

downsize: everything's waiting for you

Cheryl Markosky looks at the upside of downsizing.

Downsizing's not a dirty word, says Cheryl Markosky in her first column on starting a new life.

Seven years ago, I looked out over our communal garden square and knew it was time to go.

I'm not one for taking notice of bolts out of the blue, but brushing aside nearly 30 years of fun and frolics in a Victorian townhouse on the two-acre oasis suddenly seemed okay.

Waving goodbye to the beloved garden where the children built secret camps, I talked to my neighbours and we enjoyed al fresco picnics with friends was now a good idea.

The moment of revelation wasn't romantic. It was no-nonsense. Who would have thought it from the least practical member of the family?

But I did my sums and realised the uplift for houses surrounding a garden square was immense, the value of the communal area alone adding substantially to the price tag.

“Clearing out three decades worth of mostly pointless possessions should be easy. But it isn't.”

A garden we no longer frequented. Offspring One had upped sticks already. After uni, she got a job and was renting nearby. Offspring Two was about to depart. And my husband hadn't put a Timberland-clad foot into the shared greenery for ages.

Was it worth living next to such an asset for my odd perambulation round the graveled path? The answer was no.

This is when The Big Downsize began.

I now understand why people don't shift from the family home. They're worrying about The Stuff. Clearing out three decades worth of mostly pointless possessions should be easy. But it isn't.

After a sentimental sift of books I'd never read again, clothes I'd never fit into again and crazy rubbish I'd never use again, I became better at chucking things out. I discovered I was made of sterner stuff when discarding useless stuff.

The sale of the house had exhilarating moments. "You can't get emotional when selling your family home. It's only bricks and mortar," I told everyone in a highly emotional way.

After the sale to a 'Nice Family' – you always feel better if you sell to a 'Nice Family' – came The Revelation.

Which was that we were free of the mortgage, free of hideous heating bills, free of being on the blooming Garden Committee (communal gardens aren't all about roses growing around the pergola, you know).

I felt like a teenager again. Like Sandy in *Grease* when she dons black leather and tickles John Travolta under the chin while doing a saucy dance.

We abandoned the house in the communal garden that was costing us a fortune and giving my husband sleepless nights. No more worries about



Cheryl Markosky enjoying her 'post-downsized' lifestyle.

The Stuff or making The Downsizing Decision. The stuff was cluttering up somebody else's house via the local charity shop and we'd made that choice.

We moved to a Sixties house in a neighbouring area opposite a park. We modernised the house the way we wanted and gratefully don't have to manage the affairs of the park.

News that the recent budget benefits downsizers with inheritance free tax allowances, protecting them if they choose to downsize, almost makes me want to downsize all over again. It's not some scary thing on the horizon. It's an adventure. It's the right thing to do.

Rightsizing. I'm sticking with that, because it sounds right. And it feels right too.