

Changing LIVES

New Year's resolutions are usually a joke. So we gave three people battling to change their lives some expert assistance – and checked up on them later to see if they reached their goals. Interviews by Sue Williams

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE BACCON



To clean up my act

The client: Lynne Wilding, 59, novelist.

Her resolution: to clean up the house.

The expert: de-clutterer Carol Posener of Get Organised!

Lynne says: We've got a very big house with four bedrooms, a rumpus room, a family room and a storeroom. The bigger the house, however, the more places you can find for things. Especially as we've been here nearly 28 years. Every cupboard is jam-packed full of stuff.

The room I use as my study is packed with photos that have been waiting to go into albums for at least two years, slides and Super-8 film that we've never got around to putting on video. I wrote about 12 manuscripts before I first got published with *The Sheikh*. I've still got them all – as well as the manuscripts, edited versions, notes, copies and so on, of the five that have now been published. I really can't imagine why I'd ever need those! I've still got lots of stuff around the room from my last book, *Turn Left At Bindi Creek*, even though I'm halfway through my next manuscript.

I have to finish that soon so now I keep finding excuses not to sort out all the other manuscripts and then think about de-cluttering the house. But now I realise it is a problem. I never have much room to move

and we might want to move to a smaller house one day, too. Then there's this idea that by de-cluttering, you free up your creativity, too. I like the sound of that.

Carol told us a lot of people never get started on de-cluttering their homes because there's so much to do, they don't know where to start.

She started on our pantry. Now it's much tidier – we threw away half a garbage bag of out-of-date and mouldy food. It's also much better organised, with pastas together and things you use a lot on eye-level shelves instead of the ones you have to get down on your knees to see. It feels great and was surprisingly quick and easy.

Carol said if you waited until you had a whole day to do something like that, you never would. Far better to just spend an hour or two on one task, or one room, and get that up to scratch, rather than doing everything all at once.

I'm a bit of a hoarder but my husband John will say, "Don't throw that away, we might need it in 100 years!" For instance, I've still got the cutlery set with the pearl handles I ruined by putting them in hot water. I thought one day I might have new handles put on or get them fixed up. But why? I've already got two other canteens of cutlery. I'm now going to throw them away.

She suggested if I even do an hour a week, that will make a difference. I'm now determined to go through the house. In just my first week, I've done a lot. I've

been trying to clear out the storeroom a bit at a time. I've got things like my mother's purse and glasses and scarf she used to wear to the hairdresser's.

She's been gone 10 years but I can't let those go. Carol told me to get a little memorabilia box and put in those precious things.

And all my fat clothes from before I lost weight. I know I'm never going to need any of those things.

Now, Carol has taught me to ask myself, "Is this thing I want to keep really necessary?" and "Do I get something out of keeping it?" If not, it goes. Although, I probably won't even mention most of the things I throw out to John.

Carol says: Lynne wasn't too bad but she had rooms that were a mess and cupboards that you could barely open. Most people have at least one area of their lives they need de-cluttered but they just don't know how to start it, or they don't have time to keep on top of the mess, with kids to look after or businesses to run.

It's really good, then, to call in an expert to give you advice on how to streamline your life. It's kind of like having a buddy in to help. The idea is just to tackle an area at a time and break it down, even if it's just two hours a week. It's good to sort out mess so you know what you have, you get rid of the rubbish and things you don't want and you have space for new stuff. It's very liberating. It's usually a load off people's minds.