

## **Ron and Jeanne Interview, February 2017**

**J:** June

**R:** Ron

**B:** Jeanne

J: Hello.

R: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Ron?

R: Ron Birdsong, yes.

J: Hi Ron, this is June Hussey. Thanks for calling in.

R: You bet.

J: Are you there with Jeanne or is it just yourself?

R: No, there's both of us. We have two cell phones so we are going to have to talk separately. Or else call the same number if you want us both on.

J: Yeah, she can do that. She can call the same number and we can all be on the line together.

R: Okay, yeah, she can do it. She can put us both together.

J: Ok, we'll give her a minute to do that.

R: Alright, we used to have a house phone with the speaker but now we just live with cell phones.

J: Yeah, welcome to the 21st century, right?

R: Yeah. She's calling in.

J: Ok, I should hear a chime when she gets on the line.

R: Ok.

J: There she is. Hey, Jeanne, hi, this is June Hussey, welcome to the call.

B: Hi, June.

J: Well, it's nice to meet you both by phone and I thank you very much for making time in your day to do this interview. So before we get started I just want to go over a couple of things. They probably already told you about this but I'll just refresh it. We do these interviews with residents all over the country of Watermark Retirement Communities and it's really a fun thing for me to do. I get to know so many interesting people with fascinating lives. And in addition to getting to know them as people we like to find out about their experience in choosing a retirement community. We like to get into detail about what was going on in their lives when they decided to take a look at their different options and how they went about choosing the right one for them. And then something about their lives now that they are living there. So that's sort of the background of the type of questions I'll be asking you. But the purpose is really, we then go and share the information that we learn with other people out there who may be just in the beginning of their own thought process or maybe they're not even thinking about the future but maybe they ought to be. And so a lot of times people have never set foot in a retirement community and our residents' experiences really help open their eyes and their minds to the possibilities.

B: Ok.

J: So that's sort of the background and then I wanted to let you both know that we are recording this conversation so that we can produce an accurate transcript. If you

happen to say something along the way that you don't want to appear in the transcript, you don't want to share with the public because perhaps it is too personal or something, you can just say so right then and there. Just interrupt and say, "Hey, please don't publish this part." And then we will heed your advice, ok?

B: Ok.

J: Ok, perfect, so with the two of you on the phone we can just kind of go back and forth and you can chime in each other whenever you wish but I'm going to begin by letting the two of you introduce yourselves. You can do most of the talking. I just want to try to get a feel for who you are, what your lives have been like up until this point, maybe how you met, where you both grew up. And maybe one of you can take a turn and then the other can take a turn or however you want to do it is fine.

B: Ok.

J: And you can share as much or as little as you wish just to kind of give us a little bit of background about your lives. So when you're ready one of you can go ahead and get started.

B: Ok, I'll start. This is Jeanne and I'm 72 so I'm fairly young I think for this retirement community. I was raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. And that's where I met Ron. This is a second marriage for both of us; we both lost spouses in the first marriage so we've been married just 28 years. That's my growing up story. You want to tell her about you, honey?

R: Sure, I'm a little older than Jeanne, I'm 80. I retired from the aerospace industry 22 years ago. I was lucky enough to get a nice pension because I stayed the same company for 35 years. I was born in Denver, Colorado. I was raised in Alabama. It's too long a story to explain that other than I lost my father when I was two years old and my mom married a man that had roots in Alabama so that's where I was raised, in Alabama. I graduated from college and became an electrical engineer. I worked in the industry like I said for 35 years at the same company. When we retired, we decided to move to Green Valley. That's pretty much it. I was in the service.

J: Oh, you were in the service?

R: Yeah, for almost four years during Korea.

J: I see. So when you were working for 35 years were you in Salt Lake City that whole time?

R: No, I was working in California for most of my career. I moved to Salt Lake City about 14 years before we retired.

B: And that's where we met, we met at work.

J: Oh, so you met at work?

R: Yes, she worked for me.

B: I was an engineering analyst.

J: Ok, you both had professional careers in engineering.

B: Yes, before we worked together I worked for the Department of Energy and Department of Housing and then this was a contract for aerospace.

J: Ok and from your previous marriages did either of you have any kids?

B: Oh yeah. I have four; Ron has three although his son was killed two years ago in an industrial accident. And between us we have, let's see, I think 12 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

J: Wow.

B: And they are scattered; most of them are in Utah but some are in Washington and Oregon.

J: Ok and why Green Valley? How did you decide to move to Green Valley, Arizona.

