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How Retiring to Los Angeles was in the Stars

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My husband and I were on a long journey to determine where we should retire. We lived in the Twin Cities of Minnesota for over 30 years, built a life there, and raised our daughter. But being in the frozen tundra eventually got to us. We were tired of snow removal and freezing temperatures, not to mention how the cold weather affected my arthritis, and that caused us to look for a warm climate for retirement.

We were mesmerized by southern Spain, and especially the city of Málaga, on a trip there in 2010. At that time, we visited Madrid, Sevilla, Málaga, Granada and Barcelona. I spent my junior year of college in Madrid, and I hadn't been back since, so it was also a trip down memory lane for me. When we got surprise money at Christmas that year, we knew how we wanted to spend it: on another trip to Spain!

We decided to celebrate our 20th anniversary with that surprise money and split the time between Madrid and Málaga, Spain, in March 2011. We spent seven wonderful days and fell in love with Málaga all over again. It was during this trip that we decided we wanted to retire to this beautiful city on the Mediterranean Sea. We still had more years left to work but I set out researching our potential retirement to Spain.

We hoped to move in 2019 but no later than 2020 as our daughter graduated from high school in 2018 and would be starting her own life in college. Presumably, she would want to spread her wings and become independent. That's not what happened. She started her college education by taking general education courses at a community college in St. Paul while living at home. She transferred to the University of Minnesota where she lived on campus, and she was thriving. Then the pandemic happened which caused major disruptions everywhere, not the least of which was our daughter's college education.

The pandemic not only threw our daughter off course, but it also made us rethink our plans to move abroad. The timing didn't seem right with the world shutting down because of the pandemic. By summer of 2020 we were 60 and 66. That might sound young for some couples, but we could feel age starting to creep up on us. We began to wonder if we'd have the stamina to make an overseas move with our cat, not to mention starting over in a foreign country. As time went on, this weighed on us a great deal.

As our dream to retire to southern Spain started to fade, I began searching for other places to start our next chapter. I researched many U.S. towns including Richmond, VA, Tucson, AZ, Myrtle Beach, SC, and a few towns in New Mexico. None of them seemed right and at least one, Tucson, would not work for our outdoor cat as there are many wild animals that roam the city. I was told by many that he would not last a day outside in Tucson. That was a deal breaker as we knew our cat would be miserable if he couldn't go outside.

In the summer of 2023, we started to discuss retiring with our longtime friends George and Sally (not their real names). George and hubby, and Sally and I, have been friends since the early 70s. Sally and George met at work in the early 80s and George was a roommate of hubby's. We were in each other's weddings in California, and we've remained good friends.

A year after hubby and I married, we moved to Minnesota. We wanted to be closer to family as all of hubby's family lived in Minnesota and the family cabin is there as well. We also wanted to buy a house without driving at least an hour one way to and from our jobs. That is what we were facing after we got married in southern California.

Our friends weren't ready to retire and live in Los Angeles, where Sally and I grew up (George and hubby grew up in Minnesota). We talked about finding a multi-family property with two separate houses that we could buy together. I found a few of these in the Sacramento area. Since our friends weren't retired yet we considered retiring to Los Angeles to be closer to them. Maybe after they retired we could buy that multi-family property.

We took a trip to Los Angeles in February 2024 to see if we'd be happy moving back. We had a fabulous time and felt comfortable in our old digs which set the stage for our move back to Los Angeles.

One day during that trip Sally and I drove past a house that we rented together when we were in our 20s, after which I could not get that street out of my head. I kept picturing hubby and me living on that street. Imagine my shock when the realtor we were working with to secure a rental house found one on this same street, mere blocks from where Sally and I rented decades ago! It was in the stars.

In the summer of 2023, I learned about Habitat for Humanity buying houses in our Twin Cities neighborhood. Our now former city partners with Habitat for Humanity which rehabilitates the houses; then the city subsidizes the purchase such that a lower income family can own a nice house in a nice neighborhood.

