

DOW JONES, A NEWS CORP COMPANY ▼

DJIA ▲ 21426.64 0.06%

Nasdaq ▲ 6168.38 0.25%

U.S. 10 Yr ▲ 5/32 Yield 2.365%

Crude Oil ▲ 44.58 0.79%

Euro ▼ 1.1394 -0.08%

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/books-to-read-before-you-downsize-1458525874>

JOURNAL REPORTS: RETIREMENT

Good Reads Before You Downsize

Testing the wisdom of recent books on the joy of living with less



ILLUSTRATION: SERGE BLOCH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By *Diane Cole*

Updated March 20, 2016 10:48 p.m. ET

Let's clear up a few things about clutter.

For most of us, when it comes time to clean out the closets, downsize, move away or move on, the thought of finally making decisions about what to do with a lifetime of accumulated objects can be nothing short of terrifying.

The good news is that a fresh crop of titles have arrived with advice on how to go about making those tough choices.

JOURNAL REPORT

- Insights from The Experts
- Read more at WSJ.com/Encore

MORE IN ENCORE: THE NEW RETIREMENT

- It's Time to Rethink the Bucket-List Retirement
- How to Get People to Delay Retirement
- The Healing Power of Forgiveness
- If You're Thinking of Retiring in Uruguay
- Traditional Providers Get Into the Urgent-Care Game

I recently said goodbye to my home of 36 years and hello to a new (and currently less cluttered) apartment. Which makes me, if not uniquely qualified, then at least a freshly minted judge of how useful the many books on the topic really are—and how their tips about downsizing compare with my own experience. Here are the best of the lot.

“The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up” and “Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up” by Marie Kondo

The basic message is the same in both of these volumes: If the item sparks joy, keep it; if not, dump it. The chief organizing principle is the same as well: Sort category by category, not room by room; put all similar items (all your sweaters or suits, for

instance) on the floor to get an overview of what you've amassed, then let your joy, or lack thereof, guide you.

The main difference between the two books is that the sequel is more comprehensive, including tips galore for everything from cleaning out the medicine cabinet to saying goodbye to sentimental knickknacks to the best way to fold bras and store your underwear.

I read Ms. Kondo's first book in preparation for packing up, and took her basic suggestions to heart. Sorting through categories of stuff rather than focusing on overstuffed rooms was a tremendous help. This was particularly so as I plowed through bedding and linens I had stored in different places. (Of the several hand-knit afghans I had forgotten about, I kept one for myself and let the others spark joy as gifts to family members.) Questioning what emotion each item sparked propelled me through ranks of newly uncovered snow globes, postcards and other long-ago vacation souvenirs.

There is one untidy matter I wish Ms. Kondo had spent more time addressing in these volumes: the conflict between spouses who disagree on, say, those dozens of extra hangers accumulated through the years. ("But our guests might need them," my husband said. "How many guests are you expecting?" I asked.)

And, in the spirit of tidying up, the question has to be asked: Why clutter your bookshelf (or e-reader) with both of these books, when one might suffice? As I went about unpacking in our new apartment, "Spark Joy," with its very specific closet storage tips, is the one that sparked the most relief for me.

"Downsizing the Family Home: What to Save, What to Let Go" by Marni Jameson

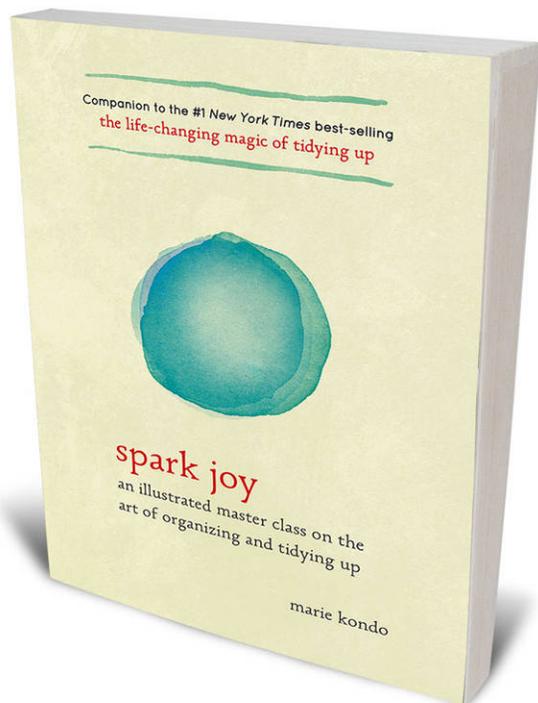


PHOTO: --

This is essential reading for anyone clearing out your own or a loved one's home. Ms. Jameson takes us through the myriad practical lessons she had to learn as she moved her almost 90-year-old parents from their four-bedroom longtime home to a small assisted-living apartment.

Accompanying each step in her journey are well-researched checklists and suggestions, such as how to cope with the emotional undertow and how to deal with mountains of memory-laden possessions. (Her mantra: "Choose to keep rather than choose to let go"—you'll cling to fewer things that way.)

