

*operation  
serenity*

A PROVEN SYSTEM  
TO FINALLY KICK OUT CHAOS  
FROM YOUR HOME FOREVER

*Sandy Marthaler*

## **OPERATION SERENITY:**

A PROVEN SYSTEM TO FINALLY KICK OUT CHAOS FROM YOUR HOME FOREVER

Sandy Marthaler

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*God grant me the SERENITY to accept the things I can not change.  
The Courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the  
difference. (from the Serenity Prayer)*

***Do I currently use it?***

***Do I really love it?***

***Would I buy it again?***

*These are the three clutter questions you need to ask yourself to help you get unburied from the chaos you live in. I put them here before the introduction because I want you to post them in your mind or, better yet, on your refrigerator. You are going to need them!*

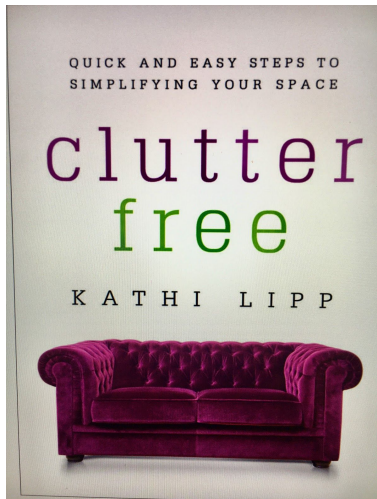
*(from Kathi Lipp's book, Clutter Free, page 144).*

## Introduction

- Operation Serenity is a system of decluttering your home that combines everything I have learned over the past fifty years, plus some new essential techniques I have found quite magical in just the last few months. Nothing else has worked for me in the long term until recently. My bad habits made it easy for Chaos to return.
- I knew things had to change. And I have changed in amazing ways. Most of the change was with my mindset. I had to decide that I could change. I then decided to write a book about my journey to chaos-free living.
- I soon realized I needed a shorter version of a larger book. I needed an ebook to quickly share my techniques of kicking chaos out of my home forever. I needed a book with bullet points and a large print, lots of white space between words, and a few photos.
- I needed a book for someone like me! I am scattered and unfocused and very easily distracted! I also need inspiration, accountability, and deadlines! I overwhelm myself daily, and I needed a book that would not do that to my readers!
- My prayer is that this book will help you on your own “Operation Serenity”!

- A note to the “Third Act” women (ages 60-90)\*: I believe decluttering and downsizing is your primary job in the third act of your life! You are getting ready for your “final bow.” I suggest starting at the earlier years of this act while you hopefully still have your health and energy! The earlier, the better! Make simplifying your life your priority. Believe me; your future self will thank you for it!
- \* I got the idea of life’s third act from Jane Fonda’s book called Prime Time, where she divides life into three acts, every thirty years. If you are between 60 and 90, you are in your third act!
- I advise you not to print out this ebook! If you are anything like me and tend to hoard paper, it will be that much less paper you have to deal with, and you take a chance of misplacing it!
- I knew that I did not have to reinvent the wheel. There are tons and tons of home organizing books out there! And I have read many of them throughout the years. Many of them did not work for me. Some did give me helpful ideas that did work. Several gave me motivation, but I usually ended right back in Chaos.
  - When I discovered this book, it rose to the top of the pile of all the books I have read. It is written for someone like me!





- If you need inspiration, read this book! Put it on your nightstand and let it be your nighttime reading while you declutter your home.
- If you need detail, the nitty-gritty how-to's for decluttering, then read her other book pictured below.
- I get almost all my books on Kindle now. I realize book collections are for libraries, not for my small condo! Both of her books are only \$1.99 on Kindle. You can then start reading instantly!



- Don't try to read all of it before you begin your decluttering! Just read the section that pertains to the area you will be attacking next!
- Kathi Lipp even has a podcast called "Clutter Free Academy" with wonderful motivation to plug into your ears on your daily walk!
- Check out her website as well for any how-to you could need!  
[www.kathilipp.com](http://www.kathilipp.com)
- Don't get bogged down reading when you need to be decluttering. Don't feel like you have to finish the books I recommend to begin your "Operation Serenity"!

