

## **Aging Happens: Examine options while you still have some**

*By Ellen Waldman  
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This is the perfect time of year to make a resolution to start planning for the future. Whether it's thinking about the holidays or, in this case, looking at options for where you might consider living, planning does help. Here are two stories to make this point.

I overheard a conversation recently between two older people exercising at a local gym. He was asking her if she's still living alone way out in the country. He himself recently moved into town to be closer to services and more activities and friends. She said that she likes living out of town, that she's fine on her own, and is not worried at all. He said that he's 79 years old, that she's older than he is, and he thinks it's not safe for her. She assured him that if she fell, got sick or hurt, her neighbors would know.

I found this exchange very interesting. (I did not mean to be eavesdropping, but they were talking loudly enough for all to hear.) This woman believed that although she lived by herself, and liked to do things alone on her large property, that somehow neighbors would know if she got into trouble and needed help.

Story number two: A longtime friend of mine who is now 93 years old lives alone near her daughter in another part of this state. She has had some very serious illnesses this year, including some "small strokes." Her independent apartment is very cluttered and difficult for her to navigate with a walker. She is weak, tired and feels unwell. At this point, for the first time, she is finally considering where she might need to live in order to get her needs met. And that's with having me as her friend who's been bugging her for a long time to check out housing options, just in case. Now, it's too late for her to look on her own and will need to defer to her daughter to decide for her.

What can we take away for these true stories? In the first case, this woman believes she still has plenty of time to live the life she has loved for many decades. She has no interest in even considering any options and is adamant that she's perfectly fine. This may be true now, but let's say it's no longer true at some point. Who wants to be faced with finding someplace to live when they are too debilitated? That is what my friend in story number two is facing, and potentially could be the case with the woman in the first story.

Here are some ideas for this New Year. Imagine that your home will no longer suit you (even if you don't believe this now). What are your options here locally? In Ashland, we have one retirement community, Mountain Meadows ([www.mtmeadows.com](http://www.mtmeadows.com); 800-337-1301) that is designed for active adults.

What if this won't work, since you might have growing needs for more caregiving? We also have two assisted living centers, Brookdale Ashland ([www.brookdale.com/en/communities/brookdale-ashland.html](http://www.brookdale.com/en/communities/brookdale-ashland.html); 541-210-8134) and Skylark Assisted Living and Memory Care ([www.skylarkassistedliving.net](http://www.skylarkassistedliving.net); 541-552-1713).

I suggest you do something radical and take a tour of one or more of these communities this coming year. Tell yourself that, at worst, you won't like any of them, but you will certainly get a decent lunch

taking their tours. Hopefully, you will begin to understand what we have in town that could work for you down the line.

You could also look further out of town and extend your view to Medford, Jacksonville or Central Point. Each town has their own options and one might fit you better. The main point, and I'm sure you've heard this from me at least a hundred times, is that it's not too soon, but it's also not too late. For my friend, though, it is too late for her to tour and visit the options. But I hope that the woman who lives by herself will at least consider checking out closer-in-town choices, just in case her neighbors don't hear her call for help.

Many of you will have family visiting over the holidays. Could you find a few minutes to broach this subject with them? You might be surprised that they would really like to hear that you're considering options, should remaining at home no longer work for you. Worse things have happened. Things like not being able to navigate your home any longer, and having to rush into a new situation without thoroughly checking out the choices. When planning begins sooner, people are much more at ease for the next steps. Here's to your happy days and holidays ahead. Plan well.