

HIGH-RISE LIVING IS NOT FOR ME

by David Mills

I live in Toronto where the phrase “high-rise” refers to the rents. We had quite a nice apartment but despite the good points, I realized high-rise living was not for me.

First of all, I hate heights. I get giddy standing on a chair. Nevertheless, I did spend a lot of time on the balcony enjoying the fresh air and the view. I never ventured too close to the edge though, just in case the railing collapsed and I plummeted to certain death on the distant concrete below. (Actually, falling from the fourth floor, I’d probably just sprain an ankle.)

As I’ve said, we did enjoy the view. Facing us was an open field with trees and flowers where children flew kites and played football, and where I sometimes worked on my golf game. (Not at the same time of course.) Two years later, five condos, each fifteen stories high, stood on that open field cramping my golf game and blocking out what little sunlight we once received.

That brings me to another drawback of apartment living. I call it the ‘Concrete Sea’ phenomenon. All the apartments were the same and everything was concrete. The balcony was concrete. The ceiling was concrete. It was physically impossible to put a nail in the ceiling or to even tape decorations to the roof. We fought this cold uniformity by trying to make the apartment as much like a house as we could. We put carpeting on the balcony and I practised my putting there. We added deck chairs and a table to make it more like a patio, but when we sat down all we could see was clouds.

And there were ongoing problems with the elevators. As you got on, someone from Las Vegas took bets on whether you’d get to your floor before nightfall. At one point, one elevator only worked properly if it was going down. It would always zoom up to the top floor then stop at the correct number on its way back down. Then when we learned this system, the rules changed and it went up and down with no pattern at all, stopping at floors that were not requested and

bypassing the ones we wanted. Occasionally, after ten or fifteen minutes, someone would get lucky and it would stop at his floor but usually people got off if it was within five floors. One night, I spent at least half an hour going back and forth from the basement to the penthouse waiting for it to stop anywhere near my floor. By the time it did, my supper was cold. Now I walk up.

Last spring, I seriously thought about building an addition on the apartment. I would seal in the balcony and convert it into a second bedroom for the baby. The fact is I was desperate for more room. The balcony already served as another storage closet. The storage closet was now our baby's room, the regular closets had our linen, the linen cupboard had our shirts and sweaters, and our dressers were stuffed with our remaining clothes. Nudity was one solution but not practical when you have a job dealing with the public. The place was just too small.

There were good points about our apartment. It was close to work and several bicycle paths but my bike was so rusty from disuse that you could no longer tell the original colour. Also, the management took care of all household repairs, but nothing ever broke down. The rent was reasonable ...until the 20% increase. It had an outdoor pool, a sauna and tennis courts but for someone who would rather watch 'Roseanne' or play cards, this didn't have a lot of drawing power.

No, it was time to move. We really wanted a quieter place, on ground level where our son could play without constantly running into things, where we could sit out in the sun and where it takes less than fifteen minutes to get from the car to the living room.

Well, we found a place with most of those things, ...and without acrophobia. And we found it just in time. I hear our high-rise is asking for another 20% increase.