

Chapter 5

Moving Without Trauma

Horror stories

The most common horror stories about moving to a rural location are about the move itself. Many couples claim that the move brought them closer to divorce than at any other time in their lives. That admission is often accompanied by an acknowledgement that they were warned that the move would be stressful but assumed they smart enough to avoid problems. Their trips proved to be anything but smooth.

Most of us choose to rent a moving truck instead of hiring a professional mover. Moving a household yourself is a tiring and stressful job under the best of conditions. Even hiring a mover can present problems.

Moving comes at an especially stressful time in your transition to rural life. You will likely be taking care of many last minute details in closing up your old home, saying goodbye to friends and neighbors, and making sure you have everything packed and ready for the move. You will be working under the time constraint of when you must turn in your rental truck or meet your commercial movers at your destination. All this leads you plunge ahead in spite of exhaustion that, in turn, allows you to make mistakes. Proper planning can make you move much more pleasant an experience.

Commercial movers

Theoretically, hiring a professional mover should be the easiest way to move. In many cases it is. However, you should be aware that there are occasionally problems with moves to rural destinations.

The problem with moves to rural homes is that movers sometimes will not drive their moving vans onto narrow rural driveways and sometimes even the rural roads leading to them. You are then faced with hiring a second smaller truck and paying to have your items loaded onto the second truck for the last few hundred feet of the move.

Offsetting this, of course is that the movers will be doing the packing, loading, and unloading. If your rural home is not ready to move into, you can usually have your household items stored until it is.

The real disadvantage for most of us is the price of using a professional mover. Most people we have talked to found that the price of a commercial move was two to ten times the price of using a rental truck, including fuel, packing materials, and pizza for the friends and relatives who helped with the loading.

Packing

There are two tricks to packing to move your household from one state to another. The first is to move as little as possible. If you are in doubt of an item's usefulness at your new home, throw or give it away. You must take care selecting which items you will move. Those unnecessary items are the bane of retired folks. Most retired couples we know end up with ten or twenty boxes of stuff they have never opened even years after their move. A close friend who moved from California to Texas still has over a hundred unopened boxes after ten years. We still have three.

The second trick is to carefully label boxes with their contents as they are packed. Take enough time to describe the contents accurately. These labels will allow you to find what you need and to know which boxes to unpack first. Number the boxes and create a list indicating box number and contents. This list can save a tremendous amount of work when trying to find things once you have moved.

Another thing to consider is what to do about furniture. We started our retirement planning several years before our actual move. We made the choice to not replace our worn furniture before our move. When it came time to move, we gave away or disposed of most of our furniture. What we took with us were a few antique pieces and some smaller solid oak tables. We came out ahead in both the effort to move and the cost of replacement. Prices on new furniture were lower in the Midwest.

The cross-country drive

If you are driving a rental moving truck cross-country, limit your travel distance to three hundred fifty miles per day. Before you leave, lay out your trip on a map and decide where you will be stopping each night. You will be starting your trip exhausted and stressed from packing, loading the truck, and closing up the old house. You will finish the trip by unloading the truck again. You must allow yourself to rest along the trip.

Most moving truck rentals automatically allow enough days to load, travel about three hundred to three hundred fifty miles per day, and unload. You will not save money if you turn the truck in early.

One of the most common problems encountered during a move is deciding to drive five or six hundred miles a day. That might be practical when traveling cross country in a passenger vehicle but don't consider it for your move. That works out to be ten to fourteen hours of driving right after the stress and work of loading the truck. The result is frayed nerves and angry squabbles over insignificant details. Often as not, a couple ends up losing a day of travel resting in a motel because they are too tired to safely continue driving. Avoid the temptation to drive distances greater than 350 miles per day.

Well.... You might be able to get away with a single longer driving day if your total move distance is less than about five hundred miles. For more than five hundred miles, split the trip up into shorter distance travel days.

Transporting your personal vehicles

There are three alternatives for transporting your personal vehicles to your new rural home. You can drive them, you can tow them, or you can have them transported by commercial services. Driving and towing them behind rental moving trucks are the most common choices.

