieved of that unpleasant task. For those whose budget and money priorities can handle it, more power to you!

In these economic times, all of us still need to stretch our dollars and more than likely keep these kinds of chores close to home and family. In sharing the castle-cleaning jobs, it's important to be as specific as possible on who does what (including general pickup/trash, spring cleaning, etc.). And don't forget the when and how often too. Some chores are daily; others weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual. You may find your family will be more motivated when you allow flexibility and periodic rotation of jobs

relieving them of their tedium with the task that eventually happen. Although I don't view housekeeping as morose as Erma Bombeck does, many may often agree with her quip, "Housework is a treadmill from futility to oblivion with stop offs at tedium and counter productivity."

So, let's give it a try on the lighter side of attitude. How about writing down your long list of jobs today (with a smile, of course), such as floors and walls (including kickboards), windows and doors, bathrooms, bedrooms, closets, dining room, entry/foyer, family room, halls, kitchen, living room, office, refrigerator, yard, even the laundry/utility room, garage, and attic on occasion (if you store stuff up there)? And what of all the furnishings, tables that collect dust and grime? Don't want to forget them as well.

After cruising through your mounting chore list and assignments to more than just Mom, what do you specifically notice about your chore list? Does Mom have the biggest share of the work to do? Have your little ones been given some age-appropriate jobs to learn about life's everyday realities? How have the chores been divided. . .Dad yard and garage? Mom and kids only inside? I can vividly remember how my husband, John, moaned many times because our daughters never seemed to help him outdoors, mowing the lawn, weeding, watering.

I must admit my daughters weren't ones to help as much as they should have inside and outside. I found it just easier to do the jobs myself than ranting with them to help, besides just cleaning their own rooms. And that was not an easy one either. Yet, I must remind John that at least on many occasions I helped mow the 2 1/2 acres we had, helped weed our vegetable garden, and collect the chicken and duck eggs. And

yes, it was a riding lawn mower on which I dodged and ducked my head under more than two dozen mesquite trees!

No matter the size of your home, inside and out, it is your sacred place where you share your life with your family and friends. I hope every room and corner of your world is filled with love and laughter, even when whistling while you work at every chore! The next article will focus on the cleaning and organizing treasures in your garden and garage. In the meantime, remind yourself of how it felt for Robert Crippen, Space Shuttle Astronaut, when he offered this advice. *"Living inside the shuttle was a little like camping out. We ended up sleeping in our seats. You had to pay attention to housekeeping, not get things too dirty."* We can then all say, "there is no place like home, no matter the size of our shuttle space on earth!"

Sharon L. Benedict, MS, ACC, is a certified life/wellness coach-consultant, specializing in lifeskills, wellness, and creative arts development for individuals, businesses and organizations (www.harvestenterprises-sra.com). She welcomes your questions and comments and can be contacted at seekreachachieve@gvtc.com.

From the Heart. . .

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Housekeeping . . . Garden to Garage

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"The *patterns of home* go deeper, linking the way the house is designed with the way we experience the world. They explore the presence of life, the way we move through a space, the feel of one space as you are sitting in another, the relationship of indoors and outdoors." Max Jacobson in his book, *Patterns of Home, The Essentials of Enduring Design*, offers us an insightful glimpse into the importance of not just our living room, kitchen, bedrooms of our house but also how the outdoors are part of what he calls the "DNA for Home."

He asks us to "think of places you've known that feel good—comfortable, balanced, dynamic, alive—and then try to derive from such places the qualities and characteristics they share." Our house, inside and outside, have a ". . . shared sense of the essence of home." For most of us, we generally know what kind of a house we would want to live in. Yet, rarely give attention to what surrounds it. Our house "participates in the larger whole: a whole that includes views; the path of the sun; the presence of neighbors, sound, sidewalks, and roads; the nature of the soil; the places that are good to be in just as they are; the ugly places; the places in between."

So, how does your garden grow? How does your yard help you "embrace the habitat of your home?" Is your inside and outside an ". . . environment where you feel

most at home?" According to Sara Susanka, *Outside the Not So Big House, Creating the Landscape of Home*, "It's wonderful to look out the windows of your house and see a landscape that knits nature and building into one complete design. Your home feels as though it extends beyond the walls of the house." Susanka states crafting the elements of nature with your outdoor surroundings or landscape is all about wellbeing— ". . . being well both in your house and on your land."

You may wonder why I started the article this way when it might appear to be about the particulars of taking care of your garden and yard. For so many of us, our yard tends to be mostly lawn with a few shrubs or a couple trees randomly planted by the former owner. Or maybe you are in the middle of building your dream house and have left the yard ideas for later to save the budget. Right now, it's just weeds, dirt, leftover gravel, cement, and boards left by the contractor.

