



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: ANNA + MATEO; CHRISTOPHER DAVILA; SHAWNA HUFF

◀ Lara Covington and George Sofis married this fall in the Shenandoah Valley but live in different towns.

▼ Mandi Kreitel and Cody Kreitel live more than 300 miles apart.



can't move until her youngest is out of school. They hope they can live together once she moves to Anchorage but are open to living apart until Mr. Kreitel's children are also out of the house, if that's what is best. Even if they lived in the same city, she says, she thinks it would be better to have two separate houses despite two sets of utility, tax and other bills.

"Trying to fully blend families can be hard," she says, especially when parents have different parenting styles. "I'm definitely a disciplinarian. He's definitely more fun," she says.

Lara Covington, the Virginia newlywed, canceled her first date with Dr. Sofis because he lived an hour away and she thought it would be better to meet someone local.

Several months passed. She texted. He was dating someone else. Eventually they started dating, meeting midway at first and then closer to his house because her job is more flexible than his. Their first date was Oct. 30, 2018. By spring 2019, they had met each other's kids.

"It was pretty obvious that this relationship was going to be something, but it was hard to figure out how it was going to work," says Ms. Covington, who began researching online. She came across Ms. Hyman's Apartners Facebook page and realized other people get married and don't live together.

"There's no rulebook that says you have to live with your spouse," she says. "I don't need a man in my life to give me money and help raise the kids. They have a good father. What I need is someone to love me. I don't need him to live with me to get that."

She presented the idea to her partner and they wed in October, in her parents' backyard, surrounded by their six children.

Audrey, her eighth-grader, loves being part of a bigger family. Yet, she is glad she can remain in her own home and school and have her mom at times to herself. "I love having alone time with her," she says.

Dr. Sofis said living apart together made immediate sense to him, both for the children and the two of them. "Lara is a very independent woman," he says. "She likes her own space. I'm the same way."

The Secret to These Happy Marriages? Living Apart

By CLARE ANSBERRY

Lara Covington and George Sofis married this fall in a small backyard ceremony in the Shenandoah Valley and honeymooned in Oregon. Then they returned to their respective homes—one in McLean, Va., and the other about 50 miles away in Stafford.

The newlyweds expect to live apart for the next eight years until their youngest children are out of high school.

"We love the idea of eventually living together. But this is working with our different lives, careers and kids," says Ms. Covington, 43, a lawyer with two children from a previous marriage, and one dog. Dr. Sofis, 48, a radiologist, has four children and two dogs.

Couples like Lara and George represent one of the many ways that marriages are changing. Many couples who live apart have been married before and don't want to uproot their children from homes, schools and friends, or can't because of joint-custody arrangements. Some have hit rocky patches in their relationship and need space, but don't want to divorce. Living apart gives them greater flexibility and autonomy, and in many cases, helps draw them closer.

The number of married people living apart, which includes mili-

tary couples, is still small but rose 4.8% in the last decade to 3.6 million, according to figures from the Census Bureau.

"There's no longer a single script for how we do marriage," says Susan Brown, sociologist and co-director of the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio. "We get married for our own personal happiness and fulfillment, and people define that in various ways."

Living apart as a married couple is part of a longer trend of marriage becoming more individualized, she says. In a 2020 study, she and colleagues found that the share of newly married couples living apart, but not because of discord, more than doubled to 13% in 2018 from 6% in 1980.

When Rebecca Huff and her husband, Shawne Huff, hit a rocky patch in their 16-year marriage in 2019, they didn't want to divorce. Instead, they sold their house and moved into an apartment building. She lived on the third floor with their daughter and he lived on the second floor with their son.

"I loved living separately," says Ms. Huff, who is 50 and writes a blog called ThatOrganic Mom. "It gave me a little more space to be myself." Mr. Huff, who is 54 and in management at an auto dealership, missed the smells of dinner cooking and sounds of family life, but val-

▶ Rebecca Huff and husband Shawne Huff at the separate apartments they moved into in 2019.

ued living apart. It "helped me learn a lot and I'm still learning," he says.

The Huffs moved into a house together earlier this year, keeping separate bedrooms to continue giving each other separate space. After breakfast and working outside together, Ms. Huff says she will tell her husband and children that she is spending the afternoon in her room, where she has a couch and desk and sauna.

