

NINNA KIEL NIELSEN

WIPE YOUR SLATE!

CLEANING • UP • WILL • SET • YOU • FREE

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Ninna Kiel Nielsen asserts her moral rights
to be identified as the author of this book

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Welcome to the preview of “Wipe Your Slate” by Ninna Kiel Nielsen. These are the first chapters in the book, and if you would like to buy it, it’s available on Amazon:

<http://www.amazon.com/Wipe-Your-Slate-Ninna-Nielsen/dp/879966111X>

The book also have a home page:
www.wipeyourslate.com

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WIPE YOUR SLATE!

My thanks...

A big thank you to my sweet and funny son, who, with his fantastic as well as odd and quirky sense of humour, has supported, criticised, pushed and forced me through this process. Stefan, you are a brilliant sparring partner.

Also a big thank you to my long time friend Brigit O'Connell, who volunteered to translate this whole thing into understandable English – and never knew what hit her! I know, that is has been a challenge to make it my words, and I am forever in debt to you – which I dont mind!

Cleaning up
your **'stuff'**
and
your
finances
will
calm your
mind,
and
set you
free

to concentrate on what
you really want to do
so you can reach
your aimed for goals

WIPE YOUR SLATE!

Let me introduce myself.

I am neither a life coach nor a psychologist, but I have written this book, because I have gone through a process, that I didn't recognize as such until I was almost half way through. I want to share my experience with everybody who may be in a similar situation.

This is not a self help book. It won't teach you to visualize success while sitting on your couch. There are no tests with answer sheets. It is a book outlining my experience of the chain reaction started by doing 'something', and ending with good results. You get peace in your life by cleaning up in your own 'shop', and come to realize what you actually need and like.

There are challenges posed by a project like this, and there will be further challenges, even when you have achieved the result you wanted. Because then, there will be no excuses left for not acting on all the ideas that have been buzzing around in your

head, but couldn't break free because you were too busy living the way you do now.

Most live our lives covered by a thick blanket of unreality hiding what is important for us, because we have never consciously made up our minds about what our personal values are. Once you know what you stand for, you can make life a lot easier for yourself. So why not find out what your honest deep values are, and perhaps make life simpler and easier for yourself – a better quality life.

This is a book meant to challenge. A book to inspire or maybe challenge you to live an easier life.

Because you influence everything happening around you with:

- **the things you say;**
- **the things you do;**
- **the way you live;**
- **your home and your possessions;**
- **your finances;**
- **the people you see;**
- **the work you do; and**
- **the goals you want to reach.**

But why did I hit this "live a simple life and find out what you really need"-road?

Because I had a problem that prevented me from breaking out of a deadlock, and was in a situation that had taken all power away from me. This process sent me on a 'journey' that I hadn't foreseen, and I want to share this, because life should be lived, not fought.

So what can you do?

You can start inside **your own door,**
so hang on and

WIPE YOUR SLATE



WIPE YOUR SLATE!

My story

We all have areas in our lives which pull us down. Small scale or big scale. It could be finances, family relations (I am talking negative relations), work related problems, home or possessions, but when you start cleaning up in one area, other areas will follow. When you start feeling in charge of one area that used to weigh you down, you gain the power to go further. One action sets in motion another action.

A hoarder was created.

My problem was things. Lots and lots of things. I 'drowned' in my possessions. I was choking! Physically and mentally, because I had kept everything I had been given and acquired, without questioning any of it. I carried too much of the past, and was living so much in the future (read: planning what I should do when I got the time) that I forgot to be in the present.

It started when I was a child.

I was 7 years old. It was my mother's birthday, and she had invited all her girlfriends for coffee. One of them brought a very special gift for me. A little pink and gold coffee cup filled with chocolate caramels wrapped in tulle and closed with a big bow. It was so little-girl-pretty, and I was excited! It went right up on my shelf – together with another small cup which my mother found in her cabinet. It was a cup that had been given to her, when she was a child. A white and cold cup with "The Sweet Girl" written on it.

During the following 6 month period of one Christmas, one Easter, and my own birthday, it became apparent to everybody who visited us that I collected small coffee cups, so the collection kept growing, and before the story about my collection mania had been 'killed', I was the owner of 26 different cups! Eight years old!

Eventually, I got tired of dusting the cups and keeping my friends from touching them, and told my mother that I would rather not have the cups sitting out in the open anymore. My mother didn't know that her answer would make a lasting impression on me. She said: "But Darling, what do you think all the nice people who have given you the cups will think when they come here and see that you didn't appreciate them?"

