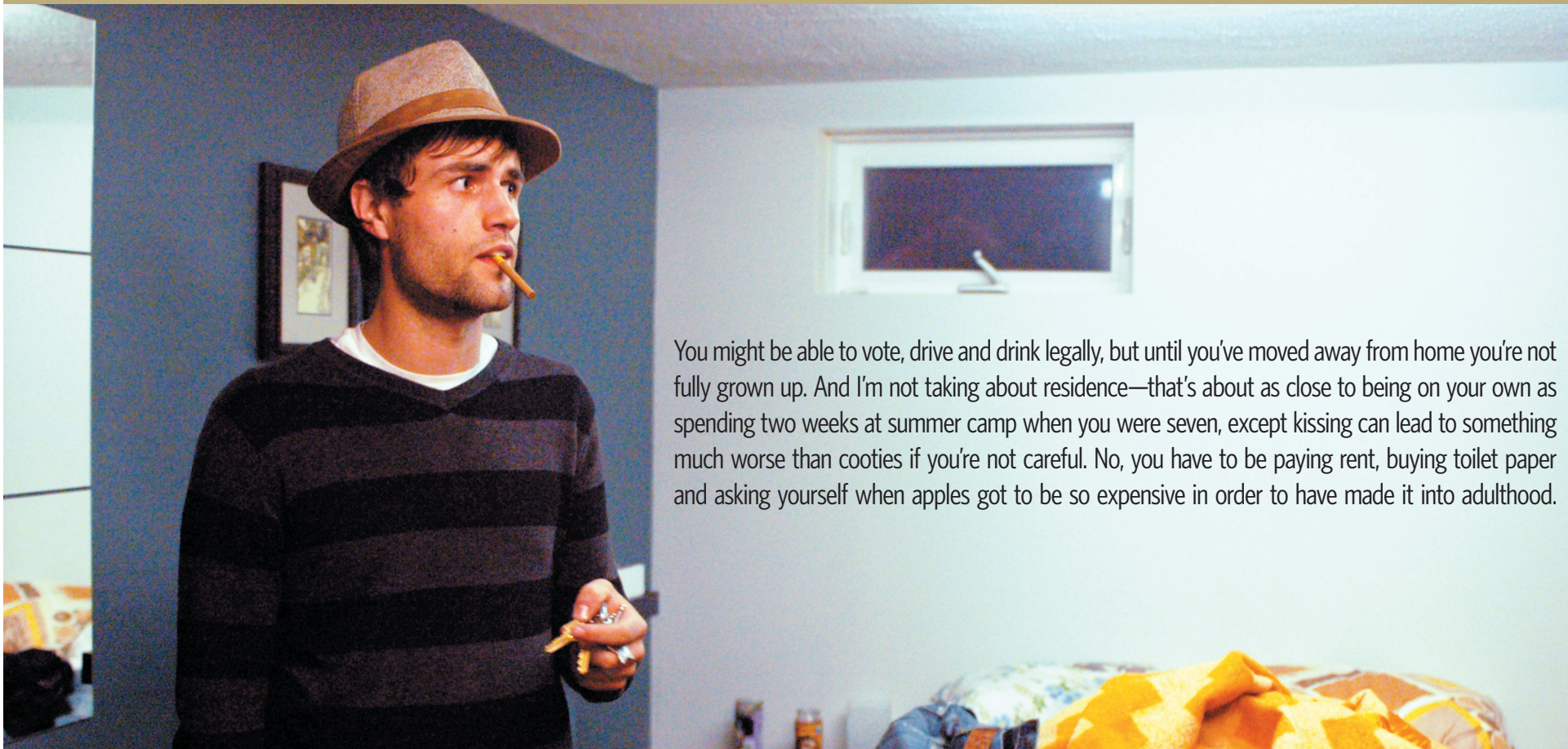


Living on your own: a personal guide

Feature written by *Natalie Climenhaga and Matt Frehner*
Photos by *Ashley Scarlett*



You might be able to vote, drive and drink legally, but until you've moved away from home you're not fully grown up. And I'm not taking about residence—that's about as close to being on your own as spending two weeks at summer camp when you were seven, except kissing can lead to something much worse than cooties if you're not careful. No, you have to be paying rent, buying toilet paper and asking yourself when apples got to be so expensive in order to have made it into adulthood.

PICKING ROOMMATES

As a cash-strapped university student, you probably won't have the luxury of living in your own bachelor/bachelorette pad, free to cook bacon in the nude and do the dishes in the bathtub once every three months. Still, there are benefits to having a roommate: the rent is substantially cheaper and you'll have someone to keep you company through the cold Edmonton winter.

At this point in the year, you've probably picked your roommates already—let's hope to God you picked with care, though, because a shitty roommate, be they a friend, a lover or a stranger (or some combination thereof), can make your life hell.

