

sees commitment without a shared home

Together, but apart

Brenda Stonehouse has been married for two years, but has never lived with her husband.

"When we met, we lived in the same town, but he left for a job opportunity so we've been living apart," she says from her home in southern Ontario.

The decidedly unconventional arrangement is becoming more common. With jobs at a premium post-recession, families sometimes have to spend more time apart than they might like. In fact, it's happening to so many Canadian families that it's caught the attention of researchers at the University of Victoria.

"As a non-traditional family form, living apart together families have implications for policy and research definitions of family," say the researchers looking into 'living apart together' (LAT) relationships.

It's familiar ground for Stonehouse.

"John has an apartment where he lives during the week," she says. "He commutes 2.5 hours home each weekend."

It's a long distance relationship, once the exclusive domain of young couples waiting for the 'right time.' But now the lessons in relationship building are becoming important to more established couples as their limits are tested by distance.

Relationship expert and adviser Dr. Terri Orbuch says that while long-distance marriages can be more work, they also offer their own advantages.

"You could see a long distance relationship as an opportunity, especially if one is married and then one partner has to move for a job or to take care of an ill parent,"



William Wolfe-Wylie
LIFE

she says.

While nobody knows exactly how many people have this situation in Canada, researchers like those at the University of Victoria hope that their work will help figure that out.

Meanwhile, Stonehouse and her husband say it's hard work, but there are also great things about the arrangement.

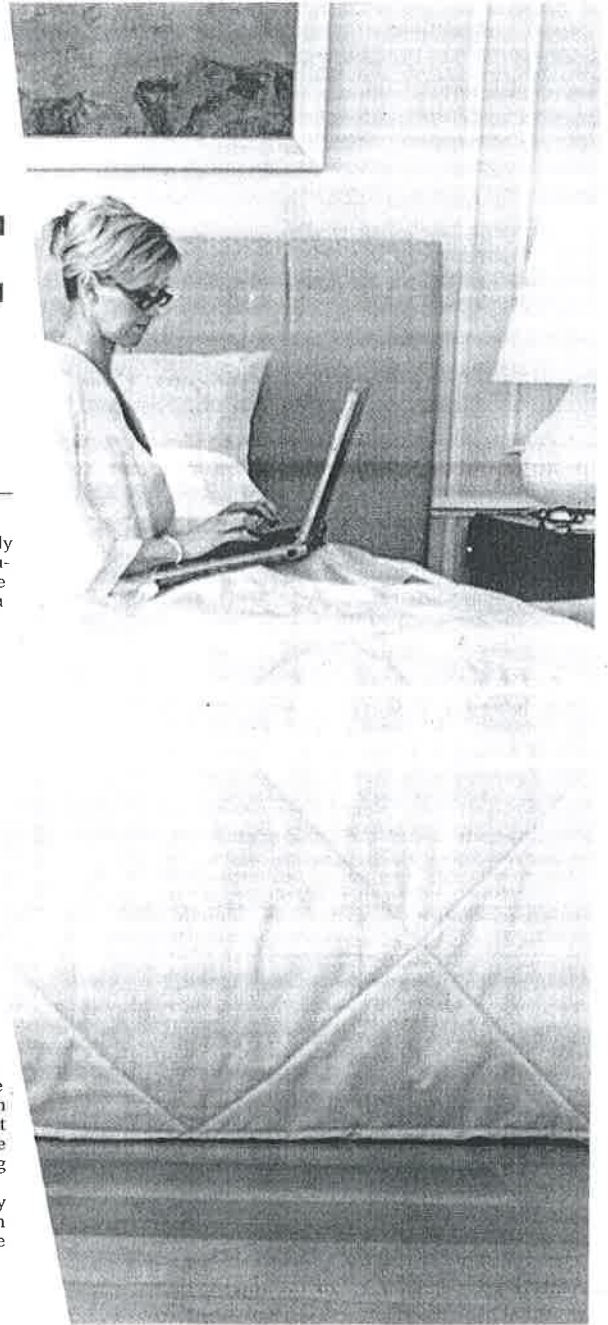
"With John's work schedule he often works long hours and he knows during the week he can concentrate on that and do what needs to be done without worrying about being at home at a certain time. I can schedule my activities without having to mesh it with his schedule," she says.

But while they make a point to talk on the phone, e-mail and text message as often as they can, it's difficult not having a face-to-face connection with your spouse.

"It's difficult when there are major decisions that have to be made and you can't discuss it in person. Financially, it's difficult having two households and the traveling gets tiring. For us, living apart is hard."

But they're the lucky ones. They have a plan to live together within a few years at the very latest. The countdown is on.

william.wylie@sunmedia.ca



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