

When Do You Ever Have Enough?

HOARDING

By Jane Reinheimer

Molly's* worst fear was that her friends would discover the canyons of boxes piled to the ceiling in her house. Hoarding had begun so long ago that it seemed like a bad habit she'd always had with her.

Molly sometimes felt confounded, wondering where it all had begun. She remembered the troubles she'd had as a thirteen-year old. Her parents' divorce shook the bedrock of her wellbeing. She'd been uprooted from everything that made her feel secure: her home, her town, her friends, her school, her father. As her mother's old, used-up car made its way south on the Interstate back to the sleepy little town her mother called home, any feelings of personal history that Molly possessed seemed to fly out the window.

It was innocent at first, this hoarding thing. She called her stuff "collections." She had collections of used-up pencils. She had ticket stubs from the roller rink, the movie theater, and other childhood excursions. Someday she was going to make a scrapbook — a beautiful recollection — to include all this evidence that her life had meaning. Molly's stuff became a physical manifestation of her emotional life.

She hardly noticed when her kitchen table had to give way to more needed space for boxes. It worked out okay — a couple of boxes gave her plenty of room for a makeshift place to eat. She never had company anyway.

Then one day a headline caught her eye. It read, "Elderly woman crushed to death in her home." The article made hair stand up on Molly's neck. The story struck a chord: when the woman was walking through one of the rooms, a stack of boxes tumbled down on her, crushing her chest.

"Oh, dear," Molly thought. "The poor, poor dear."

For the next few days, Molly thought about giving up some of her little tro-

phies. Problem was she couldn't part with anything. Just opening up and rummaging through the boxes made her feel valuable again. "It's no use," she thought. "Everything in these boxes is about who I am."

So she tucked away the newspaper, which contained the article about the unfortunate woman, on top of some other stuff in a nearly full box and closed it up again.

But that wasn't good enough. The thought of boxes falling began to nag at her. Molly was beginning to be afraid. She hadn't gotten to the point, though, where she could admit to herself that she was a hoarder, but she was beginning to wonder.

"Eventually I'll run out of room, and I'll have to quit," she thought. At that point, she would have no choice but to make significant changes. Then she figured she'd be normal. She could have friends over. Her corrugated cardboard decorating scheme would be a thing of the past. She could paint the walls a pretty color. She could have pretty curtains to enjoy instead of boxes blocking her view out the windows. She would no longer be ashamed of her living situation.

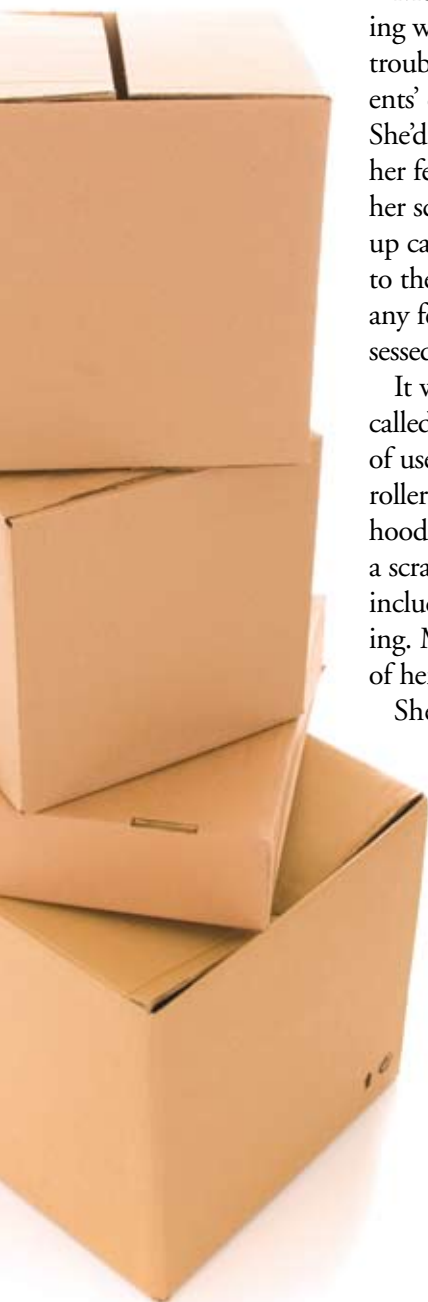
Shame recognition — that first inkling that we're doing something out of sync with the rest of the world. And once shame grabs a foothold, it starts to grow yet wants to be kept secret.

