

## The Residents' Voice: From a Dementia Unit

**Pieta Valentine**

XlibrisNZ (Oct 6, 2022)

Hardcover \$28.99 (220pp)

978-1-66410-818-9

*In the empathetic novel The Residents' Voice, a woman makes stunning breakthroughs in the study of dementia.*

In Pieta Valentine's based-in-truth novel *The Residents' Voice*, a physiotherapist does groundbreaking work with dementia patients.

Daisy begins working at a residential home for patients with dementia; she has modest goals. At the same time, Jane becomes a resident of the home, moving into a place where she's surrounded by strangers and there is little privacy. When the women meet, it changes them both.

Jane's son asks Daisy to work with Jane privately. Daisy's work becomes a matter of scientific discovery: spending time with Jane, she learns more about how dementia patients' minds work. They have breakthroughs early on, and knowing more about Jane helps Daisy to find ways to keep Jane's mind active. In time, Daisy comes to do similar work with all of the patients, achieving noticeable results across the board.

Though Daisy narrates most of the story (with Jane's perspective also centered in its first few chapters), the residents are at its center. Every patient is introduced in a thorough manner, with details about their personalities and concerning what they did before moving into the home. Daisy reveals how dementia manifests in each person in particular ways too. Many chapters focus on particular skills that she's using to connect to the residents; when they make progress, it's moving. Two epilogues are present to share practical advice with the family members of those also affected by dementia; they are concise and helpful, suggesting ways to help patients that tie into the story well.

Daisy is an empathetic guide, acknowledging the hardships of dementia and the general difficulties of aging and working to understand what people are going through and feeling. At times, her empathy becomes problematic: an entire chapter is devoted to an imagined interview with Jack, one of the more aware and adaptable patients at the home; this hypothetical approach in fact squashes Jack's own voice in the process. And there's some awkwardness in the prose too. That the members of the staff are Filipino is referenced on repeat and without need, so that the workers' nationality becomes their primary characteristic. Further, agreement errors muddle the book's timeline, and there is ambiguity in the construction of some sentences.

Working toward a bittersweet but respectful ending, the novel *The Residents' Voice* follows a woman as she makes stunning breakthroughs in the study of dementia.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (January 23, 2023)

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