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## For 'Bossy Bessie' Her Home Life Is a Family Affair

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**R**ussian-born Bessie Schneider spoke of earlier days. Of how she came to America as a little girl and watched her mother sell mattress covers on the streets of Chicago.

She reminisced about hectic years spent running Bessie's Bargain Store. "I worked hard all my life. I was never rich but I was always happy," Schneider said. "I raised three wonderful children, lost two good husbands and now I'm on my own. I make the best of it."

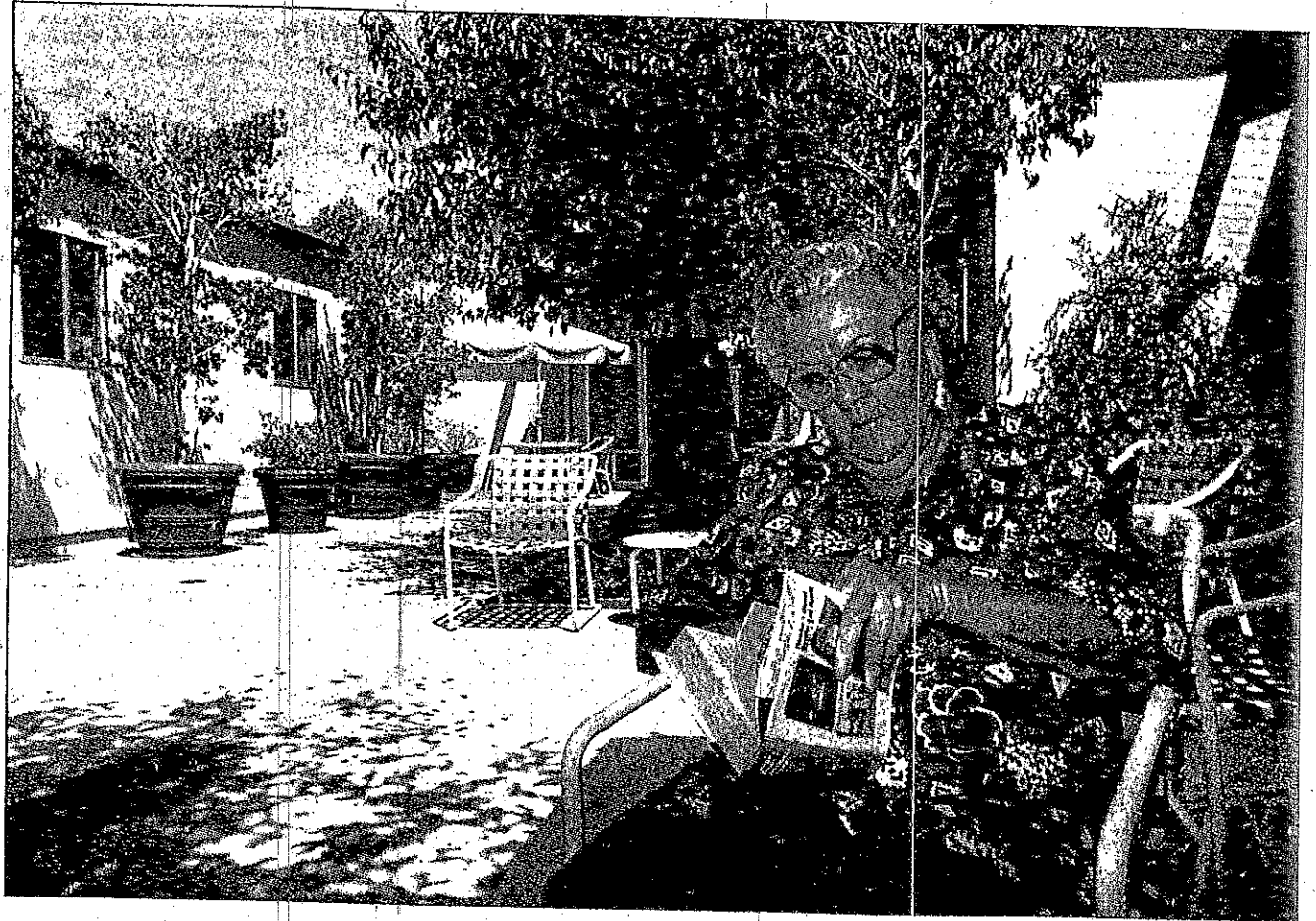
At 81, Bessie Schneider believes she's found the ideal housing situation for an older person who can still manage for herself.

