



By **DAVE BARRY**
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I'm a pretty good housekeeper. Ask anybody.

No, wait: Don't ask my wife. She and I disagree on certain housekeeping issues, such as whether it's OK for a house to contain dirt. Also smells. If NASA scientists really want to know about life on Mars, instead of sending up robots that keep finding rocks, they need to send my wife, and have her take a whiff of the Martian atmosphere. If there's a single one-celled organism anywhere on the planet, she'll smell it. And if the other astronauts don't stop her, she'll kill it with Lysol.

Which is why her approach to leftovers baffles me. I am opposed to leftovers. I believe the only food that should be kept around is takeout Chinese, which contains a powerful preservative chemical called "kung pao" that enables it to remain edible for several football seasons.

All other leftover foods should be thrown away immediately, for the same reason you should not go to your 40th high-school reunion. You go expecting to see people whom you vaguely remember as being attractive, and even though you know they've aged some-Heck, even YOU have aged some-you figure, hey, it's not as if you're OLD yet! You're middle-aged! Like Harrison Ford!

So you go to the reunion, and suddenly you find yourself in a room full of unrecognizable fossils, lurching around the dance floor to the sounds of Herman's Hermits, and you realize to your horror that YOU ARE ONE OF THEM.

You get the same kind of unpleasant shock with leftovers. Time and again, in my house, when we're cleaning up after dinner, there will be, say, a small clump of uneaten string beans, and I'll have it poised over the garbage, and my wife will lunge for it like a person rescuing a baby from a wood chipper, saying: "Those will be good for leftovers!" She'll carefully seal the string beans in a plastic container and put them in the refrigerator, as if she truly believes that sometime in the near future an actual human in our household will say: "Dang! I could really chow down on some old string beans!"

Now fast-forward about a month, when my wife, passing the refrigerator, detects an odor molecule. So she takes out the plastic container and discovers that EWWW the string beans have been replaced by alien space worms with inch-long blue fur. Which of course she hurls into the garbage, which as you may recall is exactly where I tried to throw them a month earlier. This is what happens to, I would estimate, 100 percent of our non-Chinese-takeout "leftovers."

Making the world's kitchens safer

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When he isn't making millions laugh with his humor, he plays in a literary rock band called Rock Bottom Remainers. Other band members include Stephen King, Amy Tan, Ridley Pearson, and Mitch Albom. He and his wife, Michelle, live in Miami with their two children Rob and Sophie.

Speaking of refrigerator odors, here is a:

PRACTICAL HOMEMAKER TIP: Always keep an open box of baking soda in your refrigerator. That way, when people come to your house to visit, you can say: "Would you care for some cold baking soda?" Then they will leave.

But I digress. My point, and I know this because I'm using powerful point-detection software, is that people have differing views about what constitutes good housekeeping. This is why I'm so interested in an article that appeared recently in the New York Times, concerning household cleanliness.

The article, brought to my attention by alert reader Bill Ulrey, states that your kitchen-yes, YOUR kitchen-is basically a festering swarm of potentially deadly bacteria. The most interesting part of the article concerns a discovery by a University of Arizona microbiology professor named Dr. Chuck Gerba, who is an expert on household germs. I am familiar with Dr. Gerba, because some

years ago I interviewed him on bathroom cleanliness, and he told me that the only sure way to kill all the bacteria on a toilet is-I am not making this up-to put laboratory alcohol on the bowl and set it on fire.

LEGAL ADVISORY: Dr. Gerba is a trained bathroom scientist. As a layperson, you must

NEVER EVER set your toilet on fire, **EVER**. Also be advised that it looks much cooler with the lights out.

So anyway, according to the New York Times, Dr. Gerba has found that "people who had the cleanest-looking kitchens were often the dirtiest. Because 'clean' people wipe up so much, they often end up spreading bacteria all over the place. The cleanest kitchens, he said, were in the homes of bachelors, who never wiped up and just put their dirty dishes in the sink."

That's right: You so-called "good housekeepers" with your so-called "cleaning" are in fact smearing bacteria around, while we so-called "slobs" are, by courageous inaction, making the world's kitchens safer for everybody.

There's no need to thank us. All we ask is a little respect. Also, while you're sniffing those leftovers, please grab us a beer.

(Dave Barry is a humor columnist for the Miami Herald. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.)

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