

'Our short time on earth goes very quickly ... I want to explore, taste, feel new things'

Tired of living to work, rather than working to live, Carolyn packed up her life in the US and is now living in Co Down as she seeks a new adventure. By *Emma Montgomery*

There are certain expectations of people in their mid-60s. By this age, we imagine that most people will have retired and be reaping the rewards of decades of hard work. They will be settled, perhaps enjoying a beautiful home or a brand-new car.

For 65-year-old American Carolyn Chebaro, this couldn't be further from the truth.

Months ago, she sold all her worldly belongings and moved from sunny Florida to the UK with her chihuahua, Miss Evie, to embark on a new adventure.

"No one has said to me: 'Are you crazy?' But they've probably thought it," she says.

"You can choose to look at life with fear, or not — and I choose not to. I choose to look at life with love."

The move was prompted by a sense of unhappiness with her life in the US. She decided on the UK because she has family here and lived in Northern Ireland for a decade during the Troubles. For now, she's based in Bangor.

"My family is here, and I've always felt at home here. I was tired of living to work, rather than working to live. I'd just had enough," she explains.

"At the moment, the cost of living in the States is very high, and also there's a tension in the air because of the politics and all that's going on."

Carolyn, who has a background in the real estate industry, decided to renovate an investment property she had acquired, and then sell.

Afterwards, she put the profit into renovating her home, which she sold before she moved to the UK — along with her car and furniture. She also had to rehome her 22-year-old turtle, Henrietta.

"It took a couple of years and then, along the way, there were many factors that slowed it down, to do with the economy and the environment," she explains.

Her journey has not been without its challenges. She had to live in a friend's Airbnb for six weeks while waiting for documents that would allow her to bring her dog with her.

"I left the States in April. My sister is in Wales, so I spent some time there."

Carolyn also had to spend longer in Wales than anticipated due to Miss Evie becoming unwell.

"She had an accident, so we had to stay there for two months and a bit more so that she could see her surgeon. She has a surgeon! She's fine. She's milked it for everything she could get out of it," she says, laughing.

Carolyn hasn't got an exact plan yet, but she thinks she might keep a home in Northern Ireland as a base when she travels.

"Because I've been here before in the winter-time, I don't want to do that. So I'm thinking of taking my car somewhere in Spain."

"But, you know, the more time I spend here, the more I'm thinking maybe I should stay here. Not now, because I have it in my mind that I want to see other things, but I'm thinking I could have this as a base and then go south, like a bird, in the winter."

"I don't know, but I do know that I have destinations in my mind and, just to satisfy myself, I have to do it."



Carolyn Chebaro has traded the US for the UK



Carolyn and Miss Evie in North Wales and (right) in Mizner Park, Florida

Pennsylvania-born Carolyn has led a colourful life, having tried many different careers and lived in various places across the world. She's been an estate agent, marketer, designed handbags and even owned a souvenir store on the Hollywood Boulevard.

Now, she works remotely across a variety of disciplines and is a prolific content creator on platforms such as YouTube and Facebook.

Instead of trepidation, her journey to the UK has been marked by a sense of excitement and a feeling of coming back to her old self.

"I was just very excited. In my youth, I went to college in Switzerland and in London. So it gave me a rush when I was at the airport in Miami. I thought: 'Here we go again. Many years later, but here we go again.' I loved that."

"The whole purpose of this journey is just to taste new things, feel new things. It's exploration and it's interesting. I know it sounds like 'What in the world has she done?' but I just have to trust that it's going to work out. And so far, it's been pretty cool."

Carolyn is confident in her decision to move across the world because she tries her best to stay healthy and think positively about making the most of her time on earth.

"I don't expect bad things to happen to me. Some people think: 'You're this age and this will go wrong and that'll go wrong.' No, I swim half a mile every day. I take care of myself and I'm responsible."

"The year of my birth is just a number. My thoughts are that we are given a very short period of time and it goes very quickly. If I don't do this for myself, who's going to do it?"

"We're responsible for our own actions, our own future. I know that I could have stayed in

Florida. I could have walked down the stairs to the swimming pool, done my laps, enjoyed that and died there. But I know I didn't want that."

In the coming months, Carolyn plans to revel in her new life by travelling, both in Northern Ireland and across Europe.

"I'm excited about maybe seeing the south of Spain, about maybe going to a market and getting a fresh tomato. In my mind, I know where I'm going to be sitting having a glass of wine."

"I'm also excited because this coming week I'm going to go into Belfast. I haven't been there in a long time. I'm excited to see it because I saw it when it wasn't the way it is now — it was a different environment."

You can follow Carolyn's journey via her Facebook and YouTube channels, which are under her own name