R: I had come down here on golf trips for several years from California and when they developed Rio Rico I bought a piece of land and was going to retire there except when I got ready to retire it really hadn't developed the way it was, the way I would like and we found that we really liked Green Valley as a result of looking around here. We always wanted to live in Southern Arizona.

B: And we both golf so that was a great golfing community.

R: Yeah.

J: Right, so how long ago did you make the move from Green Valley up to Tucson?

B: The end of April of last year.

R: We've only been here, it'll be ten months this month.

B: We lived in Green Valley for 21 years.

J: Wow, so take me back to the point in time at which you talked about the possibility of making a move.

B: You mean to here? To independent living? Well, a lot of our friends have moved to La Posada. I don't know if you are familiar with that in Green Valley.

J: Yes.

B: And we liked it so we got a pretty good look at the lifestyle. But we didn't want to end up in Green Valley because Ron is a heavy duty hiker and it's a long drive from there to Tucson where he had to meet everybody. A lot of driving back and forth and I kind of miss the shopping and you know the arts and that kind of stuff. And we wanted to be closer to medical facilities. And so we decided, when it was time, we probably would not retire in Green Valley but would look around here.

J: Ok and so then how did you go about looking around in Tucson?

R: We both decided that we didn't have much experience with independent living other than going over and having dinner with our friends at La Posada. I felt and so did Jeanne that we needed to do some research before we ever even thought about putting our house up for sale. We got some help from a senior organization here in Tucson that gives you the names of a lot of different places and helps you get brochures and things like that. I can't remember the name of it.

B: I can't either.

J: Was it A Place for Mom?

R: No.

B: No, similar to that though.

R: It's a place that gives you a lot of advice about what to look for. They helped us a lot. We probably visited ten or 11 different facilities. And in the process we pretty much decided that we didn't think we were ready for apartment living so we were attracted to The Fountains a lot because they have the casitas down here.

J: So how much time would you say you spent looking at those ten or 11 different places, was it months or years?

B: Months, I would say. Once we made up our mind we were pretty much ready to do it.

R: Probably about six months. We went back a couple times.

J: And you visited them. Did you have meals, did you attend talks, how did that work?

Tell people who have never done it what that involves.

B: We would make an appointment with whoever was going to lead us on a tour, and we had a specific list of questions and criteria that we were interested in asking when we went to each place so we found that really helped. The place that recommended, that we're trying to think of the name of and can't, the organization that, you know, listed all these places had a really good check-sheet of things to look for. We would take that with us every place we went. It was things from how is the appearance of the outside, the staff, the food, all different things that you would be looking for. We kind of went down that checklist with every place we went and a couple things narrowed it down for us. One, we wanted to be on the Northwest side. We really didn't want to live on the east side so that kind of narrowed it down. Other things, beside the casita, that were important to us is we are still really quite active. Ron hikes about three days a week and I'm real active and involved in a lot of stuff and so we wanted a place that offered enough variety of physical things for us to do, plus, was near the recreational type things that we still do outside of here. So that was a pretty good consideration, too. Of course the food, the food was number one.

J: So The Fountains met your criteria geographically, and the casitas, and you liked the food. Was there anything else that helped you narrow down to your final choice?

B: For me, I'm a hospice volunteer and the Casa de la Luz Hospice is right here, was really a big factor for me because I knew I could do that without having to drive, you know, clear across the city. What else honey?

R: I'm pretty good at observing people. I'm a people watcher. I noticed the different atmosphere here than mostly the other places we went to. I didn't want to get into a place where everybody was sad because they were there. I want to meet some people and socialize with them. We noticed that a lot of the people when we went to the dining room, we made a point of most of the time asking to go to dinner because I think that's important. And I just watched people coming in and out. Sure there was a lot of walkers and things like that, but there was a lot of other people that seemed to be enjoying themselves. That's important to me.

B: Me too, we're pretty sociable people.

J: Yeah, I'm sure that's important to a lot of people who are looking. So that's good.

B: One thing we didn't mention was that just looking for a place because we wanted to move and didn't want to do the housework and yardwork was a small part of it. The main reason why we decided to make a move in the first place was because, and especially because we are a blended marriage, we didn't want our children – if one of us happened to become incapacitated or die – to have to go to all that trouble and burden of making a move and trying to help us with the decisions. We wanted to be proactive and be in a place where we were already settled and had support before any of that happened.

J: Had you two discussed a certain age that you would make the move or was it more of just a feeling of, "Is it time now?"

R: I think it was a feeling of, "Is it time now?" When we started doing this research we intended if we found a place that fit our needs we decided we would put our house up for sale and get on a waiting list. The funny thing was we sold our house in two weeks.

