*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Tidying up really can spark joy**

My wife received a birthday gift a few years ago. It was a book called “The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up” by a young Japanese woman, Marie Kondo. Colleen was kind of offended, even though it was a present from her very good friend. She thought her dear friend was insinuating that she is a messy person and needs help in decluttering and organizing. She put the book away and I heard nothing more.

Well, scanning through the movie channels one evening, she came across a program featuring Marie Kondo (the cleaning lady), and she wanted to see what it is all about. “Would you like to watch this with me, honey? Maybe we can learn something together,” she said. I was a bit offended.

What do you mean by learn something together? I do dishes and clean up the kitchen after cooking, make the bed, vacuum the house, dust, and clean the kitty litter when she is away! What more do I need to learn?

But, considering that she watched a James Bond movie with me a week before, and a Kung Fu movie in Chinese (with English subtitles, yet) not too long ago. I affectionately said, “Sure, honey. Let me make some popcorn for you. Do you want butter with it?”

Swiftly I disappeared to the kitchen, taking my time to make the popcorn. I put on the lowest heat possible, praying that the popcorn won’t pop so eagerly. But of course, prayers don’t respond as fast when you rush them.

So, here I went with a big bowl of buttered popcorn, with a smile.

The show is about this Japanese woman who would get paid to tell people to get rid of “stuff” that they had treasured their whole life. What? I could easily do that.

Then I remember that before we moved up here from Milwaukee, we hired a “stage manager” to help us “stage” our home and get it ready for sale. “People don’t care how you live and what beautiful furniture you have. They want to visualize how the space would fit in their lifestyle,” we were told. Ah, so much to learn.

So, we got rid of half of our possessions (either gave them away or stored them away). When it was all said and done, I looked at our decluttered new home and wondered, this is beautiful, why are we moving? That was my first encounter seeing a place with a lot of personal space and everything is so organized! You can see what goes where and everything is arranged accordingly.

Then, when we moved to our new home in the Northwoods, everything was back to where it was. Well, that’s all of our belongings which we accumulated all these years. Everything that we touched has a story to tell. You just can’t get rid of something with so much sentimental value attached.

Of all people, I am a sentimental fool. I would save birthday cards my kids gave me since they learned how to write. I do read the cards once in a great while. Well, more like a great, great while; and now it is almost like never ever. So, I have two drawers full of old cards just taking up space, where I should be keeping more updated and important stuff.

The show involved two couples, one in their 30s, and the other maybe in their 60s. The young couple were professionals, one a writer and the other a manager of a big corporation. The elder couple were grandparents with many grandchildren.

Regardless, their homes were like a collector’s nightmare. Yes, stuff everywhere.

The younger couple’s home was stacked with all kinds of old files, clippings from newspapers and magazines, high school yearbooks, cookbooks (even though they don’t cook) … old clothes that they don’t wear anymore. The elder couple was no better off. They had stuff from their children growing up and more stuff from the grandchildren. Wonder what they will do when they have great-grandchildren?

Apparently, they weren’t happy with their lifestyle and that’s why they called Marie and asked for help. Colleen’s eyes were glued to the screen the whole time; and then she said, “That’s very interesting. I think I should get her book out and start reading it.” Right there and then, I knew my time had come, I was doomed. Good Lord, and I was right.

It was a calm and peaceful few weeks while she was digesting the book. Then one day, she put the book down and claimed that we should start to do something to our home to make it more organized and decluttered. I smiled and said, “Great, where do you want me to stay while you are doing all that?” With a frown, she said, “No, you will be helping me, each and every step.”

There was still snow on the ground then, I couldn’t sleep in a tent and I have no place to go. What to do? What to do?

So, the KonMari method (very clever, putting Marie Kondo together) is to go through your belongings and get rid of stuff that doesn’t bring you joy anymore. We started out with our clothes, putting the big pile on our bed and going through each and every single piece. Yes, each and every single piece.

Being a sentimental fool, I still keep shirts that my kids bought me many years ago. Even though the sleeves and collars are frayed, I still wear them. “No, you can’t wear them in public anymore. You are a local celebrity now and you can’t look like a bum.”

With one swift move, off they go to the “giveaway” pile of stuff. I was offended, do people judge this “local celebrity” by the clothes he wears? Knowing well the consequences of starting an argument, I gave in and did what she asked.

Actually, to be honest, I felt better after all was said and done. I could see what clothes I had left and saw some of my favorite clothes which I enjoy wearing but never did, as I didn’t know where they were. That wasn’t too painful, I thought to myself. Not knowing that the nightmare had just begun.

Watching the couples on the show, my heart just sank. How could they get rid of stuff that they have accumulated over the years?

Then the magic words of KonMari sank in: You only keep things that bring you joy this moment. For those that have no meaning these days, you just hug it, give it a kiss and let go after you say, “Thank you for bringing me joy before.” What a concept.

I now can actually see how many pairs of shorts I have, and shirts and socks. I was wearing the same clothes over and over for months as I just couldn’t find the others.

A new life has just begun. Maybe I’ll make her more popcorn and watch more episodes? Then I might need a glass of wine with that. Maybe more than a glass?