

A survival guide for seniors who live with their adult children.

## **The Other Way Home**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1846.html?s=pdf>

# Chapter 1

## The Decision

*Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.*

*Napoleon Bonaparte*

The day had finally come, the day reality told me would inevitably arrive. I should have been thinking about what the future might hold, but I wasn't willing to accept the fact that such an unexpected event would happen to us. It didn't seem fair that after all those years of working and planning and raising the kids, my husband Fred wouldn't be here to enjoy our senior years together.

In December 1991, we were visiting one of our children for the holidays when Fred developed what seemed to be a bad cold. We rushed back home to Dallas so he could consult his regular doctor. As his symptoms pointed to pneumonia, the doctor immediately admitted him to the hospital. Although he was not a smoker, the next day he was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer and given only six months to live.

Despite this crushing blow, Fred was back home very soon, appearing to feel just fine. His diagnosis seemed rather surreal, as nothing in his outward appearance had changed. I must admit that in my

mind I was even denying the possibility of his having cancer. Over the next few weeks, we traveled around visiting friends and relatives in many places from coast to coast. But my optimism was short-lived, for after six months had elapsed, it was apparent that his disease was catching up to him.

The children and their families all came for Thanksgiving that year. Even though Fred was on oxygen and in a wheel chair, he was determined to carve the turkey with the same precision that had been our family tradition for over forty years. The next day toward late afternoon he became totally exhausted, so we helped him to bed where he looked at me with outstretched arms and said “I’m so glad I married you.” Having been surrounded by his entire family for three days, he died peacefully later that evening. The day I had been dreading for over nine months had finally arrived.

I suddenly found myself strangely alone, devastated by the prospect of life without my partner of 47 years. Our four children were all

married, all immersed in their own lives with kids and carpools and soccer games, just as I had been at their ages. Moreover, they were scattered about the country like windblown seeds, the closest living almost 300 miles away.

But an even more painful reality awaited me. A few years earlier, I had been diagnosed with macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in people over age 65. My sharp-as-a-tack eyesight was failing, and during this most difficult period of transition, I was declared legally blind. Driving became a distant memory, and with no one to chauffeur me around as my husband had so willingly done, my life abruptly came to a complete standstill.

In the emptiness of the home where so many wonderful memories—holidays, birthdays, graduations and anniversaries—had been created, a feeling of despair washed over me, the loneliness at times too great to bear.

Fortunately, my children came to the rescue. They

proposed an interesting plan: sell my house, and rotate around by staying with each of them for three months out of the year.

“What a wonderful idea, so comforting and so refreshing!” I thought. To always have family around who would be there whenever I needed them seemed like a great idea. Besides, I had never been one to let grass grow under my feet. This plan would mean my time would be divided between Georgia, Florida, and Texas each year, and that I could now be a firsthand witness to the fascinating antics of my 10 grandchildren. It sounded like a perfect solution, yet the little voice inside cautioned me not plant that “for sale” sign in the front yard just yet. This idea would need some serious consideration.

Then I remembered a conversation I had with my husband a few years earlier. We were wondering just how we would spend our “twilight years,” hoping we could be free from the responsibility of caring for a home which was far larger than our needs

required. We also wanted to maintain close ties with our children, but knew the chances of their living in the same city we did were slim. Arranging reunions was becoming more and more difficult as each family was on a different schedule. Then too, there was always the question of whether or not our children wanted to spend their precious vacation time visiting parents.

So the two of us dreamed up a great plan. We would rent a vacation home in an exciting place large enough to accommodate visiting children and grandchildren, living there part of each year while entertaining a houseful of relatives and friends. When the vacation season ended, we would travel and visit each of our children and their families for whatever time was available. It would be the perfect way to keep in close touch with everyone, no matter how far away they might live.

We must have mentioned our idea to our children at some point, perhaps shortly before Fred became ill. Remembering it as I did that day helped to reassure

me that their proposed plan, though somewhat modified from the original, just might work.