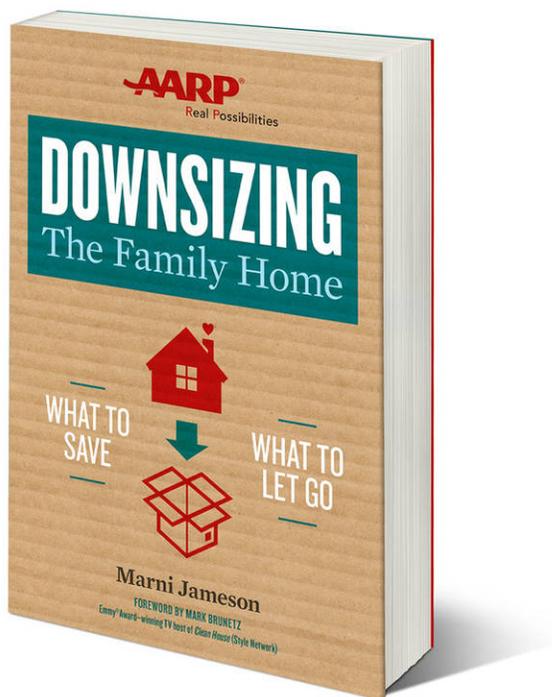


PHOTO: --

Also helpful were tips spread throughout on when, why and how to call for help, whether from family, friends or professionals. (A growing number of companies specialize in helping seniors move, and in assisting families as they sort through the household goods.)

Her suggestions about how to reframe daunting tasks as positive gambits struck me as invaluable. For example, rather than feeling paralyzing guilt about giving up the precious family home, she energized herself with the thought that she was helping finance her parents' remaining years. Similarly, as I sorted through belongings in the new apartment (including

a fair amount of clutter I had not discarded before the move), I was not dumping the precious keepsakes, photos and other memorabilia; I was editing the collection down to size—keeping the best, letting go of the rest.

I also made it an opportunity to match up certain items with friends who would find them meaningful: a framed autographed photo of Yogi Berra and Don Larsen made a perfect milestone birthday gift for my friend the rabid Yankee fan.

In addition, I was particularly taken by Ms. Jamison's suggestion to rethink the entire job of downsizing and paring down as a gift—not just to your parents (if you're helping them) or to yourself (in shaping a lightened-up and more efficient living space), but to your children or other relatives, who won't be stuck with the task.

Finally, on a practical note, after following Ms. Jameson's advice to check market prices for just about anything on eBay and Craigslist, I corroborated my long-held intuition that my son's old Beanie babies weren't collector's items, after all. But just in case you discover items that are, Ms. Jamison also tells you how to decide if you need an appraiser and how to find one.

“Never Too Busy to Cure Clutter: Simplify Your Life One Minute at a Time” by Erin Rooney Doland

Ms. Doland is less focused on getting rid of things. Rather, she concentrates on how to neatly organize the things you have. Do that, and you'll also more easily spot those broken-down or duplicate items (especially in such jumble-prone spots as your kitchen utensil drawer, medicine cabinet and coat closet) that you have neither need nor room for.

Ms. Doland advocates organizing room-by-room, cluttered nook by overcrowded cranny, and offers readers dozens of brief and easy uncluttering drills to keep things

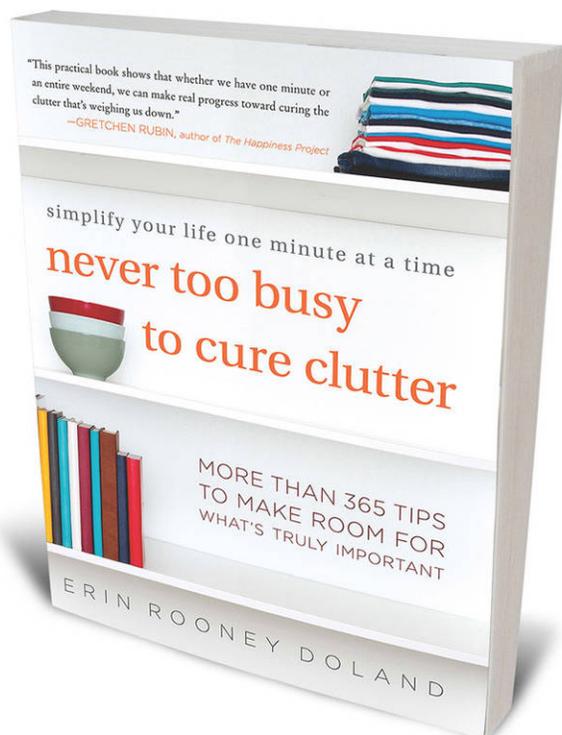


ILLUSTRATION: --



PHOTO: --

PREVIOUSLY IN ENCORE

- How Technology Will Transform Retirement (November 2015)
- To Age Well, Change How You Feel About Aging (October 2015)
- Make the Most of Longer Lives (June 2015)
- A Guide to Not Retiring (March 2015)
- Online Tools for Retirement Planning and Living (January 2015)

shipshape all the time, rather than continue procrastinating until the collective mess becomes overwhelming.

For example: Take 30 seconds to dust a single shelf; a minute to replace batteries or recharge your tech devices; several minutes to throw away that hoard of unused hotel shampoo samples. And if you think you don't have time even for that, make additional time by not folding freshly laundered underwear. Or buy multiple pairs of just one style of socks so you never need to waste time matching them.

This type of advice fit my style. I found myself adopting specific suggestions that left me feeling more efficient, such as taking regular one- to five-minute time chunks to gather and recycle papers, put my piano music in its proper place, inventory pantry needs and sort through rather than pile up daily detritus on my desk.

The suggestions for staying on an uncluttering track also helped: Watch out for clutter-blindness, for instance—in my case becoming oblivious to

newspapers piling up on the dining room table, or the good china and silver I haven't yet gotten around to putting away after a dinner party.

Still, I know I will never reach neatness nirvana. Which is why I appreciated Ms. Doland's awareness that decluttering strategies will only

stick for the long run if they make life easier, not harder, for you.

"Steer clear of any convoluted system that feels like it includes too many steps or would make it difficult for you to find things or put them away," she writes. Instead, choose your method, and rid some madness from your life.

Ms. Cole is a writer in New York City. She can be reached at reports@wsj.com.

Copyright © 2017 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

