

John and Margaret VanderPloeg Interview, May 2018

J: June

M: Margaret

V: John

J: Good afternoon, this is June.

V: And this is John VanderPloeg along with Margaret VanderPloeg.

J: Hello, how are you two today?

V: Well, we're just fine. I'm going to put you on speakerphone so that both of us can hear you and speak to you.

J: Perfect, thank you.

V: Alright, I think we are in good shape.

J: Ok, can you both hear me ok?

M: Yes, I can.

V: Yes, I can also.

J: Excellent, hi Margaret, how are you?

M: Just fine, thank you.

J: Excellent, so thank you both for making time in your day to speak with me on the phone. I want to begin by just going over a couple of things to make sure you are aware. And then after I talk I'm going to let you both do most of the talking. I want to begin by letting you know that we are recording this conversation so that we can get an accurate transcript. It really just eliminates me from having to take sloppy notes and get things wrong. But should you happen to blurt out something that, maybe after the fact, you think was too personal to share, just go right ahead and say so in conversation. Say, "Oh, please don't publish this part." And then we'll make sure we don't, ok?

V: Fine, that will be good

J: And then I want to make sure you both understand the purpose of the interview as well. We do these interviews with residents of our communities all over the country and it is my privilege to do so. I get to meet so many interesting people. What we do with their stories is we share them out in the local area and try to connect with people who may just be in the beginning of trying to think about what they're going to do in their future. And we find that by sharing our residents' stories it helps open people's minds to the possibilities for themselves of moving to a retirement community. You know, a lot of people have never been to a retirement community or maybe they have impressions that date back 50 years and they are not accurate so by interviewing residents like yourselves we get to share your experiences about how you decided to move in and how you went about looking at the different options and how your life is now that you are there. We invite people to come in and visit us and come for lunch and see what they think. So that's what it's all about. And with that I'm going to turn it over to both of you with the invitation to speak about yourselves. You can take turns introducing yourselves and you can talk about anything you want from where you were born, where you grew up, your education, your career, your family, anything of that nature just to give us an idea of who you are. And either one of you can start or you can go back and forth however you wish to do it. So, go right ahead.

V: Well, I'm John and I'm going to start with a little bit of history and Margaret will jump in whenever it's appropriate. Margaret and I have been married for 63 years, we have three children. Margaret has lived her entire life in Kalamazoo; I came when I was a teenager. But we have been in business all our lives. We started our own small company 54 years ago, the company continued to grow, we both stayed in the business until about 20 years ago when our daughter assumed ownership and responsibility for the company. And we for many years lived in a large home here in the community. About five or six years ago we decided that it would really be appropriate for us to find something where we could live everything on one floor. I had pretty serious back problems for the last 25 or 30 years. Our home was on a couple floors, it was hard for us to take care of it any longer and we made the decision that we were going to move to The Fountains. Maybe Margaret will add in something at the same time.

J: Ok.

M: When it became impossible for us to really take care of it properly we decided we would look at a home elsewhere. So, we started looking. Well, we ended up at The Fountains and have been very pleased at The Fountains for about five years. It's been everything we need. We have plenty of room, we have lots of privacy but if we do want to enjoy other things in the community we can get out and enjoy different programming, different games and we really are enjoying that. The only thing that we find, many people wait too long to come and then they are unable to really enjoy the activities and so of The Fountains. They are really beyond that by the time they come.

J: Well, let's talk about that for a second, Margaret and John, because that seems to be a recurring theme around the country and I think it's beginning to shift a little bit but why do you suppose people do wait as long as they do before they consider making a positive move like this? Is it because they don't understand what the option really is or why do you think?

V: I personally think that people fail to know what life is like at a community like The Fountains. They think in their minds of a nursing home and that seems repulsive to them. And they just have no idea what life is really like at The Fountains or perhaps other senior communities where there are so many options for a lifestyle. If you want to be very private you can do so, if you want to be involved in activities, if you want to be part of a committee, the Resident's Council, if you want to take advantage of field trips, of dining trips outside, there are so many things to do and those opportunities are made available to us in a way that is very convenient for us. If we want to go out for dinner with a group we go out in the community bus and we don't have to worry about driving at night, we don't have to worry about what time do we have to leave, what time are we going to get back, it is all arranged for us. I think that is one of the reasons people wait far too long before they make the decision.

J: Well, why don't you make a comment, and I think that is an excellent point that you made, why don't you both comment about how your life is A: the same and B: different than before you moved in. So, in other words, how has your life changed from when you were taking care of that big house to now?

M: We have far more time to enjoy other activities than we had when we had our home. And we have a very lovely apartment and there again, the size of the apartment, it depends on you. There are many different sizes and things available to us and this is what we chose and we are very, very comfortable here.