There were so many decisions with which I was faced. My failing vision meant that remaining in my home would be difficult at best. But the prospect of entering a retirement home alone wasn't exactly what I wanted. I guess I just hadn't owned up to my age, because when I had mentioned that I really didn't want to live with a lot of "old people," one of my daughters quipped, "Mom, have you looked in the mirror lately?"

Most of my friends had echoed my mother's sentiments about living with children. "Live with your children?" they'd say. "You poor thing, be careful with that one!"

Then I started thinking, "To whom do I want to talk for the rest of my life? Young, vibrant families about their activities, or older folks about the past?" But was I really ready for these active, bigger-than-life families? For boisterous teenagers as they



stumbled into adulthood? For the fast-paced world of computers and cell phones, to say nothing of the advanced ideas and concepts to which I would be exposed? It was a far cry from my present world or even from the one in which I brought up my children. Wouldn't a retirement home perhaps be a better option?

I started to feel as if I had a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other. My devilish little voice of skepticism chimed in, warning me about my lack of experience in being with older adults who were alone in the world. She further cautioned me about a move to unfamiliar surroundings so soon after my husband's death. Maybe I'd better just stay put, she warned, because although lonely, at least my life here was a known quantity. I could manage somehow.

Then my guardian angel had her say, reminding me that I have moved to different areas before and always managed to keep my old friends and acquaintances while making new ones. "Besides,"

her little voice persuaded, “if you live with your children, you already know some of their friends and associates. If you stay where you are, what will happen to you now that you no longer fit in with your couples friends when they get together? Will you be happy with a ‘fill- in’ companion? Will you be happy without your music-loving husband when you attend the concerts for which you still hold season’s tickets? But most of all won’t you be upset by all those memories that you can’t seem to shake? They are in every corner of this house.”

In the end, it was not difficult to know what I really preferred. Clearly, remaining at home alone and isolated was not an attractive option. I knew that I would much rather be close to my family, to those with whom I had strong ties. That was certainly preferable to enlisting the aid of strangers in an unfamiliar place should I need assistance. Since what my children were proposing was not so different from what Fred and I had come up with several years earlier, I felt that he was somehow giving his blessing to the idea.

So I packed up my grief and sorrow, and, leaving my loneliness behind, began an uncharted voyage to witness first-hand the good things about living with adult children and whether all the bad things I had heard were really true. It would be, to say the very least, an eye-opening journey of self-discovery.

## Chapter 2

### Making A Smooth Transition

*Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.*

*Arnold Bennett*

If your children have offered you a space within their home, it is paramount that you discuss logistics with them before the first suitcase ever crosses the threshold. Few families will have extra space just waiting to be used, so you will need to address several issues, the first of which is whether there is room for you. If so, where?

Personally, I never wanted the situation to arise where a grandchild was displaced from a bedroom because “Grandma is coming.” I felt this would be starting with one strike against me. When I talk to others who are contemplating this living arrangement, particularly newly widowed women, their plaintive cry is often “How do you handle this? A grandmother can’t exactly make her bed on the living room sofa!” I agree, but not just for Grandma’s sake. The truth is that moving in with your children, even if only for a few months at a time, has a huge impact on everyone in the family. If Grandmother is not too happy about making her bed on the living room sofa, that goes doubly for the teens who want to watch a movie at 3 a.m. So,

you must all work together to determine exactly what your “space” will consist of, and that the arrangement is amenable to everyone.

There are options available to you if space is tight. When I decided to move in with my children, I sold my home and divided the proceeds among all four. Each one was then given the funds necessary to create a space that would not only accommodate my needs, but those of their family as well. Though it was not easy leaving my home of almost 30 years, it was clear that we would all benefit in the long run if I used the money in that way. If you are not ready or able to take such a permanent step, consider a trial run for three months or so to see how things are working. Even if you have decided to move in with a child, but still can't bear the thought of parting with your house, talk to a realtor about the possibility of leasing your property. Many of us have been in our homes for such a long time that we can rent them out for substantially more than the cost of a mortgage payment, if in fact we still have one. If you do not own a home, you are

in an even better position to try this out for a few months, because you can then end your lease (or not) depending on how well it works for you.

