

Full House— AGAIN

by S. Kim Henson



Illustrations by Mike Lang

Today, as a parent of two adult children, our home is always open for visits, but long-term stays make me squirm.

Even though it was 27 years ago, I remember it well. My husband, John, and I, along with our 2-month-old son, were moving back to our hometown. We purchased a 1950s fixer-upper and planned to renovate over three months. My mom and dad offered us a place to stay. Dad said, “A newborn doesn’t need to be around paint fumes ... no way.”

John and I liked living away from the makeover mess, having meals prepared for us, and having built-in baby sitters. But every day my parents would come up with helpful suggestions about caring for our son, how to redo an older home, and landscape tips. One afternoon after stopping by our house, Dad walked in and said, “You left the iron on over there. You’re going to burn the place down before you ever move in.”

I snapped back, “It’s my house, and I’ll burn it down if I want to.”

After that, we worked overtime to complete the remodel. We moved into our home three weeks ahead of schedule and none too soon to spare our family relations. As an adult child, home sweet home was a great place to visit, but it was no longer ideal for our living situation.

These days, more of us are finding ourselves in this situation. Sons and daughters are returning home with their spouses, children, and maybe even the family dog. According to the Pew Research Center, one out of every eight households with grown children has experienced having an adult child move home in the past year.

High unemployment rates, pay cuts, stacks of bills, and relationship problems account for a lot of the boomeranging adult children. We as parents

want to be supportive, but we also may need guidance to handle the blended household we never expected. A preventative plan up front may eliminate confrontational reactions later on.

Sam and Betty agreed to let their son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter move in while their son was out of work. When he took a job out of town but was unable to take his family along, Sam and Betty continued to provide a place for their daughter-in-law and granddaughter to stay. They also baby-sat, cooked meals, and stretched their own budget until their son was able to move his family.

In the midst of the situation, Sam and Betty were unable to think clearly and make a plan. In retrospect, they admit they needed one.

The Plan: You’re Staying How Long?

- Ask your children how long they plan to stay, what support they need, and what they expect. Listen for a reasonable exit plan that will make their stay as brief as possible.

- Talk about your expectations and come to an agreement that suits both. Remember you are allowed to pull rank since it is your home.

- If unemployment is the reason for the move, discuss job search expectations. If there are no available positions in their career or income range, ask if they are willing to work in lower paying jobs. One father told his daughter, “Since you don’t have a job, looking for one is your new career. You’ll need to work it eight hours a day.”

- Expect monetary contributions if they can pay. Take into consideration the increase in groceries, paper goods, and utilities, and agree on a reasonable amount.

- Divide household duties like cleaning, grocery shopping, cooking, and yard work.

- Decide on convenient and considerate ways to share common spaces, including the kitchen, baths, and laundry room.

- Do not make the living arrangements so comfortable they want to stay permanently.

- Write out the details for clarity and mutual agreement. Having it in writing is always a good idea.

Although having a houseful was a challenge for Betty and Sam, the experience had its highlights. They took advantage of the family's time together to set an example of a godly marriage and lifestyle. They encouraged Sunday School and church attendance. Also, they took pleasure in the extra time with their granddaughter who, when the time came to move, asked, "Can we just keep living together?"

As much as grandchildren may like the togetherness, the answer to that is generally a resounding, "No!" Our grown children, no matter how relaxed they look with their feet propped on our coffee

table, typically don't want to be under our roof. We parents have become set in our own ways that don't include daily parenting. In situations like these, we want to help plan for a smooth transition with everyone headed in the right direction. For our adult children, that is most likely out the front door. **17**

S. Kim Henson lives with her husband, John, in Myrtle Beach, S.C. When they bought a place near the ocean, they downsized to two bedrooms (and one is Kim's office) so hopefully their kids would feel too cramped to move back home. But they do enjoy bumming beachside when their son and daughter visit. For more, check out www.skimhenson.com.



WHAT WORKED FOR US

Doug and Jean let their daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter move in during an extensive remodel of their home. Their son-in-law set up a back bedroom so he, his wife, and their daughter would sleep well and have their own living space. The two families shared the house for nearly a year without a hitch.

Jean offered some tips she prac-

ticed to assure their time together was as comfortable as possible:

- Steer clear, if possible, of your parenting role.
- Unless late night returns are disruptive, avoid asking questions like, "Where are you going?" and "When will you be back?"
- Respect their privacy. Reserve some quiet, personal time for yourself

and with your spouse.

- Agree on guidelines for correcting the grandchildren while they are staying in your home.
- Resist expectations of family times such as shared meals around the table.
- Reflect on the quality of your parent/child relationship before they move in, and adjust your plan accordingly.