

Berni Walter and Ed Atwood Interview, May 2016

J: June

B: Berni

E: Ed

J: Hello.

B: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Berni and Ed?

B: Yes, we're both here.

J: Oh, very good. This is June Hussey and I want to thank you for joining the call and agreeing to participate in this interview.

B: Well, it should be fun.

J: It will be fun. I get to do these interviews with residents all over the country and it's really the highlight of my job.

B: That would be very interesting.

J: It is very interesting. I get to meet some really nice people and hear their personal stories and perspectives on life at a retirement community.

B: It's good.

J: So that's what we're after from you today. And let me just remind you that we are recording this conversation so that we can produce a transcript of it.

B: Ok.

J: And that's mainly to free up my hands so that I don't take terrible notes and make mistakes. But also just so you know, should you blurt out something that you don't want the world to know and don't wish to appear in the transcript, just say so at that moment. Just say, "Oops, don't include this part." Ok?

B: Ok.

E: Ok.

J: Alright so let me start by asking the two of you when did you move to The Watermark at East Hill?

B: Eight years ago.

J: Oh my gosh you've been there quite a while.

B: In '08. (inaudible)

J: You should know a thing or two about the community I suppose.

B: Yes, we do.

J: Very good, where were you living before that?

B: Well, we were both at Heritage Village which is right next door here in the acreage and we were both there about 17 or 18 years. We knew each other as couples and when we lost our spouses we got together.

J: Alright.

E: We were living in separate three-bedroom condos.

J: So you decided to move and combine households.

E: Yes.

J: Well, very good. So take me back to that point in time where you decided that you wanted to look at your options and The Watermark at East Hill.

B: I guess we were both just tired of being alone and we had been traveling together a

lot but we still didn't see any reason to keep so much space separately.

E: We had six bedrooms.

J: Six bedrooms between the two of you.

E: Yes.

B: Two condos.

E: And two kitchens.

J: That's a lot of space. Yeah, so did you consider any other alternatives besides The Watermark at East Hill?

B: Well, we were both familiar with the other one in town which is much smaller.

E: Pomperaug Woods.

B: Pomperaug Woods and it's smaller and it's not as active as a community. We wanted something bigger and more opportunities to be active because we're both very active.

J: And did you at any point consider just consolidating into one condo?

B: I don't think so.

E: No, we liked the health benefits of Watermark.

J: I see. And so being that you were neighbors for so long, do you remember the first time you ever saw The Watermark at East Hill?

B: I remember looking at it right after the buildings were built in 1991 or '92 along in there and my late husband and I had just looked at it just to say, "Well, someday maybe we'll go there."

E: I don't remember when I first saw. But it was sometime after my wife died and before we moved here, before we moved in.

B: We had come over for programs here too ourselves together, Ed and I.

J: And you have children living in the area?

B: I have one daughter, I have four children now. One is living 20 minutes away here with her family and then my other three are in long spaces, Massachusetts and California and Florida.

J: Wow.

E: I have two sons. One lives in the East Village in New York City and the other one lives in Ottawa, Canada.

J: Oh wow, so what do your kids all think of where you live now?

E: That's one of the reasons we're here. They don't have to think about it. They're all very happy. And I think part of it is happy that we are well taken care of here. And they don't have to worry about us and we'll never have to move in with them.

B: And they will never move in with us. That keeps everybody independent and secure and comfortable and they're happy about that.

E: That is one of the great advantages of living here, your children are happy.

J: Yes, so, they've all been there I take it?

E: Yes.

B: Yes.

E: One time or another.

J: Well, good so describe for me how your life is the same and different from when you lived next door at Heritage Village?

B: Well, I think we're both as independent as we want to be. I can hop in my car and run out and shop or go to my daughter's or run around and do whatever I like. I was only 78 when we came here but Ed is a little older. He can get out and get in his car and go

where he wants to and we go out together a lot too. We are able to get and see new sights and still travel. We've cut back on our international travel though. It's so comfortable here and secure. We feel very comfortable and secure so we can be as independent as we like.

J: That's nice and so.

E: We have a gym and a pool here. I use the gym and Berni uses the pool about three times a week. That's one of the reasons we're still vertical.

J: And I take it it's an indoor pool?

E: Oh yes.

B: Oh yes.

J: Because otherwise you would only be able to use it a few months a year if it wasn't.

B: That's right. It's wonderful. It opened in, let's see we moved in '08, I think it was 2010 that we opened the pool here. I have hardly been out of it since.

J: That's nice.

B: It's really really very nice.

E: It's hard to skip a day when it's right in the building.

J: Right. Well, I'm a swimmer too so I appreciate that myself.

B: Yes, I miss it if I don't get there.

J: Exactly.

B: Another thing is I'm not cooking dinner and that's very nice. And planning and cleaning up and cooking. We have our dinner in the dining room with what we call our dinner parties which are different groups or by ourselves, whatever we feel like. We have certain nights that we eat with certain people of whom we are fond. And sometimes we'll go out to a different location, to a restaurant.

