

### Creative Clutter or Untidy House [1]

by: [MaryAnn Smucker](#) [2]

“And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” Psalm 90:17.

It was one of those balmy summer mornings when the sun shone brightly and the green grass was beckoning the children to come out and play. Fresh breezes drifted in through the open windows and the singing of birds filled the morning air. Meanwhile, in our school room, the table was in disarray, with bits and pieces of paper, rubber stamps, and a variety of markers, cutters, and glue all scattered around, since we had been making homemade greeting cards. Along the edge of the kitchen counter, my son had all his farm animals lined up as if in a parade, and on the other side of the kitchen there was another display of trucks and tractors. Playing farm in the kitchen where Mom was working seemed to be his favorite past-time.

I had the kitchen table cluttered with fabric, patterns, scissors, fabric weights, and markers as I was preparing to sew summer dresses for my five daughters. Before long I was busily cutting them out. As usual, when I cut dresses, I was allowing the scraps to fall to the floor, to be picked up later on once I was finished. This offered my daughters a great opportunity, since they loved to pick through those fabric pieces, looking for something they could use to make a cap for their dolls or as a gift wrapping for a small present to give to one of their siblings.

It was in the middle of all this “creative clutter” that a dear friend dropped by. As I quickly glanced at my surroundings I hesitated to have someone walk into my house when it appeared so “untidy.” There was no time to clean up and organize the mess so I greeted her at the door and invited her in. Since I was still feeling embarrassed by the mess, I began making apologies for my “untidy house.” Suddenly, I felt smitten. By apologizing for the creative mess in my house, I was indicating that our homes should always give an appearance of everything being in its proper place.

I remembered a choice I had made about fifteen years earlier, when I had been doing a weekly cleaning job for a good friend of ours. She was a sweet, loving mother whose husband insisted on a tidy house and saw to it that she had the necessary help to keep it that way. They didn’t have a large house, but it was the parlor that left an impression on me. Every week, I needed to polish all the furniture in the parlor, clean the large oversized windows that looked out over the backyard, and the patio doors that beckoned one to relax on the large balcony. The hardwood floors also needed to be shined and the large area rug vacuumed.

The room seemed perfect – at least it felt that way to me. A fireplace along the one wall spoke of cozy family evenings. The furniture was neatly placed so that everyone could relax and enjoy reading books together or have great times of family togetherness. The large patio doors allowed sunshine to enter the room giving it a cheery appearance. Nothing ever seemed out of place there. In fact, the room had such a neat appearance that it scarcely seemed worth my time to clean. It felt as though I was merely performing a weekly ritual.

One day I learned that the children were not allowed in that room unless the family was hosting company. This room was for guest accommodations only, which seldom occurred. How

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could such a lovely room be closed off from the family's enjoyment? It was then that I made a choice. I decided then and there, that if the Lord ever blessed me with a family, I would want my home to be a place where good memories could be made. A place where we could enjoy normal household chores, do science experiments, play games, read books, and relax together – a place where we could live. I wanted my house to have a lived-in feel, which could be enjoyed by family and friends.

Many years have passed since that day and I have continued to draw my own conclusions about having a tidy house. I have come to realize that there is a difference between being a careless, sloppy housekeeper or one whose house is a creative mess because her family lives there.

I am always intrigued by a creative mess. It speaks to me of a family living together, doing projects together, doing experiments together, even cooking and baking together. Now this morning when my friend dropped by, I was making apologies for the mess. I couldn't believe what I had just done and felt smitten in my heart. My attitude was no different than my friend's whose children could never play in the parlor.

While there is a proper time to clean the house, tidy drawers, and organize closets and shelves, there is always the need to leave room for a creative clutter. A time when the house is not always tidy since our family lives there. We read books, kick off shoes, play with toys, cook, bake, and eat. Then there is the laundry – if you would step into our house on laundry day, you would see laundry baskets of clothes, ironing waiting to be done, and piles of laundry still needing to be washed.

Does our creative clutter hinder us from being hospitable? Are we embarrassed when our friends see our counters, tables, or rooms all cluttered with some sort of creative project? Let us never be ashamed in these situations. Sometimes, in fact, I have discovered our guests seem to be more comfortable in the midst of a creative clutter than if our home would be completely tidy, with everything neatly in place.

At the same time, there is also a need to teach our children to clean up after themselves. There is so much that they can do to help keep the house in order, which includes sweeping floors, wiping counters, dusting furniture, doing dishes and folding laundry. As we include the children in these chores it will be a means of keeping our house tidy. But, when we are working together in the kitchen, we should not be afraid of the creative clutter – dishes strewn across the counters, flour spilled on the floors, and little ones with sticky fingers.

Remember, you have been cooking and baking together – making memories. If someone drops in on you in the midst of this creative mess, welcome them into your house and be sure to tell them that you and the children have been enjoying your time together cooking.

If we find ourselves feeling frustrated by an untidy house, maybe it is time to check our attitudes and do an evaluation on whether our house really is untidy or whether it merely has that “lived-in” appearance – a place where we can feel at home as a family, relax together, and enjoy one another. With it in this condition, I think we should feel good about welcoming guests in and allowing them to feel at home in the same way our family does.

Being a keeper at home and a joyful mother of children takes a personal commitment and sacrifice. As we yield ourselves to the Lordship of Christ and allow Him to radiate from our

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lives, we find ourselves taking on new perspectives about life. Colossians 3:13 encourages us in that “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him”. When we do this, He gives us grace to enjoy our daily “creative clutter”.

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