

It is always much easier to deal with sudden, catastrophic blows from life when you find you have someone else to blame. Kate and I can only wish we were that fortunate. But we did it to ourselves, voluntarily taking the steps that lead directly too...

## TRANSITIONS TWO

Or "who's idea was this, anyway?"

We watched out the window, the ocean glinting in the setting sun as we flew lower and lower to the ground, Logan Airport beginning to take shape in the distance in front of us. Arrival in Boston. The reality of the entire situation was hitting home. We had really done it, moved out of the state I had called home for eight years, and Kate had called home since her birth.

My brother met us at the airport, our luggage too large to fit in a single car, or a Mac Truck, for that matter. We were going to stay with my mother for one evening, then move into a temporary, furnished apartment while Kate went house hunting. What we brought on the plane with us was going to have to do for a while. During the drive to my mother's, we tried unsuccessfully to escape the haunting feeling that this was just a visit.

We moved into the apartment the next day. Kate looked at it and immediately hated it. Brie wandered around in it for a half hour, then decided she hated it. Will burbled happily, which he tends to do even when Brie is trying to get him to eat Daddy's credit cards, so it really didn't count. "What's so bad about it?" I asked, looking around.

"It's small, dirty, poorly furnished, has pillows that feel like crushed styrofoam, and smells like sweaty gym clothes that have been put in a plastic bag and left in the sun for a week" replied Kate, disgust deep in her voice.

"Yeah, OK, but **other** than that what's so bad about it?" I asked innocently. Kate's answer was interesting, but not printable.

Truthfully, the apartment wasn't bad, but moving to an apartment from a house is a difficult transition, all the more so because Brie really did feel confined and, combined with her unhappiness over the other sudden changes in her life, made the place a living hell for Kate and I.

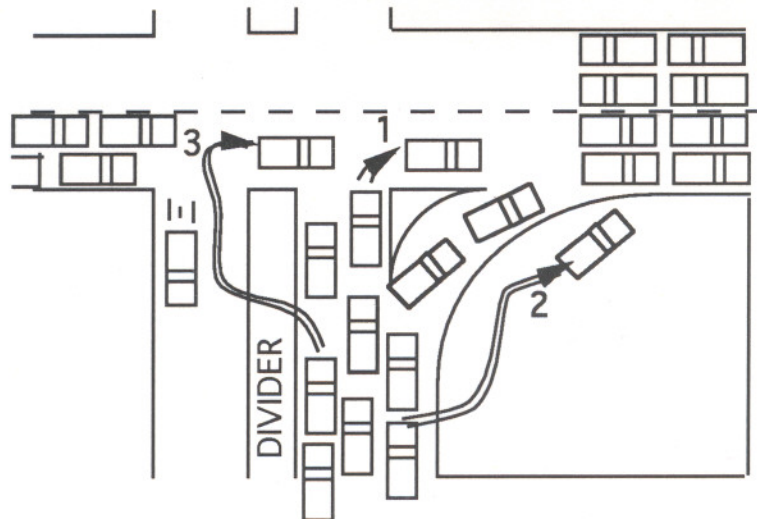
The apartment was not the only change in our lives. There was a certain amount of refamiliarization with the New England area required. One thing I had forgotten about New England was the roadways. When I first arrived in Los Angeles, I remember my irritation that so many of the major freeways were only marked with the places they went rather than "North", "South", "East", or "West". Even though LA has neat, ruler-straight roads, it can get confusing when picking an on-ramp. Arriving in New England, I had the opportunity to be reintroduced to the New England way of doing business. That is, the fact that the roads here frequently meander to all points of the compass, usually aren't marked, and more often than not have potholes that could swallow a M1 tank. We've hit potholes on major highways that have sent us airborne. Roads that are marked on the map as significant access routes turn out to be tiny, country roads that (if you are lucky) are sometimes paved. Freeways are often rerouted by painting over or bending roadside signs to point down alternate routes. Its fifty-fifty as to whether this was done by state paid workers or malicious teenagers. And when you get into Boston, it gets WORSE. And there is always the "ocean factor," where, by some prehistoric instinct, you always know which direction the ocean is, a prehistoric instinct that invariably makes you pick the wrong direction every single time when you move cross country. The whole thing was a bit of a change from LA.

