

When a loved one dies, they often leave behind more than memories. They leave rooms filled with possessions, full of emotional weight. Here is your much needed companion to help answer the question, “what do I do with all the stuff?”

**The Weight of Our Things:
Navigating Possessions and Emotions After the Loss of Your Loved One**
By Julie Martella

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

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The book cover features a light blue background with a white border. It is decorated with watercolor-style floral illustrations in shades of blue, pink, and white, scattered around the edges. The title is centered and reads:

THE
Weight
OF OUR
THINGS

**Navigating Emotions and
Possessions After Loss of Your
Loved One**

JULIE MARTELLA

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What People Are Saying

Julie's gifts for compassion and realistic advice in organizing, disseminating of what was once cherished by someone we cherish, and moving into a new reality will be invaluable for anyone tasked with this challenge.

-Dale Cline, Widower, Pastor

Julie's book has been an invaluable resource for me. As a professional organizer, I've learned how to better understand my client's needs who have experienced loss. Learning about the brain's response to trauma, the important role that organization plays, and strategies to help my clients move forward has strengthened my professional skills. I'd highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to learn more about how to move forward after loss.

-Alisha Pangburn, Professional Organizer

The Weight of Our Things is a heartfelt approach to the challenging journey of managing possessions while navigating the turbulent waters of grief and loss. It is not a book about just tidying up but rather a guide of wisdom, compassion, and practicality for anyone facing the emotional upheaval of loss and the overwhelming task of sorting through belongings. Julie

Julie Martella

reminds us that our homes should be sanctuaries, places of healing and comfort, especially when we're grappling with grief. She demonstrates how possessions, often laden with emotions and memories, can be transformed into functional, organized, and nurturing environments that enhance well-being and quality of life. The inclusion of tidying and cleaning checklists, as well as real stories from individuals who have undergone similar journeys, adds a tangible layer of guidance and relatability to the book.

*-Mary Moore Hughes, Camp Widow Program Director,
Virtual Programs Manager, Soaring Spirits International*

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Introduction

Shall we start at the very beginning?

I'm Julie, and I'm a Home Strategist. My superpower is the ability to break things down into tiny pieces and then put them together again in new and beautiful ways. I find the best and leave the rest.

What is a Home Strategist? It is someone who applies strategic thinking to the concept of home. In the business world a strategist is someone who can analyze difficult situations, identify opportunities and challenges, and create strategies to navigate and improve potential outcomes. I take those skills and apply them to the you and your home.

The title of Home Strategist has evolved as my understanding of home has deepened. I have always had love and respect for the transformative power of home, particularly during times of life transitions and profound loss.

The past several years have been filled with significant changes, making the role of home as a sanctuary even more vital to me. Just as I was completely unprepared to deal with the sudden death of my husband, I was equally unprepared to deal with the life I was handed, and the logistics that came along with it.

Julie Martella

It is my highest honor to work with men and women who have suffered the traumatic loss of a death and help them re-imagine life and home. I am here for you when you are ready to deal with the new life you've been handed. I am here when you're ready to let go, and it doesn't matter if it's been three weeks or ten years.

About You

Now that you know about me, what about you?

You might be at the start of a journey – a journey for which you are not prepared, do not want to take, and are not sure of the destination. You've lost your spouse or partner and may be struggling with one of two issues:

1. Either you have an entire house to empty, or
2. You have a house to sort through and “lighten” because your loved one is gone (lightening is another word for sorting, which you and I will get into later).

You have been faced with a triggering event that's requiring you to take action and you may very well not be ready. Regardless of the circumstance, you also struggle with getting your mind wrapped around your upcoming task. You may be wondering, “Where do I begin?” or “What am I going to do with all this stuff?”

This book will provide you with a roadmap of how to get from where you are to where you want to be. No matter your path, it begins with understanding and managing your mind. That alone will give you the motivation to get started.

You may be struggling to begin; it may be just too much or too painful. That's ok. One man told me that he could not bring himself to clean out the medicine cabinet. Asking him to sort and organize all of his wife's possessions before he was ready could have been much too difficult.

If you are not ready, just read this book and tuck it away; you will know when it's time.

Here's the reality: there are no grief police coming to check on you. There is no rule that says sorting and "lightening" has to take place. If your possessions are at a manageable level and not creating a hazard of any kind, there is NO RUSH. Again, there is no hurry... unless you've been faced with a triggering event, something outside of your control that is making you begin this project. This is where I come in. I can help manage your mind and connect with your purpose so that you can begin and finish this very difficult task!

Some clients find comfort and remembrance in their possessions and want to leave their homes untouched. But, for those individuals faced with an external force pushing the timeline, dealing with the stuff becomes a challenge that must be conquered in order to move towards their future.

You can choose to do nothing with the possessions. You can leave your home exactly as it was when your loved one died. Many people make this choice, and they would never pick up this book. Home, with all of its physical memories, becomes

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either a cozy sanctuary or a functional shrine. Many people are comforted when surrounded with the memories of their spouse or partner. This choice allows you to do nothing. For some that is the perfect solution. Others may find it leaves them feeling stuck after a while.

