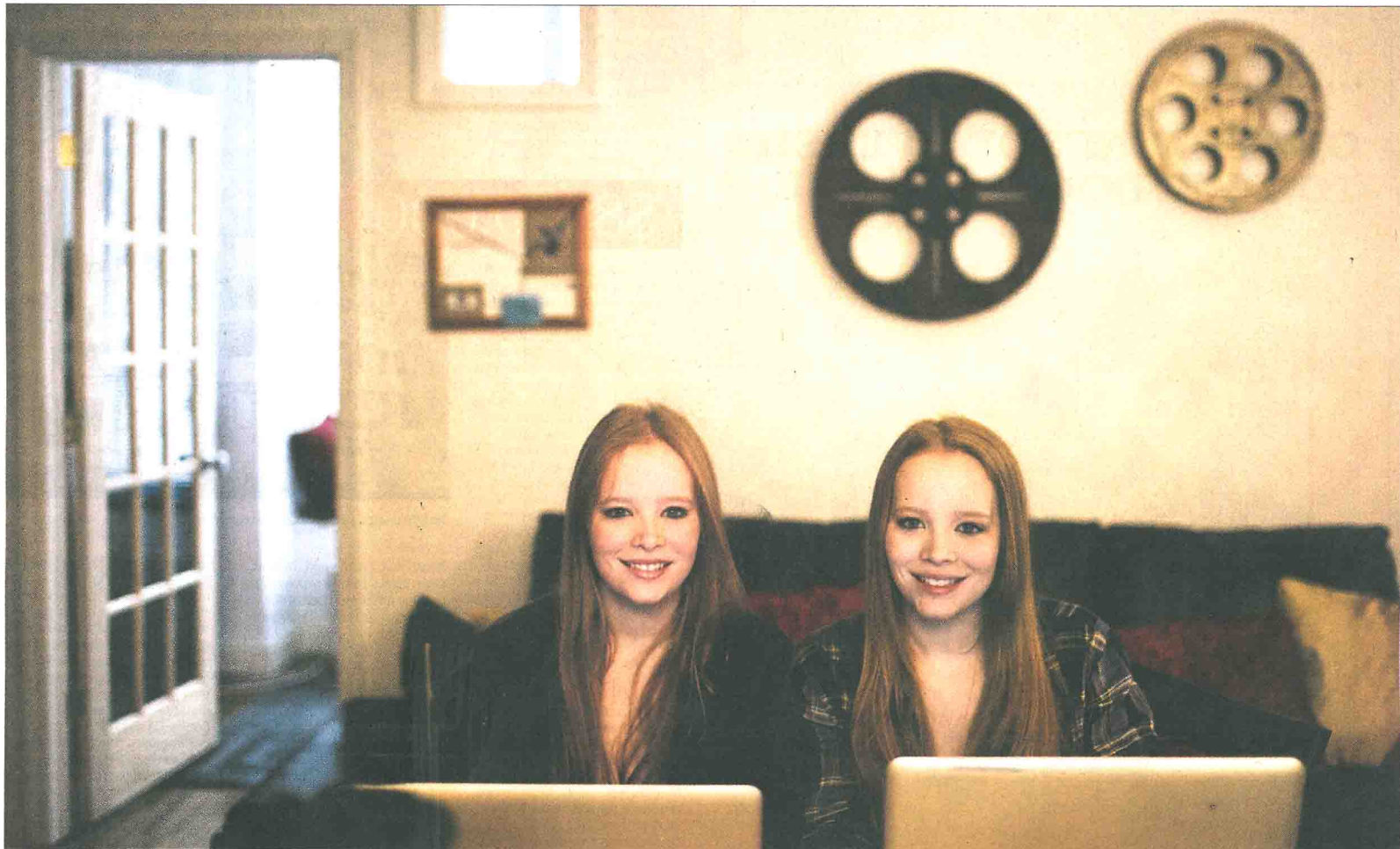


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TODD HEISLER/THE NEW YORK TIMES/BELOW, SUZANNE DENGEL

Mom Always Said to Share

Agents say sibling roommate situations are on the upswing. It's cheaper that way, and it doesn't have to be 'Family Feud.'

By JOANNE KAUFMAN

From the time they were middle-school students in Manhattan, Arielle Patrick and her brother, Andrew, had an agreement: come college graduation, if they weren't married they would share a "bachelor/bachelorette pad" in the city. They were serious enough about the matter to put the pact in writing on a piece of loose-leaf paper and, with great earnestness, to sign their names at the bottom.

