

## Nancy Mason Interview, November 2015

J: June

N: Nancy

J: Hello.

N: Hello, is this June?

J: This is June. Is this Nancy?

N: It is.

J: Well it's nice to hear your voice Nancy.

N: Well, same here. I'm glad you answered.

J: Well, we're all here now. We appreciate you sharing your time and your story with us this morning.

N: Well, that's just fine. I'm happy that I can do it.

J: Good.

N: I'm very happy here and so I'm happy to help them out.

J: Excellent. Well let me just say a few things before we get started. I want to remind you that this call is being recorded and that's basically so I can have my hands free and not have to take so many notes. But if you should say something that is too personal and you don't want the world to see just say so during the conversation and say, "Oh please scratch that part from the transcript" and we can do that, ok?

N: Ok. I made notes myself to help me along so I wouldn't forget what I wanted to say. Is that ok?

J: Ok, perfect. That's absolutely fine. I'm going to ask you some questions and then if I fail to ask you a question that your notes pertain to, just slide that in somewhere and we'll go from there, ok?

N: Ok.

J: Alright, well first I just want to confirm your name, it's pretty straightforward. Nancy Mason, correct?

N: Yes, that's correct.

J: Ok good so the first question is simple. When did you first move to The Fountains at Bronson place?

N: September 1, 2011.

J: Ok so you've been there a few years.

N: Yes.

J: Alright good and where did you live just prior to The Fountains at Bronson place?

N: We lived in Lawton, Michigan out in the country not within the little village but within that district.

J: Is that near Kalamazoo?

N: That's about 15 miles from Kalamazoo. About a 20-minute drive.

J: And are you a native of Michigan?

N: No, no we both were from Indiana.

J: Oh, ok.

N: Born and raised. I've put that in my little thing.

J: I see that here, Kokomo, Indiana.

N: That's right Kokomo, Indiana.

J: Wow, ok, so were you living in a big house right before you moved or what was your situation there?

N: Yes, it was and I was going to say that we built two homes. One in Portage which is just a suburb of Kalamazoo and also the one in Lawton and we lived there for 32 years.

J: Oh wow.

N: It was home.

J: It was home and 32 years, that's a long time to be in one place.

N: It was.

J: Did you have a hard time kind of?

N: I think everyone does you know. My husband had Parkinson's disease so you know you get to the point where he couldn't do any of the outside work anymore and what do you do? You either hire it done or you have to make some other arrangements. We tried to have good common sense and do that.

J: Good and do you have children? You do have children.

N: I have four daughters, yes.

J: Were they supportive of your decision?

N: Very much so yes. In fact they probably knew before we did that we should look into some other living arrangements so they were really supportive.

J: Did they help you find the right place?

N: Yes, yes we had one daughter that drove us all over looking at apartments. Certainly all were in on the decision making you know talking about finances and so forth and all that goes along with that. They were very happy yeah.

J: How did you decide where you were going to look and tell me about that process?

N: Well, now this is all in my little what I was going to say, is that ok?

J: Absolutely.

N: Ok, well my husband did not want to live in a condo. He didn't want to sell the home and put all the money into a condo so we started looking at apartments. In fact we found one close by here that we liked and we put a down payment that they would call us when one that we were looking for became available. The same time we got a card in the mail from Friendship Village and they were inviting us to come over and listen to someone that was going to speak on decluttering. And you know we thought we needed that so we went. And I think that's when we saw another form of living that we hadn't really considered. So then we started looking around at all the places available.

J: So originally you were just looking at plain old apartments without services?

N: Yes.

J: Then you stumbled upon, "Oh wow! This is..."

N: Especially for us with his condition deteriorating. You know, as time goes on, everything that we could get here, or at any of the places, you know, what all they give, it was just so much better than thinking of an apartment where we'd almost be in the same boat except we wouldn't have to shovel the snow or rake the leaves or do all of that stuff you know.

J: Right.

N: So for us, The Fountains just shone above the other two places so...

J: Good.

N: ...that's how we ended up here.

J: And so tell me about your apartment.

N: Well, we moved into a two-bedroom apartment. We needed to have two bathrooms available and lived there until he passed away. He's been gone 2 1/2 years now. And so then, at that point, I moved to a one-bedroom apartment to save a little bit. And I'm really happy here. It's very adequate. I have a large bedroom. I think the living room as well, it's plenty large enough. I feel cozy and it's just right for me.

