

# PCS Stories

Photo courtesy JNTO

By Elizabeth Gray

Eight in eight. That's the number of years in relation to the number of our PCS orders and resulting moves. Are we unique? Sure, but unlucky? No. PCSing so frequently has given us the opportunity to see many parts of the world and to become seasoned veterans on moving.

PCSing is not all bad! I've gotten a clean house almost annually. I do not do spring cleaning. I simply wait for the orders to come in! Cleaning out closets is not a special Saturday task, but something we do when unpacking our boxes. Two chores down with one move; how lucky am I? When those orders come in it is a little of the good and the bad. For one, I am guaranteed to have just started a new job that I love. So far this has been our most reliable way to get my husband to come down on orders.

Sometime during the eighth move I decided that having the movers at your house was like being robbed. The only

difference is that you welcomed them into your house and offered them cold drinks. You, being the polite hostess, apologize profusely when the dust bunny under the couch is mistaken for the family cat. Yet, you do not blink an eye when the packer drops your 19th century antique French vase shattering it into a million pieces. You simply smile and say, "That's okay. Road trip to France! Do you need another cold soda?"

We always try to get to know our movers just a little bit. We probably do this as a subconscious defense mechanism. If we know them we won't cause them bodily harm when they drag our brand new and clean mattress across the dirty truck bed. The movers on the receiving end can yield a plethora of information on the local area. Or maybe if we keep them engaged while they work they won't be casing our belonging for a nighttime burglary.

How do you survive eight moves in eight years? With humor, of course, and some tips I picked up from other PCSing veterans. Here are my top three:

Organize the house. But be clear, this does not mean deep clean. As a mentoring spouse once told me, "Dust keeps the paper from sticking to your furniture." True or not, I'm not going to go crazy dusting before the movers come. Organize means all your personal treasures are in the room in which they will eventually be unpacked. It will save you time on the receiving end if you don't have to wonder why the TV remotes were packed with your silverware. The movers do not care if clothes are in a basket or a drawer. It will all end up in a box anyway!

Buy the movers drinks at the very minimum. This keeps them hydrated and working hard. Some moves we have purchased pizza and laid out snacks. We've found if you take care of them, they are more likely to take care of you. It's karma. It's the golden rule. They are packing out six tons of my stuff on their backs—it is the least I can do. It has always been appreciated.

Find children and pets someplace else to be while the movers are there. Nothing is quite as stressful as looking for the cat because the sign on the bathroom door that said, "Cat, do not enter" was not clear enough. While we've only lost the cat once—that was stressful enough. We feared she'd been boxed up, but no, she just escaped the madness. You'll only look for a cat for one stressful night before you realize the benefit of anteing up the money to board her. We did one move with a cranky, teething infant. That was as fun as having a hot poker stuck in your eye. Bottom line: find them someplace to be for the day.

I remember being a young and naïve spouse who did the math and determined that if my husband did 20 years before retiring and each duty station was a three-year tour, I'd be looking at a lifetime max of eight moves. I guess I was wrong. But if I can do it, so can you. Find the silver linings that moving can bring and embrace them. For every broken vase on the losing end is one less thing you have to unpack when you get there! ●

*Elizabeth Gray and her first husband, Cody, live in Germany with their daughter, one cat and a house full of banged up furniture.*