



Living in the Past

Walking into The Wexford Residence, I feel like I'm in a hospital. Everything looks and smells sterile.

All of the seniors who pass me smile or say hello. It makes me feel like they just want somebody to talk to.

I meet Tasse Geldart and her mother, Norma Geldart and we head up to the second floor. As the elevator opens, we walk down the long white hallway passing by the residents sitting in their wheelchairs and watching television. We reach room 227 – Norma's room – and I am greeted with photographs of her past on a red billboard outside of her bedroom.

The expression on Geldart's face shows how happy she is to see her daughter, Tasse.

"I feel horrible leaving her here, and wish I could have her living with me, but it's just not possible," Tasse said.

Tasse visits multiple times during

the week to keep her mother company.

Geldart has been living in long-term care of the Wexford, located in Scarborough, Ont. for two months.

Before being accepted to The Wexford, Geldart was a patient at Providence Healthcare Hospital for eight months, where she was known as a "bed blocker."

A bed blocker is defined as someone who uses a hospital bed for a long period of time because of his or her chronic illness, preventing others who need active hospital care.

This is common with seniors while they wait for long-term care to accept them or make room for them.

The Ontario Health and Quality Council states on its website that in 2010, wait times for a long-term care bed in Ontario have tripled since 2005.

Geldart is 90 years of age and suffers from a lack of short-term memory and osteoporosis, which is the thinning of

bone and loss of bone density over time.

After too many falls and not being able to take care of herself, Tasse and her siblings decided it was time to find an appropriate place for Geldart to live where she would be better looked after.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, currently 13 percent of the population is 65 years of age or older. By 2016, there will be six million seniors in Canada.

Norma seems more sad and confused when her daughter is not there. It's more difficult to make her smile or have a conversation with her.

As I sit next to Norma in the hallway, she stares off in the distance, her wheelchair parked beside people she does not know and nervously fidgets with her seatbelt. She turns her head and says to me, "What is your name?"

The care Geldart receives at the Wexford is a big improvement from

when she was a "bed blocker". Geldart said, "The Providence Healthcare Hospital had too few staff and too many patients to be able to pay as much attention as they would like to the seniors." The Wexford is able to support seniors with physiotherapy as well as activities such as pub nights, which keeps the seniors interacting with each other mentally and physically.

"My mother is a gracious woman who always had friends and was very active as a volunteer and crafter," Tasse says. That is the only thing she misses.

"She was a public health nurse who worked family planning with teens and made no judgments when they chose abortion. She was really good with them. We did not really become friends until I was in my forties. We stopped judging and blaming each other for the past. She is a gentle and uncomplaining soul."

Top centre: Tasse Geldart and mother Norma sit in the lobby of the Wexford Residence and enjoy each others company.

Top left: Norma sits with her son while her other children go through her clothing.

Top right: Tasse and her mother share an intimate moment.

Bottom right: Tasse shaves the whiskers off her mother's face

Far bottom: Norma sits in the hallway after breakfast. When her family doesn't visit, this is what she does through most of her day.



All photographs and story by Samantha Cantelon