

## 'Gimmies' reveal spiritual poverty

The three-line ad in the newspaper announcing the upcoming garage sale fails to capture the behind-the-scenes work and stress that have gone into preparing for this event.

I've never officially held or participated in a garage sale. I often bring my boxes of clothes, housewares and toys to a local charity — not because I'm a do-gooder but because I'm too tired or lazy to haul out all my junk onto card tables and have strangers come by and barter over my old belongings. Perhaps I also donate our boxes of stuff to local charities to assuage my guilt that many of the things we buy will eventually make their way to people in real need. When we deliver our boxes to a neighborhood shelter, it's painfully clear that our family's trash is a needy family's treasure.

One of my friends was having a multi-family garage sale and it seemed like a good opportunity to clean house and to motivate my kids to go through their toys and clothes to see what we could get rid of. When my friend announced the sale's 8 a.m. Saturday starting time, I made a case for a twilight garage sale on a Friday evening. I tried to convince her that there's a whole segment of the population who have never even been to a garage sale because they would rather sleep than shop on Saturday mornings. But the Girl Scouts were meeting at my friend's house on Friday night so Saturday morning it was.

As I began rummaging through our bedrooms and basement to prepare for the sale, I quickly became agitated over the amount of stuff we've acquired, even after our countless promises to begin to simplify our lives. As I began taking stock of our stuff, I found myself uttering phrases repeatedly to my husband and children: "We have too much stuff! Do you kids know there are children in the world who don't have any toys?" In the midst of this frenzy, I called another friend who was also preparing for the garage sale.

"Hello!" she snapped uncharacteristically into the phone. Then she added, "Oh I'm sorry. I've just come from the basement and I can't believe how much stuff we have."

A few years ago when my kids were going through a stage of demanding a toy



family matters

By ELLEN MARX

or a treat anytime we went to the store, I came across a book, *The Berenstain Bears Get the Gimmies*. The two bear cubs had a similar problem that my kids were experiencing — "give me this and give me that" each time they went to the store. After one outing, Papa Bear told the cubs it was the worst case of the "galloping greedy gimmies" he had ever seen. The phrase "gimmies" has really stuck in our home over the years and no one ever wants to be accused of having a case of them. As parents we wonder why our children expect to be given so much while we continue to consume and to be consumed by material possessions. We find it difficult to be content with what we have.

We are a society with a chronic case of the "gimmies." We have grocery stores with 18 brands of one product on the shelf. We have a cable TV channel just for shopping. We have catalogs that arrive in our mailboxes almost daily urging us to buy more stuff. No matter where we turn, someone is trying to sell us something we really don't need.

As I prepared for the garage sale and sat among my boxes of stuff, I came across some images of the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Dressed in her trademark white sari with a blue stripe, she was reaching out to the poorest of poor. The only stuff Mother Teresa ever needed on her life's journey was a burning love for Jesus and a joyful and generous heart to serve people in need. Mother Teresa often spoke of the great material wealth she saw when visiting the United States and how a preoccupation with possessions and riches can easily lead to spiritual poverty. After one visit she remarked, "The spiritual poor that one finds in Europe and America is a difficult burden to

carry. One day there springs the desire for money and for all that money can provide — the superfluous, luxury in eating, luxury in dressing, trifles. Needs increase because one thing calls for another. The result is uncontrollable dissatisfaction."

Mother Teresa reminded us that if we're so busy filling our lives with the best clothing, toys, food and furniture, God can not find his way into our hearts. She often said, "Let us remain as empty as possible so that God can fill us up. For not even God can put anything in a heart that is already full. The more we become empty of ourselves, the more we will be able to be filled with God."

One week later I finished packing up the final boxes — some for the garage sale and some for a program to help homeless families who live less than a mile from our home. Through parish and scouting programs, my family has been involved in efforts to help these homeless families living in cramped single rooms in "welfare motels," where the average age of a homeless person is 7.

As I loaded the boxes into our van, I thought again of the words that came from the small woman with the giant heart: "Those who have had many possessions, who have had many goods and riches, are obsessed by them. They think that the only thing that counts is possessing wealth. That is why it is so difficult for them to leave all things as they are dying. It is much easier for the poor, who are so free, for this freedom allows them to depart this world with joy ... For my part I must say that the poor are very lovable people, who give us more, much more than we give them."

Marx lives in Lawrenceville, N.J., with her husband and two children.

## Mouse, maid drub Flubber

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are home videocassette reviews from the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each videocassette is available on VHS format. Theatrical movies on video have a USCC classification and Motion Picture Association of America rating.



### Mouse Hunt

Madcap comedy in which two brothers (Nathan Lane and Lee Evans) inherit a historic mansion, then plan to auction it off for millions if they can just rid it of an elusive mouse that is bringing the house down around their heads. Directed in episodic fashion by Gore Verbinski, the result offers some zany, occasionally over-the-top comic mayhem as the rodent foils the humans' every trap. Much slapstick violence, mild toilet humor and fleeting sexual innuendo. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### Flubber

Weak remake of 1961's "The Absent-Minded Professor" has a distracted professor (Robin Williams) leaving his bride (Marcia Gay Harden) at the altar while inventing flying rubber to save their debt-ridden college. Director Les Mayfield flubs it with an excess of jokey special effects at the expense of story and characterization. Frequent slapstick violence and fleeting sexual innuendo. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

### The Little Mermaid

Enchanting Disney animated feature adds a happy ending to the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale about a feisty mermaid (voice of Jodi Benson) who falls in love with a human prince. Written and directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, the characters are delightful, the music exhilarating and the underwater animation magical. Youngsters will love how its enterprising heroine faces up to typical parental pressures and learns to take responsibility for her own choices. The USCC classification is A-I — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

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