

“We have orders; we’re moving to...”

These words can strike panic into the heart of any military spouse; no matter how many times they’ve moved before. Horror stories of other families’ moves crash into the forefront of your brain. Did their car really fall off the ship at sea? Did the movers really unload an entire moving van of furniture and none of it was theirs? Did they really unpack moving boxes filled with nothing but rocks and paper? We have all heard these stories and know them for what they are: urban legends. Take a deep breath to calm yourself and allow yourself to start planning your move.

The stress-free move is the holy grail of military families world-wide. Expect to experience some stress; you can mitigate it by taking time to plan the process. Use the strategy of backwards planning in your brainstorming session. It really does work. Sit down with the family to disseminate the information that you do know: where you will move, when you will move, and list the tasks to accomplish for your move. Involve everyone, to include the children. Letting the children be part of the process makes it easier for them to accept the move. Keep your list prominently displayed so that you may add last minute thoughts, jobs, and ideas.

Don’t neglect to use provided resources: the military relocation and transportation specialists at your base/post are knowledgeable and experienced. They know the routine. They have resources and pamphlets to help you through the moving experience. One new resource holds promise to military families in finding housing. The Automated Housing Referral Network is a web-based service that helps you locate a place to live at

Own Your Move

By Debra Koehler

your new duty station. They will also assist you in selling your existing home. You can find out more about them at www.ahrn.com.

What do I do first? Call your transportation office for an appointment to schedule your move. Find out what paperwork to bring with you. Take a list of your own questions and concerns with you to this meeting. Also, let them know about the large or unusual items you plan to move such as a piano or pool table. This will let them make special arrangements with the moving company. During your meeting you will get information on weight allowances, items that cannot be shipped, what to do with your pets and cars, what your responsibilities are, and what the moving company’s responsibilities are. Then you will set the dates for pack up, pick up, and delivery.

Now the real work begins. Start eating your pantry and freezer; use up the food you have stockpiled. Don’t throw that food out! You have time to reduce your pantry items because you have a plan. You paid good money for those cans of creamed corn and cranberry sauce! Eat them! Think of it as a chance to create new and unusual meals for your family’s enjoyment.

Designate a place in your home to place the giveaway and garage sale

items. Use the trash for the throw-away items; do not stockpile these items. Get rid of them as you go. Don’t let the “packrat” family member sort through these items because they will find a way to hold on to some of them. “What goes in the trash stays in the trash.” Repeat this mantra out loud and often in the presence of your “packrat” until the movers pack everything up and cart it out of the house.

Start going through your items by picking an easy closet; I usually begin with my linen closet. Tackling it first gives me a feeling of accomplishment and provides the impetus I need when I look into my clothes closet. Don’t try to do all the closets in one week. It can be traumatizing. Pace yourself and don’t forget to let the children sort through their toys and books. If you decide to have a garage sale, let them keep the profits from their items as an added incentive. Keep your final destination in mind as you comb through your clothing. It makes no sense to keep children’s winter clothes for a move to a tropical climate. You have a set weight limit. You will be responsible for paying the movers for anything over that limit. Be determined. Be ruthless. YOU own the stuff; the stuff does not own YOU!

Decide what items you will place in your unaccompanied baggage

shipment. This is the shipment that you will receive first before the huge furniture/household goods shipment. Think of this as your survival pack. Include such items as bedding, air mattresses, some clothing, a toaster oven, and maybe even a small microwave. Set these things aside and clearly label them as such. Also, set aside your professional items. Be sure that they are identified as such on the inventory. These items, which you will use in your next job, do not count against your shipping weight. This is a good thing; so take the time to segregate them.

Finally, decide what to do with your high value and sensitive items. Do not try to hide your coin collection in with your regular move. Either take it with you in the car, or leave it with Uncle John, or let the mov-

ing company know that you own this wonderful coin collection and take out extra insurance on it. Movers are adept at taking care of collections. Did I point out not to try to hide your valuables? It is worth saying it twice. Your important papers, documents, and jewelry should travel with you. Many people lock these items in the trunk of their car on moving day. Contact your insurance company to ensure your coverage for your valuables.

Get up early on the day of your move. Have your car packed and out of the way. Have these items on hand: permanent markers, Ziploc baggies, coffee, cold drinks, and snacks for yourself and the movers. Have your cleaning supplies set to one side to use to clean after the movers leave. Verify that the inventory is detailed, complete, and accurate. Don't accept any

"miscellaneous" labels or entries, especially for valuables such as crystal. Keep transportation phone numbers on hand and call them if you have any problems with the moving company. Once the truck rolls away with all your belongings you can take a deep breath and realize that you have some time before you get to unpack on the other end. So, relax a bit and enjoy the trip. You deserve it. ●

Debra Koehler was raised in a Navy family, was in the Army, and married another Army service member. She has moved with the military many times as a child, a service member, and as a spouse. She currently lives in San Antonio, Texas, where she works as a teacher.

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