Filmmaker Sharon Hyman started a Facebook group in 2015 called Apartners for committed couples living apart, an arrangement academics often call "living apart together." Many of the 2,400 members are married and in the 35 to 54 age group. Her purpose, she says, wasn't to convince couples to live apart but to show options.

"People have always felt there was only one way to do relationships," says Ms. Hyman, of Montreal.



She has been with her partner for 23 years, but they have never lived together.

Living apart is expensive, and not everyone can afford two households, but some couples say it is worth the expense especially when kids are involved.

Mandi Kreitel and Cody Kreitel, both 38 and both with children from previous marriages, live 360 miles apart in Alaska. They married in June and see each other once a week, either driving or catching a one-hour flight. "I live seven minutes from the airport," says Ms. Kreitel, a dental hygienist in Fairbanks. Mr. Kreitel is a geotechnical engineer in Anchorage.

They share custody with their ex-spouses, so Ms. Kreitel says she

Millennials Are Writing Wills Amid Covid Fears

By VERONICA DAGHER

Millennials are finally embracing one of the cornerstones of adulthood by writing their wills.

Lawyers and financial advisers are hearing more frequently from younger people who want to get their affairs in order should they die unexpectedly. Thirty-two percent of the adults under 35 who wrote a will said it was because of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a 2020 survey by online legal documents company LegalZoom. Caring.com, a senior-care referral service, said about 27% of 18- to 34-year-olds had a will in 2021, compared with 18% in 2019.

The largest factor driving the increase in millennials' will writing is continued uncertainty over whether they or their family will get sick. Also driving interest, say lawyers and financial advisers, are events millennials haven't experienced before, such as sharply rising inflation.

The general unease is prompting some to write wills and healthcare proxies to feel more in control. Estate-planning lawyers say they are busier than ever.

"Millennials are saying, 'let me plan now as I'm not going to live

forever,'" said Avi Kestenbaum, a partner at Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone LLP.

Mr. Kestenbaum said millennial clients, especially ones with young children, are particularly concerned now about variants. He saw an uptick during the Delta wave and could see another push if Omicron sparks a new wave of infections.

Before the pandemic, the need to create a will and other important documents such as healthcare proxies, largely wasn't on the mind of Ryan Bayonnet and his wife, Bricey.

Mr. Bayonnet, a 29-year-old investment adviser, knew the importance of having these documents but it didn't feel pressing as the couple had no children, he said. Talking about their death wasn't exactly date-night conversation, either.

But when Covid-19 hit, the Akron, Ohio, couple was concerned, as Mrs. Bayonnet planned to become an emergency-room physician. Mrs. Bayonnet, now 28 and a fourth-year medical student, knew of people in her profession who were getting sick. The couple wrote wills in September.

"It was a game-changer when my wife asked me if I'd want to be

put on a ventilator if I needed one," Mr. Bayonnet said.

Thirty-five percent of 18- to 34-year-olds were motivated by Covid-19 to engage in the estate-planning process, compared with 23% of 35- to 54-year-olds and 16% of those 55 and older, according to a survey by

Caring.com. While older clients generally continued to keep lawyers busy, some have stayed out of attorneys' offices because of heightened health concerns, say lawyers.

Writing a will seemed labor-intensive and costly, so Kimberly Onsager kept putting it off. The event manager in Boston didn't have time to research what to include and didn't want to be taken advantage of by an attorney, she said.

Yet, Ms. Onsager, 38, felt vulnerable without a will. She is single and her parents live in Wisconsin. She wanted to make sure her end-of-life wishes would be followed if she were to get sick with Covid-19.

"I wanted to be safer than sorry," she said. In June, she created her will in roughly an hour for about \$100 with online will-creation company Gentreo.

The cost of writing a will varies widely. Do-it-yourself online options are generally cheaper than hiring an attorney. Someone can create a will and healthcare directive online for \$89 with legal-information publisher Nolo if they have a simple estate and don't want additional documents. LegalZoom offers a last will and testament for \$89.



Covid-19 uncertainties led Ryan and Bricey Bayonnet to write their wills.

Just under half of Americans, 46%, have a will, with people 65 and older mostly likely to have one, according to a May survey by Gallup. The overall percentage of Ameri-

ANDREW SPEAR FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL