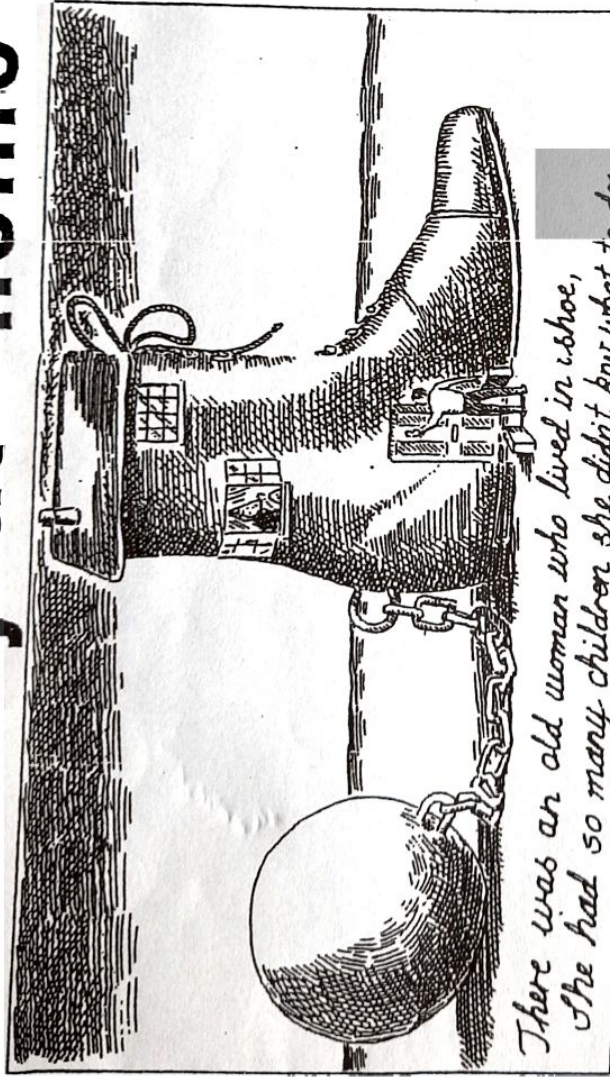


The stay-at-home kids



At 25, Alfred Henemann seems to have it made. A law student at the University of Bonn, he lives in a spacious four-room apartment in his parents' home. He comes and goes as he wishes and as a rule cooks for himself. But when he's 'hot in the mood to cook', he has a place waiting at the family table. As for the laundry, Alfred sorts his dirty clothes into piles and leaves them by the washing machine. His mother does the rest. Says Alfred: 'She doesn't mind - yet.'

Alfred Henemann is one of the hundreds of thousands of Europeans over the age of 20 who still live in their parents' home. Some do so out of sheer necessity, when they have lost a job or are unable to find one. Some seek the perpetuation of a warm and supportive parent-child relationship. Some find it is just easier and cheaper to stay in the nest. Whatever their reasons, increasing numbers of young Europeans, especially well-educated, middle-class young adults, are simply not leaving home. The pattern is beginning to worry some parents — and sociologists as well. 'Post-adolescence' has emerged as a term to describe the phenomenon, which is now rampant in France, Spain, Italy, West Germany and Sweden.

The current trend is an abrupt reversal of the pattern of the 1970s. At that time, says Alain Audrac of the French national demographic institute, 'One census after another showed young people leaving home earlier and earlier. Recently, though, it's been just the opposite.' In France, half the population between the ages of 18 and 25 still live at home; for those who have not married, the figure is three out of four. Italian studies in three cities (Padua, Bari and Matera) indicate that just over 30 percent of the 25 to 34 age group live with their parents. Statistics for West Germany are less

possible to tempt her son Alexis, 21, back to the family homestead. Every Tuesday, Alexis and his girlfriend, Maud, also 21, come for dinner and spend the night — together. The sexual revolution has changed everything in 20 years, says Christine Collange, author of a best-selling book, 'Your Mother,' on the changing relations between parents and grown children. Evelyn Sullerot, a French demographer says that the stay-at-homes are 'undergoing a semi-initiation into a socio-sexual state. It is, in fact, a second adolescence.'

Loneliness, too, is tending to push parents and their post-teen children closer together. Sophie Boissonnat, a 20-year-old Paris student, tried living in a well-equipped studio apartment, but she quickly found that she missed the lively atmosphere at home and the company of her younger twin brothers. She has now moved back. She remarks philosophically: 'I wanted to be independent, but I find it's better being independent at home.' De Solliers, the mother of three children, admits that she 'never imagined the day when the children would all be gone.' She is now considering buying a small house in an effort to tempt them back.

Some parents, though, have begun to rebel at what they see as flagrant exploitation by their own children. Collange, whose book has made her a kind of spokesperson for beleaguered parents, complains that 'children aren't even embarrassed at being completely dependent. They use the house like a hotel with all services. They treat parents as moneybags and then ignore them or just plain insult them.' Nalasha Chassagne, a French working mother with a 21-year-old daughter and a 22-year-old son at home, says: 'They take it for granted that the fridge will always be well stocked and the closet full of clean clothes. To get them to do anything around the house, you have to yell bloody murder.' A group of parents in Bremen, West Germany, has formed a self-help and counselling group called Toughlove, where they trade stories about their pampered post-teen children.

Sociologists and post-adolescents agree that shifting parental attitudes toward sex have revolutionized the living-at-home scene. Christine de Solliers, a 45-year-old divorcee in the Paris suburb of Evry, does everything

Professional observers see some even deeper dangers in the emerging situation. Today, says Ferrarotti, we have grown men with the behaviour patterns of teenagers. They are failing to mature, losing their masculinity, turning into what the French call *jeunes hommes*, old young men. Benoit Prost, who edits a magazine for French students, says today's youngsters are 'suffering from too much security and are becoming soft. One day, we may yearn back to the old fighting spirit of the 1968 rebels. At least they know how to tell the world to go to hell.'

The trend toward later and later separation between European parents and children looks like it will last for some time to come. Youth unemployment on the Continent exceeds 15 percent in every country and is not expected to fall for a number of years. More and more European young people go to universities and take more and more advanced degrees. Official student housing ranges from nonexistent to inadequate. European boys and girls marry three or four years later than they did a generation ago — if they marry at all. Those who do marry, or break off a less formal relationship, often head for 'home' when the relationship breaks up.

Much as parents may complain about the overgrown boys hanging about their houses, many of them actually relish the situation. Mothers, especially divorcees and widows, want their kids at home for company. Working mothers, ridden with guilt that they may have neglected their children in infancy, go on trying to atone for it when the children are in their 20s. On the kids' side, as well, the attractions of protracted adolescence are unlikely to diminish soon. 'Nowadays, writes Collange, 'they don't have to move out to make love. They have no problems of bed and board, no taxes and no bills and no serious points of difference with Mom and Dad.' What post-adolescent in his right mind could turn down that kind of deal?