

DON'T BOX ME IN

Barry, D. (1991). *Don't Box Me In*. Dave Barry Talks Back. Crown Publishers.

We're moving again. We're not moving far: Maybe two miles, as the heat-seeking radar-equipped South Florida Stealth Mosquito flies. It's hard to explain why we're doing this. Call it a crazy whim. We just woke up one morning and said, "I know! Let's put everything we own into boxes!"

And that's what we're doing. The giant cardboard mines of Peru are working overtime to meet our box needs, because we have a LOT of stuff that we need to take, including many precious heirlooms such as our calculator in which all the keys work perfectly except for the "4," and our complete, mint-condition set of 1978 VISA statements (try replacing THOSE at today's prices). Stuffwise, we are not a lean operation. We're the kind of people who, if we were deciding what absolute minimum essential items we'd need to carry in our backpacks for the final, treacherous ascent to the summit of Mount Everest, would take along these aquarium filters, just in case.

The humorous part is, we never finished *unpacking* from when we moved in here. The other day I watched my wife, Beth, as she opened a box that has been sitting around, unopened, since our last move, removed the contents, and carefully packed them, every last one, into a *new* box. I grant you that these are not the actions of a sane person, but you wouldn't be sane, either, if you'd spent the last few weeks doing what Beth has been doing, namely trying to get hold of workmen. The workmen are playing an elaborate prank wherein they come to our house and do a tiny smattering of work and then run off and hide in the Everglades for days at a time, breathing through hollow reeds and refusing to return Beth's phone calls. Every now and then one of them will come sneaking into our kitchen, frogs clinging to his hair, and shout, "nyah nyah nyah" at her, then sprint off before she can hurdle the boxes and grab him.

We need the workmen because we're trying to make our current house look domestic so that somebody will want to buy it. We're making a lot of simple, obvious improvements that never would have occurred to us to make while we actually lived here, because, tragically, we both happen to be domestically impaired. If we were birds, our nest would consist of a single twig with the eggs attached via Scotch tape. We lived for 11 years in a house with a light fixture that we both agreed was less attractive than if we had simply suspended a urinal from the ceiling. But of course we never did anything about it until we moved, just as in our current house we waited until now to clear out the giant tropical spiders who live next to the front door, subsisting on Federal Express men; or to replace the electrical ceiling-fan switch that has three positions, "Low," "Medium," and "Burn Down House"; or to eliminate the violently pink carpet that made our bedroom look as though an Exxon tanker had run around there and spilled

millions of gallons of Pepto-Bismol. Yes we have plenty to do, and we are doing everything we can to attract workmen, including tying a string around a small bundle of money and placing it on the lawn as bait. When a workman approaches, we tug it slowly toward the house, and when he gets close enough we slam a box over him.

During this difficult time we have received a large mound of assistance from our two dogs. Using their keen, nearly asphalt-level intelligence, they have sensed that something important is happening, and have decided that their vital contribution will be to kill anybody who comes near our house. This means they have to spend a lot of time shut away in my office, barking. They've reached the point where they automatically start barking as soon as we shut them in there, whether or not there's anybody to bark at yet. It's their job, barking in my office. Somebody has to do it! They produce approximately one bark apiece every two seconds, so if I leave them in there for say, 45 minutes, then open the door, I get knocked several feet backward by the escaping force of 2,700 accumulated barks.

Sometimes prospective buyers come to our house to look at it, and we have to go hide in the Everglades with the workmen. Buyers don't want you hanging around when they look at your house, because they feel free to make frank observations such as, "What are these? *Toenails?*" They would make this remark in my office, which contains many large unexplored toenail deposits that have built up over the years because I'm a professional writer, which means I spend as many as five hours a day engaged in foot maintenance while waiting for professional sentences to appear in my brain. But the rest of the house is looking real nice, thanks to Beth. In fact, she put some magazines on a table *in a fan arrangement*. This is of course one of the early symptoms of the dread June Cleaver Disease, which ultimately leads to the appearance, in your bathroom, of soap shaped like fruit. So I'm hoping we sell this house soon. Make us an offer. We're motivated. We're reasonable. We're accommodating. You get the dogs.