

When It's Time to Downsize

When Diane, 72, and John Hunter, 71, bought a tiny condominium in Toronto as a weekend *pied-à-terre*, they still owned a 3,000-square foot home in picturesque Port Hope, ON. Soon they were busily juggling plays and restaurants in Toronto—and spending little time in Port Hope. So they sold their home and moved to their 427-square foot condo. And that meant downsizing.

The Hunters were among the many Canadians realizing they have too much space and junk and too little time for the important things in life. Susan Borax of Vancouver's Good Riddance, Professional Organizing Solutions, says, "If you own something, you have to take care of it, pay for it, clean it, and maintain it. With less stuff, people have more time. Downsizing can give you a new lease on life."

How do you know if you're ready to downsize? Borax says people need to ask themselves, "Do I really need all of this space, or am I just warehousing things?"

Another consideration is

how much time and money you're spending to take care of your possessions. The Hunters knew they were ready to downsize. They were tired of paying people to clean their house, mow the lawn, and shovel the snow, and they were anxious to get out, explore the world, and have fun.

Start With the Easy Stuff

Once you've decided the time is now, you need to figure out what stays and what goes.

Heather Knittel from Good Riddance says people generally keep about 100 items around their homes that they don't need. "Everything that comes in for free needs to go: leftover condiments from takeout, free makeup bonuses as well as the little cosmetic bags they come in, sports bags, baseball caps, jars of mystery screws, purses, shoes, clothing that will never fit you again, bridesmaids dresses, kids' school projects, trophies and medals from every sports team they've been on...."

Once you've gone through

the easy junk, it's time to tackle the storage areas of your home—the basement, garage, and shed. That's where a lot of junk is stored that you don't really need.

Next comes the hard part: going through your valuable belongings, and that can be draining. Knittel recommends taking it slowly or you can end up an "emotional train wreck."

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"If it's going to take you a hundred or so hours to pack," she says, "sorting and valuing things is going to take at least that amount of time."

The more time and thought you put into it, the better off you'll be. Otherwise you'll move a lot of stuff that doesn't work and never really feel comfortable in the new dwelling."

Borax says you don't have to decide about everything right away. "We suggest you have a few boxes for things you haven't made any decisions about. Date them and open them in six months or a year. If you haven't looked for the stuff in that time, you probably don't need it."

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Jeanette Wetterling, who runs Purespace, a Montreal interior decor company, says older people often have a harder time parting with their possessions. "Generally, I say you have to be ruthless, but you can't do that with everyone because some people can't handle it. People with teenagers don't seem to be bothered too much when downsizing, but older people are often so attached to their things."

Look at what makes you happy, she advises. "If you

collect frogs or birds and they make you really happy, keep them because it's important you're happy in your new place. If you move there and you have nothing that means something to you, you won't be happy."

For Wetterling, the biggest challenge many people have is the sheer amount of paper—bills and the like—that people keep. She's even seen people save the bill for their first stroller because of the sentimental value. She advises people to put their

the ceramic frogs and the decorations constructed from toilet paper rolls. Of course, you might want to keep some of it for the memories, but when it comes to the stuff in your grownup children's rooms, Knittel says you need to set deadlines. "We see many people storing stuff for their children for an indefinite period of time. You shouldn't do that."

Knittel suggests culling personal photographs, although it takes a lot of time. She says that as soon as



papers in three piles: those with meaning, those without, and those that are questionable. Once you've figured out what can go, do as the Hunters did and shred the lot.

While the Hunters were no-nonsense when it came to getting rid of their belongings, Knittel says many people get caught up in guilt. But she asks, "Where was it written down that you had to hold on to that ugly sweater your sister gave you?"

The same can apply to all the art your kids made you,

you get photos developed, you should pick out the ones you want and throw the others out. "Photographs are a huge problem in most of the homes we see." Scanning them on to a memory stick for family members is one way to tackle photos. The Hunters got rid of their photo albums after asking the kids to pick out any photos they wanted.

New Homes for Old Stuff

The Hunters held three auc-