

Tight economy has young adults scrambling to find

HOMES

By CARA NISSMAN

If you've spent the last month fruitlessly searching for someone to share an apartment with and you've been out of college or working for years, join the houseless and harried club. More people in their mid-20s to mid-30s than ever before are desperately seeking roommates in the Boston area.

"I have a lot of friends around my age who are in similar situations," said Peter Nersesian, 30, of Allston who has been searching for a place in Inman Square for about a month. "You really can't start living alone in these places unless you're paying \$1,000, which is something I can't do right now."

Although the residential vacancy rate has risen over the last three years to 5-7 percent and rents have reduced, it's still tough for singles to shoulder the financial burden alone, according to the Greater Boston Real Estate Board. The fact that many young people move away after *graduating college* leaves lots of folks who decide to stay in the area without shelter companions. Even after Sept. 1, many are still looking to fill empty rooms in their apartments.

"My old roommate did consulting and was just transferred to New York," said Jeremy Kintigh, 26, of Waltham. "It was so last-minute."

"I like a cleanish house but not sterile... I'll have a beer with you, though sometimes just want to hole up on my own. I don't want to live with roommates I just tolerate or co-exist with. I would like to be friends."

— Peter Nersesian, 30, of Allston in an ad on Craigslist

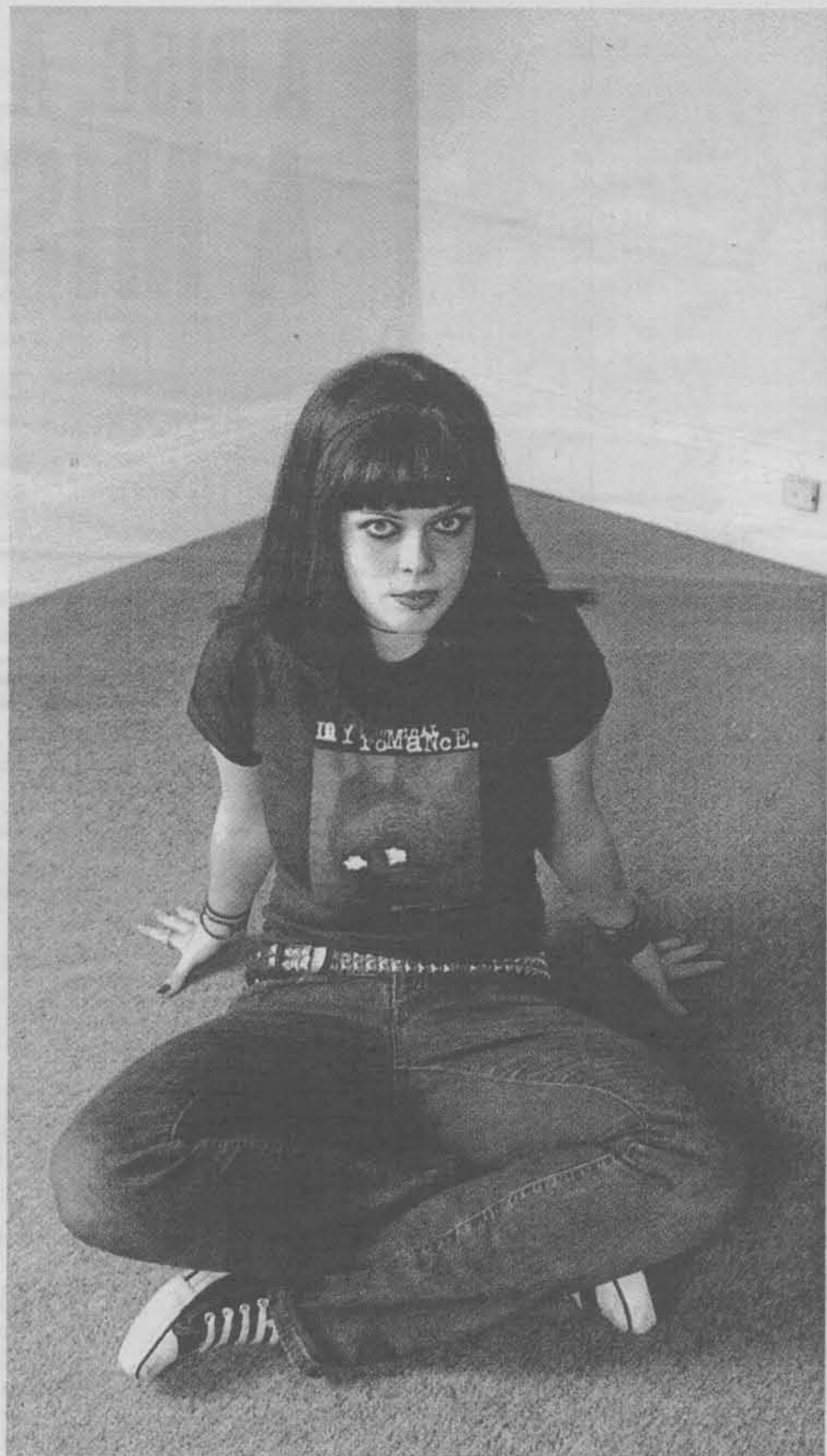
Fortunately, there are countless services available to satisfy this demand for co-dwellers.

