

Donna Peters Interview, May 2017

J: June

D: Donna

J: Hello there.

D: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Donna?

D: I'm calling from Kalamazoo. Yes, it is.

J: Hello Donna, this is June Hussey. Pleased to meet you.

D: Thank you.

J: Well, thanks for taking some time out of your busy day for a little interview on the phone with me. Before we get started, can you hear me ok?

D: I can hear you perfectly

J: Great and I can hear you too. Ok, so before we get started I just wanted to go over a couple of things, first being that we are recording this conversation so that we can get an accurate transcript and make sure we get your sentiments and quotes correct. But I want you to know that if you should happen to say something in the course of the interview that you don't want to appear in the transcript because it may be too personal or something, to say so right then and there and we will make sure we strike it, ok?

D: Is this going verbatim to people or what are you going to do with this?

J: What we do is we create a transcript of the entire interview and we make that available to people who want to read the entire interview. But what we do when we mail out our mailer is we take bits and pieces of it, quotes from you, you know, details that you have shared and we kind of condense it into a little mailer that goes out. But if people want to read the whole transcript they can. So that's why I say, you only want to share what you want the public to know and if you happen to blurt something out that you realize maybe you don't want the public to know, then just say so right then and there so we can make sure it doesn't get out there. Sound good?

D: Ok.

J: Ok, good, and I also just wanted to review the purpose of this interview. We interview residents of The Fountains at Bronson Place as well as other communities that Watermark operates around the country. And we enjoy getting to know you, first of all, just getting to know what you've done in your life and what kind of things you enjoy doing today. And then we get into more detail about what you were thinking about when you started thinking about making a move, how you went about deciding where you wanted to move and then a little bit about what your life is like now that you are there. The reason we do this is because a lot of people out there, as you probably know, have never set foot in a retirement community or maybe they don't really understand what they are all about. And so we like to share our residents' stories to kind of help those folks figure out what they are going to do in their future and open their minds to the possibilities. So that's all we are after is just your story. I'm going to let you start by introducing yourself and letting us know where you're from, what you've done all your life, if you want to share something about your family. Kind of give us an idea of who is Donna Peters.

D: Well, alright, I am 72 years old and I was born and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I have a brother who is nine years younger and a sister who is seven years older. Raised in a town south of Kalamazoo called Millwood. I attended Loy Norrix High School and graduated from that. Went briefly to Western Michigan University then decided I would rather be a housewife and a mother and I stopped going to college and went to work at a bank in Kalamazoo. Then I got married and raised my own family and had three sons and a daughter. Halfway through that raising of children I started working at Consumers Energy. I worked in the high-pressure gas department for 20 years, retired from there. In the meantime we had moved to the town of Mattawan, which is about 15 miles west of Kalamazoo. I retired from Consumers Energy and my husband and I were married 44 years when he died at the age of 63. I became a widow and stayed in Mattawan for five years after that and then started shopping around for someplace to live. And that's about it.

J: Ok, well, very good, that was a good summary. So, gosh, you lost your husband at a young age. I'm sorry to hear about that.

D: Thank you.

J: Tell me about where you were living in Mattawan, in your house, and what was going on in your mind before you decided maybe it was time to start looking around for a different kind of lifestyle.

