

## Wanda Bolen Interview, July 2015

J: June Hussey

W: Wanda Bolen

*Interview begins at 9:30am*

J: Hello.

W: Yes, my name is Wanda Bolen.

J: Hi Wanda, how are you? My name is June Hussey.

W: Well I'm so glad to know you June.

J: Why thank you so much. I'm so glad you had time to call in and share some of your story with us today.

W: I'll be glad to answer your questions. I'm not sure exactly what you want.

J: That's ok we'll go through it. We're going to talk for maybe 15 or 20 minutes at the most. I do have some questions that I'll go through but I want you to feel comfortable just answering however you want to answer in your own words and we're really just looking for you to share your experience with us about how you came to make the decision to move to a retirement community. And what that move has meant to you in your life.

W: Ok.

J: We interview lots and lots of residents and everyone has their own individual stories and we feel like the more of these stories we share with folks out there who may be in the same situation, the more insight they'll get and maybe they'll get the courage to make the move too.

W: Correct, ok.

J: Great, so Wanda Bolen you moved to The Fountains at Canterbury how long ago?

W: April the 4th.

J: Oh my gosh, so, very recently.

W: I did. Lots of things have taken place in my life in the last 10 years. Now that sounds like an awful long time but I can tell you that it was longer for me than just saying it because my husband developed dementia and those are hard roads to walk down with your mate or anyone else because it is such a wicked disease.

J: Yes, it sure is.

W: Because of his limitations and me getting older too, I felt that we needed to move out of the large house that we were in. And no way would he consent to that. So it had been suggested that we move into another state where he had lots of cousins that he grew up with and thought that perhaps would help our situation and it did for a while. But as the years went by, there was less than five, of course his dementia, he deteriorated. And along about the middle of last year I started having health problems. So I thought, oh I have to get closer to the children. We had lived in Oklahoma for nearly 50 years and so our children, one child lives here in Oklahoma City with his family. And I have a daughter that lives to the Northwest three hours away. And one to the south, three hours away, another daughter. So I'm about as central as anything could be. That was number one, but really the main thing that put me in Canterbury was the fact that I could live independently and yet see him every day under the same roof. It didn't matter what time of the day or night, I could go see him. And that was a very comforting feeling. I knew that I did need to be close to the children and he responded so well to grandchildren for about a week and a half and then that went by the wayside. And he actually passed away one month to the day after we moved here. That sounds like a real short time but when you look at the whole, I felt that God had sent me the message to get me out of the other state and here with the children closer at the correct time. I was already meeting people and it's a very, very friendly atmosphere here. And I

seem to fit right in. That's how we got here. I have no regrets whatsoever. Having gone through all of his anxieties it may sound harsh but all I could do when he took his last breath was, "Thank you Lord, he is at peace at last." He was a very smart man and the world lost a great person. But anyway, I am going right on with my life, which you have to do. The disease affects you but you cannot let it dominate you and so. Oh, the activities director here is marvelous and has so many things that we can do, you can take your mind off of anything or be as active as you want to be, even to taking care of flowers, watering, you know various things like that that you would be doing at home if you were in your home. I also feel very safe here. I chose to come on the fifth floor. I have a marvelous view over the lake. I love nature and I do get to see it. There are geese coming in on the lake all the time and just many things that I enjoy of God's creations. I am making my own way. I do still drive my car. I'm learning my own community. We came through Oklahoma City a lot going down to Norman. But it was just through, I had never learned the streets and all of Oklahoma City. But it's been very simple and I can get around and do the little shopping that I need to do or want to do. So in the short time that I have been here, I told someone the other day, I said, "You know I cannot say that I found anything that I dislike." It just all flows and so I guess that's kind of my story.

J: Wow, well, that's an incredible story and I'm sure it's one that will resonate with so many people out there who are unfortunately in that same situation. Far too many people are impacted by Alzheimer's, so I think your story will really be a beacon of hope for so many people.

W: Oh yes, I have another story of that to anyone that is walking into our or starting a walk or in the middle of it. Learn to accept them as they are that minute. You cannot change them and they cannot change themselves. It is what it is. And I discovered quite early that accepting and trying to redirect his activities or thoughts was peace for both of us. Also laughter, if I could tease him about something. So I'm still very eager and participate in the Alzheimer's Association and been very, very pleased with this facility because it is such a high priority on their list. I did not know it when I moved here but it sure has been a blessing to see a facility put emphasis on that program that has affected my life so much.

J: Right, is there a support group there at the community that you've been to?

W: Yes, yes it meets once a month just like I had in the other state where I went to caregiver's.

J: So how much of your learning about the disease came just through personal experience versus going to these support groups and getting tips and advice from others?

W: Repeat that question. I'm not sure that I've.

J: I'm sorry, I just was curious, you know, you lived with Alzheimer's in your personal life for 10 years, did you learn the tips about redirecting and laughter, were those things that you figured out on your own or were they tips you learned through the Alzheimer's Association?

