

Sandra DeMasi Interview, October 2016

J: June

S: Sandra

J: Hello.

S: Hello, this is Sandy DeMasi.

J: Hi Sandy, this is June Hussey. Thanks for calling in for the interview.

S: Ok.

J: I appreciate your time this morning. I'm going to spend a couple of minutes up front just explaining why we do these interviews and we do quite a few of them around the country. It's a lot of fun for me. And then I'm going to let you do most of the talking from there, ok?

S: Ok.

J: Alright, so Watermark has communities all over the country as you may know. And we like to interview our residents and hear from them a little bit about their life story and then what prompted them to make the decision to move to a retirement community.

S: Ok.

J: And we like to share their stories with people out there who may be just in the beginning of that process themselves. And we think that it's very helpful to others to kind of hear what it's been like for other people who have been through the process. So that's really what it's all about and we are recording this phone call so that we can get an accurate transcript.

S: Ok.

J: If you should say something that is too personal and you don't want it to appear in the transcript just say right then and there, "Oops, can you scratch that part?" And we'll do so, ok?

S: Ok.

J: Very good, ok, so I like to begin by inviting you to tell us a little bit about yourself, your life, where you're from, the kind of things that you've done in your life. And then we'll get into more specifics with questions about the decision to move to a retirement community. So you can just go ahead and get started. Talk as long as you like about who is Sandy.

S: Ok, well, I'm married to my husband John DeMasi. We've been married 61 years.

J: Wow.

S: I was born in New York and then when I got married we moved to Mahopac. I raised my children there and it was a wonderful place to raise my children. I got a job in the Mahopac School System. I was a teaching assistant for 20 years. I absolutely loved my job and the only reason I retired was because my husband became ill and he wanted to go to Florida. I was afraid if I didn't go I'd be sorry so we went to Florida. We lived in St. Lucie West. And there I was president of the woman's club there for four years. And I ran a lot of trips and parties and dances and card games and all that kind of stuff. And then my husband got sick, really sick and he broke his back and he's in a wheelchair. So I was taking care of him for several years and of course then I got myself in trouble. I had trouble with my back and it was getting worse and so my kids kept saying, "Mom, we can't keep coming back and forth to Florida. You must come here." So we did. I don't know if you know Vineyard Commons?

J: No, I don't.

S: That's a retirement community for 55 and over. I never remember where I lived, anyway, it was in New York. We were there for three years and in the meantime I got worse. I had a hip replacement and that was fine and then I had a torn muscle in the hip and they couldn't repair it. So I am on a walker. My husband is in a wheelchair. This is what started it. My son was having trouble with his mother-in-law and father-in-law. They were both sick they were both handicapped. And the kids wanted them to go to a place and they refused to go and it was driving the kids crazy. And they were running back and forth

because nobody lived near them. I said to my husband, "I refuse to do that to my children." I said, "When we feel that we're getting pretty bad I think we better think of something." Well, my husband started having trouble driving. He has neuropathy in his feet. He has diabetes so we decided maybe this is the time. So my daughter found this place and in the meantime I looked at other places and this was the nicest one. So that's why we came here. We love it here. The people here are wonderful. I'm trying to get involved in here now. I'm trying to plan a cruise for this group here.

J: How fun.

S: Yes so I try to keep myself busy.

J: Yeah, it seems to me I've interviewed someone else from Mahopac. I'm not sure if they live there at The Fountains at Millbrook or at a different community but where exactly is that?

S: That's in, why can I remember the name it's over the bridge.

J: Poughkeepsie?

S: Yeah.

J: So that's not too far away.

S: No and my daughter lives in Poughkeepsie. I have a daughter that lives in Mahopac and I have a son that lives in North Carolina. I've got eight grandchildren.

J: Wow.

S: We are kept busy.

J: And when exactly did you move to The Fountains?

S: We moved here September 1st. We've only been here a short time.

J: Just a couple of months, just a couple months, ok.

S: We try to keep ourselves busy. My husband is playing poker. We try to do as much as we can here.

J: Good. Tell me about the apartment you selected there.

S: We have a two-bedroom. And it's perfect for us. When I first came here I tell you I told everybody that I talked to I was in tears because I had a beautiful house in Florida on the lake and I had a big house. I had a living room, dining room, family room I had all kinds of things, a den, two bedrooms, a huge, huge kitchen. When we moved over here to New York to that other place I had to give up some things, not too much but some. Then to come here I had to get rid of a lot of stuff. It's a nice two-bedroom. It's a living room, dining room, a small working space kitchen, two bedrooms and two baths. We have it fixed beautifully. We really do. We had the living room fixed nice and the den is very comfortable and my bedroom fit perfect. They remodeled the two bathrooms and the kitchen. I have granite in all those rooms so it really looks nice.

J: Nice.

S: I brought all my pictures and the maintenance were laughing at me because I kept calling them, "I have more pictures." But after I got all done they said, "You know it really looks nice." I have wall-to-wall pictures. I didn't want to give up any of that stuff.

J: You downsized a couple of times then. Did it get easier the second time around?

S: Yeah, when I got here I was a little upset because the place was small and everything was piled on top of one another and we weren't settled. I thought what did I do? But the kids came, they helped me unpack. I got my furniture placed they moved everything for me and before you know it we were hanging curtains and drapes and then I felt at home.

J: Well, good that's great. Had you known anyone living there when you moved in?

S: No.

J: How has it been as far as meeting new friends and stuff? Do you find it's easy to do that or how do you do that?

