

COMMENTARY

HERE'S A UNIQUE WAY TO PUT OLD T-SHIRTS TO REST

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What is it about stuff? Most of us have way too much of it. And despite the Capitalist dream we are sold on a daily basis, having more stuff doesn't necessarily make us happy.

In fact, too much stuff can be a burden.

This thought came to me one day as I opened a closet stuffed with T-shirts. Like many people, especially South Floridians who wear short-sleeves almost all year, my husband Ronnie and I have an overabundance of T-shirts. We seem to have Hanes Beefy Tees from every sporting event he has ever attended and every city we have ever visited. There are freebie, give-away T-shirts (Pepsi! Now!) and those brought home after paying \$10 to participate in charity 5K

runs.

In any case, they were overflowing, so I dumped them all out onto the floor and began to weed through them. I decided this was especially justified since Ronnie tended to wear the same two T-shirts over and over.

I planned to be brutal. I asked myself: Who needs more than 10 T-shirts? It bordered on gluttonous. I mean, Ghandi didn't even own one T-shirt, and if he did, he certainly would not have worn one that said: "Bob Marlin. Reggae Sportfishing."

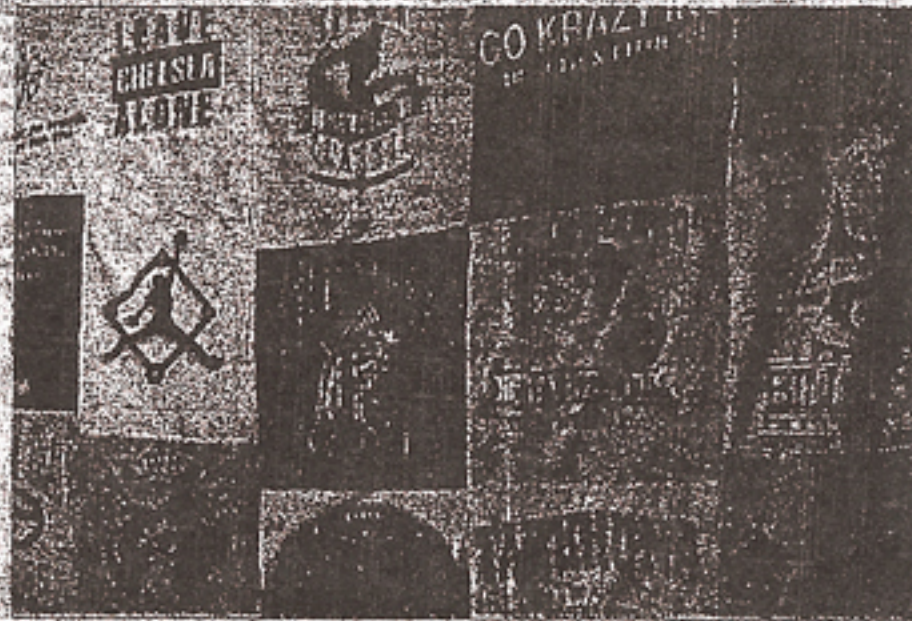
I planned to pick 10 favorites. But as I sifted through, I became emotional. "I can't throw that one away... it's from Cuba... it's from Tommy's first restaurant... my mom gave me that one... it's from a Springsteen concert... I really couldn't do it. So I

discarded every shirt that had a hole in it and/or a big, obvious stain. The new count: 70.

In desperation, I called my stepdaughter, Kelly, a talented artist and seamstress. "How do you feel about cotton as a medium?" I asked.

"I'll make a quilt," she said. Brilliant. I was thinking a fun, beach blanket, but a quilt would be even better. So I put the T-shirts in a box and sent them to Kelly. Two months later, she gave Ronnie the quilt, which is a work of art. Note: He hadn't even missed the shirts. (He's still wearing the ones on top of the pile).

My friend Ann Sullivan, a professional organizer (ATS Consulting) from New York City, was very impressed with Kelly's solution. She often consults with clients who need to get organized but just can't seem to part with things. For



A RELATIVE HAD THIS IDEA UP HER SLEEVE: Old T-shirts form the squares of a very personal quilt.

instance, Ann recently worked with a fortysomething professional who had an album collection that his wife was anxious for him to discard. He

told her getting rid of the collection was unthinkable. It had value, he said. Perhaps enough to pay for their son's college education.

Ann decided the best approach was to research the records' value. Let's just say her client's son won't be going to Yale courtesy of Three Dog Night and the Rolling Stones.

"He was disappointed when he found out they were worth about what he paid for them," Ann said. "But then he felt he could part with them. He picked five favorites and we framed them."

Making something decorative from old junk, er, treasured collectibles, is great. But for those of us with no interest in becoming Martha Stewart, cleaning out and throwing away are perfect goals.

M.B. Roberts is a freelance writer who lives in Nashville, Tenn.