

The move goes on and on

The year 2023 will be remembered as the year of moving houses as each unit of our family moved from one place to another for different reasons. Tim and I needed to downsize and simplify our life while the younger ones faced a dire and worsening housing crisis.

In October 2023, Tim and I moved into a condo, and I wrote about this in my journal entry “Buying a condo.” In that entry, I had mentioned that Adam and Steph might be evicted from their apartment, but that “may not happen.” I was being optimistic, it turns out. They got their notice of eviction in November, and we all decided that they should move into our house. John Simon has been living there on his own since October, but there’s room for Adam and Steph to move in. They moved in this week.

This particular move was complicated because Tim and I had left a lot of our things in the house for John Simon to use. This was because John Simon (evicted in the spring from his apartment in Vancouver) had gotten rid of most of his stuff and moved to Toronto to live with us. When we moved to the condo, we divided the kitchen stuff between two kitchens, and left half our linens, towels, etc. in the house too. This division helped us to downsize and simplify.

Adam and Steph’s move meant that we had to clear more of our stuff out of the house to accommodate their things. They have been living in Toronto since 2016, so they have furniture, kitchen stuff, etc. We managed to swap some furniture, Adam took my desk and I his. There are lot of other things, some belonging to Tim’s parents, his aunts, etc., which needed to be given away or turfed, something we had been doing for about two years.

While preparing to move into the condo, we had dealt with the complex issue of letting go of things, especially ones we do not need and the dysfunctional ones. Among the last two categories are many things that Tim inherited, so the arguments can escalate. Still, over the years, Tim has reluctantly accepted that he must part with some things. Our offspring should not be burdened with the kinds of things we have inherited.

Why do we have so many things? Here is a brief explanation.

Tim is an only child of his parents. They passed on what they had to him as a matter of course or tradition or some kind of tacit understanding that he will be able to use their things. Add this to the fact that Tim’s mom and dad were the babies in their families. Well, Lenore was the surviving baby, who went on to live a very long life, outliving all her siblings. Lenore’s big sisters passed on their parents’ things to Lenore, and Lenore handed them down to Timothy. John’s big sister had most of their parents’ things, which she passed on to John, and Tim inherited all of them when Lenore died.

The unfortunate thing is that while some of the stuff is in good condition, many items are broken, unusable, need repairing, and just occupy space. After Lenore died, we brought back things to Toronto. That was last year. Much of this joined the other stuff (e.g., a brass bed) that John and Lenore brought to Toronto in 1987, and more stuff Tim hauled to Toronto in 2004 when his parents sold their cabin in Maine.

For about two years now, we have had serious conversations about letting go of things we will never use. During this time, Tim found a website called FreeCycle, and started giving things away. This meant that he wasn't throwing things away, and it might have eased his conscience. I am not sure, but we gave away many things, e.g., the brass bed, a crockery cabinet, two sewing machines, two catafalques, (yes, we actually inherited catafalques!) and many smaller items like clothes, lots of fabric, fabric remnants, sewing notions dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, etc. etc. It was and continues to be an exhausting tug of war of sorts, but we are decluttering the house slowly.

We will remember some of the people who took things, and, as I said, this gives Tim some solace that they were able to do something with the stuff. One friend took the mahogany crockery cabinet with an idea of taking it apart and using the lovely wood for making other things. A theatre person took away the brass bed to use it as a prop on stage. One of the sewing machines, which I had used for over a decade, went to a lady who had had a stroke recently, and using the machine, she wanted to try to regain movements in her hands. She was delighted to get all the sewing notions as well. As for the person who hauled away the two catafalques, making two trips to accomplish the process, who knows what use she had in mind? She said something about using them as benches.

The last war in this area concerns books and Tim's research stuff. Here is where I must admit defeat or step aside for him to do what he wants. I admit to bragging about having given away all my ESL books, about changing my reading (almost completely) to digital materials, etc. On his part, Tim became a serious reader of digital books much before I did, but he tends to hang on to books, even ones that are crumbling. What do we do when printed materials turn to powder? Well, that is a good question only Tim can answer. Our condo has two bedrooms, one of which Tim uses as his office. For now, we stash books in his office. Perhaps lack of space will decide how he will deal with old books, research papers, and so on.

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