

Sharing a kitchen

Eric Blair

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OK, so I have this 195 m² house, and I only use the kitchen, front room, and sometimes one of the three bedrooms. Sometimes I feel silly having two 100% unoccupied bedrooms, so I've been sporadically looking for a roommate.

My worst roommate experience was in Madrid. There was Asshole Roommate, who would yell a lot and sometimes scared my friends, and the Evil Roommate, who made a hefty profit off of us, and always found new ways in which I owed him money. I got most of my deposit back, but he withheld a big chunk because of a long distance tech support call I made while trying to fix his computer.

The problem was that there was really no way to avoid them. Evil Roommate would track me down for debts, of course, and Asshole Roommate, a tenth-year graduate student in Political Science, was always chillin' in the kitchen. If I wanted to make tea, I would always get caught in a one-hour conversation about Schelling's theories (which are frankly surface-evident enough that they're not worth several hours' discussion unless you want to add empirical detail, which Asshole Roommate wasn't up for.) Even in my room, I could still hear his wife sobbing in their bedroom. Wife was Polish, and I can not remember a single conversation I had with her that was not about how things are different there.

I've had good roommate experiences too. Have lived with two friends, with whom I went out all the time, and never really had any arguments. As for strangers off the street, my optimum was Ms AL of LA, California. Ms AL was really smart and good conversation, but was always busy so she'd always cut off conversations at the appropriate point. Living with these people made me feel like I wasn't an asshole.

Had a pal in a comedy group, and I suggested doing a sketch about searching for roommates. Over the course of the conversation, we realized that we wouldn't have to change anything to make the sketch funny (in a pathos-laden kind of way).

There was the guy who was very persistent in leaving truly stoned-sounding messages, and finally got through around the fifth call. We were around the house, ordering Thai food, and he was nearby, so he came over. He told us that he and his girlfriend left Seattle because their roommate was a heroin addict and kept stealing things. Also, they found out that she was pregnant. So she's with her mom in Nevada while he searches for a job and a place to stay in LA. He applied for a manager position at Barnes and Noble and is feeling pretty

optimistic about it. After the interview was sort of over and we all went back to doing stuff, he just hung around, staring at the Thai food until we gave him some.

There was the woman who thought the place was messy and gave me a lecture that if she moved in it would have to be much neater. She didn't move in.

There was the one who was generally pleasant, but apparently had the crappiest ex-roommate ever. E.g., they lived by a Chili's and people would park in his space when the Chili's lot was full. He'd leave a note on their windshield telling them to come up to the apartment, and then when they inexplicably show up, he'd yell at them about how they owe him \$50/hour for using his space. Police would sometimes be called. Pissed off over dishwashing disputes, he would throw things. When his favorite team wasn't doing so well, he would yell at the TV full throttle. I asked her how long she lived with this guy, and she said "Three years." and then began sobbing.

This round in Baltimore has been even more on the depressing side. Three of my applicants were guys who had recently broken up or divorced. One was just sort of dull and not there, the next made frequent reference to progress he's been making with his therapist, and the last gave the impression that he really wanted to talk about his newfound life as a single unemployed guy.

I acknowledge that rejecting these people makes me a bad person. Almost every roommate interview I do feels like somebody asking for a friend and support as they sincerely endeavor to build a better life, and then I fail to help them. But, as my yoga teacher explains¹, some people will suck the energy from you if you give them the chance. They're down on their luck not because of luck but inherent personality problems that will make themselves very well known to you if you share a kitchen with them.

So that's the state I'm in. To some extent I'm asking for a contradiction, looking for somebody to share my house and my space and maybe dinner from time to time, but not to burden me with their deep emotional issues. And on top of that, that they are preferably vegetarian with no pets.

¹<http://dclagniappe.blogspot.com/2004/11/stay-away-from-energy-vampires.html>