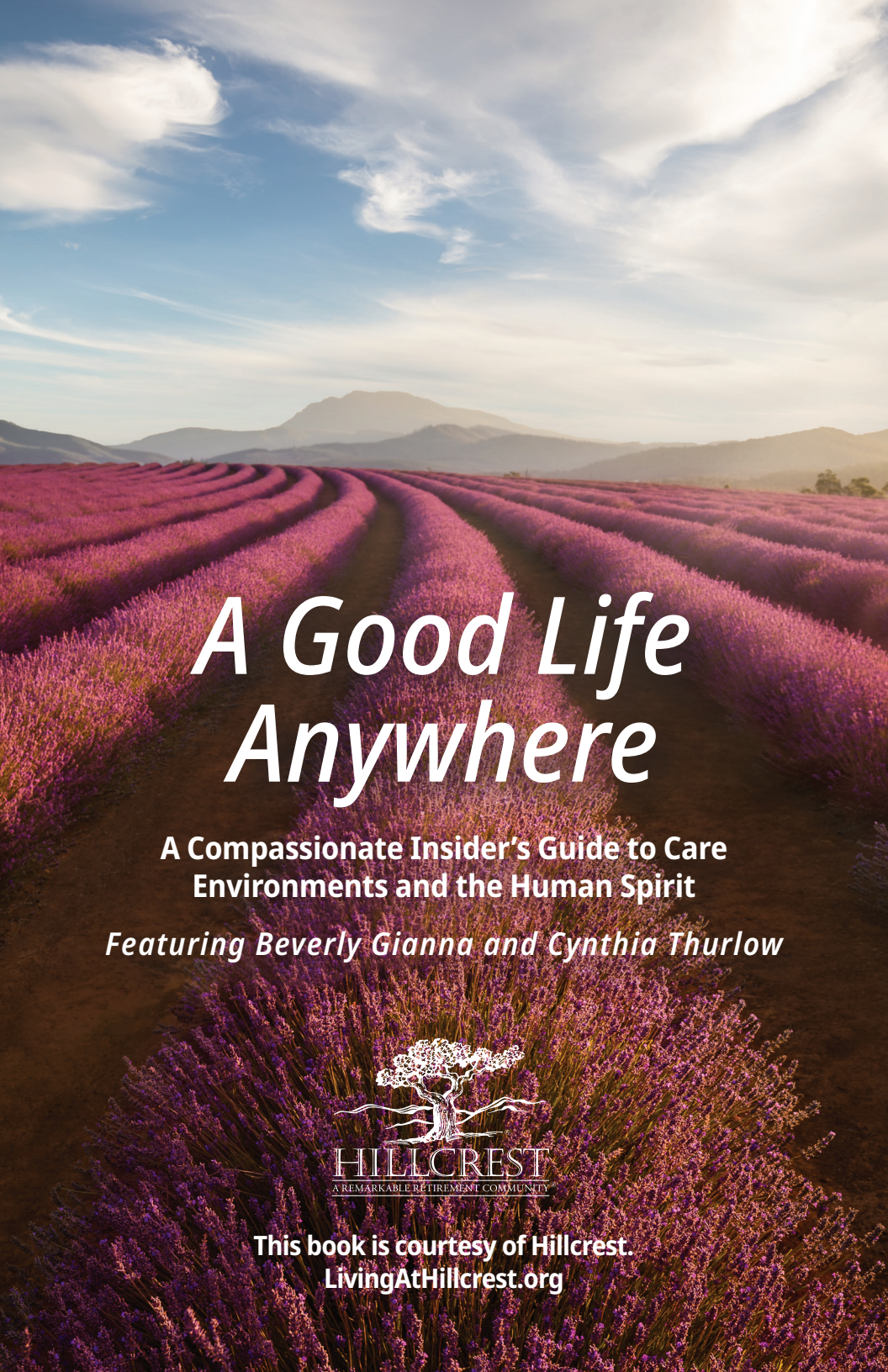




A Good Life Anywhere

**A Compassionate Insider's Guide to Care
Environments and the Human Spirit**

Featuring Beverly Gianna and Cynthia Thurlow



**This book is courtesy of Hillcrest.
LivingAtHillcrest.org**



The Power of Choosing How and Where We Age

Where we live matters.

Please accept this book as a gift from Hillcrest. As a community benefit organization, we are committed to sharing meaningful resources that support living well at every stage of life because aging is a journey we all share. This book was written by Beverly Gianna, an advocate for older adults, gerontologist and ombudsman and Cynthia Thurlow, a senior living expert. We hope it informs, inspires and helps you think differently about the future.

