

Jean Richardson Condensed Interview, February 2016

J: June

R: Jean

10:11

J: Hello.

R: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Jean?

R: Yes it is.

J: Good morning, Jean, this is June Hussey in Tucson. How are you?

R: I'm ok, June. How are you?

J: I'm very well. Thank you very much.

R: Good.

J: Well, thank you so much for making time for me this morning.

R: Oh sure, I'm sitting here with my coffee, delighted to talk.

J: Well, I'm doing the same on my end, so perfect.

R: I bet you are. It's early out there.

J: Yeah so it'll be a nice conversation over coffee.

R: Ok.

J: Ok, so before we get started I just wanted to remind you that we are recording this call. And that's really just to keep my hands free and get accurate notes. But if you should say something along the way that you don't want to make public, since we're going to publish the transcript, just go ahead and say right then and there, "Oh, please scratch that part. I don't want that in the record." And I can do that.

R: Ok, alright. And I'm speaking on a speakerphone, can you hear me well?

J: I can hear you perfectly, it's great.

R: Ok, that's better for me.

J: And you can hear me, ok?

R: Yep.

J: Ok, good. And one other thing I wanted to just give you the background of why we do these calls and we've done a number of them around the country. We find that everybody that we talk to, all of our residents, you know, bring their own personal story and history to the conversation and we find that it's very helpful to people who haven't started their search yet for a retirement community or may not know what the lifestyle is all about, to kind of hear from people who have already been through the process. So I'll be asking you questions of that nature and feel free to chime in with anything that you wish to add, ok?

R: Ok, I certainly will.

J: Ok, Jean, so when did you first move to The Watermark at 3030?

R: It was three years ago last January 1st. So three years ago.

J: And where were you living just prior to that?

R: We were living in Norwalk briefly, after 18 years in New York City.

J: Oh wow and were you working in the city or what brought you out to the suburbs?

R: Yeah, I am a psychotherapist and I was working in the city.

J: Oh great.

R: And we came out here because my daughter is right here. She's right across Park Avenue here in Fairfield.

J: Oh, isn't that convenient?

R: Yes and then she decided we should move here.

J: So it was your daughter's idea, not yours? And how did she broach that subject with you?

R: She did the research and told me about it. And told me I'd like it and brought us over here to take a peek. We loved the whole set up. I mean it was just it looked good for us.

J: And had you ever been to a retirement community before?

R: Only in Florida had we seen a couple when we were down there on vacation.

J: And how did your first impressions strike you?

R: Florida or Watermark?

J: Well, either or.

R: Well, the first one in Florida looked a little glitzy to me, a little over the top and I didn't like it but I don't think I was ready for it either. And then coming here, now do we call it Watermark or what we call it?

J: Yeah, The Watermark.

R: Ok, when we came here we liked it very much and so we moved, my husband and myself. We moved into a small apartment, one bedroom, one bath. And it's very adequate. And we loved it. We brought our cat. And we loved it here. My husband passed away a year ago.

J: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

R: Thank you.

J: So when you said you weren't ready, when you were looking at the place in Florida, what do you mean when you say you weren't ready?

R: I don't think we were psychologically, emotionally ready to make that kind of move into a place that spoke of just older people. I just don't think we were ready for some unknown reason.

J: Yeah, I asked because that's so common. We hear that so often and it's great to get insight into what that means to you. And so what changed in your life that made you finally feel like you were ready?

R: Well, just my daughter's input. She had nothing to do with the Florida thing but she had looked into this. She just thought it was a good idea at our ages. Let's see, I'm 80 now and my husband was almost 90 when he died, so three years ago. She thought it was a good idea for us, the two of us, to move to a place like this where everything was provided. I loved that idea, no cooking, not that I did much of it anyhow. But it just seemed like everything was supplied for us and I loved that idea and still do.

J: So being a working person you didn't cook much. How did you used to get your meals before you moved in?

R: My husband used to do a bit of cooking and I did a bit and we'd go out a lot. And that's one of the reasons we were afraid of being here was that we would be sort of stuck and couldn't go out and have our own to restaurants and so on.

J: How did that bear out? Were your fears real?

R: You're not going to like what I say. How it turned out was they allowed us to live here without being on the meal plan.

J: Oh perfect.

R: So every time I eat dinner it now costs me \$20 instead of \$17.50 but it costs me the same as a person who is on the meal plan. I have the opportunity to go out when I feel like it, which isn't very often. The older I get the more I'm just here and enjoy going down to dinner with different people.

J: Right, well, that's a flexible way. And so tell me about when you moved in, what was the adjustment period like?

R: Well, my kids moved us in. They were very helpful and I brought along some key pieces of furniture, very good period design which are antiques from my grandmother's house. I've been using them all my life and they're beautiful and five of them are still around me. And the rest my daughter has.

