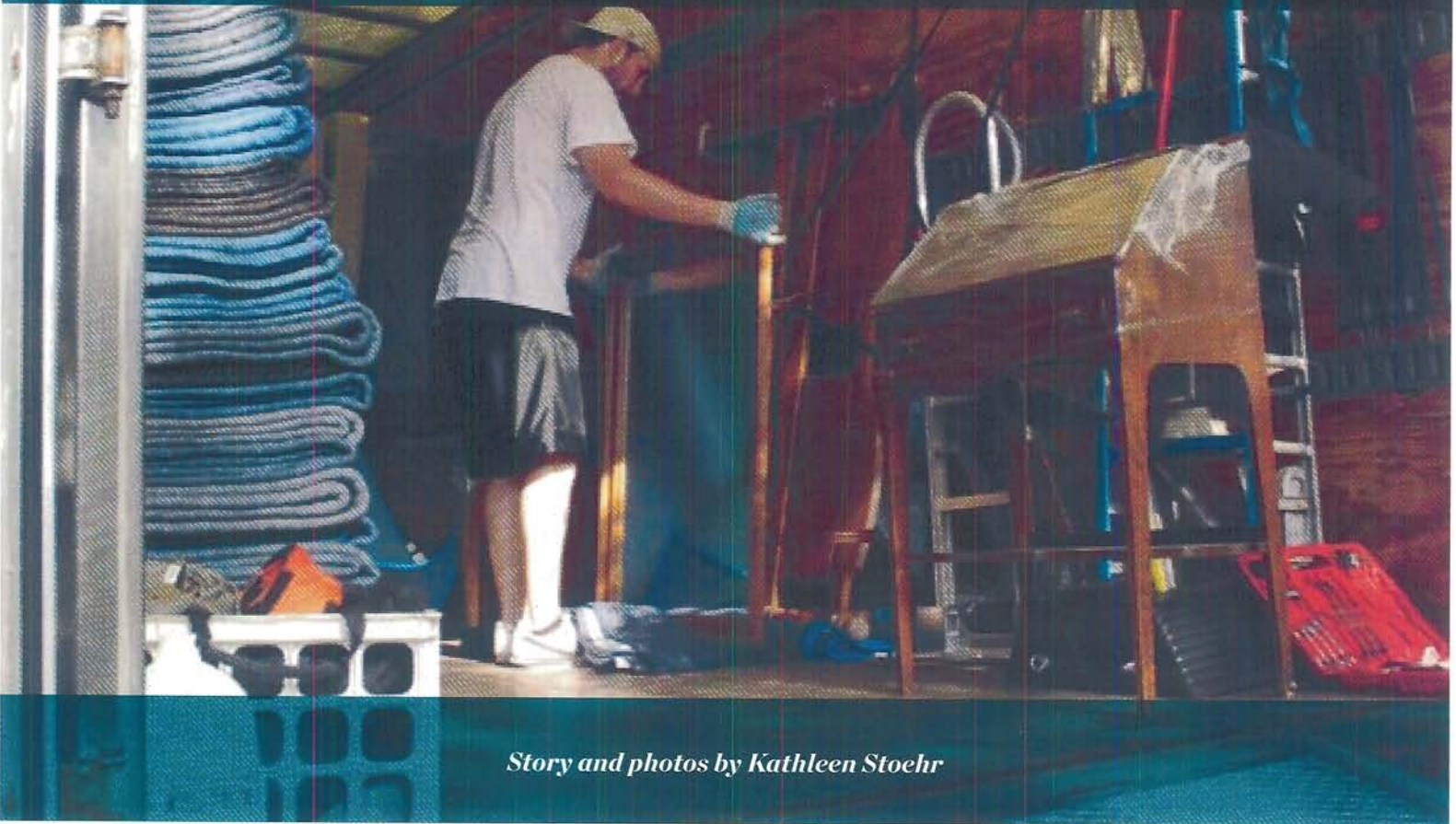


FIVE DECADES, DOWNSIZED



Story and photos by Kathleen Stoehr

My parents met cute, married quickly, and moved into a small, two-bedroom home with a single car garage in 1959. They paid \$13,200 to “achieve” Edina (as the saying goes).

I was born about 10 months later and had a small room (no closet) on the northeast side of the house.

Deer used to run up the middle of our street, Wooddale Avenue, back then. Nearby, Southdale was very new, and there was a swamp within walking distance of our home.

I had my own room for about two years until my brother, David, made his appearance. When my parents decided to add one more to the family four years after that, they also decided, after looking at larger homes in the area, that they

would just build up instead. That’s how our cute little one story became a large two story.

My bedroom on the first level became a den, the wall between my parent’s first floor bedroom and the livingroom was knocked out to create a dining room, and four bedrooms and a bath were added to the new upper level. I fondly remember being told, shortly before that livingroom wall was knocked down, that I could use it as a canvas. My brother and I scribbled all over it for days.

Our garage was doubled at some point; a driveway put in; the kitchen remodeled; and a small three-season porch was added onto the back some time in the ’90s.

Kids moved out, kids moved back in after college, and the house burst with family.

Until it just didn't anymore. And there my parents sat, with a two-story, four-bedroom house in east Edina with bedrooms on the second level, and laundry on the basement level. Too much house; too many stairs. With a house that large, "aging in place" was not a favorable option.

The decision:

My folks had been vacillating for years about moving but it always seemed that various health or personal issues would arise and cobble their plans. Finally, stars aligned, knees were replaced, the economy recovered, and they began a tentative search for a smaller home.

