

**IRENE  
VIRAG**

# *Kindred spirits in clutter*

**'D**ear Irene," the e-mail began. "What have you been doing snooping in my house?"

I loved it. The e-mail was from Sara Berger of Belle Harbor, and it's to be treasured. It's one of dozens of e-mails and letters I received in response to a column I wrote a few weeks ago about clutter. I said my husband wanted me to have a dinner party so he could see the top of our dining room table, which is usually covered with piles of paper. Sara is a kindred spirit.

"Any surface we have is instantly a filing cabinet," she wrote. "In addition, there are two of us with the same problem. Each week I have a lady come in to clean. She can't possibly clean with all that stuff on the tables or on the guest beds, so the night before she comes, we hurriedly stuff everything into plastic bags and when she leaves we resurrect it."

She described each resurrection as an adventure. "I lost a \$300 check a few weeks ago. As I was straightening up the mess yesterday, I found it."

See, clutter can be beautiful. And it's not as if the stacks of bills, correspondence, files, etc. are immovable. My family visited recently, and if my husband didn't actually see the oak surface of the dining room table, he saw the pads. Of course, the closets were bulging, and my guests had the good sense not to comment about the neat stacks of magazines on the living room floor.

That would outrage someone like E. Dent, who explained in her e-mail, "What! Where else would a person put 'interim' papers if not on the dining room table? Don't tell me some people actually live with a cleared off dining room table. . . . And, yes, I too can handle a sit down dinner for 12 any time — just watch where you're walking."

Phyllis Pappas reports a similar situation in her house, but cites her husband, who sounds like a terrific fellow. "My husband, like you, feels the only function of a dining room table is to spread magazines, newspaper articles, etc., etc. on it," she e-mailed. "As a matter of fact, every single flat surface in my house has arti-

**See VIRAG on B25**

# Clutter unites kindred spirits

**VIRAG from B13**

cles and papers on it. Even my king-size bed in the master bedroom has papers on it, making it necessary for us to sleep in one of the other bedrooms.”

Phyllis also wanted me to know that her husband and I share another interest. “Like yourself, he, too, is an avid gardener.” I don’t know if there’s some mystic connection between clutter and gardening but, for what it’s worth, my garden has a few more plants than necessary.

And Phyllis’ husband isn’t the only gardener-clutterer I heard about. Richard Siegelman, a retired teacher from Plainview, sent me two messages. The first read: “I bet my piles of papers (70 linear feet of folders weighing 200 pounds), accumulated from 37 years of teaching can “beat” your papers any day.” Then he sent a correction. “Make that 2,000 (THOUSAND) pounds (not 200)

of teaching papers. I weighed one (of 70) piles of paper-filled folders and found it weighed almost 30 pounds.”

But despite the fact that clutter can be a heavy subject, Richard knows a pun when he sees one. He added, “Although now two years into retirement, I am slowly making daily progress ‘pruning’ (do you like that gardening reference?) my files.” I figure that there’s a good chance he’s done some gardening. I thought the “reference” was just fine.

I suspect that Lorraine Tedesco, who has a waterside cottage in Greenport, would think so, too. She’s our kind of people. She wrote that she read the paper much later than usual because she got distracted by her garden that day when she picked nearly a bushel of San Marzano tomatoes and six butternut squash. Then, “one thing led to another, including the shuffling of all my papers that now accumulate in my too-

small kitchen — now overrun with tomatoes and squash — since we got rid of the paper-collecting dining room table. My son took it when he got married along with the TV and the couch. . . .

“Anyway to make a short letter as long and rambling and possible,” she continued, “I just wanted to let you know that I woke up my husband, who had just spent an hour trying to track down a cricket that was right under our bed, and finally subduing it with a squirt of WD40, by laughing so much and then reading the whole article to him out loud. . . . We both could identify with what you wrote. Thank you for that — knowing we are not alone in this wonderful defect of the creeping papers.”

Or as Lynn Canning summed up. “You are not alone! I’d tell you all about it but I have to find a spot on my refrigerator to put your article.”

*E-mail irene.virag@newsday.com*