

NEWS YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED

Carla Cotropia



WHY I CAN'T STOP CUSSING AND MY FAVORITE CUSS WORD

I know cussing is a bad habit. Many would say cuss words are used because the person using them has a limited vocabulary. Maybe so, but in the heat of the moment, it is just easier to say a cuss word than to think of the right word. When you hit your head, cussing makes it feel better rather than saying “Darn, I hit my head”, which doesn’t help. There is scientific proof that cussing increases your tolerance for pain, or at least that is what is reported in Emma Byrne’s book, *Swearing is Good for You: The Amazing Science of Bad Language*.

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By using the word, cussing, rather than cursing, I am showing my Southern roots. According to the Urban Dictionary, Cussin or Cussing is saying the word “curse” with an accent. The Urban Dictionary states that cussing is most common in the southern US, where the southern accent of the word, originated from Scottish/Irish dialect. Since I am from the South, I will stick with the word cussing.



I think cussing all started for me when I was young. My mother would fuss at me for saying the word, “crap”. Being a rebel from an early age, I wanted to argue that crap, meaning a lot of stuff, i.e. crap, isn’t a cuss word. I guess she viewed it as a way of saying Shit.

Shit is my go-to cuss word. For some reason when something goes terribly wrong, it is the first thing out of my mouth. Years ago I had a very contentious hard fought case with an opposing lawyer who was always causing me grief. My secretary announced one day that she always knew when I had a phone conversation with this particular lawyer. When I asked her how she could possibly know this, she responded, “Because I hear you say SHIT, SHIT, SHIT



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and when I hear that, I know you just had a phone call with him.” Oops, I didn’t realize I did that.

At least with my cussing, I am stuck on one word Shit, except for minor variations. The Shit cuss word sometimes morphs into Holy Shit. I am not sure why this happened and I am not sure what it is supposed to mean. For some unknown reason it just came out of my mouth. To me Holy Shit is used when it is not as extreme of a situation that a Shit, Shit, Shit requires.

The English use Bloody Hell for their extreme cuss word. That sounds a lot better than Holy Shit. The English use the word “Bloody” as an intensifier. This means when you add the word “Bloody” it makes what comes next more extreme, such as Bloody Moron or Bloody Hell. The English have some nice swearing words that I need to consider. One word is Bollocks meaning nonsense or rubbish but it is considered swearing. Bollocks sounds a lot nicer than Shit.

Back to my remorse that cussing is a bad habit. I have excuses for my bad behavior. One is I don’t have kids. Of course parents must clean up their acts and mouths since kids have super-sonic ears and parents don’t want their kids using cuss words.



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My other excuse is just plain stubbornness because sometimes it just feels good to say SHIT. Shit, when you say it with relish, has a forceful feel of wind in your throat. This rush of expelled air that saying the word Shit requires, is a stress reliever.



But saying Shit is a bad habit so perhaps for my 2021 resolution I should try to refrain from using it. Maybe the next time the urge hits me I will say Shoot instead of Shit. Maybe if I say “Well, Shoot” , it will be a good substitute. But isn’t “Well, Shoot” going to label me country fried? I guess I could say “Shucks” but I already know that doesn’t have the same good feel that Shit does. Bloody Shoot or Bloody Shucks makes no sense so that won’t work either.

I just need to come up with a proper substitute so I can clean up my act. At least, for my mother’s sake, I am not saying “Crap”.



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WHAT I KNOW ABOUT STYLE OR HOW I GOT THE STYLE I HAVE

People have asked me to write about my style. I have declined, until now, because I think, “Who cares about my style” or “What does that have to do with someone else” or “Since when did Carla get to be an expert on style.” Well the answer to the above is “no one”, “it doesn’t” and “she isn’t.” But maybe it can be an entertaining read, so if not, you can skip the rest.

My mother made all my clothes. I have a sister, Caron, 13 months younger, and it was easier for my mother to make two of everything. This would have been fine but she wanted us to wear the same thing every day like we were twins, which we certainly were not. As a result clothes became torture.



Moving forward, I had a bad day as a teenager when I lost the election to be a cheerleader and was kicked out of the band all on the same day. I deserved to be kicked out of the band, (Thank goodness only for a short time), because I was part of a posse of bad girls that threw eggs at the band director’s car. It wasn’t



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our fault he left his window down and some eggs went into his A/C vent. But because of this tragic day, my mother felt sorry for me and let me pick out my first “store bought” outfit. I still remember it to this day.

