

# SIMPLIFY MAGAZINE

· A QUARTERLY, DIGITAL PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES ·

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# An Introduction: The Declutter Issue

*by THE FOUNDERS OF SIMPLIFY MAGAZINE*



Picture your dream home. I bet it's not filled with clutter.

Nobody moves into a new home and thinks to themselves, "I can't wait to fill this entire house with clutter." But somewhere along the way, it just sorta happens and stuff begins to accumulate... in our closets and our drawers, in our basements and our attics, in our garages, storage sheds, and storage units. Clutter just happens.

The *Los Angeles Times* reports that the average American home now contains 300,000 items. [1] The size of our houses keep getting bigger and bigger. But rather than resulting in an uncluttered space, they just keep filling with more and more things. But no more!

Removing clutter makes room for a life focused on the things that matter most. It opens up physical space in our home and mental space in our mind. Living clutter free offers potential for more focus, more freedom, passion and intentionality. It helps reduce stress and financial obligations. Even better, removing the physical clutter from our home lays a foundation that makes significant life changes possible. It encourages us to question assumptions and invites thoughtful consideration of all aspects of our lives.

In this issue of *Simplify Magazine*, we tackle the important issue of living clutter free. The insightful articles were written by professional organizers, storytellers, life coaches, authors, and some of today's leading minds and voices in the simplicity movement. You will find thoughtful and practical

ideas on spring cleaning, thinning out your closet, and decluttering your mind. This issue also addresses important generational issues such as how to assist your aging parents in downsizing their homes and how to teach young children to declutter their rooms.

This issue of *Simplify Magazine* is packed with both inspiration and practical ideas. May you find it encouraging as you journey toward a life focused on the things that matter most.

With you on this journey,

Joshua Becker & Brian Gardner

# Helping Mom and Dad Downsize

*by MARGIT NOVACK, NASMM*



Sometimes it starts with a phone call at 2 a.m., “your mom had a stroke.” Sometimes it’s a gradual worsening of chronic conditions. But at some point, your parents may have to say goodbye to their beloved house. The home that hosted so many family thanksgivings, where everyone gathered to open Christmas stockings, that proudly showcases each child’s handcrafted creations is too much for them to care for. In light of this abrupt change and loss, your parents’ world will turn upside down. And you may be faced with the immense task of helping them through it all.

As a Senior Move Manager with 20 years of experience, I’ve helped thousands of families navigate the choppy waters of helping parents move. Maybe you’re in the midst of this situation right now, or maybe it’s just around the corner. I’ve seen families drawn together by the experience, and I’ve seen families torn apart. That’s why we created nine proven tips to help simplify the decision-making process, preserve your parent’s sense of control and respect their need to reminisce. When I work with families, I encourage all siblings and family members to read these tips so that everyone is focused on the same goal—honoring Mom and Dad. These guidelines will help you through this difficult transition so that your family peace is protected and your loved ones can focus on enjoying precious moments together.

## Nine Tips to Downsizing and Relocating

### 1. Let your parents' emotional and physical comfort guide the process.

Most likely, you will have different priorities from your parents. And you and your siblings may have differing agendas among yourselves. These separate priorities create conflict just when family unity is needed most. Remember that honoring your parents includes honoring their agenda.

Seemingly insignificant items may be loaded with personal meaning and memories for your parents. And objects of great material value may be less important. They may prefer old, worn objects to newer ones in better condition. Respect their decisions.

Dealing with the physical and mental loss that often accompanies old age, your mom and dad may cling fiercely to their independence and sense of control. They may have a sequence in which they need to proceed that differs from your own. If books are very special to your parents, for example, they may need to determine what will happen to the volumes they're leaving behind before they can focus on other issues. Attempting to force your parents to proceed in a sequence that doesn't address their priorities usually results in arguments and inattention.



## **2. Try to replicate the old environment.**

Your parents will be experiencing a lot of change. It will be comforting to have some things stay the same. Take photos of each shelf in the china closet, the arrangement of pictures on the wall, and the items on bureaus and end tables. The photos will help you recreate the feel of the former home with speed and accuracy, and will make the new residence feel more like home.

## **3. Focus on sorting, not packing.**

Preparing for a senior move is a major organizational challenge. There may be decades of belongings to sort through in attics, basements, spare rooms and closets. In addition to what will be moved to your parents' new home, things may need to go to family members across the country, as well as to the church bazaar, donation centers, charities, auction houses and the township dump. Helping your parents sort and organize their belongings is the single most important thing you can do to reduce stress, save money, and ensure a smooth move.

## **4. Accept their gifts.**

I was reminded of this at the funeral of my friend's grandmother. "Things were important to my grandmother," Lisa said. She told me that her grandmother had lived through the Great Depression, and then years later, buried both of her children. In the face of so much loss, Lisa's

Grandmother had held onto what she could. When she moved at age 88, she offered to give Lisa many of her cherished things. But Lisa didn't need the items. Honestly, she didn't like them and she had no space to store them. "I said no to everything," Lisa told me. "Today, I regret those decisions. It's not that I've grown to like the things she offered. It's that I was thinking of myself, and I should have been thinking about her."

