

## Personal View Point: Housing Options by Carol Ranelli

At some point, all we PPSers have to consider what are the best housing options for us as we age and develop increasing mobility problems. We may reach retirement and decide to move to a warmer climate or closer to children and grandchildren. We may find we have money to invest and the best venture now is real estate. All of these are great reasons to seek out one level living or whatever the housing options are in the area where you decide to live. Unfortunately, none of these reasons applied to me.

I spent the first few months of this year "soul-searching" where I wanted to live for the next several years. Having lived in the same house since I moved to Richmond 27 years ago, this was home to me. I've had the same next door neighbors and the majority of my friends lived in this neighborhood. I was comfortable in this area of Richmond, which has grown increasingly convenient over the years. Everything I need is at my fingertips. But there was one problem... I was a single woman who had an acre of property and a two-story house, along with increased fatigue and muscle weakness. What was I going to do?? How could I manage this??

OK... I was going to approach this as realistically and methodically as possible. Many others in my PPS support group had dealt with this problem. They had found new housing that suited their needs; given up two-story houses or townhouses for one level homes, patio or cluster homes, condos or smaller homes with minimal yard. If they could do this, so could I. But there was one problem, this turned out to be a very emotional issue for me.

I turned to my most "logical" and practical friends. I talked with friends in the support group who had gone through this housing dilemma. Help me brainstorm this issue. Help me figure out the pros and cons. Walk with me through the options. I need someone who can distance themselves from the emotional parts.

The first thing I decided was that I didn't want to leave this area of the city. I was not giving up my social base. I was comfortable here. I had friends I could call on for help if needed. To me, this was of utmost importance since I don't have family in town. Next, I talked with realtors, visited new construction sites of empty-nester communities, saw what was available for resale and considered my finances. I had to consider the physical, emotional, financial and stressful aspects of an actual move!

After looking outside my property for options, I then looked at what I had. Because I always had some limited mobility... used crutches outside the house and wore a brace, I had bought a house that had only one step from the garage into the house. I had to be able to get groceries in the house! Several years ago, my father had built me a sectional portable ramp which could be set up in the garage to get a wheelchair in and out easily. OK, this getting in and out of the house was a piece of cake. I had already put raised toilet seats in the powder room and master bath, plus there was room to increase door width in both rooms if necessary. I already had the bathing situation taken care of... transferable bath benches that I had used for a number of years. I had accumulated more medical equipment over the years than Westbury Pharmacy!

Now, for the yard. I had been fortunate that over the past several years, I had found wonderful people to cut my grass, do my leaves, mulch, plus any other heavy yard chores that came up and they were reasonably priced and dependable. I compared that annual cost to the costs of "maintenance fees" in maintenance-free communities and I came out ahead! I also had two beloved dogs that loved their wooded, fenced-in yard. I wasn't ready to send them into retirement too!

Now, for the stairs. This seemed to be the biggest drawback to staying in this house. Several years ago, I had started my research on stair lifts, so I started looking into it again. There are several places in town that carry and install different brands. I had three companies come to the house to give prices and discuss options. They were all within a few hundred dollars of each other in price. I went to each showroom to "test drive" their stair lifts and see what they looked like in person. I eventually went with Virginia Elevator Co. who took a special interest in the polio community and I felt went beyond the normal sales situation. It is now installed and I love riding up and down the stairs instead of wasting that precious energy or dealing with the possibility of a fall.

I have heard many members of our group talk about moving or making changes in their present homes. It's something that most of us, able-bodied or not, will have to face eventually and it isn't an easy decision. So many factors come into play that make it a very individual decision for each person or couple.

What this mental (and emotional) exercise answered was essentially: Where will I be happiest? I am happiest in a home I have taken great pride in, which has "Carol" written all over it (I am a designer for goodness sake!), in a neighborhood where I feel safe and comfortable, where my friends live and where I can make the house work for me. I feel most of the major problems have been solved. Is it ideal? Probably not. But for the time being, it works for me and contentment is a wonderful feeling.