

HOW THE *Declutter Queen* CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Inspired by Marie Kondo, the global titan of tidying, **Susan Horsburgh** sifts through her closet in the quest for clothes that "spark joy".

SURE, I'VE TIDIED before, but Marie Kondo promises this time will be different. I pore over her latest book, *Spark Joy*, and I'm pumped. "Life truly begins," she writes, "only after you have put your house in order." I look around at my paltry half-life – littered with spare buttons, mysterious electrical cords and Happy Meal figurines – and decide I need discipline.

Kondo is the woman for the job. Named one of *Time*'s 100 most influential people of 2015, the decluttering dominatrix has become an international phenomenon since the release of her brutally prescriptive best-seller, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. The 2014 book has inspired a dramatic uptick in op-shop donations and the Japanese author is even a verb – as in, "I took a day off to Kondo my closet and threw out three bridesmaid dresses". ➤



Susan Horsburgh in a joyous moment.

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Above: Marie Kondo gives a folding lesson for a TV show; her KonMari lounge look; Marie with husband Takumi Kawahara.

Her revolutionary idea? Keep the things that "spark joy" and chuck the rest. In her new book, Kondo expands on her "KonMari Method" and insists that if you follow it to the letter, tidying up all in one hit, you will never have to declutter again; in fact, you "will experience, every day, a feeling of contentment" – and a drawer full of undies in adorable little origami packets. I'm sold.

I set aside a weekend to face off with my overstuffed wardrobe, dutifully dumping every last item of clothing onto my bed. Just the sight of that mangled mess paralyses me for 45 minutes, but then I remember Kondo's all-important sorting order and start with the tops. Apparently it's easier to detect joy with them because they're worn close to your heart – and maybe she's right, because I manage to turf 27 of them.

To check if they're joy-inducers, Kondo wants you to "commune" with your clothes. Hug, fondle, perhaps even fornicate with them if it helps – just don't, under any circumstances, salvage an item because "it might come in handy". And don't even think of keeping something just to wear around the house. (Even so, I set aside a floppy, misshapen T-shirt for fake tanning. Bless me, Kondo, for I have sinned.)

It turns out less than 5 per cent of my wardrobe thrills me, but I can't be wearing my favourite feathered cocktail dress to school pick-up, so I have to adopt a fairly liberal definition of "joy". I also occasionally have to override myself: there is nothing more joyful than the comfiness of an elasticised waist, but I decide that self-respect has to trump joy – so I jettison the maternity jeans. It is, after all, more than five years since my last baby was born.

Before you dispatch the rejects, though, Kondo demands that you sincerely thank each item out loud and bid it farewell. It's supposed to ease the guilt, but I feel like a fruitcake vocalising my gratitude to a pair of tweed trousers.

By the third hour, my joy detection becomes dodgier and I allow myself a "maybe" pile. I try on some loose-fitting jeans for my husband and they apparently spark nothing short of repulsion; when I don a pair of flared numbers, my seven-year-old says I look like Elvis Presley. (No, she can't ▸

Kondo's six basic RULES OF TIDYING

1 The KonMari Method may seem hard – it does take time and effort – but you need to commit and believe in yourself.

2 Imagine your ideal lifestyle: Draw, write or cut out pictures to describe what kind of house you want to live in and how you want to live in it.

3 Finish discarding first: It's impossible to stay organised if you try to store your stuff without getting rid of anything. If storage units are filled with unnecessary items, relapse is inevitable.

4 Tidy by category, not by location: People usually tidy room by room, which means they end up shuffling things around the house. Gathering in one spot every item of clothing, for example, from the entire house gives you an accurate grasp of how much you actually own.

5 Follow the right order: It's crucial that you tidy clothes first, followed by books, papers, miscellaneous stuff (like kitchen equipment) and, finally, sentimental items. This helps you hone your ability to distinguish what sparks joy.

6 Ask yourself if it sparks joy: Hold each item firmly in your hands and pay attention to how your body responds – if you feel a little thrill, keep it. If you don't, thank it before saying goodbye.

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name the Prime Minister, but somehow she can conjure up a long-dead celebrity to sledge me.) Verbal abuse, however, aids the purging process, so bring it on! I emerge from the bedroom to get my third garbage bag and my husband asks grimly, "Will you have any clothes left?"

That's when I hit a wall, otherwise known as eveningwear. I can't bring myself to toss the green silk dress I wore to my pre-wedding cocktail party, even though I'll need an intense bout of gastro to get into it again. The same goes for multiple other pre-motherhood dresses from the days when I actually used to go out.

I don't know whether it's just nostalgia or my joy sensor is on the fritz. It is almost midnight, though, so it could also be flat-out exhaustion. I toss the remaining clothes on the floor and tiptoe through the detritus to bed.

Day two dawns and I want to shred Kondo's book: she says you have to tolerate the mess – you can't put stuff away until the discarding is done – but I feel defeated. Losing the will to live, I bypass jewellery and beachwear altogether. It seems I enjoy reading about self-improvement more than actually improving myself. To be fair, though, Kondo is hard-core – we're talking about a woman who used to skip school recess to tidy the class bookshelves for kicks.

"Losing the will to live, I bypass jewellery and beachwear."

She calls this a "tidying festival", but I've had more fun in the final stages of labour. And just when the onerous task of chucking is over, the origami begins. Clothes have to be folded into tight rectangular packages and then propped upright, filing-cabinet-style, colour-coded from light to dark. This is when her anthropomorphising can get a bit out-there. Kondo treats her clothes like faithful, supportive friends and suggests you do too. Bras, for example, "have exceptional pride and emit a distinctive aura" – so store them "like royalty". She also frets over the feelings of your beleaguered, balled-up socks, and insists they be laid on top of each other and gently folded so they can rest. But socks aren't magnetic and need a snug fit in the drawer to stay together, so I forget that decree too.

Of course, keeping only the stuff you love and storing it neatly makes a lot of sense. Even after I cut some corners, I finish with four garbage bags of joyless clothes to cart off to Vinnies – and my drawers are such pictures of rainbow loveliness, I find myself opening them repeatedly to sneak a peek.

By the end of day two, though, I'm a broken woman. Who has the stamina (or free time) for 12 hours of decision-making and fabric-folding? And that's only the clothing category. A whole cluttered household awaits.

Next up is books, which means at some point I will have to hold Kondo's little hardback solemnly in my hands and ask if it sparks joy. Sorry, Kondo, but I don't think you'll make the cut. ■

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