

Inundated with paperwork

Paperwork is taking over my life. I was thinking the other day that when new babies are born in America, instead of sending them home with a bag full of formula and diaper samples, perhaps it would be more helpful to send them home with a file cabinet and a handful of folders.

My two sons, ages 2 and 4, already generate an incredible amount of paperwork.

Of course, in the beginning were the hospital forms, the insurance forms, the waivers and permissions. Soon after the boys arrived, we signed them up for Social Security numbers (the root of all paperwork). Generous grandparents established investment accounts for them, my husband and I established savings accounts for them, and then, of course, there are the numerous documents verifying the state of their health and immunization status for day care.

And my sons are only beginners in this paper chase.

As grownups, my husband and I are entitled to the stacks of papers associated with mortgages, refinancing, bank accounts, bill of every shape and size, health insurance enrollment forms and claim forms, tax forms, retirement forms ... you know the rest.

When did life become contingent on filling out the appropriate paperwork?

We have a room in our home set aside as the office for conducting the business of the household. I haven't been able to vacuum in there for years because of the mounds of paperwork covering every flat surface, including



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the floor. On the top of the piles are the papers requiring immediate attention, bills, etc.

At the bottom of the piles are the "someday-I'll-have-the-time-to-take-care-of-it" documents.

For example, all the money gurus say, "Order your credit report once a year and make sure it's up to date." Does any working American parent really have the time to do this? On my list, it's right up there

with "flossing your teeth every day" as a goal I can dream about but will probably never achieve.

Of course, some of this I bring upon myself. It would be fair to say I am a compulsive saver of paper. I read a couple of newspapers a day and my dining room table is stacked with articles and special sections I tear out and set aside because I might want to reference them again in the future. (Of course, that presumes I can find them in the future, the chances of which are reduced by the fact I have piles of unfiled newspaper clippings stacked around my office.)

I have managed to organize some of my paperwork. The day-care facility my boys attend sends home daily notes that tell me how their

days went. The infant-room notes include such details as how many ounces of mil they drank at any particular time of day and when they filled their diapers. So, if you ask me how many times my eldest son pooped on Feb. 13, 1998, I can actually whip out my three-ring binder and tell you.

In an aberration that may have something to do with my being a pack rat, it is not department stores that send me into a shopping frenzy, but office supply stores. I love to walk into those big, bright, clean stores filled with file folders, file cabinets, labels, magazine boxes, three-hole punches, ring binders and all the other tools one needs to wrestle life's paperwork into some form of order.

Maybe that's the appeal of an office supply store – the promise that if you just own enough of these tools of organization, you will somehow be able to control the chaos that is your life, including the whirlwind of paperwork.

Someday I'll get my life organized. Maybe I'll spend my retirement years catching up on my filing, including the day-care notes that I've once again fallen behind in organizing.

For now, if I manage to find the bills so that I can pay them on time, I guess I'll call that good enough.

Tracy Hume of Greeley is a happily married working mother of two sons and is a member of the new Colorado Voices panel that debuts this month. Applications for Colorado Voices are accepted in February.