



Archie: [knowing they're having sex; looks angry] In the middle of the day?

Edith: Seems like an awfully long time to be showing her his grades.

These stories illustrate that *proximity* and *privacy* are two key words to think of when you begin the process of deciding what type of housing to use for extended-family living. Once you've made the decision to live together with family members, there are a variety of ways you can do so. Options include houses with accessory apartments, duplexes, town houses next door, two or more condos in the same building, family compounds, or cohousing developments. Certainly, houses next door, behind, or across the street from each other, as well as those a few blocks away, can also work.

Accessory Apartments

Suitable for one or two people, an accessory apartment is a self-contained dwelling, usually installed in the surplus space of a so-called single-family home. It can also be a detached building or a portable unit on the same property. Minimally, it features an outside entrance, a bedroom, a bathroom, and some form of kitchen. In addition, some units may have a living room and an outside patio or deck. At most, an accessory apartment shares an entrance, a yard, and parking with the primary residential unit. It is subordinate to the host home in size and appearance, often invisible from the street. There are many other names for this type of housing, including accessory dwelling unit, granny flat, sonny flat, in-law apartment, guest suite, cottage, lifecycle unit, second unit, studio apartment, bonus unit, casita, carriage unit, *ohana*, and efficiency apartment.

The accessory apartment is one of the most versatile types of housing. It can offer homeowners a good investment with a healthy rate of return; furnish housing for family members, especially elderly parents; provide flexible living space for adult children or grandchildren, a nanny, a home office, a tenant, or caregivers of the elderly; and improve security in the home. This flexibility provides a tremendous advantage to household structure. In our society, which values both community and privacy but provides few choices between those two extremes, the accessory apartment allows an extended family to live together and apart at the same time.²

One Southern California woman has realized these benefits. Susan is divorced and lives in a small residential community. Several years ago, she came up with a novel way to age-in-place with a multigenerational living arrangement that utilizes a remodeled garage on the same property as her house. At first, she used this accessory apartment as a rental to supplement



her income. Then she allowed her daughter and son-in-law to live in the unit while they both worked on their graduate degrees and subsequently established their careers. After they started their family, Susan traded places with them. While she had the apartment remodeled, she lived in the big house with her daughter and family and found it difficult. She said, “When you’re sharing a house with four bedrooms, and you’re in one of them and the kids are using the others, it’s hard. But by the time I moved out to the apartment, it was much better. I’m very separated in the sense that I don’t even hear the grandkids crying during the night.” Here’s a story she shared that underscores the benefits of separate living quarters:

Susan: By the way, I just became aware that my daughter’s mother-in-law is expecting her own daughter and husband, and their three little boys, to come and stay with her. They now live in Arizona but are moving out here. She was looking forward to sharing space with them for a couple of weeks, then they were going to either rent or buy a place. She’s just discovered that they’re not planning to buy a house here until the house in Arizona has been sold. Meantime, all the kids will be living with her and her new husband. She is suddenly much more bothered than I thought she would be. It’s going to be awfully crowded in her three-bedroom house. Actually, it’s four bedrooms, but her husband uses one of them as an office, and he works at home a lot.

Someone said to me, “Oh, she’s all upset, and she’s really just going to have what you have.” And I said, “Oh, no, not at all. We don’t share the same roof. I don’t hear them wake up. I can go home to my little place and do exactly what I want, play my music loud at night.” It just reminded me of the extent of that difference. I mean, my kids can walk over and visit me. That’s lovely. But the separation, even sound-wise, I think is quite important.

In another instance, a childless couple has come up with an inventive way to make use of the downstairs accessory apartment at their beach house in Northern California. They loan it out as free vacation housing for their “extended family” of school teachers. Here’s Dan’s story of how and why they choose to do so:

Sharon: What led you to offer your unit to school teachers as free vacation housing?

Dan: We have a friend who is a retired local school teacher who lives nearby. We also know another teacher who lives in Los Angeles and stays with us when she comes to visit her brother, who lives in a studio apartment close to us. She typically brings a school teacher friend of hers because our unit is really big enough for two people to stay in comfortably. After we got these



three teachers together, they became a circle of friends. Then, among my clients, I have quite a few school teachers, and a lot of them are single. A couple of them are divorced and have children. Since their children would be with their fathers on the weekends, they would have an opportunity to get away. However, they don't have the money to spend on something like that.

One day, I thought, "What a great way to give back to school teachers!" I think they are the most important people on this planet for what they do. And I thought, "I know these people." So we let them come and stay for free. We don't charge them. The only prerequisite for them coming is that they just totally enjoy themselves and not think about anything. They don't need to feel obligated at all to call us or knock on the door. We just want them to think that it's their own private little getaway.

It's been so great because I wanted the downstairs apartment to be used a lot more than it had been. By the way, our retired school teacher friend helps us out with the reservation process. The teachers who want to use our unit will call her to see when it's available. She also opens up the place for the guest teachers, saying, "This is your place for the weekend." We've had a lot of her teacher friends stay here too. The other neat thing is that they've all been so considerate about leaving the place clean.

Sharon: Have you heard of anyone else who has offered free housing to teachers?

Dan: No. But I really hope more people will open up their hearts and do the same thing. My basic philosophy in life is what goes around, comes around.

Sharon: Along with feeling good about making a donation to teachers, do you see any other advantages to having an accessory apartment?

Dan: Definitely. Since we've had the separate unit, when we've had our other friends, not school teachers, come and stay, it is just so wonderful for all of us. When you do stay with people . . . and I think everyone has had this experience . . . you try not to inconvenience your hosts. In turn, the hosts do their best to entertain and take care of you, and you are both being inconvenienced. I think that's another facet to this thing, just the convenience that having separate quarters brings. You can have your own privacy and really enjoy your friends more.

Mobile Homes

Included in the category of accessory apartments are mobile homes, trailers, or manufactured housing. More than twenty million Americans now