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Caregiving in Arizona

Catherine Marr

May 19, 2020

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Retrieved on 2020-08-10 from <https://anarchiststudies.org/caregiving-in-arizona-by-catherine-marr/>

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Phoenix, Arizona. A place of cinematic sunsets wherein the intense heat is felt in on the ground, in your body, and felt politically. I have been living here for nine months doing hospice care for my grandmother which is a live-in nonpaying job that requires staying at home most of the time. My grandmother is 87 years old and has a rare brain disorder called Progressive Supranuclear Palsy which has taken her memory, her ability to walk, and ability to swallow. She has opted out of a feeding tube and is on the process of slow death. I am relieved by it in some ways and love being able to give her a comfortable death in her home. Learning death doula work has been an amazing esoteric experience for me and I have long thought this would be a personal calling of mine. Global pandemics are just the tip of the iceberg as far as mass deaths are concerned. Learning how to love each other as we and our planet dies is a necessary skill.

My grandmother is also the only person in my family that is a homeowner. Her daughters are all either working class or disabled. My mother and sister currently are homeless and addicted to methamphetamine and heroin. They accumulate money for places to stay partly from me, my grandmother, sex work, stealing, selling

shit, or odd jobs. This home is unable to maintain any kind of real quarantine in this house due to them needing a place to shower or do laundry in-between chasing tricks or dope. I love them but they are incapable of seeing this as anything but a regular flu and they are also incapable of just staying here or just staying somewhere else. In so many ways it is the shittiest time for all of us to be alive.

During the past forty-five days of my attempted quarantine my mother and her husband were both admitted into the hospital with heart infections. It has been hard for me to hear talk about health-care heroes in social media because the treatment they have received as homeless addicts was terrible before this crisis and it is fucking brutal now. My family has reported how angry doctors and nurses have been with them for even wasting their time with anything that is not COVID-19 related. Any rehabilitation facility is not accepting new patients so even if they wanted to get off of the streets and into treatment – too bad.

Shelter-in-place orders are exceptionally cruel to homeless people. The only guests in hotels are homeless addicts that have done enough work during the day to get a room for the night in hopes to not spend nights outside. I know this because I am often called to quickly get to a Motel 6 because my sister might get arrested for beating up her abusive boyfriend or my mom can't carry all her things without getting winded at a Quality Inn. My mom calls sleeping on the streets "camping" and doesn't like it very much. There are plenty of others that feel the same in their homelessness. There is no good reason the thousands of hotels couldn't open up to serve the thousands of homeless people in Arizona. And yet capitalism has been the cruelest in its contradictions. This disease doesn't discriminate but it most certainly will kill a lot of people for no other reason aside from potential projected profit.

Catherine Marr lives in Phoenix, AZ for the time and is trying to get the hell out. For the past ten years she has worked as a DJ/musician, artist, and party girl. Today in aging she is seeing the softer side of the world and writing about the art of living and dying in a wretched world. Find her on Instagram @surrealist_fantasies and listen on soundcloud.com/verarubin