Another thing I had forgotten about in New England was Boston drivers. I was talking with one of my programmers at State Street, grousing about a car that had cut me off without using a turning signal, or even looking to see the if lane was occupied, when the programmer looked at me strangely. "Use a turning signal? Are you out of your mind? If you let the other drivers know what you are trying to do they'll move to stop you. You've GOT to take them by surprise." Curious, I tried an experiment on the way home, signaling for a move to the left lane. The turn signal had time to click once, maybe twice, when the car that had been about twenty feet behind me in the left lane screamed parallel to me with



the full throated roar of a automobile with the gas pedal slammed into, if not through, the floorboard. There was a second of squealing tires and smoke as the same driver slammed on the brakes in time to avoid hitting the car in front of him, finally settling into the same relative speed as the other car, and perhaps the diameter of a cesium atom off his bumper.

Of course, it turned out this was relatively tame, run of the mill Boston driving. It gets much worse than this simple example of insanity. For instance, take the following diagram, which depicts one recent experience I had trying to drive home from work on a rainy, traffic-engorged day. I was attempting to turn right onto Massachusetts Avenue, an alternate route cutting the corner between the "central artery" (read "central parking lot") and the Mass Pike (read "string of 80 MPH free-for-all zones segregated by billions of toll booths"). Of course, Mass. Ave. was packed, as well, with all the people like myself who somehow were hoping that they were the only individuals in Boston who could read a map, and the right hand turn onto the road was totally blocked. With the kind of Yankee ingenuity that invented traffic circles and pet rocks, many drivers decided it was time to blaze a new trail, in some cases ("1") with a simple illegal turn from a non-turn lane, in some cases ("2") by merely driving across a concrete platform, and in one truly impressive case ("3") by driving across a concrete divider into oncoming traffic. Of course, these tactics made it completely impossible for anyone attempting to cross Mass. Ave. from being able to get around the resulting snarl of cars when the light turned green, making them take even more bizarre and life threatening routes, only a few of which involved the subterranean sewer system. Not that they had much to look forward to on the other side since every intersection in Boston was in roughly the same shape.



Our automobile-related experiences in Massachusetts were further enhanced by two other unrelated factors. The first was the arrival of the Honda Prelude, sans a working driver's side door handle. Somehow during the move, some little gizmo that attached the handle to the internal mechanism that actually popped the door latch broke. As a result, the only way in was to open the passenger's side door, stretch across the car, and open the driver's side door from the inside (needless to say, I spent a day climbing over the stick shift before Kate pointed out this relatively simple maneuver to me). Kate did managed to shut the door while gassing up with the keys in the car and the passenger side door locked. But she managed to unobtrusively get it open again by calling the local fire department and having them send over a fire truck (really!). Fortunately, the door handle can be replaced easily. The only hitch is that it only comes in a single color, black, and has to be painted to match the car. The Japanese in their typical organized, thoughtful fashion, provide a little sticker with a sixteen number and letter code to specify the exact shade of dusky midnight sparkely slightly-mauve tinted deep ocean blue paint on the car so that our organized, thoughtful American body shop can spray on something that is almost but not quite the completely wrong color - it was more of a robin's egg blue. We are still waiting for the repainted handle.

Our other experience was with the Registry of Motor Vehicles, or RMV (our motto, "come decay with us"). Kate tried using the AAA, who we normally used to perform these types of tasks in California. In



Massachusetts, however, not only was the AAA incapable of handling the transaction, they couldn't even tell Kate what was **needed** in order to get it done at the RMV. Kate tried to call the RMV directly... for about four days, to several offices, always getting a busy signal. I found out why when I went to do the job myself. After standing in line three times, each time for well over an hour, I finally managed to transfer our car registrations to Massachusetts by taking hostages at gun point. I've seen bureaucratic, inept organizations before, but at least the attendants were breathing. I literally watched as lunch hour arrived and the typical throng of people without any other time to get these type of things done arrived... and the RMV shut down three of the four windows servicing the crowd. I waited an hour and a half to get told that there was yet another form that Kate and I had to fill out (which they had not told me about the previous day, when they rejected me because I didn't list the zip code for the car dealership the Honda had been bought from eight years previously). When I left, the line was at least half again as long as when I arrived. I seriously wonder how those people don't just fold up and die under the palpable waves of hatred beamed at them from the crowd.