So it was that in September 2012, a dozen years later, the Patricks signed their names at the bottom of a lease for a fourth-floor walk-up in Midtown East.

"We'd always dreamed of being cool single adults together in New York," said Ms. Patrick, 23, who works for a public relations firm. (Mr. Patrick, 22, is a legal assistant at a law firm.) "Some people at my office are so surprised that I live with my brother. They're very interested in how we make it work."

Earlier avatars of the sibling roommate phenomenon include the McKenney sisters, whose move to Manhattan in the 1930s formed the basis of Ruth McKenney's memoir "My Sister Eileen." The book, which went on to become a play, a musical and a short-lived television series, chronicled their life together in a tiny



Suzanne Dengel, at left in both cases, and her twin, Colleen, have been close since their days of dressing identically. Now they share a studio in the financial district. "It felt like a natural progression to get an apartment together," Suzanne Dengel says.

apartment in the big city.

For the McKenneys then, like the Patricks today, there was safety, security and (perhaps) solvency in togetherness. In fact, many young adult siblings in New York are doubling up for just those reasons. With rents sky high and entry-level salaries low, togetherness makes economic sense. But it makes emotional sense, too.

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Familiarity breeds content: With long-shared history, brothers and sisters can serve as one another's sounding board, confessor, fashion adviser and, every so often, caretaker.

Of course, there's always the chance that one or the other will go blabbing to Mom and Dad about overdue loans and overnight guests.

"It used to be that brothers and sisters who lived in the city wanted to live apart and have their own lives," said Julia Bryzgalina, the director of sales and leasing at Platinum Properties. "But in the last six months I've seen a huge jump in siblings moving in together."

In large part, that huge jump has to do with rent. The average monthly charge for a studio now is \$2,346, up 12 percent from 2011, and the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom is \$3,330, up 10 percent from 2011, Ms. Bryzgalina said.

Rents, she said, have become "unmanageable for a lot of people who have just graduated from college and are looking for a place to live."

Because siblings grow up under the same roof, they are well versed in one another's quirks and foibles and consequently might not need as much breathing room as roommates who are not related. "So they can get a smaller, cheaper apartment," Ms. Bryzgalina said. "Some might even be comfortable sharing a room. After all, in some cases they shared a bunk bed when they were children."

Share a bedroom? Seriously? For Whitney Noziskova, 32, an entrepreneur, the idea would be unthinkable if the roommate in her one-bedroom Greenwich Village apartment were anyone but her sister, Kasey, 28, a wallpaper designer. "We're definitely on top of each other," she said. "It's forced intimacy, but I think it's a good thing. The boundaries you have with any other person have been permeable with your sibling your entire life, and it stays that way into adulthood."

According to Ms. Bryzgalina, parents buying an apartment for an older child often want to make sure it has enough space for the next-oldest one. Some are focusing on two-bedroom units to avoid the added expense and hassle of having to buy a second co-op or condo down the road.

Similarly, parents who are helping with the rent may be disinclined to lay out the going rate of about \$2,400 a month for individual studio apartments. They're finding considerable cost benefit in settling their offspring under the same roof, said Geraldine Onorato, a sales agent at Rutenberg Realty.

She speaks from experience. Her daughters, Alexandra Newman, 24, a tutor, and Victoria Newman, 22, a marketing coordinator for ESPN, and their cousin Chrissy Anderson, 24, share a three-bedroom walk-up in Gramercy Park that rents for about \$4,800 a month.

"They each have their own room," Ms. Onorato said. "There's a washer and dryer and two bathrooms. They're each paying \$1,500 a month or so, and a studio would be so much more. And if a studio were \$1,600, it wouldn't have as nice a kitchen or a washer and dryer."

The upfront hassles are minimized as well. You don't have two families paying the guarantor application fee or two families submitting to a credit check. "This was clean," Ms. Onorato said. "It was my

'When it's your sibling, it's easy to fight and pout, and 20 minutes later, it's fine.'

husband and me. It's our children and our responsibility. There isn't that unknown, like the roommate who lost her job and can't pay her share of the rent."

As for siblings who are assuming full responsibility for their monthly nut, they feel a sense of financial trust they might not have under other circumstances. It's a safe bet that a sibling won't announce on Thursday that she's leaving Friday to get her doctorate or to be married and has no intention of continuing to pay rent. (Alexandra Newman is heading out of town for graduate school in the next few months, but her roommates already know that an other cousin will be taking over her room.)