E: We should also mention I think that every night we have at least five entrées to choose from. My wife never gave me five entrées to choose from.

B: And I never cooked five entrées in a night. The children ate what was in front of them.

J: Right.

E: There is usually something that we like.

J: That's nice to hear.

E: They also have a bar and a separate menu.

J: So sometimes you just like to grab a quick bite in there instead of going into the main dining room.

B: Right.

E: It's not a quick bite, it's a full meal.

J: Oh, a full meal, nice.

E: With a different menu usually more calories than in the dining room.

B: That makes it nice. We don't feel like we have to look at the same people every night.

J: Right, it's nice to have choices.

B: Yes, lots of choices and of course if we wanted to we could have got up at noon for a café meal and that would've been another alternate.

J: Right.

E: The bar is a full bar.

J: Wow.

E: It's pretty good prices, you have to pay for the drinks, they don't come free. I'm trying

to get them to do that but they haven't done anything about it.

B: Another thing we like about it, we can either be private, we can even go pick up dinner if we want to and eat at home here or we can be sociable, whichever one we like. If we can't make it comfortably to the dining room for any reason, one of us isn't feeling up to it, we can eat right here.

J: That's nice.

E: We also have an arrangement that we each have a bedroom and a bathroom so anytime we want to or when we don't get along.

B: Oh Ed.

E: We just can close the door and be in our own space and she's not allowed in my bedroom and I'm not allowed in hers.

B: You better stop right there. I have a laundry closet next to my bathroom so I'm perfectly happy to do the laundry.

E: I'm happy to let her.

J: So do you have laundry in your apartment?

B: Yes, we have the largest.

J: Oh I see. Oh, ok.

B: They put two together, two apartments. There are about four or five them.

E: Smaller ones.

B: Two smaller ones, two deluxe one bedrooms and they had put them together before we even saw them. And it's perfect for us because we have a great big living room and a large kitchen and we have the big living area and the wonderful deck outside when the weather ever clears.

E: It is the largest one they have here.

J: Nice.

E: And expensive.

J: Moving out of a three-bedroom, each of you, into a two-bedroom, was that difficult to decide what to get rid of and whose stuff you were going to put in the apartment?

B: Well, the nice thing about the separate bedrooms we each have our own bedroom furniture the way we want it and we both did have to get rid of a lot of things because we had big living rooms over in the village. We did, it was a big big job to clean out.

E: I brought most of my stuff with me.

B: Sure did.

J: Well, about that process, because I know that is probably a big one in terms of a deterrent for many people, is just the very thought of having to downsize and just go through that process is overwhelming. What advice would you have, having gone through that, for people, you know, to make it more tolerable?

B: Do it before you have to physically need to do it. Do the move when you're physically and emotionally ready and do it before you really have to physically. Because I have a friend who didn't do it as I suggested and she has regretted it ever since. You just need to. It's a big big job but I know there are people available to give advice and physically help. We didn't do that. We had each other and we had my daughter nearby who helped so that was a good thing. But it was hard to decide and I know there are things that we should've dumped before we got here but gradually maybe.

J: Well, that's great advice

B: Yeah, I think that really is.

E: I don't think we had a really traumatic time moving here.

B: No, we didn't.

E: We just moved.

J: Well, sometimes it is bigger in your mind than it actually is.

B: Well, we were really anxious to do it physically in every way. There was nobody else saying, "Oh, don't do it. Don't move." Nobody else said that to us, either one of us so in that way it was simple.

E: And we were living in a condo to begin with, well we both had condos. We both had big houses in different places.

J: So you had kind of been through that process.

B: Yeah, we had weeded out living in another community down in Connecticut and then to move to the condos and then here. So I'm glad that interim part is over and I feel very comfortable here.

J: So what kinds of things do you get involved with there at the community when you're not out and about?

B: Well.

E: Bernie runs the putting green. (inaudible)

B: We have a lovely putting green out off the patio in the back and I got started putting. I used to golf and so when the two gentlemen ahead of me both passed since I was assistant to one of them the job fell to me. As director of outdoor sports I guess you could say.

E: Just putting.

B: We do putting and then we have a bocce court.

J: Oh fun.

B: And then we have a croquet court and they're all kind of consolidated. I run two tournaments in the summer but we are every single Saturday morning all year long. We are either on the putting green or up in the commons upstairs putting indoors with equipment there.

J: You must be pretty good putter by now.

B: I'm not that good, I just love doing it.

E: She gets a hole-in-one once (inaudible).

B: We like to have new people and show them how to do it and we invite people all the time to come on Saturday mornings at ten.

J: Now do you have to bring your own putter or do you provide the putters?

B: People have left putters behind. We have thrown out people's putters. We have more than enough and then millions of golf balls and all that we have to supply are the commercial fake green putter hole. So we kind of change it around when I can. I have two gals who are my assistants and it's really good because there is a lot to arrange every Saturday morning.

