

FROM HEALTH-CARE BIGWIG TO

Home-Moving Guru

ADRIENNE SIMPSON

50 | OWNER, SMOOTH MOOOVE
Stone Mountain, Georgia
Reinvention vehicle: A big white truck with a dancing cow on it

Right out of high school, Adrienne Simpson landed a job at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan as a clerk typist. Twenty years later, she moved to Atlanta and became the director of operations for Cigna HealthCare. Senior citizens were her favorite clients. They still are.

"I first interacted with them at a walk-in insurance counter before everything was automated. They were always so appreciative, and that stuck with me.

"Then, in 2000, I was laid off in a downsizing. It was almost a relief—I was over 40, and I didn't need the aggravation of dealing with the corporate world anymore. I was finally free to spend time with my daughter, who from the age of five had said, 'Momma, who did you fire today?'"

"While I was wondering what to do next, my mom decided to move back to Michigan. I offered to take care of everything and looked for an organization to help, but there was none. It took six weeks to get her ready and on her way. Meanwhile, she was telling her friends, 'I'm moving, and I don't have to do a thing. My daughter is doing it!'"

"When I got back to

Georgia, those friends called, asking for help, and suddenly I was packing on a volunteer basis. Then I realized I could get paid for this!

"My first business plan was just a packing service for seniors; I later made Smooth Moooove a complete senior-relocation service.

"I was scared of the unknown, and of starving, but I knew that there was a need for this service.

"My first job, in January 2003, was moving a 94-year-old woman from Florida to Georgia by myself. Now I have 16 people on payroll. That first year I did 91 moves; this year, I'll do at least 750. Our most popular service involves packing, relocation and the assembly of a new home, which means we set up the new place in its entirety—from putting the pantry together to hanging drapes.

We also have services for seniors with dementia: To help support their memory, we arrange their new home as closely as possible to the previous one.

"Moving seniors is emotional for everyone involved. Some of the things that prompt their move to a retirement community—our destination most of the time—is the loss of a spouse or failing health.

And sometimes, well, they just don't want to go. Like the gentleman whose daughter was moving him to an assisted-living facility. When we showed up, he

was in his recliner—and he wasn't going anywhere. He was yelling, 'Don't listen to her—she's a little Hitler,' and it wasn't until we put him on the moving truck, still sitting in that chair, that he agreed to go.

"Now I work six days a week, but somehow it's easy. I love not knowing what state I am going to be in next, or who I'll meet. That very first person we moved was a concentration camp survivor; that little lady hopped into the truck and we drove for 10 hours. The entire time she told me stories—some horrible, and some wonderful. That's what I enjoy most, hearing about their experiences.

"In my corporate jobs, it felt good to help people on a large scale. But this is on an individual scale, and it's so gratifying. I go to sleep knowing I've changed a

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senior's quality of life. And I don't know any other moving company that has families lining up to give you a hug at the end."

—JESSICA HENDERSON