

## Bob West Interview, November 2016

J: June

B: Bob

3:07

J: Hello there.

B: Hi.

J: Hi, is this Bob?

B: Yes, this is Bob.

J: Hello Bob, this is June Hussey in Tucson. How are you today?

B: Very good. How are things in Tucson?

J: Oh, just perfect. The weather has just turned perfect for us after lots of heat.

B: I haven't been to Tucson in a lot of years but I once owned a timeshare, not a timeshare, a piece of a clustered housing project.

J: Oh, great so you're familiar with where I am. And I've been to Sarasota a number of times. I love it there.

B: Well, why not?

J: What's not to love?

B: That's right, as long as you get used to the summer humidity. However, I lived in the Washington, D.C. area for eight years before I came here so I'm well-adjusted.

J: Right, good. Well, listen before we get started, I just want to spend a couple of minutes explaining to you the purpose of this interview and we do a lot of these interviews around the country and it's a great privilege for me. It's really a lot of fun to meet different residents and learn about their different backgrounds. What we like to do is really get, in your own words, some of the reasons why you started looking into making a change in your lifestyle and how you went about finding the right community for you. And then something about what you think of the lifestyle now that you've been there for a little while. And then what we do with this information is we share it with folks out there who may have never set foot in a retirement community before or they may have never considered even it being an option for them. And what we found is that by listening to our actual residents' stories of how it changed their lives, it makes it a little bit easier for them to open their mind to the possibility. So that's what we're after today. I will be asking you some questions but I want to first tell you that we are recording this conversation. And that will help us produce an accurate transcript so that we can get your actual words correct. But if you should say something, Bob, along the way that is either too personal or you just for whatever reason don't want to make it public, just say so right then and there and we can x out those few words at the time, ok?

B: Sure.

J: Alright so I'm going to let you, kind of invite you, to talk a little about yourself and introduce yourself in terms of maybe where you're from and a little bit about your career and how you ended up in Sarasota, that kind of thing. And then we can get into more specifics about your move after that, ok? So go ahead anytime you're ready.

B: Sure, well, I actually grew up in upstate New York, went to college in Albany and then

did my graduate work at Purdue in Lafayette, Indiana. And my career took me first to Philadelphia for a couple of years, Stamford, Connecticut for about three and a half to four years and eight and half in Chicago. All three of my girls in that area were born. And then back to Stamford, Connecticut where I worked in the pharmaceutical industry, initially as a researcher and then as an administrator. And I subsequently stayed in the Stamford area in three different houses I guess over that period of time. And then moved to Fairfax, Virginia outside of Washington where I was consulting for various pharmaceutical companies and for a couple of government subcontractors. And then my wife and I decided it was time to get out of the Washington traffic mess. I've been down here for 17 years. She passed away it will be eight years ago in about three weeks. I lived in the same house in the same community. As a matter of fact, I was reflecting a couple of weeks ago I lived longer in that house than any place I've been in my whole life.

J: Wow.

B: Yep.

J: How long was that?

B: 17 years.

J: Oh my gosh.

B: Here in Sarasota, same house. It was a great community but I was reaching that point in time where I didn't want to worry about who is going to take care of the lawn and who was going to take care of the waste and who is going to take care of the air-conditioning and all the utilities and all that jazz. And so I began to look around at some of the senior citizens developments here in town, of which there are probably now about eight or ten. And I must say I probably visited six or eight of them. And actually I only lived about ten minutes from The Fountains during those 17 years and never set foot in the place until about a year ago.

J: It's kind of hidden away, isn't it?

B: Yeah, I know the corner of Beneva and 41. It never dawned on me that's where The Fountains were. And I got an invitation to have dinner here and I was in the process of reviewing the various options in the Sarasota area and I did go, as I said, to six or eight places. I was most favorably impressed with The Fountains and the facilities and the activities. A few of the places did not have that really. I still work out at the Y three days a week and swim laps three days a week. That's how I keep my girlish figure. And it's important to me because that's how I maintain my cardiovascular health and I've got bum knees and that's how I keep my legs and the rest of me in shape. Those kinds of facilities being available or nearby and since, as I said, I lived ten minutes from here this is my old neighborhood. You know it's the same Publix and it's the same AMC12 movies and the same Sarasota Square Mall that I've known all these years, etc. And as it turns out I'm actually closer to downtown here at The Fountains than I was when I lived over in Turtle Rock on Palmer Ranch. I have been very pleased with that and I've been very pleased with the staff here and the food here is excellent. There could be some more exercise equipment for guys like me. And also a badly needed whirlpool. You don't have any and that's very important to me because I have to go to LA Fitness. I was there this morning. That's where I swim my laps and I use the whirlpool and the sauna. I have a bad back and bum legs. That helps keep those things going if you will.