J: Good, that's great. So other than the fact that your husband had Parkinson's, which prompted your need to move, was there anything about living in a house that was getting difficult for you that you were glad to get rid of?

N: I had two knee problems. I had one knee replacement and the other knee wasn't too good so he, in his condition, was trying to carry the laundry up and down. Our laundry was in the basement. He was trying to do that for me because stairs were difficult and you know little things. The age process is what it is. You know, little things creep up on you and next thing you know it's harder to do one thing or another.

J: That's right.

N: So when you find a place like this, where you know, elevators help a lot. I'm on the second floor which is just fine and we did come in with a dog and we lived where I could get out easily to walk the dog. So we looked at many apartments here, we really did. There is such a nice selection and made our choice. So when I chose this one I wanted to stay on the same floor. I'd made friends up here and it's just on a different hallway but you know, I am just so happy. I have made so many friends and I've been very active here in different things and it's just a wonderful place for me.

J: Tell me how it is making friends there. How do you go about making friends?

N: Well we came in on a one-meal-a-day plan, which we took our evening meal usually. And every evening, almost every evening, we would sit with another table of people. And you learn their first names first and you get to talking about why you're there and what they did and just chitchat back and forth. If you do that enough you finally get to know these people, you know. As you begin to enter some of the activities that go on, you get to know them, too. I was asked to be on the spiritual life community and I joined that and shortly after the chairman of that committee had a stroke. And they asked me if I would take over being chairman. Well that opened a whole new thing for me. I had a committee then that I knew. And pretty soon you start playing cards or other games around here with people. If you want to get acquainted, it's an easy thing to do. And for the most part you see that happening. There's always a few people who just don't take part in things and you're going to always find that but in my case, especially after my husband died, knowing these people, knowing that many of them had been through the same situation as I was going through, it was such a comfort. The sympathy and the comfort I received from all of these people, you know, you have your friends on the outside and your family that you get that from, but this is just a whole different situation. And we feel like a family, we really do.

J: That's great. So it sounds like you're involved in committees and things like that. What other things do you enjoy doing that the community plans?

N: Well they have many outings. We have a dinner outing once a month. We have a women's breakfast group that goes out. We have the pickers to go antiquing and they take us to events at our Miller Auditorium at Western Michigan. They take us to the civic theater. There so many outside activities that they transport you to, you're not confined here even if you don't drive. I do still drive but I get on the bus and I go with them you

know instead of driving myself. It's just a very very nice situation especially for me and I think for many others that are here. I think most people are happy here. The ones that aren't so happy are where the children make the decisions for them and they didn't have any input. That's the sad thing, but you know we did our own looking. I'm happy that he was able to make this decision with me. To be able to push a button every day and know that if you don't push that button you're going to get a phone call and if they don't get you, they're going to come knock on your door to see if you're ok. That's another issue. How would you get that if you looked elsewhere?

J: Right, now with your husband's condition, did he take advantage of some of the nursing services eventually there?

N: He didn't really have to do that. I don't know how to put this. His personality changed and we had to admit him to the hospital for a time. They told me that they really could do nothing more for him and at the same time he had reacted to me in an unfavorable way and so he could not come back here into the apartment. And so we had to make other arrangements. He could have gone to our nursing home on the grounds here or he could have gone to the hospice care which is right across the street. We chose the hospice care because we had been told he really wasn't going to live that much longer. And so this is what we did and he only lived five days after entering there. There were a couple of times when I did have to call someone and they were immediate in responding to my call here.

J: Parkinson's, that's a tough one.

N: It is. It really is very sad especially when they change. He was very mild mannered. We had been married almost 60 years without a harsh word between us. Well when their personality changes, which happens so often with that, it's very hard to accept.

J: I'm reading here, it's so sweet this sentence, it says, "I became sweet on him in the fourth grade and have loved him ever since."

N: That is true. That is true. I didn't know you had that.

J: Childhood sweethearts.

N: I spied him and he says I chased him until I caught him. We went all through school and then college together. He went on and got his PhD but I stopped with the BS degree and taught school while he went on with his other degrees. It was a very good marriage.

