

THIS LIFE
CLAIRE FORDHAM

My new husband took the news that my 28-year-old man child wanted to move from London to live with us in Los Angeles very well. Colin, who's never had children of his own, said: 'Perfect. I wanted to wait a year before we had kids', and appeared neither shocked nor outraged.

I remember the man child, aged seven, stamping his feet and announcing with righteous indignation that he couldn't wait to leave home and get his own place, so he could watch as much television as he wanted and drink a six-pack of Coca-Cola if he felt like it. But it seems the single life isn't as much fun as it's cracked up to be today. It's expensive and can be lonely. Which is why, according to a recent BBC report, one in four parents has adult children living at home. In America, 50 per cent of students move back in with their parents once they graduate.

There was never any danger that I and the mothers I know would go mad with empty nest syndrome. We all had plans to keep busy and be happy in our solitude. Peace at last!

From where I'm sitting, watching my grown-up son sleeping on our couch in our small apartment, empty nest syndrome is a complete myth.

Not long ago, I stood behind a forlorn and bewildered elderly couple who were loading two supermarket trolleys with tons of shopping. Noting the many snacks and cereal boxes, I asked if their grandchildren were visiting. The husband told me in a weary croak that their daughter had left her husband and moved in with them, bringing her three young children with her. They had no idea how long it would be for.

Another couple I know of had to sell their dream home because the retirement community where they lived had a strict 'no children' policy. They inherited their daughter's two children when she was killed in a car accident. My man child is here under much happier circumstances, but there are still a few challenges: namely one bedroom and one bathroom.

During our first home-cooked dinner as housemates, I produced a comprehensive list of jobs the man child needed to do: get a Social



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Security number; learn to drive, and, please, please, change his habit of a lifetime and replace the toilet roll when it's empty. When the man child asked if his moving in with me meant that he had to give up all free will, Colin laughed heartily and said: 'Welcome to my world.'

We've told the man child we will keep him fed, watered and housed for three months while he fulfils his dream to write a book. I feel it's the least I can do as I haven't been able to set my kids up with a trust fund or buy them an apartment like many people I know.

However, I realise not having a trust fund is probably a good thing as, in California certainly, rich kids tend to have an unfortunate sense of entitlement.

Colin is thrilled finally to share our roof with someone who thinks *South Park* and *Family Guy* are hilarious – although he wasn't too happy when I mixed up their underpants and T-shirts.

I don't recall the man child being a football fan in his youth, but something has happened since he left home – he has become an ardent Arsenal fan. When he

discovered one of the cable TV channels was showing the Arsenal versus AC Milan Championship League match live, he fell to his knees and gave thanks: 'I love this country!'

The man child took one of Colin's guitars and played along with the run of play. I could tell when Arsenal was attacking because his playing became faster, louder and more passionate. I soon gave up trying to write and marvelled at my son's enthusiasm. He was so happy when Arsenal won. And I'm happy he's here. I realise it's still early days.

Now my woman child is missing her tribe and wants to move to LA as well. All we have to do is convince the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service that she, too, is an alien of extraordinary ability. And get a bigger apartment, a much bigger apartment.

So all you mothers who are afraid you'll go mad with empty nest syndrome should enjoy the peace and freedom while you can. Chances are they'll be back.