

Joan Hoffman Interview, August 2016

J: June

H: Joan

0:37

J: Hello.

H: Hi June, this is Joan Hoffman.

J: Hi Joan, this is June Hussey. Nice to meet you.

H: Thank you.

J: Well, it's so nice of you to make time to share your story with us this morning. I appreciate it.

H: No problem, no problem.

J: Good, well, let me take a few minutes up front to explain to you why we do these interviews and then I'll let you do most of the talking from there, ok?

H: Ok, sounds good.

J: Ok good so we do these interviews, we being Watermark Retirement Communities, we like to check in with residents of ours all across the US and get their stories about not only who they are but what brought them to their own personal decision to move to a retirement community. We like to know kind of the process you went through in figuring that out and selecting the one that you did and also something about your life now that you're living there. And what we do with this information is we share it in direct mail and on the Internet with folks out there who are doing their own research into retirement community living and of course you know many people have never set foot in a retirement community, so it's really helpful to hear from actual residents about how they wound up there and what the process was like for them. So that's basically what we're up to and we will be recording this conversation so that we can produce an accurate transcript but if you should say something along the way that is too personal and you don't want to share, just go ahead and say right then and there, "Please don't publish this part." And then we will make sure we omit that, ok?

H: Ok.

J: Alright so to get started, I will invite you to first state your name and then share just a little bit about who you are. I know that they sent me a bio but if you want to just pick out bits and pieces of things in your life that you think are important for people to know. Something about where you were born, your family, where have you lived, that kind of thing and then after that I'll start asking questions and get into more specifics, ok?

H: Ok, will do.

J: Ok, so go right ahead.

H: Ok, my name is Joan Hoffman. I'm 78 years old and I've lived at The Fountains at Bronson since August 15th of last year, 2015. And I'm very happy here. I came from Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is 40 miles north of here and I have a daughter that lives here and she found The Fountains for me. She looked at several places because my family decided I should live near one of my children. I have four married kids. Two sons and two daughters and they kind of gathered together and decided I should

choose Kalamazoo. So she looked around at several places and she looked at two others that were close by here but I said, "Don't give me too many choices." So that's how I came here is I found another place and she brought me here, the second time I visited and. And I really liked it, the friendliness and so on. I lived most of my life in northern Michigan, which is beautiful country up in Charlevoix, a nice little French lakeside town and worked up there as a nurse and also did some real estate and was very active in my community with the kids. And after 23 years of marriage I was divorced and was single so I moved a little bit away from the northern Michigan town and went over to Gaylord and got a job working in the operating room. And after 10 years over there I came to Grand Rapids, came back to Grand Rapids, Michigan where I was born and raised. So it's been kind of a busy cycle of life. After being there for 12 years I guess I lived back there after retirement and worked a little bit. So that's when I moved to Kalamazoo was last year. So I've been up and down the state of Michigan but I like the surroundings here very much. I like Kalamazoo, it's a little bit smaller but I still go back to Grand Rapids to see family and friends quite often. So the location is excellent. I just hop right on the highway and I'm there in 20 to 30 minutes so not too much of a problem. I'm very happy here and I'm adjusting to life, pretty much to the Kalamazoo lifestyle.

J: Good. So were you working as a nurse right up to the point where you move to The Fountains?

H: Oh no, no. I retired about 10 years ago. I've been single and retired for about 10 years. I've been divorced for 30 years and been single that long. I was working until I retired about 10 years ago, when I was 66.

J: Ok so let's see, tell me about the process of moving. Did you own your home that you lived in right before you moved?

H: Yes, I had a condo. I owned a condo in a community in Northeast Grand Rapids where I grew up. I've been there 17 years. It was a few tears in the beginning. The kids said, "It's time you live by one of us, mom." So I said, "I don't want that, I don't want that." But it was the best thing I ever did, to tell you the truth. The condo is nice but it was also 30 years old, starting to need little repairs and stuff. And I just found it to be pretty overwhelming, had to call the kids and they all lived out of town so I had to call different people. But it was nice, once I got going, and they came to help me a lot to make the move and my friends did, too. So downsizing was a little difficult at first but once I got into it last summer, I made the decision and came here to The Fountains in February and March, and looked around and told my daughter this is what I want. So I made the decision to come in August after the summer, give me four or five months to get everything straightened around. Yeah, it was the best thing I ever did. I tell people that all the time. Once I got going, it got better.

J: So take me back to the tearful part. What was it behind the tears? Were you sad to be leaving your town or your condo or a little bit of both, what was it?

