

Making Ripples

Downsizing to Live it Up

Abandon materialism to embrace the best in life

by Amanda Bancroft

Downsizing is a sticky situation involving angry relatives, puzzles, nostalgia and freedom. It's like a wild bear wearing your old high school jersey and quizzing you with riddles. It is also a gateway activity into the land of dreams. While getting rid of stuff may seem as though you're losing something, you're also gaining things like more space, personal time, enjoyment of friends and family, and pleasant experiences. Downsizing to achieve a goal can only be as successful as you design it to be, and results vary. It won't solve all problems; it is just a tool for healthy living.

For some people, downsizing means getting rid of an extra vehicle or all their vehicles and living car-free. But for others, what they really want is enough space in the spare room to begin a hobby or business. Most people downsize as they get older and worry about maintenance of possessions more than enjoying their golden years. The important thing is that anyone can downsize something, and it starts by setting goals and manageable mini-projects. Take it slow. Consider the feelings of more materialistic relatives – you might need to explain why love does not depend on objects, and memories are stronger than stuff.

The process can involve every aspect of your life, or just a single room. For example, it's easy enough to go through the bathroom cabinet and realize, geesh, I've got seven sticks of deodorant, how did this happen?! Downsizing probably helps increase brain health, because it's a puzzle: should we digitize decaying photo albums, and how? How much clothing is too much? And so on.

Some people hang on to everything, expecting that the future owners of their home will also wish to hang on to everything. This is unrealistic. Memories stored in our possessions leave the earth with us. And sometimes, things are just trash: little bits of string that break when touched, plastic or styrofoam to-go containers, crumbling projects from decades ago, moldy papers or rusted appliances that will never function again. If you want to reduce trash, the best way to do that is to stop producing trash – storing trash won't help.

However, this is where downsizing becomes a bit tricky. If your goal is to reduce trash, one small step is to start carrying a reusable water bottle, utensil package or thermos with built-in telescoping spoon (which are really neat, by the way). If instead your goal is to downsize your wardrobe, at some point you'll need to stop buying unnecessary clothes. Pick a goal, whether little or large, and don't give up. It can be painfully nostalgic to part with items, but you're not alone. Many thousands of people are downsizing right now, today, and we're all in this together!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.