- Note: You are not aiming for perfection here. Nor are you needing pretty little containers neatly lined up on a shelf. You are aiming for serenity. Who cares how pretty your sock drawer looks? I know I don't.
- One day you wake up and realize your life is not what you want it to be, and you've been fighting Chaos all your life. You may have been born into Chaos. Things are about to change!
- It is time to stop blaming your parents. It is time to stop convincing yourself that you will always be messy because your parents did not raise you with tidy habits. You can have a serene environment. You can learn how to get Serenity and maintain Serenity no matter what comes!

## **But *you* have a choice. *You* decide.**

- Do you want to continue to live the way you are living? Do you want to continue to live with the stress of continually looking for your keys, glasses, cellphones, or scissors? Do you want to continue with the frustration of never having room to set a coffee mug down on the kitchen counter, things rotting in the fridge, desk piled high with papers, and a basement full of stuff you don't need and haven't used for years?

- Do you want to continue to live with all this STUFF you have been living with, this old stuff, this inherited stuff, maybe the stuff that isn't even yours?
- This STUFF is taking up not only too much physical space but mental space in your life! It is robbing you of peace.
- Are you tired of looking at boxes and boxes piled high with clothes your family is not wearing, books you are never planning to read, toys you are saving for future grandkids?
- Do you want to continue with your various collections until your home is so crowded you can't move around freely? There are libraries and museums for collections, not your home!
- You may have even thought organizing the chaos in neat stackable boxes and labeling them was the thing to do. But you can't organize clutter and call it good. Your home is still cluttered! The question is: Do you want a haven or a nightmare to live in?

***DO NOT GIVE YOUR PAST THE POWER TO DEFINE YOUR FUTURE!***



***The definition of chaos: Stuff you are holding on to because you are not brave enough to deal with it. And you are finding it harder and harder to get out the door and be on time to where you need to be.***

**Do you feel like throwing in the towel and letting Chaos have the victory?**

**If your answer is NO,**

**You are ready to learn a new mindset, a new strategy, one that will work!**

***” Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”***

***Matthew 6:19***

- Finally, when Serenity arrives, and Chaos is kicked out, and you develop the good habits to keep it that way, you will never have to battle Chaos in your home again!

***“If you don’t have time for  
things that matter, stop  
doing the things that don’t!”***

Courtney Carver

A clutter-free, serene home matters!

## **Operation Serenity has Three Phases:**

***1. Operation Get Serenity***

***2. Operation Sort and Store***

***3. Operation Maintain Serenity***

***As you go from room to room, it will sometimes feel like juggling balls. You may be working on getting serenity in one room or sorting the stuff and finding homes for each item while at the same time maintaining serenity in two or three other rooms. But you will be practicing maintaining serenity a room at a time, and it will get easier and easier!***

## PHASE ONE: OPERATION GET SERENITY

*“At its heart, clutter is a lack of peace.” Kathi Lipp*



*Start small so you can experience victory as soon as possible!  
And then you can practice every day maintaining it!*

- Starting is sometimes the hardest part. Choose one easy-to-declutter area in one room and get it done quickly. The reason you do this is to experience a small victory, no matter how small.
- Set yourself a realistic deadline! You know you need this!
- I chose my desk. It is in my bedroom. After I completed the task, I posted the before and after pictures of my desk on social media and got over two thousand “likes” overnight. People started to ask: “How did you do it?” What were the steps you took? It was then I realized I needed to write down and take pictures of everything I did.
- Again, my best advice is to start small. Otherwise, you set yourself up for failure, and you don’t want that. When you finish a small area, it will start the momentum going. But don’t overwhelm yourself!

***After you feel victorious in that one small area, you are ready to start to work on the rest of your home!***

- The end-goal: Get Serenity in your home systematically until the clutter is all conquered, and you can FOREVER bolt the door shut to Chaos.
- The **first thing** you need to do is get one room in order - **JUST ONE!**

- You can do this! Take deep breaths! Turn on some motivating music! Whatever works for you to stay focused!
- **Next**, Move everything out! Move out all the chaos! Just from that one zone!
- Divide the room into several zones and set a timer while working on each zone. The twenty-minute interval is an excellent place to start.
- Take a little break in between each interval. This is important, especially when decision fatigue takes over and your brain becomes tired.
- On your break to go into another room and do a daily task that needs to be done or have a cup of coffee or stretch out your muscles. Whatever works for you!
- Be sure to take before and after photos, and then celebrate when you finally declare the room chaos-free.
- **Finally**, I highly recommend printing and posting a sign that says “Chaos Free Zone.”





