

Downsizing

By Toby Lieder

Try to imagine the joy when I received a phone call from the real estate this Tuesday telling me our application for our new house is now accepted. It was only a few blocks away from our present home, just half the 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 most of the 14 are married k"h and live overseas.

You can imagine our joy, when finally, our application was accepted less than 24 hours later (This time, I had written ZERO for the number of kids living with me) ZERO kids! OMG. Is this for real? I am going to have ZERO kids living with me now. Is that my newfound life? Is this the end of my 40 years of hard labour raising kids? Is this the end of feeling like there's no tomorrow? Is this the end of the laughter, the birthday parties, the beat-the-clock-to-make-it-to-school-on-time, the big Shabbos table, the love, the fights, the late-night talks, the constant buzz of activity, the constant family meetings? The first child's farewell party to Yeshivah overseas excitement, and the rest of the kids to follow, slowly becoming a routine. Very Mixed emotions indeed.

The movers began taking away my precious household stuff, that's all it is, stuff. A collection of stuff accumulated in the first 20 years of married life, and then trying to get rid of for 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 the 1000s of VHS family and kids videos accumulated over the 20 years, nor the old dusty projector. 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 with crying babies and hungry kids, for 99cents a family shoot! I can't throw those away, are you kidding me? The emotions and memories running down my spine are giving me absolute chills! I couldn't part with the stuff! It was more than stuff; it is, to me it was precious memories.

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 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!".

48 hours later, with the help of 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. 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 must keep reminding me to be future-oriented; to look ahead instead of behind. We will be living in the future, not the past.

The dust settles, the moving boxes are gone, and we look at our tiny 2x2 apartment with half a smile and say to ourselves, "Hey! **Nobody's Home!** My oh my! We are back to square one!" The house is so quiet, you can literally hear half a pin drop! The sink and counters are squeaky clean, and they might even stay that way for the entire day and tomorrow! The floor needs no mop, or even a sweep, because nobody's home to drop or spill cereal or breadcrumbs, paper scraps or potato chips, candy wrappers or orange juice.

Because Nobody's Home.

The colour-coordinated cushions line the couch in perfect order as they sit there staring impatiently, holding their breath for someone, anyone, to come and throw them around! The way life used to be.

Because Nobody's Home.

Even the washing machine is throwing a tantrum, missing the good old days of action, activity, life! The laundry room is complaining how life has now gotten so dull and boring with nothing to do all day.

Because Nobody's Home.

Imagine not having to vacuum for one whole week! Poor, sad vacuum cleaner, sitting in the corner of the spare room, awaiting that faithful day when someone will make use of her again! It looks as if the life was sucked out of her, poor thing (mind the pun).

On the other hand, though! Imagine the fridge and pantry, smiling from ear to ear with content because they are full to the brim with all of life's goodies! After all, Nobody's Home to finish everything off to the very last crumb!

Imagine finding your half-eaten, chocolate-covered cookie still sitting on the shelf wrapped in gladwrap where you left it, anticipating only you to come back and finish it off! Imagine finding your favourite bar of chocolate; relaxed, smiling, sitting, and awaiting your return to take good care of her! (No more hiding her under the lettuce, or in the linen closet, or any other hide-and-seek places you can think of)

Imagine this..... You are home alone, back to square one with just your spouse – the very one you started out with, once upon a time, long, long ago, I'm talking BC (Before Children). Imagine just you and your loved one having no distractions and being the only sweet voices that are echoed in your home!

Imagine this, you can hear the sound of the keys opening your front door at the same time every night. Your spouse comes home from work and says "Honey! I'm home!" And he walks around the house looking for you! You exchange small talk, and he says "Honey, I brought this home for you – I remembered you like coffee yogurt!" And he opens the fridge and says "Hey! You made me my favourite compote!" And the focus becomes just the two of you. Because you're back to Square One. It is just the two of you. **And Nobody's Home!**

Honeymoon days are back!

Time to wrap yourself around the 'new you' and get used to being spoiled again! Time to realize that you are now going to be spending the rest of your precious life with this same one person that will be coming in that very door every single day with the same sound of the same keys. Looking for you! The perfect spouse with no flaws! The romance: the warm-feelings-of-love-that-would-last-forever type of feeling! Let's bring back the honeymoon days and 'life is beautiful' feelings, where it is only you and your spouse, and nothing else matters! Those days where it was easy to live by my favourite slogan, "What can I do for you?" rather than "What can you do for me?"

Let's wind the clock back to those early, just-married years and slip into those fantasy slippers that tiptoed through your tiny first apartment while your spouse was having a nap and you wouldn't dare wake them up, or, make their favourite dish that only their mom knew the exact recipe for, but you tried it over and over again, until you received the glowing smile that this time you got it right! Let's wind back the clock to 'just been married' and remember the feeling that 'nobody else is more important than you' that you shared with your brand-new partner....

Because Nobody's Home is the best reason to take this rich, rewarding experience awaiting you – to reconnect with each other, to reaffirm your loving bond with each other that may have not had enough time and count your blessings together every single moment of every day – the awesome blessings you have together accomplished with the help of Hashem!

When Nobody's Home is the time to realize a new chapter in your lives; that you are so blessed to now focus on the other more than ever before! When Nobody's Home is a goldmine waiting for you to unwrap all the amazing qualities that each of you has to offer the other, which can now be expressed like new honeymooners. It's like getting a new lease on life! What a gift!