

## A Writer Receives The Gift of Space

There's more than one way to move an oak desk downstairs. My wife, Laura, said not to move her study until she was here to help, but I'm ready to begin, and she isn't back yet. After a two-week battle with computer software and printers (in an attempt to continue publishing my own books in a more economical format), I need a change.

I read somewhere, if you need a change and can't get away to the Bahamas, move furniture.

De-drawerred, over on its top, sliding on soft cloths is one way to move a desk. I learned some of these techniques from years of working alone. Don't get down-slope from the desk, though. If it starts sliding out of control down the steps, damaging a wall beats damaging oneself. But I right the desk in the place I've chosen without a scratch to it or our residence.

Winter sun shines intensely through south windows. I wonder if it will be too bright. I bring my chair downstairs, sit at my desk, and pencil letters to widely scattered friends for half an hour. The sun shines on the desk, on my growing letters, golden, warm, and welcome. In summer, when I appreciate shade, the sun moves higher into the sky above the house and doesn't shine in.

So far, my choices are right. I had wondered. I found it hard to visualize how well a rearrangement of our house would work.

Season after season, I wrote happily between the kitchen and the dining area. Then I tried new software at the same time that I was learning a new printer and a new operating system. Some of the software turned out to be defective. It took time and frustration to differentiate between defective software and my inability to use it effectively.

Because I had paused for so long, when I was ready to write again, I reviewed everything about how I work.

When I made pancake mix from different kinds of flours, oats, sunflower seeds, chopped nuts, powdered milk, yeast, and baking powder, dust from the dry ingredients drifted into my work area. Dust and computers shouldn't mix.

Bananas and oranges covered several of my manuscripts. Parts of short stories protruded into the enthusiasm of mixing dried-currants into chocolate-chip-cookie dough. I no longer felt content with mixing writing - food for the soul - with food for the body. I needed more seclusion from household activities.

The opportunity presented itself. Our daughter Juniper graduated from college. She worked through her first job after graduation, and she's confident about her future. "Use my room," she said, "for whatever you want. I don't need it anymore."

On her way from East coast to West, she stopped to visit. She sorted and stored her possessions so the room is easier to move into.

My mix of emotions is as intense as winter sun shining in the south windows: A deep touch of sadness that we won't see as much of Juniper. Joy that she is well on her way into the

world and full of a spirit of adventure and confidence about the world and herself. Relief that I can move into a better area to work.

Laura is generous. "Use the larger, lighter room," she said, "and move our bedroom into Juniper's room. I don't use a study as much as you do. I'll be fine with a table in Juniper's room."

Moving the desk follows moving a queen-size bed and other furniture into what was Juniper's room, but not up or down stairs. I gather years of history, measured by dust, with the vacuum cleaner. I remove drawers from filing cabinets, carry the pieces downstairs, and reassemble. I carry down bookcases, supply shelves, books, and the computer.

Then I am ready, sooner than I would have estimated.

Plywood spans table-high filing cabinets and gives me large work surfaces. Experience tells me I will rapidly expand to fill all the available area.

I have places to clean, piles of writing materials and books to sort and put away, but first, I compose an essay with a pencil at my desk. Then I pick up my chair, carry it around all my work surfaces, place it at the computer, and work there.

No highly efficient, save-every-possible-step work area for me. I carry the chair, enjoy the change, and see out the windows from wherever I work.

Powerful wind bends pine trees and sere grasses sticking up through snow. Outside, it's 15 degrees. Warm sun shines in the windows. This is a perfect day for sitting inside, writing, looking out every time I pause to think.

My new work area gives me everything I need. It is as close to perfect as I expect to find in this material existence. Piles of work await my attention.

I begin.