

I've downsized, and the living is easy

At least, it is now
that the clutter's
cleared and the
gadgets mastered

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A short while ago, my situation in life changed and a condo replaced my large suburban home. This seemed like a good idea at the time.

But I had absolutely no idea of the number of adjustments I would be making.

I didn't know, for example, that I would have to throw out all those old magazines, flowered hats and baby furniture. I didn't know that I would have

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to give up the dog and get a stuffed one. I didn't know that I would need an engineering degree to work the garbage chute. I didn't know that my social life would move from the living room to the mail room.

Condo living has a lot of major advantages. But the adjustments are significant.

First there was the problem of space. My condo in the Don Mills area of Toronto is big, but it doesn't have all the extra little cupboards under the stairs or beside the furnace that you find in a house.

Packing light is essential. All those little treasures that have been lovingly stored away for

some lucky person to inherit some day have to go. This can be a tough emotional experience, and I did end up with a few things that I just know my children will want when they mature and recognize true value.

Therefore I had to be creative when looking for storage. I couldn't ignore the space under the bed, under the sofa, under the fridge. Besides, more stuff under there means less space for dust bunnies.

And those storage lockers that are available? Well, some strategic packing and a couple of good pushes to get the door closed and I was all set. So far, I haven't bothered to put sheets or blankets up to hide the con-

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BRIAN DEXTER/TORONTO STAR

SETTLING IN: Susan Eaman is enjoying life as a Don Mills condominium owner, along with her "mostly well-behaved condo cat."

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tents as my neighbours do — if anybody is that desperate to have my old mouldy golf bag, they're welcome to it.

Then there was the problem of pets. We were equipped with an iguana, a large fish tank and a dog. Fred, the iguana, voted to go with us to the condo. After a few days of trauma, marked by his skin changing from green to yellow, not eating enough and sleeping too much, he settled into his cage near my son's bedroom window and began to enjoy the new view.

The fish were divided into two smaller homes — one near the kitchen sink, so I'd have something to keep me company with my morning coffee, and the other one in the guest bathroom to keep the visitors entertained.

The dog was another story. Somehow we could not picture him chewing our new furniture or swimming in the lobby fountain. So, after careful searching we found him a new home in the country with a river nearby. Instead we welcomed an indoor, litter-trained, mostly well-behaved condo cat.

Next came the problems of dealing with all the new gadgets one encounters when moving into a new high-tech building. First, there were all the

new appliances — microwave, dishwasher, washer and dryer and so on. Not only did they have to be unwrapped, untied, unpackaged and untaped, but each one came with a multi-page manual and complicated directions.

Even the stove. Surely I could figure out the stove on my own — but no! "Read these instructions carefully before doing anything." I had to set the clock, set the level, set the temperature, set the timer before I could even think of cooking. Finally, by the time I was ready to cook, it was too late and we had to get takeout.

Next I had to tackle the heating/cooling system. Fortunately, we didn't need to use it for quite some time. When it got cold we used the gas fireplace in the living room — one switch, on or off. This I could manage.

Finally, however, it was summer and very hot. Out came the manual and I began reading. The choices were overwhelming — winter, summer, morning, night. I discovered that when you add them up, you could actually have 12, yes 12 different temperature settings. And, on top of that, you could change any one of them with only the flick of a switch — after you looked in the manual again to find out which one!

Then there were the security and

fire alarm systems. A quick lesson from security was supposed to get me all set up. Unfortunately I forgot to take notes. Oh well . . .

Then there was the security system for entering the parking lot. I quickly discovered that if the gate starts to close before your car is through, honking your horn does not help.

No more sneaking outside to the mailbox in my old pyjamas. Now I have to dress to go to the mail room.

I also discovered that keys must be at hand at all times in order to avoid adventures like walking down the parking ramp from the third level to the basement with your overloaded bundle buggy in order to find an unlocked door. The elevator can be daunting as well. There is a whole set of rules one must learn, such as memorizing cues to help you get off at the right floor, mastering stair climbing in case you don't, pressing the buttons when you have both arms full of packages or breathing when somebody else gets on wearing an entire bottle of

perfume.

Then there was the problem of purchasing a new wardrobe. I had been used to meeting people under predictable circumstances: in restaurants or at movie theatres.

Not so in a condo. Here we meet in the elevator, in the halls and in the parking garage. And as if that wasn't enough, we meet in front of security cameras.

No more sneaking outside to the mailbox in my old pyjamas. Now I have to dress to go to the mail room. No more wearing my oldest bathing suit, or maybe even no bathing suit in the backyard pool. Now I must wear high fashion — robe and sandals to match — to go swimming. No more rushing out to the garage with the day's trash in my housecoat. Now I have to put on an outfit. No more running out to the car in an old track suit to pick up the groceries — somebody may be watching on TV.

Finally there was my new social life. Here in a condo, there are numerous opportunities to socialize, both planned and unplanned.

There are the parties: parties for Halloween, parties for St. Patrick's Day, parties to celebrate summer, parties to celebrate snowstorms.

There are activities: bridge, shuffleboard, aquafit, tai chi.

There are committees: the library committee, the gardening committee, the communications committee, the decoration committee.

There are enough things to keep a person busy 24 hours a day. You don't really need your own apartment at all.

Then there are the unplanned social opportunities as well: in the hot tub, in the lobby, in the courtyard. There are chances to pick up gossip at every corner.

At last I feel I have settled in: thrown out treasures, reorganized pets, mastered the technology, sewn my keys to my wrist, shopped for new clothes, and worked on my small-talk skills.

Life is good here — interesting, bustling and, for the most part, carefree. There are no leaves to rake, no pool vacuum to wrestle with, no recycling boxes to empty, no leaking roofs to patch, no driveways to shovel.

Which leaves lots of time to relax, socialize, read the paper.

What's this in the real estate section? A condo by the beach . . . hmmmmmm.

Do you have a story to tell about life in a condo? Send it to Me and My Condo, Condo Living, Toronto Star, One Yonge St., Toronto, M5E 1E6, fax it to (416) 865-3635 or send it by e-mail to condos@thestar.ca