

□ A CONFESSION □

At a time when postings are being announced, Liaison publishes a text from Nancy Fraser which is eloquent testimony of some of the difficulties facing families about to go on posting. Many of you will recognize some of them.

As a woman who has rationalized her somewhat messy house as a guarantee that our kids would not remember their childhood with a mother who focussed on fussing and scrubbing, I have recently been humbled. I have taken pride in a relaxed and creative attitude to housekeeping, and have secretly pitied those who considered it necessary to wash every glass as it was used and viewed each less-than-pristine ashtray as a personal insult.

However, even I have some standards — I draw the line at squalor!

The past few months as a full-time student and mother of three sons ranging from 12 to 18 have offered little time for serious house-cleaning, but I doubt any of us has been seriously concerned about the gradual silting-up of our living space. That attitude recently changed radically when we were suddenly and unexpectedly offered a posting. After all, the beginning of July is not the usual date for such an occurrence. Even so, it made some sense for us to accept. We were then jolted into making some serious decisions. One was that the house should be sold. **THE HOUSE SHOULD BE SOLD?** It's not that the other decisions don't have profound implications for us all, but suddenly that one took on all kinds of shadings in terms of how we live our lives!

First we had the real estate agent over to the house as it stood, warts and all, tidied moderately, but nothing more.

We made a number of forays to the LCBO for boxes, and started to pack away books that jammed the shelves. (Book-cases are not a detriment to showing a house, but it should be possible to see the wall at intervals.) Kids' rooms were attacked with brooms, shovels and garbage bags. Books and games that were no longer in use were given to worthy causes, and suddenly it seemed we'd be able to see daylight; at least we could see surfaces, and unfortunately they all needed to be scrubbed.

Floors were so highly polished we felt we were skating, and the windows were removed from their frames so the storms could be polished. All the brass and copper gleamed (acquisitions from Asia and Egypt made that no small accomplishment!), and we were finally ready to list the beast for sale.

Now we reached the time of truth; how were we to keep it all looking like pictures from a magazine while we also lived in it from day to day? To say I developed a critical eye would be an understatement. A sponge welded to my hand, I followed each member of the family as he made his breakfast, falling on every crumb as it was produced. I arranged flowers in vases on bathroom counters, and whisked towels into the hamper before they were more than damp. We all fought the ingrained habits of turning out lights as we left rooms, instead turning them on in dark corners as we left the house. The phone was used sparingly just in case another appointment to view happened to be coming in. The 12-year-old was up each morning and his bed made before we left for work. We ate hurried meals at inappropriate times so we'd be out when prospective buyers were coming through, and hit the local restaurants for coffee when we were

banished. We didn't cook fish or garlic during the whole period.

At one point I became so addicted to housekeeping that I found myself in the check-out line at the drugstore holding a box of Q-Tips I intended to use to clean the corners of the baseboards. Now if that isn't a moment of revelation, I don't know what is — that my long-lived and treasured values could change so radically, and so quickly. Our 16-year-old was barely speaking to me since I'd had a near tantrum over a single dirty sock left on the bathroom floor, so even I had to conclude that I was becoming more than a little compulsive about this whole process. I returned the package to the shelf and left the store, returning to a home that was as perfect as it was going to get.

As it happened, the house was on the market for just one week, had one open house, and more than 50 visits. It sold last night when we chose the best of three offers. One family was going to gut our home of 12 years and start again, another thought they would demolish and build over, but the successful buyers have one small child and another on the way. It's nice to think there will be gates at the top and bottom of the stairs and perhaps a crib in the striped bedroom again. So who's sentimental?

As we went to bed last night, my husband said quietly but defiantly that he wasn't going to wipe the kitchen counter before leaving for work. Our youngest son slept in until noon, and his brother left his towel and bathrobe on the floor... It feels quite comfortable, thank you. I now know near-perfect housekeeping is attainable; I'm just not certain it's worth it on a full-time basis □

Nancy Fraser, August 1987