J: Right.

B: But overall the people have been great. I think we can use some more activities in certain areas, for example some more speakers from the outside. The few of them that you have here I'm quite familiar with because I actually took a course with a senior program here in town about now it's probably about four or five years ago. She's a very talented lady, she's very good and I've attended one or two of her lectures here and she gave one last week which I missed. She has apparently been doing it here for a fair number of years as well as other places around town. And she's very good. There is some other talent I'm familiar with because I also take classes at the Lifelong Learning Academy which used to be affiliated with the University of South Florida. Now, it's really part of the Ringling School of Design now. And it's very good for lifelong learning because geographically it's a lot closer to me but also for an awful lot of people in this area, seniors such as myself, because we used to have to go way up the other end of town to the University of South Florida. But also the programs are considerably more diversified than they have been in the past. This town has a talented core of people who are willing to give of their time for these classes. I think most of them don't get paid anything to speak of for these programs but the turnout is wonderful and excellent.

J: Good, so how long have you been there at The Fountains now?

B: I moved in the 1st of June.

J: Ok.

B: Five months.

J: Five months, ok and did you know anybody before you moved in, any of your neighbors?

B: Well, actually our men's club had lunch here about a year ago before I moved in and there was a lady who moved in here about a year ago and her husband and I were very good friends. She was originally from Connecticut as was he and they had a place in my development in Turtle Rock. He passed away now, it's probably two or three years ago and she went back up North. She has a daughter up there and grandkids there. I think it was better for her. I don't think she did well here because I was here one night visiting, they were entertaining me as a future prospect for dinner, and I happened to see her sitting by herself in the dining room. She left shortly after that.

J: Well, it is a very individual thing and why don't you talk about that for a second? Why do you find this kind of lifestyle in a community setting a good match for yourself?

B: Well, I'm very active, have been but also smart enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I have an older brother, God bless him. His 91st birthday is this week.

J: Wow.

B: And his wife moved into, they had a private home over in Lake Worth easily ten years maybe even 15 years, and they saw the handwriting on the wall. About four or five years ago they moved into a Hyatt senior community over there. And they had a villa for several years and my sister-in-law fell and broke her back. And my brother developed vascular dementia and so they moved from that independent facility they had. That facility, just as The Fountains, had an assisted living and a nursing facility. And my brother is in the assisted living facility. And my sister-in-law is in the nursing facility. The handwriting was on the wall. You know, I had been living by myself for the better part of, which is now eight years and I said, "While you still have your health, do it and take advantage of the activities and the social interactions, etc. And as time goes on, if you have to go into assisted living, you will do it, you'll have it right there and you won't have

to worry about where you're going to go." It's different in many of the couples here. Really when you are on your own you need to really foresee this and put the steps in place so you can be ready for the next eventuality, if you will.

J: Well, that's a very practical point of view and I wonder if it has to do with your background in pharmacy and research that you think along those lines, because many people don't.

B: Well, that could be. But as I said, I think the fact that my older brother and sister-in-law preceded me, I knew it was coming because also I lost my younger brother 25 years ago to a heart attack. So I know from whence I come. My family history is for the birds.

J: And so you mentioned you have three daughters that were born in the Chicago area. Are they still up there? How do they feel about your move?

B: No, I have one who is in the Chicago area but she lived in Connecticut and New Jersey and also she went to Purdue and met her husband there. They're both graduates. My granddaughter is now applying for college. She's a senior and actually Purdue is one of the schools she's applying for as well as a batch of other Big Ten schools. I have another daughter that lives in Indianapolis. I have another one that lives in Alexandria, Virginia and works in downtown Washington. So they are diversified geographically but they're not afraid to get on a plane and come down and see dad or vice versa, as long as I'm able to travel. Matter of fact, my grandnephew got married up in the Philadelphia area about three or four weeks ago and so my daughter from Chicago flew into Washington, I flew into Washington and the three of us drove up to suburban Philly and spent a couple days and then came back. And me here to Sarasota and my daughter back to Chicago.

