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THE LAST NEW HOME:
RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR THE ELDERLY
IN NEW ZEALAND

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements

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The Club

Welcome to the club, they said
when he turned eighty;
the entrance fee is pretty steep
and you will find
that every year
subscription rates are higher,
and can't be paid by cheque.

But there are compensations.
The grass, if you can still see it,
is a richer shade of green;
the birds, if you can hear them,
sing more sweetly;
victory is sweet and you will find
the battle of just living
has its glory;
though friends be few
there is a closer tie
that links them heart to heart.

So welcome to the club my friend
and may you find
that life can still be sweet
though you are eighty.

Ida Stokes (1900-1995)

Abstract

The primary assumptions of government policies for the care and support of older people in New Zealand are that home based care ('ageing in place') is the best option for the frail elderly, and that 'home' and 'rest home' are mutually exclusive concepts. In this context I interviewed eleven rest home residents about their experience of 'home' in relation to residential care. What I found was that, for most of these participants, frailty and increasing dependence on family and friends had meant their own home was no longer the seat of identity and continuing independence, or indeed of close relationships and intimacy, security, comfort and control. Rather, moving to a rest home provided greater independence from family and friends and, for many, increased security, comfort and companionship. For these older people 'home' was not associated with a specific residence and was indeed transferable to a rest home setting. These findings therefore contradict and call into question the primary assumptions on which current ageing in place policies are based.

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