



Silver Linings: What Lies Beneath?

Hoarding Clean Up Yields 50 Year Old Buried Treasure

By Susan Borax

Good Riddance Professional Organizing Solutions

“Two to five percent of Americans may meet the criteria for being hoarders,” says Psychologist David Tolin, PhD, a hoarding specialist and author of *Buried in Treasures*. The houses where hoarding has occurred present risks not only to the residents but to the surrounding community. They may be structurally unsound or attract insects and vermin of all sorts. Uninhabitable and abandoned hoarder’s homes are common, and vulnerable to break-ins and squatting.

Two Vancouver based companies; *Good Riddance Professional Organizing Solutions* and *1st Hoarding Clean Up* (a Division of *1st Trauma Scene Clean Up*) have combined their respective skills to work jointly with clients living in extreme hoarding conditions. This line of work has taught their staffs to expect the unexpected. Last Spring provided an astonishing hoarding clean-up experience for the two companies - one with a silver lining.

Good Riddance and *1st Hoarding Clean Up* partnered to clear a two story Vancouver home in preparation for its sale. The owner moved several years prior, but the house remained jam packed with family possessions. The team was told to be on the lookout for valuable collections in need of rescuing, amongst the overwhelming domestic disorder. The team put in 2 full days, filling 5 dumpster bins with the lion’s share of the house’s contents, 1 room full of donations, and 1 trailer full of chemicals and other recyclable substances, all the while meticulously cataloguing and cleaning items worth preserving for storage.

What made this fundamentally different from other hoarding clean ups was the lure of having to excavate concealed treasure! There was allegedly a designated location in the basement where the owner’s father buried a fortune in gold and silver over 50 years ago. Several discoveries in the basement on the first day turned out to be a forerunner of bigger things to come. Not long after a large metal box full of silver dollars was found tucked in the back of a cold room, bags of silver dollars were recovered behind a dresser and under a mountain of old clothes. The few wallets, found filled with old one and two dollar bills no longer seemed an interesting find.

The second day of the clean-up project focused on the main floor where the only treasures came in the form of vintage toys and art glass, not precious metals. Digging into the basement floor began in earnest in the late afternoon. By 4:00pm the clean-up crew emerged from depths under the house with armfuls of dirt and money. A considerable fortune had originally been placed into a wooden box. Some stuffed into canning jars. After fifty years in the ground, the box disintegrated, and glass jars shattered, leaving gold bars and silver dollars literally lying in the earth. The team made multiple forays, bringing an inestimable number of coins and bars to the surface. The crew spread out the bounty on the front lawn so that the gold bars and silver coins could be sifted by hand, then securely stored for safekeeping. A half century later, the owner was able to recover his family's legacy totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It is not unusual for Hoarding Clean-Up techs to find hidden cash and valuables. "Often our clients are next of kin, extended family or administrators of the estate. They will have heard stories over the years, and when we find their treasures, it brings to life what was once only suspect. We always look forward to hearing or seeing their responses after we make a discovery," according to Chantelle, Operations Manager for *1st Trauma Scene and Hoarding Clean Up*.

Apparently, hoarding gold and silver is not that uncommon even today, with people going to great lengths to disguise their wealth like painting silver bars red to look like bricks. "Even if you don't trust financial institutions or feel you need instant access to your assets, storing large amounts of cash and valuables at home is not recommended," says *Good Riddance's* Susan Borax. "We work with a lot of older clients who are unable to remember where they have stashed important documents and valuables. Metal detectors make it easier for thieves to find their quarry," cautions the professional organizer and author.

Neither *Good Riddance* nor *1st Hoarding Clean Up* team members expect to encounter another discovery of this magnitude. Chantelle reminisces, "I still remember my first find of \$47,500.00 in one hundred dollar bills. I thought that was a lot of money. This was by far the largest monetary unearthing for our staff. We haven't stopped talking about it."

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