

When Is It Time To Sell? The Empty-Nester Dilemma

by Judi Wolfson and Elaine Shreiber

Wasn't it just yesterday the moving truck pulled away, leaving you to unpack boxes in the kitchen, while the kids raced each other up the stairs to lay claim to their bedrooms? Could YEARS have past since you planted the seedling in the front yard, where now stands that majestic tree? Unbelievable as it may seem, you blinked and became your parents!

Millions of baby boomers are now facing, or will shortly face, The Big Question: "What Do We Do About The Family Home?" With children grown and leaving for college or for places of their own, Fifty-Something folks find themselves grappling with a decision that many are just not ready to make.

Most boomers bought their present homes assuming they would one day make a clear-cut, economic determination. They firmly believed that once the kids were out, they would sell the big house, pocket the profit, and scale down. They logically figured that no one in their right minds would continue hanging onto a four bedroom, 2 ½ bath house after the children left. Someday in the distant future, they mused, they would be heading for something smaller, something more manageable, something more appropriate for two people.

Suddenly, THE DAY arrives ! Wonder of wonders, many empty-nesters find themselves completely unprepared. Like deer caught in the headlights of a car, they are paralyzed at the thought of having to move. While realizing it probably does not make economic sense to maintain a residence far too big for their present everyday needs, empty-nesters still stay put.

Why?

The answers are as simple, and as complex, as human beings themselves. First and foremost is the inability to face the notion that they have actually reached the "Someday" stage! Selling the big house smacks of being old. Baby boomers do not look , or feel, "old".

In addition, the home holds many emotional ties. Every room emits memories: all those family functions, all those prom pictures, all those birthday parties.

Next, there is the real issue of the disruption a move invariably causes. The process of selling one house, packing everything, buying another residence, moving, and then unpacking, is exhausting. And, where would they go? Still vibrant -- and probably still working - most baby boomers are not ready to pull up stakes and head for retirement cities.

Even if the perfect condo or townhouse complex exists just around the corner, many empty-nesters are concerned about drastically changing lifestyles. What if they hate condo living? What if they miss their backyard? What if they can't breath with neighbors so close?

What Is The Answer?

While the decision of WHEN to give up the big house will remain a personal and emotional one, some objective financial factors should, rightfully, be contemplated now:

1. Is The Area Appreciating Or Depreciating?

Empty-Nesters would be very wise to keep a finger on the pulse of the real estate market in their area. Tracking the appreciation record of an area is not a complicated matter. Call your local REALTOR and request a CMA (Competitive Market Analysis). This should tell you the direction your area is taking. If an area shows a flat rate of appreciation, or worse yet if it reveals depreciation, then you may want to seriously consider selling sooner, rather than later. Most Realtors will do a CMA without charge or obligation.

2. Do You Have The Ability And Desire To Keep Up With Maintenance?

Let's face it. All residences require maintenance, and the larger the dwelling, the more there is to do. If you have reason to believe you may become less than diligent about keeping up with repairs, even as MORE chores show up (the house isn't getting any younger, either!) , then you may want to consider selling . Homes that show signs of deferred maintenance (a fancy way of saying someone was too lazy, or too busy, to take care of things) will bring less value on the marketplace.

3. When Will Major Components Need Replacing?

The longer you remain in your home, the more exposure you have to expensive, necessary replacements. How old is your roof? What is the age of your furnace? Your air conditioner?

In a nutshell, you should take a cold, hard look at the reality of your real estate. Determine how much extra it may cost you to remain in your present "comfort zone" for a few more years, and then decide if you are willing to pay the price.

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