

Talk About A Moving Experience

How I survived packing it up... and packing it in

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No one said it was going to be easy.

But that never stopped me before.

And it didn't stop me this time when I decided to sell my Walnut Creek home in what has to be the worst time in our lifetime to buy or sell a house.

So whether you want to sell -- or have to sell -- I can give you an easy-to-follow plan to help you weather the real estate storm.

1) Get a good eraser. Whether you schedule your time on a wall calendar or computer, you better learn to be flexible. Why? Because odds are 10 to one that you are going to have to reschedule everything. If you never learned to go with the flow, you will master it now. Be open to change and remember that except for your house's foundation, nothing is set in stone.

2) Make a Costco run. No, not for a tub of Red Vines but for cleaning products. You think your house was clean when your parents came to visit – guess again. That's nothing compared to how spic 'n span you're going to have to keep it now. I went through more gallons of Formula 409 (Item # 815634) than you can imagine. And while you're there, pick up a few cases of bottled water, a double-pack of refrigerated ready-to-bake Nestles' Toll House® cookie dough and the biggest bottle of antacids you can find.

3) Don't lose your sense of humor. Remember, it's a house – it's not cancer. Keep everything in perspective and like an illness, everyone is going to have an opinion of what you should and shouldn't do; but at the end of the day, it's your house, your gut and ultimately your decision.

4) Learn to use a verbal filter. Not everyone needs to know everything. Selling a house is not permission to have bad manners and it is positively mind boggling the questions people ask you that are absolutely none of their business. If you don't want everyone knowing your business – don't tell everyone.

5) Brush up on the Constitution. How do you spell California Real Estate Law? A D D E N D U M. You can't imagine how much paperwork there is. There is even paperwork about the paperwork and addendums to the addendums. I'll bet you one automatic gas shut-off valve and two fire doors that in no time at all you will know the difference between a sewer lateral and a Section One.

6) Never say never. I was all over this one. Two things I thought I would never ever do were eat junk food and try to find a Christian bookstore. The fast food (and the 20 pounds I gained) came from the lack of healthy eating I endured because for all intent and purpose, I couldn't use my own kitchen. Well, I could have if I came up with something I could cook or microwave that didn't smell or make a mess. And the Christian bookstore thing? Well that falls somewhere between divine intervention and keeping my sense of humor. My mom kept telling me that in order to sell my house faster, I had to get a statue of St. Joseph and bury him in my backyard, upside down, facing east. When I reminded her that we are in fact Jewish, she reminded me that in this case, it doesn't matter. So never mind that a week before Rosh Hashana, I'm driving all over the place looking for a Catholic church that has a parish gift shop. In the end I couldn't fine one and instead of asking, what would Jesus do? I asked what would donnalynn Creative do? and the answer was easy. I got a bottle of St. Joseph's Aspirin, said a prayer (in Hebrew) and buried the bottle upside down in the yard.

When I called my mom to tell her, she asked if it started working yet. I told her no, but my headache was gone.

7) Learn to Let Go. If, like me, you are moving out of state, this applies to people, places and things. The people and places are obvious; so let's move right on to things. You know how half of what you pack to take on vacation you end up not using? Well this doubly applies to selling your house. If you haven't used, worn, watched, listen to, read, sat on, or played with something in the past year – give it away. Period.

8) Don't be a hero. If you need help, ask for it. In addition to hundreds of overstuffed cartons, there is a ton of emotional baggage that comes with selling your house. And whether you are moving across town or across country, packing is downright daunting. I, for one, never could have done it without the help of two extraordinary friends. Pat helped with organizing and logistics and Katrina and Michael with all the heavy lifting. And where wonderful neighbors are concerned, Hillary Clinton was right: It takes a village – and I was profoundly grateful for mine.

9) Lose the ego. I don't care how much you love your house and think that everyone else will too – they won't. My house looked like the Pottery Barn catalog – but not everyone wants the Pottery Barn catalog. A professional stager is just that, a professional. They are able to see beyond all your stuff and make the house look comfortable without feeling cluttered. Neuter it by making it not too masculine or too feminine. And most of all, tell you with a straight face, that you need to get rid of half your crap. And a real move calls for real movers. This isn't the time to be dollar wise and poundm foolish, so hire a professional mover. If I have to tell you all the reasons why, then you aren't ready to move anywhere.

10) Get serious. I know. I just told you not lose your sense of humor, but this is what I mean by addendum and here's the biggest clause you need to know. Hire the right Realtor. Your house is probably your biggest investment and the most important decision you have to make when selling it, is choosing who you want to represent you. Really, think about it – it's a huge decision -- right up there with choosing a surgeon -- you are going to have to trust this person and value their knowledge and expertise more times than you could even imagine. And like a surgeon, there are a lot of excellent real estate agents to choose from, so do your homework. I know I made the right decision when I hired Nicole Tucker. Believe me, there is no way to avoid the emotional roller coaster that comes with a For Sale sign up and don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise. But Nicole Tucker and her entire team made the unpredictable ride downright smooth and dare I say, at times even fun.

Selling your home and moving is never an easy decision. I moved here from Chicago and have enjoyed 30 wonderful years in Walnut Creek. After 21 years at Diablo Magazine I left in 2009 to start my own marketing company donnalynn Creative with the intention of moving to Scottsdale to be nearer to my mom and dad. Thanks to Nicole Tucker and the lovely family who bought my home, I am able to start the next chapter of my life here in Arizona.

Sadly, I will be hanging up my shingle as a regular contributor to Walnut Creek Patch at the end of this year but don't say goodbye yet.

I've had enough goodbyes for a while – by far the hardest part of any moving experience.