

Stuff and more stuff



MARK CHESTER

"... That's all I want, that's all you need in life, is a little place for your stuff, ya know? ...That's all your house is: a place to keep your stuff. ..."

The late, acerbic social observer George Carlin talked about "Stuff" in one of his comic routines. It's the kind of stuff that makes him great. His words still hold true today.

Sadly, some people accumulate so much stuff, they've been diagnosed with a psychiatric behavior disorder known as "hoarding."

It can be a devastating illness. And in extreme cases it leads to death.

Can you imagine death by clutter? But there have been many such incidences whereby tons of books, magazines, trash - whatever actually suffocates people.

Such a case involved a man whose piles of weighty magazines on top of a loft he was sitting under collapsed. The blow to his head killed him instantly. Talk about being a heavy reader.

I am guilty of gathering clutter - pieces of paper, newspapers, flyers, brochures, post cards and things. Often I have a Stan Laurel moment: I scratch my scalp, muttering in a high octave "what a mess."

My friend Bill went so far as to build a vertical bin on the floor with four wooden corner posts to hold his stack of stuff. He called his creation "Pile-It."

And can you believe that there is actually a reality television show, now in its fourth season, called "Hoarders."

"Hoarders not only capture the drama as experts work to put each hoarder on the road to recovery but also highlights the individual's inner challenges and

triumphs," says a promo for the show.

"Hoarding is a terrible illness. And I feel that the show exploits these people," said Nicole Gabai, who openly refers people to a 12-step program for help. (www.clutterersanonymus.com.)

Gabai knows what she's talking about. Clients call her the Clutter Coach.

Since 1999 she's been helping people of all ages and professions - moms, educators, doctors, scientists, artists, actors - maybe Indian Chiefs - organize their home, office, playroom, study, or wherever stuff accumulates.

"Whether assisting you with time management, paper management or creating the perfect closet, my focus is to help the individual from feeling stuck, discouraged, overwhelmed or afraid of change to a happier and more productive place in life," explains Gabai, 44.

Based in Falmouth, Gabai started her business, B. Organized, to create order out of chaos, she says. A member of the Falmouth Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Professional Organizers, Gabai with model looks, learned organizational skills working in the film and television business.

She also attributes her skill set to her maternal grandfather. "Whenever I called, he'd kid me and say, 'Hold on a minute, let me pull your file.' He kept all of my photos and letters together."

Being a production manager, producer, prop buyer and set decorator, taught her organizational skill sets that straddle any business.

"To be organized is to be successful" is one of her catchphrases. And "filing for retrieval" is her mantra, said Gabai, who was born in Peru and raised in Paris and Miami. At eight years old, she was tri-lingual.

Nicole is blessed with a photographic memory. She can re-

member anything visually. She knows where something is located in the client's home or office, recalling one woman calling asking the location of her divorce papers.

"It's crazy how I know where things are," she says, telling clients to call her anytime in case of emergency.

With new clients, Gabai conducts a 30 minute telephone consultation. The conversation determines if there's a good fit between her and the prospective client, as well if the client is dedicated to the task of getting things in order and organized.

Gabai uses her own intuition and listening skills, but also asks important, relevant questions:

"What are your organizing goals for the next three to six months?"

"What are the positive results you would like to feel?"

"Will you recognize the results and see the light at the end of the tunnel?"

Responses indicate if she can indeed help the individual and give her a sense of what stage in life the person is willing to feel productive and confident in becoming organized.

Once hired, Gabai works with the client on site, perhaps one session of three hours per week, or even two sessions a week. The schedule varies with each individual. She takes notes, photographs, identifies problem areas, and formulates a plan.

She commits the scene to memory, listens, observes, never makes judgments, and creates an in depth report for the client.

"I'm like an investigator, a detective in a way," Gabai laughs.

Only she doesn't wear a trench coat.

For more information visit www.b-organized.net.

A selection of photographs from Mark Chester's book Twosomes is on display at Coffee Obsession and Handworks gallery in Woods Hole.