

# SECRETS FROM AN INSIDER

A PSYCHOLOGIST'S VIEW

When people consider moving into an Independent or Assisted Living community, they can imagine all sorts of pleasant or unpleasant scenarios for what their future might hold. They may tour a senior living campus, look at the décor, read the brochures, listen to descriptions of services, and observe residents in the dining room, living room and activity rooms. But still, some mystery remains. In the end, an outsider can only wonder about the possibilities of life in a retirement community. How can you know in advance what it's really like on the inside?

## REVELATIONS FROM AN INSIDER

Carol Netzer is an 88-year-old resident of the Brookdale Battery Park retirement community in New York City who has written a uniquely insightful book, *"Assisted Living: An Insider's View,"* available now on Amazon.com. That book is supplemented by her online blog, "Overheard in Assisted Living," providing a steady stream of quotes, observations and stories from

residents that mix wry humor with sobering poignancy. (See sidebar on next page.) Carol is particularly qualified to write about the thoughts and feelings of people trying to adjust and thrive in their new circumstances. She is a retired psychologist who gives adult children and caregivers a revealing peek inside the minds of the elders they care for.

With self-awareness, Carol also bravely exposes her inner struggles to maintain as much independence as possible, while fighting lapses of her own mind and body.

She confesses the mental oversights that alarmed her enough to consider Assisted Living:

*"I tried to notice when I mislaid things, and either could not find them again, or found them in an unlikely place. A hairbrush in the laundry. The sugar bowl in the microwave. A blouse in Dick's old shirt drawer. I asked myself dizzying questions, like 'How will I know at what point I've failed to know my own mind?' The answer was, I wouldn't."*



**CAROL NETZER** has opened a window to the world in which she lives. People outside now have an inside view of a world that is less of a mystery. People inside now have a brighter view of a world with broader horizons.

OVERHEARD IN THE DINING ROOM:  
"IF HE'DA LISTENED  
TO ME, HE'D BE ALIVE  
TODAY."

OVERHEARD IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM:  
"HER GRANDSON GOT ON  
HER NERVES, SO SHE MOVED  
INTO ASSISTED LIVING."

OVERHEARD IN THE ELEVATOR:  
"I DON'T THINK IT'S OLD  
AGE. SHE WAS ALWAYS A  
LITTLE PECULIAR."

OVERHEARD IN THE SWIMMING POOL:  
"IT'S SIX WOMEN TO EVERY  
MAN HERE, SO THAT DOLLED-UP  
BIDDIE CAN KISS HER HOPES  
GOODBYE!"

OVERHEARD IN THE LIVING ROOM:  
"DON'T BOTHER WITH THE  
BRIDGE PLAYERS. THEY'RE  
LIKE ROYALTY HERE."

OVERHEARD IN THE LOBBY:  
"THE MEN PAIR UP AS  
SOON AS THEY GET HERE.  
THEY MISS THEIR MOMMIES  
OR SOMETHING"

## HOUSES AGE TOO

Some seniors resist moving to a retirement community, holding fierce attachments to their houses. But Carol saw the stark realities of her old residence:

*"At night, in bed, I could not hide from myself the fact that the empty house made me fearful and lonely. My home of 40 years became a querulous stranger, full of demands. If a light blew out, I was afraid to deal with the circuit breakers. The kitchen floor buckled. The heat went off for no sensible reason."*

Among the residents she met in her Assisted Living community, Netzer found others who were glad to be rid of their old houses:

*"Those who were widows and widowers or lived alone were relieved not to have all the responsibilities of work or home. Some found it oppressive to live on alone in a space they had shared for many years with a spouse, and were immensely relieved to leave it."*

One room in her house became particularly challenging – the kitchen:

*"I used to enjoy cooking. But shopping for ingredients and cleaning up after myself became chores in and of themselves – chores that threatened to reveal other failings."*

Her neighborhood had also changed. Most of Carol's friends were gone, and the community she knew and loved decades ago no longer existed:

*"During the day, I felt out of place among the young and middle-aged in my own beloved neighborhood."*

## A GUIDEBOOK FOR SENIOR LIVING

Carol's book serves as an invaluable guide for seniors and their adult children to make the transition into a retirement community easier. She offers recommendations on how to "shop" for a retirement community. She explains how community size, policies on resident freedom of movement, types of activities, and the functional abilities of other residents have more impact on your quality of life than stylish décor in the lobby. For residents already in a senior community, Carol also gives practical advice on actions they can take to create a happier life.

## SENIORS ARE PEOPLE TOO

When an outsider observes the residents of an Assisted Living community, it's easy to mistakenly view them as a homogenized collection of frail bodies, moving about slowly, always on the edge of hurting themselves. They seem to need constant tending.

But Carol's book reveals the hidden backgrounds of the intelligent, highly educated and accomplished residents around her. She collects interesting accounts of the senior living experience from her neighbors, including a former biologist, engineer, economist, CEO, neurologist, magazine editor, doctor, psychiatrist, and Harvard professor.



Like any society, this retirement community contains a mix of extraordinary acts of kind support (as well as social cliques, offenses, romantic entanglements, competitions and jealousies). As a retired psychologist, Carol draws back the curtain on the invisible drama and provides insights on the thoughts and feelings of people who are still very much alive in this vibrant society.

