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# The Making of *Senior Living*

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The Cast of *Senior Living*.

# About the Play

The vignettes that make up *Senior Living* give us a loving look at the residents who reside in Riverdale Manor, as well as the connections they've formed and the community they've built. Although the characters are at a similar stage in their lives, they are each navigating different hurdles that might arise as one ages, but that are seldom explored on stage. Hyams and St. Lou use the script to grapple with these issues by infusing the scenes with humor and an appreciation of what it means to get older.

We don't want to face our own mortality, or face the idea that we will also eventually be old. Everyone gets old. We did not set out to write a play because of that, but it became a byproduct of what we're doing.

Playwright Tor Hyams

It is a play about people dying to live, which is what we're all doing. Deep down inside of everyone there is a hope that tomorrow will be better and that we will have the courage to keep going.

Playwright Lisa St. Lou





I hope that the audience  
will rejoice in these  
stories. I hope they walk  
away celebrating what it  
is to grow older.

Director Judith Ivey on *Senior Living*

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# The World of *Senior Living*

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## SETTING

A retirement community in Riverdale, NY (The Bronx). Moderate to upscale. There is nothing special or particular about this community. It's what most people think a retirement community is, but it's not an old-age home.



# A Brief History of Senior Living Facilities



- ★ In the US there are currently over 1 million seniors (people over the age of 65) residing in senior living facilities.
- ★ The National Center for Assisted Living expects that this number will easily double in the next decade.



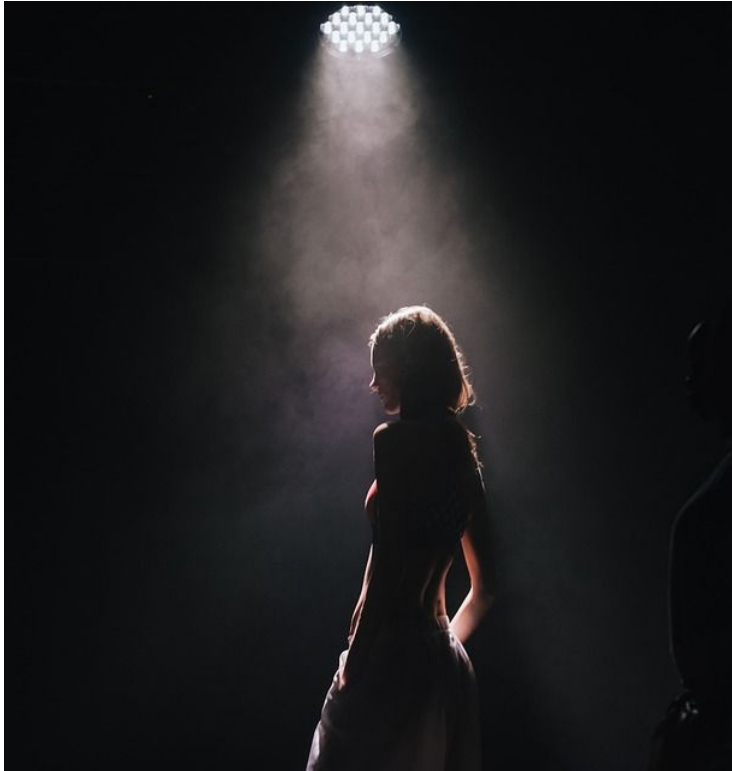
# A Brief History of Senior Living Facilities

- ★ From 1900 to 1990, the life expectancy in the US increased by 25 years which added to the demand for options to house seniors.
- ★ In 1935, Congress passed the Social Security Act which included the Old Age Assistance (OAA) Program.
- ★ In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Medicaid and Medicare into law and the government became more involved in the regulation of the nursing home industry.

# A Brief History of Senior Living Facilities

- ★ Dr. Keren Wilson is credited for opening the first assisted living facility in 1981.
- ★ Her goals were to let seniors have a sense of autonomy and independence, while also providing different levels of care to different residents depending on their needs.





“I let *it* go. But that’s the problem with it. It just keeps nagging at you like you could lose “it” at any second. And you know the day is coming when it’s gonna be gone, or at least it won’t be what it used to be. Then where will you be? *Who* will you be? What will you do without it? Because *it* defined you your whole life. So what happens when *it’s* gone?”

Carol, *Senior Living*

# Ageism in the Theater

- ★ Women ages 45 to 74 make up over 28% of the U.S. population, but are rarely cast in leading roles in theater, film, or television.
- ★ We frequently see leading women alongside men in movies (and oftentimes as love interests) with an age gap of over a decade.



# Vignette Plays

- ★ *Senior Living* fits into the theatrical canon of vignette plays, named for their brief, descriptive vignette-like scenes.
- ★ Vignettes in theater or literature are often impressionistic and focus on one particular moment rather than a long-form plot.
- ★ The individual parts of vignette plays may be simple and small, but the ways the vignettes speak to each other add varying perspectives and ideas to an overarching theme.

# Vignette Plays



- ★ The most famous vignette play is John Cariani's *Almost, Maine*, which premiered at Portland Stage in 2004.
- ★ Other examples of vignette plays include: *The Dining Room* by A.R. Gurney and *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler



*Senior Living* is a play about people dying to live. Though the characters in this play are "of a certain age," this is not a play about old people or death.

Authors' Note, *Senior Living*