

Downsizing when the kids are gone

Reprinted from the Dallas Morning News

By **KATHLEEN GREEN**, SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR

Published: May 13, 2013 3:51 PM



Louis DeLuca / Staff Photographer

Jan Thompson of Plano knows firsthand how overwhelming downsizing can be. In 2008, she pared down to move into a small apartment in downtown Denver, where she planned to join her newly transplanted husband. Thompson, who has two grown daughters, is shown here with a photo of her daughter, Rachel.

That dream home once filled with kids and activity looks less appealing as empty nesters ponder their next move. Accumulating a houseful of stuff didn't happen overnight, so downsizing must be carefully considered. It requires organization, planning and letting go, said Tonia Tomlin, owner of Sorted Out, a professional organizing firm in Plano. "It's very emotionally draining for people to downsize," she said. "You have to get mentally ready."

Jan Thompson of Plano knows firsthand how overwhelming downsizing can be. In 2008, she pared down to move into a small apartment in downtown Denver, where she planned to join her newly transplanted husband.

"We had this big honkin' house in Plano with all the trappings, three living spaces with a lot of wasted space," said Thompson, who has two grown daughters. Before she got to Denver, her husband's company closed. Thompson never left Plano, but she made peace with the purge. Or so she thought.

"I have my moments, and they come at the most unexpected times," said Thompson, 58. "This past Thanksgiving, I went to a friend's house and she was pulling out all of her special china and crystal. I gave mine to my daughter. Just seeing her pull out all that special stuff, it just devastated me."

Article Provided by

3 Friends: Estate Sales & More * (972) 383-9848 * Service@EstateSalePal.com

Getting rid of memorabilia doesn't mean getting rid of memories, said organizer Tomlin, who must handle the challenging process with care. "We try to get them to start small — maybe a small area like their closet," she said. "The emotional things that go along with getting rid of clutter, you have to be very delicate ... you're not just getting rid of stuff," she says.

Professional organizer Terri Fulton remembers one client who couldn't part with a little table and chairs where her children had done art projects. Fulton suggested she take a picture and write down her remembrances.

"Suddenly she was ready to let go," said Fulton, founder and CEO (Chief Encouraging Organizer) of Top Drawer Organizing in Dallas. "People seem to think that if they let go of an item, it's like the event didn't happen, like they're giving away the memories. But the memory is still alive even if the thing is gone."

While downsizing requires being mentally ready, there's also a strategy to it. Embracing a new home and its possibilities is a good way to start. "Once you get there, you'll have your new vision and new styles," Tomlin said.

"My mother used to say, 'Move or have a fire every five years,'" joked Joyce Beach, who says she and her husband, Gordon, are happy with their decision to give up their pool, big yard and fourth bedroom in Plano.

Knowing what to do with everything is half the battle. Tomlin suggests sorting belongings by zone: donation, consignment, trash, new house and family.

Organize

The upside to moving is taking control and getting rid of clutter. Tomlin has clients ask themselves four things:

Am I really going to need this?

Do I really want this?

Am I going to find a use for it later?

Is it broken?

"If you really don't like that piece, it's probably time to move on," she said.

Now that Thompson and her husband are actually moving to Houston this spring, she said she's finding it much easier because she's still mostly organized. "Sadly, I've gone back to accumulating," said Thompson, a consultant in managed-care contract

Article Provided by

3 Friends: Estate Sales & More * (972) 383-9848 * Service@EstateSalePal.com

negotiation. “Just dumb stuff. I bought this humidifier. It’s a monstrosity, and it takes up a lot of space.”

She certainly won’t need a humidifier in Houston, so Thompson is taking items to her friends’ garage sales and will donate the rest.

Donate

After 16 years and four kids, Kay Rinker, 49, said there’s a lot to sift through as she and her husband, Bill, 57, prepare to move from their Plano home to a one-story in Frisco.

Both she and Thompson recently donated prom dresses to the Prom Closet. Beach plans to donate books to the Plano library. Donations are often tax deductible, and there are benefits that can’t be calculated. “It’s not hard to talk myself into thinking that I could be blessing somebody else,” Thompson said.

Sell

Another option is consignment, which puts money back in empty nesters’ pockets. That can help with moving costs, Tomlin said. Moving unwanted clutter becomes even more of an issue since moving companies charge by weight. Keep that in mind with questionable keepsakes. “If you’re really not going to use those items, it’s a good idea to part with it.”

Take

The most sentimental items should make the move, along with any furniture that fits the new place, said Tomlin. Anything else is up for negotiation.

Pitch

Getting the kids involved helped immensely in the long run, Tomlin and Thompson agreed. There is nothing worse than going through your parents’ home only to find they haven’t thrown out anything, Thompson said.

“I ended up with a box of loose pictures. It was a big, hot mess, and it was a huge burden,” she said. “I don’t want my girls to be in the position I was in.” Rinker, too, has her kids in mind as she packs. After consulting them, she pitched unwanted items, including their trophies.

“I told the kids: Take it or leave it. If it stays, it will probably go in the garbage,” said Rinker, owner of Community Insurance Agency in Plano. “If it’s not sentimental to them, why is it sentimental to me?”

Article Provided by

3 Friends: Estate Sales & More * (972) 383-9848 * Service@EstateSalePal.com

Bestow

Parting with treasures is easier if family members take ownership. Thompson's just-married daughter had a new house to fill and gladly accepted castoffs.

"It didn't feel like I had to completely give it away or sell it," said Thompson, who is at peace with her choices — except sometimes when she visits her daughter. "I walk in and go, 'Dang, I wish I hadn't given you that,'" she said. "The house we're moving into, I think, golly, that tapestry would look good in there."

The Beaches' grown sons will take rocking chairs once used by a North Carolina grandma, along with a friend's painting brought back from France after WWI that was handed down.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE CASTOFFS

To gain

Clotheshorse Anonymous: 11661 Preston Road, Dallas, 972-233-7005 clotheshorseanonymous.com

Consignment Heaven: 2901 N. Henderson Ave., Dallas, 214-823-4100 consignmentheaven.com

Reventé: 5400 E. Mockingbird Lane, Dallas, 214-823-2800, reventeresale.com

Craig's List: Meet potential buyers in a public place. Use caution. dallas.craigslist.org

To give

Donation Town: This site searches for charities in your area that will pick up items. donationtown.org

Salvation Army: To schedule a pickup of appliances, clothing, household goods or furniture: 214-630-5611, salvationarmydfw.org

Genesis Women's Shelter Thrift Store: Clothing, household items, toys, furniture, baby items, office furniture and more. 3419 Knight St., Dallas, 214-520-6644 genesishshelter.org

Operation Kindness: Benefits the Carrollton no-kill shelter. To schedule a pickup of clothing, housewares or other items, 972-438-5463, donateforkindness.org

Public libraries: Check your local library's website for guidelines on what they accept.

Dallas: dallaslibrary2.org

Arlington: arlingtonlibrary.org

Plano: planolibrary.org

Frisco: friscolibrary.com

Allen: allenlibrary.org

Article Provided by

3 Friends: Estate Sales & More * (972) 383-9848 * Service@EstateSalePal.com