

The return of the Kondo hero

Thanks to Marie Kondo, known for her decluttering tips, my quest to clear up my home is bearing fruit



Tan Keng Yao

One day, the heavy glass lid of a slow cooker nearly landed on my head.

I nearly died at the hands of an appliance because it was stored on a high shelf in the kitchen cabinet instead of on the lower tiers, where big and heavy items belong.

Common sense is not my strong suit, obviously.

But there was another reason the slow cooker was stored that high up – because there was no more space on the lower shelves, which were stuffed to the brim with: never-used crockery lugged back from Bangkok (“Wah, so nice and not expensive. Must buy.”); plastic takeaway containers (“I might need them one day”); mugs, water tumblers and sandwich boxes (freebies from buying groceries); recipe books (my book shelves are full as well); and enough plastic bags to form the biggest ball of plastic carriers in the world.

The kitchen counter is also full of things I struggle to name.

So is the dining table, which led my husband to complain that there was not a single empty surface in the house for him to write a cheque on.

Telling him “I’m sorry to hear that” did not help his mood.

Organisation experts say clutter not only looks, well, messy, but it also leads to stress and anxiety.

Don’t I know it.

The struggle is real when the cab I called is already downstairs and I cannot find my house keys to let myself out.

Attempts at decluttering in the past were a bit of a Groundhog Day in that the same nightmare is repeated over and over again: I would move everything out of the various areas of storage, then run out of time or energy to deal with them, so I shove everything back in, but arranged differently.

I picked up *The Life-Changing Magic Of Tidying Up* by Marie Kondo, mistress of the universe of decluttering, to see if I could turn my life around.

“Be brutal and throw your things away” is my takeaway from her book.

Stuff must be discarded before you start to even think about organising and storing the remaining things, she says.

This is because if you put things away without throwing anything out, it just makes you think your clutter problem has been solved.

But when your storage space fills up, back comes the clutter, multiplying like Gremlins.

Which led me to have an epiphany.

My problem is not just one of organising, but one of having too many things.

Too many books, too many frying pans, too many bottles of body lotion and too many rolls of toilet paper (we bought them on offer because, for a while, we worried about a shortage on the toilet paper front).

So if I hope to regain control of my life, things have to go.

Kondo says the criteria for deciding what to keep or discard is whether you love the item and whether it sparks joy for you.

