

Deena L Stacer. PHD  
Stacer Realty  
16466 Bernardo Center Dr # 188  
Stacer Realty- DRE # 00703471

858-229-8072  
Selling A Loved One's Home

[Doc@DeenaStacer.com](mailto:Doc@DeenaStacer.com)  
[DrDeenaRealEstate.com](http://DrDeenaRealEstate.com)

## **SELLING A LOVED ONE'S HOME: THE EMOTIONAL JOURNEY OF GRIEF, MEMORIES, AND LETTING GO**

**A guide to understanding the emotions, memories, responsibilities, and life transitions that often accompany the sale of a loved one's home.**

Most people think selling a loved one's home is primarily a real estate transaction.

They assume the challenges will involve preparing the property, determining its value, finding a buyer, negotiating an offer, and completing the paperwork.

Those things certainly matter.

But over the years, I have learned that selling a loved one's home is often about much more than the house itself.

It is about grief.

It is about memories.

It is about responsibility.

It is about change.

It is about letting go of a place that may have represented decades of family gatherings, celebrations, traditions, and life experiences.

### **THE RESPONSIBILITIES ARE REAL**

Sometimes the person responsible for selling the home is also grieving the loss of a parent, spouse, sibling, friend, or other loved one.

Sometimes they have spent years serving as a caregiver before the loss occurred.

Families responsible for selling an estate property are often surprised by how quickly emotional responsibilities become intertwined with practical responsibilities.

Sometimes they grew up in the home themselves.

Sometimes they are the trustee, executor, or family member left to handle responsibilities that nobody else wants to manage.

### **WHY THE PROCESS FEELS DIFFERENT**

What looks like a real estate transaction from the outside often feels very different on the inside.



As a real estate broker and transition specialist, I have spent more than two decades helping families throughout San Diego County navigate inherited homes, trust sales, probate properties, childhood homes, downsizing decisions, and homes connected to some of life's most significant transitions.

Again and again, I have discovered that people are not simply selling a property.

They are navigating grief, memories, uncertainty, responsibility, and change all at the same time.

That is why the process often feels so much harder than they expected.



## **UNDERSTANDING THE LONG TRAIN RIDE OF GRIEF**

### **Grief Rarely Moves In A Straight Line**

One of the things I learned many years ago is that grief rarely moves in a straight line.

Many people expect grief to follow a predictable path.

They imagine that sadness will gradually decrease until one day they feel normal again.

Unfortunately, grief rarely works that way.

I often describe grief as a long train ride.

Some days the train moves steadily down the tracks.

You feel productive.

You feel hopeful.

You feel as though life is moving forward.

Then something unexpected happens.

You hear a favorite song.

You find an old photograph.

You discover a handwritten note.

You walk into a room that reminds you of someone you love.

Suddenly the train slows down.

The emotions return.

The sadness returns.

The memories return.

On other days, the train seems to stop completely.

You may feel overwhelmed.

You may feel exhausted.

You may feel stuck.

Then, without warning, the train begins moving again.

### **Why Homes Trigger Powerful Emotions**

The process of selling a loved one's home often intensifies these experiences because every room, every possession, every decision, and every memory has the potential to trigger another emotional moment.

### **When Memories Live In Every Room**

The home becomes more than a structure.

It becomes a collection of memories.

The dining room may remind you of holiday dinners.

The living room may remind you of conversations, celebrations, or quiet evenings spent together.

A bedroom may remind you of a parent, spouse, sibling, or child.

The garage may contain tools, projects, or belongings connected to years of shared experiences.

While grief affects everyone differently, it often becomes most visible when families begin making decisions about a home, belongings, and memories.





## **WHEN THE HOME HOLDS A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES**

### **The Home Is More Than a Building**

While grief affects everyone differently, it often becomes most visible when families begin making decisions about a home, belongings, and memories.

For some people, selling a loved one's home carries another layer of emotion.

They are not only grieving the person.

They are grieving the home itself.

The house may have been the place where they grew up.

It may have been the place where family traditions were created.

It may have been the place where birthdays were celebrated, holidays were shared, children were raised, and memories were made over decades.

For these families, selling the property is not simply a financial decision.

It can feel like saying goodbye to an important chapter of their lives.

### **Diane's Story**



Diane taught me this lesson.

After her mother Helen passed away, Diane became responsible for selling the family home.

What made the situation especially difficult was that Diane had grown up there.

The house was filled with memories of her childhood, her family, and the people she loved.

Several generations of family members had lived in the home over the years.

Every room seemed to contain another memory.

Every belonging seemed connected to a story.

The grief Diane experienced was not only about losing her mother.

It was also about losing a place that had been part of her identity for much of her life.

Because Diane lived out of state, she faced an additional challenge.

She was trying to make difficult decisions from hundreds of miles away.

She was grieving.

She was managing responsibilities.

And she was trying to decide what should happen to a home filled with memories.

