

Columnists

The last column from the Hill

The Baird Facts

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BEVERLY, MASS. –

By Esther C. Baird

There's a lot happening on Prospect Hill these days at Casa Baird. The trees are in bloom, my neighbor's phlox is carpeting the sidewalk edge, the carpenter bees are sleepily emerging and our exploding peony bush is, well, exploding. It's lovely up here in spring and I say that with conviction because — and here's the biggest news — this will be my last column from the Hill.

After Christmas my husband and I thought to ourselves that his frequent business travel, and my final semester of grad school, combined with two young girls, really wasn't keeping us busy enough. Why not, spice things up. Did we join a wine club? Did we decide to train for a race together? We did not. Instead, chose to put our house on the market.

Our realtor talked us through all the options and ideas and then looked me squarely in the eyes. "Now Esther, I may call you for a showing with only a moment's notice. Can you imagine trying to get your house show-ready on top of your studies and the girls?"

I, having never sold a house before, smiled serenely back. "Sure. We keep our house fairly clean, and we can be quite flexible."

Flexible being perhaps the one thing I am not.

The day our house was listed our agent called. "Let the fun begin! I have a showing for tomorrow morning. Will that work?"

I hemmed and hawed and sputtered before I realized that there really was only one answer. "That will be great."

Toys went into bins in the basement. Cluttered bookshelves were boxed and stored. Our kitchen junk bowl got stashed behind the peanuts in our cupboard and my hair dryer was thrown into the pots and pans cabinet.

My daughters stared at me that evening as I danced around tossing and shoving things. "Where are all my toys Mommy, where is my people house?" My three year old asked.

"Gone!" I barked. "It's all gone!"

I looked around my kitchen and grabbed two wash clothes that didn't match anything and had been relegated to the "basement linens" pile and tossed them to my daughters. "There you go. Magic facecloths! You may play with those."

My 5-year-old held the face cloth and looked at me. Then, wonderful child that she is, (and astute at reading her mother's proximity to breakdown) she smiled and held it up. "It's a fairy blanket!" And off they went to play fairy house.

We survived the first showing, which allowed me to realize that we were, in fact, insane.

"I have a research paper and a final that I should be studying for!" I fretted one day to my neighbor as I dashed about the house dusting obscure places like the back of our television and the leaves of my orchid. "But we have a showing in two hours, I've got class, and the girls will be here with the babysitter. I have no idea what to do and it's possible that I'm getting high from furniture polish!"

When my sitter arrived I still didn't have a plan. I handed her the keys to the Giant Sparkle and shrugged. "Just drive around, maybe take them to Papa Gino's and you know, hang out in the minivan till, um. . . . I don't know . . . but I have to go now. Bye!"

We showed our way through the month of March. The girls learned to play without toys, I learned to cook without touching anything in the kitchen, and my husband learned what life might be like when our girls grow into teenagers and he is surrounded by three slightly crazed females.

And then it sold. Suddenly it was all over. I was beyond relieved to be done with the selling part, and excited for the fun of house hunting.

And yet, I love it up here and it's sad to say goodbye to this lovely neighborhood. Further, I'm not entirely sure how I will cope without my neighbor a mere kitchen window away to discuss all my garden-killing, child-

rearing, outfit-picking, cocktail-making, snow-hating, school-stressing, camp-planning and life-analyzing needs whenever I walk out my front door.

Prospect Hill has been a wonderful place to live and raise our girls during the first exciting years of their young lives. We can see the ocean from up here and the fireworks during Beverly's August Homecoming. We have the best trick-or-treating route and the friendliest neighborhood dogs. We have loved the people (and their chickens) and the soothing ocean breezes. We hope the new family moving in will love it too.

Next stop . . . who knows, the Casa Baird Summer Adventure has just begun!

Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact her with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at www.estherbaird.com.