Aging Lifestyles: Paradise tossed

by Joe_Volz

So, you have abandoned the crowded, noisy and, yes, dangerous, big city for your retirement paradise in the bucolic countryside far from the madding crowd.

Your paradise is not only quieter, cleaner and safer - but it's cheaper, much cheaper.

What's not to like?

Well, here is one man's story of his trip to paradise. Let's hope it is not yours. I could very well title this piece, "What the experts didn't tell me."

You see, when we hustled out of Washington five years ago, I thought my wife was in full compliance with my decision to head up into the Catoctin Mountains 50 miles to the northwest to the small city of Frederick, Md.

I guessed wrong. She was just being nice, like a good wife, who grew up in the 1950s, learned to be.

She saw that I was panicking to get out of town. The terrorists had hit New York and the Pentagon a year earlier. I was convinced that there would be more attacks and our downtown apartment, just a few miles from the White House, could suffer collateral damage, as they say. If nothing else, another attack, even a small one, might force our real estate prices to plummet. Or so, I thought at the time.

I was wrong.

But my wife, Kate, figured accurately there was no sense debating a man engulfed in such primal fear. So we moved.

Now, we are moving back to Washington.

Kate has always loved Washington, the cultural life, her dear friends - even the arrogance of the

politicians. And the grandchildren are much closer to Washington than to Frederick.

To Kate, Frederick was just a rural outpost. Nice people but pretty dull. The local theater certainly didn't rival the Kennedy Center and the local paper, The Frederick News-Post, was no Washington Post.

I looked at the situation a bit differently. I had spent years covering Washington for a variety of big-city papers. I had reported on every scandal from Watergate to Iran Contra. I wanted a change. I was ready to be put out to pasture.

I came to love little Frederick and the humble rabble that lived there. I even got a job writing three columns a week on the News-Post. It was a lot of fun. People actually read the paper and they had no trouble telling this big-city liberal that I was a left-wing radical who should never have come to town. On just about every major issue, from immigration to homosexuality, I was far to the left of the population in the conservative county. A number of readers suggested in print and e-mail that I go back to where I came from. One gentleman even posted a huge sign on the main street offering his succinct opinion of my efforts, "Fire Joe Volz." Another gentleman offered to buy me a one-way bus ticket out of town. The gang at the local barbershop said they would be happy to hold a going away pizza party for me, provided I was really serious about leaving.

But many more people liked my stuff, particularly the homey stuff about my cat, Maxwell. I became a big fish in a small pond. So, no wonder I didn't want to leave town even though I promised Kate we would head back to the big city after two years if she insisted. She put her request on hold while I was having fun writing the column. But the other day, I decided I didn't want to work that hard, so I retired from the pages of the News-Post. Now I have no excuse to stay in town. So we are heading back to the old neighborhood in the big city. The old apartment we sold five years ago is worth 50 percent more now. We can't afford to move in there. So we will rent something for the time being. I suppose the moral of the story is that when you pick your retirement paradise, it might be a good idea to live there for a month or two first as a tryout before making a final decision. I love Frederick but I love Kate more. So, here we come, D.C.

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