Home sale helps active senior with pending health issues move into continuing care community so transition to â??assisted livingâ?? is not disruptive

Description

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Jody Reiss was one of the youngest people to move into The Sequoias, one of roughly 50 assisted living facilities in San Francisco. She was 68 in a place where the average resident is much older and unable to live at home any longer due to health problems.

That wasnâ??t what budged Reiss, an active senior, from her Noe Valley tenancy-in-common. She wanted to make sure she didnâ??t have to move in the middle of a health crisis. And she knew that was coming sooner than later.

Jody Reiss in the courtyard of The Sequoias, one of three continuing care communities in San Francisco. It has 143 one-bedroom, 65 two-bedroom and 18 assisted living apartments, 53 studios as well as 146 skilled nursing and 19 memory care units, plus a few cottages/houses. (Photo by Judy Goddess)

She has slow-moving Parkinsons, colon cancer, chronic migraines, erratic blood pressure, and bipolar disorder, medications for which have led to kidney disease and the need for a kidney transplant. â??I know Iâ??ll need care eventually and I wanted to be settled before then.â?•

Sheâ??s in in a one-bedroom apartment in what they call â??independent living,â?• which comes with three meals a day, housecleaning and laundry service. She comes and goes as she pleases.

Itâ??s an entry-level that allows a seamless transition to assisted living, which adds on help with such activities of daily living as bathing or dressing and/or medication management. While all so-called residential care facilities for the elderly provided assisted living, many, including The Sequoias, also

offer independent living and memory care.

Top to bottom care

But itâ??s one of only two â?? the other is the San Francisco Towers â?? that offer the fullest range of care, from independent living to short- and long-term nursing on site. The price for these continuing care communities is an entry fee on top of monthly rent, which varies according to the level of care needed.

The Sequoias offer luxurious accommodations â?? including one-bedrooms, above left, and studios, right â?? as well as high-end amenities. (Photos courtesy of sequoialiving.org/san-francisco)

Reiss put down $409,000 for her 15th floor apartment, but for those entering in higher-care categories upfront payments can range reach a million or more. Her monthly rent is $6,000 but when she needs assisted living, it will jump to around $10,000 a month. Memory care is $12,000 or more.

Reiss was able to afford all this by selling her tenants-in-common apartment. She also had an inheritance from her parents. â??There are no options for middle class people in San Francisco,â?•

said Reiss, noting that Medicare covers none of this.

> Take a virtual tour of The Sequoias, a continuing care community at 1400 Geary Boulevard. (Video courtesy of sequoialiving.org/san-francisco)

For those who can afford it, continuing care communities offer some of the most luxurious accommodations, top-notch chefs, and range of community activities â?? classes, exercise, field trips, movies, performances and even pet days â?? to keep residents, particularly those who canâ??t leave the premises, engaged. The Sequoias has 46 resident committees â?? for everything from selecting new hall carpets to welcoming new residents and setting fees, said Kevin Otterness, director of sales.

Making friends

For many, the first few months in senior housing can be disorienting, even lonely. â??Dinners can be particularly difficult when friends choose to eat with friends, itâ??s easy to feel left out,â?• Reiss said. But ever the one to dive into a new experience, she set upon developing friendships from the beginning.

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An avid walker, she joined the Saturday Morning Walkers. When the facilitator of a political involvement group retired, Reiss stepped in. Sheâ??s part of an informal sing-along group. She organized a Boomers Group for â??youngstersâ?• like herself, those born between 1946-64. The first meeting attracted 19 members.

Reiss on her apartment balcony. (Photo by Judy Goddess)

Move-in day was also fortuitous. Orientation partners new residents with a longer-term resident at breakfast seatings. â??I was paired with a good person who introduced me to people I like knowing.â?•

Though Reiss seldom goes downstairs for breakfast these days, when she does, she brings food home for other days. At lunch, she usually finds people to eat with. Seating arrangements for dinner are often made in advance. â??Our womenâ??s group meets for dinner every Thursday night, and my friend and I have dinner every Saturday night, but â??there have been days Iâ??ve eaten alone and thatâ??s OK, too,â?• she said.

Reiss still has a busy social life and many friends outside The Sequoias. She facilitates a Holocaust descendantsâ?? group at her synagogue and sings in a choir that performs in hospitals and hospices.

But when she looked to her future, there was no one she could â??rely on if I needed help in caring for myself,â?• she said. She was married once, for two years, and has no children. Her sister was busy

taking care of a husband with dementia. Their daughter has a full-time job. Extended family lives in Europe and the Middle East.

â??My friends give me emotional support as much as they can, but they have their own lives. We support each other emotionally, but physically theyâ??re not equipped to help.â?•

Reiss grew up in San Francisco and spent most of her life here. She went back East attend the School of Social Work at the University of Maryland, where she got a masterâ??s degree. The move coincided with the beginning of the AIDS epidemic. â??Some of my friends were gay and I was scared one of them would get sick and die.â?• Not satisfied with watching from the sidelines, she began volunteering at an AIDS clinic in Washington, D.C.

Heart and soul work

â??Thatâ??s where I began a journey that would last for 18 years and would include working with several hundred people with AIDS,â?• she wrote in the Introduction to her 2021 book â??Looking Back: AIDS Tales and Teachings.â?• It was â??heart and soulâ?• work: â??being open to forming deep and meaningful relationships, being open to falling in love, and being open to grief and withstanding it.

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â??Death and dying had been my lifelong companion. Iâ??m level-headed about death. Iâ??m not in denial,â?• said Reiss, whose mother was a Holocaust refugee.

After getting her degree, she moved back to San Francisco, In part to care for her aging parents. She managed the HIV/AIDS program at Jewish Family and Childrenâ??s Services, followed by 16 years as a therapist in private practice focusing on bipolar disorder and addiction recovery. She retired at 60.

Reiss keeps busy but admits she has less energy than before. (Photo by Judy Goddess)

Medical conditions, including the removal of part of her colon, friends and volunteering occupied Reissâ??s early years of retirement. She helped out at Project Open Hand, the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank and Food Runners. She sang with S.O.S. Singers of the Street, a choir of homeless people and their advocates who perform in the Tenderloin and at shelters, and took part in various political activities. â??I dive into things, thatâ??s my style,â?• she said.

She still sometimes goes back to Noe Valley to visit a friend or meet at a favorite restaurant. â??I liked my old neighborhood, she said but admitted, â??Iâ??m busy here, and I find I have less energy. I feel so lucky being able to live here.â?•

Overall, it was a smooth transition, she said. â??I knew I was living in senior housing, the first time I played Bingo.â?•

Category

1. Photo gallery

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