S: Yeah, it is, it is. After we were here about a week or so I saw a couple sitting by themselves and I went up and I introduced myself. And we decided to sit together the following night for dinner and we've been sitting together ever since which makes it nice. And I've met a lot of other people which I like and

would like to have dinner but they like to go to dinner later than we do. But I've gone to the meetings. I've done as much as I can to meet people.

J: Good.

S: So now with this cruise coming up I have to bring it to the trip committee and see if they approve of it.

J: So there's a trip committee? That sounds like fun. Where are you planning the cruise to?

S: I thought it would be for my sake too with us old people that we shouldn't have anything that has too much walking so I chose a small ship so we didn't have to walk on one of those big huge ships. And I thought if we went to the Caribbean it was easier if they wanted to get off, lots of those ports you can get right off and there's a town right there.

J: Right.

S: So that's what we planned, to go to St. Tomas. There are four or five ports. It's a lot of days at sea but I think they would enjoy that. It would be relaxing time.

J: Very nice, so are you going to think about going in the springtime?

S: No, we thought of doing it next January. They want to go in the winter.

J: Well good, that sounds like a lot of fun. Do you think you will get a lot of people to go?

S: I don't know. I already know eight people that want to go and I haven't even talked about it to anybody so I'm hoping that we do.

J: Good.

S: It will be easier if we don't have to pay for a bus because they said we could use the bus here.

J: Oh nice, good. So let's see, let me get back to some of my questions here. Being that the two of you have some limitations with walking and so forth do you find it easy to get around there at The Fountains at Millbrook?

S: Oh sure, no problem. He's in a wheelchair and when I go with him I don't bring my walker, I hold onto the wheelchair and push him. And when I go by myself I take my walker.

J: Well, that sounds good. And you mentioned the size of your kitchen in Florida. Are you a big cook? Do you love to cook?

S: I love to cook and I love to bake. But I was getting to the point it was hard for me to stand up for long periods of time and I just started getting to the point where I really didn't feel like it anymore so I don't really miss the cooking. I miss the baking but I still plan on baking for the holidays so.

J: Good, what are some of your favorite treats that you bake for the holidays?

S: I make sticky buns.

J: Yum.

S: Yeah, my kids, we've done that since my kids were little. That was over Christmas breakfast: bacon and eggs with sticky buns.

J: Oh yum and now your family is kind of spread out but do you get to see them over the holidays?

S: Oh yeah, I see my daughters because they're not far and my son I went there a couple of months ago to see my grandson, he's 13 and he's quite an athlete so we went to see him play baseball. And now are going to North Carolina for Thanksgiving. And then we'll spend Christmas with the girls here.

J: That sounds wonderful. Tell me about some of the hobbies that you and your husband either share or have separately that you enjoy doing.

S: My husband used to play golf. He used to coach games. He played bocce. What else did he do? I can't even remember it was so long ago. He hasn't been able to do much of anything anymore. But I was just active in the clubs you know with the woman's club. I love to knit. I bowled. We were both in a bowling league in Florida. What else? I used to play bocce myself. I was in a women's bocce league in Florida.

Over here there isn't too much that I do here except I go down to do Wii bowling with the group. That's really all that I do here. I'm trying to think. I do like to knit. That's my favorite pastime.

J: That's nice. What about, I know a lot of people that are from the East Coast move to Florida and end up coming back, was it hard to come back to the weather?

S: The first year it was, yeah but now I'm used to it. In fact, the first year we came back that was one of the worst years for snow here. So we didn't go out much that winter.

J: Yeah, now that you're at The Fountains you don't have to worry about the snow.

S: Exactly.

J: Do you have any advice for other couples or people in general that maybe have never set foot in a retirement community about what kind of benefits there are?

S: Like I said from the beginning I was worried that I did not want my children being concerned about us. I did not want to make it hard on them. I know what it's like to care for parents, I cared for mine. I don't want to do that to them. So that was my most concern and then as I saw myself getting a little worse I thought before I get too bad I better put myself in a place. And that's what I would suggest to people, anybody that has any type of difficulty, think about it because otherwise your children are the ones that are going to have to take care of you.

J: Right, that's good advice. What about advice on the move itself? Was there anything that made the moving easier that you might suggest to people?

S: I don't know what to say about that. It was hard for me to get rid of pieces of furniture that I had but it makes it easier because we gave them to my grandchildren. They really appreciated it. I gave my china to my granddaughters. I was going to leave it to them when I died and I said, "I might as well give it to them now." And my crystal and all that stuff. That made it easier. My children helped me a lot and that was a big help. And I kept my most important things, that I didn't get rid of.

J: And can you sum up how your kids feel about where you're living now?

S: Oh they love it, they are very happy. They are the ones that really wanted us to do this and you know when we talked about it they both said they thought it was a great idea to make sure we got someplace nice. And we went to several places, the girls came with me. This was the place that we liked the best.

J: It sure is pretty there, especially this time of year, right? How are the leaves?

S: Yeah, they were gorgeous, absolutely gorgeous.

J: Are they all falling down now?

S: Almost, yeah. We're having a Halloween party today. So I'm in black and orange.

J: Alright, well thank you very much for all your time, is there anything else that we didn't talk about that you think is important?

S: I don't think so. I think we covered everything.

J: I think we did, I think we did cover all the bases very well. So thank you very much for your time and I'll let you get back to your busy day. Have fun on your cruise next year.

S: I'm sure we will. It was nice talking to you.

J: Sandy you too, you take care now.

S: Ok, bye-bye.

J: Bye-bye.