

RESPONSE to Defendants' MOTION to DISMISS

EXHIBIT A

Affidavit

Why Do I Share my Home
Why Do I Love AirBnB?

Heleni Thayre

My Home is the Center of My Life:
How Do I Want to Share it?

Being an AirBnB host has turned out to be a far, far more rewarding experience than I expected.

I have always shared my home with roommates. This has always been a financial necessity, and sometimes it has been rewarding too. A few years ago I began to think about some of the wonderful things certain roommates had brought into my life and realized that I would not really want to live alone. It also occurred to me quite recently that many people my age have children and grandchildren. My life is not like that. What AirBnB has brought to me is a unique, soul-enriching gift.

There is no guarantee that a roommate experience will be a good one. Nevertheless, sometimes it is very good indeed – and when it is good, I am very grateful that those people came into my life. I remember twelve “long term renters” with the greatest fondness. That is what life is all about – great human connections. These twelve made memorable contributions to my life and also to my understanding of science, music, world culture and international affairs and we did many things together.

That is just twelve out of the fifty or so long-term renters I have shared my home with over the course of the past 38 years, though. (Sometimes I rented a second room or needed to replace a renter for the summer.) Sadly it is a small minority of roommates that have brought that level of comfort and stimulation and joy into my life. For that it is essential to look elsewhere.

Several other long-term roommates were decent people but I did not feel especially close to them and likely vice versa.

And I do remember well the nine harmful roommates: 2 stole from me: one \$1200 in cash (I hired a detective and she paid me back, then left immediately at my insistence;) one stole a silk rug I had brought home from China (she moved out with it, I did not get it back;) one both did and sold cocaine (while my other roommate stole from me to pay him for it - yikes!) 2 were physically and/or verbally abusive; I managed to get them to leave as well, by a great mercy; one skipped out without paying his rent after continual assurances that the money would be coming any day – I dodged a bullet there that I did not even know existed until the eviction occurred twenty years later. The last, whom I was forced to evict for a multitude of very compelling reasons, was a horrifying nightmare. This last one caused serious and lasting damage to my health and my life and my finances. It is the last one that propelled me to seek a safer alternative than allowing long-term renters to share my home. It was then that I discovered AirBnB.

Speaking from my forty years of experience renting to others, there is nothing particular about “long-term roommates” that makes the experience more positive or nurturing or meaningful or delightful than AirBnB guests do. I would say that the opposite seems true. The people I met and interacted with through Air BnB were - on average - warmer more considerate, more interesting, more professionally impressive, and in general more lovely, than my longterm roommates have been - on average.

When I first began hosting AirBnB in late May of 2018, I had not expected to encounter “Guests” of such a high caliber or such good will as those who came into my home in those first

weeks (and almost universally thereafter.) I was astonished to discover what a stimulating experience it is to be a Host. It is very different from renting longer term where roommates have their own purposes and projects and your home is often simply a place for them to live while doing their own thing. Understandable. They are paying me for housing not for entertainment. But in such cases it is not about intimacy, nor is it especially enriching.

For some reason, many AirBnB relationships tend to become intense and personal very quickly. Why is somewhat of a mystery, but I'm guessing it results partly from comfort. There seems to be something almost magical about welcoming visitors into your home. Since they are your guests you naturally want to make them comfortable and happy. Perhaps there is a primal part of human nature – a “hospitality gene” that kicks in when conditions are right. Perhaps, too, it is part of an AirBnB culture - one of courtesy and respect – and of hosts who are world travelers themselves and travelers who are sometimes hosts. In any case it is an exhilarating social landscape that few other situations in my life have equaled. I have never had so many interesting conversations with so many interesting people in such a relaxed environment, in such a short time. No conversations have been superficial and none have been boring. This in itself is rare. The topics are wide ranging, and there is always another door to open in one's mind.

I rediscovered something about myself that I had not realized when I was a young and shy child: to wit: I am, as an adult, not *really* shy at all. In fact I'm gregarious. And I'm curious about my guests, who as it turns out are in general amazing. It's like traveling around the world – without the huge outlay of energy and money which that normally requires. I chalk it up mainly to being in Boston. It is a world class city that attracts educated, involved and gifted people to the many professional conferences and universities and artistic and historic sites that abound here.

Having amazing people come to me through AirBnB is not unlike traveling in terms of new experiences and broader horizons, but cozier and without the ongoing uncertainty of where you will sleep at night. This leaves plenty of energy for connecting with your guests through stories and laughter which suits an older person very well!

It is low pressure to spend time in the comfort of one's home with well-intentioned, interesting, courteous people who are away from their own home and possibly up for an adventure. When I used to travel I was also looking for adventure. Hosting, though, is far less tiring than travel, with fewer worries. It also lacks the stress and loneliness of traveling alone. I have traveled to twenty countries in five continents, generally heading out on my own due to my long term plans: school, a dancing contract, or visiting friends and relatives along the way. I met many people in these travels and had memorable experiences along the way. But there were also many moments standing alone on a train platform in Germany or Italy, or going by myself through customs into Egypt, a country where I had never been before, that were slightly scary. It was fun to explore but sometimes when I did not know where to find that inexpensive, but special, place to spend the night, it could be stressful. Often though I did find those special places – like the Garden City Hotel in Cairo where for \$1.50 per night I joined the staff of nearby Embassies for dinner before I went to sleep. Now THAT is what I call an adventure! But I was younger, stronger and more resilient then.

