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Sharing a home with students can be very rewarding

Jennifer Pass
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Mary is a frail senior in her early 80s.

Her two children are grown and flown. Her husband died a few years ago. She found herself thinking about those unused bedrooms. Then five young male college students from Kerala (India) were attending her church and were not able to continue to stay in their rented motel accommodation. And, voila! She found herself offering them bedrooms in her home to rent.

That was five years ago. There are still three of them in her home. One has married and one has left. They have all finished college. They share her kitchen; she does have an ensuite bathroom. She does not cook for them. They tend to cook at different times from her dinner time.

Although they keep different hours, she enjoys having them in her home, and when asked, "are you glad you did this?" she says "absolutely, I have no regrets."

What would be her advice to other seniors wondering if they should rent to college students?

"Do set up, at the outset, some house rules–perhaps sharing the cost of household items that everyone uses."

While she is not a fan of curry, she admires the boys cooking together and says that she tends to have her meals at different times from theirs, so there are no conflicts over kitchen usage.

A different journey transpired for Nana, a mother of two grown-up girls, and a retired teacher in her mid-60s.

A few years ago she provided housing for some international high school students through a program run by the local school district. During the COVID pandemic this program no longer allowed seniors (because they were designated a high-risk group) to provide accommodation for foreign school students.

Nana decided to get a renovation done and it provided her with a self-contained suite in her home. She then started renting her upstairs bedrooms, living room, kitchen and bathroom to three young women college students from other countries (through the foreign student program).

Nana loves having the girls in the house. She is so much more than a "landlady" as she brightly speaks about getting take-out pizza together (her treat), or how she tried to help a girl who was moving out from making an ill-advised choice of residence. Nana truly cares deeply about her girls.

Many seniors have thought about renting rooms to students. There are many elders, who might be interested, but then become fearful or just not sure that this is for them.

It is clearly important to set up "house rules" or "house guidelines," before deciding to rent out living space. You are entitled to have "quiet hours" (for 8-10 hours per night). You might need to spell out how long your renters can spend in the shower, or the need for sharing costs of common household items. You will want to have a written agreement with a clause that allows you to evict with one month's notice (sometimes problems just cannot be resolved).

On the bright side, you might find yourself assisting a young person from a foreign country who needs an adult to advise them on what is safe and what is appropriate in a new country. You might just find that you become an important person in the life of one or two of these students and you can help them with the difficult adjustment to a foreign country. And you just might find that your joy increases as you feel your home full of life and laughter, and yes, different cuisine.



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John Aldag
Member of Parliament
Cloverdale—Langley City
214—6820 188 St., Surrey, B.C., V3S 3G6
604-575-6595 John.Aldag@parl.gc.ca
www.johnaldagmp.ca