

# your **estate**matters

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## To Downsize or Not to Downsize?

### The Answer? It Depends

Maybe your nest is finally empty. Maybe, like 82% of baby boomers recently surveyed, you feel renting is cheaper. Or maybe home equity makes up a significant portion of your wealth. Whatever the reason, you're considering downsizing and either buying a smaller home or renting.

Before you do, make sure you do the math. The National Endowment for Financial Education says unless you reduce your overall housing expenses by at least 25%, the move isn't worth it—closing and moving costs alone will offset the money you save.

Make sure you maximize not just the savings but also the cash downsizing can generate. Sell unneeded household items on sites like **Craigslist.org**, **Letgo.com**, and **OfferUp.com**. Sell unneeded clothing on sites like **ThredUp.com**, **MaterialWorld.com**, and **TheReal.com**. Or use local consignment shops to sell the items you no longer need. Anything that doesn't sell can then be donated to a local charity or organizations like Goodwill or the Salvation Army; not only will you help others, you'll enjoy the tax benefits, too.

One more tip: Start the process of downsizing early. Home ownership rates have steadily decreased over recent years and may continue to do so since many millennials are renting rather than buying. If, like many older Americans, the bulk of your net worth is in your home, and you someday plan to sell your home and rent instead, it may take time to find the right buyer. Consider downsizing long before you need the savings—or the money.

## Walking Is Great for Seniors with Dementia

### As Long as We Make Sure They're Safe

Walking is one of the best ways for older adults to stay active, but when someone develops Alzheimer's or dementia, walking alone or wandering can be extremely dangerous, exposing vulnerable seniors to hazards like street traffic, unfamiliar terrain, and opportunistic strangers.

Whether your family member or friend is living at home or with you, you can take measures to prevent wandering and protect the individual if he or she does roam. Install door locks that are difficult for a person with dementia to see or open, such as a latch near the top of the door. Place gates at stairwells to prevent falls.

Provide a place to wander safely, such as a path through the home or a circular trail through a fenced backyard. Take walks together. Many long-term care facilities provide secure spaces to wander safely, both indoors and outdoors.

Just in case, also consider an identification bracelet engraved with "memory impaired" as well as contact information. MedicAlert, a company that makes ID bracelets, has a program that helps low-income families purchase bracelets; check out **www.medicalert.org** or ask for information at your local pharmacy.

## With Age Comes Medication

### Alternative Treatments Can Provide Benefits

Medications are frequently prescribed to help combat the symptoms of various diseases. However, you may have other options. Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disease that affects movement, which is usually treated with medication. But music therapy can be very effective in addressing the physical limitations as well as speech and communication deficits. Studies show that playing and listening to music, as well as singing and dancing, can modify movements, communication, cognitive factors, and emotions by activating parts of the brain that control those behaviors. Rhythm plays a key role in rehabilitation by improving the length and speed of steps and walking, as well as other physical abilities. Not only does the brain change when listening to or playing music, but the emotional response to hearing music can actually increase the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that decreases in Parkinson's patients.

That is not only true for Parkinson's. Alternative treatments can help with other age-related issues, like heart disease. Since stress hormones can cause coronary arteries to spasm and may create micro-tears that attract potentially-dangerous plaque deposits, "treatments" like yoga, meditation, and acupuncture have been found to reduce stress and promote heart health.

Light therapy is a way to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder—a type of depression that occurs during the fall and winter. This and other conditions can be treated through exposure to artificial light. Art therapy—painting, crafts, etc.—can provide comfort and positive visual stimulation for people with dementia, helping to keep them more interested, engaged, and giving them greater confidence to try new things.

And don't forget the alternative treatments provided by our furry or feathered friends. Pets can help reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and increase social interaction and physical activity.

Plus, your pet is always happy to see you.

Can't beat that.

## Will You Become a Parent's Caregiver?

### Things to Discuss Before You Do

Millions of baby boomers will eventually become caregivers for their aging parents. But how do you begin to have a conversation on such a sensitive topic with an aging parent? Broach the subject too early and you may not be taken seriously; broach the subject too late and from the parent's point of view, it might feel like your way of pushing them into moving to a nursing home.

Whether you need to talk about no longer driving, taking over financial matters, or getting help with day-to-day tasks, the key is to start the communication process early, while the parent is still healthy and can make thoughtful decisions for themselves. The goal is to solve problems together, not to dictate solutions.

Start by taking care of the basics. Make sure a Property Power of Attorney, Medical Power of Attorney, HIPAA Authorization, and a Living Will, sometimes called an Advance Directive, are in place so you can step in and make important decisions if necessary. Also make sure a comprehensive estate plan is in place. The easiest way to start that conversation is to ask what your parent hopes to pass on to loved ones, both in financial and in emotional and sentimental terms (we can ensure the estate plan will effectively carry out those wishes).

Then ask your parent what they would want under certain circumstances. If assistance is required, would they rather receive care in the home, or move to an assisted living facility? If health issues become serious, would they prefer extraordinary measures be taken, or let nature take its course?

And when you notice a potential problem, ask questions. Ask, "How's the house? It must be hard to keep this place in good shape," instead of, "Dad, you're not able to keep the house in good shape anymore." If your parent sounds receptive to discussing a tough issue, don't try to take over. Show you're willing to help by asking if, and then how, you can help. If your parent doesn't have ideas, then you can make gentle suggestions to find solutions.

## Guess This Legacy

He was a captain in the British army. He worked as a model and then built a career in television, becoming a star in the long-running TV series, "The Saint." His 60-year career was capped by receiving a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for his work in movies and television.

And in seven films, from *Live and Let Die* in 1973 to *A View to a Kill* in 1985, he uttered three of the most iconic words in film history: "Bond. James Bond."

But what did **Roger Moore** consider to be his greatest achievement? Serving as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, traveling the world to advocate for children's rights in countries including Brazil, Mexico and Ethiopia. He was even knighted for his services, saying it meant "far more to me than if I had got it for acting... I was proud because I received it on behalf of UNICEF as a whole and for all it has achieved over the years."

*What will your legacy be?*

## Therapy Dogs in Funeral Homes

### Offering Comfort During Times of Grief

For years, therapy dogs have been used to help in hospitals, nursing homes, and hospices. Dog ownership is associated with lower heart attack risks and increased survival after a heart attack. Older pet owners walk significantly farther when they walked with a dog. Talking to a pet rather than a person is associated with lower heart rate. In nursing homes, the presence of a dog is associated with reduced need for medication, improved physical functioning, and improved vital signs—even when patients are suffering from dementia.

And now a growing number of funeral homes use therapy dogs to offer comfort to those who are grieving. "A therapy dog can provide mourners with exactly what they need during this stressful time: comfort and the chance to relieve some of their tension and anxiety," says Marilyn Mendoza, a

psychologist who specializes in grief. Petting an animal can increase serotonin and dopamine levels, can boost mood, and also help lower stress and blood pressure.

For example, Rocky is a two-year-old dog who "works" at Bartolomeo and Perotto Funeral Home. When a family gathers before a service, "He greets every single person," says Michael Perotto. "Somehow, some way, he can figure out who's having the hardest time and then he'll park with that person." Rocky has even been trained to accompany a mourner to the kneeler bench and lower his head as if in prayer.

As Jessica Koth of the National Funeral Directors Association says, "Sometimes all it takes is a nuzzle from a wet nose to help people share their feelings and begin the healing process."

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