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## Finding a Good Home

By Christine Larson

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Soon after Jeanne Erdmann's father passed away in 1995, it became clear that her mother, then 85, would one day need a new home. Although her mom, Florence Greco, was still in relatively good health, "she didn't like living by herself anymore," says Erdmann, 53, a science writer who lives in Wentzville, Mo. So six years ago, Erdmann and her husband invited Greco, who lived in a nearby county, to move in. "She didn't like being here at first," says Erdmann. "We have a lot of farms around us and no neighbors that you can see from the house, so she felt isolated." Erdmann and her husband also had to adjust, curtailing their evening activities to keep Greco company at night. Although Erdmann gets a break now and then when one of her two sisters takes Greco for a while, "the day in and day out wears you down," Erdmann says, especially as her mother has gradually required more care over the years.

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Still, Erdmann and her mother agree the arrangement suits them. "I'm very lucky," says Greco. "I took care of my mother until she passed away, and I took care of my husband until he passed away, and I have very nice daughters and they're taking care of me."

Erdmann is one of 19 million Americans caring for someone over age 75, typically a parent or a grandparent, who may or may not live with them. Often called "informal caregivers," these adult children or relatives provide 75 to 80 percent of all long-term care in the United States. Many, like Erdmann, struggle to find a living situation that gives parents both the assistance they need and the independence they desire. Historically, older adults have lived on their own, with their children, or in nursing homes. Today's seniors, however, face a rapidly expanding array of housing choices. New programs, services, and technology are helping people to stay in their homes longer. Federal and state lawmakers are shifting funds from nursing homes to home- and community-based health services. Even nursing homes and retirement communities are offering in-home services ranging from housekeeping to telemedicine. The wide assortment is encouraging new models of independent living, such as elder cohousing. Meanwhile, the number of assisted-living facilities has grown substantially in the past decade, as have continuing-care retirement communities, which bring independent living, assisted living, and nursing homes together on one campus. The changes are putting pressure on nursing homes to create smaller, warmer environments.

Still, the search for the right fit for a parent can be frustrating and time-consuming. Not all options are available in every community, and cost structures can be baffling. Here's a look at trends in housing alternatives:

**Aging in Place.** Suzanne Stark, 80, has a pacemaker, a broken foot, and a 17-pound cat named Zenobia. When the cat had to be rushed to the vet recently, Stark called Beacon Hill Village, a nonprofit association that helps residents of the Boston neighborhood stay in their homes as they age. For a \$35 fee, the association

dispatched a helper who boxed the cat and drove Stark to the vet. "I have a daughter in Brookline who has two jobs and children who are 5 and 9," says Stark. "A big push for me was to not have her take total responsibility for me."

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