At the same time, the sibling living arrangement is about comfort level. Better to go with the slob/peat freak/penny pincher/spendthrift you know well than to take your chances with the idiosyncrasies of a colleague from work or someone you found on Craigslist.

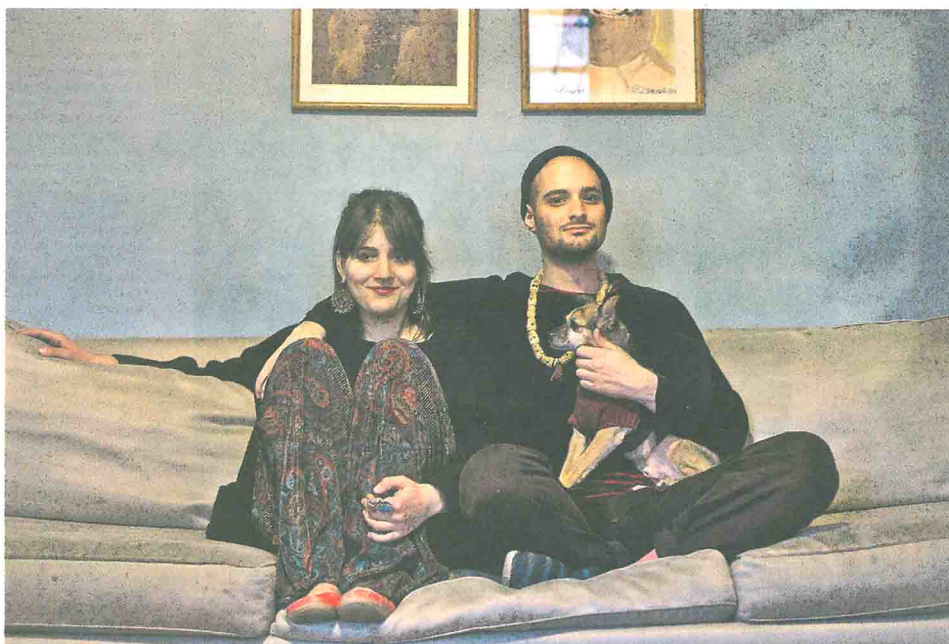
"We don't have to worry about who bought the milk," said Alan Glick, 24, a consultant who shares a two-bedroom in the East 30s with his brother, Arnold, 22, a digital media specialist. "We're brothers. We're not keeping score."

In the one-bedroom West Village apartment shared by Gigi Campo, 24, an editorial assistant at Penguin Press, and her sister, Katie, 27, a journalism student, it's an article of faith that if you finish the Trader Joe hummus, you go out and buy more, and that no one but Katie touches Katie's good Scotch.

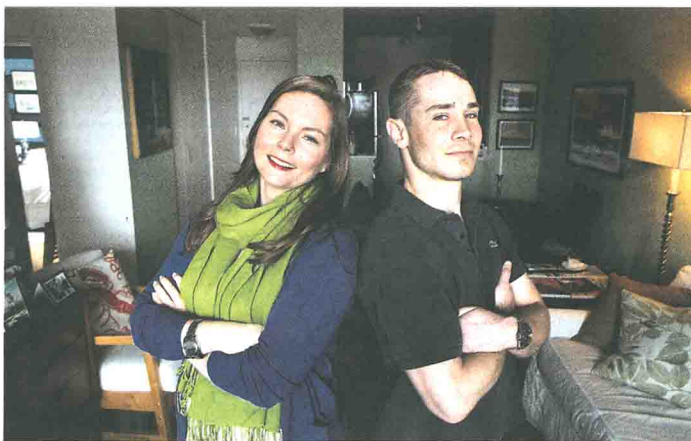
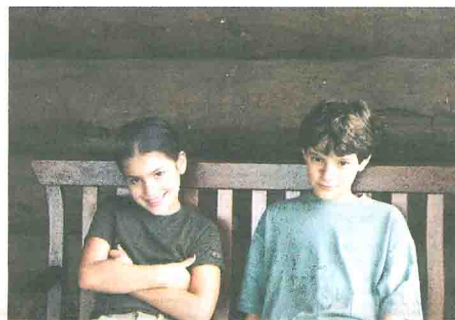
Similarly, Victoria Newman is aware that her sister, Alexandra, isn't as passionate about recycling as she is. Alexandra, in turn, tries with varying degrees of success not to notice when Victoria scavenges the trash for jars and cans that could have a second life.