- This may seem silly to you, but it really works! This sign will remind you never to allow Chaos in again! It will also alert other members of your household that something wonderful is happening! It will create accountability, and you need that! This is where the real magic happens!
- Forget about looking for the perfect system. Just find something that works for you. I purposely left out the detail and the how-to's because I don't want you getting bogged down! That is what I did for too many years. I procrastinated, and I got bogged down with perfectionism.
- Forget the notion that tossing ten things a day is adequate. Don't believe it! The operative word is soon and as soon as possible! Invite Serenity to live in a finished room and keep her there.
- An excellent space to start in is your bedroom. I believe your bedroom is this room you need serenity in the most.
- Then tackle the main bathroom.

- These two rooms are where you sleep and get ready for your day.
- The rule is that while you are sorting one room, you may have the stuff you are sorting in the chaos-free room only until you go to bed.
- Ensure yourself enough time to remove the clutter you are sorting and get it out of the room.
- Put all of the stuff to be sorted in an adjacent room, closet, or garage.

**The goal is to go to sleep with Serenity and wake up with her.**



- Soon, you will be able to add another room and then another until your entire home is CHAOS FREE!
- Write down what you need to do and do it. Write out a battle plan for the day. If you were too optimistic and did not accomplish all on your list that day, move it to the next day.
- Don't be hard on yourself! You are human! So you made some buying mistakes! So you have developed some bad habits! Forgive yourself and keep moving!
- Don't compare your beginning with someone else's middle or end!

- Get some help if you need to! Don't feel like you have to do this all alone! If you have energy or health issues, don't be ashamed to get some help!
- Don't get distracted whatever you do! You now have momentum on your side, and you don't want to lose it!
- No more sleeping with Chaos EVER AGAIN!
- You may have to clear your schedule of some things. Things like too much TV, mindless scrolling on social media, complicated meals, shopping with no items in mind, grocery buying in stores, hobbies, outings with friends, social gatherings, etc.
- Getting Serenity has to become **YOUR NUMBER ONE PRIORITY!**
- Perhaps you will have to give up some fun time. Keep in the forefront of your mind --- you won't have to give it up for long.
- Once Chaos is out and out for good, you will have so much more free time. You will have time to enjoy what you have never been able to take the time for because you have been too busy bringing clutter in, moving it around from room to room, shoveling it out by the carloads only to buy more back.

- Your losing battle with Chaos has been exhausting. You buy one more book on decluttering, hoping that reading about how to do it will somehow make it so. You feel like you will never have a life. At least not the abundant life you see others living.
- God created you to have an abundant life, a life of order, beauty, and serenity. And He will help you get there! If you ask Him to!
- You have let Chaos reign for a long time now, but with God's help and his guidance and strength, you will get to where he wants to take you!
- You will eventually get to SERENITY!

**YOU CAN DO THIS!**

## **PHASE TWO: OPERATION SORT AND STORE**

***Clutter is anything that does not belong in a particular space. It either belongs somewhere else in your home, or it doesn't belong in your home at all.***

*Questions you **DO NOT** want to ask while you are sorting ( from Kathi Lipp's book, Clutter Free):*

***How much did it cost me? Who gave it to me? What will they think if I gave it away? How much is it worth? Will I need this someday? Will I change my mind and want it later on?***

*Instead, she says you need to ask these three questions:*

***Do I currently use it?***

***Do I really love it?***

***Would I buy it again?***

*She says she uses only these three questions to help her quickly and unemotionally clear the clutter from her life. I believe that these questions make all the difference in the sorting out of all your possessions!*



- The Sort and Store Phase is when you start sorting all items in a particular area.
- I started with my desk. My desk is in my bedroom. I am a writer, and I need a cleaned-off and organized desk to function effectively.
- I strongly suggest you start somewhere in your bedroom. This is the first room you want to feel serene in.
- If you just cram things back into drawers and shelves, it won't work. Chaos will return. Serenity will leave. Don't be a crammer!
- You need a place for everything first; then, you will be able to put everything into its place!
- When you put things in their homes, you soon discover what you need to start using up or tossing!



