

Aging In Place: Making decisions, changing places

By Marian Knapp

For a long time, years in fact, I debated with myself about whether I should remain in my house or move - perhaps to a place where I wouldn't have to worry about snow shoveling, keeping the lawn mowed, electrical panel meltdowns, and all of the other things that take time, attention, and worry. For many, many sleepless nights and restless days I wondered what to do. I thought about the implications on both sides of the issue. I really like my house; it has served me well for 25 years. My neighbors are wonderful. But, if I remain, how would I continue to handle home maintenance? What to do with all of the accumulated stuff? If I left, could I find a place that would have the conveniences I had become accustomed to? Could I still grow tomatoes?

And then I woke up one Monday morning in July and the decision just happened. It was there as brilliant and sparkling as cut crystal. It felt as if some undefined inner authority clicked a switch and the choice between staying or going was no longer on the table. The decision was made - GO! As the conclusion exploded upon me, it was so clear that there wasn't a speck of doubt to mar the clarity of the choice.

In thinking back on what led up to this burst of insight, I see a few things that perhaps propelled the decision out from what had become a mired-down position. The previous six months had been stressful. Nothing really bad happened but one little thing after another made me feel worn out and irritable. I had made an exciting but tiring trip to Cuba in late winter; I went to Iowa in early spring to visit a wonderful friend but came back with an exhausting sinus infection; and, over several months, I had lots of people come to visit me - siblings, cousins, friends - all wonderful but much work. At some point during the late spring, as I wandered through my house, instead of seeing great space to spread out in, I saw empty rooms. These spaces were used occasionally but mostly they sat there devoid of activity. I began to wonder why I was holding on to all of this emptiness.

Finally, I spent some time on Cape Cod (I am lucky to have a vacation place there) but dealt with minor plumbing issues, worried that they could turn into big problems, particularly because I rent the house and am always fearful that something major could happen when there are tenants in residence (goodbye rental income and good will for the next season). This line of terrifying thought about plumbing was particularly disconcerting because, the previous year, I had thousands of dollars of repairs on the main drain in my Newton house.

Yes, the decision was definite but what wasn't so obvious was where to go. This unknown was the only thing that stood in the way of acting. I wanted to stay in Newton, first because I have children and grandchildren here and I am nicely involved in their regular lives. Also, I was committed to maintaining my involvement with the Newton Council on Aging and its great effort to serve Newton Seniors. What were my options? I called a condominium complex in the city, went to see several apartments and, in just a few minutes, I realized that I could make it work. I went home, did some calculations, talked to a friend

who had lived in this building and we agreed it was a "no brainer". Then I told my children. I explained it - all of my reasoning, all of my facts, and all they could say was, "That's great, mom."

The rest of the summer was chaotic in an organized kind of way. I got my house ready to "show", threw out endless old paper files, falling-apart books, broken-down furniture, and heavily recycled office supplies. I dumped 90% of the paper in my file cabinets. I was lucky. My house sold quickly and an apartment became available in time for me to move in the day of the closings on both properties.

Right now I am living with unpacked boxes, using only a few pans, dishes and cutlery, and busily planning how I am going to rearrange this space to enhance my existence as I move into the future. It only took me about 10 days to get my head back in gear to pick up where I left off – just enough time for me to sit down and start writing. I have changed my physical place but not my purpose, which is to try to make decisions and act on them before someone else has to do that for me. It feels fantastic!

Wicked Local Newton

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