There were other Massachusetts unique idiosyncrasies to learn about as well. I was in a Purity Supreme Supermarket, wandering up and down the aisles, when finally I found a young female employee chatting with one of her cohorts. "Excuse me" I asked politely, "but could you tell me where the wine is located?"

The woman looked at me like the two-headed cyborg from the planet Zargon. "The wine section? Not in this store" she said, clearly amazed that I had even asked. I had obviously wandered into some kind of fanatical religious supermarket chain, missing the clear connection between "Purity" and "Puritan".

"Well, then, I guess I'll just have to take my business to Market Basket" I replied acidly.

"Market Basket? They're not going to sell you wine!" she replied, her expression still declaring that I was some kind of weirdo.

"And why not?" I asked.

"It's against the law in Massachusetts" she answered. Whoops. I grinned sheepishly as I explained that we had just moved here from California where they were more... liberal about purchasing alcohol.

There were plenty of other little things that made us feel like we had moved to another country, but they were swamped by the more immediate challenges facing us in re-establishing ourselves in a new community. I had about thirty two hours (including the trip on the plane) from when we departed California before starting at my new job at State Street Bank and Trust. Kate had a month off before she needed to report to MITRE, but it wasn't the miniature vacation it sounded like. Kate had to find a house for us, and between working and house hunting, working was a bargain.

Above and beyond the stress associated with spending half your incomes for the next millennium on a single purchase, there are the little things. For instance, Massachusetts requires you to sign a form that states:

I understand that both real estate agents represent the seller, and in fact, the real estate agent 'assisting' the buyer is legally obligated to not only convince you to sacrifice your first born and pay a fortune on some moldy, decrepit mausoleum of a boarded-up house that is falling down around your ears, but to attempt to overcharge you on closing fees as well.

A good example was Kate's first day with Sheila.

"We're interested in houses between a quarter of a million and three hundred thousand as an absolute maximum" stated Kate as they were driving to the Acton area.

"Fine. Here is our first stop, a fine distinguished wonderful delightful house that only costs \$360,000 with a large, open back yard, enclosed porch, and ...."

Then there was the house our real estate agent ("our" is probably not the right term...) wanted to show Kate, the listing agent assured them that the alarm system was off.

"BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK BONK" went the burglar alarm as Sheila opened the front door.

"We've set off the alarm" Kate said, jumping at the sudden noise.



"WHAT?!?" cried Sheila.

"I SAID WE SET OFF THE ALARM! WE BETTER GET OUT!" yelled Kate.

"NO PROBLEM, THIS HAPPENS ALL THE TIME" screamed back Sheila, "JUST GO ON IN. I'LL CALL THE LISTING AGENT."

"REALLY?" asked Kate, her voice getting hoarse.

"YES, YES, YES..." answered Sheila, dragging Kate into the house. "I THINK YOU'LL REALLY FIND THE MASTER BEDROOM UPSTAIRS CHARMING" she said as she took Kate up a stairwell. She opened a door at the top.

**"BEEWOP! BEEWOP! BEEWOP! BEEWOP! BEEWOP!"** the alarm went, taking on a new, ear piercing, body shaking, mind numbing level of volume.

Kate and Sheila ran for the exit. Fortunately, they were long gone by the time the police arrived.

Of course, we did have some things going for us. The soft New England real estate market, the only place in the country that was worse than California according to everything we read, gave us time to look places over and think things through before we made a decision. For instance, when Kate found the first house she really liked, a place that had just come on the market a couple of days before, I met her there for a walk through of the place the next day.

