Aging Lifestyles: Sending adult children on their way

by Joe_Volz

Carol and Bert Breithofer thought they had finally found a way to gently push their reluctant 20-something son out of the nest.

They moved.

Bert, who was living in Washington, got a new job in Philadelphia. But their son, Sam, a University of Maryland graduate who moved back home shortly after graduation, announced that, guess what, he was moving to Philly so he could continue to live with beloved Mom and Dad.

In fact, about one-quarter of children between 18 and 34 are still living with their parents, according to the census. The Breithofers had joined a growing club of parents who continue to support their well-educated children even after the kids are supposed to find work and leave home. In Sam's case, he had found a job; however, it wasn't enough to live in the style he was accustomed to. He couldn't afford much of an apartment. So his love of his parents didn't seem to be the only thing motivating him. If he had asked his parents for a few hundred a month to subsidize his apartment, they would have said no. Sam should support himself. But what mother or father can say no to a kid who loves his parents so much he doesn't want to leave them? That takes some tough love.

A lot of parents, frankly, don't want to be that tough, particularly toward a model son. What smart kid can resist the thought of his parents paying the bills, doing the cooking or cleaning up his the room. That is a deal too good to give up. Well, these parents may be hurting their son more than they are helping him. No matter how hard it is, parents need to let go. College graduation day may be a bit late, but better late than never.

In the Breithofers' case, Mom has been, well, a control freak. She has done an excellent job of doing too much for her kids. In the case of Sam's older brother, Fred, she had cleaned and furnished his apartments at college and, afterward, examined his girlfriends with a fine-tooth comb. She dominated his life, making Fred afraid to live without her.

Just the other day, about to start a job as a teacher in a distant city, Fred said he couldn't do it. He wanted to come home, so Mom got tough. She said he couldn't drop out of his job and return home. Instead, she went to visit him and did his lesson plan for the first week. And then she is surprised that he has trouble functioning on his own.

Lisa Smith of Investopedia.com, a Forbes company, has studied the issue. She gives some suggestions: Get

the kids to chip in. Pay some rent, cut the grass or pay for gas if they use the car. And parents shouldn't open up the wallet every time their children plead poverty.

If none of these options works, there is always the solution that my friend, Earl, employed. He and his wife downsized into a one-bedroom apartment. There was just no room for junior. That worked.

E-mail Joe Volz at volzjoe2003@yahoo.com, or write to 2528 Five Shillings Road, Frederick, MD 21701

Â© Copley News Service

Aging Lifestyles: Sending adult children on their way by Joe_Volz