

Up Front/Commentary

Yard sales and colonoscopies serve a similar purpose

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune

Overheard across the back fence: "Yard sales are hell."

I hear you, neighbor. I know plenty of people who have been cleaning out their closets and garages for months now, bemoaning the fact that, "I've got to get rid of some of this junk."

Even the realization that a person can make money on old castoffs - say, 25 cents for a pair of jeans that cost you \$80 brand new - is small consolation.

We approach getting ready for the annual yard sale with the same enthusiasm we have for getting a colonoscopy.

And, when you think about it, there are some similarities between yard sales and colonoscopies. In both cases you're getting rid of a bunch of crap.

But people dread it - the yard sale, I mean. There's the stuff to sort through, mark with a price, set out on tables, advertise and then wait for the customers who will haggle over an item marked 15 cents they think ought to sell for a dime. There goes your overhead.

So why do we do it?

Well, for one reason, we have to keep having yard sales to get rid of the junk we picked up from visiting other people's yard sales last year.

It's amazing how the food dehydrator you thought was such a great deal at the time you bought it looks like just so much clutter the next year. You started out with such good intentions. Turns out the only thing you ever dehydrated were some apples that turned into rocks that broke your son's tooth and a dead mouse that sneaked its way into the food tray.

The real problem with yard sales, though, is they are self-perpetuating. We buy up stuff we find at our neighbors' yard sales and then we have to turn around and get rid of some of our own stuff in order to make room for it.

So then the people who sold you their stuff come over to your house and buy your stuff. There's this constant rotation, and what we fail to realize is that two years down the road we're buying some of our own stuff back.

Communitywide yard sales are notorious for this neighborhood exchange that goes through several hands before ending up back with the original owner. I heard of an old blender that went

through 17 owners in the same town before finally being donated to the town museum as a cultural artifact.

Yard sales are at least a good reason to clean out your closets once a year or so and maybe even discover something you thought you'd lost a long time ago. And there's always the social aspect of running into folks you rarely see and making sure you snatch up that old eight-track tape player before they get their hands on it.

But because of their nature, yard sales just keep going on and on forever, junk replacing more junk. At least with a colonoscopy, once it's over and you're all cleaned out you can go home and stop thinking about it.

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