



DOWNSIZING Your Home

By David McConkey

Photo by Kara Matthews - Sterling Images

“It is very hard,” Pat Bowslaugh says to me. “It is one of the most emotional challenges a person has in their life.”

Pat and I are meeting over coffee. Topic for discussion: downsizing. Shrinking your living from a house for a family down to a condo or apartment for a retired individual or couple.

Pat and her husband Cliff are now in the downsizing stage of life. It is a joy to talk with Pat and get her ideas and suggestions. She is passionate as she describes what she has learned from her family, her work, and her life.

After raising a family and retiring, people don't need as much space. As well, they are usually happy to hand over the maintenance to someone else. They may want to reduce their costs and so seek a more simplified and economical situation. They may also wish to travel and so desire the convenience of having their place looked after when they are away.

A condo or apartment often means no stairs, as well as the ease of negotiating a smaller space. For Pat and Cliff, like many others, an issue of mobility in their old house was a factor.

That brings us to the larger concern of health. Of course, we don't know how the future will unfold. But the ideal is to downsize before major health issues crop up. Also good to know that the tasks of mowing the lawn, shoveling the snow, and all the rest are taken care of.

But you can't squeeze all of your stuff into your new location. How does that measure up for them? Their old place: a large two-storey house (which Pat

designed herself) of about 4,000 square feet. With a basement. Their new place: a condo of 1,280 square feet. No basement.

Pat and Cliff were able to buy their condo ahead of time. If you can manage owning two places, then do so, Pat advises. Because that gave them additional time to have renovations done in the condo as well as to downsize their possessions.



Custom Murphy Bed

Pat carefully measured the condo and planned exactly what would go where in the new space. For the most part, she was able to use their existing furniture. One exception: the second bedroom. It would serve mainly as an office, but sometimes be a guest bedroom as well. To make the best use of space, Pat designed a Murphy bed (which pulls out from the wall) and had it constructed by NuTrend Kitchens.

Their condo unit was about 15 years old, and needed not only an upgrade, but also changes to suit Pat's style. So, she re-designed the kitchen and the two bathrooms and had them completely re-done, with the help from NuTrends Kitchens.



To personalize the window coverings in the condo, Pat chose Budget Blinds. Pat had already used Budget Blinds for her old house, so it was natural to choose them again. Pat raves about Budget Blinds: personable, professional, following her wishes, but also ready to make suggestions. The new look of the condo, Pat says, is “contemporary, but is me.”

With the condo furnished, there is still enough furniture left over to “stage” the old house for selling purposes. (Any



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furniture not sold with the house will be either moved to their cottage, sold, or given away.)

Dealing with all the other stuff – the stuff that won't fit into the condo – is the really hard part. What about the keepsakes, the family heirlooms, the things filled with a lifetime of memories? For Pat, most difficult to part with have been the treasured gifts she received from her students over the years. To purge is tough. But, Pat says, remember: "it is only stuff."

Here is an important tip from Pat: don't save stuff thinking that your kids will want it. Today's generation, Pat says, wants today's things, which are "plain, simple, current." But, do give the younger generation the chance to take any "things that might catch their interest."

Their son took photos of many items and posted them online; they were very quickly sold. Pat and Cliff also had several garage sales.

Don't forget about donating, Pat reminds everyone. Before throwing anything in the garbage, think if it could be donated instead. That could include extra food supplies that won't fit into the new smaller space.

Quality professional clothing that Pat had worn during her career but didn't need any more? She donated them to the Nearly New Shop, with the proceeds going to the Brandon Regional Health Centre. She says, "I felt really good about that."

Now that the process is almost complete, how do they feel about their downsizing? Cliff is delighted with the new place. For Pat – well – she is still getting used to the

idea. She misses the house they left behind, the house she designed, the house with memories. But for Pat, downsizing is yet another stage to be tackled and accomplished in a full, productive life.

Pat feels very good about all that they have done: the reducing, the renovating, the re-decorating. The condo, Pat says, will be "the last place we're going to be together."

"We need a place that is ours."

DOWNSIZING TIPS

Sue Swarbrick of Budget Blinds has helped many people with downsizing. Here are some suggestions from Sue:

- Embrace this phase of your life. You are being liberated from the hassles of house and yard maintenance.
- Focus on the positive. You have a smaller place; now enjoy making it your new home.
- Let your personality come out. Let your new place tell your story.
- Go ahead with those finishing touches, those little extras. Decorate it with the care you did your previous home over the years.
- Note to the children: help your parents make their new place homey and special.



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