

Tom and Joan Latanision Interview, February 2017

J: June

T: Tom

L: Joan

1:55

J: Hello.

T: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Tom?

T: This is. This must be June.

J: This is. Nice to meet you, Tom. And is Joan with you?

L: I sure am.

T: She's on the other line.

J: Excellent, well, I can hear you both. Can you hear me ok?

T: Yes, very clear.

J: Excellent, well, thank you both so much for agreeing to be interviewed over the phone this afternoon and especially on short notice. I really appreciate it. Can you hear me ok?

T: Oh yeah. You're coming through fine, June.

J: Good, so before we get started I just wanted to go over a couple of things because I'm not sure how much of this you were told in advance of the call.

T: We have a sheet, a write-up from Dawn here, that lists the basic parameters that we both looked through.

J: I'm glad you had a chance to read through that. And just to make sure you understand, we are recording the conversation so that I can get an accurate transcript of our interview because we want to make sure we get everything accurate, your quotes and your sentiments especially. And what we do with the information is we share your story with folks out there. You may have seen some of these mailers that we send out, maybe you had received one yourself, but we share our residents' stories with folks out there who may be just in the beginning of thinking what they might want to do in their future and we find that it's very helpful to people to hear about others' experiences, so that's really what we're after. And to begin with I'm going to invite each of you to introduce yourselves and if you would please spell your last name so I can make sure I have that correct. And you can speak for as long as you like about yourselves, where you're from, how you met, your family, your career, whatever you'd like for people to know. And then from there I will get into some questions specifically about your recent move, ok?

T: Sounds reasonable, why don't you start off Joan?

L: Ok, I'm Joan Latanision. My husband and I have been married for, what, 58 years? Going on 59.

J: Wow.

L: I hate to say this but we are getting older so we decided it was time for a move for us. We have three boys; they all live up north. And in order to make it less stressful for them we decided to move while we can still do it.

J: Good.

L: Go ahead Tom.

T: Actually, June, and our last name is spelled Latanision, and of course I'm Tom. Actually, we started the process, we moved to Florida about 17 years ago and we moved into University Park Country Club which is on the northern border of Sarasota between Sarasota and Bradenton. We lived there for 17 years having come down here in 1999. During that period of time we saw a number of our friends and neighbors get in the position where their health declined or they had some other personal setbacks that required them to need help beyond what they could have available in their single-family homes. We saw children rushing down here and spending weekends or weeks in some cases to try to find suitable accommodations for their parents. And we said this isn't the way we'd like to do it, we would like to be in charge and make the decisions ourselves on where we spent the last years of our lives. So probably six or seven years ago we bought a condominium. Our thought was that when the house is more than we want to contend with and maintain we will move over to the condominium. And we bought a condominium a couple miles away from where we lived. And about a year or so ago when we started thinking more seriously about our next phase of housing we looked at the condo and then said, "It's lovely, would like to live here but sooner or later we're going to have to make another move. We're going to have to downsize one more time perhaps and make another move." And that's when Joan and I started looking at the facilities that are in the Sarasota-Bradenton area. We did want to stay in this area. We love the West Coast of Florida. Today's a perfect example of it. I guess it's about 74° today. It's 70° right now. But anyway we visited all of the facilities like The Fountains that are in this area and that would be about six or seven I guess. You know they all have their pros and cons. They have their very desirable features and some features that we weren't especially interested in. But after we visited and revisited some places we settled on The Fountains. We just had a good feeling about the place when we walked in the door. I think part of it is the people that we just met on some of our preliminary visits. You don't get to know people very well when you're visiting places. The visits are somewhat superficial. You look at the grounds, then you look at the dining room and you look at some apartments and you meet a few people in the process. But overall we had a very good feeling about the place. Joan, you can probably tell June about Arnie, about what Arnie said.

L: We had a friend that played bridge with a lot of the people here.

T: Still does.

L: Still does and he always told us that everybody here loves it. And so we thought let's recheck this again. So we came down again and yes we found the right apartment and decided ok, this is it. So, we're happy here.

