



Karen Anderson

## The power, mystery and frustration associated with house cleaning

*Club Columnist, Karen Anderson explores the dirty underside of everyday house cleaning.*

Ever had one of those days when your kids, in-laws, and maybe even houseguests, are under foot? Not to worry. There's one fail-safe way to clear a crowd out of the house. No, you don't need to shout "Fire" or mention "Voldemort." Just whisper the dreaded word "Cleaning."

It works great at our house. Suddenly everyone remembers a soccer practice, an urgent errand, or a reason to go out to the car for just a few minutes. And never come back.

Cleaning's not a good topic to bring up when you're out in public, either.

You think people have political differences these days? Ha! That's nothing compared to the opposing philosophies on how to polish a linoleum floor or deal with the cat litter.

Do you sift or do you scoop? Mop or Swiffer? Friendships and even marriages have foundered on these questions.

Me? I don't care – just as long as somebody takes responsibility for cleaning up the mess. Don't ask, don't tell, I've found that to be the safest approach to cleaning.

But few share my approach. Thanks to social media, the kind of finger-wagging house-cleaning advice I used to get from my mother-in-law I now get from friends and friends-of-friends. These days, everyone's an expert.

Don't wash your sponges in the dishwasher, put them in the microwave! Wait, don't use sponges, use Mrs. TrendyPants' Magic Kleening Kloth! Scrub your wooden cutting boards with salt! No, wait, get rid of that wooden cutting board and replace it with the new...

Sigh.

I try to ignore it all, but I couldn't resist temptation when I came across an advice book written by a man who had owned a cleaning service. It promised step-by-step instructions for making my house easier to clean. How could I argue with that? Well, as it turned out, pretty easily.

The book started with a directive to install toilets that

attach to the wall rather than the floor. It went on to explain how to redo your entire home in a style that could only be called "Prison Restroom Modern." Once all your metal furniture is attached to the walls, cleaning becomes a simple matter of hurling a bucket of soapy water through the door and letting it run down the tiled walls into the oh-so-convenient industrial drain in the middle of the cement floor. Rinse using the garden hose.

As it happens, the interior decorating style at our house is more akin to "Contemporary Craftsman Clutter." And that means a lot of cleaning. So the Scholarly Gentleman and I have divided up the cleaning tasks. We started with the dishes, and that's certainly keeping the mystery in our relationship.

I load the dishwasher and run it. Then he unloads the dishwasher and hides things where I can't find them.

"Why on earth did you put the measuring spoons in with the dinnerware?" I ask, truly curious.

"Because they are spoons," he replies. Similarly, the pet bowls end up in the china cabinet with our china soup bowls ("because they are bowls"), and the measuring cups end up in the pie plates "because they are both used for baking."

However, his devious strategies pale next to the creative approaches of the cleaning services we've brought in to help us.

There was the team that cleaned with products that left the house smelling like a perfume counter. They were followed by the team that cleaned only with special unscented products that turned out to be "un-cleaning." The next clean-

ing service used our own cleaning products and left us notes about which supplies needed to be replenished. I fired them after getting a note that included the comment, "This house would be easier to clean if you got rid of those horrible cats."

My new cleaning service is much better. They pick up and dust everything, right down to the last knick-knack. And, like the Scholarly Gentleman, they put things back in the oddest places.

We still haven't found our vacuum cleaner. But I'm sure it's around here somewhere. And as long as they turn up to do the cleaning next Monday, I really don't care.