But I did appreciate them! And I didn't want to make anyone sad or disappointed over having given me something, that I just wanted to put in a box in the basement making me look ungrateful. I

wasn't ungrateful. I was just a little girl, who didn't like dusting, and who certainly had never planned to collect coffee cups. That episode gave birth to my hoarder trait.

GUILTY conscience

I am absolutely sure my mother didn't intend this, but the effect was that for too many years I kept gift that I

hadn't wanted;

didn't want to use or display; and

didn't have the heart to return, for fear of disappointing the person who had given it to me,

and kept things

which would only take up space in drawers and cabinets; and

which I kept moving around my house from one place to another without any joy.

The hoarder was born!

My parents and grandparents had lived through the Second World War, and that had taught them to save everything, because almost everything was in short supply, and those shortages lasted for several years after the war had ended. In those days, you knew that you would probably have a use for things which today we simply throw out. So I saw how every piece of string, every rubber band, and every piece of wrapping paper were saved. Both my mother and my grandmother ironed – yes, ironed – Christmas gift wrap, so it could be re-used the following year. Even today, I find it difficult to rip nice wrapping paper when I get a gift.

But I couldn't go on saving all these things. **Something had to happen!**

At that point, I had no idea what was weighing me down, so I ran in circles to get done all the things I thought I should do. With all the duties and obligations I had to live up to, I suffered from a permanent bout of guilty conscience. The duties took charge of me. Without being obsessive about it, I was still overwhelmed by the cleaning of my house and my things. Due to all the things I had collected, it was never done as well as I wanted it to be, because it was so time consuming. I had hundreds of projects on the go that I never finished. I could never relax, because there was always something I had to do.

I spent a lot of time looking for things that I couldn't find when I needed them. When I finally found them, either they were too small, too big, wrong, ruined, wrinkled or out of fashion. So I bought new things, nice things, cute things, modern things, but none of this changed the inner turmoil, and I bought these things in spite of not having the money to do so.

I was never at peace with myself to be in exactly the place, where I was physically. I was always planning a couple of hours, a couple

of days, or a couple of weeks into the future. I became an expert in 'panic rescues' and was the owner of endless post-it reminders and to-do lists. I never enjoyed being where I was, because my thoughts were always somewhere else – far off in the future. I was not 'present'.

At some point, when the situation felt really chaotic, my son had a birthday party, and we took photos. My son also took some the next day after the clean-up, and it was before digital cameras, so I didn't see the photos until a couple of weeks later – and I had a shock. It was a wake-up call of gigantic proportions! The 'after' photos looked as if the party was still going on. Stuff everywhere. Furniture everywhere. The photos showed that I was drowning in things. It suddenly became obvious that I had collected like a pack rat. I had saved everything that I had been given or bought through all my adult life, which at that point was approximately 20 years! I had never thrown anything away. I had said yes to everything other people wanted to get rid of, and in which I could see possibilities. I had aimlessly bought things. I could furnish at least 4 family homes. I carried too much old baggage. My home didn't meet the needs for the life I lived, or rather, wanted to live.

It was a very, very tough experience for me. I, who loved magazines with photos of beautifully furnished, functional homes with quality designed furniture. I had not been able to see that I had turned my home into a storage area for both good and bad old mementos and things of different sorts and quality. Everything from small pieces furniture to books and vases. I cannot enumerate them. There was everything – I literally lived in a flea market.

I was shaken to the core, and then relief flooded me. One photo had made it clear what had happened, and it took a whole night and the next day to digest it.

Right then and there I decided that I wouldn't own more than a bed, a beautiful dining/working table, 8 comfortable chairs, 7 sets of clothes (one for each day of the week), 2 pairs of shoes, one hand bag and a really cool wristwatch!

When revelations like this occur, it is easy to become obsessed. When I realized that I had to disown what I had done all my adult life, it took a while before I found the golden mean, and the end result wasn't quite as drastic as described above, but almost. And I have to admit that those totally strict limitations still occasionally pop into my head.

When I observed my whole life from this sort of bird's eye view, and not least my everyday life, I had to admit that nobody had twisted my arm to make me live the way I had done – not even my parents or grandparents. It was all me! The small coffee cups may have been the start, just maybe, but I was the cause. Nobody forced me.

Who had collected all my belongings?
 Who decided what I should do?
 Who made me feel those obligations?
 Who had given me the guilty conscience?

ME! – Nobody else!

It is a bit shattering to admit that I was so busy, only because I had constructed my day to day life, so as to make me feel like a bee in a bottle. That my home was furnished and decorated in a way which made it difficult to keep clean and neat. That I had made a lot of commitments, which I didn't actually have the time to fulfil, but had taken on because I am a helpful people pleasing soul, who didn't take the time to help myself. Because it is so much easier to help other people. It is always easier to see the

solution to other people's problems. But I didn't realize that the bustle was just as much in my head as in my home. The anxiety I felt every time I had tried to clear some space created a noise in my head, because I was only moving things around. I never accomplished getting rid of anything, for which, in reality, I had no use. But now I understood: The noise in my head was directly related to the quantity of things I had stored in the few square meters of my home.

