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**Personal Development  
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## **SURVIVE AND THRIVE**

# ***Sentimental Clutter***

*By Barbara Rubel*

**Who would have thought that sentimental clutter could mean so much?**

Several boxes of varying sizes are stacked neatly in a row. Children are often responsible for vacating their parent's home. And that is what I did when my mom died. Although I sold much of her personal belongings and gave away items to family members, I kept those things that I could not part with. Now, several years later, I feel ready to go through the cardboard boxes and declutter the space that takes up a small corner of my home.

After opening up the boxes, I gently hold photographs of Mom in uniform as a Woman's Army Corps (WAC) in World War II. I clutch her police shield in my hand and gently rub the numbers, which remind me that she was one of the first New York City female police officers. I find a champagne cork and wonder what she was celebrating. These are not my memories. They belong to someone else. Then why is it so hard to get rid of these possessions? Perhaps because they are the tangible links that help keep her alive in some way; parting with them is too permanent a goodbye; or somehow the objects keep her alive through reliving events in her life.

I look through Mom's college yearbook, Valentine's Day cards she got from my dad, and hand written cards that I wrote to her when I was small child. Although these are only things . . . clutter . . . to me, they are most meaningful. I cannot part with them. I decide to photograph some of the objects that are less meaningful and easier to donate or give away.

As I self-reflect, I think about what will happen to my personal belongings once I am gone. Is it time to let go of those sentimental things that I do not need to leave behind? As I clear clutter from my life, I focus on the memories that each item engenders.

The time will come when my children will place framed photos in a box along with my keepsakes. They will find their tiny infant outfits worn home from the hospital along with baby keepsakes. Will they find meaning in my memories or even consider these items sentimental clutter? I hope they reflect on the memories we created as a family, instead of the stuff I leave behind. But, if they keep a few pieces of my "clutter" to help them hold onto our connection, that would be okay.

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