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Laughing matters

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A tale of toys, spiders and Transformers

By Dave Jaffe

Someday when your children are grown and gone and you're living alone, probably without heat, open the kids' old toy box where you'll find sentimental treasures rich in family memories that maybe you can unload on Ebay.

On a recent visit to my basement I was astonished at the volume of old toys stored in boxes there.

To be fair, I'm often astonished by what I find in the basement, or even that I have a basement. I rarely go down there because that's where we keep all our spiders.

But after a recent heavy rain I forced myself to check the basement because that's also where we keep our seepage.

"Honey, have you been down here recently?" I asked my wife.

"Yes, Dave. Everyone goes down there, except you. Is there seepage?"

"A little, though not enough to drown the spiders. However, there are several garage sales'-worth of broken and discarded toys."

"Those belong to the boys, Dave."

"Hon, our boys are 19 and 16 years old. Do they really need toys like, for example, what appears to be two-thirds of Hungry, Hungry Hippos?"

"Well, go ahead and throw it out."

"I would, Hon, but the one-third of Hungry, Hungry Hippos that's missing seems to have been replaced by a moist, grayish combination of spiders and seepage. Let's make the boys do it."

In fact, cleaning out more than a decade's worth of toys is a project for the entire family, which my sons pointed out by speeding off in our car.

When they returned several days later, covered with tattoos and smelling of cheap rotgut, I called a family meeting in order to discuss reasonable ways to proceed.

"Hon, Russ, Brian, one simple method of cleaning out all those toys—and this is just a thought—is that we flood the basement with a highly corrosive liquid, then seal the room for 10,000 years."

"Dad, enough with the spiders already!"

"Russ is right, Dad. I mean, it's not like they're bees. Filthy, stinging, venom-filled African killer bees. Ack! Makes my skin crawl."

"Yeah, but not like spiders, Brian, with all those arms."

"Dave, Brian, I think we're drifting off topic. Does anyone have a strategy for the cleanup, other than acid?"

"Radiation?"

"Mom, why don't we just divide the stuff into three piles: Save, toss or donate to charity?"

"That's a good plan, Russ."

I love Russell and greatly respect him. So I'm sure that he'll understand when I say that is, without a doubt, the stupidest cleanup plan I've ever heard. For one thing, it in no way accounts even remotely for the dog situation.



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We have two dogs: Feffer, who in dog-age terminology, would be politely referred to as "90,000 years young!" and Oxford, who would be a sullen teenager if dogs were capable of sullen. He is instead feisty. Oxford is going to be the problem.

To be fair, Oxford is a little unclear on the whole "cleanup" concept. He is a small dog with a head that offers very little RAM storage space. Instead, he compartmentalizes his world into "things too high to reach" or "servings at an all-you-can-eat buffet."

Another problem is this three piles nonsense. That is so not-a-homeowner thinking. Homeowners know that only two piles matter: Throw It Out and Throw It Out Right Away, It's Leaking!

And about this giving broken toys to charity. Forgive me for being hard-hearted, but I honestly think charity can do a lot better:

CHARITY: "Well, what did you bring in today? And don't say 'action figures.' "

DELIVERY DRIVER: "Sorry, chief. Six boxes full."

CHARITY: "Any of them have arms?"

DELIVERY DRIVER: "One guy, sort of. He's kinda melted."

CHARITY: "Great, just great! Well, store them in the basement. Anything else?"

DELIVERY DRIVER: "Just this old Game Boy with 10-year-old batteries still in it."

CHARITY: "Oh hell! Throw it out right away, it's leaking!"

Join us now in the Jaffe basement.

My wife and the boys carry empty cartons and plastic bags for garbage. I am armed with a can of Raid, matches and a squeeze bottle of lighter fluid.

We have been working for 11 hours. One garbage bag is half full. The charity box contains a single board game, and it's leaking. The boys are standing in a pile of toys, playing. Oxford is biding his time.

"Brian, you remember this Transformer guy? He could change from a robot into, like, an ice-cream maker, or something."

"Yeah, but this yellow Power Ranger could kick your Transformer's butt. If only I could find his power shield."

"What's it look like?"

"It looks like what Oxford is chewing on! Dad!"

"Drop it, Oxford. Drop! Good boy! What did he have, boys?"

"Don't know, Dad, but it looks kind of moist and grayish."

"Does it have any arms?"

"Several."

"Well, at least it's not an action figure."

Dave Jaffe, who lives with his wife, two teenage sons and two dogs, cautiously welcomes your comments and suggestions at thejaffes@earthlink.net.

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