

When to Move

Joyce Tepley, Dallas, Texas

According to the latest study by the National Association of Home Builders, there are 48 million households headed by someone 55 or older. That's about 42 percent of all U.S. households. My husband, Phil, and I are part of that group.

I had polio in the summer of 1952 when I was 9 years old. My parents did not want me to attend a "special school" and I am grateful for the sound education I received.

I became a social worker and fully engaged in life as a tenaciously independent-minded person. Like many, I am a good problem solver, resource finder and risk taker. I have pushed myself beyond anyone's expectations and achieved much in my life.

Facing increasing physical debilitation as I age and losing what I once fought hard to regain is frightening.

I have used a ventilator noninvasively since 1986. Six years ago I got a terrible bacterial lung infection (*Mycobacterium avium-intracellulare* complex) that started turning my lungs into Swiss cheese. I was on three antibiotics for over a year before it cleared. Since then I have had to have two more rounds when it flared up again. Most days I am short of breath when I do the simplest things I used to do so easily — like work in my flower garden.

I use a manual wheelchair most of the time around the house and when I go out, which is less and less, I use a three-wheeled scooter. A week may go by without me putting on my leg braces and walking.

Just before my husband retired eight years ago, we looked at two cities we thought we might like to retire to — Ashland, Oregon and Asheville, North Carolina. Both had cultural amenities we were looking for but when we gave it serious thought, we just didn't want to go through moving and starting all over again in a whole new environment.

For years, my husband did all the shopping and most of the cooking for us, but he had major surgery a couple of months ago and he is still recovering. We do not have children or relatives who can help us, but our neighbors have been kind.

Between the two of us, we needed more help with grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning and all the detailed activities that keep a household and the people in it functioning.

We added more accessible equipment like extra grab bars in the shower for my husband. (We had redone the shower a while ago making it a roll-in shower for me.)

Our kitchen is not accessible for a wheelchair so I had to be clever and come up with ways to cook now that my husband can't, at least for now. I bought a convection oven and hot plate to put on our small kitchen table along with my blender. The microwave is a bit high for me but I can reach it for small things without putting myself in danger.

I cannot get close enough to the sink to get water or rinse dishes, but we bought a five-gallon industrial jug that my helper keeps full of water for cooking and my hot tea.

My cleaning lady rinses the piled-up dishes and puts them in the dishwasher once a week if my husband is too tired to tackle them any particular day.

I arranged to have packaged meals delivered and I reheat them. I also hired someone who grocery shops for us and helps with a variety of small household tasks and transportation, thereby freeing my energy to concentrate on being my husband's caregiver. (We already were paying a maid, dog walker and handyman/garden guy once a week.)

I am a supervisor of a staff now more than a doer of chores.



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So far, the money my husband and I spend on hired help plus our monthly house expenses is \$1,000.00 less than what we would pay for an average assisted living arrangement in our home town.

Other considerations:

Right now we have the money and energy to maintain our present lifestyle and home.

We guesstimate that we have five to ten more years to live at the rate of illnesses, hospital stays, emergency room visits, surgeries and number of doctors we are adding to our growing list.

If we remain in our home, we will need to increase the amount of paid help. We will probably need nursing and personal care, which is expensive. We can still drive, but when we cannot, we will need more help to fetch and carry and take us places.

Our house needs some major work and prioritizing what to spend our retirement dollars on is on our minds. Should we replace the gutters, the fence, the carpeting with wood floors? We decided against renovating the kitchen for the cheaper solution of getting tabletop appliances.

How much money should we put into the house we have lived in for 25 years that was already 30 years old? Someone who buys it will only tear it down. That's the way the neighborhood is going. We have the money to do one of the three main repair needs right now. Should we?

Moving seems too daunting a thing to face. After 25 years of accumulation (much of which I am getting rid of now I can proudly say), finding another place that will fit our needs is way beyond our imagining.

We are not sure whether we would be trading what we are able to manage now for some unknown smaller place or a place with assisted services would be better.

My husband is an introvert and cannot bring himself to move to a place that has more people near him with an expectation of socializing. We are living in a very caring neighborhood and if we moved we would lose that support and have to find and get used to a whole new set of acquaintances and places.

Most everything we need is within two miles from us and neighbors are always offering to help.

On the other hand, many of our intimate friends have died and we have to be careful about getting too isolated.

Honestly, I am not sure how we will know if and when it is time to move from our home of almost 30 years, but for now, we do not have the energy or inclination. ■

In a future issue of *Post-Polio Health*, Teyple will discuss "Where to Move."

This is the third article in a series that discusses "where to live" as we age with the late effects of polio.

Karen Hagrup shared photographs of the accommodations made to her St. Louis condominium in the Fall 2015, *Post-Polio Health*. "Aging in place with a disability" is featured on pages 4-5 of Volume 31, Number 4. See www.polioplace.org/PNN.

Beverly Schmittgen wrote in *Post-Polio Health* (Volume 32, Number 1, pages 3-5) about the experience of downsizing and building a new home in a retirement community. Four years later, she and her husband have settled in as active members of a retirement community, one of the fastest growing industries in the United States. See www.polioplace.org/PNN.