

## STUFF:

Saying something  
about who we are

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the Help-Me-Please people are the ones who make up the majority of the 5,450 who responded to the "Stuffaholic or minimal maniac" survey in *Home&Garden*, Jan. 16) that launched our "Stuffed Up" series. Those respondents came out for help with organization or help learning how to let go. But a small percentage — a hair under 10 percent, with Zinn among them — said they were quite content with the amount of stuff they've surrounded themselves with in their homes.

For Zinn, her stuff all has meaning and a place in her home where her love of family, sailboats and horses are evident.

"I have a lot of stuff, but it's not clutter," says the 5-year-old advertising agency art director. Her bookshelves are filled with mementos such as "Jumbo's" hospital wristband. (Jumbo, a musical stuffed elephant Zinn has had since she was a child. He was admitted into a stuffed hospital) to repair the music box and for her stuffing.)

Zinn's friends tease her about things like this as part of who she is.

## I am

Her bookshelves also have the children's books from the "Sweet Pickle" series her parents read to her when she was younger and an ordered pillow honoring her "Bubbe," her grandmother Goldie Vegh, who survived the Holocaust. Zinn says Vegh was in her late 70s when she died two months ago.

"I don't want the model-home look," says Zinn. "I don't want that kind of look or feeling." Her bedroom closet includes at least 20 pairs of slippers and as many pairs of shoes with different heights and styles.

"The stuff we have tells something about who we are," says Zinn, whose attraction to found objects recently drew her to old nails and keys she found on the street. "When people bring things into my home, I think they have a good story about the person who lives here."

Zinn found the person who lives here to have a heart and a quirky sensibility.

"I love found objects so I pick up things that are interesting to me that I find on the street," says Zinn. "It may look like trash to someone else but I don't see it that way. I see it as a piece of art or the potential to become that."

Zinn saw potential in a discarded vertical window frame she fashioned into a "To Do" list and a place to hang her house keys and sunglasses (on dragonfly hooks she bought at a thrift store). Her "To Do" list is written on glass panes in dry-erase markers.

Living a lot of "things" doesn't have to be defined with "problems" or "issues" or a need for change, the experts agree.

Deleen Collins Josellis, a professional organizer at Organized Chaos in Wilmette, says people are happy with the stuff they have as long as they have it.

They aren't ready to make the change and



Tribune photo by Michael

Behind the closed closet doors at Debbie Pine's Vernon Hills home is stuff galore. Pine keeps words of inspiration, vintage family photos, funny sayings, supplies for her arts-and-crafts projects and more here.



Photo for the Tribune by Peter Thompson

Lori Zinn found a discarded window frame on the street and added the dragonfly hooks so she could hang her keys and sunglasses.

maybe they don't need to," Josellis says.

Living with things that have a place and being able to put them back again can free you from being sentenced to a minimalist lifestyle.

Debbie Pine's Vernon Hills home is far from spare. Oaxacan art she and her husband, Scott, purchased on vacations and at least a dozen sculptures made by her late father, Ralph Odes, fill the two-story suburban home. "Everything here is what makes our home feel like a home,"

"I know there is a lot of stuff out and around but I don't want to get rid of anything. I don't need to," says the 51-year-old mother, who resents a home-based stamp business, Stamp Up. She spends hours scrapbooking, making collages, rubber stamping and making cards in the workroom she created out of a spare room.

## Stuffed into storage

"I'm endlessly, shamelessly bringing things into the house and it always ends up somewhere," Pine says. "Maybe it's overwhelming to someone else but I love it."

Organizer Linda Goldman of Altogether Organized in Highland Park, who helped Pine organize her art/family/workroom, says Pine has a lot of stuff but had good storage and organizational systems in place to house things.

"The things I create are a reflection of what I'm feeling about family, our vacations," says Pine. "I want to be able to share that with someone else. That's why I took over a bedroom and an arts-and-crafts room to have a place to do it. The rest of the family [her husband and her teenage daughters, Melanie, 16, and Dana, 14] comes in, too, but this is where I make things."

While Pine is at home with her stuff in her workroom, it's not like things don't get out of order. They do. But with her container and storage systems in place she can easily get them back into shape again.

"I don't want my home to be a rigid place where everything is put away only to be looked at on display or stored out of sight," Pine says. "My home really is a living thing."

"I don't want or need for things to be so perfect, so pristine," she says. "We have a home where people come in and they don't have to watch where they step and what they do. People are comfortable here. And there is stuff everywhere. But we're all comfortable here."

"Isn't that really the idea of having a home?"