J: Oh wow.

R: They scrambled here to get us into a small apartment, thank goodness. From there we got moved into a casita as soon as one opened up.

B: I have to tell you though, to answer your question, two years before we decided to do this if you would have asked us if we were ever going to do this, we would have probably said no. Because we always thought we would want to stay in our house. We liked Green Valley but you know, as time went along, it was just a little too far away from things. We quit playing golf and got involved in other things. It just didn't suit our lifestyle anymore so we thought, maybe these people and everybody we knew down there that had moved into La Posada really liked it. I mean they were all so positive so we thought well, you know, maybe it has something for us or you know, independent living style, not that place.

J: It does help to know people before you that have made that move and it kind of helps you along, right?

B: Absolutely.

J: Tell us about your casita. What is it like?

B: Ok, we have the Verbena and it's a two-bedroom, two-bath and we really lucked out because we still like to do yardwork somewhat and we ended up with one that has an unobstructed view of the Catalinas and we were able to put in a nice backyard. And so we actually have our own table and chairs so we actually are able to spend quite a bit of time outside and that was a real plus for us. And the Verbena itself, it's beautiful, it accommodated all our furniture and we were able to pick out the colors for the walls and, you know, it turned out to be the perfect size I would say. What do you think?

R: That's pretty much it.

J: And now, so you take your meals, is it 15 meals a month are included with the casita still?

B: Yes.

J: And so do you cook on your off days or do you go out?

R: Either that or go out.

B: Yeah, cooking was one of the reasons we moved here so to be honest with you we are, like Ron said, we were in the small apartment before we moved into the casita waiting for one to be available and we went down for meals every day and that actually was a little too much for us, so we really prefer the 15-meal plan because a lot of days we are either out or on the days where Ron hikes, he just wants to come home and have a small salad or nothing. This is perfect. We still feel like we get to go out to dinner half the time and the other half will make salad, sandwiches, soups, easy stuff.

J: Well, good. Tell me about a typical day there. Have you gotten involved, you mentioned you are a hospice volunteer, what about the things offered at the community besides the meals? Have you gotten involved in any of the scheduled activities or parties or trips?

B: You want to talk about that, hon?

R: We both go to five or six exercise classes a week, sometimes more than that. And Jeanne goes to

B: I go to a Bible study class, meditation and we get involved with the social events, you know, whenever they have entertainment and happy hour. We are involved a lot in the community stuff that they have for casitas here like they have a separate clubhouse and pool and we've got to know couples here, which is really good for us. They tend to be a little bit younger and a little more active and we have more in common with them. What else are we involved in? We go on some of the outings, have lunch and dinner out,

ride outs, the educational series sometimes. We both play cards but it seems like the, (inaudible) because the card group seems to be pretty formed already and they want you to be there regularly and we can't really commit to that so we haven't really done that too much. We do stuff with the couples that we've met here just in the casitas so that's great for us.

J: So how would you say that your lives and your lifestyle compares today to how it was in Green Valley; how is it similar and how is it different?

R: I'll start. I spent a lot of time maintaining the house, the outside of the house and the yard. I didn't have near the social activities that I have now. I volunteered at the Food Bank. I'm currently not volunteering anywhere here because the food bank here is not my cup of tea in Tucson, volunteers don't have much to do in my opinion. I checked it out. But I don't know, we stay busy all day.

B: You know what I noticed is we don't have to drive everywhere like we did down there and that took a significant part of our time because I had a couple of volunteer jobs there and I had to do quite a bit of driving. I volunteered at the new hospital there and I also volunteered for hospice down there and that necessitated a lot of driving around and a lot of times driving to Tucson. So we are really happy we don't have to do that anymore. Although we still have our cars. And then I think I'm busier now than I was then, and a whole lot less stressed because down there it was more, "I have to get to this place and I have to get this place and I've committed to this" and kind of overcommitted. And here, you do what you want, when you want to do it and if you don't want to do it, nobody cares; you're not locked in. So that's really quite liberating.

J: Yeah, I can imagine. Well, that's great.

R: Fortunately, there's a lot going on here. People invite us over for drinks before dinner. You know, we invite people over here. We have plenty of social activity. I'm not one that wants to sit around because I know what happens if you sit around.

J: Ron, where do you like to go hiking? You're a big hiker, tell me some of your favorite trails in Tucson.

R: I love the Rincons and the Huachucas are probably my two favorite mountain ranges, Catalinas are ok.

