

A House for Two ... Or More Annamarie Pluhar '76

AFTER MORE THAN 21 YEARS of living in shared housing, Annamarie Pluhar '76 realized that her knowledge and experience could be helpful to others. Her consulting business, Sharing Housing, aims to help people—especially Boomers—find a peaceful home in shared housing.

She has written a book, *Sharing Housing: A Guidebook for Finding and Keeping Good Housemates*, and a workbook, *Home-Mate Compatibility Assessment Toolkit*, and has created a private Facebook page to help others understand the benefits of sharing housing. She also does workshops and presentations on the topic.

Pluhar says the biggest challenge to the idea of sharing is fear. "It's rooted in the way we think. We have an idea in American culture that if you are not in a relationship and you are not living with family, that you are supposed to live alone," explains Pluhar. "But why is that? Why are people, especially those over the age of 55 or 60, too proud to live with someone else?"

She may be on to something. A study by Pew Charitable Trust shows that "living with loneliness increases your odds of death by 45 percent." Yet, since 1970 the Census Bureau has reported an increase in the number of people living alone in the

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United States. In 2013, 12 percent of men and 15 percent of women lived alone. In cities, that number rose to about half of all households.

"Boomer women, especially, don't have enough money to make ends meet," says Pluhar,

"and companionship through sharing housing while also saving money can be a huge, huge, huge help."

But Pluhar, who is originally from New York City and lives in Vermont *with* housemates, says the fear of living with someone is often greater than the fear of living alone. That's why Pluhar's company focuses on the critical selection process. *Sharing Housing's* workbook helps determine each individual's "have-to-haves" and "can't-live-withs," says Pluhar, "because those are at the center of everything." A seemingly minor but perfect example is dishes in the sink. Are they okay (and for how long) or are they a non-starter? Even the number



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of people cohabiting is important to success. (Pluhar says three is generally better than two.)



As with Pearce's SherpaShare, Mamlet's workspace-sharing companies, and Leu's italki, social connection is key to the business of Sharing Housing. "Companionship can make people healthier," says Pluhar. And, connection can breed opportunity.

In January 2016, *Time* magazine wrote: "It's clear that the demand for this way of working and consuming is profound." Indeed, economists estimate that in 2016 the sharing economy was \$90-million strong, and predictions point to further growth.

—Cari Shane is a journalist, PR consultant, and social media strategist in Washington, DC.