Housework

To be honest, I don't have many memories of housework until I left home and had to do my own. I am ashamed to say that I made no contribution as a child or teenager. I did always clean and tidy my room, including cleaning the windows, I also did some gardening but these were things I chose to do and quite enjoyed. Had I not done so, I don't know if mum would have persuaded me to carry out these tasks. By the time I was old enough to provide some useful input, mum was working and was too busy to show me what to do or to encourage me; it was always quicker just to do it herself. The same applied to cooking, which mum hated anyway and as we did no domestic science at school (not considered academic enough) my cooking 'skills' are limited, to say the least. I did do sewing, mending and various D-I-Y type jobs,[1] again by choice. Once I was at secondary school, not only did the travelling mean that I had a very long day[2] but I also had a fair amount of homework, which I was very conscientious about. Mum was happy to let me make this a priority over contributing to the housework. In retrospect it might have been better, both for her and me, if I had done more. Despite this, I repeated the pattern with my own children, for pretty much the same reasons.

We were reasonably well off for labour saving devices when I was a child. The fridge arrived in 1959, meaning that daily shopping was no longer necessary. Before she had to go back to work, in 1965 when my father died, mum cleaned every day - dusting and either hoovering or using the Bex Bissel carpet sweeper. Having a dog and budgerigars made fairly frequent cleaning necessary. I can just about remember beating rugs on the washing line. Apart from sometimes having a window cleaner, nothing

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[1] e.g. decorating, rewiring plugs and 'boys'' jobs.
[2] Three days a week I was out of the house from 7.45am until gone 5.00pm. The other two days I was home at 4.00pm.

was outsourced, we never had a cleaner or gardener and did not send laundry away or go to the launderette. Laundry was done about once a week but never religiously on a particular day. When I was in halls in college, we had one clean sheet a week and were expected to put this on top, moving it to do duty as the bottom sheet the following week.

I think when mum was home and had more time, she was probably more assiduous about housework, although looking after various decaying relatives was time-consuming. Certainly, as I got older and mum was working, washing-up might be left but when I was small it was probably done after each meal. There was no 'routine' as such, things were done when necessary. I don't ever remember a 'spring-clean', although there would be times when less-regular tasks were done, such as washing the curtains.

Once I had a home of my own, I quite enjoyed housework but it was always a bit of a haphazard affair, coming in fits and starts. I'd leave something until I couldn't bear it any longer and then have a mad cleaning fit. The window cleaning obsession remains and I will clean windows almost as often as I dust. I am not committing myself to how often that is but let's just say that dust looks no worse after four weeks than it does after one; a theory I feel compelled to test at regular intervals. I have always enjoyed gardening but to be a gardener it has to be your main hobby and it isn't mine. Much as I quite like housework, there is always something more interesting to do. When my children were at home, I would far rather spend time playing with them; now it is reading, writing or researching.

I have wonderfully good intentions of spring-cleaning rooms on a regular basis but it is decidedly hit and miss. The impetus for cleaning is usually imminent visitors. When I do clean, in my three floor houses and still now, I make an effort to do a floor a week but some weeks get missed!

Since I had a house pretty much to myself and particularly since I downsized, I am quite tidy, although some strange miscellaneous piles or boxes do lurk. I quite like ironing but what I consider it necessary to iron is diminishing.