I’ve Never Had My Own Room: An Over Sharer’s Story

Yes, I’ve never had my own room, but before a room can be addressed, what about the house, or more importantly the family in it? Why stop there? You can feel alone in an empty room; alone in a room shared. You can certainly feel alone in your family. What of the town you live in? I suppose that’s where it started for me. Can you feel alone in a town? Of course! So, what about the opposite? Can you feel like a family with a town? What about something as intimate as a roommate’s friendship, with your town?

As I said, it starts with my town. It’s a medium sized town. It’s such a cliché say that, but how do you describe a town that has bounced between small-school and big-school status in sports divisions for years? My roommate was surprised to hear that I was almost certain I’d talked to everyone in my graduating class, as well as those a year above and below. That’s just how the town was. No cliques. There were some groups of course, but the intimacy of Livonia was that everyone knew everyone to some degree. And everyone knew my family.

We lived in the village until the end of my freshman year in high school, and it made all the difference in the world. My older brother Alex and I, as soon as the school allows (4th grade) walked to and from school every day. There was a group of us that did. My parents weren’t home until late so they relied on my brother and me to be at home to make sure my little brothers got off the bus, so we had to walk straight home.

Because of this, my house became the Walker’s Foster Home. The regulars: Alex, Tyler, Future early mother, future inmate #1, future inmate #2, future college dropout/burnout, and future gap year-turned-gap-multiyear. Being just kids at the time we were all innocent and not those things yet, besides Alex and I.

A group of friends, always adding and subtracting every month or so by a member or two, would walk to my house and hang out until dinner, or after. The regulars had to do chores as if they belonged, because they did. My parents started to meet anyone and everyone that decided to come by. We always ate dinner as a family. If someone was over, they ate with us, as a family. At family dinner, we talk. We talk about everything from politics, to science, to school gossip; guests included. And so, my family grew. I think I had four friends at various points in my childhood with my mom in their phone as ‘Mom #2’. They didn’t just know my family, they became it.

My dad was involved in boy scouts, until we quit in middle school, and sports after that. My grandpa came to all of my soccer games. Soon enough, all of my soccer friends knew my grandpa. And so, my family grew.

My dad’s side of the family is small. Just my grandpa, my nana and her husband, my two aunts, and one of the aunt’s husband and two kids. They all live in the area. We gather at least once a month, all as a family (though my grandpa and nana’s husband can’t be in the same place at the same time). At least once a month is a lot, so we had friends over at those gatherings as well. My extended family dinners are my favorite things.

Slight digression: I won over my long-term girlfriend by bringing her to a family gathering before we started dating. It worked.

At my extended family dinners, there is no kids table. We all sit equally, and we all are included in the conversation. The topics are as extensive at the smaller family dinners, and we don’t baby talk the younger kids while they’re younger, we include them, for as much as they can be. Like the Kennedy’s, my Nana once said, far over representing us. After dinner, we sit for an hour or longer, before retiring to the living room or deck, just talking all that time. With no topics excluded, and no people excluded, we’ve become very close. We’ve heard all of each other’s stories, however inappropriate or ‘taboo’. When friends are present for the first time they’re usually taken aback by this, but we don’t hold back on their account. It’s a rite of passage. My closest friends I’ve retained appreciate this as much as any other family member.

This brings me to my room. I’ve always shared with my older brother, Alex. He’s older though so of course he had to go to college before me. So, you may say, you must have had an empty room. But you would be forgetting the blurred lines between family and friend, to my family. One of my friends was kicked out of his house by his mom when he turned 18. Where did he turn? We no longer lived in the house in the village. We had moved about a mile outside of town by then. We wouldn’t let something like that stop us from being the Walker’s Foster Home though. He was on occasion one of the walkers, from all those years before, but never was one of the regulars.

So, in he moved. And Brenden became my brother. He learned and talked at dinner with the rest of us. My mom badgered him about finishing his school work to graduate, like the rest of us, and he came on family vacation to the Adirondacks, like the rest of us.

It’s funny, but what I feel would be the most story worthy event in the ‘Adding Boy 5 to the Household’ narrative that was the Brenden chapter in my life, has been forgotten. I couldn’t tell you how the events unfolded that ended in him sleeping in the top bunk of my bed for nine months. It was the seamless integration of him into our family I remember.

On our family vacation to the Adirondacks, there was no question of his attendance, he really fell in love with the family dynamic we had. He told us so. It was in no way similar to his own. He (in true Davis family fashion) told us about his Dad living in Florida with his step brother he didn’t really know. How he had to get to know him in the six months he was sent to live with them; a last ditch attempt by his mom to not sever ties to the child support checks completely. How he didn’t see his dad or get to know him at all, in those six months, and his dad never made an effort to do so. He told us about his mom treating him like somebody else’s son while he was in Livonia, for most of his life. He shared with us his life, as we sat around the campfire.

