

Priscilla Lotsberg Interview, May 2015

J: June

M: Miriam

P: Priscilla

Interview starts at 5:12

J: Hello

M: Hi, is this Jill?

J: Yes it is, this is June Hussey, is this Priscilla?

M: No actually this is Miriam Witherspoon. I work in the marketing office. I have Mrs. Lotsberg here in front of me.

J: Wonderful.

M: We do not have a speakerphone so I just wanted to get her on the call and get her comfortable. So she will be talking with you and I will not be listening. I told her I will be able to read in print what she said.

J: Ok, that sounds great. Well you can turn it over to her whenever you're ready.

M: Now, I sent a bio to Ines.

J: I haven't received it but that's ok, we can just wing it.

M: If you give me your email address I can send it to you right now while I leave Mrs. Lotsberg with you if you prefer.

J: June's email address.

M: On this letter they have Jill Hofer.

J: Yeah, well, we are interchangeable sometimes.

M: Alrighty, I'm going to turn you over to Mrs. Lotsberg and just make sure she's comfortable talking with you and get started. If you don't need me I'm going to leave and then she will be here to talk with you, ok?

J: Alright, that sounds great.

M: Hold on one second.

J: Ok.

P: Hello.

J: Hello, is this Priscilla?

P: Yes it is.

J: Hi, my name is June Hussey. It's nice to meet you.

P: Ok June.

J: I'm talking to you from Tucson, Arizona which is home of Watermark Retirement Communities.

P: Yes I know.

J: It's a beautiful day here, how about in Alexandria?

P: It is here too. We've got warm weather in the low 80s and it's very pleasant.

J: Good, well thank you so much for agreeing to call in and share your story with us. Just before I start asking you questions I wanted to make sure you understood that the phone call is being recorded.

P: Ok.

J: And the transcript is going to be published but if there is anything that you're not comfortable with having published just let us know and we can omit that part.

P: Ok.

J: So basically we just want to hear your story of how you wound up there and what you think about it. It's not so much to tell people how great The Fountains is but we want to sort of let people out there

know what other people have gone through in making the decision to move to a retirement community. Your perspective will be very valuable. My first question, Priscilla, is very simple, when did you move to The Fountains at Washington House?

P: The end of January of 2008.

J: Ok, so you've been there quite a while.

P: Right, seven years.

J: Wow and where were you living just prior to that?

P: Pardon?

J: Where were you living just prior?

P: I was living up in McLean which is just about 7 miles from here. And I had been there for nine years with my husband. And so it was quite a downsize for us but we survived it all. I did have some help because I found someone that specializes in downsizing.

J: Oh good.

P: It helped me quite a bit. At the time I was recovering from having a fractured pelvis in several places and my husband had Alzheimer's so I really needed some help but anyway it all worked out very well.

J: So this company helped you with what, figuring out what to keep? What to get rid of? How to get rid of it?

P: Yes and they had a source to put it up for auction for some of the things and then some of it was given to charity and that sort of thing. And anyway some of it was just junk that you collect over the years.

J: Junk or not junk it is kind of hard sometimes to figure out how to dispose of that.

P: I had read some on it too and they were saying, like if you have maybe your mother's collection, her china collection or her crystal collection, maybe just save one or two pieces to have kind of in the memory or take pictures too of it. But I did save a couple of pieces but I still really moved with too much of it anyway.

J: Well take me back to that time before you decided to move, what were some of your motivations for wanting to downsize?

P: Well, the main thing, we had really planned to age in place and had done a little bit of remodeling toward that but my husband's neurologist, every time we'd go, she would quiz me about finding a continuing care community and she thought it would really be better for us to do so, before my husband got real bad. And so I started looking around and I looked at several places. A lot of places really wanted to take me in independent and my husband in assisted. And I just really didn't want that. I felt I was capable of taking care of him at that point. And I thought it would be better for both of us if we were just together so I came to Washington House and I liked the size of it. It was small and some of these places are two and three thousand people. And you can really walk your legs off around it. I just thought it was very welcoming. As I was leaving the interview I just thought, "I can live here." It just struck me that this is going to be the place. So anyway it ended up being so and I thought I would really not want to be in an apartment but I find it so much easier than taking care of a house. And of course my main motivation, too, was to have time with my husband and not have to be concerned about the upkeep of a house and the yard and all that goes with it. So turned out to be wonderful and I really like it.

J: Well, that's fantastic. Do you two have children or were they...?

P: He since has passed away. And he did use the assisted living and the healthcare portion here and I stayed in assisted living. He had a daughter, this was a second marriage for us and we had been married 11 years when he passed away. But his daughter was in Madrid, Spain and had lived there for quite some time. But she came usually around twice a year. I have a daughter that lives up in Frederick, Maryland which is about 50 miles from here so we don't see each other too often but she's near which is nice. And then I have a stepson from my first marriage and he's out in California, actually, but we keep close in touch with each other. And I helped raise him since he was about four years old so we've been

very close through the years.