We spent many hours talking about her mother, the house, and the belongings.

In many ways, those conversations were just as important as discussing the real estate transaction itself.

### **When Belongings Become Memories**

One of the things Diane struggled with most was going through her mother's belongings.

Many people assume that sorting belongings is simply a matter of deciding what to keep and what to give away.

In reality, it is often much more emotional than that.

A piece of furniture may remind someone of a holiday gathering.

A collection of Santas gathered over many years may remind someone of holiday traditions, family celebrations, and the countless memories shared together through the seasons.

A favorite sweater may still carry memories of the person who wore it.

A photograph may instantly transport them back to another time and place.



Every item has the potential to trigger another memory.

Every decision can feel permanent.

Do you keep it?

Do you give it away?

Do you donate it?

Do you sell it?



For someone who loved the person deeply, these decisions can feel surprisingly painful.

At one point, Diane asked me to take photographs during the estate sale.

She wasn't concerned about where the items would end up.

She had already made the difficult decision to let many of her mother's belongings go.

What she wanted were photographs of the things that had been part of her mother's life.

The furniture.

The collections.

The decorations.

The everyday items that had filled the home for years.

Because Diane lived in Missouri, she could not be there in person as the estate sale unfolded. In a moment of grief and sadness, she wanted a way to hold onto the memories connected to those belongings before they disappeared from the home.

I sent her photographs throughout the sale.

When she received them, she replied, "Thank you. That means so much to me."

The photographs were not really about the objects themselves.

They were about her mother.

They were reminders of the home, the memories, and the life that had been lived there.

Sometimes people are not grieving the loss of a piece of furniture or a collection.

They are grieving the connection those things represent.

What Diane was really trying to preserve was her connection to her mother.



### **The Family Compound Buyer**

One of the most interesting moments occurred when a middle-aged couple submitted an offer on the home.

They planned to create a family compound.

They wanted to live in the house and eventually add an ADU so multiple generations of their family, their son, his wife and their grandchildren, and the daughter who was getting married could remain close together.

Of all the buyers who looked at the property, Diane connected with them the most.

Their vision reminded her of her own childhood.

It reminded her of the way her multi-generational family had lived together and supported one another through the years.

The home was not simply a structure to her.

It represented family, connection, and belonging.

Knowing another family might create similar memories helped make her decision a little easier.

### **The Memories Were Never in the House**

I sold another couple's home, and they were struggling with the idea that their son had been raised by them in that home.

I asked each of them to share one of their favorite memories of raising their son in that home. Interestingly, both people immediately described their son's birthday party in the home when he was around 7 years old.

Neither person described a wall.

A room.

A roof.

Or a piece of property.

What they remembered were the experiences.

The people.

The moments.

And what they learned was that these memories were not going to be erased once the home was sold. Instead, the memories remained inside of their minds and hearts.

That realization often becomes an important step in moving forward.

While Diane's grief was tied to her mother and childhood home, grief is not limited only to family relationships.

Sometimes the people we lose are lifelong friends who become family.

## **GRIEVING THE LOSS OF A FRIEND**

### **When Friendship Feels Like Family**

While Diane's grief was tied to her mother and childhood home, grief is not limited to family relationships.



Sometimes the people we lose are lifelong friends who become family.

That was the case with Matt.

Matt had been best friends with Kurt for more than thirty years.

They worked together.

They spent weekends together.

They shared projects, equipment, stories, and experiences that had become woven into the fabric of everyday life.

When Kurt passed away, Matt became responsible for handling many of the details connected to the property and helping the family move forward.

What seemed like a straightforward responsibility turned into a journey that lasted nearly two years.

### **More Than a House**

Many people assume that when someone is selling a loved one's home, they are grieving the house itself.

Sometimes that is true.

In Matt's case, however, the house represented something much deeper.

The property contained years of memories connected to his friendship with Kurt.

There were tools.

Heavy equipment.

Vehicles.

Projects they had worked on together.

A converted school bus that had served as a mobile repair station.

Everywhere Matt looked, he saw reminders of the life they had shared.

The house was not simply a structure.

It was a place filled with memories of his friend.

Letting go of the property felt, in many ways, like letting go of another piece of Kurt.





### **When Grief Shows Up Disguised as Something Else**

One day Matt called me upset about the painting that had been completed at the property.

He was frustrated because he led me to believe that entire closets needed to be repainted before the home could be sold.

Because he seemed so upset, I drove to the property expecting to find a major problem.

When I arrived, it quickly became clear that the paint was not really the issue.

Only a small section inside one closet needed attention.

The reaction did not match the problem.

After working with grieving families for many years, I recognized something else was happening.

I looked at Matt and said,

"You must really miss your friend."

At first, the comment probably seemed unrelated to the discussion about paint.

But it wasn't.

The paint was simply where the grief had surfaced that day.

The house was about to be listed.