D: Well, my husband had a small business in Mattawan and we lived on Red Arrow Highway which is a secondary highway. It runs parallel to I-94. And I had been fairly independent most of my life and it prepared me for widowhood. But I lived alone for about five years and then I started shopping around. I thought I had to think about the future. I thought I was slowing down physically and I worried about slowing down mentally. What was my plan? What was I going to do? I didn't want to live with my children. They offered. That was not an option that I wanted to pursue. So then I started looking around at other places because I was tired of responsibility. I was tired of being tired. I started looking around at the retirement villages offered to me. Eventually narrowed it down to two of them, The Fountains being one of them. And one day I went to the other place for a program. I love these postcard programs that you send out because I came here for probably three years and attended a lot of those different programs that they offered to the community. I think Barbara probably thought I was just kicking tires and I was never going to settle because I wanted to be certain. I was really researching this and checking things out. One day I was at a program at another place and I had to drive right by The Fountains to go home to Mattawan. So I thought, I'm just going to swing in there and talk to Barbara for a minute because I was just about nuts trying to figure out this place or that place, this place or that place. So I walked in and asked for Barbara. She wasn't here but a man named Tom was working in the marketing department at that time. I had met him of course because of my many visits here before, prior to that. I said to Tom, "I'm ready to blow my brains out because I just cannot decide between the two places." And this really impressed me: He did not try to swing me over to The Fountains' side. He did not give me all the positive things about The Fountains that I should be thinking. He just said to me simply, "Which one feels right?" Boy, it was like someone flipped on a switch in my head I thought, "Oh my gosh, of course." This feels right. When I drove in here I felt like I was coming home. How could I've been so blind? That was the moment that did it right there when he said,

"Which one feels right?" Of course The Fountains feels right.

J: That's very interesting, very interesting.

D: It was very interesting to me.

J: Yeah, it's kind of like when you're looking at houses and finally you find one that feels right, right? It's the same thing.

D: That was the key phrase that did it.

J: Well, in addition to feeling right what were some of the things that were important to you when considering where you wanted to live? Did you have a list of things you wanted to make sure you had? How did you go about beginning to kind of weigh your options?

D: Well, I'll tell you what, first of all I had to decide that I was going to move at all, period. And then I had to decide where I was going to move and then I had to decide when I was going to move. Those were the three things. I wasn't planning on moving until November because I'm not a heat lover. I don't like warm weather. I would rather move in the cooler climate. But one day I stopped in for a visit and Barbara said, "I want to show you this apartment." So she showed me this apartment because I had told her, first of all, I wanted an eastern exposure. I wanted to see the sun come up in the morning and I've wanted that all my life in all the houses I've lived in and I never had it so I thought, "I want an eastern exposure." And secondly, I needed sliding shelving in my cupboard because I'm not as young as they used to be. It's harder to bend over and I love to cook and bake and I wanted shelves that pulled out in my kitchen. Can't remember if there was something else, oh, oh I'll tell you about this when we come to it. So the apartment she showed me first of all we walk in and the windows were all open, the blinds were all open and it was very bright and sunny and I said to her, "What exposure is this?" And she said, "East" and I thought bingo, there's number one. Then we walked into the kitchen, I opened the cupboard, bam, there were the sliding shelves. I don't know what this was, spring, I think, it had to be around June probably. And I thought, boy, I wasn't planning on moving in until November but if I don't take this apartment now it'll probably be gone because I really liked it. Then as we walked out, there were some people playing euchre at a card table by the elevator. And I'm a euchre player. I played two days a week when I lived in my home in Mattawan. And euchre playing is my life now even. So I thought let me see now, there's the eastern exposure, my sliding shelves, here are people playing euchre at the table right on this floor and then Barbara said to me, "Oh, there's an informal wine group that meets here on this floor on Mondays and Wednesday afternoons at 4 o'clock." I thought oh my gosh, gag me with a spoon, you know hit me in the head because this is tailor-made. It is tailor-made. So I said, "Well, Barb, I'm not waiting until November, we better do right now because this one is the one." It just fell into place.

J: Wow, well, I guess you were meant to be there then.

D: I was meant to be here and I've been here since August. And I'm telling you, it is just one of the best decisions I have ever made. I love it. I love it and you know Tom said, "Which one feels right?" I tell you what every time I open the door to my apartment and go in, I feel like this is home. I made the right decision. I love being here and I love the assurance of having people around me if anything should go wrong with my health. My kids were concerned very much that my laundry was in the basement of my house and I had to go down a flight of stairs. That concerned them. I don't have to do that now. My

concern was that I would like my own washer and dryer in my apartment but that turned out to be a nonissue. There's a laundry room here and every time I have gone down to it with the exception of one time since August I have been able to do my laundry. So that turned out to be nothing.

J: And your kids are they mostly living nearby, are they all in the area?