J: And how do they feel about your being situated there?

P: They really like it. I think it's a relief to them to know that we're here and that, you know, there are things in place for us here and we keep busy and occupied and happy and well fed. Things like that so I think it's a reassurance to them that we're taken care of.

J: So tell me about a typical day for you there. What kind of things do you enjoy doing at the community?

P: Well, I've gotten very active here. In fact sometimes I think I'm a little bit too overactive. Since my husband passed away I've stepped in and done a lot of things. I've been on resident council. I'm currently vice president. And in the fall we have a big holiday fund that we do and contribute funds to be distributed among our staff. So our executive committee takes that on along with our floor representatives. That's a rather large undertaking. Let's see, what else do I do? I chair the care committee. My background has been counseling and social work so I've kind of fallen into that, which I enjoy actually, too. We also have a singing group and I take part in that, The Skytones.

J: Oh, I heard you just had a concert.

P: Yes, we did. In fact, it's the lady that has been teaching me piano has taken over our Skytones. It's been fun working with her. She has made me do piano solos which, as a child I would never do. I always managed to quit before recital time but she won't let me do that as an adult. She prepares me and I do it. And then this last one we did a four-handed thing. I did it with the person that accompanies us with The Skytones so that was fun. I had never done that before.

J: You have singers there and then the piano. Was there another instrument I saw? Was it a cello or something?

P: No I don't, there is someone here that plays the cello, which is very nice. In fact, she played too, for the concert we had. And then the garden club too and we have a Great Decisions group and I do that.

J: Well you are very active and involved. That's great. It beats sitting at home doing nothing, right?

P: I've never been that way really. In fact on your list, which, by the way Miriam said that she emailed it to you, the sheet that I was to do. But it asked my latest book I've read. Well, I haven't read a book in a couple of years. I seem to just stay busy doing other things. And then I do enjoy reading the newspaper and keeping up with the news both local and internationally. So being in Washington we are kind of at the pulse a lot of things so I like to keep up with it, try to keep up with it.

J: Well I have the sheet that you filled out so all the different things you're involved with, that's wonderful. So being that you've been a counselor, maybe you'd be a great person to ask this next question of, for other folks who are out there that maybe have never considered moving to a retirement community and have never visited one. What kind of advice might you have for them, as they consider their future?

P: Well, I think it's really a good thing to do for a number of reasons. And I think sometimes you just have to gulp and bite the bullet and do it. I think the main thing that people, kind of keeps them from doing it is just going through their things and downsizing. And leaving their home. I mean some people have lived in their home for years and years and years. I've happened to move around quite a bit so I'm not quite as attached to a home but I haven't been in one place that long so it's not as hard for me. But I think it's going through their things. It just takes a lot of energy both emotionally and physically to do that and – but there are people out there that can help you do it, too. But I think they should just look around. I know here in this area there's a publication that lists a lot of the facilities, I think practically all of them. And it lists them by what type of facility they are, whether they're continuing care or not. It lists the area, who to contact and what's available in those facilities. So, I know I spent quite a bit of time looking at those and visiting other places, too and comparing the price range and what you get for the price. I think it's really kind of making a commitment and I do think the neurologist was quite right to do these things before you're ready for assisted living or healthcare, to do it when you're physically and

have more physical and mental strength to do it. So I was one I never thought I'd want to live in an apartment. I pretty much always lived in a home. But I love it, I really do.

J: That's good, that's good. What apartment did you end up living in?

P: Well initially we had a very large apartment. They had two apartments that were available that could be joined and there was a gentleman downstairs from the apartment I ended up in that had done that, he and his wife. We spent some time with them looking to see how they did it and how they liked it and we decided we would do that. So we actually had three bedrooms which worked out nicely. The third bedroom actually was very small and they all had complete baths, but we had a washer and dryer put into where the shower had been and that bathroom had a window which they would require if you had a washer and dryer. So anyway it really worked out very nicely. But after he passed away, it was just too much, I didn't need all the space and needed to cut back financially, too, so I'm in a two-bedroom apartment now. But we had quite a bit of family that visited and sometimes there would be a couple of family members so it was nice to have the extra room when we had the three-bedroom apartment. But I have a two bedroom now. It's mostly my brother that visits and he visits twice a year for usually about three weeks, at Christmas and then our birthdays are very close together. We celebrate our birthdays together. I have a sleep sofa for the second bedroom and I have it more as a den but the sleep sofa is there and it has a complete bathroom so that works out well for us.

J: And being in the DC area do you still get out and, you know, see the sights and some of the cultural events around?