Newspapers, Web sites and services, including Boston-based RoommateConnection.com and Brookline-based Matching Roommates (www.matchingroommates.com)

Room rules

The infamous Puck of MTV's "Real World" may not have been responsive, but most new roommates expect to discuss some ground rules on arrival. Here are the top three:

- Find out everyone's morning and evening schedules so you won't have a fracas over the coffee pot or hear racket while you're trying to sleep.
- Discuss trash disposal and cleaning the bathroom and common rooms.
- Talk about respecting each other's property. Will you share the milk and toilet paper? Are you going to take each other's phone messages? Can you share plates and silverware?



and roommates

ARK

Things that make you go ugh!

Local young adults have more than a few horror stories, tales of slovenly roommates and the seemingly psycho.

■ One Allston woman said her roomie left dishes in the sink to stink for more than a week. The miffed woman finally tossed them out. The offensive roommate didn't notice.

■ A Swampscott woman received a listing about a room through which her roommate would have to traipse to get into the apartment. She chose not to pursue it.

■ Apparently uncomfortable with calm confrontation, the former female roommate of an Allston man would often scream at him about taking out the trash even when it wasn't his turn.

■ A weird woman who checked out a Waltham man's digs never answered his phone messages, then months later left an incoherent message about not wanting to live with him.

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ROOMMATE WANTED

LOOKING FOR single female, non-smoker, non-drinker, vegan, no pets, no books, with own furniture for 6-room apt., must be willing to do all housework involving water. Occasional cat-sitting for Mimi, Fitzl, Mr. Ooh, Roger, Muffin and Foo-tat. Dulcimer player with night job preferred.

APT. WANTED

HIRSUTE BACHELOR looking to share someone's space: I'm recently separated with weekend custody of five children, willing to do odd jobs in exchange for a (big) break on the rent. Have medical condition requiring humid atmosphere and dark environment. Starting a band, would need to rehearse at home.

and national ones, including ApartmentsUSA.com, offer plenty of ads for a price. But only San Francisco-based Craigslist (www.craigslist.org) provides an extremely extensive list for free.

"Most Web sites say pay and register and promise you to find a roommate," said Monika, 36, of Cambridge, who refused to share her last name in case a prospective roomie reads this story. "I don't want to get into that. Craigslist works fine."

"I am very respectful of other people's property and considerate. I won't have parties, but

would have a friend or two over fairly regularly. Something with even a little outdoor space (deck, garden, etc.) would be super!"

— Jon Kniss, 30, of the South End in an ad on Craigslist

So what can young professionals say in their ads that might get a hit? Kintigh said specificity rules his roost.

"The hardest part is the limited information you get from people," he said. "Most people are really vague about who they are and what they're looking for."

Kintigh said he also is a stickler for spelling and grammar.