J: Oh great so you kept them in the family and brought things of comfort and value to you.

R: Absolutely and a large selection of art that we had collected, some by friends and some friends who are well known artists, mostly.

J: Now, did you know anybody at the Watermark before you moved in?

R: Not a soul and still don't.

J: So you must keep to yourself a little bit? Do you keep to yourself pretty much?

R: I didn't mean that. I mean I still haven't met anybody here that I knew in my former life.

J: Oh, I see what you mean, gotcha.

R: No, I've made very good friends here.

J: Oh good, good. And so tell me about some of the ways you spend your days there?

R: Well, I think I spend more time in my apartment than a lot of people do because I just enjoy the apartment and I like reading and I have Netflix in the evening which I love on my TV. And it's just such a comfortable place to be. Sunday's have been good with certain people who live here and have been in various jobs and so on have spoken on Sunday and that's quite interesting. We had an environmental psychologist yesterday and we had his wife a couple of weeks ago who, she was a psychologist who was a judge in court for small children, for the disposition of small children who had been harmed in some way. So but there are very interesting lectures by these people, in-house people that live here.

J: Wow, you've got an interesting background. Have you ever given any programs?

R: What I do is every Sunday night I have a group and it's gotten very large. I just go down with a word and throw out the word to everybody and then let them do what they want with it. They can personalize it or say something else about it and it's kind of wide open because I never know exactly who is coming because different people come but some of the same people come every Sunday. And then I have a group on Thursdays that is just for the group of eight people and they come every other week and we talk about things that are more serious and on people's minds.

J: Yes so sort of like a support group?

R: Yeah.

J: Well, that's wonderful. Now back to the word group. Give me an example of one of the words that you would throw out.

R: Well, let's see, what was the one I was thinking of? It's gone, my nouns are gone.

J: Your noun is gone.

R: My nouns are gone. I'll think of it in a minute because it was a good one and

everybody enjoyed doing it so I'll think of it in a second.

J: It's sort of a word association, whatever the word makes you think of you talk about?

R: Yeah.

J: Oh, that sounds like fun.

R: It is fun. It's interesting for people. It's interesting what people come up with. We never know so that makes it interesting, more interesting and more fun.

J: So I'd be curious about how you feel, what you might advise other folks out there who may be in a situation where they're getting isolated or things are getting a little tough around the house or maybe they're not eating properly, if they were to consider a retirement community. Would you have any words of wisdom to share?

R: Well, I would say you don't have to worry about those things anymore because you're fed, your apartment is cleaned and your linens are changed every week and your garbage is taken out every week and it's an effortless way to live and you can do what you want. You can go downstairs and join in the things that are listed on the schedule. There are computer groups and there are people who come in and give different kinds of classes and so on. There is a lovely woman who teaches French and there are all kinds of things to do.

J: And can you imagine how your life would be different if you hadn't moved in?

R: No, I think I would have definitely sought out a place like this but I might not have. I don't know what I would've done. I can't see myself any place but right here to tell you the truth.

J: So there is a period of acclimation. How long would you say it took you to get sort of settled and figure out where things were?

R: Oh, I'd say three weeks.

J: Good, now you mentioned your cat, is she still with you?

R: Yes.

J: And what's her name?

R: Her name is Catter.

J: Catter.

R: And she's a wonderful cat. She's about 10 years old and so she has been with me a while. I'm so glad she's here. A lot of people, not a lot of people but there are many people who have cats and a couple people who have little dogs, little tiny dogs.

J: Well, pets are an important part of our lives.

R: Absolutely.

J: Yeah, ok, well, I've pretty much gone through my list of questions. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you think people ought to know?

R: Basically I'm very content here and I like the people here. And I like the staff. They work very hard and they're pleasant.

J: Well, that's great to hear. That's great to hear and hopefully we can take care of those few problems that you mentioned too. Ok Jean, well it's been a pleasure speaking with you. Thanks for getting up and having coffee with me this morning.

R: Oh, no problem June, none at all.

J: And you know I grew up not far from there so I can just visualize where you are and all the snow outside and the Long Island Sound in the distance.

R: Oh yeah, where were you?

J: I grew up in Old Greenwich, Connecticut, right on the water, beautiful.

R: Yes it is. It's so beautiful down there, lovely.

J: And I hear it was pretty warm this weekend?

R: Yeah, well we've had climate change. Global warming is descending upon us so we cannot not look at it anymore.

J: So first you had the two feet of snow and then it was 40°. Yeah, well whatever nature slings at you I hope you enjoy it and enjoy your lifestyle there. We're glad that you're a resident.

R: Ok, thank you.

J: Ok Jean, you take care and thanks for doing all the support groups and things you do.

R: Oh, alright June, thank you.

J: Ok, you take care now.

R: Ok, bye-bye.

J: Have a good day, bye-bye.