T: That was the other part, moving from a house is difficult because you got a lifetime. We moved 16 or 17 times in our life so moving isn't a big deal but the last move results in having to contend with a lifetime of accumulation of possessions. A lot of the places we looked at were smaller, didn't have a lot of closet space so when we saw the apartment we ended up buying, it was probably about 60% of the size of the house which is pretty darn good size. There's 12 closets in this apartment which, that's a lot of closet space for an apartment. So, it's hard for us to believe sometimes but we moved in everything that we wanted to continue to have with us for the rest of our lives and we still have a little bit of space left. I hope we don't fill it up but there's still space to spare.

And I think that's kind of rare when you move into a condominium or an apartment. I know our condominium was generous in size but it didn't have 12 closets either.

J: Did you ever live in the condominium or did you just rent it out?

T: No, we rented it out as soon as we closed on it and it's still rented out. We have the same woman living in the condo that we did six years ago. It's been a great rental, a single professional.

J: I'm really interested in this idea that you thought you were going to move to the condo when you were tired of your house and then seven years went by and you rethought that. What was it about that particular move that made you want to skip it?

T: Well, I think we ate out but we still cooked a lot of meals at home, Joan did. Joan cooked and I cleaned up and between grocery shopping and standing in the kitchen for an hour or two, or whatever it takes to make dinner, it was becoming increasingly uncomfortable for Joan. So that was one of the issues. Even though we had landscaping services in our condo, there's always things to do around the condo. It was a villa. We knew there would still be a fair amount of effort involved in maintaining it and just living. Whereas here with an apartment in The Fountains, well, we like to go away for example four or five times a year, maybe anywhere from a week to two or three weeks, and it's nice to just close your door and walk away. The housekeeper comes in every week to tidy up and make sure everything is maintained. When you come back, your apartment is in perfect condition. All you have to do is unpack your bag and you're back at full steam. There's no move out, move in when you go away on trips or vacation.

J: That sounds nice.

T: It's a lot simpler and less stressful way to live.

J: Right, so I know that you haven't been there very long at all, you just moved in, I guess you've been there a year then.

L: A little over a year.

T: Yeah.

J: Got it, and you said that you didn't really know anybody just some mutual acquaintance when you moved in. Tell about how it was getting to know people. Was that easier than you thought or about the same as you thought?

L: It was very, very, very easy. First of all, they have happy hour three days a week.

T: Three afternoons.

L: And that's a good mixer and everybody is very friendly and they make sure that you get to know people by, they set up dinner dates with different people. So it's almost like instant friendships.

T: I think residents reach out. We do that today.

L: When somebody comes.

T: We see the listing of new couples or people moving in on the bulletin board. We let them get settled in and we generally call them a couple weeks later and ask them if they wouldn't like to come over for drinks or dinner. In a year I think we know practically everyone in the facility. It doesn't take long when you have the activities that we have here for mixing and socializing with fellow residents. It doesn't take long to get to know everyone.

J: Let's talk about that for a second, there are a lot of activities. Tell me about some of the ones that you enjoy either together or individually.

T: Joan likes to play bridge.

L: I do Tai Chi. I'm on the dining committee and what else?

T: She likes to play bingo.

L: Bingo, they started a bingo on Monday nights and that's kind of fun. Tom likes all the exercise equipment that they have and he tries to be physically fit all the time.

T: I spend a fair amount of time over in the gym and around the pool. There's also exercise classes daily. I go to the Tuesday and Thursday balance and fitness class. And I do a little bit of, my friends tell me that they think I must feel like I'm in summer camp because I play pool and I play shuffleboard, what else do I do? We have a golf group who goes out on Thursday afternoons to golf at one of the local country clubs. So it is sort of like summer camp, come to think about it. There's a lot of fun activities and not that we are looking for breaking par at the golf course but we have a great time socially no matter what we are involved in.

J: That's great. I bet your kids are a little jealous

L: Yes, they are.

