

# GOD'S WAITING ROOM

by

Ruth Daniloff

Some people cringe when they hear me refer to our assisted living residence as "God's Waiting Room". I would argue that we are all in God's waiting room from the day we are born. It all depends what we make of it.

Today with the terrifying pandemic I don't make much of it. We are in lockdown. We yo-yo from quarantine to quarantine, washing our hands, wearing masks, and keeping our distance.

Thanks to the pandemic, all the reasons we moved to an assisted living place a year ago have evaporated. For example: No more concerts, no more lectures, no more opera, no more films. No more young man who came to teach people confined to wheel chairs how to dance the "quick step." No more smiling when you pass someone in the corridor. They all wear masks and you can't recognize them.

I admit it. Ever since I could remember, I have had fantasies about assisted living. Assisted living would do the dishes, do the laundry, cleanup the kitchen. Assisted living would give me more time, time to do all the things I dreamed of doing and never did.

But you would be living with all those old people, friends would warn me. But, I myself am *une femme d'un certain age*, I would counter. Moreover, most of the elderly I find interesting. They have led interesting lives, even if they now complain of aches and pains which the doctors can't diagnose.

But you could always live with your children, friends would say. I love my children. I love their company but I don't want to live with them.

My daughter, like most women these days, is one of those super mums. She holds a responsible job, oversees a big house, looks after three children, and a spouse who is busy earning money.

A few years ago when my knees balked at the thirty-eight steps to the street from my apartment in Cambridge, my husband and I decided to explore assisted living.

I divide my friends into those who are open minded about Assisted Living, and those who wouldn't be caught dead in one. My husband, Nick, falls into the latter category which has led to arguments. We agreed to try it out for six months.

Before making a decision I checked out Assisted Living establishments in the suburbs. In addition to exorbitant fees, they boasted beautifully manicured grounds, state of the art plumbing, and small buses to shuttle you around. Most were too upscale for me I preferred more untidy urban living.

We finally settled on Youville for its location, a stone's throw from Harvard Square, and for its lack of pretention. In addition to being in their later years, the residents are varied: teachers, doctors, scientists and some professors emeritus who sit together at what I call the MIT table in the dining room. A few of the residents are deaf and a few prefer to live in the past which, in my opinion, is far more interesting than the present. The elderly women are chatty, play bingo, or talk about their grandchildren. The old men prefer weighty subjects like the state of the world and climate change.

Animals are welcome. Our oldest canine resident, a deaf-blind cocker spaniel named Zika, never leaves her mistress's wheel chair. Volunteers take her outside when it rains. There are several cats. We often talk about our animals who are more interesting than what is taking place in The White House these days.

God Bless the staff in God's Waiting Room who so cheerfully protect us

from the virus which lurks in the wings for the elderly.

I make a huge effort not to complain. The trouble is that there is no one to blame for the pandemic and there is no one to tell us when it is to be over.

I wrestle with boredom. I have time, but I don't know how to spend it; I blame myself for not being more creative. Some people would dream of having the time I am wasting.

Meanwhile, I watch too much television. I talk to my cat. She never bores me. Tomorrow I will try to educate myself by reading a book called *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* by Timothy Snyder.

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