Cheers to happy aging!



A Different Beginning.

As we move through life, we carry assumptions about aging: what it will look like, what it will feel like and what may no longer be possible. Internalized ageism has been driving the bus in our culture for too long.

The good news is, increasingly, people are seeing something different about aging. The later years are not a diminishing, but an expansion, often becoming our most creative and productive time of life.

A time when people become:

More creative

More productive

More fully themselves

Freed, in many ways, from earlier expectations, they discover new ways of engaging with life.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, preparing food on a table. The person is holding a small red tomato. On the table, there is a cluster of red cherry tomatoes, a wedge of orange cheese, a small pile of walnuts, and several slices of grapefruit. A white ceramic cup filled with coffee is visible in the foreground. In the background, another person is holding a sandwich. The scene is set indoors with a window showing greenery outside.

Aging Is Not Decline.



**“THE OLDER I
GET, THE OLDER I
WANT TO GET.”**
~ PATRICIA LORENZ

Research and everyday experiences confirm this:

- Older adults report greater life satisfaction and emotional well-being
- Older adults bring perspective, resilience and wisdom to modern day problems
- Creativity, purpose and contribution continue and often deepen as we age

The contrast of gloomy perceptions of aging find that later years bring something unexpected:

- A greater sense of clarity
- A deeper appreciation for everyday moments
- And the freedom to live more intentionally

**Aging is not about becoming less.
It is about becoming more.**

- More yourself
- More aware
- More present

Planning Ahead Matters.

There's a very human tendency to avoid thinking about aging. As a result, many people avoid thinking about their future self. By not planning ahead, they are choosing not to choose, leaving that decision to someone else. As one resident put it, "Good decisions are seldom made in a crisis." Just as talking about pregnancy won't make someone pregnant, preparing for what's next will not bring it about.

Planning is empowering. It allows you time to think and understand your options, reflect on what matters most and make decisions from a place of clarity rather than urgency.

Planning is about giving yourself the gift of CHOICE.

Where We Live Matters.

Where we live shapes how we feel and it influences our sense of comfort, our opportunities for connection and our overall well-being.

Music. Conversation. Laughter. Quiet spaces.

These everyday experiences become the fabric of daily life.

Research and everyday experience tell us something important:

- Social connection is closely linked to health, well-being and longevity
- Isolation can affect both physical health and cognitive function
- Our surroundings influence how we move through the day—our safety, independence and engagement
- A sense of belonging supports emotional well-being and purpose

We need more than places. We need communities.



At the heart of every good community is something familiar: A neighborhood.

In many ways, choosing where to live at this stage of life is no different than it has ever been. We do not begin with square footage. We begin with the neighborhood.

Qualities:

- How it feels
- Who is there
- Whether we can see ourselves as part of it
- Is there a sense of welcome?
- Do people know one another?
- Is there both movement and calm, energy and ease?

A neighborhood is not defined by walls or buildings, but rather by relationships.

It is where:

- Someone notices if you are not there
- Someone saves you a seat
- Someone remembers how you take your coffee
- We are not just choosing a residence, but rather we are choosing the place where daily life will unfold and where ordinary moments matter most

And ultimately, a place where you feel you could belong.



Here's a Story.

Mrs. Alvarez had lived in her home for more than 40 years. She knew the sound of every floorboard. The way the light moved across the kitchen table. The quiet pattern of her mornings.

When she moved, she feared losing all of it. On her first day, she sat alone. On her third, someone asked to join her. On her seventh, she was saving a seat. Weeks later, she said:

"It's not my old home. But it's becoming my place."



Community Is All About Fit.

When a place feels right, there is a comforting reassurance and a sense that life can continue with connection, comfort and belonging.

Fit is found in...

- The way someone greets you
- The way people know one another
- The way your preferences are noticed and remembered
- A place where you can continue to be yourself
- A place where you can make a new friend

A Story (About Choice).

One woman described the difference this way: She had looked at several communities, each offering similar services. But when she finally chose where to move, something had shifted.

Later, she said, “The difference is that I made the decision myself.” That sense of choice makes all the difference.

It turns transition into a decision. It is not about finding a place to stay. It is about finding a place to live.



Understanding Your Options.

For many people, this is where uncertainty begins. Not because options are limited, but because they are unfamiliar and it's such a big decision.

The good news is: there are more choices today than ever before.

You may hear newer language:

- Care residences
- Care suites
- Life Plan Communities

The baby boomers have been quietly changing the market to put the PERSON at the center.

