

But That's a Family Heirloom...

By Frances Strong



Growing up, there were many times that my grandmother would scold my brother and me for not taking care of things properly; whether it was putting our feet up on the couch, or leaving a cold glass of water, dripping with perspiration on the table, she watched us like a hawk! Now, this might tell you a few things about my very English granny, but in fairness to her, she was simply trying to take care of things that she considered to be family heirlooms.

In fact, it became a bit of an inside joke for us kids. We sniggered behind our hands as we helped out with polishing the silver and shining the brass ornaments that lined every available surface of her cluttered home, too young to consider the consequences of so much *stuff* when the time would inevitably come for her to downsize; from house to apartment, to a single room in a rest home; what to do with the possessions of a lifetime?

Unfortunately, these days there is little value in my granny's precious heirlooms. Unless they were antique aficionados or canny art collectors, whose pieces might still raise some money at auction, the furniture and decorative items that our grandparents (or even our parents) loved, are actually worth very little. Worse, the sturdy, mass-produced household items most of them accumulated are not generally wanted either. In years gone by, solid oak tables, fancy walnut chairs, brass bed frames and the like were passed from generation to generation, eagerly accepted by younger members of the family with little regard for the aesthetic and much more emphasis on their practical use. The sad truth is, there was nothing that I truly wanted from my grandparents' house.

Nowadays, we have a world of options available, many of which are designed with a minimalist bent, all smooth lines and wipe-clean surfaces with no requirement for beeswax or periodic coats of varnish. Furniture has become so much more affordable and, while it might not be sturdy enough to pass between generations, it is practical, functional and cheap enough to be replaceable.

Furthermore, with property prices at a premium, people are constantly downsizing; smaller

homes with less space for display, the emphasis on light and airy, rather than warm and cozy. Money is spent on experiences, rather than things. With longer working hours and fewer instances of extended families sharing the same house, homes are seen as a place to rest between work and trips, constantly decluttered and cleared out to free up valuable space.

House clearance firms continue to rise in popularity. As many of us now live at greater distances from our families, they are often a necessary resource to draw on. With perhaps a day or two to look through the possessions amassed during a lifetime, we can pick out a few items of sentimental value to remember the life lived in that once bustling family home, but the majority of people simply don't have room in their homes to bring away more than just a few keepsakes. The house clearers come in and remove everything, for a fee. Some firms, like Junk to Clear here in Singapore, will recycle everything that they can and distribute useful items to needy families.

As a mother of three, I am conscious of the amount of paraphernalia we are accumulating and I understand more my own mom's waves of sentiment as she stuffs my old toys in the attic rather than the donation box, unable to let go of the emotions and memories they evoke. I will have to deal with it all myself someday; I don't think it will be pretty. But for now, I will smile as she puts them away. They are family heirlooms, after all...

Useful websites

junktoclear.com.sg visit the website for an online quote

www.karang-guni.com book your slot and they will collect your unwanted items at your convenience

Originally from a tiny seaside town in the UK, Frances has called Singapore home since 2011. Five years later, she's still exploring the Little Red Dot and loves to find new and quirky places to wow her visitors. When she's not playing taxi driver for her three children, she likes to write about travel, motherhood, food, life...and anything in between.



Where Does Singapore's Garbage Go?

By Bill Poorman

Imagine this: You dump your garbage down your kitchen chute or into your rubbish cart. What sound do you hear? A crash? What if, instead, you heard a splash... a splash into the ocean? Because, in Singapore, that's essentially what happens to any household waste you don't recycle.

Singapore is, of course, an island, which means it has always had limited space for garbage dumps. In fact, the last landfill, later developed into the Lorong Halus Wetland, closed in 1999. All of Singapore's non-recycled waste now goes to high-tech incinerator plants, where it's burned into ash, reducing the volume of the garbage by 90%. The heat from the burning is used to generate electricity, and the smokestack emissions get scrubbed of toxins. After metals are pulled out, the ash is then barged out to Semakau Island, not far offshore from Sentosa.

Today's Semakau Island was originally two islands that were inhabited by fishing families. Those families were relocated to Singapore proper, and the two islands were linked by artificial berms, isolating part of the ocean into a series of ponds. Semakau Landfill, as it's known, began accepting solid waste the day after the dump at Lorong Halus closed. But it didn't take long for those first ponds to fill up, so an expansion of one large pond was built. It opened two years ago. The ash from the incinerator plants is poured into that pond. Any water that is displaced is treated before being returned to the ocean. This is where your non-recyclable garbage finally comes to a rest. From your dustbin to the briny deep.

Singapore estimates that Semakau Landfill should have enough capacity to last until at least 2035. But if the government and other groups are successful in their efforts, it should last a lot longer than that.

Because Singapore is a modern, developed nation, the amount of garbage it produces has been growing dramatically. According to the National Environment Agency (NEA), Singapore used to produce 1,260 tons of waste per day back in 1970. As of 2015, it produced 8,402 tons per day. To counter this, the government launched the National Recycling Program in 2001,

which it has continued to expand. For example, since 2011, garbage companies have been required to have one recycling bin per HDB block. A civil society group, Zero Waste SG, is also working to educate people on reducing the amount of waste they produce to begin with. Private companies are even in on the act. To counter the amount of garbage coming from electronic devices (so-called e-waste), Starhub, Singtel and other corporations offer collection bins and services for consumers and businesses. The Singapore government is even working with hotels to reduce the amount of food waste.

Altogether, the NEA reports these efforts added up to a 61% overall recycling rate for Singapore in 2015. Much of that is industrial in nature, though, like construction debris, metal and wood. Only about half of paper was recycled. Only about a fifth of glass was recycled. Recycling of plastic was in the single digits. According to the NEA, Singapore households only recycle 19% of their waste. That's actually down a couple of points from 2010 and well below the government's target of 30% by 2030.

Back on Semakau Island, Singapore is making the best of the garbage situation. The filled portions of the island have been converted into nature areas. You can even schedule a visit if you are part of a group for bird watching and other sports activities. Now that's some recycling.

For further information

www.nea.gov.sg/energy-waste

www.zerowastesg.com

Bill Poorman is a part-time writer who, for the last several years, has been a full-time member of the unpaid economy – that is, he's been a stay-at-home dad, raising two boys. The family moved to Singapore just over a year ago for his wife's job. Prior to all of that, Bill was a radio journalist and media producer.

Photos courtesy of National Environment Agency



Replanted mangroves at Semakau Landfill



Aerial view of Semakau Landfill Phase II