J: Nice.

B: We try to do that once or twice year and I also have another whole family through my second wife in Connecticut. So I'm going up there for Thanksgiving.

J: Oh good, very good. Not to get off the subject but I grew up in Connecticut not far from Stamford, the next town over as a matter of fact.

B: Norwalk?

J: No, Old Greenwich.

B: I knew people in Old Greenwich. And I had my office on Greenwich Avenue as a consultant for half a dozen years at least before I moved it back to Stamford. I like Greenwich, Old Greenwich too. As a matter of fact, one of my friends used to keep his boat down at the Old Greenwich Marina.

J: Yep, yep, I grew up right across from there.

B: We used to get his boat in and out of the water with the change of seasons. A lot of good memories of those days.

J: Sarasota has a lot of nice water features too.

B: Yeah, I actually met my second wife, my first date with her I took her for dinner down, it used to be a Greek restaurant down, not Greenwich Avenue.

J: Viscardi's Colonial Inn?

B: Colonial Inn that's the place.

J: Yep.

B: I used to like that place very much. We used to go there often. I don't know if they're still in business or not.

J: No, it turned into a place called The Beach House and then I just heard that place just closed like a few weeks back. So it's available.

B: I'm sorry to hear that. And I used to play indoor tennis at the Old Greenwich Racquet Club too.

J: Well, moving back on topic here, what kind of advice would you offer to folks who may be in a similar situation to yours before you came. I know that you mentioned you came over for dinner and so forth. How would you recommend people start investigating their options?

B: Well, I think it's important that you visit the facility. You definitely should have a couple of meals I believe because I can tell you there were a couple places I visited here in town that I would not go back there again just on the grounds that their lunches were so bad. And one place I think I had dinner and it was nothing to be written about positively. So that's an important issue because it's a very important part of your life socially as well as intellectually and of course from a health standpoint. You should investigate and see that the dining facilities and the quality of what's being offered is good. I can also say that I did attend a couple places where the food was good, actually quite good. But from a competitive standpoint, the places pricewise I think are out in left field for what you're getting.

J: So how many meals a day are in the plan that you're on? Do you have breakfast, lunch and dinner or how was that arranged?

B: You can't have lunch at all.

J: Oh, I see.

B: You can if you want to pay for it separately or, as I did yesterday, I had accumulated dinner meal credits because I had three days I was up in Philadelphia and Washington so I used the last one yesterday and had lunch over at the café which is over in another building by the pool. And their food is quite good, as a matter fact, I'm going to go there Friday night for dinner instead of the regular dining room. But we get the equivalent of a high-class Continental breakfast. You get fruit, dry cereal, you get oatmeal once or twice a week, juice, coffee, etc. Once a month they do have bacon and eggs and more substantial stuff. I understand that used to be once a week but that's been cut back to once a month. I don't understand why, economics probably but I'm hard-pressed to see they are spending that much money for that. And then we also have, once a month we do have really a first-class buffet brunch. And that's really outstanding. I'm very pleased with that. And of course I just had my own lunch today which was, you know fruit, yogurt and cottage cheese because tonight I'm eating downstairs. Wednesday is prime rib which is excellent. I'll probably have fish, which I do at least three or four nights a week here. And I'm glad to see that they do have a fish offering every night and they also have a salmon every night of the week. You can get it poached, broiled, steamed or even in a salad if you want. You can't beat that from a health standpoint.

J: Right.

B: And then they also have some kind of a chicken salad periodically that you can order, which is not part of the regular offerings if you will. And the new chef that we have, all of us are very pleased with him.

J: Good.

B: People do see definitely a difference over what they had five or six months ago.

J: Well, that's good to hear.

B: And we have a number of programs which, I'm very pleased, we have a cookout for Memorial Day weekend, the Fourth of July with a jazz group. Last week, I suspect the new chef had something to do with it, we had a Lobster Fest. It was excellent really and all kinds of stuff to go with a lobster. We had clam chowder and we had mussels and clams and shrimp and cheese and wine and beer. And we also had some music that night, too, so that was very successful. Last night was Halloween.

J: Oh, right.

B: And the whole crew came in costumes, the whole dining crew.

J: Oh fun.