Your parents will be saying goodbye to a great deal. Knowing that cherished objects, and even ordinary items, are with family members eases their sense of loss. If they give you things, even things you don't like, accept them graciously. Store them in the basement if you must. Conversely, if your parents are warehousing things that belong to you or your siblings, take them now so your mom and dad don't need to worry about them during the move.

## **5. Be tactful.**

Poor health, caregiving duties and failing eyesight can result in housekeeping practices that are less stringent than they once were. Tactfully clean things as you sort, and avoid making your parents feel embarrassed. If you find clothing that is torn or stained, suggest a donation site that recycles textiles. Take worn towels to the local animal shelter. Knowing that things will be used, regardless of their condition, will be a comfort to your parents.

## **6. Let your parents say good-bye.**

Keep sorting sessions brief— 2-3 hours at the most. It is may be difficult when you come to town for a weekend and plan to blitz through things. But constant decision-making is exhausting and marathon sorting sessions usually result in diminishing returns. Accept that some days you will accomplish less than you had hoped for and let your parents enjoy their recollections.

The sorting process brings up memories, so stories and reminiscing are natural. Studies show that reminiscing calms people and reduces stress. You may find that after telling a story, your parents are able to focus more on decision-making. In short, storytelling is a productivity tool, not a hindrance. Listen respectfully, ask questions. Remember that in the long run, it is your parents' stories—not their belongings—that you will cherish.

## **7. Be realistic about how much time you can devote to the process.**

If your parents live in the family home, allow 60-80 hours for the downsizing process, and 20 hours for items not going with them. Helping them pack, move, unpack and settle into their new home will take about 50-80 hours. If your time is limited, focus on doing fun things with your parents and providing emotional support. Hire a professional Senior Move Manager to help with the rest.

## **8. Concentrate on the big picture.**

You have a lot on your plate including your own home, family, job, and even caregiving responsibilities. All this can add to your stress regarding your parents move and distract you from the big picture. Conflicts sometimes develop between siblings over the dispersion of items, and more frequently, over the sharing of caregiving duties. As you work with your parents and siblings, keep three objectives equally in mind: caring for your parents, taking care of yourself, and keeping the family intact.

## **9. Hire a Senior Move Manager.**

Downsizing and moving are challenging tasks, but you don't have to do it alone. A Senior Move Manager can provide expert planning, proven resources and hands-on help to take the work and worry out of moving. Most Senior Move Managers provide a free, no-obligation home visit. For NASMM members throughout the U.S. and Canada, visit National Association of Senior Move Managers ([www.nasmm.org](http://www.nasmm.org)). NASMM members must meet insurance and educational requirements and adhere to the NASMM Code of Ethics.

## **Home is More Than Four Walls**

The home James shared with his wife was filled with the artwork, vases, sculpture, china, silver pieces and miniatures they had collected on their travels around the world. After his wife died, James was comforted by the

things that connected the two together in memory. From his favorite chair, he could see the Turkish vase she had fallen in love with in Istanbul. The tile painting on the mantel displayed the same beach in Mexico where their grandchild touched the ocean for the first time.

At age 79, James couldn't travel or drive anymore. Even the rutted sidewalks in his neighborhood had become too difficult to navigate. James knew it was time to move to a retirement community. But the new apartment didn't have the space to hold all his wife's things.

Cindy, one of the NASMM Move Managers, sat down with James and listened as he told stories of world-wide adventures. Cindy knew that James would never be able to throw any of the treasures away. But donating them to causes that aligned with his wife's values would comfort him with the fact that they would be enjoyed by others. Cindy recommended special charities that she thought would connect with James. His wife's clothing and household items were donated to a shelter to help abused women begin new lives. A pet rescue organization entered valuable collectibles at a charity auction. It took more time to sort the possessions this way but it was the right process for James.

Cindy expected James would forget to eat on move day, just when he needed nourishment the most. So on move day, Cindy brought him coffee, donuts, and milk for his cereal. She made sure he ate a sandwich at lunch.

After unpacking, James thanked Cindy, saying his new home was "perfect." Although much smaller than his prior home, he was surrounded by things he and his wife had collected. It felt like home. James had left the house, but he took the memories with him.

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**Margit Novack** is President of Moving Solutions, and Founding President of the National Association of Senior Move Managers (NASMM). She is a leader and pioneer in the Senior Move Management industry. Margit is a sought-after speaker and has often been featured in national media on topics related to senior relocation, family transitions, downsizing and creating legacy. She has developed multiple training programs to educate individuals interested in this growing field, and she was the first recipient of NASMM's prestigious Margit Novack Award for Excellence in Senior Move Management.