

A Moving Story, Part 2: Packing Party

The moment we made the decision to move our family to the country after seeing a “For Rent” sign in front of a beautiful restored farmhouse, I started packing. First, the kitchen. The potato ricer I only use to make gnocchi once or twice a year. The dozen or so margarita glasses I wasn’t going to need for a summer party that probably wouldn’t happen. (Lots and lots of bubble wrap.) Even the spices found their way into a shoe box. (Except, of course, for salt, pepper, and Old Bay.)

The articles I’d been reading online about moving suggested ordering take-out for a few weeks. (And I wasn’t going to complain about that.) Within a few days, I’d broken our kitchen down into the three pots and pans we used regularly, a wooden spatula, a slotted spoon, and one good knife. Paper plates and plastic utensils would tide us over until we returned to our regularly-scheduled meal routine in our luxurious new kitchen. As I adjusted to life with the few necessities that would prepare our food, I kind of liked the simplicity of having less. Less dishes to clean up. Less effort rearranging cabinets to accommodate barely-used kitchen appliances and tools. And less of that feeling that comes from being overwhelmed by clutter.

I discovered a podcast called “The Minimalists” and listened to it while I packed. It’s about two guys who were life-long best friends who decided to abandon their decadent lifestyles by getting rid of all of their belongings and moving to the country, taking with him only those things they needed to survive. They share stories, offer tips, and answer other people’s questions about how to live the minimalist lifestyle. Their little “rules,” like “If you can replace it for \$20 or in 20 minutes, it’s safe to get rid of it,” or “If you haven’t used it in a year, you don’t need it,” resonated with me as I stumbled upon boxes of dollar store picture frames I was saving for a “photo wall” and a blue dress I used to wear in my early 20s...before I had four babies. I had saved nearly every birthday card I had received for the past ten years and at The Minimalists’ advice, I chose to keep one or two from each of my nearest and dearest where I loved the message and the art.

I got rid of hundreds of things in the first few weeks, feeling lighter with every

garbage bag and recycling bin that made its way into my alley. At the same time, I lovingly wrapped and packed my most precious possessions, spending a few moments taking in the beauty of my great-great-grandmother's China with the purple and white irises waving across its pink crackled surface and the photographs I took in Ireland. I skimmed a few pages of my favorite books, reminding myself of why I loved Tom Joad and gaping in awe at the glossy photographs of epic tree fortresses built by "Treehouse Master" Pete Nelson. I tucked away the Baptism and First Communion keepsakes that decorated the my children's rooms, remembering fondly the short walks we had taken to St. Joan of Arc Church to celebrate their Holy Sacraments. I tried to picture my belongings in my new house, which was, at that moment, a blank canvas waiting for us to make it a home with our curated collection of the things we genuinely valued; not stuff, not junk, but treasures.

Sorting through the belongings of four little people was much harder. Our toy room was the size of a two-car garage and every surface of it was covered in a carpet of toys. Part of me wanted to give my kids the option to choose what went to our new house, as *The Minimalists* suggested, but the other part of me found out very quickly that the things they considered valuable (a one-armed Darth Vader action figure, a Hi-Ho Cherry-O with exactly eleven cherries, a Ziploc bag of assorted puzzle pieces...) didn't matter as much to me as my vintage 1986 Cabbage Patch Doll complete with brown yarn hair and a green and yellow jogging suit, an interactive world map that explores not only geography, but culture, as well, and the wooden train that my beloved late cousin gave Collin when he was born. So, I compromised and put the toys I knew they played with regularly (even one-armed Darth Vader) and a few of my favorite things into a few special boxes. The rest was sorted into storage, yard sale, and donation piles. Now that the kids' toy room would be the size of a walk-in closet, a minimalist approach would provide them with the space they needed to enjoy their favorite toys.

Clothes were easier than I thought they'd be. All of our warm-weather clothes would reside in our dressers and closets while our cold-weather clothes bided their time in storage. I got rid of the clothes shoved to the back of our dressers and closets and kept our favorite things. ("All of your things should be your favorite things," *The Minimalists* say.) I encapsulated my wardrobe and have found that getting dressed in the morning was easier without having to sort through a blur of colors, patterns,

shapes, and sizes. I can see all of my clothing at once and know that I look and feel my best in all of it.

Within two weeks, just about everything we chose to own was tucked neatly into plastic bins and cardboard boxes headed to our new home. Even though our new house was much larger than our old one, we were only bringing the things that mean a lot to us, or what The Minimalists call, “added value.” They even suggest what they call a “packing party,” where you pack up everything you own and slowly unpack those items you decide you cannot live without. In essence, I had my own “packing party” in order to prepare for a new life where serenity and order would replace the chaos and clutter we’d succumbed to for far too long.

I came across a quote by Jules Renard that resonated with me as my packing party came to a close:

“Oh! Old rubbish! Old letters, old clothes, old objects that one does not want to throw away. How well nature has understood that, every year, she must change her leaves, her flowers, her fruit and her vegetables and make manure out of the mementos of her year!”

In my packing party, that’s exactly what I did. I gathered all of the necessary pieces to start my next chapter. And if the time comes for me to leave this home for another, I will do it again. But, hopefully not too soon...because moving in is a marathon! Find out more about it in Episode 3.

Check out part 1 of this story.