No matter whether you have included landscaping plans or not, the connection between what you see through your windows and doors makes all the difference on making the house truly your home. Whether you have a landscape architect or are a do-it-yourselfer, I highly recommend you check out Jacobson's and Susanka's house and landscaping books before you build, remodel, or start digging up your yard.

Since there are so many great resources for you to utilize (and I am definitely not an expert in this area, but am lucky enough to be married to one!) I only will give you your first few steps here. When it comes to caring for your garden, the first thing is to consider how much time you want to spend in your yard and garden. Then consider your locale for the types of plants that do well in your region of the nation; and then when to plant certain varieties that handle the seasons. How about including vegetable,

herbs, and fruit varieties as well that fit your locale and particular season. Why not literally enjoy eating the fruits of your labor year round?

Give some concentrated time to native plants that do well in drought conditions. You will be amazed at how many beautiful seasonal blooms and greenery you will have throughout the year to choose from. You will find your tending chores are less cumbersome all around too. Native plants seem to know just how to care for themselves in many ways. But don't feel you have to go 100% native.

There are a variety of introduced plants that do quite well also if tended correctly. Also, keep in mind, just like any variety that is prolific and spreads vertically and laterally, you want to choose those plants that fit the size area where you want them to grow alongside other plants. Go to your local nursery where they have a native plants expert handy; or visit the nearest nature center for all kinds of help, such as Boerne's Cibolo Nature Center or Kerrville's Riverside Nature Center. You will learn all the details on how to choose, plant, and care for the "Habitat of Your Home."

Next article will focus on your garage . . . often times the catch-all, alongside your car, for everything you don't quite know where to put. And you don't have the time to keep organized and clean. We all know our garage is often our workshop with projects laying around half finished. And who really cares? Nobody ever sees the garage except you, right?

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Housekeeping . . . my garage, are you kidding!

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Ever consider that keeping house also included your garage? For many of us, our garage is often times the catch-all, alongside the car, for everything we don't quite know where to put. And who has time to keep it organized and clean? Who really cares? Nobody ever sees the garage except you, right?

Where do you usually find your “guy” spouse. . . in his favorite part of the house? Maybe in the garage working on his latest project for the past six months—a rebuilt motorcycle or that vintage farm tractor? Surrounding his favorite project are stacks of “stuff” shoved in the corners and hanging from the rafters. No room for the car? And where did I put those Christmas decorations anyway?

How does it feel to walk into your garage? Is it easy to find what you need? Or are you climbing over lawnmower parts, garden pots, wheelbarrow, rake & shovel, and some 2x4s you know you will need sometime? What about the extra quantities of paper towels and goods you bought in bulk from Costco or Sam's to save on your budget that lasts for months? Do you have the stench of your trash and recycling bins permeating your garage/workshop area?

If any of this sounds familiar, I bet you wish you had built that shed in the backyard years ago when the cost was so much cheaper. Or just maybe you are ready

to do some garage housekeeping without breaking the budget. Here are some simple steps to start with:

1. **Take inventory.** Dedicate a weekend with the whole family involved. Take inventory of everything. Begin to put in categorized stacks or piles outside the garage (i.e. garden/yard, decorations & collectibles, household/workshop tools & supplies, paints/solvents/combustibles sporting, auto maintenance/repair tools).
2. **Create Sell, Give Away, Throw Away piles.** Then look at your piles. Choose which items to either sell, give away, or throw away. Place in one of these designated piles.
3. **Sweep out garage floor & dust benches.** This also means mop or clean up any lingering grease and other spills; and dust anything you couldn't move out of the garage, as well as what you put in the piles you want to put back, sell, or give away.
4. **Draw a layout plan for garage items.** Now that you know what items you are going to put back into your garage, a layout plan is essential for helping you stay organized and make it easier to routinely clean the garage in the future.
5. **Determine your budget for storage container/layout purchases.** Depending on your budget, you may want to go the plastic container route, label and stack them for easy access against one of the garage walls. If more dollars are available, you can purchase or build yourself garage storage cabinets and shelves based on the items you are going to place back in the garage. With available funds, you may even want to consider hiring a professional organizer, specializing in garages. Yes, there are some out there. Simply, do a net search for local companies, get references, and a bid before you hire out. With any one of these options, if you have garden/yard items

(i.e. lawnmower, garden tools, equipment, & supplies), consider placing them in a waterproof shed in your backyard to ease up garage space, particularly for workshop projects. Whoever has their garage as their favorite hiding place for ongoing project will thank you. In addition, do some research on how to store combustibles and other toxic products.

