

Breaking My Heart

By Janine Boldrin

Hearing my movers use the word “storage” was enough to strike fear into my heart. Even though we had moved many times as a military family, our household goods had never gone into storage. And I knew what storage meant: more damage to my furniture.

I think there are a couple of approaches people take when it comes to good furniture and military moves. Either they wait to buy good furniture until retirement and don't mind the breakage that comes with moving their “military” furniture. They buy good stuff and grin and bear the damage that comes with moving. Or, like me, they buy good stuff and get teary when the fable that the furniture people managed to get to your house from a store 600 miles away without damage is getting a huge scratch from being jammed through the door of your new house.

I love furniture. I love big heavy furniture that involves a lot of dark wood. And, at this stage in my life, I want good furniture. Or at least stuff that looks like good furniture. In my mind, cracks, scratches, and gouges didn't make for good-looking furniture. Even though I know we are reimbursed for damage, the process of documentation, evaluation and remediation to make my furniture “whole” again is tedious and rarely results in my furniture being restored to looking like it sat in the same house for 20 years. But each time, I fill out all of the paperwork anyway, just hoping.

Good furniture and military life are just not compatible. As many times as

I repeat this in my head, my eyes still wander to the beautiful curves of an antique or the deep wood of a dresser in the stores that I visit as we move across the country. I seem to forget the fate that will befall that gorgeous piece of furniture.

In New York, I watched in horror as my writing desk was disassembled down to what looked like matchstick-sized pieces. The truck was already loaded with someone else's stuff and the remaining room meant a tight fit for our household goods. As night approached, and the last mattress was stuffed into the truck, a pile of our goods was piled in a packer's pick-up truck.

“Don't worry. I will get it there,” the mover said. “We're going to off-load and repack the truck to make it fit. And then it will go into storage in Tennessee.”

That word. I cringed. And crossed my fingers.

The first item on the list of damage from the move: knobs broken off of my clothes washer. This caused heartache but not because of the pitiful looking, knob-free washer: I had already exhausted most of our clean clothes during the move. Added to our list was the large split down the drawer of my son's brand new dresser and the huge chunk of wood out of the bookcase, scratches down the top of my beautiful desk and gouges on the edges of my dresser—those made me sad. Admittedly, even a little mad.

“Sorry, ma'am,” said the mover who saw me looking sadly at my writing desk.

I felt defeated. Maybe it was time to stop buying anything nice. At least I wouldn't get upset.

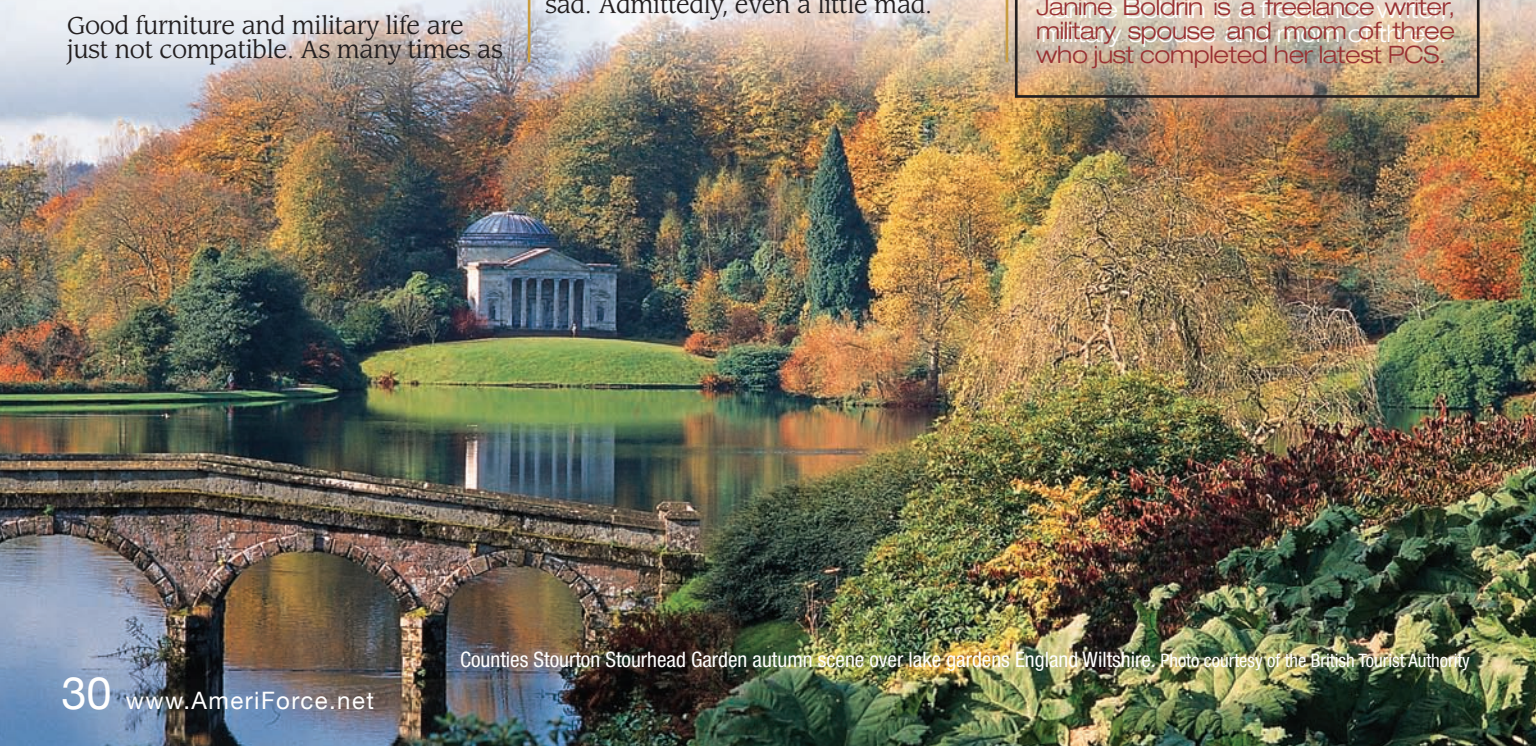
After four days of unpacking, I took the kids for lunch at a friend's house. We needed a break. As it is in military life, old friends had moved to the same post as us and while our kids played, I sat down with my friend in her very nice living room.

I admired her curvy sofa...and noticed the wooden legs of her couch had big scratches in them. And her beautiful coffee table that stood in the center of the room...had a lot of gouges on the top. The closer I looked, the more damage I saw but when I looked at the room as a whole ... I didn't see any of it. I saw the interesting items she had gathered in her many military moves.

Could it be that way with my things? Would I ever be able to see past the dents to the beauty of the furniture that was left?

My furniture may not be as pristine as the stuff that sits in a home for 20 years. But it has a different kind of beauty — one that comes with documenting our journey as a military family. It tells the story of the places we have been. And shows the marks of the bumps and turns we have taken on the way home. ●

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Counties Stourton Stourhead Garden autumn scene over lake gardens England Wiltshire. Photo courtesy of the British Tourist Authority