I got in touch with the Habitat project manager and, after she toured the house, she said they would be interested in buying it. It was a win/win for everyone. Habitat for Humanity got a well-maintained home. We didn't have to do anything to the house as Habitat purchased it as is, plus we saved money in not having to pay commission to a realtor. That is what paid for our move in the fall of 2024. And the next family to live in our house gets a renovated home in that nice neighborhood.

It continues to amaze me how things fell into place for our relocation once we decided where we would move. It started with an idea to be closer to our friends and ended with us securing a rental house prior to heading west.

First among these amazing things that happened was learning about Habitat for Humanity. This could not have come at a more perfect time for us. By taking advantage of this opportunity, we saved a lot of money that we didn't have to pay in commission to a realtor to sell our house. We didn't have to do anything to prepare the house for sale, thus saving us more money.

Choosing a moving company was also “in the stars.” I researched the best moving companies and got quotes from two of them. The differences between the two couldn’t have been starker. They both had the same approach by making a list of all the items in our house that we were moving and then giving me an estimate based on approximate weight. The first salesperson gave me nothing to read. She only gave me a verbal quote and left her card. There was no additional follow-up.

The second salesperson was much more thorough. And it helped that his quote was about \$2,000 less than the other one. He also left a packet full of information for us to read. The choice was easy from that point. We were so happy with that moving company—from the salesman to the people in the office when we needed more boxes to the workers who put those boxes into our car and to the moving crews both in Minnesota and California. Everything went off like clockwork.

Once we decided on our route, I researched hotels and made reservations for our eight-day, seven-night journey across the country. I had to find hotels that took pets. Most places did take pets for an additional fee.

Speaking of pets, our cat Frankie was the perfect little traveler. Even that was amazing because Frankie is high maintenance and doesn’t like disruptions to his routines. Our daughter was worried that Frankie would be a nightmare, as she called it. He was anything but! After the first day or so, he figured out that life in the car was okay if he could sleep on the console next to me. He did that each day of the trip.

I also worried that Frankie would howl in the middle of the night because he had been used to staying outside all night. Not so! He was likely so nervous about his new surroundings that changed every day that he was stunned into silence. I’m not sure, but I was grateful he was the perfect travel companion and didn’t disturb other hotel guests.

It was an amazing trip across the country and one without incident. Unless you count the bug bites on my left arm that I acquired along the way. There was only one run-down hotel on our journey and if they were bed bugs, I imagine they came from that hotel. But there is no way to know where those bites came from and I’m not sure they weren’t spider bites or no-see-um bug bites. We took some precautions once we arrived in California, and we haven’t seen any bugs or new bites.

We arrived in Los Angeles three days before our belongings did, so we roughed it in our empty rental house and slept in sleeping bags on the floor. That inconvenience was minor compared to all the things that might have gone wrong on our drive across the country. There was one scary stretch along interstate 25 in Colorado where the winds were so fierce I gripped the steering wheel so hard that my shoulders ached when we reached our hotel. I also noticed several trucks pulled over to wait out the wind storm. Besides the wind, and a couple of people who tried to kill me as I navigated the traffic through Denver, it all went off without a hitch.

Prior to deciding to retire to Los Angeles, I had been looking for signs that this was the right thing to do. Considering that I said I would never move back to Los Angeles, this was a huge decision for me. Hubby always wanted to return. I had to be convinced. I never got an obvious sign but the way things fell into place convinced me this was the right move. Even down to the cat's dish that we forgot: I found a better one in Los Angeles. And I am truly happy to be back in the warmth of southern California and among familiar surroundings. That surprised me, too, but after 32 years of dealing with the snow and cold, I am so glad to be here among the stars.

I'm reminded of a phrase from the book *The Alchemist* (Paulo Coelho, 1988), that has run through my mind ever since I read it in Spanish. "Cuando deseas una cosa, todo el universo conspira para que puedas realizarla," which translates as, "When you want something, the entire universe conspires so that you can achieve it." There is no doubt that this is what happened with our retirement to Los Angeles. Once we decided to move, everything fell into place and I'm so grateful.