

Nancy Keller Interview, February 2016

The video interview is available for viewing here. An edited transcript follows.

J: Jill

N: Nancy

45:55

J: So tell me who you are and a little bit about yourself please.

N: I'm Nancy Keller. I'm very active in community life here at The Fountains. I'm a graduate of the University of Arizona with my highest degree of PhD in sociology but prior to that I honored my nursing program, bachelors from University of Kansas and Masters from University of Texas. So you can tell I don't hold still.

J: Great and what brought you to Tucson?

N: Actually, it was to go to the University of Arizona. Those nurses of us who were looking for a higher education, because there was a shortage of faculty for the schools of nursing, were offered, tuition free, a stipend to choose a university cooperating in the project and obtain a doctoral degree. So I came here to be the first graduate of the sociology department University of Arizona. And I call myself a clinical sociologist. I love working with the real stuff, with the people, not an academic.

J: Nice and when did you move to The Fountains?

N: I moved in September 2012. It was a great decision for me to do so at that time. Primarily I was following the model of my mother who entered a similar facility back in Kansas because she wanted to go to such a resourceful place while she was still fit. And so she started out in independent living, moved to the apartment house and from there into the health center and so on. But to me that made so much sense and she was able to adapt much much better to her own personal issues. The other sort of push for me to move was I didn't want to own property anymore. I was living in Green Valley, lived there 10 years and liked to come to Tucson to do theater and movies and shopping and that sort of thing but I didn't want to own property anymore so it was time. So here I am.

J: That's great and how is life different now compared to when you were in your property that you owned, day-to-day?

N: To me it's much more active. Green Valley calling itself a retirement community which it is, but it's "so much for summer" for people who come for our winter. So they go home for the summer, wherever that was, so you don't have a lot of community left among the permanent residents there. And I miss that so here it is active and it's understandable and we have some influence on what happens to each and every one of us. So it's great. I love living here.

J: Tell me about the programs and activities and committees that you do to stay active.

N: Well, the first year that I was here was pretty much settling in and selling the property in Green Valley. It was an important time but it wasn't an active time for me to get involved that much. So the second year I learned the committee structure and was on the food committee for about a year. The activities themselves have always been important. Tai chi, chair yoga, the socials every week, it's great, it's just a great mix. It's

like living in a mixer. I like it.

J: That's great. It will definitely keep you moving, keep you going.

N: Yes. So currently I am on the health and wellbeing committee, the community life committee and the library committee. And through those structures there are sufficient ideas and projects that come to light that being a resident dealing with other residents seem very satisfying to both of us. Me, because I can spearhead and organize and the people involved they like giving, they like helping so it becomes a very productive scheme. We have, now it's called the RSVP program, the ROTC Student Veteran Program. We ask our local resident veterans if they would like to participate in a 30-minute conversation with a ROTC student. It's been a fabulous program to start and to see people coming back. Many of them would like to come every session, they're like twice a month, so that's been important. Through the library committee, next month, we're starting a reading service for residents who are visually challenged so we are now recruiting for residents who would be willing to read aloud to another resident who either on a one-to-one or in a group, we're going to do current events at The Fountains which we will read the house, the facility "Ripple Effect" and the "Thrive" so that they know what's happening each week.

J: That's great.

N: Yes and we're also inviting our residents who are published to read aloud portions of their work so that the people who cannot read their work will find out what it's about and have a chance to ask questions and of course those residents who have already read this resident's publications will be there too. So we're looking forward to starting that program next month. And then finally through community life, for as long as I've lived here, there has always been a concept of each hall in the big building having a corridor minder, somebody that is one of them and could answer questions about who to see about issues, welcoming the new residents and helping them get settled in with information that they find they need or want. And we had, see there would be 27 halls in the building and almost half of those did not have anybody assigned so we're rejuvenating that and changing the name from corridor minder. It was changed to hall monitor and those of us that are in that slot we don't say things so that people are minding or we're not minding them. Then it was changed to hall monitors. Well, we don't like monitoring either so we settled on hall friends. So I'm busy reinstituting that from the residents' point of view and getting their cooperation to put their name in and say, "Yes, I'll do it for my hall."

J: Nice.

