

Slouch By Jim Earle



"That's the main reason!"

Sharing homes saves money

By Maxwell Glen and Cody Shearer

On its front page the other day, the Washington Post divulged a secret that many young Americans learned long ago: Sharing a house is cheaper — and more sensible — than living alone.

According to the Post's story, in fact, the group house concept is sharply reducing demand for more recently constructed single-person dwellings in and around the nation's capital. Reports from other states echo this trend. As one landlord's representative complained to the Post: "Instead of paying \$300 a month for a one-bedroom apartment, you can share a \$100,000 house and pay \$250. It's a lot more value for the buck."

Time was, of course, when "group house" connoted illicit activities: overgrown yards and unmarried people of both sexes in close quarters. Residential neighborhoods rarely threw welcoming parties for newcomers who favored the Grateful Dead at 3 a.m. Indeed, as late as 1978, residents of Berkeley (Calif.) demanded a law requiring that group house residents park their automobiles off the street to ease curbside congestion.

Yet, as the Post discovered, simple economics has turned the radical into the chic. More so than previous generations, a wide variety of young Americans have moved in with friends, lovers and complete strangers to save money.

According to the Census Bureau, the number of households comprised of "unrelated individuals" rose 72.4 percent between 1970 and 1980, or from 14 million to almost 26 million households. This increase was more than three times that of any other living arrangement during the decade. No wonder, then that the group house has evolved from a

den of iniquity to a major factor in the real estate market.

In addition to its economic needs, the group house caters to the baby boom's fancy for having it all. Group house groupies gain access to a well-cared-for house (often much like the one in which they were raised) as well as more space than they could otherwise afford, a yard, and pleasant surroundings. With the presence of three or more housemates also come increased quantities of furniture and beer and an enhanced sense of safety. It's sort of like an overnight club.

Yet if the group-house concept seems form-fitted to our contemporaries, it's unclear whether they're well-suited to living in numbers. While some friends thrive on a cooperative environment, others often don't seem willing or able to make the necessary sacrifices. Unfortunately, in our own experience, group-house horror stories have been more the rule than the exception. For example:

- A 25-year-old woman enters into a year-long lease for a three-bedroom house and invites friends to move in. Yet, after inviting in a lover and upsetting the two house members, she moves out two months later, regardless of the legal and financial burdens her departure places on the other two.

- A 24-year-old unemployed Yale graduate spends two years in a group house, rarely, if ever, offering to clean or buy groceries for the communal refrigerator. Though independently wealthy, he repeatedly has to be asked for a check at rent time. The frustrated house leader eventually asks him to leave (the scoundrel is now back home with mom, dad, and the maid).

"A lot of people go into a group house blindly, without thinking about the re-

sponsibilities," explains Nancy Brandwein, coauthor of "The Group House Handbook," just published by Acropolis Books. "They expect (that) their lives go on as smoothly as if they were living alone, and then don't want to deal with the problems."

According to Brandwein and her company's survey of 300 group houses, house-sharing arrangements don't survive a year in their original form.

The high turnover rate reflects the fact that group houses are, first and foremost, marriages of convenience. "Though we live with others, we don't always love it."

"The Group House Handbook" attempts to provide guidelines for confronting problems — such as zoning problems, live-in lovers, moochers, food squabbles and utility bills — before they turn nasty. At the pointers seem a bit namby-pamby. One section includes 300 words on how to write an agenda for a house meeting, another suggests to those looking for a house, "Don't bring your resume to an interview."

But whatever house sharers do along, economics will increasingly be a mediator-of-last-resort. As cycles of high rents and condo conversions increase pressure to form groups, Americans may spend more than the previous generation's on living space. Shared living space in America may never match that in communist countries, but it is an increasingly popular option with contemporaries who are well into their 30s, married, or both. If the group house becomes less transitional, it will be taken more seriously.

Until then, its everyone for himself.

Main street trivia from past elections

by Arnold Sawislak
United Press International

WASHINGTON — Before the election is forgotten, tribute must be paid to political trivia, which reached the highest point of abstruse sophistication in 1982 since someone discovered that Bary Goldwater was the first jet pilot to win a major party presidential nomination.

Political trivia, it should be noted, can be a sport or a business. It becomes the latter when politicians are trying to prove a point that normally gullible people might have trouble accepting.

For example, who won the elections just past?

It was not, as someone who is unaware of the nuances might think, the party that won the most Senate and House seats and governorships.

