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A clutter-free life. What a dream!

When looking back over columns, I've lost count how many times I thought I had taken a big turn in my life to be organized. Ha. If that's the case, then why do I have drawers, closets and a large store room full of clutter?

How do people do it who always seem to have their house and office in order?

More recently I caught sight of a hoarding TV program to realize that I could be much worse. Oh my!! Those examples are disgusting. There's big business out there that guides people how to de-clutter. It's not something you can conquer and think you're done. It's forever and ever an ongoing process.

A friend recently exposed me to www.FlyLady.net. It offers free consulting and is great! Rather than being so totally overwhelmed with where to start, I'm taking baby steps and am getting the fever.

Waking up to snow on the weekend found me desiring to cook. A new chicken recipe caught my interest. Where's the paprika? The recipe called for 1.5 teaspoons, which is quite a bit of one spice. Should I just do without it?

Did I really have 10-year-old spices?

It hadn't been that long since I used paprika and I'm sure I didn't empty the container. The de-clutter concept kicked in and I started removing everything from the three shelves in the cupboard. What a mess.

Why did I have four boxes of baking soda, three of them opened?

Why did I have three containers of ground allspice? What does allspice go into anyway? Was it possibly among spices I received for a shower gift prior to our wedding? We've been married 31 years.

Did these spices get moved from the other house 13 years ago? There was the little bag of fresh sage that a Wauneta neighbor gave me, some of it gone. So that's obviously more than 13 years old. Fresh? Not anymore. What about the canned sage? Was it even older?

Off I went to FlyLady for guidance. What should go back in our cupboard? When you need $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of a spice, you obviously have to buy the whole container and it can get expensive. Did I want to throw spices away? On the other hand, were they any good?

I was shocked to get an email response to my question on a Sunday. Katie indicated that it's important to put spices in a sealed container and to avoid direct sunlight. Manufacturer guidelines recommend that ground spices can be kept two to three years while whole spices can be kept from three to four years. She puts a date on spices and baking products when she opens them. Great idea.

Obviously, the majority of my spices needed to go, even the ones that I've used recently.

I started tossing a box of Fry Magic when I noticed it had a "best when used by" date of 1999. Holy moly! It should have been tossed 11 years ago.

The baking powder also showed a date of six months expired. I did use it just last week and it

seemed to work fine. Six months is definitely different than a decade.

So should I return the Egg Cuber to the cupboard? My cousin, whose clutter-free habits I greatly admire, gave it to me years ago. Someone gave it to her and she immediately passed it on. I, on the other hand, put it in the cupboard and forgot about it.

What is an Egg Cuber? The box notes, “makes a square egg.” Doesn’t everyone want a square egg?

Well it’s obviously a gadget. So I read the directions and put a pan of eggs on to boil. Each warm egg then went into the device and was squished to a square form. They looked more like marshmallows. Totally ridiculous but kind of fun.

It’s back in the cupboard. And next time we attend the same picnic, you might guess that mine are the square deviled eggs. Ha.

No matter how valuable all those spices used to be, many of them are now in my garbage. They will be among the many pounds of stuff that I eliminate from our house in January.

Does anyone need a double mattress? It needs to go, too.

Before this went to press, an appropriate quote came my way which makes me relieved that my old spices aren’t that uncommon.

Once you get a spice in your home, you have it forever. Women never throw out spices. The Egyptians were buried with their spices. I know which one I’m taking with me when I go.

– Erma Bombeck