D: Three out of the four live probably within 15 miles of me. The fourth one lives in Virginia. My daughter, I have one daughter and three sons and the daughter thanked me for making this decision. She said, "Mom, thank you for making this decision because we won't have to make it for you and we know you will be happy with your decision."

J: Wonderful, that is such a great gift.

D: Yeah, I'm glad she said that and I'm glad that I could make this decision without the kids having to struggle with it.

J: Now, you've probably known a lot of people and I know I've met a lot of people that have the attitude that they are just going to stay put where they are, as long as they can, until they have to move. Why do you suppose people feel that way?

D: Well, I can't tell you why people feel the way they do, everybody has their own reasons, everybody is unique. But from what I heard a man, a resident who lived here, one of these meetings, of the multitude of meetings I attended here and his name was John Vanderploeg and he was giving a talk like you are asking me to give. One of the things he said that impressed me was, "Don't wait too long." I left that meeting that day and I thought about that and I thought about it. I thought, "he is right, he is absolutely right." They offer so much here in things to do, the activities coordinator here is wonderful. She just seems to hit everybody at different times. She has such a multitude of varied things that she offers that I wanted to be well enough to attend those things and do things and participate. So it made sense to me. That's one of the reasons that I moved here in my late 60s rather than waiting until I was in my 70s.

J: How about, did you know anybody, before you moved in, that live there?

D: No, no but I met somebody that I worked with. He worked at the Consumers in Grand Rapids. Our paths have crossed, we didn't know each other intimately but our paths had crossed so I was familiar with his name. And he was a euchre player so my gosh, how good was that?

J: So I imagine you met people by playing euchre right off the bat. How else did you go about making acquaintance with your new neighbors?

D: Well, that activity log comes around once a month and I looked at that and every day I did something on that activity log. I got to meet a lot of people that way. It was just a great way to meet people. I just showed up at the venue that they had listed on there, sat down and started talking to people. And then another thing that I really liked is for dinner I went down by myself and I stood in the doorway and the hostess seated me with somebody different every night. There were very few people here that I don't know now. It's just from participating in the activities or being seated with people at the dining room table. I certainly didn't get to know who they were all in one night, maybe five nights down the road I would sit with them again and I'd have to ask them all over again what their names were and where they were from. But eventually you get to know who the people are. Everybody was so welcoming, first of all. You get to know people who are here so then you can spot a newcomer and boy they spotted me and they would

walk up and introduce themselves and welcome me, anything they could do for me they would offer to do. It's just a very warm and inviting place to be.

J: That sounds nice. Tell me about the physical move, was that something you had been dreading? I know a lot of people put off their move simply because they dread the physical move itself. How did you go about moving your stuff and deciding what you wanted to bring?

D: Well, I lived in a small two-bedroom house to begin with so it wasn't some palatial place that I had to worry about moving tons of stuff, I didn't have a lot to begin with. My solution was to have a huge garage sale. I told you we lived on Red Arrow Highway and during the day there's a lot of traffic there. We had great success with our garage sale. I sold a lot of stuff in the garage sale and what remained we boxed up and took to a charity place. And then I called the Salvation Army and said, "Take it away." They took away the big stuff and things I couldn't move and all the rest. Then I had friends come over and I was lucky enough that I lived close enough to The Fountains that I could do this in stages. I didn't have to load it all up and move it in one day. I took a load a day. And I drive a pickup truck so we loaded that pickup truck, friends, my euchre player friends, they came in handy. As well as playing euchre they are very considerate, kind people who helped me move. Sons of my friends helped me move, my children helped me move so we did it in 10 days. We just kept reloading and loading up the truck. And then Two Men and a Truck came and moved the big furniture in. It was absolutely painless, just painless.

J: Now, you mentioned your friends from your old neighborhood, have you stayed in contact with your old friends?

