Housing prices have millennials opting to stay with their parents, changing American family dynamics in the process.

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Leaving the nest is a rite of passage that connotes the hackneyed image of a smiling 18-year-old loading up the station wagon and looking forward to a fulfilling life – and a nest of their own. Since the Great Depression, the number of young adults still living with their parents or guardians has never risen— until now. Per the Pew Research Center, more than 30% of adult millennials are living with their parents. This generation is more likely to live with the people who raised them over a spouse or partner in a space of their own, a trend that spans across every racial demographic.

In Gresham, Oregon, two such young adults continue to live in the homes they grew up in, complete with childhood stuffed animals and parents’ rooms only a hallway away. Emilia Adamson, 22, and Taylor Wood, 21, both deal with the benefits and difficulties of having to live at home due to rising housing prices not only in the Portland area, but across the state.

“It’s really rough out there right now,” Adamson said about the current housing climate. Adamson lives with her mother and earns minimum wage preparing pizzas at Papa Murphy’s. She walks two miles to and from work every day – rain or shine – because she can’t afford a car. Adamson pays a share of the rent, which is a great help to her mother, who works two jobs herself to get by. Emilia says she would love to be living with friends or going to college, but knows it’s not viable right now: “I couldn’t pay for it. My paychecks are a few hundred dollars. That’s absolutely nothing when you’re paying rent, too. As a kid, I thought a few hundred dollars was a lot, but in reality, it barely lasts a grocery trip,” she said.

Adamson did live with a significant other when she was 18, and they made it work with a combination of food stamps and pooling together what little income the two had. But when they separated, she was faced with the devastation of having to figure out where to live and how to pay for it. Her only option was to move back in with her mother, a rough transition after becoming accustomed to the freedom and space that came with living on her own.

But freedom and space are in high demand in Oregon, and millennials are intimately aware of this. According to Zillow.com, the leading online real estate marketplace, the median list price of Oregon homes is $327,990, up 12% since 2016. With Oregon ranking as the most flocked to state in America, housing analysts and housing advocacy groups are concerned that those already living here will be forced out. This includes the millennials who grew up in the state and are often faced with student loan debt, which sits at a statewide average of $27,000 per student. This, combined with stagnant wages and high rent prices, has many young adults unable to leave their parents’ homes and redefine the common stereotype that millennials are “entitled free-loaders.”

“There’s a lot of judgement from older generations,” Adamson said. “They think, ‘oh, so you live at home? Your parents are taking care of you? Oh, so we’re taking care of you?’ Like we’re helpless. And that’s frustrating because so many of us are working so hard.”

“I’m lucky to live here. I’m lucky I don’t have to worry about if my home is going to be permanent or if I’m going to be kicked out,” Emilia Adamson explains as she sits on her bed working on her art projects. At the age of 22, Emilia has been living with her mom in the Portland area for almost year after being on her own since she was 18.
Living without a car, Emilia has to walk a couple miles to work as she explains, “I’m struggling to save money, it’s rough. I’m still on food stamps, but it’s less because I’m working. I’m using my small paycheck of sometimes less than 20 hours to buy food and supplies.”

Taylor Wood is another millennial who lives with her parents because of rental prices. She goes to school full-time at Portland State University, and until recently was also working full-time at Nordstrom, juggling the two responsibilities with her eye toward a goal few millennials can fathom nowadays: buying her own home. She realizes the difficulties that young adults have to deal with now that previous generations did not.

“I always hear about how my parents worked part-time at McDonald’s when they were my age. They worked their way to pay for college and they had their own apartment and went on vacations, and they had everything just by working part-time at McDonald’s. I can’t imagine that life at all.”

However, both Wood and Adamson are profusely thankful to be in the privileged position of having a stable home to live in, food to eat and a family to help support them. For a generation that was brought up with the boom of social media and online activism, young adults today display an unprecedented awareness toward issues of gentrification, homelessness and the concept of privilege in general. As of 2015, more than 13,000 Oregonians were homeless, with 9% of those being young adults ages 18-24. For Adamson, who still depends on food stamps to get by, the thought of where she would be living if her mother’s house wasn’t an option is an alarming one, saying, “That’s actually a frightening thought. I’m so lucky that’s not the case. I’m so lucky to have this. I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t have this.”

“You can come together to have a stronger voice with other tenants,” Phan explains. Since CAT has opened, one of its biggest big victories was enhanced inspections — an action that Portland and Gresham have taken as a response to the advocacy by this alliance.

\[Image\]
An estimated 61% of Oregon graduates in 2015 took out loans to pay for school. According to a 2014 analysis by The Oregonian/OregonLive, over a ten-year period, Oregon students and their families borrowed more than $12 billion, more than double the amount from a decade earlier.

**Seen and Heard**

With so many millennials living at home, American households are changing – both statistically and psychologically. The Pew Research Center found that in 2014 a record 60.6 million people (about 19% of the United States population) now live in housing with multiple generations sharing a roof, a percentage that was last seen back in the ’50s. With multiple generations living together again – the most common arrangement being parents living their adult children – social psychologists like Susan Newman are interested in the societal effects of multigenerational living and cohabitating. Dr. Newman has done considerable research on this topic and has written a book on the subject titled, “Under One Roof Again: All Grown Up and (Re)Learning to Live Together Happily.”

She says one non-economic reason for the rise in millennials living at home is the newly democratic rearing of children, which is much less authoritarian than it has been in previous generations. She said, “[Parents are] giving their offspring more freedom and decision-making power. The old concept of ‘children are seen but not heard’ has faded.”

She added, “Children are growing up having their say and being heard. And that has allowed them to be and feel more understood and accepted by their parents – a factor in creating closeness.”

Taylor Wood’s parents are an example of this changing family dynamic: Wood looks at her mother as her best friend and her father as kind of a sibling she never had. She said, “It’s me and my parents hanging out together. Every time I mention moving out my dad is like, well, you don’t have to yet. My parents would almost rather me stay here than move out.”

Dr. Newman sees the rise of multigenerational housing as something that could be beneficial to the structures and values of families. “[They] get to know each other as people instead of parents and child. It’s an opportunity to discover and explore mutual interests which you might otherwise not have, and tighten the bond.”

As she does her makeup in her childhood bedroom, Taylor Wood feels comfort in knowing she can live with her parents while saving money and focusing on her academics, rather than searching for a place to live as housing prices continue to increase in the Portland area.

“Living here gives me freedom and sanity,” Taylor Wood, age 21, explains as she sits on her bed reflecting on her experiences of living with her parents while she attends college at Portland State University.

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