

Dump Day

Dump day is sacred in my household. Some years it ranks right up there with my birthday and Christmas. Actually, the official name for it is Neighborhood Clean-Up Day, but we affectionately refer to it as “dump day.” Dump day occurs twice a year—once in the spring and once in the fall. The purpose of dump day is to help upgrade certain neighborhoods that the city considers marginal. I suppose I should feel offended that they picked my neighborhood—but I’m not, because well, it’s free.

Here’s how dump day works. Each fall and spring the city designates one Saturday as “Neighborhood Clean-up Day.” On that day you can dump almost anything for free—just by taking it to the appointed site. For a family with packrat tendencies, dump day is like a breath of fresh air. It

offers that wonderful opportunity to purge all those things you’ve been squirreling away for the last however many years—like the leftover shingles from your roof that you installed 15 years ago, the broken rake that might someday get a new handle, or the chair that you bought at a garage sale thinking that you might take a recaning class. Add to that the pitching backstop that your child used for 2 months, the rusty porch swing, the lawn chair that “bit the dust” at your last Fourth of July party and about two dozen items that are cluttering both your house and your mind, and you have the reason I love dump day.

For the last few years dump day has always fallen on the worst weekend possible. We always find ourselves out of town or committed to some other less worthy endeavor. This year I vowed it would be different. As I surveyed the garage, the basement, and the attic I swore that, no matter what, this year dump day would not pass us by! As spring approached I anxiously waited for the mailer that would herald the date. It was a cold, crisp day in March when it came. It was bright yellow (sort of like Willy Wonka’s golden ticket), folded over, and stapled shut. I knew immediately what it was. My hands almost trembled with excitement as I ripped open the staple and unfolded the beautiful yellow flyer to see this year’s date.

“YES!” I shouted “We are in town!” I ran to the calendar to check the date against our marathon of activities. Empty! The date was completely empty on our overfull calendar. I was too excited for words.

That night I announced to my husband that dump day was just a few short weeks away and that I really, really wanted to participate this year. He agreed, and I was overjoyed.

However, as the date grew near my husband noticed something I had overlooked on our calendar. We were hosting a big brunch party at our house on the day after dump day. “No big deal,” I said. “I think we can handle both. We’ll just have to work ahead to make sure we’re ready.”

But as the date quickly approached the days leading up to dump day seemed to evaporate before my eyes. Every night I crawled into bed realizing we had not made any progress on either task.

On Saturday morning (dump day) my husband announced “Sorry, but I think we just don’t have time to participate this year.”

“What!” I cried in disbelief. “We have to do dump day. We’ve missed it the last 3 years!”

But he persisted, “Honey” he said, “Look around you. We have to clean the entire house, go grocery shopping and fix all the food for tomorrow. We don’t have the time for dump day.”

“It won’t take that long,” I implored. “We’ll just

take a quick look around and get rid of the big stuff and be done with it.”

He looked at me with skepticism. “You know it always takes longer than you think. We really don’t have the time today, I’m sorry to burst your bubble.”

I was not in the mood to take no for an answer. I looked at him disdainfully and said, “Fine then, I’ll do it myself.” Before he could protest, I trotted off to the garage to get started.

Fifteen minutes later my husband was standing in the garage looking at the piles I had amassed. At first, I thought he was feeling bad that he had blown me off, but I quickly realized he was just defending his territory. I’m sure he was concerned that my zeal for cleaning would begin with his “discardable” items. (I do typically start throwing his things out first.) Within minutes he was sorting alongside me.

Before long I had fully “sucked him in” to my agenda, and I disappeared into the house to start cleaning for our party. The hours ticked by, and what I thought would be a quick and dirty job had materializing into an all-morning affair—just as he had predicted. At 1p.m. he announced he was through with the cleaning. All that remained was to make a mad dash across town to borrow a truck to load everything up, and then he would be off to the dump.

By 1:45 p.m., the truck was fully loaded, literally heaping a good 4 feet above the sides of the

pick-up, and I was urging my husband to hustle off to the drop-off site. “You know they close in 15 minutes, don’t you?”

As I watched him drive away, I felt somewhat satisfied that we had managed to pull off dump day. I also felt a little guilty that I had strong-armed my husband into it.

It was just after 2pm when I heard the truck pull into the drive. I headed to the door to congratulate him for all his hard work but stopped short when I caught sight of the truck. It was still completely loaded!

I hurried outside. “What happened?” I said incredulously. “Did they close early? Did you get there late? Did you forget to take your ‘golden ticket’ to get admitted to the site?”

He slipped out behind the driver’s seat, without saying a word. He walked toward me, handed the “golden ticket“ back to me, and uttered 3 little words.

“It’s next week.”

That was all he said. He walked toward the garage, popped open the door and then suggested I help him unload all of the junk into our now clean garage so that he could return the truck to our friend.

And yes, the following week he borrowed back the truck, loaded it all up again and made the trip to the dump, again without a word.

To this day he has never shared that story with anyone. There was no “I told you so”; no snide remarks to his friends about his overbearing, “always-has-to have-it-her-way” wife.

I, on the other hand, have shared that story many times. I’m not quite sure why, since I am really the punch line to the joke. Maybe it’s out of an appreciation for that style of self-deprecating humor—or, maybe it’s just that I feel incredibly blessed to be partnered with someone with such a long fuse.

—Pat (and Jim)

Pat and Jim were married in 1984. They have 2 children. Pat continues to do dump day but not as often as she’d like!

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

—Proverbs 14:29