

Arline Stern Interview, November 2016

J: June

A: Arline

4:39

J: Hello.

A: Hello, June?

J: Yes, is this Arline?

A: Yes, it is.

J: Nice to meet you.

A: Nice to meet you too.

J: Thank you for making time in your day for this little interview.

A: Yes, that's fine, glad to do it.

J: Alright, well, before we get started I just want to take a moment to explain the purpose. We enjoy getting to know our residents and sharing something about their lives with other people who are just in the process of thinking about what they might do in their future. And we like to kind of get into the details about what made you think about making a move to a retirement community and what life is like for you now that you're there. So that's pretty much what we're after today is your personal story and thanks for sharing it. And just so that you know, we are recording this so that we can produce an accurate transcript and get your words exactly right. But if you should happen to say something that is maybe too personal or you don't want to share with the public, just say so right then and there and we we'll scratch that part from the transcript, ok?

A: Ok.

J: Alright, well, very good. I'm going to begin by inviting you to talk about yourself and your life and introduce yourself, you know, anything about you that you would like people to know. I see here that you are a ceramic artist. I'm sure people will be interested in that but you know you can talk about anything, from where you were born to how you ended up in Sarasota, and then after that I'll get into more specific questions. So go right ahead.

A: I've been a ceramic artist for 60 years. I do mosaic art and I'm also a quilter. I've always been involved in the arts. I'm widowed. My late husband was a doctor. And I've been widowed a long time and I have three children and lots of granddaughters and grandsons and great-grandchildren. And I come from New York City. I lived in Yonkers, New York. My husband practiced in the Bronx. And then after he passed away I moved to Manhattan. I lived in Manhattan for 25 years, always doing my artwork in different studios. And then my daughter, who lived in New Jersey, said to me she said, "Mom, how about we move to Florida?" She never liked the cold weather. So I said, "Alright, as long as it's not in a retirement community, a gated community." I wanted to live by myself, you know. We moved to Central Florida. She moved to Winter Park, I moved to Maitland which is just north of Orlando. I had a beautiful condo on the water on a big natural lake. And she lived in a house very close by, about 10 minutes away. And my grandchildren were young enough to start school there and I didn't know a soul there. I

made lots of friends through the museums. I went to a lot of museums enjoying museums and took art history classes. I had a wonderful group of women and we used to go out all the time and have movies, theater, lunch, dinner. It was really nice. And I always worked in my art studio. After living there 16 years my daughter said, we're beach people, we always loved the beach and we rented at Longboat Key and Siesta Key a few times or we go on the east coast to Smyrna Beach. So my daughter said, "How about if we moved to the west coast?" She travels on business and she has just as many clients on the west coast as she did, you know, in central Florida. So I said, "You're making me move again?" She said, "It'll be nice, you know we like Sarasota." I really didn't know Sarasota, we liked the Keys, you know Longboat Key and Siesta Key. So I said, "Ok, but I think I'm ready for an independent living. And I was getting older, I am older, I'm 87. And I still drive and do my work. And she said, "Ok." In her travels she looked around at several places and picked three or four that I should look at and then we came back and I looked at two other places. I came here to The Fountains and I liked the appearance and the landscaping and the low buildings right away. And I met people. The people were friendly, so friendly. And I liked the small size of it but what really made me move here, we have a big artists' studio here and I said, "Oh, I'm in heaven." I could leave all of my paraphernalia and everything because I was, have another room and I worked in and an outside studio. So I always had a second bedroom that I would have all my paraphernalia and I said, "Oh, this is wonderful, I can do my work and be fine." So I said, "Ok." And that's how I made up my mind and I'm very happy here. I'm very happy here. I work in the studio two or three times a week. I met wonderful people and I feel secure. I had to change all doctors, which is a big thing and people recommended lovely, good, competent doctors and I'm very happy. I feel well. And I know my daughter doesn't have to worry about me.

J: Excellent.

A: My suggestion to people, they didn't believe I broke up my old gang. They said, "You're moving to independent living?" Because I'm such an independent person so I said, "Well, I want to move in when I'm well." And that's the time. I don't want to wait until something happens, so I'll be here and my daughter doesn't have to worry. My sons don't have to worry. That's my story.

J: Well, that's a very thoughtful approach and you've been there for how long now?

A: February 8th I moved in.

J: So not quite a year then?

A: No, I have a beautiful apartment on the third floor. My one condition was I wanted an open lanai. Good thing I asked if you allow pets because I have two cats and they said, "Yes." They allowed two cats and I wanted an open lanai because most of the lanais have been closed and are part of the living room. I wanted an open lanai because I had a big terrace before and I like to have my plants out there and my cats sit out there. I sit out there when the weather is good but they sit out there all the time. They showed me a beautiful apartment. It doesn't face the lake but that's ok. I face the trees, I feel like I'm living in a rain forest so it's really lovely. And I like the cathedral ceilings on the floor and all my artwork, my son came and hung up all my artwork high. So I'm very happy here.

J: Well, that's great and your cats made the adjustment ok I take it?

A: Oh yes, they love it.

J: And what are their names?

A: Kami and Klay.

J: Oh, that's cute. Well, good and so you didn't know a soul when you moved there. How would you say your social life is, now that you've been there for almost year?

A: Very active, very active. You make appointments for dinner. I have so many people to have dinners with and it's really lovely. The men and the women, the women are great. And you know it's fine. I didn't know anything about Sarasota so I had to find my way around. I know where Costco is and Bed Bath and Beyond. I found a new hairdresser. As I said, I found all new doctors so I go myself after the first time. So I go to Publix by myself. The weather is great, it's wonderful. It's a little warmer than Winter Park but that's fine. I like the warmer the better for me.

