

Casting Off

Life's lessons seem to occur just when they're supposed to. Twenty years ago what was counted a loss might today be considered a gain. Walking a few miles farther down the road of life can flip-flop our reaction to the casting off of worldly goods. Moths and rust, pronounced the Apostle and tax collector, are where they're headed anyway.

We just went through the bittersweet task of getting rid of a lifetime of possessions, and the chore is not complete. The occasion was our move down to South Carolina from a home in which we had lived for 35 years. The Carolinas have termites. Carolina homes therefore have no basements, those treasure houses in which many men store all their great stuff. I didn't know it was possible to carry on a normal life without a basement. Or an attic or an old barn or spare rooms. But I'm learning it can be so.

To be truthful, parting with many of my favorite toys and trinkets hasn't been all that dreadful so far. To rid oneself of belongings is often cathartic in any case, and in my case I was lucky to sell what I felt I should receive money for, and to give away items that to me were priceless. The experience was made more enjoyable by the likable folks who carted away my toys.

The Air Force couple who purchased the white baby grand piano was ecstatic to find their hearts' desire for a price they could afford. (I practically gave it away.) The husband knew something about keyboard instruments and lovingly disassembled the white lady before he hauled away all her lovely parts in a large trailer.

The young physician in training, along with his fiancée and her Mom and Dad, spent a day with me at the tiny Windswept Press running the Damon and Peets Favorite and Pearl No. 3 presses, before loading them with the typesetting bench and type fonts into a UHaul truck and taking everything back to Syracuse.

A similar story played out with the collector who bought my old radio collection. It's nice when the buyer has the same childlike fascination for radios that as kids we couldn't afford.

The middle aged mother of teenagers, now a college

student, tried twice to pay me as she loaded boxes of books from my library into her SUV. But I'd made up my mind I couldn't be better paid than to find someone with energy who wanted half of my collection more than the lazybones at the local library who wanted me to box and transport them and then carry them up on to their second floor. (I sit here typing in my new room down South with books climbing the walls to the ceiling and wonder why I didn't give away more.)

We even gave away a houseful of furniture to people in need and some who thought they were in need. Out with the old! In with the new, I told my wife. (I didn't know how expensive new furniture was! But now we have a whole new set of friends at various furniture stores!)

Of course it occurs to me that I must guard against collecting a new army of junk. We bought a smaller home with reduced storage space to keep ourselves lean and mean. In our new little house we appreciate having a tiny attic and a 2 car garage, with only one car squeezed in among the boxes of stuff that apparently followed us here.

Is there hope for an old couple like us who remember as newlyweds breaking into our piggy bank on Valentines Day to buy a single bottle of Ripple to celebrate? But who can now buy new furniture by just writing a check?

I hope so. We landed here after breaking out of a velvet prison, an old house perfected over the years to our liking, filled with a lifetime of memories and possessions we thought at one time we couldn't live without. I didn't think I wanted to leave and was too comfortable to get up and go. But one day we looked at each other and knew it was time to escape what we had built, time for one more adventure while we could still get out the door on our own legs, time to flee our northeastern state before the tax collector cleaned out our bank account, time to be light and free and get back to what originally brought us together ... us. A journey begun 47 years before would hopefully refocus on two young-at-hearts who had bounded down the steps of the church that day and took off in a shower of rice and prayers, with their old life in the rear view mirror and their future up ahead.

The true weight of possessions is a lesson often placed toward the end of life. The learning will probably take longer than I've anticipated. But it feels good to be on our way again, just ahead of the moths and rust.

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