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## A Moving Experience

By Caren Elizabeth Austen

**“WE’RE MOVING.”** Those two words usually spur strong reactions rivaling those other three very significant words: I love you. Both phrases usually signal a major shift in circumstances that affects nearly every aspect of life.

Though a change in marital status ranks higher on the scale of major life stressors, the considerable mental, emotional and physical stress involved in relocation makes it a significant stressor as well. When one considers that friends, associates, neighbors, church, physicians, perhaps family and truly, “all the comforts of home” are to be left behind, it’s not surprising that relocation creates such anxiety. There is a mind-numbing series of major, as well as minute, decisions to be made and actions to be taken before settling in a new house that, with time, family and friends, will become a home.

Having moved from Joplin, Missouri to St. Petersburg, Florida to Dallas to St. Louis, to Rockaway Borough, New Jersey and back to Texas in the span of 11 years myself, I’ve learned a few things about surviving the roller-coaster ride of relocation. First in the process is sharing the news with the family, including children. Listen to their feelings and try to empathize. After all, the decision is usually

made between the adults, so it’s natural for children to feel resentful and fearful at having to leave friends and all that is familiar. Include everyone in decisions as much as possible.

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Of course, you must be prepared if a younger child voices a desire to live on a farm so she can have a pony. If that lifestyle is not likely to be a viable choice, let her know that you’ve heard her and explain in terms that are meaningful to her why that may not be the best choice. For instance, you might want to say something like, “I agree that living on a farm, with a pony to ride, would really be fun. But if we do that, Daddy will have a very long drive back and forth to work every day, and we

wouldn’t get to see him very much. Maybe we can look at a house near a park where you can go to ride your bike and play with friends instead.” What’s important is that the child knows that his needs and wants are heard and respected even if they are not truly reasonable under the circumstances.

When my family was preparing for the move from St. Louis to New Jersey, my older daughter (actually, my only daughter at that time) dealt with it in the way that she usually dealt with something that was somewhat frightening or out of her realm of experience—she acted it out in play. At three years old, she didn’t remember the previous move. One day, she had been playing by herself and been unusually quiet for just long enough for me to wonder just what she was up to. So, I entered her room to find her “working” hard at carrying her most precious possessions from their assigned places to one particular corner of the room. Her response to my questions was in that “duh” tone of voice that let me know she thought it was obvious. “I’m moving!” she said. So, rather than scolding her for making a mess, I sat down on the floor with her to talk about how a real move meant going to a completely different

house in a new town with new neighbors and new friends. She wanted reassurance that all her special things could go with her even if her special friends, with one notable exception, could not. The exception was her invisible friend, Grover. During that interesting discussion, I told her that Grover was welcome to come with us if it was all right with his family. Later, I was informed that Grover and his family had decided to remain in St. Louis. Planning, along with listening to a lot of questions and concerns, and offering reassurance minimized the difficulty of that move for all of us.

The Garrard family relocated to Frisco last October from a small town near Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Christy, her husband, Alex, and their daughter, Samantha, sat down together before the move to determine what factors in a new community were important to them. She says they asked themselves, "If we could create the perfect environment for our family, what would it look like?" So when they came to the metroplex, looking for a neighborhood to call home, they knew what their priorities were. Mrs. Garrard said, "We'd come from a neighborhood in which we'd all built houses at the same time, had babies at the same time and were moving through life together. Samantha's best friend lived across the street. When we moved, we wanted to find a place where we would have that same sense of community."

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They quickly discovered Frisco and found it fit the bill. Mrs. Garrard



immediately began volunteering at Samantha's school, where she began to get acquainted with new friends. Then she accepted an invitation to an event hosted by the Women's Ministry at Preston Trail Community Church. That led to finding a church home, which is central to the life of the Garrard family.

Finding the right school is critical for children. In my daughter's experience, a move we made at the beginning of her second grade year was particularly difficult because of the difference in the quality and the pace of education. It took changing classes, then transferring her to a different school before she was truly settled in an environment that her particular learning style needed. Because our move came about somewhat suddenly and during the summer when school was out, we couldn't visit her neighborhood school to determine whether or not it

would be a good fit. If we'd had the opportunity to do more research, we might have spared her a great deal of difficulty in adjusting.

Mrs. Garrard agrees with the importance of choosing the right school for your child(ren). "When we moved here, we lived in a corporate apartment, which happened to be in the Plano school district. I was hoping that when we moved into

our home, the district would allow her to complete the year there. However, they insisted that she leave," Mrs. Garrard said surprised. "We already had enrolled her at Legacy Christian Academy for her sixth grade year, so we contacted them to see if she could complete fifth grade there. We were thrilled when they said they had a space for her. That meant she could settle in and begin to get involved because she would not have to change schools again." She admits that the adjustment was not without difficulties for her daughter. "Samantha was uprooted from the only home she'd ever known and had left her best friend behind. She's not particularly outgoing, so she was lonely for a while. But when she was accepted at Legacy Christian, they assigned a family to us. They were so helpful in answering questions and helping her acclimate to her second 'new' school. Now," says Mrs. Garrard, "she has quite the busy social calendar. It's great!"

Mrs. Garrard has advice for newly transplanted families. "Take the initiative to make new friends and find your place in your new community. It's not likely that someone is going to come knocking on your door asking to be your friend," she says with a grin. "I decided to make the most of this opportunity and, in doing so, I learned that if you open up to people here, they respond. We're beyond happy in Frisco."

*Caren Elizabeth Austen is a freelance writer living in Plano.*