



Fancy a cuppa? Contact the Elderly is looking for tea guests.

Wanted: guests for tea and a chat

By Gilli Pettinger

Contact the Elderly is looking for people over 75 who would like to join our regular monthly tea parties. On the first Sunday of each month a group of volunteers working for us pick up elderly people in and around East Finchley at about 2.30pm and take them out for tea.

Every month we go to a different host who provides a wonderful afternoon tea and we all sit round a table and catch up with each other's news, stories and photographs. There is usually a lot of laughter. At about five o'clock we all say goodbye, thank our hosts and the drivers take the guests home and see them safely indoors.

All our guests are elderly people who have difficulty get-

ting out and don't have close family around to help them. If they need an arm to lean on, we lend one. We all have cars and drive the same guest each month so we get to know one another well. At the moment we have vacancies for two or three new guests.

If you know anyone who would like to join our group

please contact either Gilli Pettinger on 020 8361 6313, who runs the East Finchley/Muswell Hill group, or Contact the Elderly on 020 7240 0630 and tell them your post code. They will pass on your request to the nearest group. All the drivers are carefully checked and are fully insured to drive our guests.

Coming clean on housework

By Diana Cormack

My grandmother died in 1970 at the age of 82. Among her effects was a poem which she had kept for many years. I believe she cut it out of the Radio Times decades before the feminist movement hit the headlines. Although Grandma never expressed them, she

must have secretly shared the writer Mary Knight's views on housework. This was long before vacuum cleaners, washing machines and dishwashers were the norm, yet reading it I realise just how much I take after my grandma!

A Psalm of Home Life

(For the Other Listeners who find the Household Talks oppressive)

Tell us not in mournful numbers
How to keep our houses clean:
When to leave and seek our slumbers,

How to fill the hours between.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
Spotless homes are not its goal;
Who dusts, and then to dust returnest,
Leaves no rest for sole or soul.

Not enjoyment - surely sorrow
Is their destined end and way
Who so plan that each tomorrow
Is the same as yesterday.

Housework's long, and time is fleeting,
Must our wives, though stout and brave,
Go on bottling plums and beating
Carpets to the very grave?

In the world's broad field of battle
This seems a depressing strife.
Be not like dumb driven cattle!
Get some pleasure out of life!

Ten tips to help you declutter

Clearing out clutter can be a huge job for many of us. Starting is the hardest part, but once you've heaved the first few unwanted items into a rubbish bag, you'll find the energy to continue. If decluttering is one of your New Year resolutions, the following tips from Viviana Lotti should ease your progress and save you time.

Tip 1: Clear your clutter before buying any storage

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Many magazine and newspaper articles offer great advice on decluttering, but some are glorified advertisements encouraging you to de-junk so they can sell you more merchandise and the 'perfect' storage solution.

Don't waste money and time buying huge shelving units or cupboards until after you've had a really good clear out. Aim to sort out your storage needs to accommodate what you're left with, otherwise the storage itself can become a clutter problem. Work out exactly what storage you need, which isn't necessarily what's 'in' this month or what everyone else has got.

Tip 2: Short-term chaos is worth it

Depending on how cluttered your home is, clearing out your junk can make it look like the set from *Apocalypse Now*. Don't be afraid to declutter for fear of your home looking a complete mess while you're doing it. Temporary chaos indicates positive change is occurring, and is only a problem if it becomes your permanent, default mode of living. Just keep eliminating your junk and the mess will subside.

Tip 3: Don't throw out someone else's clutter without their permission

Avoid this at all costs unless you actually enjoy screaming matches. Many of us are emotionally attached to our clutter, and letting it go can be unsettling at first. Decluttering someone's possessions before they're ready to do this for themselves will upset them immensely. It's also bad karma. By all means tell your loved ones how good it feels to clear your clutter, and suggest they try it too, but don't do it for them unless they specifically ask for your help.

Tip 4: Don't use charity shops as a junkyard

Only give away possessions to charity if they are in saleable condition and fit for purpose. Your junk can be someone else's jewel but only if they can use it. Also, charities spend precious resources getting rid of (primarily well-meant) donations which they can't sell. Please don't add to their burden.

Tip 5: Don't overestimate the resale value of your unwanted goods

This applies mostly to books, CDs and DVDs. If you have, say, lots of books to sell, don't assume you'll get anywhere near the price you originally paid for them. However, if you're a truly spectacular

haggler, feel free to ignore this advice. The rest of us can take our chances with eBay, Amazon and the like. Get the best price you can but don't be greedy; remember, your primary aim is to get rid of excess clutter.

Tip 6: Avoid using paid-for storage as a long-term solution

Storage rental facilities are a brilliant short-term solution between house/flat moves, or if you're doing some major home refurbishment and need to keep your belongings safe and out of the way. However, locking up huge piles of clutter for years will cost you money without actually solving your problems. You'll still feel your clutter is 'hanging over you'. And why pay rent on stuff you'll never use?

Tip 7: Don't take on someone else's clutter

If you really want to do Aunt Rose a favour and look after her ancient leather sofa 'for a while', put a deadline on it. Make it clear you'll only keep it for a set period of time (say, three months). If not, chances are the person whose junk you're caretaking will suddenly feel liberated and may not want it back. They probably won't tell you and you'll be stuck with their clutter for a very long time.

Tip 8: Let something go before it's beyond repair

Sometimes we hang onto stuff that's broken or useless because we can't afford a replacement. Don't worry, just let it go. Nature hates a vacuum, so disposing of the offending item will create a space for something better. Releasing your dead clutter will also send a message to Divine Providence that you trust it to provide for you in the future.

Tip 9: Keep what you love, regardless.

Decluttering isn't about throwing out things you love and need, it's about releasing unwanted junk that's holding you back. It's also not about interior design or having the latest 'must-have' furniture or artwork. If you love something and/or find it useful, ignore what anyone else thinks and keep it. If looking at it makes you happy, it belongs with you. If you shudder just thinking about it, get rid of it.

Tip 10: Be positive

Clearing out unwanted clutter is one of the simplest and most powerful ways of improving your life. Remember that letting go of your junk isn't about making do with less, it's about making room for something better. Good luck and happy decluttering!

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