

The Meadian



A newsletter published periodically for families, friends and residents of St. Anne's Mead

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What to do with Dad's clutter when it's time to move **The Generation That Grew Up Stockpiling**

Life was a lot different 90 years ago. It spawned behaviors and habits that seem peculiar among today's younger generations.

Consider the Silent Generation born between 1925 and 1945 during the worst economic times this nation has ever faced. Today, Silents comprise most of the residents of assisted living and nursing care facilities.

Characteristics of the Silents are a strong belief in conformity, a trust in government and a stone-hard work ethic. Ironically, this generation also produced high-profile activists and anti-establishment adherents such as Martin Luther King Jr., Jimi Hendrix, Malcolm X and Gloria Steinem.

Shaped largely by the financial crises of the times, the Silent Generation became adept at hoarding: accumulating "things" that might be needed during some future crisis. This generation's penchant for collecting was passed on to their Baby Boomer children born between 1946 and 1965. Boomers grew up never being taught how to avoid clutter.



Kenneth Schwartz, a new resident at St. Anne's Mead, was born into the Silent Generation with parents who believed that once you bought something, you kept it. Saving things is typical of the Silent Generation which was one of the smallest groups in history due to the inability of parents to afford larger families. Kenneth went on to become a collector and seller of antiques including "a very large collection of clocks."



Gen Xers, born between 1965 and the early 1980s, entered the American Dream courtesy of their Boomer parents who could not let them “go without” or endure unnecessary discomfort. Their sacrifices fostered the term “Soccer Moms”, female parents who gave up much of their day to drive their offspring to school, to extra curricular activities, to the mall and wherever else they needed to go. That continued until the child turned 16 or 17 and was handed a set of keys often to a newer and better car than their own.

It has been said that Gen-Xers -- grandchildren of Silents -- do not want “everything”, but are very selective about what they acquire and are less likely to be emotionally attached to the things they have.

Nurtured by rapidly changing technologies, namely cell phones, computers, flat screen TVs and other electronics, GenXers grew up accepting early obsolescence and had little problem disposing of things that were outdated or no longer gave them social status. Unlike their parents who viewed electronics as toys, Xers saw them as necessary for a more meaningful life.

As more and more Silents move into assisted living and nursing care, the problem of what to do about Mom’s or Dad’s collections has become a common issue for responsible adult children. Robin Harris, Director of Admissions at St. Anne’s Mead and her colleague Michelle Mitchell, Social Worker, see this every day.

“I’m the first person people meet when they inquire about residency,” says Robin who conducts facility tours and handles assessments, “so I get a lot of questions about the process of leaving home.”

The Boomer children “have few ideas about how to deal with the stacks of old paper records and personal items that their parents collected believing that they might be valuable someday,” says Robin. “And, their dilemma is worsened by having to dispose of broken appliances, worn out furniture, and cases of expired can goods.”

“In some cities there are services that come in and handle just about every aspect of sorting, selling and giving away personal items,” says Robin, “but we prefer alternatives such as charities and auction houses that can fix or repair the items then sell them to eager buyers, or put them out for purchase ‘as is’.”

Top Reasons for Hoarding

by Blogger Beverly O’Malley

- I might need this someday.
- It might be worth something.
- Someone else could use it.
- I paid good money for that.
- Being wasteful is bad!

“Quite often, Boomer children are not capable of deciding what items should be kept and which should be discarded,” says Michelle. “I help them by talking about why the items were saved in the first place, whether siblings have any interest in them, and deciding which ones their parents haven’t touched, used or thought of in years,” she says.

“Many items for which there is no storage space but have special meaning, can be saved in a legacy box,” says Michelle. “Obviously, everything cannot be put into it, but you can

put in photos of special items, along with the covers and dust jackets of favorite books, a few zip-lock bags holding favorite earrings, watches or other jewelry, and some sample stamps or coins from a large collection.”

Once the facsimiles are in the box, the actual items can be discarded or sold without creating hard feelings, says Michelle.

“The legacy box can be part of the move-in process to help new residents acclimate to unfamiliar surroundings. The contents can be shown and talked about with new friends or family. It gives seniors with memory loss visible cues to help them reminisce,” says Michelle.

Leslie Pielack, director of the Birmingham Historical Museum and Park, is often asked to take old furniture and household effects by Boomers who believe their parents’ collections have historical value.

“There may be strong, emotional attachments - and we are sensitive to that - but in most cases the collections do not match our mission. We can offer suggestions on disposal but regrettably we have no room for items that are not relevant to the history of Birmingham,” says Leslie.

At St. Anne’s Mead, Robin refers to a list of charities that may benefit from the resale of donated items. “It’s a win-win for those having to deal with things that are ‘too-good-to-throw-away,’ even when discarding them makes sense,” she says.

The list of not-for-profits that can help with disposing of collectibles and saved items is available at <http://www.stannesmead.org/pdfs/Organization-Contacts-for-Item-Donations.pdf>



Worth Repeating

Here’s what they’re saying about St. Anne’s Mead

Everyone from the aides and reception desk to the kitchen and office staffs are so helpful and cheery and quick to smile! My mother is blind but she knows they smile because she “...can hear it in their voices, and feel it in their touch!” (That)... has helped us all sleep better knowing she is being cared for with such kindness. Mom has met some great residents ... she calls them the “Golden Girls.”

-- Jill Stein

Senior Tips

Create a Legacy Box to Replace Parent's Collectibles

A legacy box, commercial or homemade, is a practical solution to what to do about Mom or Dad's collections and personal effects when she or he moves into assisted living. Important papers such as wills, passwords and insurance policies can be put into a safe deposit box.

Large items such as knickknacks, pottery, bikes -- even cars or boats -- can be photographed or captured on video. Prints or SD cards then can be added to the legacy box and taken out anytime and shared with friends or family, an activity that helps those with memory loss recall the things and events that were worth saving.



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Our Mission

St. Anne's Mead mission is to provide compassionate and professional health care and supportive services to seniors in a safe, secure, and loving home.

In keeping with our faith-based traditions, we endeavor to serve the unique needs of individuals and their families while preserving dignity and enriching lives.