B: One of my waiters, I was going to stick a pin in his. He had a blown up costume on him that made him look at least three times as big as he is. He could have blown up. But they were all dressed in something different. And they're a good crew. The dining crew is good. And the maître d' is very good and very conscientious and personable too. Overall the staff is quite good, quite good. The one place where it had problems has not been solved. The activities director had a very short stay of about six weeks and her predecessor I guess wasn't all that much longer either, and they are currently looking for a new activities director, which they need. And I think they better say to themselves, "Let's not get the cheapest person we can get. Let's get somebody with a little bit more experience." So we don't have to go replace them every, in this case she didn't even last two months.

J: That's a key position. Maybe somebody reading this will apply for the job.

B: Well, they did have somebody here previously that was at one of the other senior facilities and she was here for a while and then she was let go, too, and I don't know why. But there is a message there. There is another message too: the physical facilities are now over 30 years old. And the main Fountains building needs work done on it. My elevator lately has been out a fair part of the time. And they may have to start thinking about how they get part of those elevators replaced. I don't know.

J: Well, I'm sure it's on their minds.

B: And they have also had other water problems with leaks in the dining room and so on from the ceiling coming in. I'm not sure they've got that solved yet either.

J: Well, it sounds like we have some work cut out for us there.

B: Yeah, I'm giving you both sides.

J: That's good feedback. We appreciate it. What about the timing of your move, do you feel that you moved at the right time in your life or could you have benefited from moving in sooner?

B: No, I chose the right time to move. Part of it had to do also with the real estate market. The real estate market this past year has been good. And I said, "It's time so let's do it." The fact that it was that close to me, only ten minutes away, and I must give your moving people a lot of kudos. They were terrific. They really did a terrific job of planning and getting the stuff put together and packed together and getting it all put away for me. With no real sweat on my part, believe me.

J: Good, tell me about your apartment.

B: Well, I have taken the two-bedroom version. And I have a second bedroom, has a hide-a-bed in it and if one of my daughters come and we don't necessarily want to use the guest apartment here. I have a combination living dining area and then I have a nice little lanai, enclosed but you can open the windows. And that's where I have my

computer and my bookcases. And there's also a very nice storage area, too, where I keep my luggage and stuff that I don't have to use every day. The master bedroom closet is really great because it's a walk-in. I have all my stuff in there. And in addition to that I have the second bedroom has a closet, a hall closet for some of my kitchen canned stuff and cereal and that kind of stuff. I have a very nice little kitchen here. I could cook a meal here if I wanted to. I'm not saying I do it, but I could.

J: Have you ever been a cook in your life?

B: Oh heck yeah, oh yeah. Listen, my wife has been gone for eight years but before that there was a period where she was working in Washington and we were living in Fairfax and if you know anything about the beltway traffic in Washington and as a consultant I would spend half my time. I had plenty of room in that house. I had my own office area etc. I'd often cooked dinner so that she didn't have to knock herself out after that commute.

J: Nice.

B: I had a grill out on the deck and I often used it even in the wintertime. I can put together a meal. That I'm not in the least worried about, however I'm getting spoiled here.

J: Well, that's good. I think that's a good note to wrap it up on. We've covered a lot of different territory. Is there anything else you can think of that you think is important for people to know before they start their search?

B: Do your homework. And I mean that because you heard me say that I did. I went to several other places. I not only compared the cost but I also compared the quality of the food and the activities and the equipment that they had because I may very well, I don't know if I am, come to think about it, I'm probably the mid-range of the age here. I'm 85 and we've got people here, God bless, we have one chap here who celebrated his hundredth birthday two weeks ago and his kids threw a blast of a party over by the pool. It was wonderful. But we have people here in their 90s, plenty of them. I doubt that we have very many, to be honest about it, in their 70s. Last I heard the median age here was more around 82 or 83, something like that. There must be some that are in their upper 70s.

J: Well, I'm in my 50s and I don't see any reason why I wouldn't love living there.

B: When my three daughters came here and checked out the place they said, "Dad, you're going back to the campus again." I said, "Well, I could do a lot worse. They said, "That's right."

J: Alright, Bob, well, I really appreciate all your time today and all your sentiments. It's been great speaking with you. I need to wrap it up. I've got another interview starting in a couple minutes unless you have anything else then we can say so long and thanks again.

B: Oh, my pleasure. I hope I've given you a broad insight, let's leave it that way.

J: Yes, I think you have and I think people will be very appreciative of it. Ok, well, you take care there in Sarasota. Enjoy the rest of your day.

B: I will.

J: Bye now. B: Bye-bye.