

Downsizing

Don't you just hate that word?? I do. The moment I hear it my "energy-o-meter" starts to plummet.

My hubby says he has a "care-o-meter" (of great use for deciding whether or not something is really important). I have an 'energy-o-meter.'" (used for deciding whether or not each task of the day has enough importance to merit depositing my energy coins into it. If I could keep them and use them again, that would be one thing. But since the hungry little meter eats them forever, I have to decide whether it's worth it.)

So, what is it about the thought of downsizing that gets me "down"? Is it losing stuff? Nope. The thought of half as much "stuff" in here delights me. Is it the loss of memories involved? Hmm.. Maybe. I've always thought that a 'pleasingly cluttered' room was a comforting one. But at some point—and I'm way past that now—it begins to be oppressive instead of comforting.

I'm not exactly sure when this happened. When I was a kid, my idea of a dwelling place in heaven was a huge room with big windows and only a baby grand piano and a harp in it. Sleep? Who would need to do that? Scratch the bed idea. Stove and refrigerator? Who would need to cook? Scratch the kitchen. Now, that idea, I really like! (note to self: consider taking harp lessons!)

But over the years, something has changed. "I married someone who loves collecting, and I learned to love it too. I grew very sentimental about my "things" and loved garage sales and flea markets. 44 years of marriage has sort of meshed our likes together, and in this case I'm not so sure that's a good thing. (another note to self: make sure there's a place to set it down before bringing it home.)

Anyway, back to the point.

Okay.., so even if we weren't at the point where we were in need of considering a move closer to the kids, it would still be a good idea to de-clutter. The big problem: How to do it. I wrote my "Polio family" and asked what they would do.

Here are some of their answers:

- ***“Start with a yard or garage sale.”*** A wonderful idea! In our area people love garage sales. It probably wouldn’t work for us unless we could borrow a garage from someone in town. Our location is such that people would never be able to find us. (I can feel my energy dropping even as I write this!)
- ***“Rent a dumpster.”*** This was sent by a friend who knows me well. (Really?? A dumpster? I’m still laughing at this one.)
- ***“Visit local garage sales and sneak your stuff in with theirs and leave it there.”*** (Clever, huh? my hubby calls this “reverse flea marketing”. But that would take forever.

But as the old proverb says, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” And we must face facts. We as a couple are becoming limited as PPS advances and as macular degeneration affects vision, and it would not be fair to our children to wait until we reach the age where we can’t—and they must—do it. That would be selfish of us, I think.

So, the need remains to figure out ways to accomplish this.

Of course, a lot is determined by the place in which we intend to move...which in turn depends on how much we are able to get for our house... I understand all that. “But,” I keep telling myself, “we must begin to do something. And there’s never a better time to start than now.”

Some more really good advice I’ve received:

- ***“Look around the community at people in need, and think about who might benefit from each thing the most, and who would appreciate it? Then give it to them.”*** (Or give it to them anonymously; that way they couldn’t give it back!)
- ***“Go through things room by room and make a ‘most precious’ list (“Most” being the key word), by deciding which things are the dearest to you. Was it a gift from someone dear? Was it something that you saved money to buy and you dearly love? Or was it just something that takes up room? Does it make you smile each time you see it? Or does it make you think...”Gee, I need to dust.”*** Make a list of those things. Somehow, it does help if it’s down in black and white. And don’t be afraid to re-evaluate from time to time. What’s precious today should still be precious in a few weeks. If it’s not, it can probably be dropped from the list altogether.”

- Decide to keep only those things which meet the “most precious” qualification. Then pack the rest away for six or eight months, and if you have resisted the urge to pull them back out, or have forgotten they are there, donate them. Since things are generally “out of sight, out of mind”, you may realize you didn’t miss them at all. (This is a really hard one for me.)*

Recently I packed some stuff away in a tub. As I evaluated the things I put in it, I realized that among them were things that I bought because they reminded me of Mom or Dad—or reminded me of something that I had as a child. But the thing is, I already have so many things that either belonged to Mom and Dad, or things that they gave me as gifts, that it’s unnecessary to go and buy something that just happens to remind me of them. Those other things I was able to put away. I probably should have just sent them on their way and parted with them altogether.
- Another friend wrote: I have been trying to get the help I need to downsize as well. It is very hard for me, but there is very little of this that I can do alone. I keep reminding myself that if it is done by others when I am gone they may not recognize the few things that are really important and throw them away! I am trying to make myself write down particular things that I think might be meaningful to certain of my children and grandchildren. That would have meant so much to me if my parents had done that.”*
- Another friend added: “And take lots of pictures! The pictures can also be of value in case of insurance claims.”*
- Another wrote: “I drag a box into the closet with me. Little by little spend a few moments each day dropping things into the box until it’s full, and then ask someone to take it to Goodwill or the Salvation Army”. (note to self: see if there’s a box the size of Rhode Island somewhere.)*
- “I had someone tape the names of loved ones on the backs of certain things; that way those family members would be sure to get them.”*
- “When the kids come and express an interest in something, I’m sending it home with them.”*

- **And one of the most helpful came from my sweet hubby, and can be applied to any task that requires energy: “Take a timer with you and set it for 10 or 15 minutes. And when it goes off, stop and rest for as long as it takes. When you feel completely rested, set the timer for another 10 or 15. If you start to notice that it’s taking longer and longer to rest up, stop for the rest of the day.”** (He’s trying to keep my ‘energy-o-meter’ empty. He knows I need those energy coins more than it does.)

If, as folks with PPS, we take things slow and try to do a little at a time, we can *still* get things done, it just takes a little longer (better to be a turtle and move slowly than a hare who burns out quickly and never meets the goal).

If I do all these things, perhaps maybe I’ll make a dent and the house will begin to be a comfort again? I don’t know. But finding a place to meet needs and finding new homes for stuff seems to be a wonderful place to start. If that doesn’t work by the time we need to move, then perhaps....

...well, just perhaps, I’ll consider the dumpster!

Annie