It was a surreal experience to stand in front of the mirror and recognize that it was my own choices, not any outside influences that had gotten me to where I was. I could only point at myself. So then the question was: How should I start changing my life? Where should I begin?

The answer came fast: I wanted to start with something that I thought I could handle. Something physical. Something visible. I would start changing my home, so I could gain some perspective and control my home environment.

“Operation Big Purge” started! I began with a really firm hand – the method is simple, it hurts, it is absolutely possible and I will write about it later – and the result is fantastic. I got so much ‘air’ in my surroundings that I just had to continue. I had started a physical and mental avalanche. I cleaned and cleared my home, my way of life, and as a result, my head. I found out what should fill my life, and what wasn't functioning anymore.

Today my home is the place where I get my energy, before I leave for the outside world. My home is also the place I return to at night without getting overwhelmed by all the things I must do. But when cleaning up just things could have that effect, what would happen, if I took control in other areas?

What **else** could I clean up and out?

- My finances Where did I spend money on something which wasn't necessary, and which didn't give me pleasure?
- My shopping habits Did I ever think about, how much I bought that wasn't on my shopping list
- My routines Did I do things that simply had no purpose?
- My daily life Did I just complicate it for myself?

Yes, and **everything** was
picked up,
tossed and
turned.

So I took apart my life and put it back together. Turned it into something much simpler, much more functional, a lot less time consuming, freer, and much more wonderful!

Now this sounds like quite a big mouthful, and it was. Because until you tear down the wall, it is difficult. But once it is down, it becomes a sport. You can 'smell blood' – or fresh morning air – your choice. And it works! Even if it just starts with a physical clean up and out of things.

A lot of crucial questions popped up. Questions I had never asked myself, because my head had no room for them, and which gave me a queasy stomach, because I had forgotten to be myself. I had forgotten to be authentic, to recognize my own values, and to live by them. It is so easy to forget to be true to oneself.

In the middle of my cleaning out I found a newspaper article I had saved for many years without ever thinking about it, but it must have 'spoken' to me at a very early stage. I just hadn't listened. It is about 'The Dream of the Empty Room'. It is all about how we cannot get enough stuff. We fill our homes with things that make us feel safe. We collect, hide and bond with everything from pots and pans to decorative objects. If there is a space on the wall, we immediately find something to fill it.

I had that confirmed a couple of years ago, when I had my kitchen completely renovated. Not because I wanted it fashionable, but because the old one was falling apart! Renovating one area invariably leads to unforeseen needs to do the same in others, so I couldn't stop at just the kitchen. I lived in an open space apartment, so when I got a new floor in the kitchen section, I also had to get one in the living room.

I decided that now everything was already a mess, I might just as well paint the living room, while nothing was in its right place anyway. It did not really need painting, but then it would be done. A lot of stuff had to go into my 12 square metre bedroom, and the things – and I – were stuck for a couple of days. Never have so many things been stored in such a small place. But I was already an expert at that. A lot of the furniture stood on end, including a big sofa, and I got a lot of exercise crawling in and out in order to find my bed.

So on a sunny Saturday I painted the living room. A good friend came over with a 'reward'-cake, and there was no space for it anywhere but in the empty room. So I set up a

couple of chairs in front of the big window and our coffee cups in the window sill. We talked about what a big job it was to renovate, especially 2 rooms at the same time in a relatively small apartment. My friend got a little absent, and all of sudden she said: "What a wonderful peaceful room this is! There is nothing here to disturb."

I felt as if somebody had shaken my brains into place, because the first thing that popped into my head was the plan I had, when I was still living with my parents. The plan for how I would live, when I moved out. Because in my childhood home I was surrounded by collectors. I had had the dream about the big room with the big window, the gigantic bed with white bed linen, a big green plant, a telephone and a closet for my things. What else would I need? A place with a roof, heat, a bed, and the ability to stay in contact with family and friends. That was what I would need. The longing had obviously been there from start. I had just chosen not to listen to myself. I had been the nice girl, who said 'yes, thank you' for all the things I would rather have been without. I didn't need to own them, even if they were good things.

So while I was cleaning out, I thought about how exciting it would be to have an empty home, walk into a room and ask oneself: What do I really need? What does it take to make me function optimally. Would I go straight to Ikea, to an expensive designer store, or to a flea market to 'build a home'? Or would I just walk in, close the door and take my time to find out, what I really wanted, without any outside influence at all. Looking back now, I have no doubt about what I should have done:

I would need a bed with a duvet, pillows and bed linen.

