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As I peer into the abyss of the toy box, steeling myself to chuck out nine tenths of its contents, it occurs to me that some people deep tidy their house like this every month. I do it so occasionally, I still possess clothes I last wore in 1983. I suffer from chronic untidiness, and the wonders of the world do not reside, as far as I am concerned, in the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids but in my mother-in-law's napkin drawer. She is the kind of person who neatly folds away her summer clothes in October and brings them out again in April; who colour coordinates her towels and flannels, and who hoovers her ceiling. Ask her for a pair of pinking shears or a screwdriver for mending spectacles and she will find them within ten seconds. I, by contrast, will know I have them somewhere, and emerge four hours later having rummaged through all the likely places (a cupboard in the loo; a cardboard box in the shed, maybe under the sink) and emerge triumphant with

nothing more than some lost earrings and old letters. When you are untidy, you are always revisiting your belongings with a sense of surprise and wonder. Did I really fit into that micro-mini? Did I really write that? Are those bright orange corduroys now really so awful? As I write I am wearing a pair of riding boots last seen five years ago.

The point about being tidy is that it is a relentless task. If you are going to do it properly, you really don't have time for anything else., like reading, writing, painting, playing the piano. But by the far the most important ingredient, as far as I can see, is to be unsentimental. Tidy people, when faced with a wooden Noah's ark with half the animals inside missing, would have no difficulty in throwing it out. Me? I think about the person who gave it to me; feel guilty about having looked after it so badly and resolve to do better in future, by treasuring it a while longer. So, the half empty Noah's ark is still in the toy box. But chuck it out? I'll have to leave that to Tom.

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