

## John Wenderoth Interview, May 2015

J: June

W: John

Interview starts at 6:58

J: Hello?

W: Jill?

J: This is June Hussey.

W: This is John Wenderoth from The Fountains. (inaudible)

J: Hi John. I've been expecting you. Thank you so much for calling.

W: Well, it's my pleasure.

J: Good. Well, I'm delighted that you have agreed to share a little bit of your story with us. I'm sure that they have explained to you the purpose of our call today. We will be recording the call, just to make sure you know that.

W: Ok, ok, fine.

J: And so don't worry about that. If you mess up and say something you wish you hadn't, just say scratch that, ok?

W: Ok, sounds good to me.

J: We're really interested in hearing different residents' perspectives on making the move to a retirement community for the benefit of those who haven't done it yet. We think that every perspective we can have is great so it's really just sharing your own personal story and how you came to be there. I do have a couple questions. You can just tell me whatever is on your mind but I'll start. This will only take probably 15 or 20 minutes or so. When did you first move to The Fountains at Washington House?

W: Ok, I moved here in October 2010.

J: 2010, ok.

W: I've been here almost 5 years now.

J: Pretty good, good, well then you must know it pretty well by now.

W: I think I know it pretty well by now.

J: Right before you moved there, where had you been living previously?

W: Well, I'll tell you I had a large, three-bedroom condo in Alexandria and my wife passed in October, I'm sorry, August 2010. And I really didn't know what I was going to do at that time. This condo was too large for me. And I just didn't feel like being there alone so I kind of turned to my daughters for their advice. I have two daughters, very nice girls, I mean they're really helpful. And it was funny in a way because here I was asking for their advice and for years they had looked to me for advice. But anyway, I kind of did some soul searching and my daughters came up with several alternatives and they said, "Well, you know dad, you can move in with either one of us." And I said well, I kind of didn't want to do that since I wanted my own space and privacy and I didn't want to be a burden on them. Or I could buy a smaller condo but still I would be by myself and I don't want that either. So they said, "Ok dad, did you ever think about going into retirement community?" I said, "You know, I have given it some thought." I said, "Well, at least I would have company there anyway." Well, lo and behold we started looking and gathering information on various retirement communities around the Alexandria area. I wanted to stay in the Alexandria area because it was my home for 61 years. And I also wanted to be close to my kids. Well, we started looking at the various communities, one to another, went to almost all of them. All of them had nice features. For some reason or another they just didn't appeal to me. They finally said, "Well there's one place we haven't seen yet dad and we kind of went out on our own the other day and

looked at it." They said, "Well, I think you'll like it." I said, "Ok, let's go." So we made arrangements to come over here to The Fountains at Washington House and I don't know what it was. As I walked into the lobby I kind of looked around and it just seemed so comfortable and homey. And I looked at my girls and I said, "I think this is the place I want to live." Well, lo and behold we went over to the concierge desk, was greeted very cheerfully by the concierge there. She in turn called the sales rep and she came out and introduced herself. And then we took a tour of the facility which was very nice. She showed me different rooms that were available and after looking at several of them I decided on the model apartment they had on the sixth floor which I kind of liked. And they said, "Well, Mr. Wenderoth it's available to you if you want it." I said, "Ok, sign me up for it." Well the funny thing about it is when we got ready to leave the apartment my youngest daughter she looked at me and she said, "Dad, look at the number of the apartment." I said, "Yeah it's 618, so?" She said, "Gosh dad it's your birthdate." I said, "It'll be easy to remember anyway." I think this was kind of a good omen too. So, I have a very, very nice apartment here, one bedroom, quite adequate and very comfortable. I think I made a good choice.

J: Well, that's great.

W: Ok, so that's how I got here to The Fountains.

J: Wow, so it sounds like you were primarily looking for people.

W: I'm a people person really. I just didn't want to be by myself. And I like to be with people and I enjoy people. It's just great here, it's real fine, you know.

J: Now you've answered so many of my questions I'm skipping down my list to find the next one. Tell me how your life is different now than it might've been had you stayed where you were.

