

First Time

MOVING EXPERIENCE

First day in a new house

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This is the seventh in a year-long series offering a look at various "firsts" for people around the region.

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FINDLAY - The first night in the house was the creepiest.

There were unsettling noises. The floor creaked with every move. Wind whispering through open windows slammed an unseen door shut.

"It was eerie to me," said Ann Dombrowski, who spent the first night in her new home sleeping on air mattresses with her family. Other than that and a couple other items, the place was practically empty. The moving truck wasn't scheduled to show up until 9 the next morning.

"It's hard to go to sleep in a house with nothing in it," said Ann's husband, Paul, a recruiter for the Army National Guard recently transferred here from eastern Pennsylvania.

Even the family dog, Bear, knew something was different. He wouldn't eat.

"It's his nerves or something," Ann said.

One in seven Americans moves each year, and the process is often included on lists of life's most stressful activities. It's nothing new to the Dombrowskis. As a military family, they relocated eight times in three years at one point.

Even though it can be nerve-racking, the first 24 hours in a new residence is always pregnant with possibility. Those same empty rooms that were so unfamiliar to the Dombrowskis that first night also offered limitless hope in how they might be filled.

For daughter Emily, 12, it meant the chance to convince her mom to let her turn a room adjoining her new bedroom into a reptile room, full of "geckos, frogs, and stuff."

(She knows her mom will need a little convincing on this, but she's preparing her arguments. "They don't smell up the room," she said. "I had a hamster last and she didn't like it at all.")

Ten-year-old Christopher already could see his empty room transformed into a shrine for his favorite football team, the Atlanta Falcons. The most important thing had already been decided to his satisfaction, though - which room would be his.

"I wanted the bigger room 'cus last time I got the smallest," he said.

For Paul, 36, this two-story house in a quiet little Findlay subdivision is more than a home; it's a homecoming. A Toledo Rogers High School graduate, he hasn't lived in northwest Ohio in more than 15 years, since he joined the military and traveled seemingly everywhere.

Much of his family remains in Toledo, and Paul said, "Ohio kept calling and calling us." When he answered, it helped that he could find a house with a giant master bedroom, wooden floors, and a tub in which he could finally lie down comfortably. But no time to take a soak yet.



Ann Dombrowski supervises as a mover wheels some of their things into the new house in Findlay. (THE BLADE/ ALLAN DETRICH)

By the time the two moving trucks from Stevens Worldwide Van Lines lined up at the end of the driveway with the contents of their lives squished into giant crates, the family was eager to get started on their new life. (Aided, no doubt, by the fact that they'd been living with Paul's brother in Toledo for a month waiting to move in.)

"This is when the fun starts," Paul said.

Everyone took their stations: Paul, with his head shaved, stood in the driveway, rubbing his chin as he watched boxes of stuff carted off the trucks, then directed the movers to the proper room; Ann, 34, was posted in the kitchen checking off the numbers called out by movers, keeping track of what had been unloaded.

Tired and looking a little bored, Christopher grabbed a seat in the grass in a folding camping chair, where he could watch the proceedings and zone out, biding his time until his beloved PlayStation 2 was freed from the moving truck.

While all of them were focused on the business of making their house a home, Emily turned her attention to making friends when a boy, a fellow 7th grader, rode his bike to the edge of the yard to talk.

"The boys are coming already," noted Ann, who likes moving to new places and meeting new people, but still admits, "It's a lot easier for kids to meet friends than for adults to meet friends."

Maybe that's why Emily isn't too sad about the move. Sure, she would've liked to go to junior high with her old friends, but she's looking forward to new people too. She might be the only kid in town saying, "I can't actually wait for school."

Everything was unloaded by around 2:30 p.m., after which the family decided to take a little break from the hot, hot sun outside. They turned on the air-conditioning, grabbed chairs, and just sat. And relaxed. And relished doing nothing.

There would be plenty of time for more work later - putting the beds together, finding something to eat, dealing with all the giant boxes. And then finally, time for sleep, a much more satisfying one than the night before.

After all, now they were truly home.

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