W: Well, that's kind of hard to say. To be completely true I had never heard the word redirect. I understand of course what it is and I think I was using it to a great degree before I heard the word in a caregiver's and a nursing home. There was one he was in that was their main thrust was redirection. To my knowledge, you can only redirect for a certain length of time because they lose their ability to comprehend words or even if they comprehend words, they cannot react to them. So I would hesitate to say either way. A lot of it I discovered was just plain common sense. He could not do today what he could do yesterday. It's the opposite of a baby. You look at a baby and you're, "Oh, what are you doing today that you couldn't do yesterday?" Well with Alzheimer's, I found that it was right the opposite. They just don't know today what they knew yesterday. It does leave them. And again, they can't change it and you can't either. Of course, I do hope that one day they can eliminate the plaque and all that covers the neurons in the brain that keeps them from remembering, it blocks that memory.

J: Prevents it from firing.

W: Yes.

J: Well, gosh I'm sorry that you went through that but that's the journey you were on and you've come through the other side and look at you now, you're enjoying life again and in a new place.

W: Don't pity me, don't think that I had it all bad because the minute that I realized that he really did have dementia I just told the good Lord I said, "Now, he was yours before he was mine. I'm going to give him back to you but I want you to direct me as how you would have me to help him." And I just went with those thoughts in mind and depended upon thoughts being put in my head that kept everything peaceful. Also, I think people that are going through anything like that need to respect their children. By the time they get our age their children are grown. And they have gone through lots of different experiences and they're probably still in the workaday world and are seeing changes and some are good, some are bad, some are just there. But we really should listen to them as they listen to us because the world is changing every day. And once you walk away from your job you are not learning anymore. Or I found it to be that way. You're just not in the area where you do learn and keep up with how things are done. You don't think about it while you're out there doing it, but once you walk away from it, you don't have anybody to call upon to fix your computer or to, "Oh, how does this phone work?" It's not as readily available and so a lot of times when children or younger people than us get a little frustrated, it's not that we don't want to use the advancements, we forget them, we don't know how to use them. And so you know, it's kind of funny. But I think that both our children and us should probably work together more. I have had such wonderful support. They have just been wonderful to me.

J: Well, I'm sure that they feel good knowing that you're where you are and you're safe and not needing anything.

W: Right, that's right. The family here usually take me out to eat one night a week or on the weekend. That has been a very extra treat because we never lived close by any of them. You know there's just been some real good blessings come around. My daughter is here now today, we have two granddaughters that live here so one of them needed something and she came down and of course she always does something for me when she's here.

J: Good. Now I understand you love music too.

W: Yes I do. I love to listen to the music. They have some very talented people around here and then they take us, if we want to go, to some good entertainment down in Oklahoma City. I think we've seen four already anyway stage plays, musical stage plays. You know there's a lot of things to take advantage of.

J: Right, so if you were to offer advice to other folks out there that may be kind of struggling with caring for a loved one and perhaps had never considered a retirement community what would you say to those folks?

W: Seriously consider it. Visit. I think here that you can come and even stay a night or two. I'm not sure whether they charge or not, I don't know. But be around, do you want to prepare your breakfast or do you want to dress and go downstairs. I'm not going to do it at 7 o'clock, there's no way. I may be up and around but I'm not going to dress and go down to eat breakfast, that's just not me. Others cannot wait for breakfast, they were right there on the spot and then the same with lunch or dinner. You have your choice. You can direct your life pretty much like you had it at home. It won't be exactly the same but as I'm here longer it feels more and more like home. They have it set up floor by floor with representatives from each floor meeting and then I'm not sure how often that we have a general meeting of everybody and the head of each department reports on things that they have changed or they're planning to change or make better according to what they are fed through these meetings that they have on the halls and representatives that chair that with them. So if you really want something different added or taken away, you need to contact your floor representatives and it will go through the channels. I thought it was a very, very good process.

J: So it sounds a little bit like a democracy there.

W: Yes, yes and I think that's what we should strive for.

J: Right.

W: I'm sure not against it, that's for sure.

J: Well, that's fantastic. Is there anything else? I've gone through my list of questions and you've done a wonderful job of explaining your particular situation, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to point out or share?

W: Not that I'm aware. I talk a lot but I think I've covered everything. I sometimes sound like a Pollyanna and I'd rather be that. I was in a position just this past week that I heard some ladies that are older than me and their attitudes were so grouchy. They're not from here, they were somewhere else but I thought, "You know the world doesn't revolve around you." I wanted to chastise them for being so, you know, it just wasn't, they just didn't react like I thought they should have. But I bit my tongue. I did not say a word.

J: You sound like a very positive minded person who has found a place around other positive minded people so you sound like you found the right place.

W: Yes, yes, I think I was directed in every way going to the correct place that gave us both peace and I am at peace now. I really am and it's just wonderful. I sat down Sunday in Sunday school class and looked over and I thought, "I know that lady." And it was a lady that I had her daughter in Girl Scouts 50 years ago almost that long, it wasn't quite that long but just about. And sure enough it was her. They had moved down here. The world gets smaller.

J: Well, that's wonderful. Well, I think on that note we can wrap this up. Once again I want to thank you so much for sharing your personal story and I'm so glad that you found The Fountains at Canterbury.

W: Yes, I am too. I am too.

J: Ok, well you enjoy the rest of your day and I really appreciate your time.

W: You're very welcome, very welcome. I hope you can use something out of it.

J: I sure will, thanks Wanda. You take care.

W: Bye-bye.

J: Bye-bye.