Independent Living

- Private residences for those who want independence with connection
- Social opportunities
- Dining and shared spaces
- Freedom from home maintenance



Care Suite Living

- A new category for a more advanced level of support in a residential setting
- Residential-style apartments designed to feel warm, not clinical
- Higher level of care available, with more personalized attention and flexible support that adapts as needs change
- Comfort, dignity and familiarity at every stage

Assisted Living (Care Residences)

- Support with daily living while preserving autonomy
- Help with bathing, dressing, medications
- Meals, housekeeping, engagement
- Supportive, but not limiting

Skilled Nursing (Short-Term Rehabilitation)

- Licensed medical care focused on recovery after illness, injury or surgery
- Short-term stays with clinical oversight
- Physical, occupational and speech therapy
- Goal-oriented care to return home or transition safely

Long-Term Care

- Ongoing, comprehensive support for those with chronic conditions or extended care needs
- 24/7 nursing supervision
- Assistance with daily living and medical management
- But life continues, with preferences, relationships and daily choices

Continuing Care Communities

- A place where you can remain as needs change
- Offering continuity, stability and peace of mind

There is no “right” choice. There is only the choice that is right for you.



A photograph of an outdoor patio area. In the foreground, there is a wooden deck with several white wicker chairs and a large white umbrella. The background shows more patio furniture, including a white wicker sofa and another umbrella, surrounded by lush greenery and trees. A white gazebo is visible in the distance. A large white fan is on the right side of the deck. The text "Understanding Your Options" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Understanding Your Options



Choosing the Right Community.

If choosing a community versus aging in your home is your goal, when the time comes to choose one, the question becomes more practical: How do I know what is right for me?

It's natural to focus on the measurable things such as price, services, amenities and levels of support. These matter. But they are rarely the whole story.

More often, the decision comes down to something less tangible: how a place feels and whether you can imagine yourself living there. Beyond the brochures and tour routes, there is an atmosphere you begin to notice—one that reveals itself in small, human moments.

As you visit, pay attention to what you sense:

- Are the front doors clean? Parking lot tidy?
- Is it a quiet or warm feeling when you walk in?
- Is there a natural warmth in how people interact and say “Hello” to you?
- Do you feel a quiet sense of comfort and support, as if you wouldn't be navigating life alone?

Sometimes, the most important signal is the simplest one: a feeling you may not be able to fully name, but immediately recognize. When in doubt, visit again. In fact some people start searching for a community years ahead of time and determine where they want to live well before they move.

A Story.

A woman visiting several communities found herself lingering in one lobby longer than she had planned. Nothing in particular had been arranged for her, i.e., no formal presentation, no guided tour. Just the quiet rhythm of everyday life. People moved in and out. A conversation unfolded in the corner. Someone greeted another by name, warmly and without hurry. It was ordinary, and yet, something about it held her there.

Later, when she was asked what stood out, she paused and said, "I don't know exactly what...but I could see myself here." There was no checklist that led her to that conclusion. No single feature or amenity. Just a subtle feeling that she belonged.

Finding the right place is rarely about perfection. It is about "fit." And when a place feels right, it brings a quiet reassurance along with a sense that life can continue with connection, comfort and meaning. Because in the end, we are not just choosing where to live; we are choosing HOW we want to live. This decision is equally as important as where we go to college, who we choose to marry or where to buy a house. So take your time and be sure you're in the right place.



**TAKE YOUR TIME
AND BE SURE
YOU'RE IN THE
RIGHT PLACE.**

Meet the System Designed to Support You.

Why would we even talk about laws at this point in life?

Because they reinforce a powerful idea: that aging does not diminish your agency. Your voice, your choices and your independence are meant to be preserved and never (ever) set aside.

The sooner we begin to think this way, the more confidently we can approach the decisions ahead.

And along the way, many of us will find ourselves supporting someone else through these same questions. A little knowledge now can bring clarity and calm when it's needed most.

The Older Americans Act (1965)

This Act created a nationwide network of services so older adults can live: as independently as possible, for as long as possible.

This includes:

- Meals and nutrition programs
- Community supports
- Services for caregivers
- Local aging agencies

The Nursing Home Reform Act (OBRA'87)

Affirms the right to:

- Dignity, respect, participation in care
- Individualized care

The Olmstead Supreme Court Decision (1999)

This decision established that care should be provided in the least restrictive environment possible.

The Ombudsman Programs

Established under federal law, every state has an Ombudsman program to protect individuals living in long-term care settings.

The Ombudsman is:

- For the resident, not the community or provider
- Guided by the resident's wishes
- Free, confidential and accessible
- A listener, advocate and ally

Residents also have clearly defined rights, including something deeply important: their agency.

