

Chipping away

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I stood before the pile of clothes, holding each piece and asking myself, “Does this give me joy?”

If you are also part of the [KonMari](#) cult, you may recognize this ritual. I, like many Americans, have been discovering the *Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. Actually, this is just one part of my life that has been culled back. I feel like a sculptor, who has this giant slab of marble, and I’m chipping away the pieces. I have a hammer and a chisel and I’m banging, here and there. It’s painful and difficult, because somehow I am the one who is sculpting *and* being sculpted.

It started with my identity. I had been a Pastor, Writer, and Speaker. I was holding all three together for a long time. Then, I became exhausted and my body was falling apart. (Literally. I have a very painful stress indicator. My shoulder dislocates.) But I kept working at all of it, enjoying every full minute.

Then we moved, and I became a writer. I signed a contract with a Big Six publisher and got to work. I didn’t realize that it would be painful, letting go of that pastoral identity. I mean, I’m still a pastor, even if I’m not serving a church. But I didn’t leave the church in a huff. I love it. I miss it. I think I was pretty good at being a minister. Whenever people ask me what church I’m serving, I feel this ache in my side—the chisel gouging into me, reminding me of that throbbing loss.

Then it happened with my stuff. We had already downsized quite a bit, moving from a three-story home with a roomy attic to a small one-story. But Joe B. Martin, a wise pastor, taught me that we have an emotional attachment to things, and they can make us exhausted. As he spoke, I felt the weariness of trying to store and manage all that stuff. I needed to do more chipping.

I got the large garbage bags and I’m sorting through the boxes in my closet. I am trying to figure out what gives me joy, and I’m carving away everything else. I will

take it to Mercy Junction's free store, where people who need it can have it.

Now I'm sorting through other things. I'm looking at relationships that suck everything out of me and never give anything back. I am re-evaluating my habit of befriending energy vampires. I'm letting go of friends who no longer want a relationship with me. I'm grieving the loss and moving forward. Facebook is a lie. No one can have 5,000 friends. So I have to discern whom I would actually call in a crisis.

I'm thinking about commitments, the events where I feel used and belittled at the end of them. I'm reevaluating the projects where I put in days of work and get no appreciation at the end. I'm realizing that I'm way past doing things "for the exposure." Usually projects don't give me any more exposure than I already have, and I *really need* to have a quick, ten-second thank you when I've put in a ton of work into something.

I am a giver, by nature. I mean, I get a lot of joy out of helping people so all of this sorting can be agonizing. But, I realize that I cannot keep it up, or else I will be completely consumed by life. So I keep chipping. As painful as it is.

I have read sculptors who describe a mystical process, where the stone *wants* to be something. The artist just has to listen to that formless rock, attune her ear to the beauty that must emerge. I pray that it's the same with me, as I continue to cleave my freshly hewn life.