Now I am in college and my rebel nation or should I say crazy nature hit an all time high. I decided to wear the exact same outfit-a ratty sweater and jeans- every time I went to my economics class. Don’t ask me why I did this. But I did wear the exact same outfit every time except for the time I wore the sweater inside out-tag showing.

In law school on a limited budget, I started shopping at the local Salvation Army. The good Baptists in Waco donated all kinds of cool things and it became my clothing treasure trove while spending little money. One of my price possessions was a wool Girl Scout jacket-in perfect condition-with badges included. I loved wearing that jacket to my law school classes even though I never made it in Girl Scouts very long, having dropped out when I was supposed to cook a hamburger on a tin can (Girl Scout survival skills no less) and my burger/can collapsed in the dirt. I decided then, No More Girl Scouts, but I did love that jacket! My law professors were not so endearing of the Girl Scout jacket and one professor, (Professor W. Frank Newton) pulled me aside my last year to tell me I needed to be more “lawyerly”. Professor Newton was a thoughtful caring man. At least he had the guts to tell me, in a nice way, I looked crazy wearing a Girl Scout jacket.



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Kathy Whitmire (Source: Forgotten Houston)

The next phase -so to speak- was the dressing like a man i.e. Kathy Whitmire-look. Kathy Whitmire was the Houston mayor from 1982-1991 and wore little ties and suits. So the Kathy Whitmire look for women lawyers in the 80s meant suits-only in navy and black and khaki in the summer with button down shirts in either white, or blue and those little ties that you wore at the neck.

(This is embarrassing to even write. But it was the 80s.) Even the shoes were like men's oxfords, flat. Stilettos in those days were for hookers. And if you had boobs you certainly didn't flash them with low necklines. The goal was to look like a "man".

I was in the corporate man-like wardrobe for work, but outside of work, I was in vintage 1950s dresses. These dresses were nipped in at the waist, with trim that is rickrack and tiny buttons with full skirts. The only problem was this wasn't in style in the 1980s. Now vintage is in style, except you really can't find 1950s clothes and now 1980s clothes are considered vintage. (Lord that dates me!) No, in the 1980s you were a misfit if you wore vintage clothing.



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As I was approached turning 30, I decided to enter my “Glamour Stage”. I got blond streaks and hired an image consultant. She took one look at my closet and turned to me and said, “What do you wear to work?” Needless to say she had her work cut out with me.

As I left my 30s and approached my 40s, I decided it was time to get comfortable. This meant throwing away any shoes with heels. As time went on, and decades passed, it became more and more of my mantra, Comfort Baby, Comfort. Now it was time to ditch the shoes, except for high top sneakers or huaraches in the summer.

One day I realized I had turned into Mrs. Ottea. Who is Mrs. Ottea? She was an Italian lady in Mumford where I grew up and unfortunately, she lost her husband at an early age. This resulted in what any proper Italian lady would do which is to wear only black—no design and no patterns, just plain black clothes the rest of her life. I realized with a start that I had turned into Mrs. Ottea.



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Carla, Why do you need fifteen pairs of black pants, and twenty solid black tops? I had a Mrs. Ottea black uniform. This is what Steve Jobs did with his black turtlenecks. The theory is you only have so much decision making power every day so why waste it on trying to decide what to wear. Just grab your black uniform and go.

Once I realized the Mrs. Ottea phenomena had occurred, I decided to sparkle things up. This meant high-tops with glitter and sequins. When you get a certain age you can be as inappropriate as you want. I was put in my place when I took some leopard print glitter high-tops to Buffalo Exchange, a consignment shop, to sell them. The young lady behind the counter looked at me and said, “We don’t take glitter things unless they are for children.” Oops, was I now dressing like a child?

All of this may not matter now, since with COVID I am mediating mostly by zoom which means only my top half is seen. I do try to wear color but no one cares if the bottom part is stretch pants.

I am a little worried what the next clothing phase is going to be...



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WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CLUTTER?

I have had a roller coaster relationship with clutter. When I was younger, I didn't have time to think much about it. I remember having one room where I "stuck" stuff then shut the door and tried to not think about it. Unfortunately it worked and the only reason I didn't drown in clutter was because I moved so many times. The first move out of law school was from Baylor Law School in Waco to Galveston. My parents helped me move into my little apartment which was on the second floor.



After many back-breaking trips up those narrow stairs, my mother in a fit of desperation, opened one of the boxes. She hit the ceiling (not literally but definitely emotionally) when she saw what was in the box. At this point she began frantically opening boxes to find there were more and more boxes contained nothing but National Geographic magazines. Rightfully so, she yelled, "Are you telling me we have been moving boxes of old magazines!!" What can you say...