H: Yes, yes, we, it was everything. I was very happy there when I moved back there. I had been there 16 years and I wasn't ready to move to a retirement community. I didn't need that. It was my kids' decision and helping me. But once I got going. I could see their reasoning because there was nobody around. It happened to me. I had some health issues and a car accident and all this stuff came down on me within three months in January, February and March. And all of a sudden I thought my daughter is half an

hour or 40 minutes away and she has kids and a job so she couldn't come running to help me. So it was a big decision. That was the tears was because I grew up in that town and was afraid to leave basically. But the nice part is everything is here. She's close by and I've made some nice friends and everything. The location is actually perfect for me because I still drive. I'm very active. I go out, I shop. I'm very busy all the time and so I wanted to be independent but not alone. So I'm glad I did it, very glad I did it.

J: So paint for me a picture of your life before and after. How is your life the same and different than it was when you were living in your own condo?

H: It's very different. I was becoming, and my kids could see it, you know, coming in at four or five in the afternoon and getting phone calls from friends, "Well, we don't want to go out at night, we don't want to do this, we don't want to do that." And here. it's so different. It's so busy and we have so much activity going on all the time. I didn't realize how isolated I was, you know? I didn't realize how I was dependent on other people. I was driving everybody in my condo neighborhood to doctors and dentists and eye appointments and all this stuff. I was one of the younger ones in the neighborhood and it was just, I would back in the garage and shut the door and that was the last I saw of anybody for a couple days. And here it's just not anything like that at all. I mean, I have all I can do to keep track of the schedule. So it's the closeness of people here, the friendliness and also the fact that I'm not alone and I've got the call bell. I've got everything right at my fingertips and, you know, I pick up the phone and call the desk if I need anything or whatever and it's really a comfort to me because I'm alone. And it's a comfort to my family. too.

J: Right. So, do you think that if your kids had not made the strong suggestion that they did, do you think you ever would have made a move like this?

H: No, no, I would never have come this far from Grand Rapids. I might have gone into a retirement community but probably not until I was another 10 years older, and so I was at least in my 80s probably, which I don't think is a real good idea. I think it should be done when you're active and busy. There's so much more to do and also you can help other people. I'm a helper, I'm a doer.

J: Well, you're a nurse.

H: Once a nurse, always a nurse. And that's what we're talking about. I do the best blood pressure business in the world in my apartment here because people go down to the dining room and they stop on their way, "Can you take my blood pressure?" And I say, "Sure, come on in, sit down." And we talk, visit, I take their blood pressure and they go on their way. Because there's quite a few 90 year olds and 80 year olds here. So I like doing that. That's my charity work and I feel like I can answer a few questions and stuff. So yeah, works out pretty good.

J: Well, it's nice to feel needed, right?

H: It is, yes it is. And I figure I can do that so I take them in my car. We go different places and out to dinner and things, three or four gals from here. And the circle of friends now, in just a year, that I've got, 10 or 15 on my cell phone. So we call each other and it's amazing. People told me, "You won't have any trouble once you get there because you make friends easy." And I said, "Yeah, but I don't want to leave my roots. I don't want to leave the friendly people that I know here." But as I looked around I thought, my gosh, my friends are all either older or they don't want to go, they don't

want to do things. They don't want to drive anymore so this is nice and it forces me, not forces me, I should say, gives me a chance to go do things I would never have done by myself, you know, just going places with the activities and all the stuff. And you can pick and choose. My goodness, the calendar is so full all the time I just can't begin to do everything every day. So yeah, I'm real happy here.

J: What kind of encouraging words would you have to share with someone out there who may be living alone and may be fearful of change and fearful that, you know, they wouldn't be successful if they made such a move, what would you tell them?

H: Well, I say, talk to somebody that has done it recently but don't be afraid because once you start the downsizing and once you start the decision in your mind to do this, it's ok to be scared. But keep going, you know, keep making that move because it's too late when you absolutely cannot do it anymore or you become totally incapacitated or anything like that. Don't stop just because you're scared. We all had that feeling and I had that feeling when I made my visits here. I had dinner, I stayed three days in the hospitality suite here and I met every woman at the table the first two nights said the same thing, "We've all been there, we've all done that, we've all had that feeling." So don't wait and I think that's the best advice I can give. I am 78 now and if I waited another three or four years, I would've probably not done this, you know. I would've been scared or whatever, but once you start the downsizing and you start seeing what you absolutely need to have, it's amazing. I've always been a picker and chooser and keeping things and stuff and I just had to, you know, downsize immediately, so it worked for me. I say, just keep going. You'll have days when you want to throw in the towel and say, "Shouldn't I go back and do my own thing?" But don't, don't do that.

