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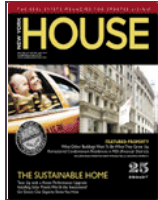
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SO LONG, MCMANSION

A homeowner recounts a time when bigger wasn't better.

BY CATHY BONIELLO AS TOLD TO SUSAN HODARA



In 1998, Cathy and Joe Boniello and their sons, J.T., then 13, and Stephen, 10, moved into the home of their dreams—a 4,000-square-foot, four-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath house built in 1995 on a friendly street in an upscale community in Yorktown Heights.

Seven years later, they moved to an even larger home—a 7,000-square-foot Colonial with a large porch built in 2000—in a more upscale neighborhood in the same school district. Within months they realized they'd made a mistake.

It was during the summer of 2005, when the real estate market was at its hottest, that we decided to sell the house we'd been living in for seven years. The house was on a premium lot. We had added crown molding, finished the basement, and redone our kitchen with granite and ceramic tiles. We'd transformed the backyard into an oasis, incorporating an elaborate in-ground pool and professional landscaping. By selling, we were trying to protect our equity by making what we thought would be a wise financial decision.

Our new house was easy to fall in love with. It had a beautiful front porch and was in an estate neighborhood. Stephen is in a band, and the huge basement seemed like an ideal place for them to rehearse. And even though our sons are older, we wanted to have plenty of room for them if they chose to move back after college. At the time, we thought a bigger house was a good idea.

We moved in December 2005 with what we thought was a pending contract on our first house. That deal fell through and the house was back on the market.

The new house was spacious and beautifully built, but from the start, there were things we couldn't get used to.

One was the kitchen. There was a heaviness to it, a kind of darkness. The cabinets were cherry, the floors and countertops terracotta. I missed the bright airiness of my former kitchen. The new kitchen was large, but there was less cabinet space, and it didn't have a pantry. I transformed one of two coat closets, but that meant I had to walk down the hall to get a box of cereal.

Because the lots were larger, there was more distance between the houses. In our old neighborhood, we all knew one another and would stop to chat at the mailbox. At the new house, I never saw anyone.

The basement didn't work out as we'd hoped either. The family room in the new house was small, so we set up the big-screen TV and our oversized sectional in the basement media room. But we never used it. We wanted to be closer to the kitchen. When Stephen went down there, he felt isolated. I stored some overflow kitchen items there, but it felt like I had to travel five miles to get a cookie sheet.

In the house we'd moved from, there was an open hallway overlooking a large family room where we spent a lot of our time. The boys could open their bedroom doors and see their dad sitting on the sofa watching TV. What we missed most was that family-centered feeling.

None of us ever bonded with the new house. Stephen never liked it. Joe missed his big-screen TV in the family room. I didn't feel comfortable anywhere. We did our best to make it home. We painted. We hired a decorator. But within three months, we knew the house was not meeting our needs.

Our first house was still on the market, and before long, we considered returning. Joe and I made lists of the pros and cons of doing so, and there were far more pros. The decision was made. We took the old house off the market and put the new one on.

We wanted to sell before we moved, but as the holiday season approached, we were anxious to be back home. Enough was enough. In November, we moved back.

That was on a Saturday. As the movers pulled out, the telephone rang. There was a couple interested in looking at the house. They came the next day, and ended up buying it. We closed in March.

It was a costly mistake. Home prices had dropped soon after we bought the big house. In addition to the costs of moving back and forth, we'd spent money on furniture and blueprints for a swimming pool. But we couldn't have been happier the day we moved back. I hope the new family finds more joy than we did, but for us, it was too big. The roominess made us uncomfortable. It was never home. 🏠

Illustration by Steve Bates

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