

## Women's Residences: HALFWAY BETWEEN HOME AND ON YOUR OWN

**D**o you—or your parents—ever wonder what life would be like for you in the big city? Where would you live and how would you get along? Set your mind at rest; the institution known as the women's residence is still going strong. For most girls, such a residence serves as a way station until they get their bearings. For those few who don't quite manage to settle anywhere else, the residence offers a semi-permanent home.

"I can't cook and I don't like housework," says an airline secretary who has chosen the residence life in Chicago. "A furnished apartment—which is what I'd need—is expensive and hard to get. Besides, I like the company of other girls and when I want to be alone, I can keep to myself. And I feel safer here than I would in an apartment."

In Boston an art student explains, "When you share an apartment with a roommate, you really have less privacy. Here you can just shut the door to your single room without hurting anyone's feelings."

And in New York, a black girl from Baltimore, newly ensconced in a Greenwich Village residence, confessed, "I was going to be a social worker in Harlem, but I got so depressed up there I used to call my mother for an hour every night. Now I'm working as a receptionist and taking acting and writing lessons. I have a place to live that's reasonably priced and family-like while I'm deciding what to do. And I'm meeting girls from all over the world and learning about their attitudes—it's education without pain."

Today, girls right out of high school are migrating to big cities. They are passing up the liberal arts education for a two-year secretarial or fashion course. They plunge right into courses in music, drama or art, or they start in working, as models in New York, as government girls in Washington, as secretaries anywhere. For the average girl who emigrates to a city either to study or to work, the goal is still a place of her own, but before she can afford it there will be years of sharing apartments. She needs to meet prospective roommates and to make sure they will be congenial. Even if she plans to brave the city with a phalanx of home-town chums, she must find out which neighborhoods are safe, convenient and economical. For a girl who is trying to get her bearings the residence, despite its faults, can be a blessing as a temporary home. "And if you're just in town for a summer job, it's invaluable," writes a Los Angeles girl. "No leases to sign, and you don't have to buy a spatula."

**R**esidences come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes, but two factors seem universal: they accept guests for stays of at least a week (preferably for a month or more) and aim to serve as their home; and they all prohibit visitors—male and female—from roaming the halls at will. Visitors must stick to designated rooms at certain times, and eventually—often around midnight—the doors are locked to outsiders. Beyond this, the differences between residences are legion. Some are operated commercially for profit; others are philanthropically endowed. Most are

exclusively for women, but a few are coed. The largest residence I saw accommodated 1,200; the smallest, 40.

**B**y reputation, a women's residence is a secular convent in which straight-arrow young ladies are chaperoned by a genteel widow who checks them in at night, scrutinizes their boy friends and sniffs their breath. Actually, supervision is casual and outright curfews are rare: where found, they apply mostly to students (except for one place which couldn't afford a night watchman). Once the door is locked, you can get in either with your own key or by ringing the bell. The cozier residences will reprimand a girl who habitually keeps late hours, but as one housemother observed, "They soon discover they can't come in at three o'clock every night and still hold down a job." By and large, the attitude is laissez-faire. "We're a hotel," said the manager of New York's Barbizon. "We don't tell you to put your rubbers on." "We must move with the times," said a YWCA director. Residence directors range from the all-business type like Edith Stone of Simmons House in New York ("I have two sons, and I'm their mother") to homey ladies like Ilene Beyor of the Cambridge Y, who sends out cozy letters "From the Beyor's Den." All are willing to provide a sympathetic ear; rarely do any take the initiative.

The no-men-above-the-first-floor rule, which applies in most residences, seems designed to keep out prowlers and to allow the girls to pad the corridors freely in nightgown and (continued on page 156)

Susan