"Oh" said Sheila as we moved into the kitchen, looking at a guest registry.

"Oh?" Kate and I asked simultaneously. "Have there been any other walk-throughs?"

"Oh certainly," Sheila replied, "I'm just surprised how many. There must be twelve or fifteen here... two of them for the second time."

"Twelve or fifteen in the past three days?" we asked incredulously.

"Oh, no, that's since we were here yesterday" she replied.

We made an offer that day, almost too late. Another couple made a offer at the same time as ours, and it turned into a bidding war that ended with us offering \$1,000 below the original asking price and beating the other offer by that amount. I thought about our house in California sitting for two months and selling for \$60,000 less than we had originally asked and could only conclude that individuals writing the real estate articles in newspapers and magazines must be on drugs.

But the house, located on Silverhill Road in Acton, was a gorgeous, eleven year old place. 2,700 square feet on just over an acre, it was backed against conservancy land that could never be developed on, had a large, modern kitchen with an island, a fireplace in the master bedroom, a screened in porch, and a large family room with built-in solid wood shelves and entertainment center.

After the inspection, we found out it also had a completely shot furnace, extensive dry rot (the inspector pushed his screwdriver completely through the wall near the front door with about as much effort as cutting sponge cake), a leaky roof, and worse, a total lack of standard features like water diverters that would have prevented the damage in the first place. Professional estimates placed repairing the damage at just short of ten thousand dollars.

Sheila told us the owners wanted us to pay for the repairs, and based on the interest the house had generated, were willing to walk away from our offer if we weren't prepared to meet their demands.

"Sheila, when we spend the kind of money we've offered for that place, we expect it to be in total, move-in condition" we replied. "They pay for all damages. We'll pay to have water diverters and other preventative measures put in."

"Then we better start looking at other houses immediately." Unfortunately, Kate had called her supervisor at MITRE and moved her start date up by a week, not anticipating the seriousness of the problems found during the inspection. That left us a little over a week to not only pick a place, but to get the general inspection, radon inspection, and sewer system inspection completed, while praying we didn't run into the same problems over again. But we didn't see many options.

So we... or rather, Kate... started looking again. The real estate agents kept negotiations open on the first house, but Sheila felt sure they were not going to compromise, and we were equally adamant



about not changing our position. Kate went back to checking out places in Wayland, Acton, Concord... the communities that were close to her work, not too deadly a commute for me, within a reasonable drive from my Brother's and Mother's, and rated in the top ten towns for public school systems.

Sheila showed Kate several other houses, including a home on Arborwood Road that had just come on the market (in fact, Sheila drove her by it the day before it became available). Kate picked out the best two, the Arborwood place and a home in Concord, and we went to look at them the next day.

We were in the Arborwood place. "Dave" said Kate "Dave Dave Dave Dave" echoed back from the distance. "I think..."

"Shhhh!" I hissed at her.

"What's the matter?" Kate asked, surprised.

"You need to speak quietly in a church!" I said in a quiet voice.

"Dave... this is the family room."

But it wasn't just a family room... it was a HUGE family room, just short of half the size of our entire house in Los Angeles. "Wow" was my completely inadequate response.

The family room was located off the breakfast nook. The breakfast "nook" being a space large enough to feed a family of sixteen.

The formal dining room was a nice size (read "HUGE"). The kitchen was adequate for most tasks (read "HUGE"). The back porch could have been a little bigger if you intended to host a party for the entire country of Kuwait (read "HUGE").

It was a big place.

It also featured four fire places, an eight zone security system, a completely finished basement with full bath, a good sized (read "HUGE") living room, an attached fire wood bin, an acre of land, and a built in bank vault for your valuables.

"Ho, Ho" you are undoubtedly thinking, "there goes Dave with his propensity for exaggeration." A completely undeserved reputation, as this particular situation demonstrates. Because the place really, truly, honestly has a bank vault. I mean a magnesium-tungsten steel alloy door about the size and weight of a Cadillac Seville with a tumbler lock straight out of "The Great Train Robbery." With a ROOM inside. You could sleep in the place (assuming you don't suffer from claustrophobia).