Throughout their search—the goal being a two-bedroom condo somewhere near their original home—they waited too long for one, couldn't afford the second, lost out on a third, declined on a fourth, and finally hit pay dirt with the fifth. This is an oversimplification of course, but they truly were too cautious—at least in my opinion.

But there were lessons learned along the way I'd like to impart. Of course, this is just from a daughter's viewpoint, but sometimes the best way to see something is through someone else's eyes.

Plan for all roadblocks.

Their Edina home sold prior to being put out on the general MLS (Multiple Listing Service) site. The Realtor they engaged had a deep knowledge of their community and already was scouting for a family or two wanting to move into the area. While there were showings of their home, there was never an "open house." It sold to a young family within a couple of weeks. Roadblocks followed.

The home went through inspection and mold was discovered in the roof area. A boatload of money later, the problem was fixed and the house passed inspection.

Then my dad had a heart attack.

Fixed with a stent.

Then the A/C went on the fritz.

Fixed with a little bit of cashola.

Honestly, this downsizing stuff is a real drag!

Bottom line: plan for the unexpected. Stress, of course, was not the ultimate cause of my dad's heart attack. It was plain and simple artery blockage. Mold? Who knew. It manifested in a

way that the home itself was not compromised. The living areas on every level were fine, but inside the roof things were cooking like a firmly sealed Tupperware container with milk inside, slowly curdling.

Thank goodness enough time was built into the process to contend with life's small (and large) curveballs.

Begin downsizing early.

One of the more dazzling (at least in my eyes) aspects of my parent's move is that they put a lot of thought into ridding themselves of things they didn't need anymore, way ahead of time.

For example, taking a page from her mother, my mom did something unusual. Here's the story: long ago, when my grandmother was facing death (cancer), she asked each of her five children to give her a list of 10 items in her home that they would like. When she got the lists back, she remarked that there wasn't one thing on any of them that was duplicated! From these lists, she put together part of her will.

My mom took it a step further a few years back: she asked the same thing of my brothers and I, but then handed over those possessions that she and my father felt they were ready to part with, for whatever reason. This is how I came into possession of a 1970s era catsup bottle, way sooner than I thought I would.

Also, here's one more bit of advice: if you don't want (or need) it, and your kids don't want (or need) it, and it didn't sell in the garage sale, don't worry about it! Put it in the donate box and say goodbye.

If you like it, bid on it.

Like any auction or bet, submitting a bid on something doesn't necessarily mean you will get it. As our housing columnist, Lisa Dunn, mentioned in our August issue: from a homeowner's perspective, multiple bids are fun! Take a chance and make your best offer. The worst they can say is no. Sitting on your pocketbook and hoping the property is available when you want it is the best way to lose it.

If you do win the bid, there are various means of financing your new home while you still own your old one, from "bridge" loans that →

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Don't push yourself.

My parents said there were days when they'd look at each other and just laugh, because they were so uninterested in packing. They knew at some point it would all get done, but that on that particular day, not a thing in the world was going to encourage them pick up a box and a roll of bubble wrap. Make time for that, the "doing nothing" kind of day, to give your stress level a breather and your body a break. Or, hire someone to do it for you. There are plenty of moving companies in the Twin Cities that specialize in helping boomers and seniors move.

Conversely, on moving day, Minnesota had one of its hottest days of the summer. Humidity was high, and the house open wide for large furniture pieces to be taken out. It was sweltering by 10:00 in the morning. And yet, there's my dad toting boxes and asking the people he's paying (Two Guys & a Truck)—if he can help them! Without being too obnoxious, we had to firmly tell my dad to sit himself down. I'll reiterate: don't push yourself. With illness, taxes, and divorce leading the pack, moving is one of the other large stressors a person can experience in life. So hire it out or enjoy a respite from packing if you feel like it. In the end, it will all resolve.

Let people help you.

My mother said, "You are middle aged. I don't want you lifting that heavy thing!" Whatever that heavy thing was, it really wasn't that bad.

Hire movers for the big furniture pieces, but let your kids carry the boxes. Really.

It's "pay it back" time, and there's nothing better than doing things for those you love. So please, don't tell your kids you have it handled or that you have enough money to pay someone else to tote your glassware carefully. If your kids offer to help, and you love them—let them help. It made me feel super good to help my parents and it actually lowered my stress level to know I was doing the work instead of them.

Know a good remodeler.

No matter where you move, you will still need to make a few tweaks to the structure at the very least. In my parent's case, a "step-over" area to access the porch is a hazard they are not willing to gamble on. In the next few months, they will be bidding out removing baseboard heating, knocking out the 10-inch tripping hazard, and then dropping three sets of sliding glass doors down to floor level. Whether it's installing a few extra grab bars, moving light fixtures, adding a drop down Murphy bed for the occasional sleepover guest into a den, or more major remodeling like my parents anticipate, having the names of a few talented, ethical home improvement contractors, remodelers, and handypersons is a good thing.

Let it go.

Mom commented that it was strange that after living in the house for 54 years, she didn't feel bad about letting





My dad, checking out a property with Kim Melin, Realtor.

it go. A health issue shortly after moving kept her from returning to the house one last time after it was empty—but she says it didn't bother her all that much. "You'd think it would," she mused.

After all of the internal struggle about moving, once she was gone, she was adjusting well. "This new place doesn't feel like home yet—I feel like I'm visiting—but I know it will in time. It's quiet, the deck is great, and there are some little yellow birds flying so fast through the trees, I can't imagine how they navigate so well. And I made your dad put all of the unopened boxes in the bathroom so I don't have to look at them until I'm ready."



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