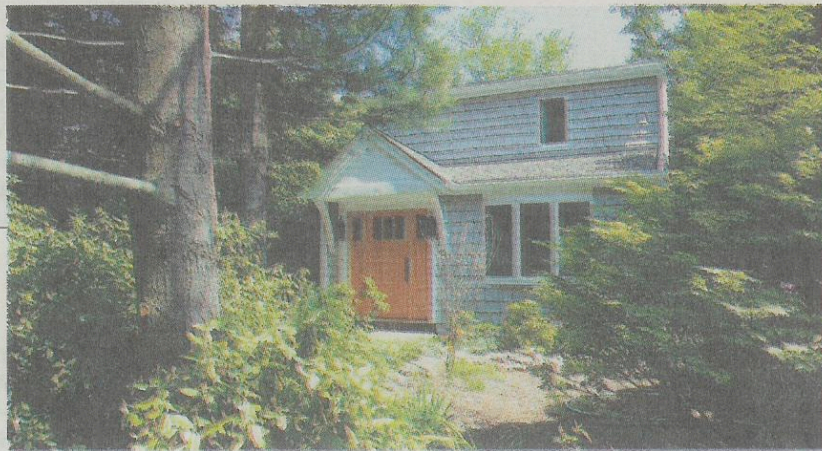




NEEDHAM The Temple family has swapped its Needham home 11 times. "Even if your exchangers did some damage," says Matthew Temple, "they would have to totally destroy your house for you to wind up behind."



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/BILL POLO

PADUA, ITALY. In 1995, the Temples stayed in this eight-bedroom villa surrounded by gardens in Padua, Italy.



PAU, FRANCE. In 1998, the Temples stayed in this semicircular, contemporary house designed by its owner, an architect.



Home loan

Vacationers in house-swapping programs get special feel for a new town ... or country

By Susan Chaityn Lebovits
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Ed Klugman and Paula Schneider will soon be packing for their summer vacation in Great Britain. They won't be staying in a hotel, however, or even with relatives or friends; instead they'll be living in the home of a family they have never met. And that family will be living in Klugman's place in Newton for a week and then move on to Schneider's at Lake Sunapee, N.H.

Klugman, who will turn 80 in September, is no novice to opening his home to strangers. The retired Wheelock College education professor and his late wife ran a bed and breakfast in Newtonville for nearly 18 years.

"It was an outgrowth of the philosophy of life: connecting people to people," said Klugman. He has been able to continue living that philosophy through

home exchanges.

Matthew Temple's family has swapped its Needham homes 11 times, enjoying free stays in spots ranging from San Francisco to Italy.

"We have friends who find the idea of going on vacation and cooking completely abhorrent to them, and the idea of someone else sleeping in their bed completely abhorrent," said Temple. "We don't care."

International house swapping has been around for 50 years, but with the Internet, it has become more convenient and less of a gamble. HomeLink International, with 14,000 members, and Home Exchange, with 7,000, are among a number of agencies that connect house swappers. They charge annual fees in the \$50 to \$75 range that provide members access to websites listing homes around the world.

The listings allow owners to give a short sales pitch

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BISHOP'S STORTFORD, ENGLAND. Randi Friedman and her husband, Lester Krumholz (at right) and their children exchanged time in their Newton home for time in England.

No place like somewhere else

▶ SWAPPING

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touting the home's location, amenities, and nearby attractions. Members then contact one another to arrange the details and what will be swapped, which frequently includes cars, bicycles, and sometimes pets.

The most popular type of home swaps are simultaneous, exchanged during the same time period, typically one to four weeks. For those fortunate to have a second home, nonsimultaneous exchanges can be arranged. Less common are hospitality exchanges, in which people exchange playing host.

"What exchanging has allowed us to do is feel like expatriates where we are visiting, rather than tourists," said Temple's wife, Nancy.

"You're in a home, shopping at the local supermarket, or sitting on the back deck reading a book and having a glass of wine," she said. "The next-door neighbors are talking with you, your kids have made friends with their kids, and it feels like belonging somewhere else."

During a trip to England, the Temples' daughter, Anna, was invited to go shrimping with their neighbors. In Switzerland, the host family's grandfather, a composer, arranged for their son, Alex, to play the organ at the local cathedral.

Randi Friedman, director of career services at Northeastern University Law School, and her husband, Lester Krumholz, a software developer, explored Bishop's Stortford, England, with their children.

Unlike typical tourists staying in hotels, they and their children enjoyed going to local soccer tournaments, taking dance classes, and dining with neighbors.

While the Friedman-Krumholz family was getting to know Bishop's Stortford, their exchange mates, the Ramsay family, immersed themselves in Newton Highlands.

