

I think my attitude is almost a cop-out. That way I don't have to clean, and I feel okay about it. Because really, I don't know if it would be that difficult just to pick up after ourselves all the time. That's what we should do. Every time I clean and it looks nice, I think, "Let's keep it like this." But it doesn't work! I would have thought that by now—I'm 47—I would have it down, but I don't.

I used to clean when I was very little, and I hated it. My mom died when I was nine. She had been in and out of the hospital for a long time, since I was six years old. My dad was from a generation where men didn't do housework. My mom had been there to do it for him; she didn't work after she got married. So after she died, he just expected my sister and me to take care of the house.

Plus, he was blind. Even if he had been a sighted person, he probably wouldn't have been doing housework. It was just the two of us girls doing everything in the house. I hated it.

He would check to make sure we had done the dishes, by feeling around in the sink. So we would move the dishes from the sink to the counter, so that he would think they were done. Then, if he started to find them on the counter, we'd hide them under the sink. It was almost funny. We were working harder to hide all this stuff, than to actually do it! I remember my dad used to say, "Are you doing the dishes?" We would sit in the hallway in front of the kitchen so that we could respond from where he thought we were: "Yeah, we're doing them!" [Laughs] And we were not doing them. He couldn't hear that the sink wasn't going, because he was always listening to the radio.

I grew up in Spain. I don't know if this is only in Spain or here, as well, but it's considered lazy to just pull up the covers on your bed. You actually have to undo it, and then do it again. Shake it out, then put it back. That's how you make your bed. That's called "cuerpo alegre," a "happy body." And if not, it's a sad body. And my dad would insist that we make it "cuerpo alegre." We never made our own beds, but his bed had to be made. He was not gonna go to bed without having his bed made. So we learned to cheat. We would make it look like it was—well, FEEL like it was done right. But then, he would know. And he'd actually get us up out of bed! "You have to redo it." Every day.

We had a cleaning person at the very beginning after my mom died. But my sister, who is very hard-headed, said "We don't need her." So it was just us. Every now and again my aunt would come, but very rarely. We did his laundry. We didn't have dryers, so we had to plan ahead to dry things on the line. It's not like you can do it at the last minute.

So, if we needed to get things dry in a hurry, we would hang the clothes in front of the space heaters, and sometimes they would burn. And it was like, "Oh my God, now we have to deal with this!" He used cloth handkerchiefs. That's a nightmare! And we were like, "Use the frikin' paper one!" No. He was not gonna. He was not gonna change anything. He would not adapt to the situation. He wanted things like when my mom had been there to do it for him. I hated it. I can't even remember how many shirts we burned by hanging them next to the space heater. The good thing was, sometimes they'd just get toasty brown, without breaking. He could wear those, and he wouldn't know. And also, he wore a sweater over it. So it didn't matter. But if he knew that it had been burned? Oh, my God. He didn't know that we were heating them up like that. He wouldn't have been okay with that. It would not have been cool. Like making the bed not the right way.



I think because I was with my sister, it was kind of okay. It was the two of us. And part of the challenge was how to get around it. This is disgusting; I don't know if I want to share it. Yeah, I'll tell you. His handkerchiefs? When they're dry, you kind of just shake them. And scrape them. That's what we would do. You can't wash them at the last minute. Because they're not gonna dry, especially in the winter. Forget that. It's gonna take two days. So, if he wants a handkerchief right away? That's it. You have to get creative.

Some of the things were actually more work, now that I think about it. Like the hiding the dishes? Oh my God, that's a lot of work. We would cheat as much as possible with dad. With cooking...with every possible thing.

I remember my mom had the house always perfect. After she died, I was so jealous of girls who had it clean all the time. Our best friend lived in our same building. She would be called for lunch. Called for dinner. She hated being called, because she had to stop playing and go and have lunch. I realized how lucky she was. She had a lunchtime and a dinnertime. We didn't have that. She didn't have to clean up, and her house always looked perfect. Everything was so nice. Lucky. Very lucky.

So, in a way, when I think about my kids, I don't want them to have to do all the work. To me, it would have felt like a luxury to go to my drawer and have matched socks. That's why I do it. My kids have a lot of socks. And a lot of underwear. There is never a time when they cannot find...well, sometimes there is, but that's only because I hate doing it so much. But rarely will they look for underwear and not find it. I remember having to look through piles to find the thing I needed.

