



## Old Friends

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It is nearly impossible for nursing-home life to substitute for the community left behind. To create a community of two with a roommate that one tolerates, much less learns to respect and love, is a rare and valuable thing indeed. OLD FRIENDS is the chronicle of such a friendship.

Joe Torchio and Lou Freed meet when they are assigned the same room in a nursing home in western Massachusetts. At first it seems that they have little in common. Lou, ninety years old, began work the day after completing eighth grade. He never smoke or drank, and was married to the same woman for almost seventy years. Joe, seventy-two years old, has a law degree and was chief probation officer in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The tragedies he has faced—his first son died of leukemia and his first daughter was born retarded—have left him with a dark outlook on life.

Despite these differences, the two men find that they are in agreement over certain important issues. They both admire those who bear pain and hardship with stoicism and grace. They value laughter and try to use humor to grant a certain dignity to their situation, referring to the bathroom, for example, as “the library.” And while Linda Manor imposes its own strict routine upon their lives, they manage to find their own routine-within-a-routine.

Kidder records the men’s lives but remains removed from the story himself. He is a fly on the wall, an impartial observer, not a witness but a scribe. This is too bad. Joe and Lou’s conversations, recorded as they are, often seem to be dancing around critical subjects like death and the nursing home. By including his own insights, Kidder might have been able to give the book more of a dramatic edge.

## Sources for Further Study

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