

Exploring the outer limits of the mother-of-all junk drawers

Cabin fever is an insidious virus that breeds in confined spaces like an alien life form in a bad sci-fi rerun. Masquerading as simple boredom, it attaches to the brain, rendering its victim capable of the craziest notions and in the mood to actually carry them out.

There is no vaccine. No one is immune. Forced to take cover from the elements, we wander around our homes aimlessly, bored beyond all reason, bouncing off of the walls, vulnerable to attack. We pace around our pretty cages, unaware of the virus growing in our brains, the symptoms becoming more and more pronounced as the days go by until propelled by our fevered minds we begin to act irrationally.

A-a-a-rgh!

It was a Friday night, three days into a weeklong deep-freeze that had kept me indoors except for emergency trips to the grocery store for the essentials – cat food and coffee – and my daily walk (down the driveway and back with the dogs).

It was 3 a.m. and I was sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor, cleaning out the junk drawer. It was obvious I was under some kind of alien influence.

I knew instinctively that there were things in the bottom of that drawer that were best left undisturbed. But propelled by forces beyond my control I sorted, surrounding myself with piles of batteries, tangled string, one dried-up tube of wood glue, filters for a long-dead Shop-Vac, one extension cord, several night lights, two remote controls, some faucet washers, instructions on how to install a Fluidmaster fill valve (Don't ask me!), and several other categories of "junk."

I won't describe what I found in the bottom of that drawer, but if I were on the Starship Enterprise I would have pulled my phaser first



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and called for security later. Trapped as I was in the 21st Century, I scalded the life form with hot water and flushed it down the kitchen drain.

That's when I realized I was infected (not with what I found at the bottom of the drawer). It was a classic case of cabin fever. The veil was lifting, but everything still seemed a bit fuzzy.

The last few days began to come back to me in bits and pieces. I had gone on an irrational campaign of organization and fueled by my infection, gave no quarter. Everything had been fair game. I wandered through the house assessing the damage. Furniture had been moved; whole rooms had been rearranged.

In my fevered state, nothing was sacred, not even my junk drawer.

I went back to the kitchen and looked at the piles of junk, a collection that spanned six homes and several marriages. This was no ordinary junk drawer I

had dismantled. This was the mother-of-all junk drawers, nearly two decades old. I remember when it was born, just a few screws and a hammer, some string and a leaky bottle of wood glue.

I had fed it a steady diet of junk food over the years. Smaller items had sifted to the bottom and become trapped in the primordial goo – the tube of wood glue had leaked – forming the junk drawer's nucleus.

Above that, there was a kind of order in disorder, as oft-used and important items floated to the top and unidentified items sunk into the goo.

For years I knew right where to go for a screwdriver and a three-pronged plug, loose change and sunglasses, lipstick and tampons, insurance policies and all of my correspondence from the Secretary of State. If what I was looking for couldn't be found anywhere else, I knew where to look.

And from those humble beginnings, the junk drawer grew.

It had overflowed its confines, spawning several species of junk containers scattered throughout the house. There was a junk drawer for office supplies, a basket for receipts and other important papers and another

one for coupons. There was a box for purse junk, a tin can full of screws and nails and several more junk containers that defy definition.

And yes, it was as I had feared, I had cleaned and sorted all of those, too.

What had I done? I shook myself out of my horror and surveyed the damage. I, the High Priestess of Stuff, had mucked with the (wood) glue that holds my home together, the very basis of my vast collection of stuff, the foundation of all that I held sacred.

I stumbled from room to room checking baskets and drawers, hoping that some junk had survived my fevered fit of organizational madness. All might not be lost. I could still recover if I acted quickly.

I am happy to report that some of my junk survived my illness, at least enough to start over. I tossed all of the piles in my kitchen floor back into the bottom drawer, added a new bottle of wood glue and left it to age for a few days.

And I am stronger for the experience. I had survived a near fatal case of cabin fever. I had nearly destroyed a lifelong system of disorganization. I had walked out onto the precipice and stared into the abyss, and the abyss had stared back at me. I know now that life without a certain amount of junk is no life at all.

"A place for everything and everything in its place" only works in Doris Day movies and in Martha Stewart's house. In my book, the motto reads, "A place for most things and everything else in the junk drawer."

I know that it might be months – maybe even years – before I get things back to a blissful state of orderly disorder, before I know right where all my junk is. But I've got a good start, and the mother of all junk drawers is growing. I tossed it a few paper clips today.

Don't touch that dial! Or remote! Or whatever you have!

A new year ... another batch of reruns on the tube.

It's only January, and yet I'm already into watching old "Seinfeld" episodes. Do you remember the television shows from your youth? I do, and they were so much better than what's being offered nowadays.

In the '60s we had a black-and-white television set in a blond cabinet. It was aces in its time. No remotes, you actually changed channels with a big, round, gold dial. Of course, back then, there were only three channels. On occasion, we could get channel 8 – but it was usually snowy and "rolled."

We loved watching such shows as "Andy Griffith," "The Addams Family" and "The Patty Duke Show" from the comfort of the living room floor. That's when Dad let us use the set. He and mom pretty much controlled the dial while they watched such shows as "12 O'Clock High" and "Daniel Boone."

Writer's Block
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Later on, when a color set came to our house, we all enjoyed such programs as "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea," "Lost in Space," and "Laugh In." (Well, maybe not so much the parents.)

Everyone had their favorites. I was partial to such shows as "The Mod Squad," "Love American Style," "All in the Family," and "The Man from Uncle." I secretly had a crush on David McCallum's character, Illya Kuryakin. Sigh ... a blond, beautiful Russian no less!

I also loved a lot of the old medical shows – stuff like "Marcus Welby, MD," "St. Elsewhere," and

"Medical Center." It was nice that they could diagnose an illness, treat it, and still have time for a dozen or so commercials in the hour-long time slot. None of this cliff hanging stuff from week to week.

My sister tended to favor such shows as "The Brady Bunch," "Walton's Mountain," and "Little House on the Prairie." She once threatened to run away and live with the Partridge family. (Why didn't Mom and Dad just let her go? I remember thinking to myself.)

We shared a bedroom, and there was an eight-year age difference. Enough said? By then we actually had a small black-and-white TV in the room we shared. It was a struggle to see who got to watch what. Of course, my shows usually came on later in the evening, after her bedtime, so I rarely got to watch anything throughout the week for fear of waking

her.

Today, I still love to watch movies ... and the older the better. I especially like black-and-white ones with stars like Bette Davis or Cary Grant. I enjoy seeing their clothes, and the props used, especially old dishes and glassware. Occasionally I'll spot a piece or two that I may have in a collection, or have seen at antique stores. So, that's an added bonus along with excellent plot lines.

About the only shows I set my watch by these days are "Survivor" (which is now over for the season), and "Nip/Tuck" (which is now into its final season.) Whatever shall I do?

Looks like another rerun of "Seinfeld" tonight.

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