There are many fish in the sea

Published on August 29, 2020

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This is an article about life and relationships and how to enjoy life, enjoy people and examples of what happens when people are older, live together in the same building, have common present experiences and very different past experiences and different personalities. People are fascinating and looking at people living in a retirement home is kind of like going to a zoo and looking at the animals, unless you live in one and then it is a different experience. I am trying here to give you a sense of that experience and the people around who have become in a certain way, kind of an extended family. As senior citizens who feel that they are no longer working and no longer contributing to society, they are afraid that their worth has decreased. Many of them do not feel valuable anymore.

Their building is not a retirement home; it is a retirement community, each individual being part of a whole that has its own personality and characteristics. The retirement community has many benefits and some pitfalls.

There are many topics here, that different individuals talked about after choosing pictures from KEG cards. Each issue and topic was presented by a personality or several personalities; for instance, the hoarder, who desperately needs help to declutter. She has clothes from 40 years ago which she does not wear but cannot get herself to get rid of. Another hoarder has an apartment full of books; she is drowning in books and papers; another hoarder has medicines that she has left over from many illnesses ago and she is afraid she will need them one day and so she cannot just throw them away. Our hoarders all have one quality in common. They are afraid. Fear and anxiety flood their unconscious and they have a basic statement in their unconscious that rules their lives, "There is not enough". They are all afraid that they will not have enough of something. What unites them all is the fear that they do not have enough time; time to do all the things that they wanted to do in their lives; time to see all the places and fix all the relationships and just to live life to the fullest.

Then we have a group of the hypochondriacs who are constantly worried that they have all the possible illnesses and that they are going to die, today, not tomorrow or next week, or next month, or in a year or in 10 years. They are deathly afraid that their end is now. We have a group of "givers" and a group of "takers." The givers are giving to the collective "everybody" in many different ways and the takers are taking in many different ways. The takers are acting out of a feeling of emptiness; they have a huge hole inside them that they have to fill up and so are taking from others whatever they can: attention, time, food, objects, and even a plastic foot that is used as door stopper in the computer room and suddenly disappeared. The givers have many different tasks, some official and some they invent. It is their way for making up for what they are losing with age and time. They are making up for their losing health, strength, ability to function one hundred percent and with very little time, quickly and with little effort. The givers collect plastic containers to recycle and this is their way for saving the planet for the next generation. The givers are in the various committees for the good of the house/building. They work in the library, teach computer skills or smart phone skills. They sew masks out of material to give out to their friends during the Corona Virus turbulent times. They try to help and do for others even when the others want their independence and challenges and do not ask for help, trying to do things themselves. There are those that think they are better, more intelligent, more successful, more talented, look better, are richer, or more important than others; then there are those that really are better than others but do not know this. These individuals feel that maybe they did something wrong, are not as good as they could be, are not really successful or intelligent or good-looking or talented. There is the woman who always talks about her dead husband and the talks she has with him every morning. The list of personalities is never-ending and this book only describes some of them, the ones we are living with and see every day, except for the days that some are hiding away in their apartments afraid of getting the Coronavirus.

There are those that throw caution to the wind and go to shopping malls, family meetings, restaurants and even weddings; and there are those that are afraid to ride on the elevator with you. There are daredevils and frightened loners who retreat from any social contacts that might infect them with the virus.

This retirement building is full of intrigues, power grabs as seen in the voting for the different committees. One-upmanship is often seen in various contexts as is backstabbing on the one hand, and then there is selfless giving and caring for others on the other hand. Just like our country is our country, for good and for bad, our extended family, our living community is ours. The residents here are part of our extended family if they suffer from many insecurities and if they suffer from over-confidence. Some suffer from physical constraints, others from mental constraints and others from financial constraints, or maybe they are just counting their coins out of a psychological limiting belief and not out of a real financial necessity.

An example of a picture often chosen is Scardie cat. It was chosen by several residents that reported that he symbolized how they feel, especially in these turbulent frightening and challenging days. People that chose pictures and talked about them, reported feeling much better, stronger and better able to cope with the emotional difficulties of this stage in their lives. After choosing and describing the frightened Scardie cat and answering questions about his thoughts, feelings and activities and making up narratives, almost everybody chose the picture of the happy Scardie cat who has adapted to his new reality. If you change the way you think about reality, your feelings change, and then as if magic, the reality changes. written by Eleanor Avinor, KEG cards and a retirement community. from eleanav@research.haifa.ac.il