The sale was becoming real.

Matt was beginning to face the reality that the chapter of life he had shared with Kurt was coming to an end.

### **The Real Problem Was Never the Paint**

When Matt heard those words, everything changed.

His frustration softened.

His emotions surfaced.

And he admitted what was really bothering him.

He told me he would give anything to keep the house and live in it himself.

More than that, he said he would give anything to have his friend back.

The paint was never the problem.

The closets were never the problem.

The real issue was that selling the home meant facing the reality that Kurt was gone.

For nearly two years, Matt had been carrying the responsibilities connected to the property while also carrying the grief of losing one of the most important people in his life.

That day reminded me of something I have seen many times over the years.

Grief does not always show up as sadness.

Sometimes it shows up as frustration.

Sometimes it shows up as anger.

Sometimes it shows up as indecision.

Sometimes it shows up as an unexpected emotional reaction to something that seems insignificant.

The emotion is real.

It is simply attached to something deeper than the surface problem.

### **Recognizing What Is Really Happening**

When families are selling a loved one's home, it is easy to become focused on repairs, paperwork, inspections, belongings, and deadlines.

Those things matter.

But sometimes the most important thing is recognizing the grief underneath the task.



Once Matt was able to acknowledge what he was really feeling, the paint issue disappeared almost immediately. He calmed down.

The problem had never been the paint.

The problem was saying goodbye.

### **Transition to Complicated Grief**

Not every relationship, however, is filled with warm memories and deep affection. Sometimes the emotions surrounding an inherited home are much more complicated.

## **WHEN GRIEF IS COMPLICATED**

### **Not Every Relationship Is the Same**

Up to this point, we have talked about people like Diane and Matt, whose grief was closely connected to relationships filled with love, memories, and deep emotional bonds.

But not every relationship looks like that.

Sometimes the person responsible for selling an inherited home had a difficult relationship with the parent, sibling, or loved one who passed away.

Sometimes the relationship was strained.

Sometimes it was distant.

Sometimes it was marked by years of disappointment, conflict, criticism, addiction, mental illness, neglect, or unresolved issues.

When that person dies, the emotions that follow can be very different from what people expect.

### **Carla's Story**

A friend of mine once described this experience in a way I have never forgotten.

For years, Carla helped care for her aging mother.

As her mother's health declined, Carla moved her from her home into a senior community. Later she moved her again. Then eventually into assisted living, where she could receive a higher level of care as her health continued to deteriorate.





Each move required Carla to sort belongings, pack boxes, coordinate logistics, and move large items that had followed her mother through multiple transitions.

At one point she laughed and said, "I think I've moved these giant paintings four times already."

But behind the humor was something much deeper.

Carla told me that she and her mother had never really been close.

The relationship had been strained for years.

Her siblings had largely stepped away from the responsibility.

Carla was handling everything because she lived closest to her mother, and because someone had to do it.

Then she said something that stayed with me.

"I gave up years ago that we were ever going to have the kind of relationship I wanted with my mom."

There was sadness in those words.

Not because she expected the relationship to change.

But because she had already grieved the loss of that possibility long before her mother passed away.

For Carla, the grief was not only about her mother's declining health.

It was also about accepting that some relationships never become what we hope they will become.

Yet despite the disappointment, she continued showing up.

She continued helping.

She continued carrying responsibilities that others chose not to carry.

### **More Than Sadness**

Many people assume grief is simply sadness.

In reality, grief can take many forms.

There may be sadness.

There may be anger.

There may be resentment.

There may be guilt.

There may be confusion.

There may be relief.

Sometimes all of those emotions exist at the same time.

I have had people tell me that while they were saddened by the loss, they also felt relief that a loved one's suffering had finally ended after years of illness and decline.

Others have told me they felt sadness that a relationship was never repaired.

Some feel anger about how they were treated.

Others feel guilty because they do not feel as emotional as they think they should.

All of these reactions are normal.

The emotions that follow a loss are often connected to the relationship that existed before the loss occurred.

### **Selling an Inherited Home Can Bring These Feelings to the Surface**

The process of selling an inherited home often intensifies these emotions.

Every room may contain reminders of the relationship.

Every belonging may trigger a memory.

Some memories may be positive.



Others may be painful.

Unlike Diane, who wanted photographs of her mother's belongings because they represented cherished memories, someone with a difficult relationship may experience those same belongings very differently.

Instead of sadness about letting go, they may feel frustration, resentment, relief, or even exhaustion from carrying one more responsibility.

In these situations, people are not only deciding what to do with the house.

They are often sorting through years of unresolved emotions at the same time.

### **There Is No Right Way to Grieve**

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that there is no single right way to experience grief.

People often judge themselves because their emotions do not match what they think they should feel.

The truth is that every relationship is different.

Complicated relationships often create complicated grief.

That does not make the grief any less real.

It simply makes it different.

