

# Of a certain age.....

By Sue Stafford  
Columnist

Have you ever noticed how a particular theme or topic seems to keep popping up in your life? Finally, about the fourth time it does, you realize this recurrent theme has been knocking at the door of your consciousness, seeking attention. I always figure that's the universe's way of telling me there is something that needs attention.

My latest experience with this phenomenon has been around "letting go." When cleaning out my jewelry drawer recently, I came across a bracelet made for me years ago by a friend. It consists of a leather thong, strung with square wooden beads, imprinted with the letters L E T G O.

Recently on Facebook I came across a quote from Deepak Chopra.

"Holding onto anything is like holding onto our breath. You will suffocate. The only way to get anything in the physical universe is by letting go of it. Let go."

Joseph Campbell, American mythologist,

writer and lecturer, provided me with one of my favorite quotes on life.

"We must be willing to let go of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us."

So what is it I am being reminded to let go of? It started with the decision to clean out the clutter in my garage. I had unopened boxes that had moved to Sisters with me 11 years ago and had never been opened. If whatever was in those boxes hadn't been needed in 11 years, I could probably let go of it. That required letting go of the "but what if I need it someday" mentality.

As I pulled textbooks from my master's program off the shelves in the garage to send them to Goodwill, I had to remind myself that the books going didn't mean I was losing that part of myself. The important materials had been incorporated into my life and my knowledge base, and those books were no longer needed.

When it comes to things my sons have given me over the years — cards, hand-made items from school and

Cub Scouts, and their many drawings, I still can't part with those. I am definitely a sentimentalist and it still feels uncaring to dispose of those.

What about the files full of workshop materials and resources gathered over the years from all my various professional pursuits? So much good information and so many creative ideas for groups and workshops, gone with the flick of a wrist into the paper recycling. Disposing of much that has been meaningful over the years caused me to take an in-depth look at who I have been and who I have become — a good exercise.

Traveling less encumbered can be very freeing. Every time I walk out into the orderly garage, where I can actually see the floor and easily put my finger on exactly what I'm looking for, I feel a sense of satisfaction with the new order. And I don't miss what is no longer there.

Now, however, I still have to sort through much of what is in the house, including personal photos, mementos and family heirlooms — not as easily

discarded, recycled, given away or sold.

I have learned it is easier to face this downsizing chore when there is someone to keep me on task and to ask if something is really that important. My older son, who is temporarily living with me, has been a great help and motivator. He can lift and carry and haul as well as keep me honest about what is really needed rather than just wanted for sentiment's sake.

People and relationships are sometimes more difficult to say goodbye to, even when I know it is time. Letting go of a friendship that no longer fits can be awkward. Letting go of my children, with love, and the role I have had as their protector and provider, is something every parent faces — some sooner than others. The reward of seeing them mature into responsible, caring adults making their own way in the world is sweet indeed. And even if they aren't at first successful, and continue to stumble and fall, I must accord them the respect and freedom they need to make it on their own, in their own way

and time.

There is a Buddha quote that says, "You can only lose what you cling to." If I try to cling to my children, they will push me away. Setting them free has provided them with the opportunity to return of their own free will — and they have.

Besides material possessions and personal relationships, there are all those intangibles that can weigh me down if I hold onto them — the past with its anger, expectations, resentments, betrayals, dissatisfaction, regrets, old hurts and disappointments. It does no good to keep looking in the rear-view mirror. Focusing on the past only holds me back and keeps me from living in the present.

As I live my last decade or two, I want to have a grateful heart, a caring spirit, and a backpack empty of any regret or anger or grief, so it can be filled with more curiosity, laughter, love and special memories of a life well-lived.

"When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be. When I let go of what I have, I receive what I need."

~ Tao Te Ching ~

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