V: I think the other thing here is that in many ways, our life is pretty much the same in that we

still go to the same church, we go out for dinner often and we go to the same places that we did when we were in our home. We go out with friends like we always have so that, in many ways, our life is the same. On the other hand, as Margaret said, we just have more time to be able to do some of the extra things in our life that we didn't have time for before. We don't have to worry about taking care of a home, we don't worry about taking care of the yard. At The Fountains, here one of the wonderful things is that our car is parked in an underground garage immediately below our apartment that is heated all winter long and in the middle of February that is just in amazing advantage. So, some things have stayed the same but there have been new opportunities that we really enjoy.

J: Excellent and you mentioned that you looked at several different options. What was it about The Fountains that made you feel like it was the right choice for you?

M: One of the options that was provided was the underground parking, that was the only one in our area that provided that. Many of them are outside parking. John has a sister who is in a senior community here in Kalamazoo, she is a widow and she has to park outside and in the winter time in Michigan she said, "I don't really care to go out at all because I can't get my car cleaned up from the snow and I'm not wanting to dig out everything so I just stay in." Well, we don't have that problem here.

V: Going back when we were really thinking about the whole idea of selling our home and moving, we decided we weren't going to ask our kids for their advice. We looked at some condos, we looked at some other senior living centers to see what else was available and after looking seriously at least two other communities very seriously, The Fountains just came out on top with the beauty of the facility, the size of the apartment that was available, we wanted something toward the bigger end in size, the underground parking and just the location where it was in relationship to the heart of the city. It was the right place for us and we had friends that were living here so we had known about The Fountains for quite a few years and when the decision time came, we made the decision, we announced it to our children, they were kind of shocked but now that we have been here for five years, they are so thankful because they just don't have to spend their time worrying about us.

J: And that's a gift, right?

V: Absolutely.

J: So, you said something interesting that I would like you to expand on if you would. You said some of the options you looked at were simply condominiums, so you looked at downsizing from a large house to a smaller, maintenance-free type dwelling. What was it about a retirement community versus the condominium that made you choose the retirement community?

V: The condos that we looked at there just weren't the kind of options available that we were interested in, the combination of the right size living facility, the option of having a lot of things provided for us like being able to get our meals, two meals a day regularly without having to worry about it even though when we moved here we took along all or dining room furniture because we were determined we were going to continue to cook for our family. The fact of the matter is that we decided we didn't have to cook ever again if we didn't want to and we don't. So, the availability of meals, the availability of underground parking, the activities that were available at The Fountains, there were so many things that were an advantage when we compared it to condo living, it just was an easy choice when we finally had to make the

decision.

J: Fantastic, so what advice do you have to share with other couples or perhaps single people out there that may be beginning to think about their future or maybe they ought to be beginning to think about their future, do you have any words of wisdom that might save them some time or give them some ideas?

M: Don't wait too long because the longer you wait, the less you can enjoy. If you come in when you are able and you are able to participate and make new friendships it is a wonderful experience but if you wait until it's too late, which many people do, they will tell us right out, "I think we waited too long because we are not quite as interested in making friendships like we used to be."

V: I'm not sure you want to publish this but the thing that we've been noticing, especially in the last two years, is that people are coming in, in their early to mid-90s as opposed to coming and maybe their mid-70s, and the result is that they're really candidates for assisted living as opposed to independent living. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't find an appropriate place for them but if they really want to take advantage of everything that's available in independent living at The Fountains, the big thing is that, don't wait until you are no longer able to really take advantage of everything that is here.

J: Can you think of any examples of experiences that you have had at The Fountains that were fun and exciting and interesting, that you simply would not have ever had the opportunity to do living in your own home, just to paint a picture for people about what they don't know they are missing?

V: I'll answer first and then Margaret can answer. I think the opportunity to meet a whole new set of potential friends and many of them truly have become friends, people that came from different walks of life than we did. At The Fountains there a lot of former educators, professional people, we were business people and the people we knew, the friends we had, were largely business friends. Here, we have met a whole new group of people and we would never have experienced that if we hadn't come to The Fountains.

J: That's a great point.

M: But I do believe the camaraderie that we have enjoyed here has been wonderful and it's not just with other residents, it's also with a lot of the staff. The staff has been, they step up to the plate and they try to make everything so enjoyable that it's a pleasure to participate in activities and so forth here.

J: That's nice to hear, I'm glad. Well, it sure sounds like you two have found a place that is right for you and that you are thoroughly enjoying it. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think is important for people to know?

V: Well, I think so and I think it's been a whole new life for us. We had a wonderful life, we loved our home, we enjoyed our life, we always had a lot of friends that we have enjoyed spending time with, but coming to The Fountains five years ago has expanded our life once again to new opportunities.

J: Excellent, Margaret, anything to add?

M: No, only that our children have been very, very pleased that we have made this decision on our own and that we are enjoying it.

J: Wonderful, thank you both very much for sharing your story with us today and with everyone out there. I hope that people will find it inspiring and be willing to come in and meet you and

have lunch and look around and see if it might be the kind of lifestyle that would be good for them as well.

V: Alright.

J: Ok, well, thanks for carving out time in your day and I will let you get back to all the fun things going on there at The Fountains at Bronson Place, ok?

V: Thank you very much, bye-bye.

J: Ok, you take care now, bye-bye.