

Aging in Place: I want to stay in my own home



Would you worry about your elderly parents climbing these stairs every day?

It's a funny thing, at least for people who are parents, how as you get older, the tables can turn. The child you lovingly watched over may now be doing the same to you, which can be rather disconcerting at times. Especially if your children are telling you that they don't think your home is safe anymore and you are determined to stay in it as long as possible — the term used these days is aging in place.

Priscilla and Bill Ambrose, who are in their mid-seventies, are perfectly happy in the 200-year-old colonial they've lived in for the past 25 years. "We love it," says Priscilla. "We're in good shape physically, but our bedroom is upstairs and it's a concern for our children and for us too, as to what the next step will be. But we feel that we're too young to sign up for the retirement community. The problem was we couldn't agree on what to do about the situation."

Enter sisters Kim Dorsky and Liz Pattison, who run a downsizing business called [SimplySized Home](#). They were able to assess the situation without the emotion and angst that was preventing Priscilla and Bill from moving forward or more to the point, from moving downstairs

. "We have found that it is often the children who suggest the move to first floor living," says Liz. "I think many elders don't want to face the fact that they're finding it more difficult to do some of the routine things they once were able to do."

The major concern about Priscilla and Bill's bedroom on the second floor was the stairs they have to climb. "The house is very old," Liz describes, "and the stairs were frightening, skinny treads that were very steep. I am sure they were the original stairs from the 1700s."

Finding space for a bedroom on the first floor

The challenge was to find a space on the first floor that could be turned into a bedroom. Kim and Liz asked a few questions:

- How important was it to have a formal living room?
- How often did they use the dining room?
- What room could be transformed and have the least impact on daily living *and* family gatherings?

After considering all the downstairs rooms, Priscilla says they settled on a room that was used as a den/library and was next to a full bathroom. "We realized with their guidance that we could turn this lovely room into a bedroom if we rearranged the desks to create a nice space for a bed and cleaned out the bookcases and shelves."



The den that will become a first floor bedroom

Before they proceeded, Kim and Liz asked more questions:

- What size bed did they want?
- Do they read at night?
- How important are bed stands?
- Can they mount lights on the wall if there isn't room for bed stands?
- Did they need so many bookshelves?

"It was important to know what they wanted and what their habits were," explains Liz. "We wanted the transition to be as comfortable as possible. For Priscilla and Bill, I think we were able to assure them that moving downstairs wasn't going to be all bad."

If you've decided that aging in place is the approach you want to take, the most important thing to consider is safety inside and outside the house.

Aging in place safely

- Railings on both sides of all stairs
- Adequate lighting in all rooms and hallways, and at the top and bottom of any stairs
- Leading edge of each stair marked so it can be easily seen
- Scatter rugs secured or removed
- Floors free of clutter
- Grab bars in the bathroom and by the bed, if necessary
- Anti-scald valves on water supply to tub, showers and sink
- Properly placed smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
- Elevated toilet seats
- Accessible shower
- Motion sensitive lights that go on at night
- Lever door handles in place of knobs
- Snow and ice removed from driveway, walkway and stairs

The update on Priscilla and Bill is that with Liz and Kim's help, they cleared out the library and moved in a new bed. Now ... much to their children's dismay, they haven't actually moved themselves in yet, but Priscilla says at least the room is ready for them "when the time comes." "It's a beautiful room," she says, and it has relieved us a great deal. We feel that we could stay here another 10 years and we're so happy with that. We've cleared everything — our heads, our life, and our room."

A final piece of advice from Priscilla — if you want to stay in your own home, plan ahead. There's a lot more wisdom about aging in place that we can pass along on the Advantage Home Care Blog, and we will in future posts. If you have any advice, please share it with us. If you'd like some tips on downsizing and clearing the clutter, be sure to read our previous post [Downsizing Your Mother's Home](#).