My husband is in charge of cleaning the litterbox and taking out the trash. How easy, compared to laundry. What else does he do? Everything that has to do with the car. But...housework? No. Why doesn't he do it? He works much more than me, because I teach. My schedule is much more flexible. I'm home on Fridays. I'm home early. Blah, blah, blah. I see that he doesn't have to, that I should do more. That's fair. But I shouldn't do everything. So sometimes I test him to see, "How long can I leave this here before he deals with it?" How long is it gonna take him to do it? And he can go very long now. Sometimes, it just gets to a point where somebody has to do it.

You're supposed to clean your house. People expect that your house is clean. Sometimes I wonder, "What would it feel like just to let it go, and live like that? How would it be?" Because sometimes I don't make my bed for several days, right? I get in, and I can feel the blanket is all bundled. And I'm thinking, "It's not that bad." You kind of find a space, and...it's not nice, but it's not dirty. Because we'll wash it, anyway. So it's not unsanitary. And I think, "How would it be, just to let it go?" But I don't know...I don't think I would like it.

I have a friend I'm very jealous of, because she has a woman cleaning her house, three hours a day. I've hired people before, maybe once every two weeks is the most regular that I had. But I had to pick up the mess before they came, so it ended up being a chore. It was like, "My God, the cleaning people are coming! Now I've got to put away the dishes, the laundry, and the toys so that they can actually clean." [Laughs] I was exhausted. Also, I had them for quite a while, maybe three years, and I became kind of friendly with them, and they were doing less and less and less, but I couldn't really tell them. So it was all the work I had to do before they came, and some things I would have to do after. My husband would say, "You have to tell them. They're not cleaning this!" But I didn't want to deal with that, so I cleaned it after they left, and I was exhausted.

If they don't like coming to your house, they're probably not gonna come, either. I mean, I don't know how desperate they are for work now, but some of them are not. They know they are gonna go to other houses. Especially if you don't pay them a lot. I met Carla through a service, and then we stopped going through the service, and that way, she was making more money and I was paying less. But with the service, it's actually easier to tell the person to do something differently, because you can just tell the person who's in charge, "They didn't do a good job here." But then you pay a lot more. It ends up not being worth it. The last time I had somebody here to clean was a year ago, before my son's birthday party. And...I think she hated it. I think she thought, "This house is way too much." When I got home, she looked so sweaty and so overwhelmed that I felt bad. Like really, I'm only paying you sixty bucks. I would never do it for that amount of money, so...I felt bad.

I want to not have to think about it. Just, "Here, clean everything and let me go." But even if I hire a cleaning person, I can't leave it messy. You have to get rid of the clutter. They don't know where things go, and you can't have them just putting things away for an hour.



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My husband loves to keep every single thing. He has every draft of everything he wrote when he was in college. And now, with the kids? Every single thing they do, he wants to keep. They put a sticker on a piece of paper? He'll keep it. So a lot of what we have is crap that we don't even know who made it. It's not dated. It's really useless. Newspapers from the day they were born, every possible paper from the day they were born, and from the day when Obama got inaugurated. I mean...you name it. He has to keep it.

We have a storage space packed with books, toys, and kitchen stuff. I used to work at Pottery Barn. And Pottery Barn put Williams-Sonoma together. They have these high-end, beautiful things, and I would get a huge discount. I have every gadget imaginable. Little tools to take the stem out of the strawberries. Like, who really needs that? I have it. And I don't even cook that much. Right now the kids are into Beyblades. It's a Japanese high-tech metal top that spins. It's only eight dollars. If it were twenty dollars, we would only have one. But...it's only \$8. We have seven already. I have my own! Why do we need to have seven? Because they have to fight. And they need a container to fight in, like an arena. So now we have the arena. Well, where do all those things go? Now we have to buy a box, so that they can go in there. It's crazy, the stuff we collect. And I like them having it. I think that's because I didn't have it when I was little. In Spain, things are a lot more expensive than here. So there's no way kids would have ten of the same. And when you live in an apartment, you can't keep collecting everything. But I bought into the culture here. I have a lot of stuff.

It makes me think about people who lose everything, and how liberating that would be. I almost wish the storage room would burn. Or people who have hot fires in their house? How liberating that would be. My husband would have to deal with the fact that all his drafts are gone. I would find it liberating.