D: Oh absolutely and that was one of the concerns I had when I moved into this place: Am I going to get a set of new friends and then I'm going to say goodbye to my old friends? I didn't want that to happen and I thought how is this going to go. It didn't take very long I found out it meshed, it just absolutely meshed because the people from my old life have been here for lunch, for dinner, they have been here in the evening to play cards, some of them have met people I play cards with here and so they are intertwined. Some of the people from here have gone out with me like in the evening at the Knights of Columbus they have once a month euchre tournament and the residents from here have gone with me to there. My old people have come here; my new people have gone there. It has just blended really well.

J: It sounds like you have actually broadened your horizons rather than narrowed them.

D: Oh absolutely, absolutely, my husband said to me one time after I retired, "I saw more of her when she was working than when she's retired." And one of the residents here calls me Donna Go-Go because I am active and I like to do and I like to go.

J: Well, that's great. Well, any other advice that you might want to share with people that are living in a big house and getting tired of being tired as you said?

D: You know because it's a personal decision, everybody has to arrive at it at their own pace. When the student is ready the teacher appears. That's just what I feel. It was a good decision for me. I can't speak for everybody but you know everybody has to come to that decision on their own.

J: That's right. Like we always say and like Tom pointed out to you, what feels right to you? We always like to say, "Find the place that's right for you." It might not be The Fountains; it might be some other place but as long as it's right for you, then that will

work.

D: I'm glad I took the time and researched. I felt comfortable with my decision when I made it. Here's another point, a lot of people go away for the winter in Michigan and now I don't have to worry about my pipes freezing while I'm gone because I don't have to worry about it. As far as having a pet to have somebody take care of, I took care of, the lady two doors down, Nancy Mason, and she has cat and I took care of her cat for a week while she was gone. I absolutely loved it. There are people vying to take care of her cat. It's almost like a lottery she has to pick from for people willing to take care of her cat. And I don't have to worry about going away for a week or a day or a month because there's somebody here to take care of what needs to be taken care of.

J: That's nice.

D: Another reason why moved here, I want to bring this up before I forget. This was probably about five years after my husband died, it was 9 o'clock at night, it was dark, it was like early spring or late winter, a knock came on my door about 9 o'clock at night, you know. So I was in the living room and I moved downstairs to like the breezeway area of my house where we have another outside door and I opened that door and I saw the person who was knocking walking down to get into his vehicle. When he saw me open the door then he approached the house again and when he approached the house I had a motion sensor light and that flood light came on, boy I saw a guy that probably hadn't shaved in two days and was kind of a questionable looking character. And I looked at his vehicle in the driveway, it was a solid black van, I thought this is not a good situation. I didn't feel very comfortable being alone in the house at that time and having this man knock on my door. I didn't open the screen door. I opened the storm door but I didn't open the screen door but then he held up a business card so I did open the screen door to take it. And then I shut it quickly, and I said this is not a very good time to be calling on people at 9 o'clock at night. His card said from a carpet cleaning place in Jackson, Michigan which is 60 miles from here. So I just shut the door and locked it but after that I called the state police and he told me I shouldn't have opened the door to begin with, you know. And I thought well, alright. I don't have to think about things like that anymore and that's another big impetus for me to get moving was that incident. I thought no, I don't think so. And then two weeks after I sold my property two of my sons bought, I lived in a commercial area, they bought my house and my property, my business property and two weeks after I signed on the dotted line with them, a big oak branch came down on my garage roof. And I thought that's too bad, you're going to have to fix your garage.

J: Timing is everything.

D: What's not to like here? I'll tell you I'm just thrilled that I made the decision I did when I did. It worked out right.

J: I'm glad you brought up the idea that your neighbor has a cat. I think a lot of people just assume they can't bring their pets to a retirement community. Do a lot of people have pets on your floor?

D: No, not a lot. I think people have them and you are not aware that they have them. Somebody said they had a cat and I didn't even know they had an animal. You don't know. This lady has a cat and a man just around the corner has one. That's all I'm aware of on my floor. On other floors they have little dogs even. We have a coffee group in the morning that meets in the lobby and the two young boys that walk one of the

resident's dogs come in. They always greet us and say hi, hello, talk to them for a couple of minutes but they are dog walkers so they go get the resident's dog and they come in a couple of times a day. If the people are not able to take care of their own animals, get out and walk them, they have people that will, dog walkers that they can hire.