She lives in a housing cooperative that could be described as a cross between a congregate-care facility and board and care.

"But it isn't really a care facility because no one takes care of us but ourselves and one another," the sprightly woman said.

Schneider is one of 14 renters at Rothman House in West Hollywood, a residence for seniors operated under the auspices of the nonprofit Alternat-

Please see **BESSIE, K14**



Bessie Schneider relaxes with book in courtyard of housing cooperative where she has lived since 1985.

RANDY LEFFINGWELL / Los Angeles Times

# BESSIE: Hybrid Care

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tive Living for the Aging.

"We do pretty much as we please, within reason, of course," she said. "We have our own doctors, phone and TV. We pay \$455 a month, and that covers utilities, upkeep and the evening meal. In addition, we have a gardener, a janitor, a cook and a social worker who is available for individual needs."

Schneider moved to Rothman House in 1985, shortly after the facility opened. "There are not very many places like this around. And we wouldn't have it if it weren't for Janet Witkin, the director of ALA, who made it all possible."

Rothman House has two separate wings, each with seven bedrooms and individual baths, a common lounge and kitchen. In the evening, residents from both wings gather in a large dining area for the only meal of the day prepared by the house cook.

"We live like a family and we have a say in how the place is run," Schneider said. "All residents attend a weekly meeting where we voice our complaints and make suggestions."

Who runs the meetings, a visitor asked. "Bossy Bessie," she replied, with a laugh. "I'm the president of the joint."

Schneider has a weekly appointment at the beauty parlor and when she's not busy helping solve house-related matters, she shops or spends time on the patio knitting and reading.

"I'm in some pain most of the time from my arthritic condition, so I don't get around as much as I'd like to," she said. But the handicap did not deter Schneider from hopping the plane to Aptos (in Northern California) recently to visit with one of her daughters.

Schneider believes she has finally tamed her restless nature. "But I'm still learning to be patient. It's something all older people must learn to do," she said.

"I always have to be doing something. It's the way I am. All my life, if I was baking one pie, I'd bake two. There was always a

friend or a neighbor who could use one. Here we also do a lot of sharing.

"Each resident has a designated space in the refrigerator and a shelf in the pantry. We fix our own breakfast and lunch and everyone is generous with sharing what they make. Any time you need something, someone is here to help," said Schneider, stopping by the kitchen stove to add some dill to the chicken soup she had started preparing earlier.

"We also take turns with cleaning up in the kitchen, but if someone isn't feeling so good, the others pitch in," she said. "We all look in on Florence who hasn't been feeling too well lately. We bring her a cup of tea or soup and see that she's comfortable. We watch over one another and that's a good feeling."

Schneider greeted new tenant Harvey Goodman and thanked him for changing the light bulb in the kitchen, then stopped to introduce her next-door neighbor, Cele Schulman, 85, who was waiting to be picked up by a relative.

Schulman came to live at Rothman house three years ago. "My daughter built a nice house for me but I felt so lonesome. I don't like crowds of people, so I didn't see myself in one of those large retirement homes. This arrangement is perfect for me. It's like being home with people who understand how we feel," she said.

"Living with the children never works," Schneider commented.

"I have a daughter up north, another who is an artist and a son who is an investigator. They are all busy with their own lives and have their own problems. Some older people can make their children miserable with their demands."

Schneider, who has been a widow for 6½ years, admits that even a place like Rothman House takes getting used to. "Older people are set in their ways. They want things the way they had it many years ago. But you can't look back.

"Most of the people who live here come to realize how lucky they are. We are never alone."