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# An Interview With Beth Baker

## Old Age in a New Age: An Urgent Call to Action



by Keith Schaeffer

When her grandmother “lost her spark” after moving into a conventional, medical model nursing home, Beth Baker assumed it was the result of old age and frailty.

But after four years of extensive research for her new book, *Old Age in a New Age: The Promise of Transformative Nursing Homes*, the writer and former hospital worker is no longer so sure. “I wonder now, it might have been the environment itself,” she says.

Baker, a regular contributor to the *Washington Post* Health Section and the *AARP Bulletin*, visited more than 20 nursing homes across the country and interviewed countless residents, caregivers, administrators, advocates and gerontological experts. As an outside observer, she confirms what culture change enthusiasts within the industry have been saying all along: institutionalized nursing homes are unhealthy for residents and caregivers alike. The good news is, it doesn’t have to be that way, as demonstrated by Baker’s

stirring accounts of elders who have literally come to life when placed in “person-centered” surroundings. Common threads running through the successful transformative models she visited are strong leadership, environments that encourage interpersonal relationships, and commitment to creating a real home for residents.

Baker discovered to her astonishment that nursing homes that empower frontline caregivers and give residents choice, autonomy and a reason for living need not cost more to operate than the old model. “Everyone assumes if it is a good quality home, it must be for rich people. (Learning otherwise) was a very welcomed surprise,” she says.

She doesn’t dismiss the practical difficulties of deep culture change. But the biggest impediment, she believes, is cynicism by management and the public about residents and staff.

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard, ‘that might work for assisted living but not in a nursing home because (the elders) are too far

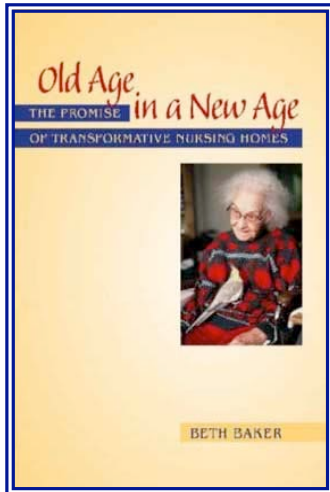
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### *Old Age in a New Age, continued*



In *Old Age in a New Age*, award-winning journalist Beth Baker takes readers on a journey to some of the best places in America for elders to live. In these remarkable nursing homes, residents have a say in their everyday lives, enjoy an environment that looks and feels like an ordinary home, live with dignity and purpose, and find comfort in close relationships with caregivers.

gone...(or) aides at our home couldn't possibly do (that)," she says.

She dispels such myths with individualized success stories and statistical outcomes, some at transformative nursing homes located in the most unlikely places. Baker hopes her book imbues readers with a sense of urgency and willingness to play a role in transforming the culture of long-term care.

"There's a million levels they can do that on," she says. *Old Age in a New Age* is an extensively documented overview of the current situation and how it can be so much better—a must-read for anyone with a nursing home in his/her future.

You can find *Old Age in a New Age: The Promise of Transformative Nursing Homes* at our website:  
<http://www.culturechangenow.com/otheritems.html>