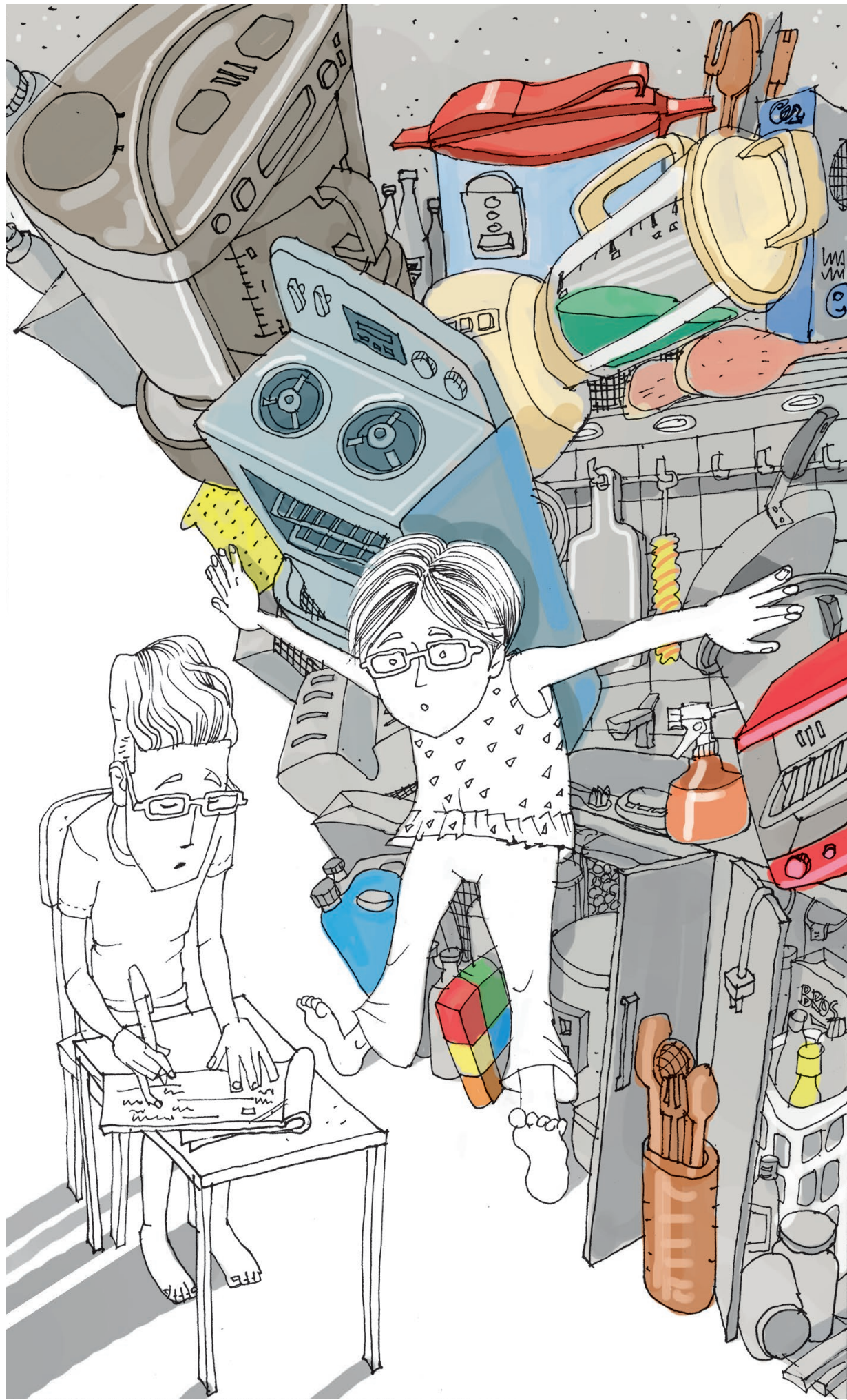
Using my love as a gauge, it was easy to break up with the VCD player, my collection of wedding magazines from 15 years ago and miscellaneous ornaments that doubled as repositories of dust.

It’s not you, it’s me. I just don’t feel that way anymore.

But what about things whose relationship with me is, like they say on Facebook, complicated?

These include books I didn’t enjoy, but which I paid good money for.

Or scented candles I received as gifts, but which I can’t light up



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

because they would probably burn down my house, given the amount of clutter.

Clinging onto these things is like hanging onto a bad relationship. You keep hoping the problem will sort itself out, but it rarely does.

Kondo has the answer to this as well.

Even clothes that have not been worn or books that have not been read have a purpose, she says. Perhaps they sparked joy when I

bought them or that they are teaching me a life lesson and helping me realise what really suits me.

So thank them for serving their purpose and let them go, she adds.

So far, I have done a few rounds of culling in my house.

I’m also trying to cut down on things sneaking their way in, such as freebies from goodie bags, junk mail and impulse buys.

We have definitely stopped

stocking up on toilet paper.

Tidying and organising the house can be a Sisyphean task and I still have some way to go before I become a Marie Kondo success story.

But now my husband has a place to sign his cheques, my bookshelves are emptier and my risk of death by falling slow cooker has, hopefully, been reduced to a negligible one.

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Why I refuse to date an older man

Mona Chalabi

If I could prolong my time as a young adult by, say, 2.3 years, here is a list of things I would like to do.

Go to more parties. Preferably wild parties that I can think about, years later, at mild parties.