J: So how many people would get involved in one of your tournaments?

B: About 12 to 14 people.

J: Nice.

B: And we've lost people. Sometimes we've been up to 18 and other times we have been down to 10 or 12. Just people leave us.

E: And they don't always die.

B: No.

E: But they get rickety.

B: They're not able.

E: They can't bend down to the ball.

J: Got it.

B: They get so they just can't walk without a rolling walker and that's not possible on the putting green. It just doesn't work that way. I hand them a putter and say, "Here pretended it's your cane." And it works pretty well. We do that and then I swim myself but other than that. Oh, I'm on the library. I'm one of the library ladies. I help with the stacks. And the two of us are on the commemorative committee which accepts donations in memory or in honor of residents and we have a group of about eight people who decide how the money should be spent. If it isn't designated then we choose. And we do shrubbery or equipment or whatever.

J: Oh nice.

E: I play poker.

J: You play poker? That sounds like fun.

B: It's sacred to him every Tuesday.

E: For money too. We don't fool around.

J: Yeah, you have a big group?

E: The women play bridge. They don't play for money though.

J: Yeah.

E: Actually, we have two women who play poker.

J: I bet you hate to lose to the women.

B: At a nickel a chip they don't lose too much.

J: That sounds like fun. What advice might you have to share with folks who have never been to a retirement community and have no idea what it's like?

E: You know what I have to get used to? What I'm still not used to. I'm paying all this money for the care.

B: And he doesn't need it.

E: We haven't used it which is a good thing I know. But I wonder maybe we came here too soon.

B: No, we didn't. Don't say that. No, I had to have a hip replacement and I didn't have to leave the premises fortunately because I don't live alone, I could stay here for rehab. And then I just went downstairs to the physical therapy center and I could get my PT taken care of right here. And I didn't have to go elsewhere in the community for PT. And I didn't have to stay away somewhere for a couple weeks in another facility but that was nice because I had a roommate, very nice. The fact that I could live here and have the PT right here in the same complex is a good thing because I do know people in the village condos. Of course they're not aware that in five minutes the nurse can be here and the maintenance guy to help you if you have a problem.

E: If you fall down. You're not supposed to fall down.

B: No, that's right.

J: Do you know of lots of people that moved there from Heritage Village then?

B: I know a few, yes quite a few are here and others are at the other one down the road.

E: Pomperaug.

B: I'm working on several friends. And they have the name at the sales department here that she's going to work with them with me that I want to come here that I know should.

We'll see.

J: Yeah well, for people who are, for whatever reason, hesitant about making a move or reluctant, what kind of words of wisdom would you share?

E: Don't wait.

B: Don't wait. Yes, I think that's the one. Do it before you are falling down needing it and have to be brought in a wheelchair. If you come in when you are physically and mentally pretty good you can make friends easily and learn to do all the things that are available, all the programs and everything. If you wait too long you're just not able to do it.

J: Right.

E: We have a lot of women and not as many men. I think a lot of the women come in after their husbands die. It would be better usually if they came in with the husband and then he could be taken care of here.

J: Right, so you think it's better to come in when you're a couple.

B: If you can. A lot of people can't.

J: Right, right.

B: If I hadn't known Ed before and traveled with him for ten years after our spouses died that's how it happened with us. He said, "I'm thinking about going over there, why don't you come with me?"

E: We were used to each other.

B: We were used to each other and my children said, "Go for it mom." Now, coming in as a single woman is little more difficult I think.

J: Yeah.

B: But we adopt the new ones, you know, invite them to eat with us and so on or putt or whatever.

J: Well, I think we've covered most of the bases that I can think of unless you can think of anything else that you think is important for people to know.

E: I think it's important to know that you can do all the way from nothing to very active. It's your choice. You don't have to participate in all these things. You can just sit and read which I do a lot of.

B: Well, I think you can have your private time or you can be sociable and nobody is going to push you. You can go in and close your apartment door and nobody is going to be knocking on the door saying, "Come on, come on, come on."

J: Yeah.

B: It's your choice.

J: That's great. I hear that a lot.

B: Do you?

J: In fact the people I just interviewed said the exact same thing from a different community.

B: Is that right?

J: Yes, yeah so and maybe people out there that have never visited are under, you know, a different understanding that they think maybe when we move in we have to participate in everything and we're not like that. So it's good for them to hear that from you.

B: Lots of different kinds of people.

E: I think a lot of people living alone are lonesome as well. It's hard to be lonesome here because you go to dinner every night, you meet people in the hallways and activities.

You know just about everybody that is here.

B: People are very friendly.

J: That's great. I'm sure glad that you both decided to move in and are enjoying it so much.

B: We are.

J: Well, thank you.

B: You're welcome.

J: I appreciate your time and you've made some very good points that people will appreciate I'm sure.

B: Good, I hope we've been helpful.

J: You have been very helpful.

B: Ok.

E: Thank you.

J: Enjoy the rest of your day.

B: Thank you.

J: Alright, take care.

B: Bye.