Then she became fearful. Fearful that her friends would reject her if they found out what she was really like. Fearful that a pile of boxes would topple over and kill her.

Her fear combined with shame to form guilt, but a sense of guilt that enabled her to be willing to reverse direction.

With new resolve, she set about getting rid of some stuff. "Baby steps," she thought. "One box at a time. First thing I'll do is to count the boxes. Just how many are there?"

Well, there were hundreds. She sat alone on a box that she was using as a seat in the kitchen. "Be still ... be still ... oh, what's the rest of that verse? You'd think that with all the stuff in this house, I'd



be able to put my hands on a Bible — I know I have so many. I memorized that verse a long time ago.”

Unable to find a Bible in her house, she headed for the neighborhood bookstore to purchase one. Dashing out to buy something she already owned but could not locate was her standard practice; however, the outcome this time would be different.

She found the verse — Psalm 46:10 — *Be still, and know that I am God.*

“I’m afraid I’m going to need more help than that,” Molly thought. “If I emptied out a box a day, it would take me more than a year to get rid of most of the boxes. Besides, I know I’m not going to be able to get rid of everything.

“I do know one thing,” she thought. “I can’t go to a real person — not a friend, not a relative, not a neighbor. If I get through this at all, it’s going to be just me and God — together daily in prayer and reading His Word. God alone can guide me through this. Just like His Word always promises. He is faithful, and He’ll forgive me whenever I stumble. That’s what Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is all about. I won’t be embarrassed because He sees me and loves me and forgives me and gives me second chances.

What does the stuff we hoard say about us? When does hoarding nudge up against greed? Do we make the things we hoard an idol? Scripture references such as Matthew 6:19–20a (*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.*) and Matthew 6:26 (*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*) helped Molly to gain perspective.

“At first, hoarding was how I thought my life would be meaningful,” Molly thought. “It started out with silly little pieces of pencils that I couldn’t even hold to write with. They were just useless little nubs.”

Then an insight seemingly came from out of nowhere. “It’s all about living in the past. I must have been terrified of my future. All those boxes became a fort to keep me focused on the past, not my future. My present life has become nothing but a money tool that I use to get more boxes to put more stuff in.”

That revelation kept going through her mind and gave her hope. She knew from somewhere deep inside that her future meant giving up a lot

of old collections. Hope started to take hold in her heart.

“With His help, I can direct my life to grow God’s Kingdom instead of wallowing around in a comfort zone of nothingness, collecting little scraps and pieces of things. I thank God I was raised in a Christian home and given the opportunity to memorize all those Bible verses in confirmation class so many years ago.” Ephesians 2:10 came to mind: *For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

She remembered all the whining and complaining she had done about memorizing Bible verses, but she also recalled what her pastor had told the class, “The day will come when you will face a crisis and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, one of these Bible verses will pop into your head at just the right time. You may not remember where to find it, but you’ll remember enough so that you can find the reference using a good concordance.”

As she began to spend more time in prayer and the Word, she realized how far she had moved away from her heavenly Father and how she had turned to her possessions to bring value and meaning to her life.

She prayed, “I never doubted Your existence. But like many of my treasures, I just forgot where I had put You. I know now that You are here with me and have been all along. I cannot do this without You.” She whispered, “Please help me.”

The forgiving mercy and affirming grace of Jesus did not fail her. A shift began to take hold in her life. A sense of peace — the peace that our Savior imparts (John 14:27) — touched every cell of her being. It released her from years of grief. It was His peace. He had taken the burden — the shame, the guilt — from her, just as His Word promises to all who seek Him. In faith, she walked alongside Him, step by step, day by day. A fresh start!

Some days, the task that lies ahead of her still seems insurmountable, but she clings to Him for strength and enjoys the new hope she has found in His Word from Matthew 11:28: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

*not her real name

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