W: Well I think if I had stayed in a condo or by myself I probably would have, I don't know, it wouldn't have felt right, I'm sure of that. Because like I said, I'm a people person and I enjoy people. I like to associate with people and I like to get out and be active and different things like that. And I don't know if I'd stayed in an apartment I probably just would have kind of curled up and been a vegetable or something, I don't know. But when I came here, to The Fountains here, I just enjoyed it so much because the people were so friendly here, both the staff and the residents and everything else. And it wasn't long before I started getting active in quite a few things here. I've joined many of the activities that have been available to me here. Of course my favorite activity is the Sky Tones, our musical group. I like to sing and I even get to do a solo once in a while.

J: Wow.

W: You got that!

J: You just had a concert last week, right?

W: Excuse me?

J: Did you just have a concert last week?

W: We had a concert last Sunday; actually it was the Sunday before. And it was very nice. I didn't sing a solo that day but coming Memorial Day I will be singing a solo.

J: Nice.

W: But I enjoy it. I'm on several other activities. I'm on the activities committee and I'm on the house committee. And I'm also on the resident council. And I'm on the ambassadors club which greets and meets potential residents. And it's just so much to do here. I mean, you know I can't think of any reason somebody wouldn't want to come here to enjoy the rest of their retirement life because it's so much to offer here really.

J: Right and so you went about sort of picking and choosing the things that you like to do from what was offered.

W: Absolutely, that's exactly what I did. Of course you know I've enjoyed every bit of it you know. And another thing that we had which I enjoy doing also is we had a group here called The Red Hatters that they used to go out to lunch once a month and pretty soon they were dwindling down and it was kind of restricted to the ladies, stuff like that so it was getting to be almost into nothing. It was very poor

participation and that so I took it upon myself to take over the senior luncheon each month. So now we go out and we call ourselves the Mad Hatters now rather than Red Hatters.

J: That's great.

W: And so what I do is I contacted various local restaurants around here and make sure that they have the various criteria that we need. You know first of all handicapped accessible, place for us to park and also separate checks. So I have a list of the restaurants that we go to and we go to a different restaurant every month. And we really have an enjoyable outing that day. It's really great.

J: Just for the guys?

W: No, this is all residents. All residents, where the Red Hatters were restricted the Mad Hatters we have both male and female.

J: That's more inclusive.

W: Right.

J: Well, so speaking of people you mentioned if you were back in your condo you might have just curled up and been a vegetable.

W: I just couldn't see myself doing that. You know I don't know what it is like. I said I've always been active all my life dealing with people and that, so I couldn't see being there by myself.

J: Think about the folks that may be out there right now doing just that because they're not aware of the alternatives. What would you say to those folks who either have never heard of a retirement community or have sort of a bad connotation of a retirement community in their minds?

W: Well, I can only tell them through my own experience and kind of encourage them to at least come down and take a look at it anyway. I have several friends that I am right now working on because they're getting to that point where they are looking to come to a place like The Fountains. I haven't been successful yet but I'm still working on it. And you know I try to tell each and every one of them that I've come in contact with, "Hey come down and just look around. I'd be glad to take you to lunch or whatever you want to and give you a tour of the place. They do have conducted tours by the salespeople but from a person that is living here, I can give you firsthand experience."

J: Right.

W: And I was successful in getting one last year. Believe it or not I stole them from the Hermitage which is one of our neighbors. Excuse me, I'm suffering from allergies so that is the reason I'm coughing here. This is not a place to live for allergies, believe me. Anyway, I don't know, you've got to convince them to come here, I think actually seeing it, you know, rather than talking about it is a big help because my friends have come over and things like that and there's some interest in it so maybe one of these days we'll get a few more residents here.

J: Well, there's always room for a few more, right?

W: Oh yeah, we have a few more vacancies here.

J: So, but it's different for everyone in terms of figuring out what that point in time is that they're quote unquote ready. What do you think that is, in people, that makes them feel suddenly ready?

W: That's a hard question to answer because I think each individual probably has a different time in their life when they feel ready to go into a facility like this. We have some people that are much younger than I am that decided, "Hey this is the place to go, I'm tired of doing this, I'm tired of taking care of the house, I'm tired of doing the yard work and things like this" and when they get to a point like that, they have to look to some place like this because everything they have here is so convenient for them. And there's other reasons there because like myself they didn't want to be alone anymore. I don't know, numerous reasons why somebody should come here and I just can't really pin down one individual reason for it. I think it's great, I really do, and I would really recommend it to any of my friends and people that I come in contact with.

J: Something else you said struck me and that was that you had looked at quite a few communities that you didn't particularly care for and how many people might give up at that point and say, "They're all

the same."

W: Well I have an answer for that if they ask me that. I can only tell you what I went through and I said I can give you the reason why didn't like the other places or the locations. Now that was a big thing for me deciding on The Fountains was the location because I really wanted to stay in the Alexandria area. I wanted to be close to my children. Now my one daughter lives only a half a mile from me. I have a granddaughter that lives a half a mile on the other side of me. And my other daughter is very close by too. It's convenience and I mean you have everything here, what can I say, I just sit back and let everybody else do everything else for me. I don't have to worry about cleaning my apartment, I don't have to worry about this, and I don't have to worry about preparing my food. And they have outings here, beautiful outings. I try to convince people, I say, "Hey, you've got plenty to do when you come to a community like this, it's up to you to take advantage of it."

J: Right, now you were in the Navy, weren't you?

W: I was in the Navy, yes I was during World War II. I served in the South Pacific.

J: Are there lots of retired naval people there?

W: We have all branches of the service here. We have quite a few veterans here and they always kid me because I'm always wearing my Navy gear, something that has to do with the Navy. I enjoyed the Navy very much. And after I was discharged from the Navy I moved down here. I was offered a job here with the Navy Department at the Pentagon, that's what got me down in this area. So I started working at the Pentagon. I was in the Pentagon for 36 years so I had a long tenure there. I finally retired in 1983 and at that time I was with the office of the Secretary of Defense. It was an enjoyable career. I enjoyed it very much.

J: Thank you for your service.

W: You're quite welcome. I'm ready for any other questions you want to ask me.

J: I was going to say I think we've covered all my questions unless there is anything else on your mind that you might want to share with anyone that we didn't cover.

W: Well the only thing I can say is, really this is my home. And I recommend The Fountains to anybody, to all my friends, which I told you before. The staff here is great. And as I said previously I made a lot of good friends here. I am very, very happy.

J: Well, we're glad for that and we're glad you found it and that you're home.

W: You know it's a funny thing my daughters every once in a while asked me, "Dad are you happy there?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm happy there, I'm enjoying it very much. Why you ask?" They said, "If you're not satisfied there we'll maybe look for some other place." I said, "No, this is where I'm staying and they're going to carry me out of here in a box, believe me."

J: I've heard a lot of people say that. Well, it's a great way to live and I hope that others who are reading this decide to come take a look.

W: Like I said it's an opportunity. It's one of the things I enjoy about being on the ambassadors club, we have the opportunity to reach potential residents and talk to them you know; try to make them feel that this is the place they should be.

J: And it's nice that it's coming from a peer rather than a salesperson because...

W: That's right, it's coming from somebody that is actually living here and they're having the experiences. Absolutely, absolutely.

J: Well, we are very grateful for you sharing your story with us and with everyone. And unless you have something else to add, I think we can wrap it up.

W: Well I think that's about it unless you have some other questions.

J: No, I think we just about covered it. So I thank you once again and I hope it's a beautiful day in Alexandria, you go enjoy it.

W: Well, I'm enjoying the weather here right now. You know we don't have a spring here. We go directly into summer and unfortunately it is a lot of pollen here right now and in the last few years I've been

suffering with allergies terribly and it's really been bad here. I've been sneezing my head off and headaches and everything else but I was once told that this area was founded by ear nose and throat doctors. It probably was but I'm sure the weather out there is very nice. It's dry, right?

J: Yeah but we have pollen, too. You can't really escape it, wherever you go.

W: Yeah, that's true, that's true. Well, I enjoyed talking to you and I hope I've been somewhat helpful to you anyway.

J: Very much so, thank you so much and you enjoy the rest of your day.

W: Ok thank you and have a nice day.

J: You too, take care.

W: Bye-bye.

J: Bye.