In one of her blog entries, *Iris the Husband-Stealer* Carol tells the story of Leah, who lives at Brookdale Battery Park with her second husband, Herb. Thirty years earlier, while she was still with her first husband Robbie, Leah learned he was having an affair with his co-worker, Iris. So, Leah divorced Robbie and later married Herb. And now, husband-stealing Iris has moved into their community, wearing mascara and rouge, still looking for romance.

### Leah described her dilemma:

Herb often played darts with Ivor, a tall, thin widower in his eighties who had owned a string of beauty parlors.

So, Iris became very interested in playing darts.

*“Do I have to live my whole life all over again, the aggravation of it?” Leah wailed to Herb.*

*“You have nothing to worry about,” Herb said. “Iris and Ivor have already arranged to move in together.”*

*“What? Now I’m really insulted!” Leah replied.*

*“You’re complaining when you should be happy. What’s wrong with you?”*

What’s wrong is that Iris doesn’t think my new husband is good enough to steal!

That’s a real slap in the face from this 85-year-old chippie!

### PRAISES AND CRITIQUES OF SENIOR LIVING

Carol’s book advocates the positive benefits of living in a retirement community. She writes:

*“You are free from the worry of everyday problems. You can do exactly as you please. For many people, this is the first*

*time in their lives this is the case, and they want to use the time well. They’re buoyant and curious and develop new interests. They’ve raised a family, sacrificed and worried about it, and now their job is done and they can do as they like without compunction.”*

### But Carol also offers some criticism.

She feels that too much control of residents’ daily lives fosters demoralization and increased dependency. For example, Carol wants the freedom to be picked up by a friend to see an evening concert, then enjoy a late night drink before coming home. Next morning, she wants the option of sleeping late without interruption.

Carol also says typical senior activities of bingo, bridge, and crafts are not enough. She prefers more intellectual activities, such as participating in the play script-reading group, going out to the symphony, or hearing educational presentations on interesting topics.

She believes senior communities could do a better job of matching new residents with others who share the same physical and mental capabilities.

This improves their chances for making new friends and connecting with their new community.

To illustrate, Carol recounts the story of an outing to see Walden’s Pond in which residents at various levels of mobility were loaded into the van. When they arrived at that tourist attraction, no one was given the opportunity to leave the van, which simply idled in the parking lot for 10 minutes before the return trip home.

Because there were some who could not leave the van and walk to Henry David Thoreau’s cabin, no one else was allowed to. Carol suggests that separate outings for the able-bodied and able-minded would enable them to more fully engage with life and preserve their abilities longer.

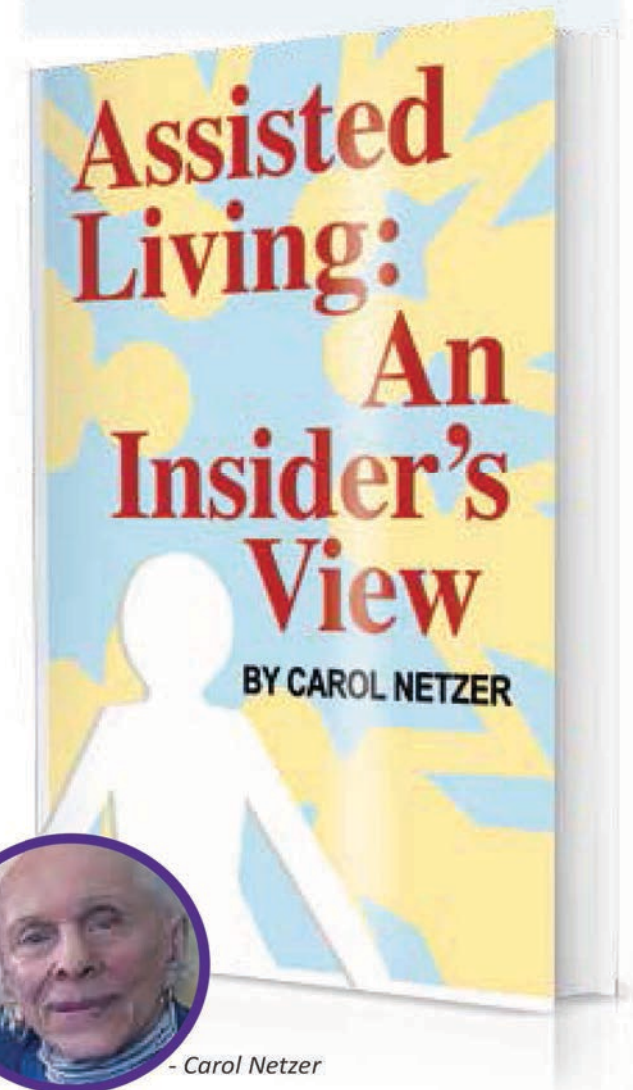
### SEE THROUGH SENIOR EYES

If you have ever wondered how life in an Assisted Living community would look and feel, Carol Netzer lets you see through a senior’s eyes.

Her book, *Assisted Living: An Insider’s View*, is available on Amazon.com – in print for \$7.99, or a downloadable electronic version for a Kindle tablet or PC for \$3.99.

- If you are a caregiver in a senior living community, Carol’s book can help you understand what it’s like to live in your residents’ shoes.

- If you live in a retirement community, her book can give you the comfort of knowing you are not alone and tips for making your life better there.
- If you are an adult son or daughter of a parent considering a move to an Assisted Living community, Carol’s book can be a gift that helps your parent see the positive possibilities of that transition.



- Carol Netzer