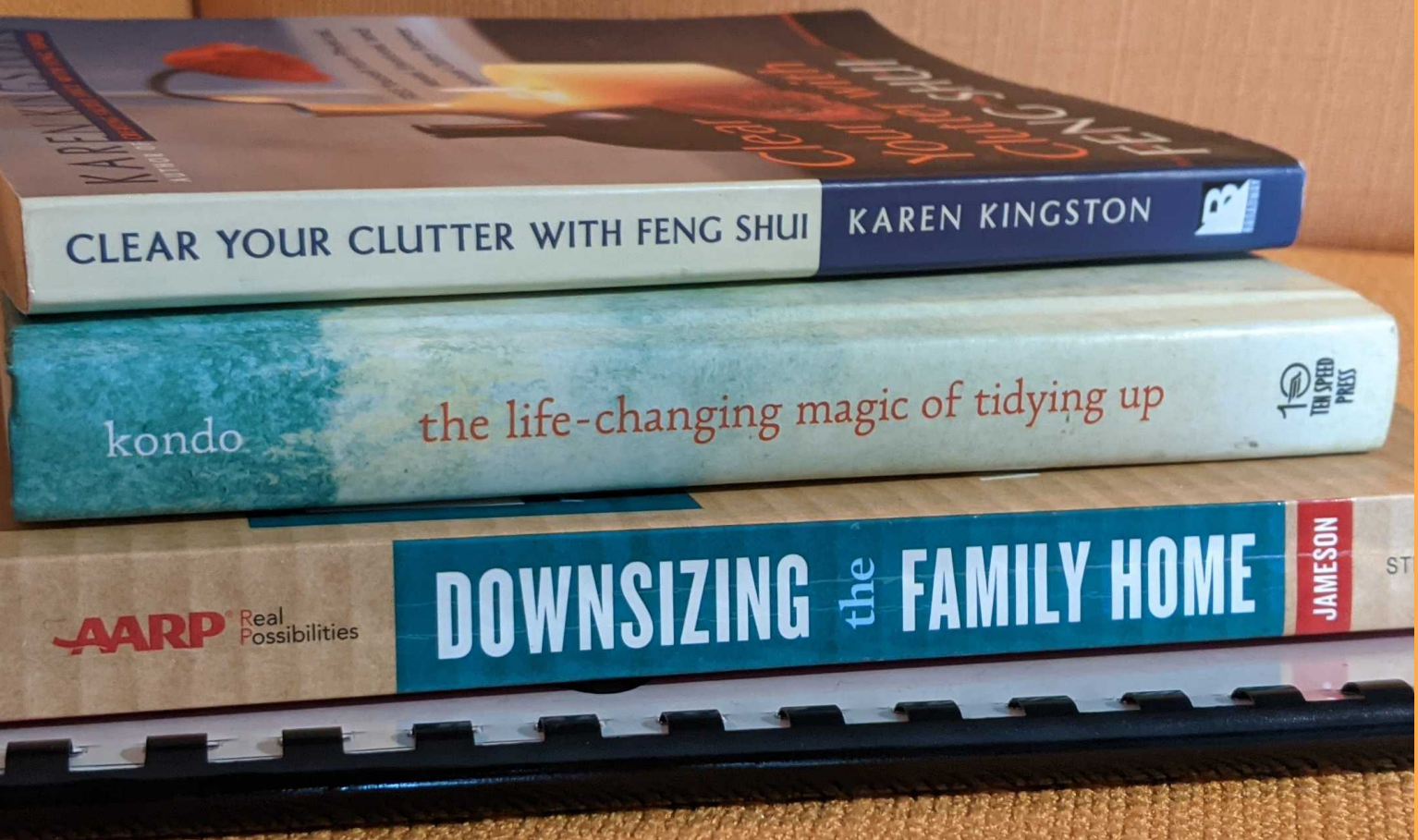




*Falling into*  
**BELLINGHAM**



CLEAR YOUR CLUTTER WITH FENG SHUI

KAREN KINGSTON

kondo

the life-changing magic of tidying up

TEEN SPEED PRESS

AARP Real Possibilities

DOWNSIZING the FAMILY HOME

JAMESON

# DECLUTTERING

finding space

PHOTO: UNDERCLUTTER/CGNW

*That stack of boxes in the garage. The totes, Tupperwares, and tub of pre-Covid clothes that "might fit again" under the stairs. The drawers of odd charging cords, owners manuals, air fresheners, branded giveaways, and miscellaneous hardware rattling around the bottom. The set of Grandma's china that's not-quite-our-style somewhere in the attic. That stack of papers on the kitchen desk that never seems to lessen.*

Clutter is a constant feature of modern living. For many of us, it's a low-level stressor that we might only notice when we can't find that one piece of mail, or where the holiday decor ended up, or when we realize that once again, the house seems to have thrown up on itself - and we're not sure where to begin.