If you are responsible for selling an inherited home and your feelings do not match what you think they should be, give yourself permission to experience the emotions that are present.

You do not have to force sadness.

You do not have to force forgiveness.

You do not have to pretend the relationship was something it was not.

You can acknowledge both the good and the difficult parts of the relationship.

You can honor the reality of your experience and move forward without judging yourself for the emotions you carry.

### **Lily's Story**

Lily spent years caring for a family member whose health steadily declined.

Like many caregivers, she gradually found herself spending more and more of her time managing someone else's needs.

Medical appointments.

Legal matters.



Daily responsibilities.

Difficult decisions.

Over time, caregiving became a major part of her life.



She attended medical appointments, coordinated care, managed medications, handled paperwork, adjusted schedules, and spent countless hours helping with the day-to-day challenges that come with declining health. Like many caregivers, her life gradually became organized around the needs of someone else.

By the time her loved one passed away, Lily was emotionally and physically exhausted.

Many people assume that once the caregiving ends, the grieving process begins.

In reality, caregivers are often grieving long before the loss occurs.

They are grieving each decline in health.

Each loss of independence.

Each change in the person they love.

For Lily, however, the challenges did not end when the caregiving ended.

Years passed before she felt emotionally ready to sell the home.

The property remained tied to memories, responsibilities, and unfinished emotions.

Just as she began moving toward the next stage of life, new complications emerged.

Family disagreements surfaced.

Legal issues arose.

Decisions that seemed settled suddenly became uncertain again.

The home was never placed on the market.

Instead, the process became delayed by events outside her control.

Lily's experience reminds us that grief does not always move forward in a straight line.

Sometimes people are ready to take the next step.

Then circumstances force them to wait.

The waiting can create its own form of grief.

There can be feelings of powerlessness.

Frustration.

Exhaustion.

And uncertainty about what comes next.

For caregivers especially, the end of caregiving is not always the end of the journey.

Sometimes it is simply the beginning of a different chapter filled with new decisions, new responsibilities, and new challenges.

## **CHILDREN EXPERIENCE GRIEF DIFFERENTLY TOO**

### **Children Feel Grief at 100 Percent**

While adults often struggle with grief, loss, and major life transitions, children experience these events differently.

One of the things I have observed over the years is that children feel pain at 100 percent.

They feel sadness at 100 percent.

They feel fear at 100 percent.

They feel grief at 100 percent.

Adults often recognize that something is bothering them, even if they have not yet taken the time to fully understand it.

For many adults, grief can feel like a pot on one burner of the stove that is boiling over.



The emotion is there, but they are still managing the other parts of life.

Children often experience grief very differently.

For them, it can feel as though all four burners on the stove are boiling over at the same time.



Everything feels overwhelming.

Everything feels uncertain.

Everything feels bigger than they know how to explain.

### **The Vintage Kitchen Utensils**

I learned this lesson many years ago while preparing to move with my children.

As we packed boxes and prepared to leave our home, my daughter suddenly became emotional.

With tears in her eyes, she asked,

"Mom, what's going to happen to the vintage kitchen utensils hanging on the wall near the breakfast table?"

I explained that we would take them with us and find a place for them in our new home.

Then she said something that surprised me.

"Every morning when I eat breakfast, I look at those utensils. I'm going to miss them."

At first glance, it may have sounded as though she was talking about kitchen decorations.

But she wasn't.

Those utensils represented something much deeper.

They were part of her daily routine.

Part of her sense of comfort.

Part of what made home feel like home.



What she could not fully explain at the time was that she was grieving the loss of something familiar and safe.

What made the experience even more meaningful was that those utensils were important to me as well.

They reminded me of my grandmothers and the kitchens where they cooked and cared for their families.

They represented part of my own family history and heritage.

While my daughter connected to them differently, they were meaningful to both of us.

When we moved into our new home, one of the first things I did was hang those utensils on the wall.

I wanted her to know that some things could come with us.

That not everything she loved was being left behind.



### **The Children Who Were Leaving Their Home**

I saw something similar when I helped a family sell their home during a divorce.

Four children were involved.

Three boys and one younger daughter.

The children had grown up in the house.

They had celebrated birthdays there.

Created memories there.

Built friendships there.

And now they were preparing to leave.

The boys threw themselves into helping.

They carried boxes.

Painted walls.

Helped prepare the home for sale.

The daughter, however, expressed her grief more openly.

One day she commented that she liked a necklace I was wearing.

Later, I purchased a matching necklace and gave it to her.

The necklace itself was not the important part.

What mattered was helping her feel seen, heard, and understood during a difficult transition.

Her mother had originally asked me to talk with the children about moving.

Instead, we ended up talking about grief, memories, and ways they could carry the important parts of the home with them.

### **Children Need Permission to Grieve**

Children often ask questions that sound confusing to adults.

Can I take this with me?

Will my room look the same?

Can we keep that chair?

