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Beyond the Closets: When a Mother De-Clutters

by Emily Enger

Like nearly everyone in the world, my husband and I binged *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* shortly after Netflix released the series earlier this year. As a staunch minimalist with a regular route to the local donations bin, I would never have considered myself someone in need of Kondo's energetic inspiration to de-clutter. But as every parent can attest, no amount of good habits can possibly keep up with the inevitable mess once kids overtake your time. So began an intense series of purges as my husband and I went room by room together.

After we threw and/or donated everything that didn't sit in plain sight, I expected a feeling of release, lifted weight. Like I'd felt other years after spring cleanings. But even as my husband reveled in that lightness, I felt heavier than ever.

My son, Frankie, was born in 2017. He takes up a lot of space for a little 2-foot bruiser. But it isn't just the sprawl of toys or mound of graham cracker boxes. As I stepped back to survey my newly-organized closet, the spare-ness only served as a mirror - a literary foil, as it were - to what I hadn't yet tidied up. My house wasn't really what needed Marie Kondo's fundamental question: Does this bring you joy? It wasn't the physical chaos of a toddler that was draining me, but rather the clutter he brought to my emotions, my schedule and my mind.

I needed to KonMarie my life.

I've never related to the seeming-90% of the population that struggles to let go of things. I've never worried that maybe tomorrow I would really need that dress I haven't worn in two years. I cut items from my life with the same ease that once cut other people's redundant sentences when I worked as a magazine editor. But as I sat and thought through my responsibilities and daily schedule, I finally understood the fear of letting go.

Purging my lifestyle meant walking away from a good job. It meant saying no to gatherings with friends. It meant going to bed early instead of watching Netflix. For weeks - months, really - I avoided these decisions. Why is it that even when something no longer brings you joy, you still desperately fight to keep it in your grasp?

Our world keeps sending women the message to lean in, balance it all, multi-task, be all the things. But once I finally took the leap, I found an indescribable relief when I stepped back, let go, sacrificed and re-focused.

Frankie has turned my previously minimalist existence into something a little more cluttered. Thoughts of him and worries about him fill so much of my mind there is little brain space left for things like basic food prep and the proper side of the road to drive on. But he is worth every lifestyle change and

unexpected setback, because his biggest invasion isn't the adjustment to my career or increase in grocery store runs; it is the massive space he has taken in my heart.