



Photo by Björn Hänssler, courtesy GNTB

PCS Stories

By Jennifer G. Williams

Everyone has one. If you're in the military, chances are, you've made a move or two (or 14). And if you've made a move, you have a PCS story.

Years ago, when my new husband and I moved to the Washington, DC, area, we were absolutely shocked at the housing prices. Of course, these days, we look back and think, "Wasn't that cheap for a house in Arlington?" Hindsight, of course, is always 20/20.

With each move, you learn something new. You can even learn from other people's moves. A friend of mine told me about the disappearance of her DVD collection in her PCS move—a theft that went unnoticed until she started opening the movie cases (which were delivered intact), and finding that the actual disc was missing—about 60 of them in all.

Another PCSing friend remembers that the only box missing from her household goods delivery was the one from the living room that had clearly been marked "Bose Speakers."

I took these anecdotes and planned for my own move last year. I bought two huge CD cases and emptied my CD and DVD collections into them both, letting the movers pack and deliver all the empty cases to our new home. I also instructed the movers NOT to specify on the moving boxes what type of equipment was in each box—just knowing the "electronics" were in the family room or the master bedroom told me what was inside.

My husband PCSed to and from Germany before we met. He said the thing he wishes he'd known before he left is that he needed lots of GOR-TEX® (he was in the field a lot).

He also says one thing he regrets is that he didn't do more "touristy things" while stationed in Europe (which, admittedly, was hard to do, being in the field). But there is so much within a day's train ride, he now wants to go back to Germany, just to do all the things he missed out on before.

That is one common regret, no matter where you live—

not going or doing things while you have the chance. I can be faulted for that, as well: I went to high school in Philadelphia, and did not see the Liberty Bell or Independence Hall for years, until I went back on a visit with my husband.

Don't let it happen to you! Go see all the treasures that abound in "The Old World." You will never regret it, and you likely will regret the things you did not do.

And lessons can be learned on every move. My mother and stepfather had already moved several times with the Army, but their move from Fort Polk to Chicago in the early 1990s taught my mom a lot. The movers arrived late, with a load already on their truck and told my mom all their stuff would fit in the available space. Mom was skeptical, but didn't say anything. The movers ended up cramming as much as they could into the truck, and had to get another truck anyway to load the rest of their stuff—and did about \$5,000 worth of damage in the process. My mom's lesson learned? That You are the boss. So many people feel like the military is paying for the move, so you have to take what you can get. Wrong—if you don't like the way things are going, say, the movers are not doing things the way you know they should, you have the right to request that someone else come and finish the job. Call your transportation office and see what can be done. At the very least, you'll provide a red flag for the military not to use the same company again—something the moving company is sure to want to avoid at all costs. You may have to wait a day or two (which, admittedly, most of us cannot do when going through a PCS), but just remember that you ultimately control your move. The moving company does not get paid until you sign off on the paperwork.

Not all PCS stories are bad, but all have value, and we'd like to hear yours. We will be featuring a different PCS Story in each one of our Relocation Guides, with the hopes of making you laugh, empathize, and ultimately learn what to do and what not to do on your next move. So please, send in your PCS Story, along with your contact information to jenniferw@ameriforce.net — and who knows? You may see your PCS Story in the next guide! ●