What will happen to my toys?

Will we ever come back?

These questions are rarely about the objects themselves.

They are often attempts to understand what is changing and what will remain the same.

Children need permission to grieve what they are leaving behind.

They need patience when they ask the same questions repeatedly.

They need reassurance that their feelings make sense.

And they need opportunities to talk about their memories, fears, and hopes for the future.

What may seem like a small object to an adult may represent comfort, safety, routine, and connection to a child.

Helping children understand that memories can travel with them often makes these transitions easier.



One of the questions both children and adults eventually face is this:

If the house is gone, where do the memories go?

### **If the House Is Gone, What Happens to the Memories?**

One of the fears many people experience when selling a loved one's home is that the memories will somehow disappear too.

In many ways, that fear makes sense.

Homes often become containers for memories.

A particular room may remind you of a birthday party.

A staircase may remind you of children playing games together.

A kitchen may remind you of family dinners, holiday traditions, or conversations around the table.

The smell of oranges from a backyard tree, a worn section of carpet on the stairs, an old stove, a favorite chair, or a familiar view from a window can instantly bring back moments that might otherwise remain forgotten.

When the home is sold, people sometimes worry that those reminders will disappear and that the memories connected to them will fade as well.

There is some truth to that concern.

Most of us do not remember every detail of our lives.

Some memories become less vivid over time.

Some moments become harder to recall.

The house itself may have served as a trigger that brought those memories to the surface.

At the same time, the most important memories are rarely contained within the walls of the home itself.

They live within us.

They become part of who we are.

The love we experienced.

The lessons we learned.

The traditions we shared.

The moments that shaped our lives.



When people worry about selling a loved one's home, they are often afraid they are somehow letting go of the person they loved.

They may worry they are being disloyal.

They may worry they are leaving the past behind.

Yet most parents, grandparents, and loved ones who created wills, trusts, or estate plans understood that one day the home would likely be sold.

Their hope was not that the house would last forever.

Their hope was that the people they loved would be cared for and that the value of what they built would benefit future generations.

The house may eventually belong to someone else.

But the memories, the lessons, and the love remain part of the people who lived them.



### **The Birthday Party Lesson**

I remember working with a couple who were preparing to sell the home where they had raised their son.

Like many families, they were struggling with the idea of letting go of the house.

They worried that once the home was sold, the memories connected to it would somehow disappear as well.



As we talked, I asked each of them the same question.

"Tell me one of your favorite memories in this house involving your son."

Without hesitation, both of them began talking about birthday parties.

Interestingly, they did not describe the house itself.

They did not talk about the walls, the floor plan, the kitchen, or the backyard.

Instead, they described the excitement of the celebration.

The people who attended.

The laughter.

The joy on their son's face.

The special moments they remembered as parents.

As they shared those stories, something became very clear.

The memory was never really about the house.

The house had simply provided the setting.

What they treasured was the experience.

The relationship.

The love.

The memory itself was still alive inside them.

That conversation became an important reminder for all of us.

The house may help trigger memories.

The house may provide a place where memories are created.

But the memories themselves are carried within the people who lived them.

What they discovered was that selling the home would not erase those experiences.

The memories remained with them, carried in their minds and hearts long after the home was sold.

### **Rachel's Story**

One of the most personal examples in my own life involves my daughter Rachel.

Rachel was born with a rare chromosomal abnormality, called Trisomy 9. She lived for only one year. She passed away on her first birthday.



Like many parents who lose a child, there were moments when I wondered how I would move forward.

Rachel never smiled.

She never recognized me as her mother.

Because of her profound medical challenges, our relationship looked very different from what most parents experience with their children.

And yet I loved her deeply.

A physician once told me she believed Rachel lived as long as she did because of the love and care I gave her.



Whether that was true or not, I have never forgotten those words.

During the first week of Rachel's life, I was driving to the pharmacy to pick up medication for her seizures.

I was only twenty-one years old.

Scared.

Overwhelmed.

And completely unsure what the future would hold.

As I drove, a thought came to me so clearly from deep within me that I have remembered it ever since:

"You can be bitter or better."

At the time, I realized it was a given to me as a challenge, that thought was pushing me to decide about who I wanted to become. It was a question about how I could choose to respond not only to Rachel's condition, but to every difficult situation I would face throughout my life.

Would I chose to become bitter because of the pain, the loss, and the unfairness of what was happening?

Or would I choose to become better because of the pain, loss and the unfairness of what was happening. A challenge to chose one or the other.

In that moment, I decided that I wanted to be better, not bitter.

During one of the most painful times in my life, I chose being "better" as my guiding principle.

That moment has stayed with me ever since.

Whenever I faced grief, loss, overwhelm, a difficult divorce, being a single parent, and financial hardship, I always returned to that lesson.

Rachel's life changed me, in so many ways.

One of the greatest gifts she gave me was the reminder that while we cannot always choose what happens to us, we can choose how we respond.