In just about any scenario, you can use the money that you are not paying to a mortgage company or landlord to help finance the creation of a suitable space in your child's home. Nor does this have to be a major construction project that costs thousands of dollars. You may need to think outside the box to come up with an arrangement that works, but it can be done. Try to be open-minded and creative during this process.

Space-smart ideas such as Murphy beds abound these days, and there is no shortage of talented and creative designers who can conjure up innovative solutions to just about any “we need more room” dilemma. There is also a relatively new solution to the where-to-put-mom problem, which is called ECHO (Elder Cottage Housing Opportunities.) It is a temporary, movable and low-cost self-contained house designed to enable older persons to live on

the same property as their family without living under the same roof.

Whatever your particular living arrangement, the key is for everyone involved to remain flexible, and in so doing, you will all benefit in the long run. The extra space created for you can be used by other family members when you are away, and will undoubtedly enhance the value of the home in which you are living.

Your new space will most likely be smaller than the one from which you are moving, particularly if you are coming out of your own home. So what happens to all your things? This is perhaps one of the greatest material benefits of living with your children. You won't necessarily have to bid farewell to all those treasures you have acquired over the years. You will appreciate seeing most of your possessions in your new surroundings.

What worked best for me was to pack up my personal belongings, then let my children divvy



up the rest. It was fascinating to see who wanted what, but I stayed out of the fray and instead let them negotiate their own deals, with one exception. Since I was disposing of some rather large-ticket items, such as a baby grand piano and a car, I tried to ensure that each child received something of equal value from those more high-dollar possessions. Depending on the number of children, step-children, etc. that you have, you may want to enlist the help of an appraiser in this process. Beyond that, the children worked off of my “master” list, putting their initials on things they wanted. When two or more wanted a single item, it was up to them to barter with one another. The list proved to be a great way to streamline an otherwise insurmountable task.

Nowadays, in this age of “digital everything,” there is an even better way to divide your belongings. I recommend that you take digital photos of all your goods and print them out. Your children or grandchildren can probably do this if you do not know how. Circulate the pictures among your children so they can decide who gets what and

dispose of the rest. I hired an estate sale company to tag and sell anything that was left over from our cumulative list, and pocketed a tidy sum to boot. After all was said and done, I got the best of both worlds, giving what they wanted to my children, and generating some quick cash for the leftovers. I also made it clear to my children that when something they selected for their home no longer worked for them, then they were free to sell, donate, or dispose of it however they saw fit. Frankly, I was surprised how easy it was to let go of material possessions that I had owned for years, and in the end I realized that it was actually a tremendous relief not to have to keep up with so many things!

A word of caution here. Although many of your things may end up in your new “home,” you must be aware that the memories you have attached to a particular object do necessarily not transfer to your children. I was shocked one Halloween when my granddaughter used a beautiful sterling silver bowl we had received as a wedding gift as the “trick or

treat” candy dish. This particular piece had been given to us by the widow of the owner of the company for which my husband worked as a young man. It was indicative of the high esteem in which he was held by all who knew him there, and for that reason I used it only on very special occasions. Upon reflection, I realized that the history of an item is often more precious than its value, and therefore there was nothing wrong with my granddaughter using the dish in the way she had chosen. The same situation is true in reverse. When we were cleaning out my home, I almost gave away an old wool blanket only to learn that it was highly sought after by my two younger daughters, both of whom had fond childhood memories of it!

Once you’ve waded through the sea of belongings you’ve accumulated over your lifetime, divvied them up to everyone’s satisfaction, and located your corner of the earth in your child’s home, you are ready to move in and move on to an even more pressing issue: money, that ever-present and necessary fact of life.

A survival guide for seniors who live with their adult children.

## **The Other Way Home**

**Buy The Complete Version of This Book at  
Booklocker.com:**

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/1846.html?s=pdf>