

"Downsizing"

By Toby Lieder

Zero Kids

Try to imagine the joy when I received a phone call from the real estate this Tuesday telling me our application is now accepted (to move again!) into another premises we had applied for (only a few blocks away from our present home, just half the price and size ☺)

You see, twice before, our applications were declined, because after research into who we are, they found out we have k'h 14 kids, and there was no way they will accept 14 kids in a 2 bedroom apt! Go explain that 10 of the 14 are married k'h and live overseas. (Sometimes just a tiny bit of minor detail is lost along the way during these important, major investigations!)

You can imagine our joy, when finally, our application was accepted less than 24 hours later (THIS TIME, I had written ZERO for the amount of kids living with me)! ZERO kids did it! OMG. Is this for real? I am going to have ZERO kids living with me now? Is that my new found life? Is this the end of all my 40 years of hard labor (14 real labours!) and the 'who ha' of raising kids: feeling like there's no tomorrow, the laughter, the birthday parties, the beat-the-clock-to-make-it-to-school-on-time.....and not to mention the big Shabbos table, my dream, the excitement, the love, the fight-solving, the late-night talks, the constant buzz of activity, the constant family meetings/job duties, then the first child's farewell party to YESHIVA overseas excitement! And the rest of the kids to follow overseas slowly becoming a routine..... sad and happy. Very Mixed emotions indeed.

As the movers are taking away my precious household stuff (cuz that's all it is, stuff. A collection of stuff accumulated the first 20 years of married life, and then trying to get rid of it the second 20 years!!!) As they hold up each piece and ask for instruction, "Ma'am, is this going with you?" I look at my husband for the 'nod' and say "whatever he says" because my heart doesn't allow me to utter the word NO.

I cannot say 'No' to all the 1000s of VHS family and kids videos accumulated over the 20 years, nor the old dusty super 8 projector (it's still outside waiting for another nostalgic oldie, like me, to dust it off and give it a home).....

My husband reminds me, "Toby, at the end of our time in this world, we won't even be able to take a pair of socks with us...When's the last time we used it or looked at X-Y-Z?!" They say if you haven't touched it or seen it for 6 months, out it goes!! Does anyone else sympathise with me? Hello?!

I ask, "But what about the stunning family photos on wood that we ran to pixie photos in Kmart for, at 6 pm (only time available) with crying babies and hungry kids, for 99cents a family shoot! (And they always talked us into getting the whole package deal....remember?)" I can't throw those away, are you kidding me? The emotions and memories running down my spine are giving me absolute chills! I almost felt a tiny bit of the emotional selection process (please forgive me) when they said "You go to the right and you to the left (to die)"I couldn't part with the stuff! It was more than stuff; it is, to me, selecting life and death, in a way.

My kids' accumulated school stuff they 'couldn't throw away' all these years! Saved for "one day" When is that "one day" supposed to be? Now? When their 60-year-old parents move to a 2 bedroom flat with absolutely no room for a kitchen stool? What about the 40 dishes that witnessed happy Shabbos and Yom Tov tables, that were now distributed for free pick-up because there are only 2 of us now?

Just try and feel the emotional turmoil of someone picking up our dear 21-foot Shabbos table, a table that once seated 40 people laughing and listening to the most inspirational Divrei Torah from my husband; a table that took talent to set every Shabbos since we had such creative souls, experimenting different styles and expressing their inner creative self by the way they set the table! A table that witnessed laughter and tears from every sort of human being, made possible due to the variety of Shabbos guests we were honoured to have each week with us. Watching that table go, with all the memories attached to it, was more than heartbreaking, yet blended with a sense of satisfaction and completion. The feeling of completing a task, a mission accomplished. I imagine that an artist would feel the same way, after completing a piece of art that took toil, sweat and even tears, before he sold his hard work. The mixture of emotions. The deposits; the withdrawals.

It is a huge roller coaster of feelings that I have never experienced before.

I had never been asked to complete a form that required me to write ZERO kids, either. Wow! Anyway, there I am going through this emotional washing machine, dryer and cleaners (!!!), When a woman from our community pops over with hot soup that literally warmed my very thirsty mouth and heart, and a kind word. She waved off my thanks with an, "Oh, it's nothing; I should've brought you a whole meal!" She caught me between both houses since I MUST MOVE before the weekend (which is now!) as we're going overseas on Monday and I accepted this lease just yesterday.

48 hours later (and 6 high-energy Israeli backpackers!), my new place is already set up and waiting for us to return from our overseas trip to our daughter's wedding. In our old home now, almost bed-less, fridge-less, and chair-less, not to mention table-less and hot food-less, we are coping till Monday and will make it with your small acts of kindness! And my wonderful husband, who can say 'yes' or 'no' without strings attached to enable us to move on to the future and let go of the past.....(which is nearly impossible for me at least!)

One person texted me and said "Anything you need, I'll be there for you in a blink." While another woman offered, "Come on over, I have 50 boxes you can use. I'll even help you bring them with my van!" These acts of Chesed really made my ride so much smoother – you will never know the huge impression it made on me. Melbourne community, you are awesome! My husband has to keep reminding me to be future-oriented; to look ahead instead of behind. We will be living in the future, not the past. And in the end, all our possessions will be left behind.....We can't even take a pair of socks..... (Refer to the Raichman story, link to follow)