

## Who's Afraid of the Nightmare Housemate?

*By Julie André*

"Hell is other people," French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre famously observed. If true, why would anybody try to share their home and live in close quarters with another (unrelated) human soul?

Talk about a nightmare! Better to stick with the in-house poltergeist, a known quantity who may not pay rent or help around the house in any way, but who does know to make himself scarce and vanish during the day.

Sartre later shed light on his observation: other people are hell only if our relationships with them are bad. Since research shows that social isolation leads to poorer health outcomes and quality of life, the solution is simple: share your life or personal space only with people who enchant you!

Initiating new relationships may seem daunting as we age, if not outright scary. But there's good news, a magic potion to ensure those new connections are positive in a shared housing situation. To help find a compatible housemate and a mutually beneficial homesharing arrangement, a few time-tested ingredients will do (and I'm not talking about eye of newt).

The first comes from a centuries-old Greek recipe: "Know thyself." This silver bullet will eliminate any creepy characters that don't fit your lifestyle and expectations. Ask yourself: What habits spook me to the point that I cannot live with them? Common ones are smoking, someone else's pet, cleanliness standards, or, for an early riser or light sleeper, the noises of a night owl firing up a cauldron for a midnight snack.

Follow up with: What aspects of life at home do I treasure and cannot do without? Some examples are music or the news playing in common areas, morning coffee or tea with no interruptions, or letting your pet bat fly freely around the house.

This inventory of can't-haves and must-haves is an essential trick to help identify your requirements for a future housemate. Choosing anyone not meeting the criteria will jinx the prospects for a comfortable, harmonious partnership.

With firmly established boundaries, it's time to pull out the crystal ball and search for the most appropriate housemate or housing situation. Once you have a solid prospect, additional selection strategies include an interview (vampires need not apply), and obtaining at least three personal references you can call with questions on personality and habits.

This probably feels a bit involved, because it is: there's no magic wand to connect safely with your next housemate. But following these steps will help ensure that you are happy with your ultimate choice and can avoid the dreaded nightmare housemate.

If you'd rather not go it alone, use Northcoast Homeshare as your scarecrow. Our local program, hosted by Area 1 Agency on Aging and open to all ages, offers a free housemate matching service that supports all parties, with a few more safeguards built into the process (background check, trial period, etc.), to help you find your dream housemate.

**Julie André**, coordinator of Northcoast Homeshare, can help. Check out [a1aa.org/homesharing/](http://a1aa.org/homesharing/) or email her at [homeshare@a1aa.org](mailto:homeshare@a1aa.org).