“The Littles,” I call them. These small items can be excruciating to deal with!



My clutter and disorganization prevented me from seeing how many of certain items I had! How many cleansing cloths for eyeglasses does a person need?

- You also need to know some principles about storing things.
- There are three types of storage: primary, secondary, and long-term.
- The frequently used items (every day or at least every week) go in primary, easily accessible places. And preferably will take only one motion to get to!

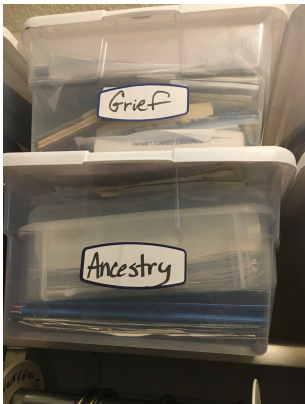
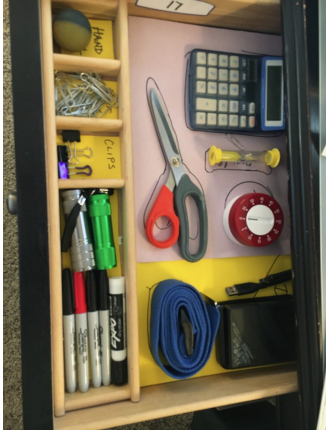
- The items used less frequently (maybe once every week/month) go into a secondary place.
- And the items seldom (a few times a year) go into a long-term storage place (luggage, holiday decorations, tax files, etc.).
- You also need a **well-defined and confined place** for every single item. And this is why you will **need labels on everything**. Every item in your home needs a home. With labels on everything, you are less likely to put an item in the wrong home.

Ask yourself after sorting and storing:

**“Could I find any item in my home in two minutes or less?”**

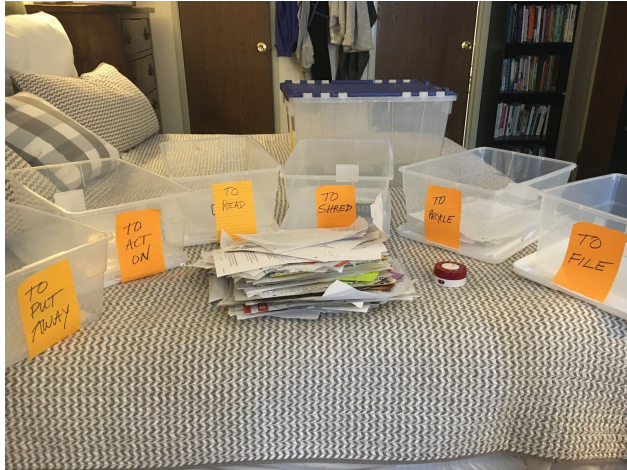
If the answer is yes, you have completed Operation Sort and Store successfully.

The following photos show examples of primary storage (my top desk drawer), secondary storage (a drawer near my desk), and long-term storage (a bin in my master bedroom closet). Remember that you want to make your primary storage items **“one motion”** (meaning they take you one motion to get to without moving any other items around). This will make sure they are easy to get at and easy to return!



- After decluttering the bedroom and bathroom, I moved onto the linen closet and other closets, the laundry room, the car (I needed it clear because of all the chaos hauling I would be doing). I needed the laundry room clear to develop good laundry habits like dealing with the clothes as soon as I washed them. I also needed to clear out some things from my storage closet to create room for things I actually used.