And when conflicts do crop up, it's emotionally safer to dress down your sister or brother for neatness noncompliance than to go mano a mano with a friend who, after one too many arguments about whose turn it is to clean the kitchen, may no longer want to be friends.

"When it's your sibling, it's easy to fight and pout, and 20 minutes later, it's fine," said Claire Burke, 30, a member of the in-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR J. BLUE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. BELOW, MANDELBAUM FAMILY. BOTTOM, ANNE GALYAN



Clockwise from above, Lily Mandelbaum and her brother, Louis, lived under the same roof as children and have repeated the experiment for the past four years. Their current apartment is in the East Village.

formation technology staff at the New Museum. She shares a two-bedroom in Park Slope, Brooklyn, with her sister Ellen, 25, a production assistant at MSNBC. "If it's a roommate who isn't a family member, it's a slightly different scenario."

Clay Elliott, 33, a nursing student who shares a two-bedroom Upper East Side apartment with his half-sister, Emily Thompson, 28, puts it a bit more bluntly: "You can tell your sibling, 'Shut up,' and you'll still be related."

But you can't always tell your sibling to break up. "The previous apartment that my sister, Lily, and I shared was much smaller than the one we share now," said Louis Mandelbaum, 28, a D.J. and writer. "Her boyfriend, whom I wasn't in love with, was basically living with us, and I wanted him to start paying rent."

"We tried to set boundaries like he could only be there three or four nights a week," he said. "It was the most tense time we had, but there was nothing to be said until she realized he wasn't the right guy for her."



Brothers! But Ms. Mandelbaum, 23, who with her mother founded stylelikeu.com, a Web site devoted to personal style, displays fair-mindedness, a good quality in a roommate. "I think I went a little overboard with the amount of time I spent at the apartment with my boyfriend," she said. "I feel bad. But I think Louis is a little bit picky about his living space. I'm not sure if it would have mattered who my boyfriend was."

For some siblings, living together as adults seems like the normal course of events. Colleen and Suzanne Dengel, 20, twins, actresses — they played Meryl Streep's bratty daughters in "The Devil Wore Prada" — and seniors at the Fashion Institute of Technology, live in the finan-

cial district in a penthouse studio they fashioned into a two-bedroom. "With twins it can go either way," Ms. Dengel added. "But we've always been close. We were roommates in the dorm. It felt like a natural progression to know an apartment together."

year before things settled down," said Ms. Thompson, an associate director of a nonprofit. "It was mundane stuff. I'd come home from work and there were dirty dishes in the sink, and Clay was sitting there watching television. And I felt like the beleaguered breadwinner whose wife was eating bonbons."

In return — "just to vex" her brother, who she says "has a streak of O.C.D." — she left cabinets and drawers open.

After six years, she said, "I'm getting to the point where I want my own apartment. But I think Clay and I will be that much closer as we get older because of the stretch we did living together."

Sometimes, no one is more stunned or delighted about the success of the arrangement than the parents. "As children they fought like cats and dogs," said Beth Sievers, an agent for Halstead Property, of her daughters, Amanda, 22, and Victoria, 25, who along with a friend share an apartment on the Upper West Side. "I was worried about putting them together, but I wanted Amanda out of the dump she'd been in prior to this. There are a few disagreements, but nothing like when they were younger."

Downsides? Sure. "If I have a crush on a boy and I tell my sister in confidence," Gigi Campo said with a laugh, "my parents will call the next day asking about him."

When Clay Elliott didn't like the behavior of his sister's ex-boyfriend, "he'd call my mother and tell her about it," Ms. Thompson said. "He says I was the tattletale when we were growing up. Well, he's the tattletale now."

Still, the compensations are many. "We're each other's mother, sister and friend," Suzanne Dengel said. "We take care of each other when we're sick."

More than anything, living with a sibling seems to be a graduate program in human relations.

Until Noelle Gentile, 34, a drama teacher, got married last year, she shared a Park Slope apartment with her sister, Amanda, 31, who works for a nonprofit.

"I learned a lot of my conflict-resolution skills living with her," Ms. Gentile said, "because she was a safe person to figure things out with. I used to be more fiery than I am, more temperamental. Thanks to Amanda, I went from slamming doors to going for a walk to having a calm conversation."

Through it all, she knew her sister would be there. "It set me up for who I would be when I found a romantic partnership," she said. "To have that kind of stability while you're flailing around the biggest city in the world is a really amazing thing."