N: So with that you can see that I'm busy.

J: Yeah, you have a couple of things going on.

N: Right.

J: Tell me about your apartment and why you chose the Town Center.

N: I chose it primarily because at that time I could get the classic plan which was less expensive which was an attractive feature. I had a dog at the time who moved with me from Green Valley and so we were placed on the first floor which was fine with us as long as we could be on a courtyard which we were. So that became Charlie's playground. So I like the apartment. I got a one bedroom and I had moved only those things from Green Valley that I truly love so it's home. It was always home even as I was settling in.

J: What was that like, the downsizing process or what advice you have for people who have such a hard time letting go of those things?

N: Well, I just used that criterion. I just looked at something and I'd say, "Do I love you?" Well, if the answer was "yes" well then that was coming. If it wasn't, I left many things in my villa in Green Valley just simply for that, so it sold as a furnished villa because I had exercised my decision to take with me only what I loved.

J: That's great. What advice do you have for people who are stuck? They just don't know.

N: I think at our age and stages it's crucial to understand the need to simplify life, to really be willing to learn how a change in life can benefit a person. It benefited me a great deal. I no longer felt stuck. I was learning, people around me were learning, so quickly we could form friendship circles and discussion groups and all sorts of things that I think are crucial to really adapting. And the main thing is to continue to learn. As long as we're learning we're alive.

J: If you had a friend who said, "I just don't know how to start, I don't know anything about any place I just think I might need to move." What kind of advice for researching and learning about this would you give?

N: Well, I did my research in a very personal friendship way because while I was still in Green Valley I had a dear hiking buddy here in Tucson who was diagnosed with a terminal disease. And while she was living in a development she finally agreed she needed to move so another of our buddies and I scouted the area. She wanted to stay on the Northwest side. When I lived in Tucson I was on the east side so I was learning a lot too at the time. So we scouted for her what was available in the Northwest sector, particularly close to the hospital. Well, after we had done that and of course The Fountains was on my list when we went back to her and said, "You know there is really no choice. You're going to The Fountains." Which she did and so with sort of experiencing with her entry into the facility and seeing how she was accommodated to in her condition I said, "This is it." So you have to scout and you have to find the place that not only is offering so many things and resources but that you feel at home in. And you'll find it if you just visit them.

J: That's great. It's perfect that by helping someone else you ended up learning what you needed to learn.

N: Right and with my mother's model as I've described before it was the easiest decision I ever made about where it was going to be. I was coming to The Fountains.

J: What's your philosophy on life?

N: It's still evolving but I do think that after retirement it's the better part of life, actually, which is to adapt and to simplify and to do what you like to do. And do it with people who say, "Yeah, not my shtick but it's ok."

J: That's great. Is there anything else that you think that we should add? Advice for someone who is out there on the fence or someone who needs the encouragement to learn or do. You've done an amazing job. This has been a great interview but anything else at all?

N: Well, I'd say to come visit us. Take a tour and look into it and I always say if I can't decide what I'm going to do, I flip a coin. If it's the answer I was tending to ok if it's not then I think I need a little more time to consider. And so it's a comfort level thing and you have to come back and come back and test it out. And when it's comfortable, then that's

the place, and to simplify life is just to get on with it.

J: Beautiful, thank you so much.

N: You're welcome, I love living here.

J: That's great. Yeah, it's so good to talk to people who have such a zest for life and they take every opportunity they can to stay busy and really inspire everyone else.

N: And it's been here all the time.

J: Right, I want to hear about your ring.

N: The ring is something that a dear friend gifted me with. But it relates to a trip on the Mississippi River in one of the Delta Queen family ships and on that it was in the midst of all the terrain was just beautiful and it was alive. And we had a naturalist as a speaker and he said, "You all think that the leaves themselves change color." He said, "That's not true. We see them in the fall but that's because the sap to the leaves has been cut off because of the coming cold weather and you see these beautiful colors but you need to know that they were always there. Nothing changed except the reduction in sap." And so I've approached life in that way many times I think is discovering something wonderful and I think it was always there it just took me a while to find it.

J: That's terrific. Can we get a closer shot of her ring just in case we end up using it? I'm so glad I asked about that ring.