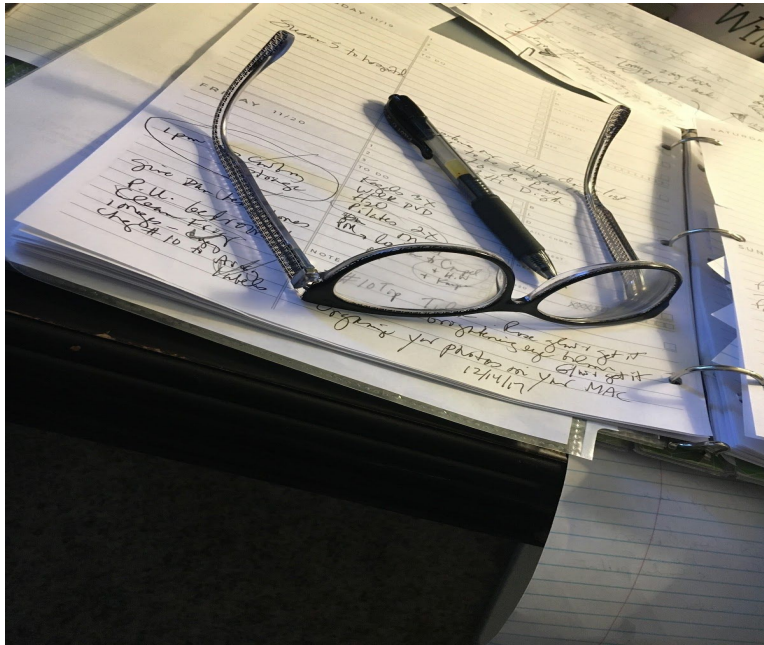
- I saved the kitchen and living room and adjoining balcony area for next to last. I saved the paperwork for last because it involved the most decision-making and was excruciating for me.



- I recommend saving your photo and computer organization until you get Serenity and have maintained it in your home for a while!
- You may decide to retire from things that take up too much of your time and are no longer necessary! Like ironing fancy clothes or fixing fancy meals, or dyeing your hair. I could go on, but I won't. I trust you will figure it out!



## PHASE THREE: OPERATION MAINTAIN SERENITY



***SOMETIMES YOUR “STOP-DOING LIST” HAS TO BECOME LONGER THAN YOUR TO-DO LIST!***

- Congratulations, you are now an accomplished Serenity Warrior! You will never be calling yourself messy again! You are so in love with your new home where Serenity reigns you can't imagine going back into the pit of Chaos!
- Maybe it was overbuying stuff that got you into this mess.
- You begin to realize that you have to shut off the flow of clutter once and for all.
- Stopping buying what you don't need just might be the hardest of all.



- Don't go to bed until there is Serenity in all the Chaos Free Zones. With this rule, you will begin to start tidying up before you get too tired! Eventually, you will start to leave a room better than you found it.
- You will begin to hate items out of place and immediately put them in their homes!
- You will keep your new habits. When Chaos was reigning, new patterns were impossible to establish!
- For now, know that you can change, and you will want to change once you get the feel of how wonderful living with Serenity is! Also, know that.

**IT IS NEVER TOO LATE, AND YOU ARE NEVER TOO OLD TO CHANGE INTO A BETTER YOU!**

- Habits that you have had for a long time are hard to change.
- But what makes good habit formation easier is what the experts call “habit stacking”—tacking one habit onto something you are already doing.
- Also, multitasking, taking advantage of little minutes you are presently wasting to incorporate your new habits.

- When I was in the middle of the ‘Maintain Serenity” phase, I realized what had gone wrong in the past with acquiring new habits. I was trying to do them in Chaos. Somehow putting something away is not so appealing amongst so many things that are not put away. Clutter attracts clutter.
- That is why it is crucial to get Serenity in a room first and then practice the Serenity Habits in this new serene space.
- Some experts say it takes twenty-one consecutive days to establish a new habit. Some say it takes sixty-seven days. Whatever you have read does not make it so.
- When you fall in love with your now serene room that is absent of clutter and all horizontal surfaces are clear, and there is a sense of peace there, you are going to develop several habits overnight. Not only develop them but keep them!
- You must practice the Serenity Habits first, let others slide for a while, and just focus on these top three I talk about for now.

## **MY TOP THREE SERENITY HABITS**

**Serenity habits are those habits that will keep each of the rooms that you have declared CHAOS FREE ZONES permanently that way.**

- They don't include clean habits, but I soon realized that the clean habits quickly followed when Serenity was reigning in those rooms.
- It is so much easier to dust and wipe off counters and sinks and floors when they are empty of clutter!
- For me, the clean habits started quickly (almost overnight) and stayed. But the Serenity habits had to be first and foremost! If a side table had a little dust, it was no big deal. I knew serenity was the priority - returning all the items to their homes was more important than the dust!

### **SERENITY HABIT NUMBER ONE:**

#### **Go to bed with SERENITY at all costs!**

- This means you may be using the surfaces to sort out your chaos, but chaos must be boxed up and moved out before you get into bed.
- This rule must never be violated. This means you don't put your shoes and clothes on the floor; you don't leave any horizontal surface uncleared --- bed, floor, dressers, desk --- whatever is in that room

must be cleared of chaos and returned to order. This means not even a kleenex or a paper clip can be left on the floor.