For me, being better instead of bitter became part of Rachel's legacy and one of the most important lessons she left behind.

### **Carrying the Lessons Learned Forward**

Rachel's life shaped the person I became.

It influenced how I work with families.

How I understand grief.

How I understand loss.

How I understand resilience.

The memories did not disappear.

They became part of me.

### **Facing Grief**



One of the most important lessons I learned was that grief is not something we need to run from.

It is something we need to move through.

Many people are understandably afraid of grief because it feels overwhelming.

Sometimes they overwork.

Sometimes they overspend.

Sometimes they overeat.

Sometimes they overdrink.

Sometimes they oversleep.

Sometimes they find other ways to avoid the pain.

Yet grief has a way of waiting patiently until we are ready to face it.

And although it may feel frightening, overwhelming, complicated, confusing, or even unbearable at times, grief often waits quietly for us.

If we are not able to face it in the moment, it does not disappear.

Instead, it remains nearby, waiting until we have developed the strength, support, understanding, or life experience we need to work through it.

I do not believe that “time” itself heals grief.

What I have noticed is that life continues.

New experiences occur.

New responsibilities emerge.

New memories are created.

Friendships deepen.

Children are born.

Grandchildren arrive.

Families grow and change.

Activities fill the space between where we were and where we are today.

The grief may still be there.

The love is certainly still there.

But over time, we often discover that we are able to carry both.



What I learned from Rachel was that I did not need to be afraid of the grief.

The sadness was a reflection of my love for Rachel.

The pain was a reflection of the loss.

The memories were a reflection of a life that mattered.



The goal was never to erase the grief.

The goal was never to forget.

The goal was to allow grief to become part of the journey rather than something I spent my life running from.

Once people begin to understand that memories travel with them, many begin looking for meaningful ways to honor the person they loved while continuing to move forward with their own lives.

## **FINDING WAYS TO HONOR THE PERSON YOU LOVED**

### **The Memories Continue in Different Forms**

Once people begin to understand that the memories are not contained within the walls of a home, they often begin looking for meaningful ways to honor the person they loved.

There is no single right way to do this.

Every family is different.

Every relationship is different.

And every person finds their own way of carrying memories forward.

What matters most is not the method itself.

What matters is finding a way to stay connected to the people, lessons, traditions, and experiences that shaped your life.



### **Diane's Scarves**

One of my favorite examples involves Diane.

Helen, Diane's mother was a member of a networking group I belonged to for many years.

She was one of those people who quietly held everything together.

She worked hard.

She cared deeply about the members.

She helped create a sense of connection and community within the group.

After Helen passed away, the women in our group wanted to find a way to honor her memory.

Every May, during our annual luncheon, we wear scarves in Helen's honor.

It is a simple tradition.

Yet every year it reminds us of the kindness, commitment, and friendship she brought into our lives.



The scarves are not really about the scarves.

They are about remembering Helen.



### **A Painting of a Family Home**

Another family found a different way to honor their memories.

I helped a couple sell a home they had built and lived in for many years.

The property held countless family memories.

After the move, their daughter, who was an artist, painted a picture of the home.

The painting represented more than the structure itself.

It represented family gatherings, milestones, celebrations, and years of memories created there.

Today, the painting serves as a reminder that while the family no longer lives in the home, the memories remain part of their story.



### **The Rocking Chair**

Sometimes the object itself becomes the connection.

A dear friend of mine knew he was nearing the end of his life.

Over time, he began giving special belongings to people he cared about.

One of those items was his grandmother's rocking chair.

His daughter did not want it, but he knew I would treasure it.

Today, that rocking chair sits in my living room.

Every time I see it, I think about my friend.

I remember our conversations.

I remember his generosity.

I remember the relationship we shared.

The chair is more than a piece of furniture.

It is a reminder of a life and friendship that mattered.



### **Christmas Decorations and Family Traditions**

The same friend also gave me some of his Christmas decorations.

He loved Christmas.

He knew I loved Christmas. For years after he passed away, I displayed those decorations every holiday season.

Each ornament reminded me of him.

Each decoration carried a story.

The important thing was never the decoration itself.

It was the memory and the connection it represented.



### **Finding Your Own Way**

Some families create photo albums.

Some create memory walls filled with photographs and keepsakes.

Some gather together on birthdays or special anniversaries to share stories.

Some write letters.

Some preserve a treasured family recipe.

Some support a favorite charity.

Some pass special belongings from one generation to the next.

Others simply set aside time to remember.

There is no right or wrong approach.

The goal is not to hold onto everything.

The goal is to hold onto what matters most.

The house may eventually belong to someone else.

The belongings may be distributed.

The estate may be settled.

But the love, lessons, and memories can continue in whatever form feels meaningful to the people left behind.

## **TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF DURING THE PROCESS**

### **Selling a Loved One's Home Can Be Exhausting**

If you are responsible for selling an inherited home, you are often carrying multiple burdens at the same time.

