



Living Alone

By Katherine Shirley

“Keep busy and get a poodle!” is what M.D. Willis* has to say about living alone. Mrs. Willis was widowed 10 years ago and previously had never lived alone. “Staying busy keeps your body going and your mind strong,” she says. Sewing, knitting and needlepoint help keep Arthur (a.k.a. Arthritis) from visiting her aging hands. Mrs. Willis has five daughters and 15 grandchildren living in the area who keep in touch on a regular basis. Even so, it’s Angel, her gray Toy Poodle, who snuggles with her at night, wags her tail to greet her in the morning, and sits with her on the porch when the weather is favorable.

Living alone can have advantages, just ask Lynn Miller*. “I don’t make my bed,” says Miller. While Lynn keeps his house neat and tidy, not making his bed is one small luxury he affords himself. He also says that he doesn’t have to be concerned about pleasing another when buying groceries, choosing paint colors or deciding what to watch on television. Lynn has lived alone for all of his adult life and can’t imagine it any other way. He is alone, but most definitely not lonely. Lynn frequently travels, has dinner parties, attends family functions and lives life to the absolute fullest.

According to the US Census Bureau, from 1970 to 2005, people living alone grew from 17% of all households to 26%. At the same time, women living alone decreased from 67% of one-person households to 58%, while men living alone increased from 33% to 42%.

A number of issues face those who live by themselves – loneliness, depression, security and financial pressures to name a few. One may say that we all face the same

issues. While that may be true, some studies found that depression is significantly more common among people living by themselves than among those residing in families. Certainly security and financial pressures are intensified because there is no one “in-house” to help bear the load.

So what’s a one-person household to do?

Get a pet. A pet can be a great companion. Cats or dogs are what first come to mind when thinking of pets. But if you’re up for it, think outside the box – birds, fish, iguanas. Be certain to do your research before deciding. Ask around. Visit pet stores. Contact your local humane society. Ask yourself these questions: Can I afford a pet? In addition to the obvious needs of food, water and shelter, your pet may need collars, leashes, toys and of course veterinarian visits. Does my lifestyle warrant bringing a pet into my home? If you travel frequently, your pet will need to be able to self-sustain during those times or you’ll need to hire a sitter. Do I have the time to give enough attention to a pet? Bored pets can sometimes be mischievous pets. Consider if there will be training involved.

Stay in touch with family and friends. With so many ways to communicate nowadays, this one should be a breeze. Phone a loved one. Email a friend. Sit down with pen and paper and write an “old-fashioned” letter, put it in an envelope and mail it.

Host or attend a gathering at least once a week. There is no need for this to be an inconvenience or to be costly. Have the guys over for poker. Invite a few friends to watch your favorite TV show. Go out with

a co-worker for drinks after work. Host a Monday Night Football party. Whatever you choose, have fun!

Find a hobby. If you don’t already have one, get one. The choices seem endless. Gardening. Photography. Painting. Sewing. Pottery. Dance. Guitar. Motorcycles. If nothing listed here catches your eye, see what some of your friends are doing. Take a class at your local community college. Hobbies are more than just fun ways to occupy your time, they’re actually good for your mind and body.

Stay safe. This cannot be stressed enough. Do the obvious things to keep you and your home safe and secure. Lock doors and windows. Know your neighbors. Keep dark areas well-lit, especially parking areas. Have a security system installed. Keep bushes and plants trimmed in front of doors and windows. Always be aware of your surroundings.

Keep a positive attitude. How many times have you heard “Attitude is everything”? If you are finding that living alone is sucking the fun out of your life, either decide to deal with it positively or do something to change your situation. Think about the good, rather than the not-so-good. Experts tell us frequently to have some “me” time. Don’t assume because you are the only one in the house that you are having the alone time you need. Make certain to sit back and enjoy your own company.

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*Not their real names.