J: There is a big art community there in Sarasota. Have you make connections that way?

A: Well, I came with a project. I'm doing a big mosaic tabletop so I've been busy but we have the art historian, Baylor Miller, comes and lectures once a month which I look forward to. And I've been to the Ringling and I've been to the Dali with The Fountains' bus. And there are lots of places. I may go back to clay after I finish this project. I know there is adult continuing education on Bonita which is pretty close. And they have studios there and there are a lot of art centers that I can go to. But right now I'm just doing my artwork right here in The Fountains. It's the best artist studio, it's a big open space, open the garage, plenty of air. The other ladies and gentleman do painting, somebody else is a potter. I'm doing mosaics so it's very varied. In fact once a month on Tuesdays we have an artist of the month and we eat together. It happens to be tonight.

J: Oh, that's nice. That's very nice.

A: It's a nice community.

J: Tell me about your mosaic. What is the design?

A: My own design.

J: It's original.

A: Yeah, my own design.

J: That's a very time-consuming process.

A: Yes, I'm not in a hurry.

J: Well, good for you, good. So tell me about a typical, if there is such a thing a typical day for you there, what do you enjoy about living there?

A: Well, I go down for breakfast. It gets me up and out early. Then I come back and do what I have to and then I either decide to go to the studio or go do water aerobics. If I have errands I will get in the car and go to Publix or something like that. I'm just busy all the time. And then I come home to take a little rest about 3 o'clock, shower and get ready for the evening. We have a cocktail lounge at 4:30 or 5 o'clock. We meet people there and everybody is very friendly and then you have dinner with different people every night, different groups, you go to the café some nights. It's very busy. You can be as busy or not busy when you want to.

J: That sounds fantastic.

A: I am very happy here. I feel very secure because I know if anything happens, my daughter, she moved to Longboat Key by the way. The plan was that we both move at the same time. And I sold my condo quicker than she sold her house so I moved in sooner. My granddaughters all live close by. My friends from Orlando have visited. And I'm just busy all the time.

J: Do you ever get back to Winter Park to visit them?

A: No, I haven't but they've come here. But I will be going probably at the beginning of December. I have a function to go to. But I speak to them and they come here. A few of them have slept over. My children come to visit, my grandchildren come to visit. Everybody lives in Florida except my one son lives in Portland, Oregon. He's been here several times already.

J: You must be happy you found such a great place for you.

A: Yes, I think it's a wonderful fit for me. People are varied and bright and intelligent. I'm very happy here.

J: Would you have any advice to share with people out there who perhaps have never set foot in a retirement community and don't know anything about the lifestyle? What would you recommend for them?

A: The first thing I would say that you have to put your mind away from the fact that it's an old person's home. It's not, it's independent living and if you need assisted living it's right there. But I think the most important thing is, as I said before, that you should move in when you're well. Don't wait until something else happens. This way, if you want to go away and travel, you just close your door and you know that you don't have to worry about a house or an apartment or a condo. Everything is taken care of for you. I stopped cooking. I'm on the food plan. I used to be a very big cook which I don't have to do any of that anymore. So it's time. It's very nice. I enjoy my life and I would say you have to get over the fact that it's not like a home, like an old lady's home, an old person's home. It's a vibrant community. And everybody is here to enjoy themselves. They are very friendly. And, as I said, move in when you feel well and you can still do whatever you want. You're not confined.

J: Yeah, let me ask you this, you seem to have had an open mind to what you call independent living. Had you visited communities up in the Orlando area? Why did you have such a positive impression and think that was going to be something you wanted to do?

A: Well, I have friends that live in Village on the Green. Are you familiar with that in Longwood?

J: No.

A: Or the Mayflower in Winter Park?

J: Yeah.

A: I know lots of people have gone there and everybody seems very happy. I've been to several luncheons at Village on the Green. And everybody there, women I've known who lived in condos who moved in there and I've been to birthday parties and luncheons and everything and they all seem so happy. They say it's great so I had an open mind. My friends and I discussed it and a lot of people say, "Oh, I would never do that. I would never do that." And I said, "Why not?" I mean you're not going to be this age forever. It would be nice to have someone that waits on you and you don't have to prepare food. Some people do still prepare food. You know, I still make lunch for myself. It's great so I always had an open mind. I don't know if I would've had the same feeling five years ago but I feel now it just was a natural thing for me.

J: Very good. Well, that's great Arline. I can't think of anything that we did not cover so unless you can think of anything else that you would like people to know about the process or the place.

A: Well, I think the size of the place means something. It has a good mix of people. It's not overwhelming. Everybody says hello and everybody is friendly, they're automatically friendly. I think the people here are terrific. It will extend my life, I believe. You do see people get sick whether that happens all over in real life too, outside. You just know that this is a different stage of your life. I feel fortunate that I can be here and live like this.

J: Well, that's a great note to end on, I think, and it sure sounds wonderful. And I'm glad that you found happiness there at The Fountains. Thank you so much for sharing your story with us today. I appreciate it.

A: Alright, June, it was nice talking to you. I'm glad I helped. I'm telling you how I feel from the heart.

J: Well, that's exactly what we wanted and you've done a fine job so thank you again and you enjoy the rest of your day there in Sarasota, ok?

A: Thank you very much.

J: Ok, bye Arline.

A: Bye June.