J: So your kids live up north you said and I am reading here that you are both from Pennsylvania originally. Is that where your kids are, up there?

L: No, we have two in Minnesota and one in New Hampshire.

J: They must like that cold weather.

L: They do.

T: Believe it or not they do. Although, we're going to have company next weekend. We have a son and granddaughter coming down for three or four days to visit with us.

L: They like coming down.

J: And do they stay right with you in your apartment?

L: Yes, we have a two-bedroom unit so it works out really well.

J: Well, tell me a little bit about your apartment, it sounds interesting with the 12 closets. That's more than most people have in their house.

L: We have a huge living room dining room combined, a brand-new kitchen. They remodeled this unit right before we moved in so that works out nice. We have two I guess you'd call them like lanais. At one point they must have been screened in but now they are closed in so that makes nice little sitting areas to read the paper or whatever. It's two bedrooms, the master bedroom is huge. We have a small office.

T: How about your closet and dressing table? Joan has probably one of the finest bathrooms you can imagine for an apartment.

L: There's a nice dressing table, a huge closet, what else?

T: You have two closets in there, one you use for cosmetics and medicine and the other is a linen closet. Of course then the double sink and shower, that's her bathroom. I use the other bathroom that goes with the guest room but since there's not very many guests here, that's my bathroom.

J: And you mentioned that you looked at pretty much all the other communities in the area. What was it about The Fountains at Lake Pointe Woods that really made you feel like that was the right choice for you?

T: I think a good part of it you almost have to really rely on the impressions of people you know who've been at the facilities. I think our friend had a big influence on us when he told us how friendly people seemed. I think we got a sense of that when we made a couple of visits here to The Fountains when we were in the decision process and we got

a sense of the camaraderie in the sociability of the people. And the grounds of this facility probably are as good or better than most of the facilities in town. There's more land here I think than most. At least it feels a little bit roomier. There's over 60 acres here and some of the facilities are a little more confined in space so if you're like myself, if you like to spend a lot of time outside, you can ride your bike around the one-mile perimeter if you like to. I usually go offsite but you could do that. People do walk around the perimeter; it's a mile around the perimeter. And it's a very nice atmosphere despite the fact that we are kind of in the middle of the city if you think about it. We've got every commercial establishment you could hope for within a few minutes from our gate. You can go to Costco or the Publix grocery store or any fast food place you can think of or any other retail outlet. There's a shopping center a little bit north, shopping center a little bit south. It's a great location in Sarasota.

J: And how far is it where you were living in University Park?

T: It's about 15 miles, June.

J: Ok and have you met anyone since you moved in that used to live at University Park also?

T: I think there are about four or five units occupied by University Park people. Matter of fact we had dinner with one of those couples last night, Dr. and Mrs. Turchik.

That's a typical day for us, 5 o'clock yesterday we went down for happy hour and cocktails. We went in and had a wonderful prime rib dinner with Dr. and Mrs. Turchik. Today, we got up, let's see went for breakfast with another couple and as you probably know in this facility, breakfast is included with your residency. Then I went to exercise class and then we had a great brunch on the beach.

J: Oh, nice.

T: 25 of us went over to the beach in a bus and Chef Paul and one of his assistants, Brian, did the cooking and the community director did the waiting along with the bus driver and we had mimosas and Eggs Benedict and cannoli.

J: That sounds wonderful. Which beach were you at?

T: That's a pretty good 24 hour span.

J: I'll say.

T: Yeah.

L: The only problem is we're eating too much.

J: Well, you know when you're not cooking it, it's easier to do that.

L: Yes.

T: A day like that, 24 hours like that, there's not much not to like.

J: Yeah, so let me ask you both for some words of wisdom. You mentioned that you had known folks in your previous neighborhood that kind of waited too long and their families had to come down and make decisions. I'd like to know, first of all, why do you think people drag their feet like that and wait too long and, secondly, what advice do you have to try to convince people not to wait?