You may be grieving.

You may be handling legal matters.

You may be sorting through decades of belongings.

You may be coordinating repairs.

You may be communicating with family members.

You may be balancing work, parenting, caregiving responsibilities, and your own personal life.

The emotional weight alone can feel overwhelming.

The physical work can be exhausting.

The decisions can feel endless.

That is why self-care is not a luxury during this process.

It is a necessity.





### **Schedule Time to Replenish Yourself**

One of the most important commitments you can make is to intentionally set aside time to replenish yourself.

Not when everything is finished.

Not after every problem has been solved.

Now.

Put it on your calendar.

Make it non-negotiable.

Give yourself permission to step away from the responsibilities, even if only for a short time.

For some people that may mean taking a walk.

For others it may mean reading a book.

Gardening.

Cooking.



Having dinner with friends.

Taking a class.

Writing in a journal.

Spending time in nature.

For others it may mean exercising, working out, working in the garage, tackling a favorite project, fishing, golfing, taking a bike ride, or participating in a sport.

Sometimes it is as simple as sitting quietly in the backyard listening to the wind chimes and allowing yourself a few moments of peace.

For some families, it may mean asking others to help carry responsibilities for a weekend so they can rest and recover.

There is no single right answer.

The goal is to create moments that replenish your soul while you are carrying the responsibilities of the journey.

### **SOMETIMES THE PROCESS HELPS US MOVE FORWARD**

One thing I have noticed over the years is that selling a loved one's home is rarely a smooth journey.

There are decisions to make.

Documents to sign.

Repairs to coordinate.

Belongings to sort.

Unexpected problems to solve.

Sometimes family disagreements.

Sometimes delays.

Sometimes circumstances completely outside anyone's control.

At times, the process can feel exhausting.

At times it can feel overwhelming.

At times it can feel as though every time one problem is solved, another appears.

Yet there is something else that often happens during the process.

The responsibilities require us to keep moving.

Not because the grief is gone.



Not because we are ready.

But because life continues asking us to take the next step.

In some ways, I think of it like taking a long airplane trip.

Before the trip begins, there is planning.

Packing.

Waiting.

Interrupting your normal routines.

Sometimes anxiety about the unknown.

Traveling to the airport.

Standing in security lines.

Waiting at the gate.

Boarding the plane.

Then there may be turbulence during the flight.

Delays.

Missed connections.

Unexpected changes.

Moments when you wonder if you will ever get where you are trying to go.

Eventually the plane lands.

The turbulence is over.

The waiting is over.

The uncertainty is over.

Most people are grateful to have arrived.

They can finally focus on where they are instead of how they are getting there.

Selling a loved one's home can feel very similar.

The process itself is often difficult.

The grief may still be present.

The memories remain.

The sadness may still be there.



At the same time, many people eventually reach a point where they feel relief that the responsibilities have been completed.

The house has a new owner.

The paperwork is finished.

The major decisions have been made.

The uncertainty has ended.

While the loss has not disappeared, one chapter of responsibility has come to an end.

For many families, that creates space to focus less on what still needs to be done and more on remembering the person they loved.



## **THE FOUR STAGES OF SELLING A LOVED ONE'S HOME**

One of the things I have noticed over the years is that while every family's situation is unique, most people move through four general stages when selling a loved one's home.

The timing may be different.

The circumstances may be different.

The emotions may be different.

But understanding these stages can help families recognize where they are in the process and what challenges may lie ahead.

### **Stage One: Deciding How and When to Sell**

The first stage involves making decisions.

Sometimes the decision to sell is voluntary.

Other times it is driven by financial realities, legal requirements, trust provisions, probate obligations, or the practical need to settle an estate.

The question is often not whether the home will be sold, but rather how and when it should be sold.

Families may spend weeks or months discussing timing, legal authority, tax considerations, market conditions, and whether any family member wishes to keep the property.

For some people, this stage brings relief because a plan is beginning to emerge.

For others, it brings anxiety because the reality of the loss is becoming more concrete.



### **Stage Two: Preparing the Home**

For many families, this is the most emotional and physically demanding stage of the journey.

Belongings must be sorted.

Important documents need to be located.

Repairs may need to be completed.

The home may need to be cleaned, organized, painted, or updated.

Family members often find themselves opening drawers, closets, cabinets, and storage boxes that have not been touched for years.

Every item has the potential to trigger a memory.

Every decision can feel personal.

At the same time, there is often significant physical work involved.

Boxes need to be packed.

Furniture may need to be moved.

Donations arranged.

Estate sales organized.

Contractors scheduled.

This stage requires emotional energy, mental focus, and physical effort all at the same



time.

### **Stage Three: Waiting for the Right Buyer**

Once the home is on the market, families enter a different kind of challenge.

Waiting.

Waiting for showings.