J: That's great advice. So paint a picture for people what a typical day there at The Fountains at Bronson Place is like. Is there such a thing as a typical day?

H: Well, the nice part is you can do whatever you want to do. I eat my meals in my apartment. I cook. I don't go to the dining facilities as much as some other people because I'm very active and I enjoy fixing a meal and I don't like to eat early at 4:30. So a typical day would be I'm up usually about 9:00, 8:30 or 9:00 and fix breakfast. And then I get out and do whatever is on the agenda for the morning. Sometimes it is, you know, class or sometimes it is a cooking demonstration or whatever. And then I come back to the apartment and sometimes I go out and I go shopping or whatever. Around two or three or four every day we have different activities in different parts of the building. So if you go out to the patio on Fridays we have cookouts in the summer. We have our happy hour in the lobby on Friday afternoon. So it's a pretty busy day. And we have two days a week that we have doctor's appointments and people with transportation, all free, and you can go and make your appointments. And two days a week we get shopping trips. The bus goes out to all the shopping centers around here and grocery stores, the hardware store and wherever you want to go. So on Monday and Wednesday mornings they're pretty busy. Afternoons they have a lot of classes and activities early afternoon. And then four or five days a month we have outings that go to the art museum and to the, oh gosh, we go to restaurants which I really enjoy because I don't have to drive and we pay our own way. Our activity director's fabulous, and Nancy, it takes her hours over the regular time of working to go places with a group. And usually there's 25 or 30, they take a bus and we go there early and we get seated and we get waited on as a group but we pay our own way. It's really nice. I can't say there's

a typical day. Now some days, on the weekends quite often, it's kind of slow, there's not too much. This summer we're going to the park downtown in Kalamazoo every Sunday afternoon. The bus comes by at 3 o'clock and they have outdoor concerts, which are beautiful, and they take, you know, 10 or 15 people downtown to the park and they listen to music and they're back here by six or whatever. Yeah, it's just a nice place to be, all the time, beautiful grounds and stuff, get a lot of walking. People exercise and walk. I don't do the exercise class but a lot of people do. There's line dancing and all the stuff in the morning, three mornings a week. There's a lot to do, you know, so I can't really say there's a typical day.

J: Well, you've painted a great picture there. Thank you for doing that. I really can't think of anything that we haven't covered but is there something that you can think of that you wanted people to know that I haven't asked you?

H: Yes. I do want to tell you about the staff. I mean there is never a time you walk anywhere that the staff doesn't greet you with, "Hi, how are you? I hope you're having a nice day." Everybody, that's what impressed me when I walked in the door the first time, everybody, maintenance, the aides, the cleaning people, the guys that work in the garage downstairs. You call them and they're here within, probably within a half an hour or forty five minutes if you need something fixed. Everybody talks to you in the hallway, sales you know, "How are you doing?" And they call you by name and call you by name when you walk in the door. The staff at the desk knows everybody by name, first name. "How are you today?" Or if you've got something special going on, that is very nice to be called by name I think. That impressed me a lot and it was from the day I walked in until I moved in. Even now, after a year, it's the same thing all the time. It's very pleasant, very nice to know that there's somebody around that knows where you're going and what you're doing and what's important in your life.

J: That's so nice. What a warm and uplifting environment.

H: It is, very nice, very nice and very pleasant everybody is to work with. If you need something you just pick up the phone which, living alone, that meant a lot to me when I needed the lightbulb fixed or, you know, the toilet was stopped up or my shower curtain fell down the first couple weeks I was here came. I had one of those expandable ones and so my daughter put it up and so fell down and I just couldn't hold it up to fix it so I called and they came right up. And he said, "Where is your permanent one?" And I said I don't know." And he said, "I'll get you one." So I went downstairs, five minutes later I had a new shower rod and it was permanent. It was nice to be able to do that and I enjoyed that very much.

J: Well, great, that's fantastic. Well, gosh I think we've covered all the bases there. I can't thank you enough for your time, Joan. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

H: Thank you, thank you.

J: You have a full day ahead of you there I'm sure. Is it a beautiful day in Kalamazoo?

H: Oh it is, it's gorgeous, yeah. We've had a wonderful summer. A little bit hot at times. It's 88 or 92 today I guess is going to be the high but it's nice inside here. We open windows and stuff and night, I do anyway. Some people don't but I do, beautiful.

J: Well, you get out there, enjoy the rest of the summer and one more time I thank you very much for your time. We really appreciate it.

H: Ok thanks June, bye-bye.

J: Ok, Joan, Take care, bye now.