LIVING WITH FRIENDS

While so-and-so may have been your BFF since, like, forever, there are unfortunately high odds that you'll hate them by November if you don't engage in a little bit of compromise. Understand that just because you're friends with someone prior to living with them doesn't mean you must now be joined at the hip morning, noon and night. You'll be spending enough time sleeping under the same roof, and it's important that you don't feel guilty about going out without your roommate.

You may also begin to notice all their annoying little habits you never knew were there. Put it in perspective and keep in mind they probably are discovering the same thing about you. And while they may drive you insane now and then, do you really want to end a friendship over the way they floss their teeth while watching TV, or fry bacon and eggs with their left hand down their pants?

LIVING WITH STRANGERS

Unfortunately this will be like a game of Russian roulette, except with more bullets. You may get lucky and meet someone incredibly cool, or you may spend the better part of the year avoiding your home like the Black Death. If you're not in a fixed lease, don't feel bad about moving out if their obsession with Disney or high-pitched sexual escapades prove to be too much.

University brings with it enough stress without throwing a crazy roommate into the mix.

FINANCES

Splitting rent is generally a given, but when it comes to sharing foods items, it can get a little bit complicated. The granola-commie method will have you sharing everything from lunchmeat and bread to honey and coffee. But if you have a unique diet or strange eating habits, you may want to revert to labelling everything in the fridge and cupboard with a big, black marker. Splitting basics such as milk and bread is a good idea provided you both like skim and whole wheat. Think about your needs and your personality. If money stresses you out, or you're a vegan, it might be best to buy your own grub. Even non-picky eaters have their brand preferences and it may be easier to just buy your own food instead of worrying about splitting bills and who ate more than their share of the cereal. Still, there will always be those communal household items such as cleaning supplies, toilet paper and garbage bags, which should be discussed before you spend \$100 at Costco with the expectation that your roommate(s) will pay their share. Having a communal piggy bank earmarked for the purchase of such items may also be a good idea, as constantly splitting bills gets annoying and tedious.

PHONES

In today's world of cellphones, purchasing a landline may not be necessary. So while that bundle may offer 1000 minutes of unlimited calls in North America, realistically consider how much you'll be using it, and if that extra money would be better spent somewhere else.

CLEANING SCHEDULES

While a detailed schedule works in theory, once you get busy with your university responsibilities, you literally may not have the time to vacuum every Thursday. However, common sense should maintain a generally level of cleanliness even when you don't have the time to be dusting. By making an effort to keep the majority of your crap in your room and by washing your dishes, you can prevent almost all disputes about tidiness. Most people are more annoyed by clutter than by fingerprints on the coffee table.

Because there's not much worse than coming home to a sink so full of dishes that you can't even get yourself a glass of water without rubbing up against week-old ravioli, a simple invention can prevent fights over kitchen cleanliness: the Dish-Bin System. Here, each

roommate has their own Tupperware dish-bin, in which they place all of their dishes. The bins can be stored on the counter or in a cupboard—as long as the sink is free, you're good to go. The purpose of the DBS is two-fold. Obviously it keeps clutter down and stops you from becoming bitter about having to wash your damn roommate's crusty Kraft Dinner pot, but it also serves to guilt the lazier roommate into doing their dishes, as they continually notice that their bin is the full one.

SEX

Seriously, talk about it now. Because at 3am, when stranger number whatever is using the bathroom, it's not the time to confront your roommate about his/her unholy lifestyle, which will have them frying in hell for eternity. If you're uncomfortable with the idea of your roommate having guys or girls (or guys and girls) spend the night, let them know from the get-go, you self-ish prude. And try to be nice to buddy's girlfriend/boyfriend even if their lovey-dovey touchy-feely crap makes you jealous/vomit.

NON-RENT PAYING GUEST

You may find that while you initially said you were okay with having significant others, friend or family spend the night, you now have to always enter the kitchen fully dressed because they're always over. But telling your roommate you're sick of having their best friend, sibling or boyfriend/girlfriend around will be a touchy conversation and will likely make them get defensive, so unless it's really killing you, try to be patient and ignore it. They'll break up eventually, right?

INSURANCE

If you're renting, your landlord will have most likely taken care of house insurance, however, this doesn't necessary guarantee coverage for your personal belongings. Coverage for a year can be bought for under \$60 and is a good investment, considering most of us can't afford to replace a stolen laptop or iPod without it.



THE ROOMMATE EVERYONE HATES

This is really only a problem if you are this roommate. Otherwise, said hated person becomes the scapegoat and somehow everything from the sink being clogged to garbage pickup coming late becomes this person's fault. While finding the oven left on all night with nothing in it will have you wishing your roommate would just end your agony and stick his or her head inside of it, you have to look on the bright side. Realize that this is a rare opportunity to acquire a source through which you can channel all of your negative emotions. Consider him or her a "hate sponge" of sorts. And while they'll be constantly getting under your skin, you'll have the opportunity to bond with your other roommate(s) through your mutual rage.