

Keys To a Successful Later Life Move

—By Sue Ronnenkamp

Honoring & Valuing the Life Cycle:

- Don't overvalue or become obsessed with independence. The last half of life should move our focus to interdependence and to accepting help and support from others.
- Just because your current home fit for you once doesn't mean it is still the best place for you to be living. Different spaces fit different phases so choose appropriate housing for where you are NOW in life. Plan for either a series of downsizing transitions/moves or focus on moving to a life care community where all levels of care are available, and focus your housing search on a setting with less responsibility, more available support and assistance, and hopefully more opportunities for interaction with others.
- If autonomy and freedom are important to you, moving to a small, more appropriate setting for this phase of life can help prolong your independence because you'll be in a better position to adapt to the changes that lie ahead.
- Moving later in life is NOT just another move. This is a major transition where you cross the threshold into the next phase of your life. Honor and value the importance of this change as you did earlier major passage points like leaving home for college, marriage, and retirement.

Making a Later Life Move:

- Be proactive rather than reactive with this move. The most successful later life moves are those where the older adult feels they have some control over the process and the decisions that are made.
- "Too soon" is better than "too late." The older you are when you make this move, the harder the transition and the more support you will need to make this change.
- Moving together is easier than moving alone. If you have the option, don't wait until a spouse dies to move. Moving while still together as a couple will ease consider-

ably the stress of this transition.

- As long as you are a competent and capable older adult, make decisions based on what feels right for you – NOT on what feels right for your kids. Your adult children may feel that they know what's best for you but you are the ultimate judge of this.
- Plan ahead and allow as much time as possible for this move and change. Look at your past experiences – this transition is going to be easier or harder based on how much or how little practice you've had along the way.
- Break the process into manageable pieces and stay FOCUSED. This applies to each step of the move process as well as to completing this transition. If your situation allows, move first, get settled and then think about clearing and selling your home.

Psychological Preparation:

- Moving at any time of life is stressful but the level of stress can be tempered if you're a proactive planner rather than a reactive scrambler.
- Acknowledge and validate your feelings about this move – including fear, excitement, sadness, anticipation, grief, and other very normal responses to change.
- Be flexible with yourself and the process for this move. This attitude will also come in handy for the continuing changes to come. "Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape."
- Moving later in life is not the time to be a penny pincher. As one client told me, "We saved all of our lives for a rainy day and now it's starting to sprinkle." It's time to use some of your saved money to pay for housing that is a better fit for this stage of life, as well as services to make this transition as easy and stress free as possible.
- Allow plenty of time for settling in and adjusting/adapting to your new home. Just because the physical move is complete doesn't mean you're done with this transition.

Letting Go:

- "To every thing there is a season...., a time to keep and a time to throw away." (Ecclesiastes 3:6) Later life involves letting go of possessions along with outgrown identities and responsibilities. Releasing the excess "stuff" in our life is an essential part of this transition.
- Drop the rocks in your life! Accumulated belongings and responsibilities can become too heavy for us as we age and will start bringing us down if we don't release them and let them go.
- Simplify and lighten the load for this phase of life. The smaller the living space, the less there is to take care of, the less stuff around you for confusion, the easier it is to adapt to changes and further transitions as you continue to age. Think of this as "right sizing" your life rather than downsizing.

Attitudes & Beliefs:

- Every ending is a new beginning and we learn from every phase and experience in life.
- We have control over our attitudes and beliefs no matter how old we are or what happens. "Attitude is everything – so pick a good one!"
- You can become a positive role model for your adult children and your peers. Older adults who proactively make the needed adjustments and changes that befit this phase of life are becoming the new role models for our aging population.

Sue Ronnenkamp is a nationally recognized expert in the area of later life, transitional moves. She is the founder and owner of Living Transitions, an Austin, Texas-based business that provides "hands on" help to older adults making downsizing moves. Sue also provides educational programs and resources including her book, Living Transitions: A Step-by-Step Guide for Making a Later Life Move, a long list of articles, popular presentations that shed a positive light and perspective on this topic, and a Business Starter Kit for Senior Move Specialists. For more information, check out Sue's web site at www.livingtransitions.com or call Sue at 512/407-8488.