

'Our elders need us'

I am one of many people who has lost a parent since the pandemic started. My mother didn't die of COVID-19, but she was in a quarantined assisted-living facility in April 2020 when we got the call that she had died in her sleep.



by
Joe Wills

The author is a psychotherapist and writer in Chico.

I feel guilty about my mom being in that place. I did a lot for her over the years, and I loved her very much, but I did not do everything I could. She would say, "I don't want to be a burden," and she was earnest about that—but it also let me feel good about keeping a certain distance.

At the same time, I don't regret making my wife and kids my priority. It's been the most

fulfilling part of my life to find a partner to share it all with, then be fortunate enough to help bring children into the world.

As many adult children know, integrating

care for a parent into the rest of your life is an agonizing balancing act. People have struggled with this for time immemorial.

A European folk tale—one of many like it—tells of a day when it's decreed that old men had outlived their usefulness and should be killed. One man could not kill his father and hides him in the cellar. When crops wither, only the father knows to plow the road, where seeds have fallen off farmers' carts, averting mass starvation.

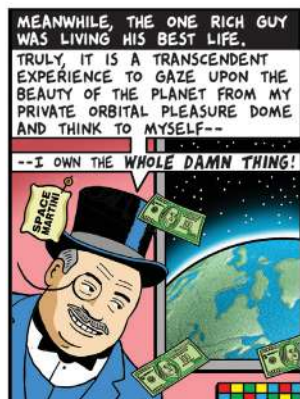
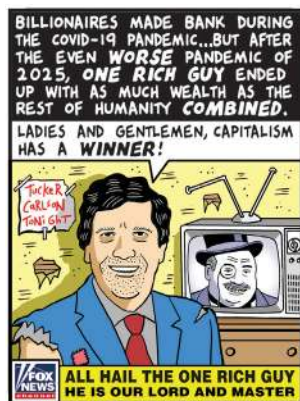
We know in our bones that our elders have wisdom. We also know that we may not have all the time and resources we'd like to care for them. It is an awful, ancient dilemma.

Perhaps all we can do is acknowledge there is no solution but stay present in our elders' lives. Don't pretend they are doing fine and have everything they need. Don't forget what great value and understanding they bring.

There is an indelible image from the pandemic of an isolated elderly person staring out a window. Perhaps it will serve as a painful reminder of how much our elders need us—and mean to us.

THIS MODERN WORLD

BY TOM TOMORROW



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