

After 26 years, leaving this house would seem like leaving life itself behind



FOREVER Home

BY ALINE ALEXANDER NEWMAN,
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TWENTY-SIX YEARS AGO, MY husband, Neil, and I found the perfect house. Neil had been hired at a paper mill near Turin, a tiny farming community in upstate New York. Looking for a place to live, we came upon a rambling, nineteenth-century farmhouse surrounded by cornfields and cow pasture. Yes, it needed work—the kitchen was out of date, the windows were drafty and, upstairs, the loft was unchanged from its days storing hay. But there were lilac bushes in front of a bay window, an upstairs sewing room and a ready-made nook for our wood-burning stove. Like a mole in winter, I burrowed in—expecting to stay forever.

UPROOTED *A sudden move and a hard decision*

Then came the phone call one late summer day a couple of years ago. It was Neil, trying to sound calm. "My job has been eliminated," he said. "I've got to clean out my office and then I'll be home."

"Clean out your office?" I repeated. "Should I come help?"

"No, no," he answered quickly. "I just wanted you to know. I'll be home soon."

Home. I put the phone down and walked dazedly to the porch, where Neil and I often relaxed in lawn chairs. Out of habit, I scanned the horizon for the reassuring plume of white smoke rising from a paper mill in the valley below. That mill—and half a dozen others within a 50-mile radius of Turin—had always been our ace in the hole. If something went wrong with Neil's job,



DOUGLAS LLOYD

we figured, he'd have plenty of nearby options.

But the smoke was gone, and so were the mills, most of them shut down, their contents sold at auction. It was the same throughout the northeast, where paper mills, facing global competition, were disappearing from the landscape. We knew about the closures—the trade magazine Neil got each month, which once bulged with employment ads, was now thin as, well, paper. Recruiters, who once called Neil weekly, had mostly fallen silent. I bit my

breathed our presence, from the den door frame marked with Wade's and Matthew's heights, to the kitchen wallpaper, now curled at the corners from steaming jars of my homemade chili sauce.

I walked to the driveway and began pacing, looking past a neighbor's barbed wire fence into pasture beyond. As a boy, Matthew had christened that pasture the "cow's yard" and convinced me, one spring, to pack him a hot dog lunch so he could go fishing in the snowmelt running down the hillside.

hand over the handprint Wade had pressed into the concrete below the basket.

By the time Neil pulled into the driveway, I was sitting in the kitchen, worrying. I watched him get out and walk to the house, leaving a pile of cardboard boxes in the backseat. I went to him and we held each other silently. *Lord, help me be strong*, I prayed. I wanted—needed—to be supportive. Neil had just lost his job! But fear for the house ate at me. "They're cost-cutting," Neil said. "They were very nice about it, but

Like a MOLE in WINTER, I burrowed in—expecting to stay FOREVER.

lip. If Neil was going to find another job, we were going to have to move. Far from Turin. Far from our beloved home. I turned and looked up at the walls covered with gray siding. I remembered conquering a fear of heights to paint the second-floor windows Williamsburg blue. *This house is me. It's all of us, our whole life together*. Our older son Matthew was a baby when we moved in. Wade, our youngest, wasn't even born. Every inch of the house

Imagine my surprise when he returned home, triumphantly bearing a 10-inch speckled trout! Beyond the pasture loomed 1,200-foot Snow Ridge, where our family skied each winter. Turning, I saw the basketball court Neil built when Wade turned 10. For years not a day went by that I didn't make dinner to the rhythmic thump, thump, "Yes!" of Wade shooting baskets—prelude to his years playing for his college team. I knelt and laid my

—I'm out of work." I tried to think of something reassuring to say. No words came.

The next day Neil got to work surfing the internet, updating his resume and checking want ads. He swallowed his pride and called business associates and recruiters. For a while, there was only silence. Then one day a recruiter called with an opening in New Zealand.

"That sounds promising," I gulped. "We've always wanted to travel. And New Zealand is supposed

to be beautiful." But the move would mean living on the other side of the planet from our sons, both settled in upstate New York. And there was the house. We'd never see it again. All those memories. Neil looked at me with the practiced eyes of decades of marriage. He knew I didn't want to leave. "I'll keep looking," he said. Later, alone, I appealed to God. *How can I be supportive when I'm feeling so scared? Help me be strong, Lord, for Neil.*

Another opportunity came up, but it would have required Neil to move several states away. We talked about doing a commuter marriage—Neil renting an apartment near his job and flying home on weekends. But, again, he could tell I hated the idea. "I'm not sure what to do," he said. "I just don't see how to work it—a new job and keeping the house." He looked defeated. We *felt* defeated. And I wondered, was I being unreasonable? Maybe a big change would be good. Maybe it was even what God wanted for us.

A few days later, I was walking through the house, trying to keep my head above a torrent of memo-

ries. I passed the den and ran my finger over the pencil marks charting Wade's and Matthew's growth. *If we do move, I thought, I'm prying this board out and carrying it with us. It's just too precious.* I walked to the window and looked out. It was a sunny day, and in the clear, fresh air I could see Snow Ridge, the cow's yard and a corner of the basketball court. Something about the sun jarred me—



HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

Where Aline and Neil made a million memories

it's brightness. And suddenly I remembered what a delightful surprise that sun had been when we first moved to Turin, after years living in the perpetually overcast Mohawk Valley. Strange, I thought, but back then, Turin had seemed like a foreign country. I'd worried about our future there. Just like I was worrying about the future

now. But, why? God had brought many blessings in Turin. Wouldn't he be equally with us wherever we ended up? Of course he would. I felt a warmth come over me, that radiant sun. I lingered in it for a moment. Then I hurried to the kitchen to find Neil.