STAFF PHOTO ALYSSA CWANGER

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT ONE: Peter Nersesian, 30, carries boxes out of his Allston apartment. Nersesian finds the roommate-screening process similar to dating.

"It's almost like looking at resumes," he said. "Using good punctuation shows that you put time and effort into it."

Nersesian likened the process to dating. "The more open you are, the more common ground you'll find," he said. "You should mention the good things about yourself. But don't be dishonest."

Even if you are honest, that doesn't mean your personality will come through well in just a few sentences.

"I don't know if you can necessarily know much about a person before moving in with them," said Jon Kniss, 30, of the South End. "It almost doesn't matter what you put in an ad."

"I need to find someone by tonight or I am out of luck. Help me!"

— Sarah Mandell, 20, of Boston in an ad on Craigslist

Professionals also are finding themselves competing with college kids seeking off-campus pads as the school year begins.

"It's crazy," said Monika. "This is the worst season to look for a place."

But college students also are finding it tough to secure shelter.

"I'm wicked stressed," said Sarah Man-

Sweet rejection

Many people avoid calling back unsavory prospective roommates. But for those who answer the phone and have to offer an awkward excuse to the character on the other end, keep this advice in mind:

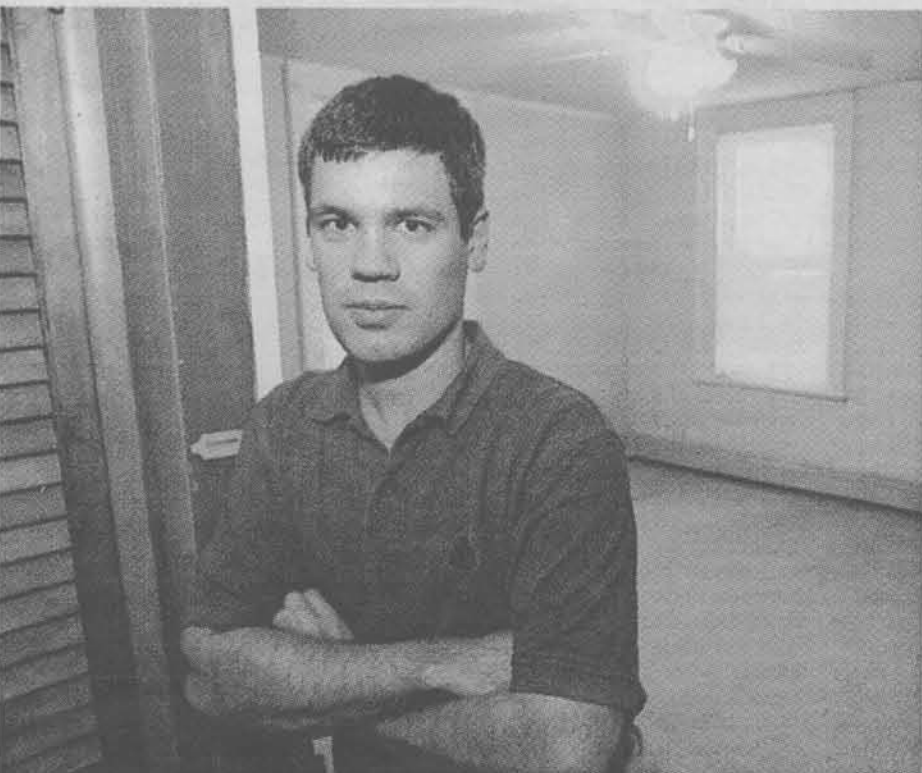
■ "You can only do so much for someone in that situation," said Peter Nersesian. "You can just apologize and say, 'I'm still looking.'"

■ "I say, 'I found someone else who wanted to take the place right away,'" said Sarah Mandell.

■ You can say the person who had planned to leave the room changed his or her mind so it's no longer available.

■ If you're brave, you can let the person know why they're not a good fit, said Nersesian.

— CARA NISSMAN



HELP WANTED: Jeremy Kintigh, 26, of Waltham likens browsing roommate ads to 'looking at resumes.' He says he's a stickler for grammar and spelling.