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This brings me to one of the big issues with clutter which it is –keeping stuff. I don't remember why I thought I needed to keep every National Geographic magazine. My Mother's outrage did cause me to reflect and ultimately dump them. I don't know if it was the memory from being in grade school in the very poor school district of Hearne Texas. The school had battered copies of National Geographic. To contrast how different things are now, the boys would sneak looks at the pictures of the African ladies to see their naked breasts.

Maybe my clutter problem stems back to my family. I grew up on a cotton farm and farms have a lot of space, plus no garbage pickup. My grandfather, Anthony Cotropia, would take the spark plug that no longer worked out of the tractor and put it into the spark plug box which of course he didn't throw out.



There were plenty of sheds with plenty of shelves to keep boxes of parts, with the no-longer-working part in the box. And if a machine stopped working of course you wouldn't get rid of it. No you might need a part from that machine at some time in the future. So that is why on the farm, there were numerous sheds filled with machines that didn't work and boxes of parts that no longer worked.



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But really it isn't fair to blame my problem on my grandfather, I also get it from my grandmother Mary Cotropia, in a different way. Miss Mary was a collector of antiques/junk. As a side note, my grandparents were Italian and according to my grandmother had an arranged marriage. My grandparents, their entire lives, called each other Mr. Tony and Miss Mary. Miss Mary had a side business of selling antiques, (also made wine, and loaned money but that is for another day). Miss Mary started her antique business in the 1950s and continued her entire life. And once again because there was plenty of room on a farm, and plenty of odd buildings for her collection of antiques/junk, her side business spread and the stuff accumulated. Recently I was at the farm and found in a shed covered in dust and spider webs, medical books from the 1960s. Miss Mary wasn't a doctor. She was a collector of stuff.

So my inherited collecting bug increased my clutter problem. Then to add to the situation, I decided to "change my image" and went on a clothing transformation. Too many clothes and too much stuff. Luckily, I met a good friend when I moved to Houston that is a professional organizer. She "shamed" me into letting things go. One example was my closet. In going through my clothes she pulled out a dress, looked at me and said dismissively, "Is this what you wear when doing the carpool?" This was nothing against mothers but rather an edgy point since she knew I had never driven a carpool in my life. Whatever, it worked and it quickly went in the Goodwill pile.



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The key to removing clutter is to not let it build up in the first place. I had a couple friend where the husband was so strict, he wouldn't let his wife bring anything into the house unless something went out. This extreme measure resulted in their house being so inhospitable their friends stopped visiting. Too extreme.

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal by Ellen Byron, *How to Win the War Against Clutter* offers some tips and I will share my comments.

Byron's Tip 1: Don't buy anything to organize clutter.



Carla's Response to Tip 1: There really isn't anything wrong with buying things to organize your stuff but the deeper message is that is just an excuse to feel good that you are dealing with clutter. The real problem isn't the organizational boxes or bins you need but your inability to get rid of anything.

Does any of this sound familiar?

I paid so much for that I can't get rid



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of it. I was given this and I can't get rid of it. I have had it so long it has become sentimental/important and it would be too hard/wrong to part with it.

I may regret it if I get rid of it. I will get rid of it later but I can't deal with it right now.

I could keep adding to the list but you get the picture.

Byron's Tip 2—Decluttering is emotional. Carla's Response to Tip 2-- Hell Yes, it is emotional. This is the reason professional organizers exist. Sometimes you need someone to hold your hand and give you the ok to "pitch it" or shame you into it as I sometimes needed.

Byron's Tip 3: It is easy to procrastinate so just start somewhere. No right starting place exists. Decluttering is delayed decision-making. For example, every single sheet of paper represents a transaction in your life. Every single thing you touch will cause you to replay the transaction and the emotion attached to it. You have to decide whether to keep it and if you do keep it, where it will go in your house and that's another decision. The more decisions you have to make the harder it is to make a decision. So just start.



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Carla's Response to Tip 3: Do what I did. I told myself I could not leave my storage room until I got rid of at least one box of Christmas decorations (I have a decoration addiction) and it didn't matter what it was. It was just going to have to be one box of something. (Sometimes I don't mind myself when I tell myself something but this time it worked.) I knew I would not be able to take a snack break or put my feet up or surf the web or whatever until I had at least one box of Christmas decorations in the garage to go to the thrift shop---and it worked.



One last thought—Feng Shui masters have a theory about clutter. Feng Shui being the theory there is a flow of chi—(chi means universal energy) in your house. If there is clutter, the clutter clogs up the flow of chi which in turns decreases the good energy around you. And I don't know about you, but for me I need all the energy I can get.



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