GEORGE JONES AND HIS DAUGHTER AMANDA, WHO IS STARTING A CAREER IN TEACHING, MAY NOT HAVE IMAGINED THEY'D BE LIVING UNDER THE SAME ROOF AGAIN NOW, BUT ARE APPRECIATING FINDING A NEW, CLOSER RELATIONSHIP AS ADULTS.

SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER...

But what do you do when your adult child returns to the nest?

BY LEE ANN WATERMAN

Out of school and working to build a career. Underemployed and unable to afford rent. In need of a soft place to land after loss of work or a relationship or a struggle with addiction or mental illness.

These are some of the common reasons parents are seeing more and more of their 20-somethings returning home to the nest.

Statistics Canada's 2011 census found just over 42 per cent of adults aged 20 to 29 live with their parents. In 1991, that number was 32 per cent; in 1981, it was 27 per cent.

Young adults, the census report states, may live with their parents as a source of emotional or financial support. Reasons for staying or returning home include not being part of a couple, cultural preferences, cost of housing, pursuit of higher education or difficulty finding employment.

Toronto filmmaker Maureen Judge explored the topic of boomerang kids in the 2002 documentary *In My Parents' Basement* and is currently working on another film on the topic, *My Millennial Life*.

Her 24-year-old son is back living at home while he works two part-time jobs, with the goal of a career in the music industry.

She has observed some of the downsides of adult children living with their parents.

The "failure to launch" can lead to low-self esteem, bitterness or anger "at the world" and even depression for adult children. It can also cause some resentment among parents who may feel they are putting their own plans—to retire or downsize, for example—on hold for their kids.

"It's hard to accept that your 25-year-old isn't contributing to the household financially," Ms Judge says.

JIM CRAIGMYLE PHOTOGRAPH

But, she says, there are also pluses.

For the children, it can provide a sense of emotional and financial security at a stressful time in their lives.

"Security was a big one that's a positive to me," Ms Judge says. "Having a place where you know you can go and be safe—and I mean mentally and physically safe."

For parents, there is satisfaction in providing that safe landing and in having a chance to build a deeper relationship with their children—something Ms Judge found with her son.

"I really enjoy his company as an adult," Ms Judge says. "My husband and I both learn a lot from him and I think he's learned from us. So there's that mutual giving."

The millennials, she says, see living with their parents as acceptable, commonplace.

"They are not unhappy or happy," she says. "It's just a fact."

Amanda Jones, 24 and living with her dad in Holland Landing, says she is hardly alone in her circle of friends. In fact, she can only name one who has left the nest.

For Ms Jones, who lived away from her parents for five years while attending school to become a teacher, moving back home made sense for her long-term goals.

After university, she moved to Waterloo to live with her boyfriend, a graduate student. She volunteered during the day and worked as a tutor in the evenings. When she landed a spot as a supply teacher with the school board in York Region, where she and her partner hope to settle, she knew she had to take it.

Moving in with her dad (and her sister and her boyfriend) meant she could take the job and start saving for her future. When her boyfriend graduates this year, he will join her. Their end goal is to save enough money for a wedding and a down payment on a house by summer 2016.

"Financially, it's amazing," she says. "I'm really lucky. Not many people have it as good as I do."

She gives her dad $50 a month—an amount she admits is more of an acknowledgement of his support than a real contribution to household costs such as utilities and food. (She pays for her car and other personal expenses.)

The downside, Ms Jones says, is a lack of her own space in a pretty full house.

"I spend a lot of time in my room," she says. "It's hard going from having a whole house to having a room—at least it feels that way some times."

Ms Jones doesn't recall discussing her plans in detail with her father before moving in. She just assumed he'd be okay with it.

"Guess what, I got a job in York Region and I'm moving into my old bedroom," is how her dad recalls the conversation. But, he is quick to add, he was okay with it.

"Amanda is driven and motivated," George Jones says with obvious pride. "She knows her path and if there is any way as a parent I can help her in that, I will."

Neither felt the need to establish ground rules beforehand—largely because of Ms Jones' personality (her dad describes her as responsible and easy-going) and because she had a plan and a timeframe for getting out on her own.

Flexibility and general consideration for one another, Mr. Jones says, is key to harmony in the household.

He warns parents in this situation to expect that your kids will have changed—matured and developed their own opinions and habits. But getting to know the new them can be enjoyable.

Both father and daughter have appreciated finding a new, closer relationship as adults.

"I have more insight into what's happening in his life and he knows more about what's happening in my life," Ms Jones says. "We talk more."

Communication and respect

When parents and adult children find themselves living under the same roof, they can revert to old patterns, says psychologist and author Sara Dimmerman. For children, this might mean leaving dishes in the sink or sleeping in until noon. For parents, it could be attempting to enforce childhood rules or offering unwanted advice.

What families need to do is have an honest conversation, Ms Dimmerman says. "We are all adults. How do we make the best living arrangements possible? How do we work as a team to make this work?"

Making it work, she says, depends on respect for one another and a shared understanding of what is appropriate, considerate behaviour when you're living with other adults. Establishing expectations at the outset and revisiting them as needed can make for happy co-habitation, she says.

These expectations will be different for each family, but could include:

• Contributing to household expenses and chores: Will your child pay rent? Cover their communication and transportation expenses? Make dinner once a week? Cut the grass?

• Communicating around schedules: Do you expect a call or text when your child won't be home for dinner? Will a child staying out until the wee hours on a weeknight disturb your sleep? What's a reasonable time to expect them home?

• Socializing: Can your child's boyfriend/girlfriend spend the night? Can they invite friends over? Do you want them to clear the room the night of your regular book club meeting ?

• End game: What does your child want to achieve before they venture out on their own? Completed post-secondary education and full-time work? Employment that can cover their living expenses? Money saved for a down payment on a condo? What steps are they taking to get there?