I have to have showers or baths, so I would need towels.

I have to get dressed, so I would have 7 top to toe outfits – one for each day of the week. For now, forget about fashion. We are talking bare necessities.

The next thing would be a big table with at least eight chairs – where I could work and dine with my loved ones.

I would need to cook, so a pot, a knife, some plates, glasses and cutlery – not a lot of gadgets. Just the stuff needed to create a good meal.

What comes next? A comfy chair or a sofa ... but then we already get to whether that is necessary. Comfortable yes, but necessary? Can you make do with a bed, a table and a chair? And how would that feel? Stressful or liberating?

I can only speak for myself. It would be liberating and honest. And that was how it turned out, but only after a long fight, and it wasn't quite as simple as described above. Very close though.

Douglas Coupland in "Generation X" expresses it like this:

**"I have the need for less in my life
Less past.
We store, save for seasons, save for
bad times, save.
We have 10.000 of square feet of
malls and shops.
Why?
How much do we need?"**

The above was written in 1991, and is more relevant than ever. We consume more than we could ever have imagined in the early '90s. We would do better to think more quality and much less quantity.

WIPE YOUR SLATE!

A Childhood Memory

In my adult life I have questioned, why I feel the need to live in a minimized environment, and today I know that it is easier for me to feel good about a few good things rather than many things. I can easily do without the quantity, which just produces confusion, noise and extra work.

This has made me think of a childhood girlfriend.

I once had quite a large extended family, who loved to give present, and since I liked dolls, I was given new ones almost every Christmas and birthday. One day my brother and I had a contest to see, if he had more model planes than I had dolls. I cannot remember who won, but I do remember that my brother's count was 40 dolls! From the 1 inch doll to the very big glass doll. All these dolls had beds and prams, clothes and accessories, so the equipment was in order.

When I was 8, my family moved to a new town and into quite

a new building right next to a very old one. The old building was poorly maintained and in a very bad state. Linda lived there with her mother, father, and an older sister. We were the same age and quickly found each other in the back yard, where we played daily after school. When the weather was bad, we played at my place, because Linda didn't want me to come to her home. But I finally did, and then I understood why she hadn't wanted to bring me there. I didn't come from a wealthy background, but neither did we go without anything at home. Here, for the first time in my life, I saw a family struggling to keep things together.

Linda shared a room with her big sister, but not in quite the same nice way my brother and I did. The room was very small, and there was only space for a dresser with six drawers, a bunk bed, a small mirror, and a coat rack hanging on the door. That was all. Linda's clothes were in the two lower drawers, her sister's in the next two, and then the girls each had one drawer for their personal belongings. Only one drawer for all the personal things! Toys, poetry books, glossy pictures, dolls. Everything!

Linda had one doll, and she loved it! I didn't feel like that at all. I had dolls I didn't care about at all, and I had dolls that I liked, but I didn't love any of them.

We also played a lot with paper dolls, and they evoked the same feelings. I didn't know how many I had, but I had a lot. Linda had three. One, which was almost worn to pieces, and two that her sister had drawn for her. I understood why she appreciated the paper dolls her sister had made. They were special and made for her alone.

Today I understand that those feelings were a kind of jealousy. Jealousy over being able to appreciate one special thing. I didn't appreciate my things, because I simply had too many. Jealousy is not a nice feeling, and luckily not something from which I normally

suffer, but I was jealous of Linda's serenity about having just a few things, that made her really happy. I had lots of things, which didn't mean all that much to me, because there were just too many.

When I had to set some parameters for my cleaning, the realization of where I wanted to go with my need for getting unimportant things out of my life made the memory of Linda stand out clearly. For me, wealth has nothing to do with quantity. It is all about being surrounded by things I need.

WIPE YOUR SLATE!

Enough about me - your turn!

Let us start with something common to all of us, and the most important 'thing' in the world: People.

Without other people we are nothing – no matter the relationship we have, no matter how irritating or wonderful they are, no matter how close or distant to each other. We mirror each other, we relate to other people's successes and failures. We see ourselves in them and the reverse. All this makes us who we are. The

„It is written in a highly humorous tone of voice and lively prose, which actually inspires you to clean up your things, economy and relations...
[Danish] Psychology Monthly

This is the end of the preview of „Wipe Your Slate” by Ninna Kiel Nielsen. We hope you like what you have read, and if you are interested in buying the book, it's available on Amazon:
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Also visit the home page of the book:
www.wipeyourslate.com