



A Landlady's Memoir

Judith Glynn

Like most homeowners on Providence's East Side, I watched as the real estate market sizzled and envisioned a ka-ching moment for my cash cow multi-family house. I'd owned it for 20 years and occupied one of its three apartments. It had a sliver-view of Narragansett Bay, wide-plank hardwoods and working fireplaces. I occupied one of the three apartments. To sell traumatized me.

"This was always a happy house," an elderly neighbor said when I bought the sad-sack place, built in 1882. Once a grand single-family, after being divided into apartments and decades of college rentals by absentee landlords, it needed extensive work. Maybe that's why the realtor lowered the sales price on the purchase contract without me asking.

My mother remembered that my grandfather, whom I never knew, had lived on the same narrow street when he emigrated from Ireland to join his siblings. I was an only child with few relatives and pictured my ancestors visiting the house I now owned close to theirs. Silly, maybe, but knowing we walked the same sidewalk soothed my soul.

Years later and under my bone-breaking devotion, alongside competent contractors, the house had a soul with strong bones. I knew every inch of it. I'd joke that Home Depot named an aisle in my honor since I shopped there constantly.

Being alone, divorced and worldly, my housemates sought my sage advice. Some cried when leaving. Some became life-long friends. I was thrilled when babies were conceived there and sad over a breakup. And when my grandchildren re-enacted Cinderella on my hearth and stuffed their toys in closets for return overnights, I was complete.

But, over time, I got cranky about crowded street parking and noisy concerts from India Point Park. Placing For Rent ads became tedious as was being a hands-on landlady aging into a senior landlady.

Then there was the occasionally disrespectful tenant such as the young doctor who moved out of the second-floor apartment at 1:30 AM. "Are you crazy? What are you doing?" I asked him in the hallway, clutching my robe. "This was my only free time," he said as he and

his girlfriend carried a futon couch down the winding staircase.

An email to me from the new tenants entitled "Difficult subject to discuss" was funny to read but their complaint about the amorous, male stud living below them needed a resolution. He'd recently separated from his wife and was exploring new women in bed. Since I sympathized with both sides and realized there was zero insulation between floors, I soundproofed his ceiling. That compassionate fix cost \$3,000 to assure harmony under our roof.

Although I'd lost only one month's rent during my ownership, day-to-day operation was closing in, especially when thieves smashed the sliding glass door on my back apartment twice in two years. What was worse? The robbed \$500 I left in a bureau drawer or feeling unsafe at home. Installing security cameras and lights was costly. Another problem was brown water damaging plumbing because century-old city water pipes needed replacement.

Another season for me of getting snow shoveled and tending to blooming lilacs was coupled with my hair turning grey and my back hurting more. With no repairs left, profits went into my pocket. But reality meant my 137-year-old home built with handmade nails brought challenges as we'd grow older together.

"List it fast before I change my mind," I told my realtor, stifling tears. "It hurts, but it's time to cut the cards." I believed in exits no matter how good the memories. Living well meant moving on. That night, I sat by my blazing fireplace, sipped wine and mourned a place I loved more than life itself on some days. In the morning, I packed for my goodbye.

My happy house sold in three weeks for an unimaginable profit. The new owners said I could rent there but that would never work because it would still be my house in my mind, never theirs. I declined. Instead, I paid in cash for a high-end, spanking-new condo several miles away, no longer a landlady but thankful and at peace for the experience. 🌸

Judith Glynn writes travel articles and books, but her favorite genre is personal essays.