Waiting for offers.

Waiting for inspections.

Waiting for loan approvals.

Waiting for escrow to close.

Many people assume the hard part is over once the house is listed.

In reality, this stage often creates its own stress and uncertainty.

Will the home sell quickly?

Did we price it correctly?

Will the buyer stay committed?

Will the transaction close?

Every offer, inspection report, repair request, and financing milestone can bring another wave of emotions.

It is a period of hope, uncertainty, anticipation, and patience.

### **Stage Four: Moving Forward**

Many people believe the journey ends when the house closes escrow.

In reality, another stage begins.

The house may be sold.

The responsibilities may be lighter.

But life is now different.

Some families are still settling estates.

Some are distributing assets.

Some are handling final accounting, trust administration, or probate matters.

Others are simply adjusting to a world where the family home is no longer part of their lives.



This is often the stage where people begin finding meaningful ways to honor the person they loved.

They create new traditions.

Preserve important memories.

Share stories with future generations.

Or carry forward lessons that continue to shape their lives.

The house may be gone.

But the memories, relationships, and experiences that mattered most remain.

Understanding these four stages does not eliminate the challenges.

But it can help families recognize that what they are experiencing is normal.

Each stage brings its own responsibilities, emotions, and decisions.

And each stage moves them one step closer to carrying the memories forward while building the next chapter of their own lives.



## **BUILDING THE RIGHT TEAM**

One of the challenges families face is that no single professional handles every aspect of selling an inherited home.

Depending on your situation, you may need an estate planning attorney, probate attorney, accountant, financial advisor, trustee, organizer, contractor, moving company, estate sale company, and real estate professional.

Each person plays a different role.

The attorney may help with legal issues.

The accountant may help with taxes.

The contractor may help prepare the property.

The estate sale company may help sort and distribute belongings.

The real estate professional helps coordinate the sale of the home itself.

What I have found over the years is that families often benefit most when they have a trusted guide who can help them understand every step of the preparation process, set realistic expectations, attract the right buyers, evaluate offers, navigate negotiations, and help the transaction successfully reach the finish line.

Just as important, it helps to work with someone who understands the emotional process of selling a loved one's home and can help reduce unnecessary stress, confusion, and emotional overwhelm along the way.

## **A FINAL THOUGHT**

Selling a loved one's home is about much more than selling real estate.

It is about saying goodbye to one chapter while carrying forward the memories, lessons, traditions, and relationships that helped shape your life.

The house may be sold.

The belongings may be distributed.

The paperwork may eventually be completed.

But the people we love continue to live within the stories we tell, the values we carry, the traditions we preserve, and the lives we continue to build.

The home may belong to someone else.

The memories never will.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Deena Stacer has spent more than three decades helping families navigate major life transitions, including grief, divorce, caregiving, probate, trust sales, downsizing, and the sale of inherited homes.

As a Certified Probate Realtor, Trust Specialist, educator, author, and broker, she understands that selling a loved one's home is rarely just a real estate transaction.

It is often a deeply personal journey filled with memories, responsibilities, decisions, and emotions.

Her goal is to help families move through the process with clarity, compassion, realistic expectations, and the support they need every step of the way.

## RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS

If this guide has been helpful, you may also find these resources useful:

- Download my free book, [Selling a Loved One's Home](#), for additional guidance, stories, and practical strategies.
- Contact Dr. Deena Stacer if you have questions about selling an inherited home, trust sale, probate property, downsizing, or other major life transitions involving real estate.

No family should have to navigate this journey alone.

[Read the 5 Conditions Blog Series](#) (5 Story Posts)

[Read the 7 Secrets Blog Series](#) that are Part of Selling a Loved One's Home (Post #1)

[Download my Book: Selling a Loved One's Home](#) (if you want a physical book sent to you via US Mail, reach out to me and ask. My contact information is below.)

Contact [Dr. Deena Stacer](#) if you have questions about selling an inherited home, trust sale, probate property, downsizing, or other major life transitions involving real estate.

If you are preparing to sell a loved one's home, in San Diego County, download my FREE RESOURCES, including helpful guides on what to fix, what to leave alone, and what to understand before the home goes on the market, strategies for selling a home during a divorce or after downsizing. [Download all of the Free Articles and Books](#) to help and assist you through the preparation and sale of a loved one's home.

No family should have to navigate this journey alone.



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Dr Deena Stacer

Selling A Loved One's Home: The Emotional Journey Of Grief, Memories, And Letting Go

## CONNECT WITH ME

Dr Deena Stacer

This Doctor Makes *House* Calls!

858-229-8072

[Doc@DeenaStacer.com](mailto:Doc@DeenaStacer.com)

Stacer Realty

CA DRE#0073471

<https://www.instagram.com/drdeenastacer/>

<https://facebook.com/deenastacer>

[DrDeenaRealEstate.com](http://DrDeenaRealEstate.com)