Instead, it apparently was the party that did better in the election than it should have. And that is where the trivia begins to fly like shrapnel.

The president's party usually loses seats in Congress in midterm elections. Since 1902, with only two exceptions, the average loss has been 38 seats in the House. But that seems archaic, like baseball statistics before the era of the lively ball, and is avoided by true political trivia lovers.

In recent times, the preference has been to use the post-World War II era in measuring midterm average losses. That number drops to 31 seats. But in 1982, both the Republicans and Democrats found a need for better trivia on midterm elections.

The Democrats, worried that they wouldn't win either 38 or 31 seats and would be judged to have lost the election if they won only 10 or 20, set to work to find a more acceptable bit of trivia.

They came up with a thoroughly cooked statistic that showed recent presidents lost an average of only 11 seats in the first midterm after their first election to the presidency.

They did not, by the way, include Harry Truman's midterms either in 1946 or 1948 or Lyndon Johnson's in 1966. That would have raised the average to about 25, which is about the way it came out this year.

The Democratic trivia wizardry didn't buffalo President Reagan. The day after the election, Reagan triumphantly announced that the Republicans had won the election because they had not lost control of the Senate.

Reagan declared that every other president since 1928 whose party had won control of one house of Congress when he was elected had lost control of that house in the next midterm election.

Nor did Reagan have only one trivia arrow in his quiver.

He also announced that he had beaten the odds by losing fewer House seats than any other president in a midterm election during "hard times." That apparently was a reference to 48 seats each lost by Dwight Eisenhower and Gerald Ford during midterm recessions in 1958 and 1974.

All this reminded the writer of a telephone call from a small town news stringer years ago in Wisconsin. The caller, highly excited, announced that there had been a horrendous accident when a fully loaded produce truck and a car had collided in the center of town.

"How many people were killed?" he was asked.

"Killed? Nobody was killed. But there were cabbages all over Main Street!"



Ears tell the meaning of life

By Dick West

WASHINGTON — All of us are aware that the lines and wrinkles in the palms of our hands foretell the future for good or bad. Usually bad.

And any good cranium-reader will tell you the shape of your head reveals worlds about your character. Or lack of same.

But ears? Until the current issue of Omni magazine was published, I somewhat had never thought of ears as "reflecting the peculiarities" of our psyches.

Creases mean one thing. Small earlobes another. And dangling lobes are indicative of something else. Or so Omni reports.

It remains to be seen whether the article will give birth to a new pseudoscience based on the auricle, as the outer ear is called. Certainly any oracle of the auricle would have a tough time competing with phrenology, palmistry and astrology, which already are well established.

It does seem logical, however, that the outer ear is at least as reliable a clue to our inner being as the tea leaves some fortune-tellers use.

In recent years, ears have fallen to a low estate. So anything that tends to elevate their status must be considered a distinct plus.

"Unlike other parts of the face," Omni points out, "the ear isn't groomed." Indeed, some hair styles, effected by both men and women, cover the ear completely hiding it from the world of day and making it impossible for passers-by to gain any psychological insights therefore.

Nevertheless, the outer ear long has been recognized by connoisseurs as valu-

able equipment that is worthy of rehabilitation.

Corrugation, for example — the grooves and gullies, ruts and furrows that give our ears their shell-like appearance — plays a vital role in the hearing process.

Scientists tell us these culverts and channels guide sound waves to the middle ear, which passes them along to the inner ear, where the hearing is done.

Thus, as you can see, there is a great deal more to the outer ear than simply a convenient anchorage for earrings.

Ear-wise, perhaps, we are less fortunate than elephants, rabbits and foxes, whose ears give off body heat and help them stay cool in summer. Moreover, the three muscles that attach our ears to our heads are not as well developed as they are in certain other animals.

Bats, for example, can move their ears as nimbly as you might twiddle your thumbs. But the best a human being can muster in the way of ear action is wiggle or two, if that.

Nevertheless, human beings are better off than crickets, whose ears will give new respect if they become recognizable as mirrors of the soul.

Who knows, the time might come when matchmakers will use ears as criteria in determining whether a particular couple is compatible enough for matrimony.

As Omni, somewhat lyrically, points out, an ear "unfolds like a flower, free on its own, shaped by the energetic forces that surround it."

Yes, and if, in time, an ear comes to resemble cauliflower, that makes it less informative.

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SUPERMARKET



by Brickman

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