L: Probably the biggest thing is realizing you're getting older. Nobody wants to admit they're getting older but when you look in the mirror and you see, it's time to do something. We don't want to have to depend on our children, not that they wouldn't mind as much but I just think it would be an imposition on them and this is what happened to a number of our friends. So it's just easier for us to look around while we're capable of it and move in while we're capable of it and know that if we have a problem

there's somebody here.

T: And I think, June, people have a misapprehension about what continuing life facilities are like. Personally, in our family, I have an older sister who lives in Santa Barbara, California. And my brother and I and her family, her children, have been trying to get her into a facility in California for years. My sister thinks she just won't leave her house, she thinks that it's, I hate to say it but, a death sentence when you go to a facility like this. A lot of people have never been and I don't think they understand how enjoyable the sunset of your life can be if you live in a facility like this. I think they have a complete 180° opposite perception of what life is like in a retirement community.

J: And do you remember the first time you set foot in a modern-day retirement community and realized they weren't like a death sentence, as you said?

T: Well, I think the ones we looked at here in Sarasota, they're all nice.

L: They're all lovely.

T: They're all lovely and this community, are more like a resort than anything else, the facilities and the buildings and the apartments, the ones we looked at were first-class.

J: Tell me about your visit and did you come over to The Fountains for a meal or were you nervous the first time you came? Tell me how that went.

L: What's to be nervous about?

T: There's nothing to be nervous about. I don't think we came for a meal, we came to look.

L: Yes, we came to look and then we came back for a dinner or lunch.

T: Might've been a lunch.

J: I'm just trying to put myself in the mind of someone who doesn't want to come look and try to figure out why they might not feel comfortable.

L: I think if you're apprehensive you shouldn't do it but you've got to realize you are getting older and at some point you're going to need help. And it's kind of silly to wait until it's too late. Just face reality, that's me.

J: I think a lot of people think that you already have to need help to move in.

L: Right, you have to do it when you're capable. It makes it a lot easier.

T: I think both of us feel that, as we go into the future, we got here early enough. As I said, we know most everyone in here and we know a lot of people quite well, considering it's only been a year. Those people will be here as long as we are or longer and it's nice to know that if anything ever happens to me, Joan will have friends here that go back to the time when we moved in, when we were able to partake of the activities and the opportunities to socialize with people. If you wait until you are not capable of doing that, it's going to be a lot more difficult to meet people.

J: Right, right.

T: And then you could conceivably move into a facility and have a hard time feeling that you've got a circle of friends to mingle with and to share stories and confide in. It's nice to have friends when you're away from your family.

J: Right, I think that's a great point. I think I've covered everything that I wanted to cover unless you can think of anything you would like to add that you think is important for people to know.

T: No, the only other thing I'd say is that Dawn was our move-in coordinator and she did a terrific job. I think she came and visited us at our home maybe two or three or four times before we moved, quite a few times and brought information to us, made the

move about as easy as you could imagine I'd say. So that assistance, that move-in assistance that was provided was welcome and it's very beneficial.

J: Excellent, alright, Joan did you have anything else you wanted to add?

L: Not really, just that we are happy to be here and life's a lot easier. You don't have to worry about anything so.

J: Well, that's great.

T: We hope that the family will enjoy the house we left behind for 15 years like we did. They've got young grandchildren and it's got everything that they need in it. It provided us with that when we had young grandchildren. Our grandchildren now are finishing up college or out of college. It's different today than it was 17 years ago when we moved to Sarasota and bought a single-family home on a golf course.

J: Ok, well, I want to thank you both again for sharing your story with us today and I think what you've mentioned will be very helpful to people to learn and read about and hopefully they will want to come and join us for lunch and learn a little bit more about The Fountains.

T: Well, I hope so. I hope you keep the place completely full.

J: Ok, great, well, thank you again. It's been a pleasure speaking with you and you enjoy the rest of your beautiful afternoon in Sarasota.

L: Thank you.

T: Thank you, bye-bye.

J: Alright, take care, bye now.

L: Bye.