Moving truck rental companies rent a variety of equipment for towing your car, truck, or SUV. They range from simple hitches to full size drive-on trailers. Towing requirements vary for different types of vehicles. Some, such a four wheel drive vehicles, may require that drive shafts be disconnected if a drive-on trailer is not used. You will have to check with your moving truck rental company for the towing requirements for your specific vehicles.

Keep in mind that towing something behind your moving truck adds greatly to the difficulty of your drive. Backing a large wheelbase truck with a smaller trailer is

extremely difficult, even with a trailer large enough to haul SUV. Not only is it difficult to see what you are towing to know how to steer while backing but the longer wheelbase of the truck makes it very difficult to control the trailer. The solution is to examine your route carefully and avoid any situation that requires that you back up. Look for large, mostly empty parking lots in case you need to turn around. Wal-Mart parking lots are like oases for couples making cross country moves – just park across the lot away from the main store with the other rental trucks, RVs, and big rigs.

Towing a vehicle is much easier if you have someone else do it. This choice is often difficult or expensive to implement. Locating a reliable transport service is may not be easy and those that are available often specialize in high value vehicles so are expensive. This cost may, in part, be offset by the cost of fuel that would be incurred if you were to drive the vehicle yourself. If you are using a commercial mover for your household, an option worth investigating is whether they will also handle your vehicle transport problem at a reasonable price.

Driving personal vehicles for a cross-country move is a popular choice. If a commercial mover is moving your household effects, you simply drive to your new home and wait for the moving truck to arrive. Most of us, though, chose the rental truck method of moving and end up making up a two-vehicle convoy.

The common scheme is for a wife to be driving a personal vehicle with her husband driving the rental truck. They travel as a two-vehicle convoy. Done correctly, this can be fun. Done incorrectly, it's just sad. The sad way is when they travel with the wife following so close to the rental truck that all she can see out her windshield is the butt end of the truck. That is both tiring and dangerous. Besides, she misses all the scenery she is passing through.

The correct way is for them to maintain several hundred yards or more spacing. Rental moving trucks are usually big, brightly colored boxes traveling along the road. It is easy to keep track of them from quite a distance back. With planning and use of inexpensive portable two-way radios, it is not even necessary that they remain in view of each other.

The way to plan a day's travel is to look over the route and choose meeting points about every fifty miles or less. These should be highway exits, cross roads, or rest stops. Make sure that you make contact with each other at each of these locations before proceeding on. That will keep you from being too far apart in case of a breakdown and to allow coordination about rest, fuel, and food breaks.

Coordination between vehicles today is easy. Simply buy a pair of Family Radio Service (FRS) or General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) walky-talkies. They are

inexpensive and available in just about any general merchandise store such as Wal-Mart and K-Mart. Reliable range between these radios used inside vehicles is about one half mile for FRS transceivers and two or three times that for GMRS transceivers. Much greater range is possible when there is a clear line of sight between the radios.

Practice using your walky-talkies before you start out on your cross-country trip. Get familiar with their operation. You won't want to be trying to figure them out while navigating dense traffic in some strange town. Periodically check in with each other with them. They are a tremendous help while making contact at your meeting points.

With prearranged meeting locations and two-way radios, your trip can be less stressful. The faster vehicle can move ahead to the next rendezvous point and rest or perhaps scout for restaurant or a good place to buy fuel. Even when traveling together, having the prearranged meeting points removes the stress of worrying about losing sight of each other and the radios allow you to coordinate stops.

Lessons learned about moving

- 1. Bench seats in trucks are more comfortable than bucket seats on really long trips.*
- 2. If you are towing something, never drive into a location you must back out of. Backing out of a busy parking lot is quite an adventure for a beginner. Don't be afraid to get out and walk your route to make sure you can pull through.*
- 3. While traveling, follow the one-hundred-mile rule. Never travel farther than one hundred miles without stopping for a break. We old folks get tired, stiff, and cranky if we sit in the driver's seat too long.*
- 4. We had never appreciated Wal-Mart stores quite as much as when we travel cross-country with trucks and trailers. They are usually well marked, close to the highway, have room in their parking lots for big vehicles, and usually have restaurants nearby.*
- 5. Don't give in to the temptation to continue driving after you reach your planned overnight stop. You will discover all the motels and restaurants down the road are either closed or full. That appears to be an inviolable physical law.*