

Die Clutter-free and Save the Planet	Vali G. Heist, Author and Certified Professional Organizer®
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In my organized, utopian, fantasy world, there would be a law (*okay, suggestion*) that between the ages of 65-75, people should start to downsize their possessions. It could be called the “The Great DUMP” (Downsize Useful stuff to Maintain our Planet). People would begin to unclutter long before they are ready to actually leave their current homes. Items that are no longer being used could be passed down to family and friends, recycled, donated to charities, or sold. In other words, leave this world clutter-free.

In their book *Die Broke: A Radical Four-part Financial Plan* (1997), Stephen M. Pollen and Mark Levine, explain their revolutionary philosophy of dying broke by asking these questions:

- “What good will money do for you when you’re dead?”
- “Isn’t it foolish for your family to have to wait for your death to benefit from your wealth?”



I agree with the authors, but for reasons that have to do with clutter not wealth. Here are my questions:

- “What good will your stuff do for you when you’re dead?”
- “Isn’t it foolish for your family to have to wait for your death to benefit from your belongings?”

As a professional organizer, I work with a lot of clients who need to downsize their homes. Some clients begin to downsize well in advance of leaving the home and I also work with relatives to clean out a home after the homeowner has passed away or gone to live in an assisted living facility. The biggest difference between these clients is the amount of trash we throw out. For clients who begin the process early, they decide where to donate their items and I sell some items on eBay to get cash for the client. Very little gets sent to the landfill.

For clients who stay in their homes long after they are able to care for themselves or their homes, we throw out many more items. During that period however, the homeowner’s immobility prevents them from taking care of their pets and their home (e.g. second floor, attic, basement). As a result, many items that are stored in hot attics, wet basements, plastic wrapping, or out in the open air are ruined and that means we must add to the landfills.

My challenge to you is to make a list of five items you want to hand down to your family and write down the stories about those items so others understand why these things mean so much to you. If you’ve been saving other items for your children, ask them if they want them and then listen to their answers. Try not to take offense if they don’t want your antiques.

Finally, take a few moments to think about the belongings in your home. If everything you didn’t touch, use, appreciate, or even look at for a period of two years just disappeared, how much would be left? This would vary from room to room of course, but if you can’t see it or aren’t using it, why do you have it? There are so many people who need our used items and if we can let go of the items we aren’t using before they aren’t useful to anyone, then future generations and our planet will thank us.

“There’s a name for people who have the most stuff. They’re called hoarders. Back in the day, they were just called grandmothers.” Ellen DeGeneres, comedian