

The movers are coming! Get your house in order!

By Jodie Cain Smith, Clemson Road Creative Managing Editor and Packing Virtuoso

I am a packing virtuoso. Over fifteen years and ten moves as a military spouse, I have no use for modesty when it comes to my skills of packing and unpacking a house. With a few simple tips, you, too, can raise your packing skills to artistic levels.

Admit to being an accidental packrat, and change your ways.

Lord knows I try to keep an organized house, but I fall victim to saving unused or outdated items. "One day I will not hate sewing," I tell myself. "I will save these random scraps of fabric and trim and yarn in this closet until inspiration strikes." Then, two years later I am stuck packing scraps of fabric and trim and yarn because inspiration is an elusive witch. After several moves, I had to admit I would always hate sewing.

So, the first step to a successful move is to clear out the junk. Any item that has not seen the light of day in a year (clothing, seasonal décor, all the old scrapbooking supplies we collected before the birth of Shutterfly, etc.) gets donated. Or, if you're the type of person who enjoys displaying your junk on the front yard at 7a.m. on a Saturday, have a yard sale. The method doesn't matter; just get rid of the excess.

Un-decorate your house prior to packing.

Little known fact outside of the military: If the Army (or whatever military service) has hired movers to pack your belongings, you are not allowed to assist in the packing. Sitting for fourteen hours on whatever piece of furniture has not been wrapped and loaded while the packers shove random items in random boxes with no thought to whether the items actually belong together or not is my personal Hell. Imagine 15lb barbells stacked on top of my beaded ball gowns and you'll get a sense of my rage. It also became my Groundhog Day until one idea hit me like a brick: Group like items with like items to make the madness stop.

All wall art should come down and be gathered in one room. In the new house, I unpack all of the artwork at once, and then decide which piece will go where according to the new floor plan. I do the same with curtains and linens, crystal and china, candlesticks and decorative chachkies, small, framed photos, etc.

This benefits both DIY-ers and the no-way-I'm-doing-this-myself-ers. DIY-ers will save time and space on both ends of the move. The packing will be less frustrating as you eliminate the search for boxes to shove things in, and you will more than likely have fewer boxes when unpacking. For those of you who like to throw money at a problem (and I really want to be one of you), you won't have to throw so much. Most

packers get paid by the hour. Organizing your belongings before they show up will result in a faster pack.

Channel your inner Martha Stewart with labels.

Aside from committing a crime that resulted in months spent in unflattering prison orange, I admire many of Martha's ways. And, although my pantry will never look like hers with coordinated containers for all pantry staples, labeled baskets for produce, and I'm assuming an elaborate foil, plastic wrap, and parchment paper station in a corner, I do look to Martha on packing day with room-specific labels for each box.

In preparation for our last move, my husband thought the Army had finally caused me to crack up when I revealed the box labels. Color coordinated, the labels told the movers which floor and room each box should land in the new house. My birth certificate may indicate 41 years on this planet, but my knees and back tell a grimmer story. Nobody has time and energy for moving boxes from room to room and floor to floor. For the record, when the hubby had to carry no boxes up and down stairs thanks to my pretty labels, he finally admitted my brilliance.

So, as you pack or have your belongings packed, place your own labels (designed according to your new floor plan) on each box as soon as it is closed. That missing box of dinner plates will not be discovered two months later hiding in the garage.

Bonus tip: Empty the garbage.

I leave you with this: Ask any military spouse, and she will recall that time the movers carefully packed the full garbage can. God, bless 'em. When this happened to me, my belongings went into crate storage, not to be unpacked for months. I gagged for three days.

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