There seems to be something almost magical about welcoming people into your home and wanting to make them comfortable. Perhaps it comes in part from focusing your attention on the

comfort of your guests instead of your own. The result seems to be that both of you are happier. Perhaps there is a primal part of human nature – a “hospitality gene” that kicks in when conditions are right? Perhaps, too, it is in part the AirBnB culture of courtesy and respect - of hosts who are world travelers themselves and travelers who are sometimes hosts. In any case it is an exhilarating social landscape that few other situations in my life have equaled. I have never had so many interesting conversations with so many interesting people in such a relaxed environment, in such a short time. No conversations have been superficial and none have been boring. This in itself is rare. The topics are wide ranging, and there is always another door to open in one’s mind.

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I feel very relaxed being a Hostess in this low-pressure context, which is not at all the case when I give my annual Twelfth Night theme party. I worry about each little thing and spend so much time in the kitchen that I barely get to talk to my guests. It was so stressful recently due to the residue of trauma following the afore-mentioned eviction that for the first time since the early 1980’s I could not bring myself do it at all for two years.

The closest comparison I can make to hosting Airbnb, is that it feels similar to having old friends or cousins visit whom I have not seen in years. They have become a bit like strangers, but they are so easy to talk to! Having visitors is unfortunately something I rarely do anymore. I’ve not had the leisure nor the money for it. Multiple financial and housing issues have demanded almost all of my attention. But when I *did* visit friends and when I *did* have visitors, it felt a lot like Airbnb does.

One older couple from Peru reminded me so much of my grandfather (who was born in Mexico as were his brothers and sisters), that sometimes I had difficulty remembering that they were *not* my family! Their daughter Pilar lives in Brookline and her kids stopped by to visit their grandparents twice during the week they were staying with me. They were laughing and playing board games, much like I did with my own grandparents at their age. I was thinking back to when I had traveled in Guatamala and Peru in the 1980’s. I found myself “channeling” my great-grandfather while hiking through the tropical vegetation. He was quite a “celebrity” in our family due to his swashbuckling reputation as an archeologist and adventurer, so there was a lot of family lore transmitted to us by my grandmother who moved with my grandfather to the Yucatan briefly after their marriage.

It is a privilege and an honor to invite people from all over the world to share my home, which I love and am proud of. My first two guests were two young men from Finland. I invited them to go with me to church, because our wonderful co-minister never fails to portray Jesus as a warrior for social justice, which I love!

Another of my international guests who both inspired me and broke my heart was a man from Mexico, Juan. Juan had purchased tickets for three Sox games in Boston, and I nearly cried

when he told me on his second day that he had saved for seven years to make this trip to Boston. The Red Sox were playing the White Sox though so I teased him saying “Good job! You got six Sox games for the price of three! Go Sox!”

On the day Juan left to catch his plane home, he told me he had an appointment at MIT. A visiting professor from MIT had taught at his university in Mexico for a semester. Juan was going over there to visit him and in hopes that he could snag a job there. I knew what a long shot that would likely be. Again I almost cried. He wrote me back later and said there would not be a job – but maybe he could come back to study.

In some ways, Juan was the most memorable of my AirBnB guests. Many of us don’t fully realize the dire level of economic disparity that others are facing daily.

For instance, I met a woman from Pakistan (whose name I will keep confidential) who was coming for a conference. I was excited to discover that she worked in the field of women’s education (knowing what an issue that is there.) When we were sitting in my dining room I asked if she had worked with 16-year old Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yosefzai and she said yes she had. How else can I meet such people? The answer is I can’t.

I am not a person with a lot of time or money for entertainment or even for my social life. Most of my focus is of necessity on finances, paper work and other related matters. At 76, everything I do takes longer and is harder than it once was. My social life is limited at best. There is nothing else easily available to me that would come close to replacing the fun and stimulation that Airbnb brought into my home.

Another person I met through ABnB in 2018 is special also - Squall. Many years ago I created an original Chinese noodle recipe made with a famous Chinese hot sauce that a Chinese roommate introduced me to. It is called Lau’ga’ma. By chance I learned that Squall came from the same small city where it is produced. What are the chances? China is so BIG! I shared it with him – and made it a couple more times for him also so he could learn to make it. I asked him to take it back to China and try it on his friends. Not sure what he did in this regard but EVERY single holiday - American or Chinese - I receive text greetings from him. In January I found out, when I asked him, that he was stuck in quarantine at his parents home where he had traveled for the Lunar New Year and he was not working of course. He told me the population there was very low and he was very safe. In any case I was fortunate to get an early heads up about the economic as well as the health ramifications of the coronavirus and to begin to wear a protective mask to the grocery from early days. And to anticipate a global pandemic also, which I in fact did do.

Had I still been operating an ABnB, I had the information and the warning I would have needed to cancel my upcoming AirBnB reservations very early on. This is one of the safeguards, by the way, that owner-occupied AirBnBs provide: oversight. We have a desire to preserve our own health and the safety of our homes and neighbors. I would not be bringing AirBnB guests into my home at this time. I am in a high-risk group. My contacts are severely circumscribed.

I affirm and swear under penalties of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

March 9, 2020, Heleni Thayre, 12 Euston St., #3, Brookline, MA 02446