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In a world of sadness and grief, hope is the spark of sanity that allows us to look at something differently and imagine the bright spot. Hope allows us to believe that a small change can bring about a miraculous makeover, worthy of the time or few dollars spent. Rummage sales are therapeutic for this. Rummage sales don't just weed out the unwanted. They open the closet door to the forgotten, the discarded. They persuade us to unclutter our lives, live more simply, and be grateful for the treasures of the past. They allow us to grieve what we have lost, choose to remember what was important, and commit to valuing what we have left.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS---DISCARDING THE REGRETS: AND FEELING GOOD ABOUT IT.

“Memories are our keepsakes.

No one can take them away from us.”

– Nan Zastrow

My list of Unfinished Business is getting smaller. I admit to an urgency of completing tasks and projects we just never got around to. Even though it's only a year since my husband, Gary's death, I've been obsessed with things from our “Honey Do” list.

On my journey through grief this time around, I'm okay with what I'm doing. When my son died in 1993, I hung on to everything of his that I could possibly store and take with me as we moved from house to house. Today, 30 years later I still have 2 tubs of things, a dresser, and various other items belonging to my son, Chad, because I'm still not ready to let go of those.

My personal story of unfinished business differs from the kind I talk about in my grief education groups. Unfinished business in grief is strongly associated with regrets, defined as something that is incomplete after loss and deprives the griever of a sense of peace. It's often full of anxiety and conflict. It may include, for example, unresolved feelings in a relationship or shoulda-woulda-coulda regrets. These can be a major obstacle interfering with your desire to move forward or let go of some things you just have no control over. However you look at it, unfinished business weighs on your mind and complicates your ability to see the future through rose colored glasses.

Don't grieve and rummage sales then have similar intrinsic values?

- To discard your regrets.
- To confirm that you have lived.
- To savor what you have loved.
- To have enjoyed and to have shared.
- To have brightened lives with cherished memories.
- To ultimately give meaning and purpose to someone else because of your experience.

Source: Article by Nan Zastrow “For Sale: Madness, Memories, and Maybes”

Nothing can be more disruptive, sleep depriving, and haunting.

This time, I didn't want to put myself through that same turmoil again. I decided to write a list of all the unfinished business my husband and I had discussed—a “Honey Do” list of sorts. I was determined to cross each item off the list and finish it. This wasn't just “getting rid” of personal items. It included tasks/jobs and plans to do things that just never got done. These were jobs/tasks we typically tackled together. So, I felt justified and gave myself the green light to challenge myself to complete the jobs. Little by little, I've been crossing off items on the list and feeling really good about completing them.

This is not the solution I would recommend for everyone grieving, but for me, this time, it was therapeutic. I felt

UNFINISHED BUSINESS...CONTINUED

Gary might be smiling down at me and applauding me for taking on the monumental tasks by myself. I value my emotional response. If I feel I'm not ready, I quit. For you, do only what feels comfortable for you. You definitely don't want to rush something that will cause regrets later. Here's the thing about regrets. We all have them. We all could make a list of things we wish we had said or done differently, and we fantasize over what the outcome might have been. Those kinds of regrets require reflection and planning. But discarding clutter, updating legal documents, finishing household projects etc. are pretty well defined and don't require major decisions.



These are the kind of tasks I tackled and are all just baggage that I was procrastinating over. I wanted to prove to myself that in spite of grief, I could "Give in and get it done!" Procrastination becomes an easy way to avoid things you really don't want to do. My accomplishments amazed me. I'm not sure where I got the energy or spirit in times of sorrow to forge forward and take on tasks

seriously beyond my physical capabilities. But I did, and I feel good about it.

One major project was having a dreaded garage sale. I've written about these before. This is a continued chronical resulting in positive vibes that can come from letting go of personal items.

- When a man picked up two bundles of Hot Wheels, some classic, I smiled as I remembered how Chad ran the sporty cars across the floor for hours. And then I wondered if his son or grandson would give him the same memories someday. Or maybe there were other stories attached to each.
- When another man picked up military items, I wondered if he had a connection to them in about the same time period as my son (Iraq conflict) or my husbands (Viet Nam era). If so, perhaps they would soothe his memory or bring back fond memories about others who served.
- When someone purchased many well-used tools that Gary used to build over a dozen homes, I wondered "Why those?" Today there are more efficient power tools than these hand-me-downs from his dad.

I don't miss the things I let go of, the changes I've made to our home, or any other thing we once talked about doing. My list has one or two things left on it to handle in the coming year but I have the confidence and courage to go ahead with my husband's blessing.

Many of the things that hold us back are physical possessions. Letting them go is more about the memories that go with those items, not the items themselves. I have no regrets...and I'm feeling really good about it.