For others, it's all at once: when we come to the realization that it's time to downsize. Or when a loved one is unable to care for themselves or passes away, and you're left with both a torrent of emotions and an estate to deal with.

Meet Rhonda Bolton. She's a professional organizer and the owner of Underclutter (and a member of NAPO - the National Association of Professional Organizers).

**"WHAT YOU'RE SURROUNDING YOURSELF WITH IS WHAT YOU'RE TELLING PEOPLE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU."**

With 13 years of experience, she's dealt with it all - a collection of 25 spatulas, the dozens of music boxes, a stack of centenarian doilies, or the 14 complete sets of china packed away in boxes.

Rhonda sat down with me to chat about clutter and how to re-frame the relationship we have with our stuff. She pointed out that our home is not only our place of rest, but the things we have in it are a display of who we are as people.

As for those nostalgic items that are just so hard to get rid of, Rhonda offered this thought from one of her favorite organizing books:

**"There is balance to find between your past, your present and your future."**

*- Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui, paraphrased*

**Curate** is one of the words she repeated during our conversation. It's not about stripping away those beautiful items that are part of our story, but allowing the most powerful pieces to shine. After all, isn't it better to have four teacups displayed museum-style rather than 20 sets packed away and never enjoyed?

Here are some ideas for dealing with the tough clutter - the pretty things, the nostalgic ones, and the ones that tell our stories.

## **Recognize the emotions**

It's not silly or childish to be attached to a collection or piece of furniture and reticent to deal with it. There are very real fears involved. We feel vulnerable, exposed, even guilty:

*This part of my collection was a gift from a friend - I feel bad sending it to Goodwill.*

*Is it unfaithful to Grandma's memory to let go of her wedding china?*

*This sweater was the one I wore on our first date - every time I see it I get butterflies all over again.*

It's normal to have emotions and fears around decluttering, and that's where these strategies come in:

## Body doubling

Humans function better in community than in isolation. “Body doubling” means having another person with you along the way.

Whether it’s a friend or a professional, just having someone to hold you accountable to making a decision helps speed up the process.

Note that in both cases, *the decision is not theirs to make FOR you*, but their presence will get you to that point, and provide energy for the followup - wrapping up the dishes or bagging the clothes and making them disappear once the decision is made.

## Photos

If you need to get rid of something, but want to keep the memory, consider photographing it!

This is a great strategy for items that are broken/damaged or otherwise unusable, for antiques tied to a family member’s memory, or for collections that have become unwieldy.

## Showcase

The answer to clutter isn’t always to get rid of it! Creating space in your home also gives freedom to truly showcase the pieces that are extra special.

Rhonda told me of a person who had more than 25 teacups; some were handpainted antiques, some were gifts from a great grandmother, and some were just picked up over the years or gifts from acquaintances.

Because of the various sources, the collection had different levels of attachment and emotional value. In this case, some were given away to a neighbor with young daughters (who loved them for their tea parties!), some were donated, and the most special ones were kept and displayed as the treasures they truly were.

## Getting creative

Two grandmothers of a family had oh-so-many crocheted doilies to deal with. Rhonda got creative on Pinterest and consulted with the family about making something fun & funky - a showpiece of their family history.

She & the client sewed doilies together into larger table runners: each one is essentially a funky & functional collection! Each interested family member received one, along with a printed label that told the stories of the women to whom they had belonged.

A stack of 2 grandmothers' doilies becomes a unique tablecloth/runner for the next generation.



This family reclaimed a local directional sign and featured it as bathroom wall art.



An heirloom, framed and on display, made up of a collection of ties from a deceased family member.



# RECOMMENDED READS

- Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui (Karen Kingston)
- Downsizing the Family Home (AARP)
- Conquering Chronic Disorganization (Judith Kolberg)
- The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up (Marie Kondo)

# CONNECT WITH RHONDA



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[underclutter.com](http://underclutter.com)

"I am interested and empathetic to the issues surrounding your organizational challenges.

My goal is to help you make meaningful changes in your home or office. My approach is relaxed and non-judgmental.

I love to organize and when I see clutter I think "fun." I'm always ready to roll up my sleeves and get things done. My first line of thinking is to always make the best use of what you have. I am committed to the re-use, re-purpose, and green philosophies."

## The other side

Sometimes, when we're stressed about nostalgic stuff, we forget that there are people out in the world who would love to invite those things into their homes - and to love them more than we do.

One of Rhonda's downsizing clients had a gorgeous hutch she couldn't take with her. They posted it on Nextdoor and the new owner was THRILLED: "I've always wanted one of these!"

Or the teacup collection mentioned earlier - the little neighbor girls were so excited to have grown-up china of their very own, and so the cups were loved and used so much more than they had been at the prior owner's home.

## Final thoughts

Clutter is something we all deal with, and our possessions carry memories, emotions and weight with them.

And the decision fatigue is real.

This is where someone like Rhonda can walk with you through the process. Focusing on what's important, clearing out space (both mental and physical), and providing the creative energy to help you curate a home that you can truly love.

