



When Life Downsizes

The good news is that, as I write this, my cheerful cousin Pam is back from the hospital. The way-less-than-good news is that she needed to have both legs amputated below the knees. Beyond that, the good news is that she's facing this traumatic challenge with courage, faith and even a little humor. Pam said, "What the heck. I'm not using these feet anyway."

A few years ago she took a tumble down her steep basement stairs. After spinal surgery, doctors determined she would not walk again. Given her health challenges, Pam could no longer stay in the home she shared with her late husband Tom for some 25 years.

We helped move her belongings into storage, and she was able to move into a residential care home. I regularly spend time in Pam's storage unit on her behalf, sorting through belongings and furnishings, deciding which to sell or consign with antique dealers, which to give to charity, which to dispose of or keep—so that we can further downsize her storage space.

Pam and Tom enjoyed long careers with the phone company. In retirement they were socially active and frequent volunteers in the community. Pam never had children, but she loved them and they loved her. She worked with kids at a day-care facility and served in the nursery at her church. You might say Tom and Pam were "living large." Now, suddenly, she's "living small."

Pam isn't alone. Every week I seem to hear of another friend or relative who is experiencing some kind of life downsizing. In one form or another, it comes to all of us. In fact, if you've been around a while, you've probably endured multiple downsizings—job losses, an empty nest, health setbacks, a divorce, deaths of loved ones. While we can recover from these ups-and-downs of life, some downsizings in this life are more or less permanent.

George Land, an author on growth and transformation, asserts that the most fundamental motivation for humans is growth—or the perception of growth. I think

he may be right. We like to feel like we're making progress—expanding our influence, wealth and power (even the guy who robs you on the street feels like he's growing—at your expense). No wonder life's downsizings are so hard. They make us feel like we're retreating or getting smaller—anything but growing.

But the Apostle Paul reminds us that regardless of our physical circumstances, we are always growing because of our connection with Jesus, who is the author of growth and life. Paul describes just how far Jesus downsized when he laid aside his infinite divine power to become truly human—all for us (Philippians 2:6-8). A couple of chapters later in the same letter, Paul comments, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (4:12). Paul reveals his secret in the next verse: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

We don't have to face these experiences by ourselves. God, in the person of Jesus, has been there, done that. As much as we would like to avoid life's downsizings, he doesn't necessarily spare us from them. Just ask my cousin Pam. But I believe she also knows firsthand that he's there with us every step of the way—as one who has experienced it Himself. □

—Monte Wolverton



Monte's cousin Pam with her late husband Tom.