**Life after college for many means returning home**

**Recent grads continue to move back in with Mom and Dad**

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Katie Blaha leaves her job in Hunt Valley at 5 p.m. every day to return to a house in Catonsville she shares with roommates who are a good bit older than she is and ask a lot of personal questions.

Even though she's got solid employment and has weathered the worst of the economic downturn, Blaha, like so many in her generation, is back living with her parents.

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"I want to save money, so I'm not just getting by," said the 22-year-old who graduated from Washington College in 2009, and spent nearly a year working internships — paid and unpaid — before she could put her degree to use in a marketing firm.

But even with what appears to be a job that could be the start of a career, Blaha, like many others who entered the real world as the economy sank, is in no rush to leave the comforts of the suburban home where she grew up.

"What I didn't expect was for me to be here this long," she said, quickly adding, "I'm very grateful that I can save, and many don't have that luxury."

A survey of last year's college graduation class showed that 80 percent moved back home after getting their diplomas, up significantly from the 63 percent in 2006. The CollegeGrad.com survey of 2,000 young people showed that seven in 10 said they would live at home until they found a job.

Now, as another class of graduates — the 2010s — move into the job market, "the economy is still rough. … a good number are still searching" from the class of 2009, said Guy Davis, director of the career center at Towson University. He said only about 20 percent had jobs lined up at graduation, with "a fair number" looking at graduate school.

The 14.7 percent unemployment rate for those ages 20 to 24 remains double what it was in 2007, recent Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show, and is 50 percent higher than that of the overall population.

During recessions, there is "a less likelihood of household formation," said Gary Dean Painter, a professor of real estate economics and planning at the University of Southern California. Research shows many people chose to stay at home or double-up with roommates, he said.

**Friends in the same position**

Gary Burtless, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said unemployment has hit younger adults harder, which could have lasting effects. "There will be a scarring affect that will persist," he said, saying that the struggle those graduates faced may keep them in safe jobs and less likely to take risks and that the "struggle to get a decent job means that you live at home with your parents."

Greer Dorsey, 24, returned to her mother's house in Pikesville after she graduated from Virginia's Hampton University in 2008 with a degree in psychology. She has been working as an administrative assistant at the Johns Hopkins University, but she said the search to get that position took longer than she expected.

Dorsey, like, Blaha, said she did not intend to live at home for more than a few months, but living with her mother made job searching less stressful. But even with a job that uses some of her skills and training, she said, "I'm not sure what I want to do."

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She said she plans to live at home for another year to save money, so she can have a buffer of 6 months' rent, "to be comfortable to know I don't have to scrape together."

While she said she doesn't feel any stigma about returning home — "My college friends are still in the same position," she said — she acknowledges that she "can't live at home forever."

Moving back home gives graduates breathing room as they hunt for jobs, and allows them to return to a lifestyle more comfortable than they could enjoy on their own.

Matt Oster, a December 2008 University of Maryland, College Park graduate, returned home to save money, but he admitted his parents' house in Cockeysville is much nicer than any place he could afford to rent. He pays no rent and gets free meals.

"It's actually really nice to come home to a nice house with a lot of the comforts that I might not have if I were on my own," he said.

**The talk among mothers**

Oster, an analyst for AOL, said he moved home after college to help pay for law school at Cornell University in the fall. He said he had planned to go last year, but deferred because of the slow economy and the elimination of many of the high-paying law firm jobs. Living at home, he said he expects to save $20,000 to use toward graduate school.

But Oster said living at home is not his first choice. Most of his friends are in Baltimore, where he spends many nights. "I've been a big couch moocher," he said.

And he said that the shock of life after college might have been more severe than if he had moved out. "It was hard at first," going from life as an undergraduate in College Park where friends were within walking distance, to life in suburban Baltimore County with a morning commute down the Jones Falls Expressway.

But Oster said his parents have not reverted to treating him like a high-schooler. The 24-year-old said his parents let him come and go as he pleases and that they are "happy" to have him home.

Blaha agreed it has been a challenge to adapt to the postgrad world. She said returning to being under her parents' roof and their rules, with them "wanting to know where I am every second," has been an adjustment. Her mother, Patricia Blaha, responded that "It's not that I want to know where she is all the time, but in this day in age, it's a safety thing."

The predicament has become the talk of motherly cliques.

"This is the topic of conversation when I'm with my girlfriends or when we're at a party" said Patricia Blaha. "One mom will tell you that her daughter is living at home. Another mom will tell you her son was living on his own but just moved home. It's what we talk about."