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Planning For Solo Agers”

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Q: Why did you write this book?

I wrote the book for and about Solo Agers (people without children or aging alone for any reason) because I am a Solo Ager and I wanted to be clearer about my options as I got older.

The more I spoke with other Solo Agers, the more I realized how little information and few resources are out there for us. I wanted to start changing that. I also wanted to raise awareness of the existence of this large subset of the over 50 population.

Q: Main message?

There are two key ingredients for a safe, secure and satisfying older life for Solo Agers: 1) Planning and 2) Flexibility.

An equally important part of the main message is that we need other people around us throughout our lives. We need an active social support network and we need to build and nurture it while we are still active and healthy.

Q: Why don't most people plan for retirement?

Most people are in serious denial about what will likely happen to their bodies and minds as they age. Yes, some people appear to reach their 90s and 100s with few challenges along the way.

This small minority of older adults continue to live alone, doing their own shopping, cooking, driving, planting and harvesting their gardens, exercising, taking vacations, etc. We all know a few of these people.

The problem is that most people believe they are going to be

part of this small minority so they don't do any planning for the more likely eventuality that they will

“People spend far more time planning a vacation than planning for their future”

experience challenges and those challenges may well lead them to need aid and care of some kind; maybe a change in living environment and surely a change in their habits and routine.

People spend far more time planning a vacation than planning for their future—financially or emotionally. Those who have had an up-close experience of the aging of a parent are often knocked out of their denial by it but the majority of baby boomers still refuse to acknowledge that they will someday grow old.





Q: Isn't it better to "age in place" than move?

This is a tricky subject for several reasons. The denial I referred to above is in full force in people who insist on remaining in their two- or three-story home, with out-of-code railings, small doorways, bathrooms without grab bars, poor lighting, throw rugs, etc. These homes are not safe to age in.

In my research on aging alone, I interviewed dozens of people living independently in 55+ communities and not one told me they wished they had kept their old home and not moved.

Every single one told me it was the best move they made. The homes in those communities be they freestanding, condos, apartments or mobile home parks are small, one-story structures.

They are easy to keep clean, usually convenient to services and close enough to get to know your neighbors. These are the kind of homes that "aging in place" make sense.

And by all means, everyone should join a "village" if one exists in the area. I don't think we have room in this article for me to discuss this concept and extol all the virtues of these

villages but I am a big fan of them for people who are determined to age in place. Readers who are interested can check out the village concept through the Village-to-Village network (vtvnetwork.org).

On the other hand, I also think retirement communities that offer different levels of care when they become necessary are great options for Solo Agers who can afford it. I encourage people who are open to that possibility to do good research in their areas. Get out and visit these retirement communities in your area. Meet some people who are living there, ask for a tour, stay for a meal, see how it all works.



Q: Why is moving away from friends and family "risky," especially for those in their 70s and beyond?

We all need what I call a "social support network." This network starts with your family and close friends. Without this support network, when something goes wrong who will be there to help you?

I've interviewed too many people who moved away from their friends to be near a grown son or daughter and grandkids. Sometimes that works

out; sometimes it doesn't. In the most tragic of cases, the younger family has to move again and the older person is left behind, knowing few people (or none) in their new hometown.

“If you are going to move for any reason, do it early. Do it in your 50s or 60s while you are still healthy and strong.”

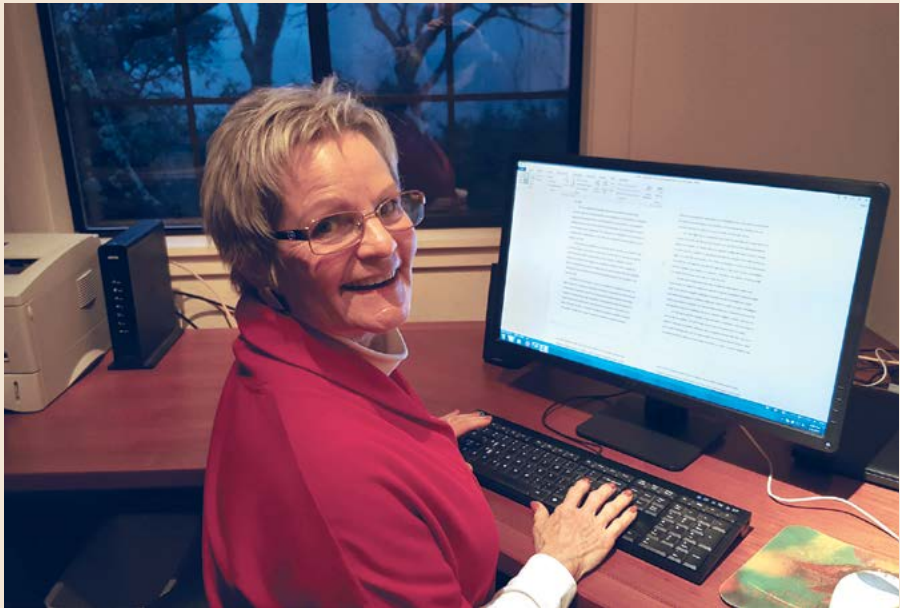
My philosophy is if you are going to move—for any reason—do it early. Do it in your 50s or 60s while you are still healthy and strong. That way you will have the chance to meet new people and form new communities of friends and neighbors.



Q: What are some of the trends in senior housing?

I am not the expert on this topic and I am sure you will be interviewing people who have much more intimate knowledge of this field.

However, what I am seeing is senior housing communities ramping up the



amenities that they believe will appeal to boomers. They are installing or increasing their wellness options; they are building more elaborate gyms, par courses, swimming pools; they are bringing in healthy eating options and more choice about when and where people can take their meals; they are bringing in education components for lifelong learning.

Some are co-locating with universities partially for this purpose. Some of the more expensive communities are bringing in renowned chefs and full wine cellars. I believe that “choice” will be critical in luring boomers into this kind of living environment.

The less regimentation, the better. These senior housing communities are going to be important for Solo Agers who can afford them. The biggest challenge for Solo Agers is avoiding loneliness and isolation as they age. Without family, this is their greatest risk.

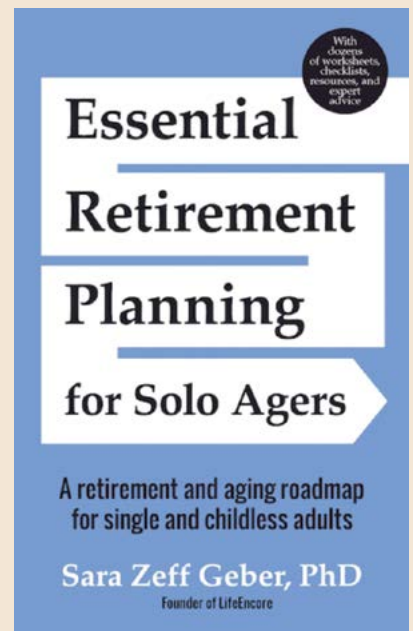
Q: What makes mobile home communities attractive for senior housing?

Mobile home parks can be ideal senior housing. They are compact and close together. Residents see one another daily and that familiarity often leads

to friendships. Many parks have organized activities. Some people age in them for 30-40 years. Others may choose them later in life as a less expensive option for aging in place.

Q: Your favorite way to kick back and relax?

Enjoying a great glass of wine and a good meal with friends.



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