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The story of the messy car

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A while back, I longed for a large receptacle, to wit a Dumpster, to purge my household of the unwanted accumulation of stuff associated with a family of six and a large dog in the western suburbs. Be careful what you wish for, because it occurs to me as I wait for the delivery of my oversized rubbish bin that I already have one – a traveling Petri dish that seats seven.

When I swaddled my four children, never did I imagine that one of my primary functions would be shuttle bus driver. My kids range in age from 5 to 12 and as they get in the car after school, their primary greetings are "Do you have a snack?" and "What's for dinner?"

As a result of the snack requirement the food pyramid can be recreated by remnants found in my automobile. On a quick glance I see Goldfish crackers, popcorn, Pringles, a half-eaten cherry lollipop stuck to the carpet, the crust of a peanut butter and Fluffernutter sandwich in a plastic bag and wrappers to Kudos, granola and Nutri-Grain breakfast bars. I dare not look under the seats to find the scraps of French fries and other fast food delicacies. My husband thought it an extravagance when I pleaded for leather seats. He has never had to drive around with the smell of chocolate milk fermented, spoiled and seeped into cloth seats that no amount of Febreze can do away with.

At the end of the old game show "Let's Make A Deal," Monty Hall used to ask members of the studio audience to reach into their purses and see if they could come up with specific items that he would trade for cash, for example, four paper clips, three bobby pins or a nail clip. I wish we still had that opportunity, but with our cars. I know I would make big bucks because I have all manner of stuff in mine, essential for someone to bring into the car but not so important as to be removed.

How much do you think he'd pay for: two scratched bike helmets, one boy's bathing suit, four shoes (none matching), one set of Mardi Gras beads, one skateboard, two bouncing balls, one marble, two basketballs, one Darth Vader action figure, one half of a Bionicle, one rusted set of chains, one broken garage door opener, one watch that doesn't work, four empty water bottles, one walkie-talkie (no batteries), one handmade snowflake necklace and one musical instrument/sword made out of paper cups, tape and beans. That's just the beginning. I chronicled three pages of treasure.

know the time wasted compiling a list would have been better spent cleaning my vehicle but the half hour squandered on inventory is not nearly sufficient to properly clean the beast. Therein lies the problem. A proper cleansing with an industrial vacuum, Windex and disinfecting wipes requires a good hour. It must be done without children, because they want to save things and say things like, "You're not going to throw that away, are you? It's special to me." Then they want to help, and they spend most of their time sucking up their own T-shirt or better yet their brother's with the long suction hoses of the carwash and wasting your quarters. It seems of late that I don't have an extra hour in my day without a child to sanitize the Suburban.

So I will continue to try and remove trash faster than they can bring it in and say a little prayer that the dog days of summer will allow us to step away from our vehicles. On the upside my husband thinks if we were ever trapped in my car, we would be able to find enough food, clothing and amusements to last about a week.

Sarah Banse is a writer and mother of four. She has been a Wayland resident for 10 years.