Somehow, after it was all just a dynamic, we realized we weren’t getting to know people; we were collecting family members.

The friends do chores, the friends eat dinner and talk, the friends go to my parents for advice, the friends take care of the younger siblings, and now, they catch up with my parents when they come back from school.

You can imagine my shock, by now at least, when I came to RIT and that’s not how the world worked.

“You don’t know my grandpa Fred? That’s right! Let me catch you up”.

Apparently, I share intimate details with people I barely know.

What’s an intimate detail?

Who do I barely know? Why not? I want to know them! Tell me!

According to my RIT friends, that’s not how the world works. People don’t just tell you about their family, their dynamics, their missteps. It’s weird when I tell them about the time my dad got so mad he threw me up the stairs. He’s a great dad, and I have to reassure them that it was one small thing in a lifetime (mine) of him being a great dad. A detail my friends that are family now, know. My difficulties with my (ex) girlfriend shouldn’t be public I guess. No matter how much my family discussed them, often with her, openly, family forum style.

And suddenly the family member collection stopped, with my RIT friend’s inability to always be around the family. My house was no longer full of people. Not even filled with me. My mom often tells me how weird it is for my littlest brother to always be going to other people’s houses, when her whole parenting life her home was filled with children. All hers whether they, or she, wanted it so.

I had a professor (did I mention the high school teachers were included in the ‘everyone knows my, often extended, family?) last semester that I’ve grown close to, who expressed to me that I tend to hold nothing back. I was just drawing analogy to this book by using my family, sir. All I was doing was saying that the semi dark situation going on in the book was similar to this one time with my family. That’s normally private information within a family? Well, news to me. He didn’t mind, he said, just pointing it out. I was “Odd that way” as he put it.

I rather like this class. It feels like family. The deep and personal things shared in a casual way is more comfortable for me than anywhere I’ve been outside my, or my family member’s homes.

I like to tell intimate stories.

My brother had a baby. He is one year older than me, and was not planning on such an event. His girlfriend at the time, has a rare blood disease. I forget the name. So of course, a pregnancy would be hard to spot. Especially when she was on the pill, messing with her cycle.

I spotted it. We were out to lunch and she smelled someone’s cigarette and she had to run to the bathroom to puke. It was like when a TV show comments on a female character’s boobs getting bigger, it was right there in what felt like a staged moment. She was pregnant.

They never tested for it because “no, her [blood disease I don’t remember] makes her nauseas sometimes and sensitive to stuff like that”.

He broke up with her because they got to that point. You know the point. It’s a ‘feel’ point but is always around two years in. It’s the “I’ll probably commit the rest of my life to this person, or break it off now” point. He decided that he couldn’t see himself with her in his life forever. Ha.

Five months later I get a text while I’m in physics. It’s a picture of her holding a newborn baby.

“Who’s baby is that?” “It has to be Alex’s they’ve only been broken up five months” “Where did he get this picture? Social media, or is he there, or did she send it to him?”

It was a group text to my brothers and I. I texted him separately with the words: Yo, what?

He said he was cleaning up in the morning after a party at his apartment, after going to his 8am class. His apartment was trashed. He got a call from Anna’s mom. “Anna is in the hospital” (Big pause because she’s horrible at giving news in which Alex’s mind raced from her blood disease to worse), “She’s in labor. You can come and be here for the birth or not. It’s up to you.” He paced the apartment for a few minutes fighting the urge to pass out. He called my mom, who luckily works on campus, to drive him there.

No questions. Anna’s mom sent the directions via text. They skipped the (un?)pleasantries of recently broken up young adults. They talked names. No boy’s names came to mind, but she wanted a girl to be named after her late Aunt Karen. It was a baby girl, perfect. Alex cut the cord, cried, and bathed the baby. A 21-year-old father that had just decided he didn’t want to have his life set in stone.

She had gone to the hospital because she thought she had appendicitis. They took an ultrasound to see how inflamed it was. They broke the news. She didn’t believe them. It didn’t matter.

“Those appendixes can be a bitch” is all I could respond to Alex’s story response. I had a niece. I helped spread the word to the rest of the family. Everyone ignored all questions of what this might mean for Alex and Anna, Alex, Anna, the baby, the 46-year-old grandparents, we were all just happy.

Alex moved home with the baby, so my parents could help with the burden. Suddenly, my mom had that full house she grew to love, again.

She walked for the first time this past weekend, the weekend of the 25th and 26th of March 2017. She says “Hi” and a few other small words. She can do the ASL for ‘more’, that she’s all done with something, and she can blow kisses. Nobody was ever upset with the situation, and that’s beautiful.

The story of Karen wasn’t a private thing either. As a family, we told everyone. That exact story, or whatever length we could manage at any given time. To others it was intimate, to us it was just another joyous occasion. I say intimate, not because having a baby is intimate, but because we told everyone every unpleasant detail that made the story what it was.

That’s who we are, and I love it.