



SENIOR TRANSITION SERVICES: There was Light at the End of the Tunnel

By Marlene Stocks

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It had only taken them 10 years, but the painful and gut-wrenching decision had finally been made. The ink of their signatures had not yet dried on the contract that bound them to move into a local retirement community within three months when the second guessing and uncertainty began. Were they doing the right thing? Was this the right time? Will they have enough money? What if they don't like it there?

Tom and Sarah had just agreed to leave their four-bedroom split-level residence of 46 years, the home in which they raised their two children and was filled with souvenirs acquired during their numerous trips, Sarah's artwork that could have easily filled a gallery and a library with hundreds of volumes to move into a much smaller two-bedroom apartment.

Yes, the time was right because of Sarah's inability to safely navigate the two sets of stairs between the entry of the house and the bedroom. She had already fallen several times, which required medical treatment and a stay in rehab. It was clear to both that she needed the care that a retirement community could provide. A careful review of their financial situation confirmed that the move was affordable, but it meant that their house would need to be listed for sale quickly to take advantage of the spring selling season. Everything seemed to be swirling around them with hurricane-strength winds.

Decluttering the house became the top priority so it could be photographed and listed on the Multiple Listing Service for a quick sale. Many difficult decisions about which contents would move with them, be sold, donated or discarded needed to be made. It was an emotional and exhausting roller coaster ride for both. When the house was ready to be shown, a steady stream of prospective buyers visited, adding even more stress on Tom and Sarah. Thankfully, within three days of showings that created a bidding war, the house was under agreement. Settlement was scheduled for two days after the moving date.

The final frenzy of preparing for the move began. More downsizing was needed that required another round of decision making. The items identified for donation were packed, and the charity pickup scheduled. Old, sensitive documents were shredded, and the trash was hauled away. They were now ready for the movers to pack up and move their most important possessions to their new home.

Moving day was mildly chaotic. Tom and Sarah waited patiently in the lobby lounge outside of their new apartment, while a team of nine set the furniture, unpacked the boxes and carefully recreated their home for them. After a very long day, Tom and Sarah crossed the threshold of their new apartment to find a miniature version of the home they had just left behind. The worst may have been behind them, but they were still skeptical.

Many of the community's residents quickly came to the rescue by introducing themselves to Tom and Sarah and making them feel welcome. They were invited to join other residents for dinner and eagerly participated in the diverse table conversations that often erupted into laughter and lasted for hours. They began to look forward to these dinner events because of the rollicking great time and exuberant conversation they created. Their social experiences kept expanding, and before long, Tom and Sarah, who had both been teachers, volunteered to participate in a program that reads to children. Tom spoke about starting a poetry reading program, while Sarah enjoyed an art class she attended.

Their lives were finally getting into a smooth routine. Their outlook, which only a few weeks earlier had been depressed and uncertain, was now more calm and grounded than it had been for a very long time thanks to the lively discussions and laughter they shared with other residents. These new friends and the worry-free lifestyle the community provided negated Tom and Sarah's social and intellectual isolation they had known at their former residence.

Thankfully, the transformation yielded an inner peace and acceptance of this new environment and lifestyle. Tom and Sarah came to the realization that they belonged there and believed it will be beneficial both physically and emotionally. Tom confided, "I haven't felt this good in years. This feels like a whole new life is opening up."

Welcome home, Tom and Sarah!

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