

How to downsize when you lose a mate

Part 1

“How do I make this home mine without losing her?”

The heart-rending question came in an email from Bob Glockler, 83, of Leesburg, Florida. He recently lost his wife of 56 years.

Now, I have written books about clearing out the family home, about downsizing when you find a mate and blend two homes into one and about what to do with all you own so you don't leave a mess when you die, but never this: What should bereaved spouses do with their late mate's things? Ugh.

“We (now I) have a spacious, 1,600-square-foot, two-bedroom home,” he wrote. “What do I do with all her things and pictures? Obviously, I will not, do not want to, forget her, but my lifestyle now changes. How do I shift her ‘stuff’ out of the big closet, and move in my ‘stuff’? Do I give up the king-size bed to make more room in the bedroom? (I do not know for what.) At this point, I am not thinking long term — she died only a month ago. But what if I do finally find a new companion?”

Phew. That's a lot to unpack. I needed to sit down, stick my nose in a can of strong ground coffee and take deep, head-clearing breaths.

“I thought my dilemma might make a good column,” he added. “But maybe I am in a demographic too old for your readers.”

I've got news for y'all, while advanced age is a risk factor for death, none of us is immune, as we have all recently observed. What a remaining partner should do when death do us part hits home can happen any time.

I got Mr. Glockler on the phone. “I'm not sure I have the answers,” I told him. “But I will listen and



AT HOME WITH
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try.”

He came across as in his email: kind, sensitive, honest and realistic.

He and Mary met in Cape Canaveral, Fla., in 1964. He was a U.S. Navy officer. He went to open an

account at the bank where she worked. He wore his officer whites, and that was it for her. They married the following year.

They settled in New Jersey, where he worked in pharmaceutical management. They never had children. They retired in Leesburg, where Mary had gone to high school. Two-and-a-half years ago, they downsized from a 2,800-square-foot, lakefront house to an apartment across the lake in a senior community that offered housekeeping and nightly dinners.

“The decision was simple. It was time,” he said.

Mary died peacefully at home, on Aug. 13, holding his hand. She was 84.

Now what?

We tackled the questions re-

garding his home one at a time, starting at the front door:

• *The entryway.* “When I walk up, I would like to feel this is my home, and not see a reminder of her. Yet I feel conflicted. I want to make this mine. Is that OK? Or is that the same as saying, “I don't want her?”

“What's there now?” I asked. A small table with a doily and a ceramic statue of a troubadour, he said.

“Now I would not put a troubadour on a lace doily at the door, but I don't know what I would replace them with, either. It's not really me. It's her.”

Suggestion: It's not disrespectful to change décor that doesn't reflect you. Just go slow. Remove everything, and see how you feel. Live with nothing there for a while. Then consider what you

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