

## Why I traded my pots and pans for a better social life

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The author pares down her belongings before moving into a 334-square-foot apartment.

*Photo by: Jessica Guzik*

Two weeks ago I was nostalgically cradling pots and pans on my kitchen floor. I didn't want to give them up — they never quit on me, not during any of the dinner parties I hosted in my one-bedroom apartment. But the dinner parties were becoming more rare. I had the option to sacrifice my kitchen stuff — plus a dozen books, two lamps and a sofa — for a more exciting social life, and I decided to exercise it.

I gave up my bright, airy, one-bedroom apartment in D.C.'s Cleveland Park neighborhood to move into WeLive, a co-living community in Crystal City, Va., in the same building as a WeWork co-working space. My rent is about the same but my living experience is drastically different. WeLive encourages — and designs around — resident interaction. Think dorms or retirement homes, but for people who are neither in college

nor retired. WeLive apartments, like most dorms and retirement homes, come fully furnished and with limited storage space. I also have access to common spaces scattered throughout the building, such as yoga studios, dining areas, lounge rooms and a garden.

This move posed a challenge for me, a 30-something single woman who's spent a decade amassing adult furniture. Through my 20s, I figured I would combine kitchen resources with a partner someday, not throw them all away for a communal kitchen. (Every WeLive resident is provided with a private bathroom, a bed, a sofa — sometimes combined as a convertible Murphy bed — a kitchenette and a flat-screen TV.)

In preparation for my move, I had to reduce about 20 boxes of belongings to five. First I shoved my big-ticket items into the arms of Craigslist strangers and then I picked my way through a wedding registry's worth of ramekins, chef's knives and an ice cream maker, wondering what to keep. Of all the decisions related to my move, the ones made on my kitchen floor were the hardest.

I had purchased nearly every spoon and spatula with one scene in mind: a casual dinner party among friends. When I first held my giant Dutch oven, I imagined preparing boeuf bourguignon for a dozen close friends. When I ran my hands over the smooth contours of my mortar and pestle, I dreamed of using it to prepare the kind of rustic guacamole that draws a crowd. Whatever cookware I acquired in the past 10 years was for the purpose of tempting my peers to step away from their lonely microwave dinners and join my table.

This was easy in my 20s, when microwave dinners were my main competition. Most of my peers and I were socially untethered after 5 p.m. Group texts about impromptu dinner parties were common. My mini food-processor, my wok, my paring knife — they all had to be within reach for a last-minute stir-fry for five. But then we got busy. A sense of urgency began driving our work, family and dating lives. Casual gatherings — as easy to organize as to cancel — were, for that reason, the first to get canceled. The Dutch oven gathered dust, and I ate lonely microwave dinners more than I'd like to

admit.

My social life didn't dwindle to a slow drip of human interaction; it relocated. Rather than catching up with each other on a friend's futon, my friends and I migrated to buzzy pop-up restaurants. Instead of bumping into guys at house parties, I started seeking out dates at Derek Brown concept bars. Whatever I lost in homegrown meet-ups I gained in fun new venues for maintaining and making new friendships. However, it was because of these fun new venues in which to socialize that my home became less of one.

When you're single and live alone in your 30s, this is what you miss: casual, drop-in social interactions. It was for those interactions that I hosted breezy dinner parties, and it was for those dinner parties that I purchased a dozen dessert plates. Now I've sold the dessert plates and have moved to WeLive on the bet that social interaction is more a product of where you live than what you cook.

Last weekend, I ate my first meal in WeLive's communal kitchen. Before moving in, I had imagined I would be poking around cabinets for a colander and explaining my dish to curious neighbors. But before that could happen, I was invited to a barbecue in the garden. The barbecue turned into a card game, the card game turned into movie night, and I tumbled into my actual first meal in WeLive's communal kitchen: Papa John's pizza, straight out of the box, with a dozen new neighbors.

WeLive won't be the end of my microwave meals — a microwave is all I have to cook with without leaving my 334-square foot apartment — but it will change my social life. I can no longer host a private dinner party for six: I have neither the kitchen gadgets nor the space to do so. But I no longer *need* to host a dinner party for six if what I'm after is a sense of belonging and the ambient hum of people chatting. I can find that in the garden, in the lounge, in the yoga studio, in the library, and, of course, in the communal kitchen.<

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