

# OUR days



## Saved by the Grandchildren!

My housekeeping skills have always been atrocious. So sue me.

By Penina Pinchasi

“You know you’re my role model,” my friend Dina said one morning as she walked through my front door, skirted a pile of toys, tripped over a stack of books and almost lost her footing in a puddle of Cheerios and milk coagulating on the floor. Grabbing onto the table to steady herself, she removed several piles of laundry from one of the chairs and made herself comfortable.

“Your role model! What exactly for?”

“Because you’re the only person I know who could live in this perpetual mess and not let it bother her. I know I couldn’t.”

Sadly, this backhanded compliment is the only one I’ve ever received for my housekeeping skills since the day I was married...a very long time ago.

I had always been a rather untidy person but assumed that when I got married I would change; wouldn’t I *have* to? But it was my *mazal* to marry a man

whose idea of putting away clean clothes was to leave them neatly at the foot of his bed so he’d always know exactly where they were.

Nonetheless, all good things must come to an end, and once I year I was forced to confront my slovenly ways. In truth, I really used to love Pesach cleaning, if only for the fact that at least for a few days my house looked neat and I knew where all my possessions were. I also used to look forward to finding all those things that had inexplicably disappeared over the past year. My husband, though, always hated it, because all of a sudden his belongings were no longer where he had left them: on the chair, next to the unpaid bills, under the collection of old eyeglasses that haven’t been the right prescription in ten years, right next to the bag of nails that’s been sitting there since we took the *sukkah* down.

As for the “pleasure” of having all his undershirts in a single basket instead of

all over the bedroom, well, he doesn’t see it that way. “Now I have to sift through all of them to find the one I’m looking for. I liked it better the other way.”

With such a high level of appreciation for my efforts, why would I even want to improve my organizational skills? It’s not as if I’m being pressured to change.

Having a husband like this, though, does relieve me of any guilt I might otherwise feel. I’m sure a lot of chronically untidy wives would be eternally grateful to have a husband who doesn’t mind living in squalor, which I’m very good at creating. To me, however, it’s a sign that my fate is sealed. I will never emerge from my dark cave of self-inflicted chaos.

If not for the fact that we keep Shabbos and ostensibly clean the house in its honor (okay, at least the ground floor: living room, dining room and kitchen, whatever might be seen by visitors), we might never have known what the floor looks like. (It’s



## PEOPLE BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT MAYBE THEY HAD BEEN MISJUDGING OUR CHILDREN ALL THOSE YEARS.

hardwood.) My only basic standard is that by the time I light the Shabbos candles (usually at the last minute, due to my terrible housekeeping), the house has to look reasonable enough that a neighbor won't alert the authorities if the door inadvertently opens.

Talking about answering the door for visitors, I've learned a few tricks over the years. One must always answer the front doorbell with a broom in hand so it looks as if you were just about to clean the house. Another is to keep a big laundry basket in the living room so that if your mother-in-law or daughter-in-law calls and announces she's on her way over (G-d forbid), you can chuck 90 percent of all the stuff lying around into the hamper, quickly hide it in a bedroom and charge your children money to retrieve their belongings. Not only will your house look presentable in minutes but you can earn some money at the same time.

I'm a minimalist, as befits someone who doesn't rate housekeeping as one of the

Ten Commandments. If I haven't worn an item of clothing for a year, out it goes. There are plenty of people in the world who don't have the luxury of enough clothes, so why waste them on me? But as luck would have it, my husband is a "maximalist." (I might have just invented this term.) Somewhere on the top shelf of his workroom I'm sure he still has all his notebooks from high school. Sweaters that will never fit him again (and even if they did he wouldn't wear them) still litter his wardrobe, "just in case."

My sons-in-law should be very appreciative of my habits. It's only because my daughters grew up in this house that you can eat off the floors of their spotless homes. Their fastidiousness is definitely a reaction to their childhood environment, and I'm really proud of them. I just hope the pendulum doesn't swing back with their own daughters, who will be just as determined to have a house as diametrically opposed to their mother's as possible.

When my children were little I was more or less forgiven the mess, as it was assumed that it was their fault, and I never bothered to dissuade anyone of the notion. But when our last daughter got married and not even a shoelace was picked up, people began to realize that maybe they had been misjudging our children all those years.

Then, just as I began to worry that I'd have to start mending my ways or face the embarrassment of owning up to my messy habits, along came the grandchildren! And G-d bless them too, as they are an ever-multiplying commodity, and far more of them than the number of children I ever gave birth to.

So now, whenever I open the front door with broom in hand (still the same one, as it doesn't get much wear and tear) and my visitor looks around in disbelief, I just say, "No matter how much of a mess they make, grandchildren are such a blessing, *bli ayin hara!* Don't you think?" ■