We're thinking about renting out space to the U.S. Treasury department.

"I wasn't sure about even showing it to you Dave" said Kate quietly when the owners and Sheila were out of earshot.

"Huh?" I replied stupidly.

"Well, you must have noticed."

"Noticed? Oh, yea, sure" I replied, desperately trying to think over the tour we had just been through and what glaring deficiency I had missed. Dry rot? Leaky plumbing? Cockroaches? Kate looked at me expectantly. "Its... ahhh... its... very... BIG!" I finished explosively.

Kate looked sideways at me with her "is this a joke, or are you really a babbling cretin?" look. "Dave, look at the carpet, for God's sake."

I looked down at the carpet covering the family room. It was a thick, shag, wall to wall carpet that appeared to be reasonably new. I traced the edges, looking for flaws or gaps. There was nothing obvious. "I don't see anything" I said doubtfully.

Kate rolled her eyes. "The carpet is ORANGE, you idiot! And so is the linoleum in the kitchen!"

I looked again. She was right. "What color is it supposed to be?" I asked, even more confused.

"Its SUPPOSED to be ORANGE! These people LIKE this color!" Clearly, Kate did not. "So... and I know this is a jump... but if you ignore the decor, the place has possibilities. What do you think?"

"I... I... I LOVE THIS PLACE" I practically screamed. I knew we had found our future home.



On the drive back, we turned to Sheila. "I think we need to start putting together the paperwork for an offer" we said.

Sheila looked uncomfortable. "Oh... well, there may be a small problem... you see, while you were looking the place over I received a call from the office. The people at the Silverhill house have accepted all your terms and are ready to sign the Purchase and Sales agreement . . ."

**TO BE CONTINUED (are you getting tired of hearing this?)**

**Transitions 2 addendum  
or "the more personal stuff"**

Just to avoid any semblance of stress in an already fracturing universe, and more importantly to avoid having to send out separate change of address cards, we will now reveal that our address and telephone number as of June 18th will be:

**20 Arborwood Road  
Acton, MA 01721  
508-263-7322**

Brie and Will are doing great. We can't get over how fast they are changing, though. Brie is getting cuter every single day. She is beginning to speak in short sentences, like "Moor gacker peeee" (translated "More cracker please") or "Give me another ride or I'll kick your shins." It is hard to believe that just a few months ago, "Da" and "Juice" were her only consistently used words. Her favorite word right now is "Yucky." You only have to point out a patch of tar or some other unappealing substance and say it, and a wide grin comes over her face and she runs off yelling "Yuck-Eee, Yuck-Eee, Yuck-Eee," squealing in delight.

Brie is also getting to know her cousins well. The apartment is very small and offers coin-operated laundry machines typically jammed with other people's laundry. Neither are very enticing reasons for hanging around, and we have spent every weekend since we arrived here up at my mother's. My brother, Bill, with his son Andy (3-1/2), and daughter Dani (1) are only a few minutes further. Brie and Andy will usually fight each other over one of the sixty zillion toys hanging around my Brother's yard, then after five minutes settle down into running around with each other for the rest of the day. It's nice to see them playing so happily together.

Will is still Mister Mellow, crying only when tired, hungry, or wet. Change the condition and he begins gurgling happily to himself again. He is getting very interactive, smiling and cooing when you pay attention to him, and did his first real giggle last weekend (June 6th) as Brie swung toys over his head. He is beginning to realize that the strange flesh colored appendages that frequently wave in front of his face are his hands and are, to some extent, under his control.

Brie still has occasional fits of jealousy, but for the most part has become fond of Will, sometimes falling on him and hugging him until his eyes bug out and he turns blue. Will just loves Brie, getting all smiley whenever she plays with him. That, we are convinced, will change.

Kate and I are doing well, although it has been stressful. We will be happy to be in the house and settling into a routine again.

Well, enough for now. Keep in touch, and best of luck to you all!

*Dave, Kate, Brie, and Little Will*

P.S. If you are ever in the Boston area, we may be able to find a small corner for you to sleep in.