Have more romantic partners. Get a bit higher up the career ladder a bit earlier on. That would probably boost my earnings, giving me more financial security.

I could use that money to go to more parties, get a membership to a fancy gym and maybe even meet a romantic partner on the ab machines.

Most men who date women do not fantasise about what they would do if they had these bonus years – they simply get them.

In two-thirds of heterosexual couples, the man is at least a year older than his partner. The average age difference is 2.3 years, according to the Census Bureau.

I know what you are thinking: “What’s dating got to do with your weird list?”

You are right, in theory. Life does not stop once you settle down, so you could complete your own 2.3-year list regardless of your relationship status.

But in reality, most couples who commit long-term end up having

children, so the age gap carries over into parenthood.

The average age of a new dad in the United States is 31, compared with 26 for a new mum.

Typically, becoming a parent has an enormous impact on your health, career and ability to party.

It is already bad enough that those burdens are more likely to be shouldered by mothers.

The fact that women end the childless part of their lives earlier than their male partners is just salt in the wound.

And looking even further down the line, the bigger the age difference, the more likely it will be women who take care of their male partners in old age.

Outraged at these numbers, I send my mum a text outlining my plans to find a much younger man.

But then I change tactics and organise a date with a fellow 30-year-old.

He waits in the garden of a Brooklyn bar while I get us two spicy margaritas. When I come back, I ask him what he is looking for.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, do you want something serious?”

Leaning back in the sunlight, he smiles and says: “Oh, no, I don’t think so. I’m not in a rush.”

My eyes fall on his sleeveless T-shirt. I imagine pouring my drink on it.

I know I am not a fun first date.

I want to ask prospective partners whether they want to become parents and when – and excuse me? You have not given it much thought? A shrug from a man who already has a couple of grey hairs strikes me as wild arrogance.

This arrogance has, as I see it, two main causes – one, a belief that their spermatozoa are good for a very long time; and, two, a belief that they could get a younger woman.

Your sperm is not immortal. A study that tracked 8,559 pregnancies found that “conception during a 12-month period was 30 per cent less likely for men over age 40 as compared with men younger than age 30”.

Men are much more fooled when it comes to that second belief – that they could get a younger woman if they wanted to.

Dating site OkCupid’s researchers found that most conversations take place between an older man and a younger woman and, in almost half of them, the age gap is at least five years.

That same OkCupid data shows that even when men are in their late 40s, they carry on looking at the profiles of women aged 20 to 24.

Women, by contrast, look at older men’s profiles as they get older.

Where do 50-year-old men get this strange impression that they

could date a 23-year-old? Perhaps it is their TV screens.

When *New York* magazine looked at the careers of 10 leading men, it found that as they aged, their onscreen love interests did not.

Take, for instance, Liam Neeson. In 1990, he appeared alongside Frances McDormand, who was five years younger than him.

By the time he starred in *Third Person* in 2013, the 61-year-old’s lover was played by 29-year-old Olivia Wilde.

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better with time. Women are like cheese – they get blue veins and start to stink.

Do I sound angry?

Maybe, but I am also scared. I inspect my body when I step out of the shower and I can see the skin loosening above my knees.

I do not want to choose between being single and dating a much older man with much older knees.

I think, maybe, I could deal with dying if the person I love is creaking along at the same rate I am.

So, this is where I ask for help from other single women seeking men.

Sign a pledge with me – let’s end this scourge once and for all by committing to contemporaries.

I understand your reluctance.

Perhaps we have dipped a toe in the younger male waters and been burnt by the sleeveless shirts, the sheetless beds, the unbridled selfishness.

But we must persevere. If not for ourselves, then for one another.

I hereby swear that I will not take an eligible older man out of the dating pool – to do so would be to slap future-me in the face, but it would also signal to men my age that it is okay, you have time.

Time is too precious to donate – so do not give away 2.3 years of it.

NTIMES

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