"We felt very safe and enjoyed walking to the ice-cream parlor [Ice Cream Works], the bakery [Baker's Best], and swimming pond [Crystal Lake]," said Julie Ramsay. "We also felt it was safe for the kids to cycle around."

The Ramsays said they found it easy to take the T into Boston for sightseeing (including the Duck Tours) and shopping, and enjoyed visiting the North Shore and Cape Cod. They also found that they were accepted as part of the community.

"Randi and Lester's neighbors and friends were very hospitable," Ramsay said. "Both our children had sleepovers and trips out with [their children's] friends."

Home exchanges are especially economical for large families, as Rabbi Keith Stern and his wife and fellow rabbi, Liza, have discovered with their five children. They say that swapping homes was the only way they could afford to vacation in Europe.

The first trip they took was in 2001, a month in Cambridge, England. The rowhouse may have been a bit cramped compared with their Victorian back home, but "it was perfectly wonderful," said Keith Stern.

"There were three floors with long narrow rooms," he said. "Not a lot of room, but we managed easily with our family of seven." The classic structure had been updated, so much so that Stern said a degree in electronics would have come in handy for operating the oven and dishwasher.

The Sterns were so thrilled with their English experience, they exchanged again in Grenoble, France. "To give you an idea how amazing [the French family] was," said Stern, "they drove out to DeGaulle airport — which is not easy — picked us up, helped us with our bags, brought us to their house, and stayed elsewhere so we could get used to the house before they left for vacation. Things your own relatives wouldn't do, they did for us."

Stern said they found it is easy to find potential exchange homes. "We never did much fishing for places [to swap]," he said. "We waited for them to call us. And every year we're listed, we get four or five inquiries from all over the world."

The Sterns have been fortunate to enjoy such a response. In general, said Home Exchange president Ed Kushins, "if you have a reasonable exchange offer and send out 20 to 30 inquiries, you will likely get 15 to 20 replies. Of those 15 to 20, there will be three to five good possibilities and one to two real offers."

Noting that the listing companies don't get involved in "selling" the swap, Nancy Temple said, "It's a good idea to have a self-promotional package ready that explains why it's great to come to the Boston suburbs: what is close by, including museums, sightseeing, shops, and day trips."

Kushins said that international exchange inquiries usually begin three to six months ahead of time, but "because we are always getting new members, [swaps] can and have been arranged in a matter of days or weeks."

For domestic exchanges, anywhere from a few weeks to five months is common. Weekend exchanges can be arranged in as

little as a week.

Whether a swap will be successful depends on more than the right time and place. From the outset, swappers must make clear their needs, expectations, and ground rules for what is and is not available to their temporary guests.

"Every two or three years, if there is a car exchange and if the people don't explicitly discuss expectations beforehand, it can be an issue," said Kushins. "There have been cases where one of the parties will drive the car a lot further than the other guy expected."

Kushins said that when he does a car exchange with his home in California, he will say, "Feel free to go to San Diego or Santa Barbara, but I really don't want you driving to San Francisco or Las Vegas."

Kushins pointed out that it is equally important to be specific about amenities.

"I had a member who went from Palo Alto [Calif.] to a 150-year-old apartment in Paris," said Kushins. "He was disappointed that he had to walk up stairs, didn't have cable TV, didn't have a garbage disposal or a dishwasher. He described the place as a dump."

"I did some investigating, and this place in Paris was very, very nice by tourist standards. It was

fully outfitted, but this guy expected the same things he had in his house in Palo Alto."

Kushins recommends asking owners for references from people with whom they've done prior exchanges. Home exchange websites often will show whether a party has done a previous swap.

Matthew Temple, who is director of research computing at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, said the savings in hotel and restaurant bills more than makes up for the potential risks.

"Even if your exchangers did some damage, they would have to totally destroy your house for you to wind up behind," he said.

"You have to trust that people are good and honest," said Rose-Marie Pronovost, a social worker in Needham. "I called [our exchangers] and told them to enjoy our home and please use the candles and silver in the dining room. When we got to their home in Santa Barbara [Calif.], they had a fresh chicken in the refrigerator for us, they'd made soup, had gotten roses from the farmer's market, and had set the table," Pronovost said.

"They lived in this lovely house with a magnificent view overlooking the city of Santa Barbara, and the ocean beyond. . . . We walked in and said, 'Oh, wow.'"

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Listings for home exchanges

HomeLink International www.home-link.org; 800-638-3841

HomeExchange www.homeexchange.com; 800-877-8723

Digsville www.digsville.com; 201-659-5934

Intervac www.intervac-online.com;
800-756-4663

Senior Home Exchange (for ages 50 and
older) www.seniorhomeexchange.com