While working through each step, I suggest you wear a filter mask and eye goggles, even gloves if necessary. You never know what things linger you don't want to touch, breathe in or irritate your eyes. Here are a few other tips to consider as you clean your garage, making it a safe and efficiently organized part of your home and family life.

- Keep toys and toxins safely separated. That includes such items as insecticides, turpentine and gasoline. Store flammables with care in a fire-safe cabinet. And toss your greasy, oily rags.
- If you keep your garden tools in the garage, use a garbage can with wheels to place your garden tools in to simply wheel it out to your garden area.
- Utilize simple containers such as coffee & soup cans for small items such as nails and screws.
- Use corkboard to pin your plans and ideas for handy reference.
- Safely hang bicycles, canoes, kayaks for easy retrieval.

These are just a few of many possible ideas for simple living—little tricks that make housekeeping a little easier on you and your budget. Remember, the physical condition of a family's home, including the garage, is often a reflection of the care you have for one another. Sandra Felton, one of our nation's housekeeping mavens, encourages us in her classic 1986 book, *Messies 2, New Strategies for Restoring Order*

in your Life and Home, to seek simplicity, seek nature, seek a rhythm in living, seek beauty, seek quality. “Finally, there is the house. Simplicity does not preclude beauty; it accentuates it. One reason we must get the house under control is in order to place beauty there. Imagine in your mind your house in order and beautifully appointed. How wonderful it is. Living in it, you are beautiful. The home reflects loveliness from within you. See that finishing beauty in your life, the beauty of your home.”

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By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Housekeeping . . . Dirt Happens

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It doesn't matter what corner of your house or apartment you go in to, you will undoubtedly find resident a mist or mound of dust and dirt there. No matter how diligent you may be to dust or vacuum it away one moment, in a matter of minutes you will find the next layer of dirt settling in for the duration. So, with a slight poetic license here from a one-liner offered by George Bernard Shaw, "[Dirt] ~~Everything~~ happens to everybody sooner or later if there is time enough." Like life, dirt happens to us all.

For some more fastidious housekeepers, dirt is always an unwanted visitor but always conquerable. Yet, it is all around us and in the air we breathe. For those Sandra Felton, Messies Anonymous housekeeping maven, describes as "Cleanies," they have devised all kinds of methods for holding back and removing on a regular basis this unwanted visitor. When Cleanies come home from a hard day's work, the last thing they want to see is the shadow of dust and dirt misting the air and furnishings. But, no worries, they are already on the job touching up each layer as they walk to the closet to hang up their coat. No use wasting the trip!

For us more "Messies" types, whose hearts are vigilant in intent but not always in action, we see dust and dirt as a creative opportunity to etch our latest words of wisdom

for the ages! That way we won't forget it as we try to find our notepad to post it more permanently, wherever we left it last time.

As you can tell, I was having too much fun waxing whimsy here and not giving you much of any tips. So, let me offer a few here from the hallowed halls of our "Cleanie" friends.

1. Place or install an air filtering system, portable or central, to absorb airborne particles. This will also improve any allergic sensitivities.
2. Declutter rooms to have less items for dust and dirt to settle on.
3. Organize home (including closets, basement, garage) in a way that makes it easier to remove accumulated dust and dirt.
4. Tackle one section of your home at a time. Set up a weekly schedule and who does that area. This goes for all housekeeping tasks, not just dusting.
5. Utilize dusting/cleaning tools and supplies that keeps it from becoming airborne again to just settle back down as you leave the room. Insure the supplies are user friendly for the benefit of your health.

I again offer that the heart and soul of housekeeping encourages you to **keep your castle clean enough for healthy, but dirty enough for happy**. So, I leave you with a few "dirty" quotes from humanity's repertoire of reflection. Bet you never thought that "dirt" would be spoken of in so many ways throughout the ages. Dirt isn't so bad, is it!

"Painting is the most magical of mediums. The transcendence is truly amazing to me every time I go to a museum and I see how somebody figured another way to rub

colored dirt on a flat surface and make space where there is no space or make you think of a life experience.” Chuck Close, Artist

“Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then the worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order.” David Gerrold, Writer

“In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.” Margaret Atwood, Novelist

“The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just on the body, but the soul.” Alfred Austin, Poet

“Let’s not push it under the rug, or push it to the side because, no matter what, it’s going to keep coming up. You know, if you never deal with that dirt up under the carpet, it’s going to get larger and larger, and it’s going to keep coming up.” Herschel Walker, Athlete

“For suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring, dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in. If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes so that you say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor man, "Stand over there," or, "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," haven't you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” James 2:2-4 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

“People are like dirt. They can either nourish you and help you grow as a person or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die.” Plato, Philosopher

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