J: Here's something that you haven't mentioned much and that is the food situation. I'm looking at some background they gave me and it says you like to cook and bake. Do you do much of that in your own apartment?

D: Absolutely, as much as I can. I made a rhubarb pie last night.

J: Oh, yum.

S: Yes, I do. I'm on the food committee. Food is important to me. When I was young I considered being a dietitian. I was the bread baking instructor for 4H. Food has always been first and foremost in my life. The food here in the dining room, I cannot complain about it. Every once in a while you get something that doesn't appeal to you but boy, oh boy, I certainly am not complaining about it. I am happy to be down there eating. Like I said, this is rhubarb season and I wanted to make a pie and I do take two days a week off usually and do my own baking or cooking or whatever I want to fix in the kitchen. My neighbors love me because I share it.

J: Yes, yes, you sound like a great neighbor to have. Well, listen I can't think of many other topics that we haven't talked about, can you?

D: No, I've gone through my list of notes here and I think I've covered just about everything.

J: And you still drive I take it?

D: I just looked at that right the minute you said it. What happens when I can no longer drive? That was the thought of mine. Yes, I'm still driving.

J: You're still driving and I know a lot of people I've interviewed there talk about the convenience of the garage.

D: Yes, that part. What do I want to say? The van is available to me even though I still drive. I can also take the van to the grocery store twice a week or to doctor's appointments. I love getting on that van and going to the grocery store people because it's just fun. It's just fun, what can I say?

J: That's a good point? No one has ever mentioned that. That is true. I would love to go to the grocery store with a bunch of friends, too, instead of by myself. You've got people to help you find things.

D: They bring you right to the front door. You don't have to get out to the parking lot and say, "Gee, where did I park my car?" Because the van is right there in your face. You walk out the door and there it is. If you have lots of purchases you've made, Ken is the bus driver, he will take your packages for you. You don't have to struggle with them. It's very accommodating. He goes regularly to Meyers and Harding's. I like the store Aldi which is a German store. He will take me to Aldi because it is on his route right before he goes to Harding's. I've gone to the Dollar Store. We've got a big strip mall and he will take you to any store in that mall. I've gone to City Hall. It's all in a close proximity but any place you want to go he will take you.

J: So you don't have to use your car that much it sounds like.

D: No and I'll tell you what I love my gas bill these days. It has gone down, way down. Because I can just hop in the van.

J: Right, well, very good. I don't want to keep you too long. I really appreciate the time you've spent with me and all of the information you shared. I think we covered all the bases. Any final words you want to share?

D: No, Jane told me that you would be asking me to give a talk in August. I'll just have to know what points you want covered at a later date you can fill me in on that.

J: Well, that won't be me. That will be somebody at the community. I'm sure they'll give you plenty of notice on that. Ok, well, thank you for sharing your story with us and you have a wonderful rest of the day there in beautiful Kalamazoo. Is it a sunny day?

D: It's gorgeous today, absolutely gorgeous. A day that you just wish will never end.

J: Oh, nice, you enjoy it.

D: Where is your location, where are you?

J: I'm in Arizona, Tucson.

D: Arizona, what is it 120 there today?

J: Now, I think it might get into the 90s maybe but you know what they say, it's a dry heat.

D: Right. Ok, well, it's about 60 here today and all the flowering trees are in bloom. I'm looking out my window and there's pink flowering crab it looks like and I can hear the birds chirping. Everything is green green green.

J: How lovely. Well, enjoy the springtime and all the flowers in bloom. That's a beautiful time of year in Michigan.

D: It is, it is. It's been pleasurable talking to you.

J: Thank you, Donna, I really appreciate it. Alrighty, take care now.

D: Don't forget to throw in there, "Keep a positive attitude." Because that's so important.

J: I agree, thank you. Those are good final words, thank you very much.

D: You're welcome. Bye-bye.

J: Bye now.