B: I have to tell you Ron, I'm sitting here looking at the little things on the wall, he has a patch for climbing the hundred peaks and for hiking every trail in eight mountain ranges. So he's done most of it. He's currently hiking the Arizona trail and he's done about 650 miles out of the 800 of it.

J: My goodness.

B: Yeah and he's a guide for hiking clubs. That's what keeps him interested.

J: Wow, that's incredible.

B: I like to walk. I do a lot of walking. I used to hike but I have asthma so now I'm just real content to walk all around here and there are wonderful places to walk, the washes and places that you feel like you're not even in the city. It's perfect.

J: Right, well, now that you've gone through the process of figuring out your best future what advice might you share with other people that are just, you know, where you were a couple years ago?

R: My advice to people, and we talked about it a lot before we made the decision, is I wouldn't want to do like some people do where they wait so long. We've had several friends that their husbands died and the wife had to take care of putting the house up for

sale, all the stuff that is hard to handle and we didn't want that to happen in our life. We wanted to be proactive instead of reactive. We didn't have to move here; there's nothing physically, there's no physical reason that we need to live here.

B: No, (inaudible) ten years ago, and I'm only 72 so, I have a couple of things. One of them is to consider the medical facilities that are nearby because that became very important in Green Valley. Also, to consider the financial, I mean really carefully consider the financial, because it's hard to predict how much things are going cost and I think it's probably a little more expensive than we had expected because we didn't know how much it was going to be going up every year and so people have to really make sure they can afford it before they make the move. That's important but in our case one of the big reasons that we picked The Fountains is because there is no buy-in, so that's a huge plus and the fact that it's so much a month. I think that's really workable for most people. But the big thing for us, I think, do it before you really need to because it'll save you so much heartache down the line, you know, than trying to do it when you're under stress.

J: Exactly, well, good, that's very good advice. What about your kids have they been out to visit you, what do they think about your situation now?

R: Our daughter is coming in March. It'll be her first visit with two of our grandchildren. I have a granddaughter in Phoenix with three little ones that visits us once in a while.

B: Our kids were very relieved we decided to do this because they wouldn't have to do it, so I think they are really pretty in favor of it. Nobody objected at all.

J: Well, great, I think we've covered almost every base that I can think of unless there is something that you would like to add before we close?

R: No, just explain to us what you put together and do we get to look at it before it gets published?

J: Yeah, so let me explain what happens from this is we, first of all, will produce a transcript, a word-for-word transcript from our conversation, and from there that will get posted on The Fountains website so that people who are interested in really reading in depth about your experience they can go and read it but, other than that, take bits and pieces from the interview, direct quotes from you and your sentiments and roll it into sort of an expanded postcard that gets mailed out. You've probably maybe seen a sample of that; we've done quite a few of them in the past and I'm sure they will be happy to show you the samples and what yours is going to look like, too. But that will all be happening in the next couple of months. It will probably go out I'm guessing in the springtime. What it does is it includes your story, your quotes and an invitation to come to a Discovery Luncheon so that people can come and get a taste of the lifestyle and meet you and hear from you in person and that kind of thing.

B: Oh, ok. We would go to that then?

J: Yeah, they will be in touch with you about that and explain that a little bit more and check on dates and things like that before it gets to that point.

R: Have we ever looked at The Watermark website?

B: Oh yeah, we did.

R: Where do I find this information that you were talking about?

J: You mean a sample of the direct mail? If you go to [WatermarkCommunities.com](http://WatermarkCommunities.com) and you click on The Fountains at La Cholla when you pull up the map and you'll find The Fountains at La Cholla, I think it's under "Join the Talk" if I'm not mistaken where you'll

find a bunch of the other interviews that have been conducted in the past.

B: Yeah, we haven't looked at that.

J: And then if you go to the sales office and talk to Carleen or somebody there I'm sure they can show you samples of different ones that have gone out in the past.

R: Ok.

J: Ok?

B: Thank you very much.

J: You're very welcome. Well, it's been a pleasure meeting you both and I'm sure happy to know you're finding your life at The Fountains so pleasant.

B: We're very happy here, we're very happy here.

J: Very good, well, we always love to hear that and thank you again for your willingness to participate in this.

R: You're welcome.

J: It's been a pleasure speaking with you. You have any other questions or comments?

B: I don't think so.

J: Ok, well great. Then I'll wish you a great afternoon. Enjoy this beautiful weather we're having.

B: Ok, we will for sure.

J: Alright, take care now you two.

B: Thanks, thanks a lot.

J: Thank you, bye-bye.