The 'Tchotchke' Challenge

By Mel Lavine

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I have the intention of getting rid of six decades or more of accumulated stuff around the house. But I procrastinate, find it hard to get going, and parting with old newspapers, letters, articles, books, files, clothing I haven't worn for years, bric-a-brac and whatnot, stuff the Lady Friend intolerably calls junk.

My inspiration comes by way of Jane E. Brody, the indispensable personal health columnist, for the New York Times. My late wife was a Brody fan as is the Lady Friend. In a May 1 article, Brody reported "significant progress" in her effort to rid her home and herself of "a half-century of everything from papers, books and files to packing material and shopping bags."

Brody's inspiration came by way of Robin Zasio, the author of "The Hoarder in You," a book she describes as "very practical," and Barry Dennis, a motivational speaker, and the author of a book about the challenge from "tchotchkes."

"Tchotchke" is an Anglicized spelling and an expanded definition of the Yiddish word which refers to "trinket or knickknack" – stuff that piles up, a nuisance, gets out of hand, takes up space, gets in the way, bogs a person down physically and mentally.

Dennis cites as "tchotchkes" things many people might never have included like CDs and DVDs, equipment that people no longer watch or listen to. Laptops, iPads and smart phones are not outside the pale. Brody muses, "I wonder what people did on vacation before we had this plethora of electronic equipment keeping us 'in touch' 24/7"?

E-mail has its advantages but, Brody asserts, "when it takes the place of talking with people face to face or on the phone, something essentially human about communication is lost – a tone of voice, a laugh, a sigh, a grimace or a smile."

Brody maintains lightening one's physical load can brighten the mind and lift the spirit."

Dennis, the author, cautions people to give serious thought before they buy anything. “Everything we bring into our lives, we will eventually have to get rid of, and that is much, much harder to do than bringing it in.”

I make no promises but the moment does seem right for me to begin to rid the house of years of my accumulated stuff. For all their sound and fury, Obama and Romney are still shadowboxing. No solid punches. So I have time to attend to matters closer to home – unless Obama and Romney get in the way.

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