

Milk, House Plants, Colored Pens, Single Egg Cup

By: Zoë Fahy, HopeSource
May 6, 2014

The title of this month's column is taken directly from the receipt of one of my recent trips to buy milk. I'd say I regret buying everything that comes after "milk" on that list. Shocking, I know. As adorable as that egg cup is, I can't say that my quality of life has improved much now that my soft-boiled egg has a tiny porcelain pedestal.

This receipt is a shining example of impulsive shopping. Evidence of our impulsive nature is piled up all around us — from the lone egg cup on the shelf to the countless items filling our basements and closets. While it's hard to own up to foolish purchases, the harsh reality is that you don't need anything that spends the majority of its time in the basement. Even if it's bought on sale, it's never a good deal if you end up buying something you don't need.

Studies show that the snow-blowers and specialty cake pans that huddle in the darkest corners of our house cause far more stress than happiness. After all, clutter is hard work — it demands to be organized, cleaned and stored.

If you could go back and undo all of those purchases and put the money in a savings account, how much would you have right now? How much time have you spent moving and maintaining things that have not improved your life?

Craigslist and EBay are great ways to hit the "undo" button, simplify your life and spend more time with the people you love. To stop clutter at the source, ask yourself these questions before you make a purchase:

- How many hours will I have to work to pay for this?
- Can I borrow one?
- What will it cost me in time and energy to maintain?
- Can I buy it secondhand?
- Can I reuse something I already have?
- Will I get a lot of use out of this?
- Can I afford it?
- If your answer is "yes," wait 48 hours. If you still feel sure after 48 hours, buy it.

Zoë Fahy serves as the financial literacy coordinator at HopeSource in Ellensburg through the Washington Service Corps.