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WEEKEND BREAK

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THE FINAL VISIT?

Webb’s visit to mother may be the last



Photos by Patrick Webb
May Webb, right, has a new bear called ‘Fred,’ who lives in her room at a residential care home in England.

By PATRICK WEBB

My mum, May Webb, has a new bear. Fred stations himself on her bed. Golden brown, he is a loyal ursine, always handy for cuddling.

Her 14-inch companion is plush from newness, hard round eyes buried deep in shaggy facial fur, paws still firm because they haven’t been laid on.

He delighted us both earlier this year when I visited my native England to see how Mum is doing, one year after she moved into what likely will be her last home.

Her residential care home is located in a town south of London that seems less familiar with each return visit. Storefronts change repeatedly as the bleak economy continues to wane.



Positivity is emanated among staff and residents of the residential care home, where walls display inspirational quotes.

It’s less than a mile from the public library where I spent my childhood, my bicycle chained outside. Betting parlors, pubs, Indian restaurants and junk stores line the pedestrian-only High Street whose centerpiece is a chain grocery store. The green 462 bus I caught to the train station every day for seven years hasn’t passed that route for decades.

At the same station, traveling on a theater trip

to London, I discover the young woman serving at the snack buffet is Bulgarian. We exchange humorous banter about professional wrestler Rusev, then move to serious consideration of Hristo Stoichkov, the highest scorer at the 1994 World Cup in the U.S., which I attended.

Her nation’s losing semifinal was played at the Meadowlands before she was born, but she knows all about Stoichkov’s penalty kick to reduce the deficit to 2-1 just before half-time.

Here I am, chatting with a woman less than half my age who is 1,200 miles from her homeland. Except in the U.S., soccer is the world’s universal language, effortlessly crossing nationality, age and gender lines. I encountered the same in Africa when a phone store manager knew the exact words the English coach said to

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The center of the town south of London where Patrick Webb grew up typically has few visitors.