Agency means having a say in your own life, regardless of age or ability. It is the ability to make choices about how you live each day: what you eat, when you go outside, how you spend your time and who you spend it with. It is not something we outgrow. It is something we must protect.

These rights include the ability to:

- Be treated with dignity and respect
- Make decisions about your care and daily life
- Have your preferences and routines honored
- Speak up without fear of retaliation

These rights are not optional. They are protected and they matter every day.

Knowing your rights is one of the most important ways to ensure your voice continues to be heard. And when additional support is needed, legal professionals who specialize in elder rights can help guide you through more complex concerns with clarity and confidence.

Purpose...Choice...Voice... Person-Centered

In every supportive environment, your voice matters.

You are still you.

Life doesn't always follow a straight line. Many people will never need supportive care, and many others will, often unexpectedly. If this doesn't feel relevant today, that's okay. But consider for a moment: what if it were? Or what if someone you love needed your help navigating it?

Know this, throughout your life, you always:

- Have a voice
- Have rights
- Are not alone

Wherever you move, your rights move with you.

Choice Lives in the Details.

The way you like your mornings to begin. Your favorite place to sit. These are not small things, they are your life.

A Short Example.

Each evening, just before dinner, a woman settles into her usual spot by the window, a crystal glass of Chardonnay resting beside her. It isn't rushed or scheduled. It's simply hers. A small ritual, a quiet pause, a reminder that life is still meant to be enjoyed as we wish it to.

How does this relate to your search for the right community?

As you explore different communities, it's important to look beyond amenities and services and understand how they approach personal choice.

A key question to consider is: Will this community respect my preferences, even when there is some level of risk or they don't agree?





**“WHERE FOCUS GOES,
ONE OF THE SECRETS
TO A HAPPY LIFE IS
CONTINUOUS, SMALL
TREATS.”**

~ IRIS MURDOCH

At every stage of life, we all deserve to maintain our sense of agency. That includes the freedom to make everyday decisions: what we eat, how we spend our time, when we go outside and how we enjoy life's small pleasures. For example, if someone chooses to have a cocktail in the evening or take a walk outdoors, even with some risk, that choice should be respected. It is their life.

One of the challenges in senior living can be the tendency to overprotect, to unintentionally limit independence in the name of safety. This is named “benevolent ageism.” But the most thoughtful communities recognize that dignity includes choice.

As an informed consumer, consider asking:

- Will you honor my preferences, even if they involve some personal risk?
- How do you balance safety with independence?
- Are daily routines shaped around residents, or around staff schedules?
- How do you individualize care to reflect each person's lifestyle?

Communities grounded in human-centered care understand that support should be customized to you, not the convenience of operations or the fear of liability. They see you not just as someone to care for, but as someone who is interested in fully living.

When Life Changes the Rules, You Still Choose How to Play.

All of us are aging, whether we choose to think about it or not. And while aging does not automatically mean decline, it does invite change. At some point, most of us will need to adapt, physically, emotionally or socially, to continue living the lives we want. The question is not whether life will change, but how we will respond when it does. The following story is a reminder that even as circumstances shift, a full and meaningful life remains entirely within reach.

A Story About Jerry and a Life Fully Lived.

Jerry used to say, “I am an emperor,” borrowing from Marcus Aurelius’ belief that while we can’t control everything, we can choose how we live within it. And Jerry did just that. He became a runner in midlife and kept going well into his 70s. When a hip replacement ended his running days, he didn’t leave the community. He stayed connected, showing up for breakfasts and friendships that mattered just as much as the miles.

When Jerry lost his sight, he didn’t stop creating. He simply found a new way. He began “painting with words,” dictating reflections and humor into his computer, building a blog that made people think... and laugh. He still devoured books, too, listening to several each week. Life had changed, but it had not diminished.

At 80, Jerry met Ann. She was 75 and it was her first marriage. Together, they chose a continuing care community, not out of necessity, but intention. Their life there was vibrant. They were the couple others gravitated toward, the ones who brought energy into every room. Even when Jerry needed additional support after surgery, it was temporary. He returned home to Ann, to their life, to dancing and connection.

Jerry didn’t ignore what he lost. He adapted. He continued. He chose, again and again, to make something meaningful from what remained. And Ann, now in her 80s, is still creating too, with her first book being published. Their story is a reminder that while life will change, what matters most can endure: your sense of self, your relationships and the meaning you continue to create.



Help Others Understand You; Don't Assume They Will.