- If you forgot what the room looked like when Chaos moved out, take a picture, hang it up and look at it and get the room back into that same state.
- If your social media, post your before and after pictures (maybe a private page on decluttering) for accountability with people you know will encourage you and cheer you on. My favorite is called “Decluttering One Day at a Time” on Facebook. These people have been extremely encouraging to me!
- I started with my bedroom and then the bathroom that was adjoining it. These two rooms seemed to be the most important since I woke up and started my day in these two rooms. Getting these two rooms back into the Serenity state at the end of every day may take some changes in your schedule.
- You may have to start picking up before getting tired and making sure you have left enough time to tidy up and return items to where they need to be. You will soon develop habits that will prevent things from getting too chaotic!

## SERENITY HABIT NUMBER TWO:

- **Make the bed as soon as your feet hit the floor! Get serenity back asap!** (you may have to remove a book or some reading glasses off the top of the bed, but not much!)- you now have the first horizontal surface cleared, and you are less likely to mess it back up unless you are still in the sort phase and need it to spread out items to look at before storing them in their proper homes!
- You will soon learn that bringing in just a box or two at a time to sort is the wisest approach.
- Then other habits can be stacked onto this habit - yours will differ from mine. But I trust you can develop an excellent list of serenity habits that will be added to your morning routine.
- My good habit was to hang up my robe and put slippers in the closet where they have their home. After my shower, tidy up the bathroom - leave it how it was. You are more likely to hang up the towel right away than putting it on the bed to do later, and your future self will thank you for it.
- Your “future self” is the one who will be walking into the room at a later time. So your “present self” needs to think about how your future self will feel when she walks into this room later! You have to do it sometime, so do it now!

- After you shower, dress, including your shoes, you can then go into the kitchen where it is still not serene and get breakfast. The kitchen is ideally being saved for last since it requires the most effort to keep it tidy.
- But for now, pat yourself on the back for each day you have the bedroom and the bathroom chaos-free!
- And the more days you keep it, the more successful you will feel, and the more everyone who lives with you will know how serious about this you are!
- It got to the point that my husband reminded me and encouraged me to get Serenity before bedtime.
- Most evenings, I would get Serenity before I let myself relax and watch a tv program because I knew if I waited until later, I would have a more challenging time picking up things.
- As the days went by, I had less and less to pick up because I was developing the “Put it away now” habit. It is so much easier to keep new habits once I cleared the room of chaos.

- This is where the real difference is - serenity first, habit development later.
- The living room was quite cluttered at the end of my decluttering process. I had moved things in there as I decluttered the rest of my home. I had to put the stuff somewhere!
- The balcony area was collecting items also. Mostly there were lots of empty containers. I also had two chairs and a lamp that I needed to donate that had been sitting there for months!

### **SERENITY HABIT NUMBER THREE:**

**Return all items in their homes** (the new homes you created during the sort and store phase). Make it a point to do a “Serenity Check” at the end of each day - checking all horizontal surfaces for any loose items that you need to return to their homes!

## Conclusion:

- And there you have it, the method I created and used that transformed me and my home.
- After twenty-two moves and years fighting household clutter, the light has finally come on! My husband says he is astonished and continues to ask me what I did to his wife!
- Operation Serenity works! I am also pretty astonished at myself as days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months.
- I am maintaining Serenity almost effortlessly now, and I have so much more time for the things I enjoy. I have my life back!
- I continue to develop new habits but never abandon the ones that I have already formed. I am continually analyzing and asking myself, “What is the best place for this item? “How can I make this easier to do, more efficient so that I have more time for fun?
- I hope this book will help you begin, and more importantly, finish your own “Operation Serenity” and that you too can be who God created you to be. That you too can live the life He created you to live: **a life of order and peace and joy!**



## About the author



- Sandy is a writer who desires to help women in their “Third Act of Life” live more joyfully.
- She recently downsized into a small condo with her husband. She wants to help other women her age live a simpler, less chaotic life!
- She can be found on her website, where she writes and speaks on various interest topics to the aging woman. [www.sandymarthaler.com](http://www.sandymarthaler.com)