The second choice is that you can sort through the possessions, and make the necessary decisions about each of them. Some things you will choose to keep; some you will let go. When it's the right time for you, you will know. This is the choice of moving forward into whatever your future holds. This is the choice of saying goodbye, whether in tiny increments or in giant sweeping gestures (like emptying a house).

The fact that you are looking at this book tells me that you are faced with the second choice; the choice to go through your loved one's possessions, perhaps to move into your future. For whatever reason you NEED to go through the stuff, this book will help you with that daunting task!

1. Meet Your Brain

The limbic or primitive brain is actually a collection of structures including the brainstem and limbic system that have the combined focus of keeping you alive. You may have heard it referred to as the “reptilian” or “ancient” brain. It is responsible for all the functions that helped your early ancestors survive, such as:

- Survival instincts include the fight-or-flight response, habit creation, and primitive sensory processing.
- Primitive drives such as hunger, thirst, sexual behavior, warmth, and shelter.
- Regulation of essential bodily functions such as breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature.

When your brain enters survival mode, your limbic brain takes the reins, temporarily hijacking the rational prefrontal cortex (PFC) which we'll explore shortly. You may find yourself feeling “driven” by the need to survive. You may feel hyper vigilant and look for threats where none exist. You may find yourself not wanting to get dressed, leave the house, or engage with others.

When you are not under stress, your brain has the luxury of time to process information and to filter it through the modern parts

of your brain (the PFC) to determine if the input is a fact or a thought – and if that thought is actually true or just *feels* true. This understanding of your brain’s mechanics will empower you to make conscious choices and manage stress more effectively.

Have you ever seen pieces of candy progressing down a conveyer belt? Imagine you have the job of wrapping each piece in a little wrapper. When things are slow, you wrap the chocolates confidently and send them down the conveyer belt. As the equipment gains speed, you are unable to keep up, and chocolates end up everywhere except where they should be.

Your limbic brain works in much the same way. When your brain has too many, or very difficult, thoughts to process, you can lose the ability to rationally analyze them.

The limbic brain does not care what is true or not, it is just trying to help you survive in the moment. When your brain is in “survival mode” it will process information as fast as possible – *not as efficiently as possible*. Your primitive brain will prioritize survival strategies such as seeking comfort or food instead of assessing the validity of your thoughts. In survival mode, you may be more likely to make decisions based on faulty information than on reality. This is the number one reason why it is important to question the stories your brain tells you in difficult or stressful moments.

8. Home Creates Its Own Kind of Overwhelm

Now you can see why dealing with the possessions after the death of your spouse or partner can be such a challenge. It has the potential to meet every part of the definition of overwhelm! The process of organizing your home and doing “the big sort” is part of the outward, physical manifestation of your grief. That can cut deep.

Letting go of possessions may feel like letting go of a chapter in your life and acknowledging the finality of your loss. If their things are gone, then your brain must finally accept that they are too.

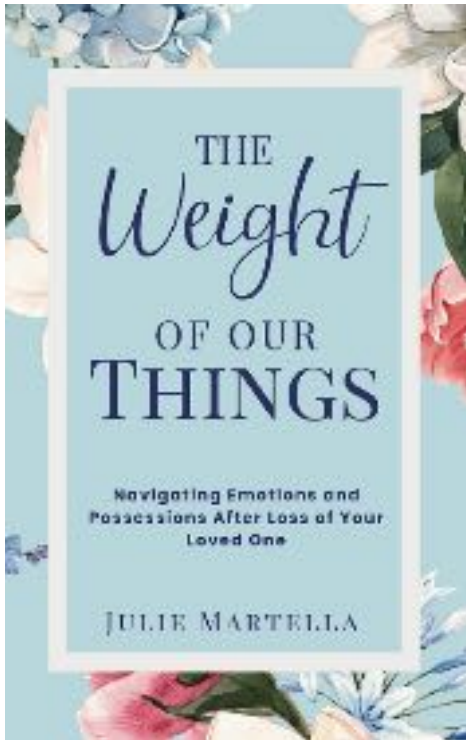
Decision fatigue is real and plays a role in your feelings of overwhelm. Sorting through your loved one’s belongings requires a lot of single-minded focus and determination as you decide what to keep, donate, or repurpose. All of these decisions require time, physical energy, and mental focus. You may find yourself in possession of none of those resources, which makes decision-making that much more difficult.

Thought work: Which of these situations, if any, are factors in your current feelings around decluttering or sorting? What are some things you can do to ease the pressure you might be feeling?

There are times when you may not need or choose to part with your loved one's belongings. For many people the belongings bring emotional comfort and connection. Some people aren't ready to let go, and some feel the weight of being the memory holder for children, grandchildren, or other family members.

There are no hard and fast rules.

If your loved one's items don't create a clutter issue or impede daily living, there is no harm in keeping them. It's truly all about you and when you're ready.



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