In any new setting, people will begin forming impressions quickly, often with limited context. And in environments shaped by time pressures and assumptions, those impressions can sometimes be incomplete or even incorrect. That's why it's so important to actively share who you are, your background, your preferences, even how you communicate. A little context can make a profound difference in how you are seen, heard and supported.

A Story.

A community received a telephone call to admit a new memory care patient and to give an assessment. Shortly after, the man's son called the community and explained his father did not have dementia, but that he just doesn't understand English. And yet, all of the hospital records and skilled nursing records stated he had dementia due to failing his assessments and struggling to answer questions. He hesitated. He paused. His responses came slowly, and at times, not at all.

A conclusion was made quickly by the medical industry. But something had been missed and dynamics of ageism took hold. English was not his first language.

The referred community introduced the gentleman to one of their residents who speaks fluent Vietnamese, and lo and behold, the

gentleman was cognitively fine. The lesson in this story is that people can be quick to judge and misunderstand. Which is why we all must communicate about ourselves and help people get to know who we are.

**“LIFE IS EITHER
A DARING
ADVENTURE OR
NOTHING AT
ALL.”**

~ HELEN KELLER



We are not looking for where to go. We are looking for where we can still belong.

And perhaps, in the end, it comes down to something simple:

To live.

To connect.

To enjoy.

*"The three grand essentials of happiness are:
something to do,
someone to love,
and something to hope for."*

-Alexander Chalmers

To notice the small moments.

To savor them.

To hold onto what matters.

To continue fully.

Not someday. **Now.**

And to carry forward a spirit that celebrates life as it is being lived:

Laissez les bons temps rouler.

Let the good times roll.



About the Authors

Beverly Gianna and Cynthia Thurlow share a deep belief that life can be rich with purpose, connection and dignity at every age. They first met at an AgingIn symposium focused on human-centered care in small-house settings, where an immediate sense of kismet sparked the idea for this book.

Beverly, a lifelong student of living well, brings decades of experience in communications, gerontology and advocacy, along with the wisdom of navigating nearly eight decades of life with curiosity and joy. Cynthia works nationally with senior living organizations, helping communicate about environments and experiences that support meaningful aging, informed by both professional expertise and personal experience.

Together, they offer a perspective grounded in both lived experience and a shared commitment to reimagining what it means to age well.



Resources and Support

For those who would like additional information or support, the following resources may be helpful.

Finding Your Local Ombudsman Program.

An ombudsman is someone on your side—an advocate who listens, helps resolve concerns and supports you in making sure your voice is heard.

Services are confidential and provided at no cost.

To find your local ombudsman program:

https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help

Understanding Your Rights and Protections.

Several important federal laws support older adults and help ensure quality care and individual rights:

Older Americans Act (1965)

Supports services that help people remain independent and live with dignity. <https://acl.gov/about-acl/authorizing-statutes/older-americans-act>

Olmstead Decision (1999)

Affirms the right to receive care in the most integrated setting appropriate. <https://ltcombudsman.org/issues/olmstead-decision>

Nursing Home Reform Act (OBRA '87)

Establishes standards for care and protects the rights of residents. <https://theconsumervoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/summary-history-federal-nursing-home-reform-act.pdf#:~:text=The%20Federal%20Nursing%20Home%20Reform,living%20in%20certified%20nursing%20facilities>

Comparing Care Communities

If you are exploring care options, this tool allows you to compare quality ratings, services and inspection reports: <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/>

Understanding Types of Care and Living Options

As needs change, there are a variety of care environments that can provide support:

- Residential living with services
- Assisted or supportive living
- Memory care
- Short-term rehabilitation
- Long-term care support

Understanding these options can help you make informed and confident decisions.

Additional Support <https://eldercare.acl.gov>

The Eldercare Locator is a trusted national resource to help you find services and support in your local area.



La Verne's Un-Retirement Community.

Hillcrest is designed for people who can't see themselves living in a traditional retirement community. Come for an event or tour and see why gardeners, artists, academics, lifelong learners, wellness enthusiasts and ageless spirits from all walks of life are discovering this hidden gem and loving what they find.

Amenities

- Resident RV storage (Only Hillcrest has this!)
- Fine dining, casual, grab-and-go and MIND diet options
- Campus shuttle for getting around
- Zero cost for maintenance, utilities, internet and cable

Wellness

- State-of-the-art aquatic and fitness center
- Pet-friendly with plenty of lush, walkable paths
- Top-notch fitness classes, gym and personal training options
- Plus a full continuum of health services

Arts & Intellectual Activities

- Artistic pursuits: acting, singing, music lessons, concerts, special interest groups
- Art and crafts classes and gallery
- Full woodshop
- Composting, a greenhouse and resident gardens



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