P: Some, I've kind of, I used to do more than I do now. We do have a driver here and we can go to the art galleries and the garden club actually sponsored going to our arboretum to see azaleas and other flowering trees too. Just about a week and a half ago we went, in fact it was last week, last Monday. Our driver took us and drove us around, we didn't have to get out and it worked out very nicely so that's an example. I know at Christmas time, too, he takes people around to see the Christmas lights and at cherry blossom time which is very beautiful here, if you've never been here at cherry blossom time. Down at the mall it is just lovely and so he did take residents around for that too. But I do drive so I don't go quite as often with him on some of these things just because I can drive.

J: And how about do you cook or do you take your meals at the community?

P: Well, I do take my dinner. That's included in our rent. And I eat a small breakfast and a small lunch so I don't usually. We can have a continental breakfast here which is included. If we want a fuller breakfast there is a charge for that. And for lunch we have the Cherry Blossom Café which is nice and we can get a lunch there too. I occasionally do that but as I said I'm not a real big eater for lunch or breakfast so I don't take advantage of that so much.

J: Well, that's just about, I've gone through all my questions but I'll ask you if there is anything that we haven't covered that you think would be important for people to know while they're sort of tussling with the decision on their end.

P: Well, I think the main thing is for them to look around and see what they feel would fit them. But as I said, I personally really like the size here. There are about 100 people in independent living, about 50 in assisted and about 50 in healthcare. And we're all in one building. We can just take the elevator down to healthcare or down to assisted living if we have friends there or if we ourselves are going to be there, there's others in our community that can visit us quite readily. I find it a very friendly community both with the staff and the residents. They were very supportive to me when my husband was in his final, all while he was here but particularly in the final weeks of his life, they were very supportive and continue to be. I just think it's so nice to be in an area where you don't have to eat alone. It's nice that you have the dining room and we don't have assigned seating but most people seem to stay with the same group which is nice to have company while you're eating and chat and get to know some of the other residents too. And also, too, if you're not feeling well you can have food sent up to you and someone from the nursing staff can come up and check your blood pressure and your temperature and kind of check in on

you and see how you're doing. So I just think it's a very nice situation to be in. You almost feel like you're in a hotel but you have all these other things going on too.

J: Right and I think it's interesting that originally you had planned to age in place and that your circumstances led you there. Can you imagine what your life would be like if you were back living in your house by yourself?

P: Well, I wouldn't like it. I know one thing, I'm quite a social person and enjoy contact with other people and I just think it would be rather lonely to be there by myself. I know that I wouldn't eat properly because I know when years I have been single, particularly an evening meal I just didn't, you know, you don't feel like eating that much. I don't when I'm alone. I certainly wouldn't be preparing a full meal by any means, unless I had company or some special occasion I was having people in, a relative. But here you tend to gain weight, you have to watch that. The food is quite good and the desserts are wonderful, but anyway.

J: And what about the exercise classes, have you ever tried those?

P: Yes, I was taking them rather regularly, particularly when my husband was alive because it would help him. Of course it would help me too but I haven't quite gotten into the routine again of that. But we do have a dance class, the line dancing. And we did have ballroom too but the person that led that is no longer here but the line dancing is good exercise, too. That I take.

J: And it's fun.

P: I hope to get back to doing more exercising.

J: Where did you grow up originally?

P: I grew up originally in Erie, Pennsylvania. And I lived there until I was about 14 and then my family moved to Florida. I didn't like Florida. It was too flat and hot and humid so when I was old enough to get away from the Miami area I went to college in the mountains of North Carolina for two years. And then I went to Florida State University in Tallahassee which is a bit hilly there. It isn't quite so flat and the climate is a little more varied too. But after that I moved around quite a bit with work. But I stayed longer in the greater Washington area than anywhere in my life. I moved here in the early 60s. I lived primarily in Maryland but in this area, there's just the Potomac River that divides Maryland and Virginia so when I met my second husband I moved over to Virginia. I crossed the river as they say.

J: Right, I've been to your community and have gotten lost crossing bridges and finding myself in different states every five minutes.

P: I can believe it.

J: When you're not from there it's kind of confusing.

P: I know and the traffic keeps getting worse. I don't really go downtown that much anymore just because parking is such a problem. But there is good bus service here to that I just haven't availed myself to but I know we have a resident here and she was only here one week and she knew the whole bus route to get down but I keep wanting to go around with her and learn it myself.

J: Well listen, I don't want to keep you forever and you've given us so much great information. I really appreciate your time.

P: Well, thank you.

J: So if there's nothing else you want to add we can say goodbye and thanks so much. I'm sure you have the rest of the day to enjoy.

P: Right, yeah, it's lovely here. You do edit this, correct?

J: Oh yes, oh yes.

P: Ok.

J: And you'll get a chance to read the final piece before it goes to press just to make sure it's accurate and everything.

P: Alright, well thank you very much for giving me the opportunity.

J: Oh, you're very welcome. Thank you so much and you have a great day.

P: Thank you.

J: So long.

P: Bye.