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OPINION

Kindness amidst the coronavirus

She'd been waiting to list her Coachman with RVs4MDs, a volunteer group that matched the RV owners with medical workers in need of temporary housing.

By **Leila Philip** Updated September 11, 2020, 1 hour ago



Some RVs have all the comforts of home. RVSHARE

The text from my neighbor had come at 5 a.m., “Mother passed yesterday evening.” I called immediately, but of course, there was little to help with. It was April and COVID-19

meant there could be no funeral. Her family could not travel home. My neighbor had been caring for her mother, who had dementia, for many years and for the past three weeks, she had been keeping vigil, not leaving the house and living mostly on oatmeal. When I offered to make her a rhubarb crisp, she answered emphatically, “Yes!”

As I pulled into her driveway, I was startled to see an enormous motor home. Even more startled when my neighbor popped out, broom in hand. Was she already planning a trip?

“You didn’t know I had this, did you?” she said, taking the still-warm crisp. Then she explained that she’d been waiting for an opportunity to list her Coachman with [RVs4MDs](#), a volunteer group that was matching RV owners with medical workers in need of temporary housing. My neighbor had just lost her mother, but there she was, cleaning her expensive motor home so she could loan it to someone else whose life had been upended by COVID-19. As I was leaving, she called out, “Hey isn’t your son an EMT? Shouldn’t you be thinking about him living in an RV?” She urged me to go to the group’s site and make a request.

After much family discussion, we decided not to make a housing request; our son was a new EMT, just out of college, and not working in a high-risk area, at least not yet. My neighbor’s RV was loaned to a family welcoming back a military worker from a base in Iraq.

Rvs4MDs began when two women in Texas saw a concrete way to help others. Within a week of their putting up [their Facebook page](#), hundreds of people had joined as volunteers and the organization grew to include 17,000 followers with representatives in almost every state. They have matched 1,500 RVs with nurses, doctors, EMTs, and paramedics.

“Within the group, we see nothing but love and kindness,” said Holly Haggard, one of the founders, “it has brought hope to so many.” Her cofounder, Emily Phillips, agreed, “We didn’t realize it when we started, but in addition to helping medical workers, we were building a community. Nobody brings their politics to the group. It’s such a nice change

to leave the divisions outside.”

Barbara Ludwig is a professor of Nursing with a specialization in critical care. An air force veteran, she did not hesitate when the call came in April to work in a COVID-19 unit, but she had a problem; members of her immediate family were high risk, and she feared bringing the virus home and infecting them. Barbara was in the middle of searching for an affordable hotel room when she learned about Rvs4MDs. She posted about her situation and Krystal Muci responded, offering to loan her 42-foot-long motor home. Within days, Krystal and her husband had not only driven their RV to Barbara’s house outside Kansas City (a 3-hour drive), but had found an electrician to do the needed electrical work and complete the hookup. When Barbara got off shift and walked into the RV, she found a gift basket and a poster of photographs of her family that Krystal had made and hung on one wall. Krystal had even stocked the RV with lawn games and a lawn chair so that when Barbara got off shift, she could sit outside and watch her children play.

“Knowing someone had cared enough to do this for me, it brought tears to my eyes,” said Barbara, “and it allowed me to focus on taking care of patients because I knew my family was safe. In my work as a critical care nurse I am used to dealing with mortality, but the amount of loss that was happening every day . . . it took a toll on me that I was not prepared for. Many times, I’d be the one holding the hand of a dying patient, then I’d have to call the family. Every day I left work thinking, did I do enough? ”

Now that we are six months into the pandemic, the unprecedented emotional toll it has had on the mental health of caregivers and health care workers has begun to emerge. Preliminary studies in Italy show that [over one-half of health care workers there suffered some form of PTSD](#). In New York City this past April, national attention was brought to the issue when an emergency room doctor, two physicians, and two EMTs committed suicide.

More than [192,000 Americans are dead of COVID-19](#). While the Trump administration shamelessly uses the pandemic to seek to further divide us ordinary Americans like my

shamelessly uses the pandemic to seek to further divide us, stigmatizing Americans like my neighbor and the many volunteers at Rvs4MD show how we can prevail — when we remember our American tradition of lending a hand, the transformative power of kindness.

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