

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 75 - Room to Breathe

Everyone needs a little room to breathe. There is something about living a Simple Life that allows the heart to inhale fresh, life-affirming air, and breathe out the stale, stifling emotions. Life just feels better, unencumbered, and peaceful.

One way I've found to sabotage this breathing space is to live among clutter. We live in a society where our wants dictate our spending habits. We bring home unnecessary items that we 'can't live without' and mingle them with those precious things that have been handed down from generation to generation. Before long, our homes are so cluttered there is no longer room for the people.

Clutter is more noticeable to me, as I have a tendency towards claustrophobia. Lately, my home has gotten too tight for me to live comfortably. So, I am throwing down the gauntlet, and will be doing some serious cleaning. You may hear wailing coming from this direction, but I plan on being ruthless towards what stays and what goes.

One thing to remember about the things you have sitting around your home – the more you have, the more time you spend dusting or washing. I have a collection of enamelware, fiesta ware, and knickknacks which are displayed on a vintage shoe rack in my kitchen. At least once a month, if not more often, I find I have to unload the rack and wash every item on it.

By the time I'm finished with just that one section of the kitchen, almost an hour has gone by. Time I could have been doing so many other things. And that is only one small area of my entire house.

The less clutter I have, the less I have to clean. The less I have to clean, the more room I have to move around. The more room I have to move, the fresher, less encumbered and more peaceful my life becomes. And my heart is able to breathe again.

Cleaning out the clutter in your home sounds like a major undertaking – and yes, I can already hear you moaning. But it doesn't have to be a treacherous job, and if you keep a mental image of the finished project in mind, it may just make the going easier. Here are a few tips that may help:

Don't Hurry.

A thorough de-cluttering shouldn't be rushed. Yes, I want this project to be finished as quickly as possible, but by doing so, I may be unhappy with the final result.

I may accidentally give away or sell an item that, come to find out, belonged to Great Aunt Rachel, is a one-of-a-kind, and has great value – either monetarily or sentimentally.

On the flip side, I may keep an item that has no real use, but has memories attached. Keep in mind that it took you a lifetime to collect all these things – give yourself permission to take the time to sort through them.

And set a few goals for yourself as you tackle the decluttering. From start to finish this project will probably take me one full year, and I divide that year into sections. That may seem like a long time to declutter, but there is a method to the madness. I have an initial goal of three months to clear away the surface items – things like knickknacks, books, and paperwork.

If I'm not sure about an item, I will allow it to stay for an additional six months. The final three months will be used to determine if the remaining items still have enough value to stay. If not, they will be put in a box and disposed of. And if something is determined to be put in a box, I will do so without hesitation.

You may be thinking a year is a lot of time to spend on this project, and too many things can happen in that time to stick with it. If you prefer to reduce the first three months to a week, go ahead and knock it out.

But if you like the idea of spacing it out, get out your planner or calendar, and mark out the time to get the initial part done. And put it in red, so you know it's mandatory. For the first three months, choose a day for each room, and write it down. Then set a 6-month date for the next walk through, and a final notation one year from your starting point as your deadline to get it all done.

Be Prepared.

It is helpful to have boxes and/or bins on hand when you get started. Place four on the floor. Mark one for Garage Sale, one for Donations, one for Trash, and one for Family. As you pick up an item, decide if it stays, or which box it needs to go into. Once it goes in a box, it is required to stay – which is why you really want to take some time to decide.

It is possible to have a fifth box for storage but set yourself a few ground rules. Storage items should be limited to holiday and things you may want to hand down to your own children someday. If that is the case, give each category its own box. Just set yourself a limit as to how many boxes can go in storage, or you might end up with a hundred boxes with that designation, which in turn defeats the main purpose.

One Room – One Section – at a time.

Each room will be divided into sections. In each section, I will begin with surface things, then move to closets, drawers and under beds. Each item will have to answer a series of questions. Are you necessary? Are you useful? Can I live without you? Will my mother or sister kill me if I sell you in a garage sale? If 'no' is the answer to any of these questions, (or yes, to Question #4), then in a box it will go. From there, I will either have a massive garage sale or a local thrift shop will have a sizeable donation.

On the first pass, my goal is to clear out no less than 50% of the extraneous items. After I have finished a room, I will make another sweep to see if there is anything else that can go before moving to the next room. When the last room is finished, I will make a final pass through the entire house, then let it rest for the allotted six months, then I'll repeat the process.

About those boxes.

As you fill them up, be sure you put them in their proper place. If they are being donated, go ahead and put them in your vehicle, and schedule a time to drop them off within the next day or so. If they are designated for a garage sale, store them in a place where they are out of the way, yet easy to get to. Check your calendar and go ahead and pencil in a date. By doing so you will encourage yourself to keep to your de-cluttering schedule.

If there are items that you want your family to sift through, call them up and have them come as soon as possible. In order to encourage them to come, let them know that if they haven't gone through the items within a certain amount of time, they will be headed for the Garage Sale pile or the donation box.

The best part about giving yourself a longer decluttering time is that you can schedule an hour or two in the evening, or a few hours each weekend, without tying up every free minute you have. Some rooms, such as the bathroom, can probably be accomplished in an hour or two. Some may take a full day, so break it down to several two- or three-hour sessions and take a short break in between. And don't worry. You have time to get it all done. Just don't give yourself so much time that you give up before you get just one section of one room done.

Put Yourself on a Buying Hiatus

You haven't done all this work just to undo it and add the clutter back. For the time it takes you to declutter your home, make an agreement with yourself. You will not purchase any unnecessary items until you have finished. And if you stick with that, you might just see how clean and fresh your house has become and may end up being a bit more careful about what you purchase in the future.

Is breathing in your own home getting difficult? If you feel as if you are being suffocated by a cluttered home, then maybe it's time to get busy and create a little more room to breathe. You, your family, and your heart will certainly appreciate your efforts.

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If you have questions or just want to stop in for a visit, you can do that through email at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting for the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie