

Barbara Gallagher and Patricia Dowd Interview, August 2016

J: June

B: Barbara

P: Patricia

J: Hello.

B: Hello, June?

J: Yes, this is June. Is this Barbara and Patricia?

B: This is Barbara and Patricia is on the line also.

P: Yes, I'm here.

J: Very good, well, nice to meet you both.

B: Nice talking to you too.

P: Nice to meet you.

J: And thanks for taking time out of your busy day to take part in this interview.

B: Of course, happy to do it.

J: Good, I'm just going to speak for a few minutes before we get started about sort of the reason why we do these interviews. And we do a lot of them and it's really fun for me to speak with residents from all over the country at different Watermark Communities and learn a little bit about them and learn about the process that they went through when they first decided that maybe moving to a retirement community might be a good option for them, how they picked their community and what life is like now that they live there. And then what we do with this information is we share their stories in direct mail pieces and on the internet so that people who are just in the beginning of their own thought process or maybe have never even considered a retirement community have a basis of comparison and they can hear from people who've done it and maybe be a little less afraid to look at those kinds of options. So that's pretty much the reason behind these interviews. And one note I want to make sure I'm clear on is that we are recording this conversation so that we can produce a transcript.

B: Yes.

J: And it helps keep my hands-free and if I were trying to write this all down I would surely get it wrong. So we record it and then just so you know if there is anything that you say throughout the course of the conversation that you don't want to make public just say right then and there, "Oh, please don't print that part." And we'll make sure we don't, ok?

B: Ok.

J: Very good.

P: One question I do have is it Barbara alone all the way through hers and then me?

J: Well, no, it's up to you but I think when I've done it with two people on the phone before I kind of will just say why don't you answer this one Barbara? As long as you're not talking over one another it really doesn't matter. If you want to chime in just chime in, ok?

P: Ok, good.

J: Alright so why don't we start this way. Barbara why don't we start with you? And I'll have you each take a turn at this part. Just introduce yourself and say a little bit about you, where you're from, where you've lived all your life, anything that you might want to

share just to give us an idea of who you are and then we'll switch it up, ok?

B: Ok, fine. I'm Barbara Gallagher and I'm from Chicago, Illinois. I spent the first 22 years of my life there so the majority of my life has been spent out in the Washington, D.C. area. I graduated college in Chicago. I was a chemistry major and worked believe it or not in the stockyards in Chicago for the Armin Company research division. After a year there they were splitting up the research division and offered me the opportunity to go to Kankakee, Illinois which did not really excite me so then they sent me to a National American Chemical Society meeting where I had several interviews and was able to secure job with the American Chemical Society in Washington, D.C. I worked there for 32 years. The first half of my career was managing their chemical library. The second half I managed the College Chemistry Accreditation program. After that, after some 32 years there, I retired and have been in the Arlington area, well, since 1960 on. And I guess it was back in...I don't know if you want me to go into how I happened to come to the Watermark community.

J: Well, why don't we stop it there and we'll get to that next? Let's let Patricia chime in with her story.

B: Ok.

P: Ok, I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. The youngest of a large family, I graduated from high school there and then worked for a couple years and then I was offered a job in Washington with the Civil Service Commission and so accepted that, came to Washington in 1959 as a secretary. And I've had a number of jobs over the next ten years. I seem to be a person who couldn't take a job for longer than two years. I got very bored and had to move on. Eventually I had been studying stenograph machine shorthand since I was in Worcester. I had taken a course there so I studied it part-time over the years. And then in about 1969 I think I went into court reporting finally as a profession. I was a self-employed court reporter for 30 some years and that entailed working like a telly girl type of thing where my office would send me to a different assignment every day and then I would, you know, take the deposition or whatever it was then transcribed the notes and deliver back to the office. But I was considered self-employed so I did that for 30 years and then I retired. I've been quite happily retired since then.

J: Very good, ok, so let's see, so you were sharing a house, I guess from the notes they sent me, in Arlington. Tell me at what point, well, first of all how long have you lived at The Fountains at Washington House?

B: We've been here since September of 2015, just under year.

J: Almost a year, going on a year. And what was going on in your lives that made you say to yourselves maybe we should look at making a move?

B: Well, for me it was the fact that one of my closest friends developed a serious illness in I think December of 2014. A person who had been in good health all her life and very vibrant and within six months she was dead. And during that six months her niece had been coming down from New England to take care of her affairs and manage all her medical care. And I didn't have someone that was going to be doing that for me and I thought I've got to find someplace where I can plan the rest of my life, where I can be taken care of. So talking with Pat we thought we should look into something. We loved the house we were in, we absolutely loved it, didn't want to leave it but we were on our own in that house. At any minute the air-conditioning could go out or the furnace could

break, that big maple tree could come down on the sunroom and we thought we should start looking for something where maybe we will be taken care of if any of those things happens. So we started looking at various retirement communities in the area. Didn't want to leave, didn't want to get too far from the Arlington area where all our friends and business associates and everything were located so we went to, we called a referral service called A Place For Mom and they gave us several places to check out which we did, probably every place in the northern Virginia area we looked at. And we had an invitation for a luncheon at The Fountains at Washington House. We came here and were offered a tour and when we came for the tour we found an apartment that was larger than anything we had seen at any of the other places. And the real deciding factor was that it was a rental community. We didn't have to give all our capital that would come out of the house that we sold to somebody else. We could manage it ourselves and that was most appealing. After several trips looking at the apartment we decided to go for it and I called the referral service, A Place For Mom, and told them what we had found and what all the advantages were and she said, "Oh, I think you hit the jackpot." So we were quite happy.

J: That's great. Pat, do you have anything to add to what Barbara said?

P: No, I think that's probably it. I mean we have several friends who moved into other retirement communities in the area. There are a lot of them in the Washington area. And we had visited them as well as taking the tours and so forth and the idea of, you know, giving them all your cash money pretty much all of it didn't sit well with me. That was a very big item in our decision. Let's see if there's anything else. Just that the house was getting to be harder to maintain because of things going wrong or you know a big snowstorm we've had. Luckily, we were able to find a couple of teenagers during the last storm that we were there but that winter was a pretty hard winter. I know a lot of my friends had the same problem and decided to go ahead and change their way of life. And then the first winter we were here it wasn't a huge snowstorm but it was pretty big and it was just so delightful because the maintenance people here went out and cleaned off both of our cars and shoveled, you know, the driveway. Everything was just wonderful. We could go out without a problem so that was a big advantage for us.

J: Well, that's great and you had been in your previous home in Arlington quite a number of years, right?

B: 40 years.

J: 40 years and so tell me about the downsizing you had to do. How was that process?

Was it easier than you thought or was it harder than you thought? How did you do it?

B: We were very fortunate. We were, as I say, in the house 40 years but we had an attic and a garage. We accumulated a lot of stuff over 40 years. Pat has a niece and nephew-in-law in the area and they had always loved our home. And they always said, "If you're going to do anything to give us first right of refusal." Which we did and they opted to buy the house. So that was a very easy transition. They gave us whatever time we needed to move out. Then we hired TAD which is Transitional and Design, I think it is, moving service. They came in, they had the floor plan for the apartment here, they looked at everything in the house that we had and she'd point to something and say, "Are you taking that with you?" And I'd say, "Oh, yeah, we're taking it." And she would roll her eyes and think what are they not taking with them? But she worked with us and over a period of a couple of months actually we narrowed it down to what we could

manage to bring here and what we would have to get rid of. We had garage giveaway sales. We had furniture giveaways. Some of our furniture is with friends and we have visiting rights to it but all in all it could not have been a smoother move. By the time we came for the move, they didn't want us around to say, "Oh no, don't touch that, don't touch this." We were out the day they packed up the house. We were out the day they moved into the apartment. They called us everything was ready we could come and see it. The beds were made, everything was in place, wine was chilling in the refrigerator. It was the easiest thing I could have ever imagined.

J: That sounds like the way to do it.

B: Yes.

P: I will say, this is Pat, I will say that a few months before we actually made the decision and saw The Fountains but leading up to that I had an enormous library in the house and I probably had 500 or 600 books at least. It was more than that.

B: More than that.

P: In the thousands I would say of books. I did start to get rid of a lot of those things for a few months before we actually made the decision to move so I would take four or five grocery bags of books over to the local library and drop them off and things like that. We did get rid of a few things like that. So we were aware of what we were getting into and tried to make it as easy as possible but it was still a lot of work.

J: Yes, it is a lot of work. Well, it's nice to know there are companies out there to help like you had.

B: Oh yes.

P: But we were put in touch with them through The Fountains here. They have worked with them over and over many times and they know how good they are.

J: That's great. Now describe for me how your life is different or the same now than it was before you moved.

B: Well, pretty much it's the same and better. I'm still doing all the things I did before. During the school year I tutor first and second graders in reading. We both do water aerobics. We go to the theater. We have a subscription to the theater. We dine with friends. We still are very active in our church group which is closer to The Fountains than it was to our house. As I say we are doing all the same things we were doing before and with a lot more ease I think now. I don't worry about that tree falling on the sunroom. I don't worry about all that stuff.

J: How about you, Pat?

P: I would say the same. I'm trying to think if there was something. No, I can't think of anything. I would say more active in some ways because we have the exercise program here, yoga and line dancing. There's something every day to get involved in. I didn't do that much when I was in the house. I would kind of, you know, be more homebound I would say. Although, I did a lot of at church we did a lot of, we have a, what am I trying to say?

B: Volunteer opportunities.

P: Yeah, volunteer, we did a lot of volunteering, the food pantry where we serve up to 200 families a week with groceries. Barbara does a lot of that of giving the actual groceries away. I got involved in the packing of the bags and we both got involved in the buying of the food once a month or so we would do that so we did quite a bit. And we're still active there.

J: Speaking of food, do you take your meals at The Fountains or do you cook for yourself? What kind of plan are you on there?

B: We're not on a meal plan. We cook for ourselves. We have gone to the Sunday brunch which is wonderful and a couple times we've been to dinners down in the dining room. Actually, they were coupons we had received when we first moved in so we've use those. For the most part we do our own cooking.

P: But my understanding is that they don't, the newcomers moving into The Fountains do not have the option. As far as I know they don't allow anyone to do their own cooking anymore. I don't know why but it changed right after we moved.

J: So you're grandfathered in. Lucky you.

B: Yes.

P: Some of our friends who have stopped to investigate The Fountains have asked us that question and they've been told, "No, you have to take a food plan." Eventually we will I'm sure get into that but now we are happy to do our own.

J: Right so did you two know anybody who lived at The Fountains before you moved in?

B: No, I didn't know anything about it.

P: I recognized a couple of people after I got here from church but they weren't people that I knew well. Just said, "Oh, I knew she used to go to Queen of Peace. I haven't seen her in a while." You know and there she was so. There are a couple in that category. Since then we've had, three or four people, one good friend who came here for rehab after being ill, she is elderly and so she came to rehab here because we were here and then she moved into assisted living. And then there's another woman from church who had the same experience. She knew we were here so she came to look at it and did move in.

B: Another friend I had from tai chi outside suffered a stroke and her daughters contacted me because they were looking for a place for her after her hospital stay so she came here for rehab and she is now here in independent living.

J: Wow, so you came there knowing no one but a lot of your friends have followed you.

B: Yes.

P: Yes, a lot of our friends are very impressed with it.

B: Everybody who pops into our apartment is very impressed with it.

J: Good and what about meeting new friends there. You don't take your meals there which would seem to be an excellent place to meet people so have you had chances to meet many people since you moved in?

B: Oh we have. We go to every single venue, any musical events that they have upstairs in the Sky Room and we have just met some wonderful people. We participate in so many activities. There's a Great Decisions program that meets once a month and discusses world issues. The people there and the backgrounds, I mean, I'm just so impressed by some of the people here: military people, government people, teachers. There's a book group that we participate in. There's a current events discussion group every other week. I'm very impressed by the quality of people here.

P: And then we were laughing the other day heading out to something to meet somebody for dinner, I don't know where we were going, we met two different people in the lobby. It was right after the evening dinner about 6:00 or 6:30, something like that and everybody is still gathered, they're all having a good talk after dinner in the lobby and we had to make our way through the lobby and get stopped by two or three people

just have a discussion. There's a lot of good people here.

B: You can't sneak out. You always meet somebody you know.

J: That's nice. What you are both describing to me can be summed up in a word and that's community.

B: Oh yes, very much so. Very much so.

P: The other thing that I think is kind of important in comparison, I think, to some of the other communities around is that it's smaller than, for example, the Goodwin House which is huge. I don't know how many people they had living there. This is sort of cozy, not exactly cozy but it's like living in, I don't know, like a hotel but where you know everybody or almost everybody and you're always meeting somebody that you know. You get into these interesting conversations and the staff is excellent I think.

B: Oh yeah.

P: You just have some really good people on staff here.

B: In fact I wouldn't say that there is anyone who is not friendly and knowledgeable.

J: That's great to hear. Do you feel that you made this decision to situate yourself when you did at the right time of your lives or do you wish you had started thinking about it earlier?

B: I'm satisfied with when we did it. You know, as I said we were very happy in the house but just all of a sudden seeing that things happen quickly and you never know how quickly they're going to happen or you could be able to control it. My big thing is the fact that we moved when we decided. We didn't get sick and somebody decided for us that we had to go someplace. This was our decision. It's something we wanted to do. Nobody told us, "You know you've got to get rid of the house, you can't be there anymore, you can't drive come you can't do this." We made the decision and we're here because we want to be here. And we love our apartment and we love the people we've met here.

P: Exactly.

J: Fantastic.

P: When we first started looking it was like, "Are we old enough yet to do this? Are we pushing ourselves?" But when we came here a lot, not a lot but a number of the people who were here are actually younger than we are. We're both 79 going on 80.

B: That's not really very young.

P: It's probably just about the right time.

B: We convince ourselves, we close the door and we're young again, so it's ok.

P: I'll tell you one incident that happened, living together all these years, you always call out if you need help with something or other and Barbara called out to me and said, "Can you come and help me flip my mattress?" It's a chore so we've done this 100 times so there we are flipping the mattress and the mattress decided to flip me. I was on my back on a bare floor. I mean it was right in the doorway between the kitchen and her bedroom so I went flying through the doorway, landed on my back and on my head, hit my left side on the door jam and I'm just lying there thinking what happened, am I ok? And Barbara pushed the button. We all have little buttons that we're supposed to wear all the time. And the nurses came up within minutes and evaluated me and they called for an ambulance that got there within five minutes and took me to the hospital. They said I didn't have to go. It was up to me but they suggested I go. At the hospital they did a CAT scan of my head to make sure I wasn't bleeding inside or something and I was

fine and then they took me home. You know it was like the next day I was saying to the receptionist, the concierge, "Did you hear about what happened to me yesterday?" And she said, "Yeah, I heard about it. Why didn't you just call me and say I want to flip my mattress? And I would've sent two guys up to do it for you. That's why you're here." Ok, lesson learned.

B: I hope.

J: I guess when you're used to doing things for yourself all your life it takes a while to realize you can just pick up the phone.

B: Exactly, exactly.

P: And another thing, this may be off-the-wall but, you know when there's ever a storm a bad storm or heat wave or what have you, and they tell you on the news you know, "Check with your elderly neighbors to see how they're doing." Nobody ever checked with us. I guess they didn't think we were elderly. We were always on our own.

J: That's funny. Ok so, let me end with this question, advice to other people. Obviously you've had conversations with friends who have moved in but if you were to meet a stranger who said to you, "Oh, I would never move to a retirement community. That's for people who are sick or for people who are old." They have that old stigma in their mind. What would you say to people like that about your experience?

B: I would say you can be as young as you want to be, you can be as old as you want to be. It's up to you. My biggest thing about moving to anything, giving up your home that you can make the decision I want to be in charge. I want to make the decision where I'm going to live, what I'm going to do. And I don't want to wait until I'm incapacitated and somebody makes the decision for me.

J: Good, good advice. What about you Pat?

P: I think I would just say yes, that's true.

J: That's good. Is there anything else that you would like to add that I didn't ask?

B: I think you pretty much covered everything but we really and people keep saying, when I was talking to friends who were thinking of coming here, "What's the best part?" And I'd give them all the best parts and she'd say, "Ok, now what's the worst part?" And I said, "After all this time I haven't found a worst part yet so I'm still happy with it."

J: Excellent, well, I'm glad to hear that. And I guess we've covered all the bases then and so I will let you two get back to your lives. And thank you again for spending time with me on the phone and sharing your story with us.

B: Thank you. How is your weather out in Phoenix?

J: Oh, it's Tucson. It's sunny today. We've had a very very great wet monsoon season. We've been lucky to get a lot of rain which we of course always need. But today it's sunny and it's quite humid. It's not as hot as it usually is. It's only in the upper 80s but it is humid out there. It feels like Florida.

B: We're going through a very hot humid spell here. The heat index is over 100.

J: Oh my goodness, well, it's probably about the same here. Well, you stay inside in the air-conditioning then.

B: We're inside. The air-conditioning is working well so no complaints.

J: Alright, you enjoy the rest of your day. Thank you again so much.

B: Ok, thank you. Bye-bye.

J: Bye now.