Bolstered by my optimism, he soon got a new offer at a mill about 100 miles away, in a larger town called Fulton. It was a good job, supervising more than twice as many people making technologically advanced products like backing for vinyl floors and car-engine gaskets. And you know what? We only *sort of* had to leave the house.

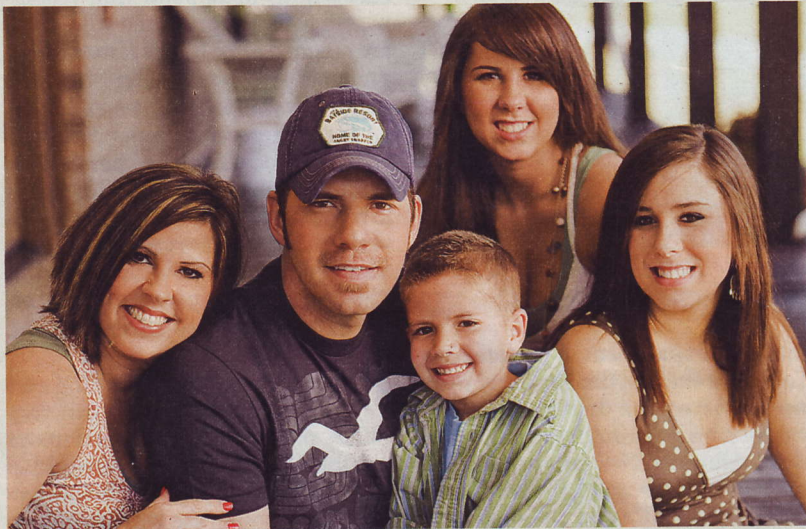
We could keep it, rent an apartment in Fulton and spend weekends in the country. Our perfect home had become our perfect country house. "Imagine us," I said to Neil with a chuckle, "with a country house. It sounds so fancy!"

Yet, that's the thing about change. It's God's way of surprising us, and reminding us that wherever we go, his blessings go too. ■

For more on this story, see Family Room.

Family Room

MEET THE PEOPLE IN OUR PAGES



ATKINS Rodney recorded his latest album at home to spend more time with wife, Tammy Jo, stepdaughters, Lindsey and Morgan, and son, Elijah.

Rodney Atkins (*What's in a Name*, page 40) made an auspicious decision when he refused to change his name. Today, his career is soaring! His hit single, *Watching You*—an ode to his son—was the No. 1 country song in the US for five weeks. Rodney tells us his son's name holds special meaning. "When my wife, Tammy Jo, was several months pregnant, I flipped through the Bible, and my eyes fell on Elijah. I nudged Tammy

Jo. "That's it," she whispered." Rodney recently performed a fund-raiser to benefit the orphanage where he was adopted. "I'm so thankful to my parents. Our name means everything," he says. For more, visit rodneyatkins.com.

Leaving her country home was difficult for **Aline Alexander Newman**, (*Forever Home*, page 78), but she says unexpected blessings came when she and her husband, Neil, moved

TAMARA REYNOLDS

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NEWMAN Home is where the heart—and high-speed internet—is.

into a new apartment in upstate New York. "For the first time in thirty years we can have pizza delivered!" Neil is enjoying his seven-minute commute to work. Aline and Neil are also closer to their sons, and reaping the benefits of living near a YMCA and a multiplex cinema. Aline is working on a book about animal rights for young adults. "I've discovered another advantage of this 'city' apartment—high-speed internet access. It's saved me hours!" she says.

What's next for outdoorsman **Michael Muir** (*Nature's Cure*, page 32)? This year Michael plans to lead disabled nature enthusiasts on at least 22 excursions! The treks range from a hunt for California wildflowers to a more grueling ex-



BARBER The Barbers celebrate the family traditions of service.

pedition through remote Sierra Nevada backcountry in the John Muir Wilderness, a federally protected wilderness area named after Muir's famed great-grandfather. "Having John Muir for a relative has helped me tremendously," he says. "Whenever I've gone off the beaten path, I know he's been there before, and I'll get through." Muir is also eager to help others start their own Access Adventure chapters. "I want those who are disabled to focus on what's possible. The worst disability is a bad attitude!" For more visit access-adventure.org.

GUIDEPOSTS contributing editor **Karen Barber's** military prayer website comforts troops and their families around the world (*A Mother's Mission*, page 44). Before creating the website, she was inspired to create a video series. "I hope to teach others how to find an answer to prayer," she explains. Her son Chris is currently a captain serving in Iraq. Karen tells us serving the country runs in their family. Her husband, Gordon, was an Army

lieutenant, and son Jeff is a former Air Force captain. The boys also share another title in common—Eagle Scout. Karen's youngest son, John, recently received the honor at their church. "Jeff and Chris were living far

TOP: DOUGLAS LLOYD