J: Lucky, lucky. And so you have four daughters. Forgive me if I already asked you this but do they all live nearby?

N: No, three of them do. One is in Missouri and so she's a university professor there at the University of Missouri. The other three are within a 20-mile radius I should say. One lives in Lawton. That was hard because she only lived a mile down the road and I had two grandchildren there that were in and out all the time. That was probably one of the most difficult things. And then I have the two others that are not too far away.

J: So you probably get together with them pretty often.

N: Oh absolutely (inaudible) ballgames and all the sports that the younger children get into these days and everything else so.

J: Do you have plans for Thanksgiving?

N: Yes, my daughter and family will be coming from Missouri for a week and we have, my husband's family, have their Christmas gathering the Saturday after Thanksgiving and it happens to be my turn so they're all driving up from Indiana. With my kids and

family and them, it should be close to 40 people.

J: Wow, are you doing that there at The Fountains?

N: Yes, I have the auditorium that I'll be using. I'll bring food up of course but I'll have a meat tray. We don't have the turkey, they have that on Thursday. So were going to have a meat tray first. Family tradition, everyone brings salads and desserts and we will have plenty to eat.

J: Wow that sounds like fun.

N: And then we all bring a \$10 gift and we have numbers that we draw and when you get a gift if someone likes your gift they can take it from you but if you can get it back three times then it's yours.

J: That sounds like a fun game.

N: It is. It takes quite a while but we have a good time with it.

J: Good well I'm just about done with my questions but you had some notes. Was there anything in your notes that I didn't get around to that you wanted to share?

N: No, I think like I said, I wrote this out. I hope in reading it and I won't sound like I'm reading it but pretty much it's as I told you, if that's going to be ok.

J: Absolutely. You shared some great insights and you've had many important points that I think others out there that may be in a situation of thinking about moving will appreciate reading about. Do you have any other advice to either couples or single people that haven't ever seen a retirement community, what would you say to them?

N: Well, other than the things that I do here and the activities that we have, I was going to close this, with my advice to people is not to wait too long before they make that decision because I wish we had come in sooner. I would have had more time with my husband, you know, at a better time in life to enjoy everything that we could do here.

J: Right.

N: And I don't want them to feel like they move in within something like this and that they never get out, they never do anything else, they lose their friends on the outside because I have all my friends on the outside. I get together with them all the time and I realized when I stop driving that's an issue too but you have friends to pick you up and they take you places then. It's really nothing to wait for, I don't think.

J: Right, good.

N: I hope my little talk will inspire some people. I don't know.

J: Well, you know it always does and sometimes people need to hear it from a lot of different sources and sometimes if they don't know the person, they listen more to them.

N: Well, that's true, too, I guess but when I talk it's going to sound just like I've been talking to you. I hope that's ok.

J: Oh absolutely. That's perfect, that's perfect.

N: You'll be hearing it twice.

J: It's just the way we like it, it's just a casual conversation and yeah so thank you so much for sharing your time and it was nice getting to know you on the phone.

N: Well same here. I don't suppose we'll ever meet.

J: Probably not but we had this time on the phone so I appreciate it.

N: That's right. Well, you do a wonderful thing too. It is a great way I think to get to people in here so they can hear our side of the story rather than just the marketing people.

J: Exactly. Well great. Thanks again. And I know you probably have a busy day ahead

of you see you enjoy that.

N: I will.

J: And it was a pleasure.

N: Well thank you so much.

J: Ok, take care now.

N: Ok, so I just begin? Or that's it?

J: I was going to say that's it. Oh, did you have more you wanted to say?

N: I thought you talk to me and then I thought I, little misunderstanding there I guess I thought I just talked a whole string by myself.

J: You can if you'd like to.

N: No, no no no, that's fine. We did very well. My last sentence was just a minute and let me find it here. I said that I wake up each morning and I look forward to enjoying all that's offered in the days ahead and I hope that this will continue for many days and years. My advice is to not wait too long before making your decision that could bring you much enjoyment in your senior years. And that's all it was going to add.

J: Perfect I love it.

N: Ok. I thank you. That was easy.

J: Thanks again for all your time and thoughts. I appreciate it.

N: You're quite welcome, you're quite welcome. Alright bye-bye.

J: Bye-bye.

N: Bye-bye.