

Charlotte Battistone Interview, May 2017

J: June

C: Charlotte

C: Hello.

J: Hi Charlotte, this is June Hussey. I'm happy to meet you by phone.

C: Well, yes, the same to you, June. Nice meeting you.

J: Thank you, can you hear me just fine?

C: Yes I can, just fine.

J: Good, it seems like we have a good connection. Alrighty, well I want to start by thanking you for participating in this interview. I look forward to it. It should be a lot of fun. I get to do a lot of these interviews and it's really a treat for me. I get to meet the most interesting people all over the country. It's just really a pleasure for me.

C: Well that's nice.

J: Before we get started...

C: It's always good to have a job you like.

J: Yes. So I want to go over just a couple of things before we get started if you don't mind.

C: Sure.

J: One is that I want to make sure you are aware we are recording this conversation so that we can get an accurate transcript.

C: Alright.

J: And the reason I want to make that clear is sometimes these conversations get into personal stuff and if you should happen to say something that you don't want everyone to know, just say so right then and there, "Please don't include this part in the transcript." And we will make sure we honor that, ok?

C: Ok.

J: Alright and then I just wanted to make sure you understood the purpose of the interview. In addition to getting to know you a bit as a person and your interests and that kind of thing, we like to get into the process that you went through to figure out what you were going to do in your future and how you went about it and what was going through your mind.

C: Yes, I understand.

J: We find that by sharing people's experiences it helps others out there who may be just starting their own process. That's what it's all about. I'd like to begin, I will get into some questions for you about that, about your move and so forth but I'd like to begin by just inviting you to introduce yourself and you can talk as long as you like about your life and where it's taken you so far. And then we'll get into more specifics about the move, ok?

C: Alright, by way of an introduction my name is Charlotte Battistone. I came to Cincinnati from Parkersburg, West Virginia after high school. And I attended Christ Hospital School of Nursing here in Cincinnati from 1945 to 1948. I was married in September of 1948. Had my husband still been living it would soon be 69 years in September. It was a long and very wonderful, actually very good marriage. We raised three children, all of whom are hale and hearty. One is close to where I live now. She is seven miles from Pinebrook, one is in Columbus and I have a son across the river in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I did nursing for many years, I worked in the operating room. I ultimately moved to the endoscopy unit at the hospital and retired from there actually in 1990. My husband and I, over the years, had the good opportunity of being able to travel frequently, which we did. Then after living in a house for 42 years we scaled down and moved to a condominium, that was in 1998. And we lived there until my husband died after 10 years and I was left alone. So after seven years of living alone I decided that I needed to do something with my life. And my children encouraged me to because I was age-appropriate. I will be 90

years old next month. They thought that I should get some place where if I needed something I would be close at hand. So that was one of the motivating factors, was age. Actually, I was doing just fine living alone in my condo. I had a lot of friends who lived there and I do miss them but it was a good decision for me to make. I did my research. I researched other facilities and actually my daughter that lives close was on the Internet one day and she is the one who found Pinebrook on the Internet. So it went from there. We called and arranged to meet Amy for an interview. I had more than one interview, you might want to know, because I had a lot of questions and so forth. But after viewing the facility, talking to Amy and considering what other facilities had to offer, I really liked the atmosphere at Pinebrook more than the others. I felt like it was more personal. That proved to be true. I have been here, it will be 11 months May 10th. I feel like I've moved in with a family. I'm very comfortable and pleased with my decision. I've had good health. I've had a lot of health issues but nothing I have been unable to overcome. I'm still very active. I exercise every day. I still drive and of course, we don't know how long that will continue, at my age you never know. But at any rate, that brings you pretty much up-to-date.

J: Ok.

C: I have grandchildren, six grandchildren.

J: Wow, it is so nice that your kids live so close and I'm sure you get to see your grandkids a bit.

C: I have three older grandchildren. My son has grown up boys, they are in their 30s. But my younger daughter is the one in Columbus and she, her daughter, my granddaughter, is graduating from high school here this month. That's my reason for going up there. I'll be gone until the 31st of May. She has three children: the granddaughter that is graduating, and I have a grandson who will turn 16 while I'm up there and another one will be 13.

J: Oh well, that will be fun to visit with them a little bit.

C: Oh it will, it will, yes.

J: Let me ask you. I'm curious, take me back before you first downsized, the first time with your husband, to the condo. Did you and your husband ever think about retirement community living or was it always just "we are going to downsize to a condo?"

C: Right, we did not consider that at that time. At that time we were both in very good health. In the intervening years my husband did have colon cancer but he ultimately died of ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease. Before those health issues came, we had downsized and moved to a condominium. We had never considered retirement at that point in our lives. I was only 71 then so we hadn't really.

J: A lot of people do move to retirement communities in their 70s and that's just why I was curious. I suppose you being a nurse, you probably were a caregiver for a little bit with your husband with the ALS, weren't you?

C: Totally, yes, I took care of him except for the last nine days. He did die in a hospice facility. Yeah, he was on a feeding tube and suctioning and everything but fortunately I did have the skills to be able to take care of him.

J: Right, right, ok so then describe for me what your life was like living in the condo after you became a widow. How is your life both the same, or different, now that you have moved to a retirement community?

C: After my husband's death I was always, I belong to the YMCA and when I retired from nursing in 1990 my primary care physician who happens also to be a good friend of mine, we work together before he went out into practice, he told me he said, "Charlotte, you have no idea how important exercise will be to you as you age." And I took him at his word and I started in 1990 going to the Y almost every morning. The first 14 years I was a swimmer. Then I had a heart attack and after the heart attack, actually I had a heart attack while I was swimming one morning so that frightened me. I did not go back to the water. But after the rehab, the cardiac rehab, I continued just doing what I had done in rehab and I still do it to this day.

J: Good for you.

C: I did it this morning. I use the fitness center here at Pinebrook. But I also walk. I walk outside whenever I can. So I'm still fairly active. It's getting a little more difficult though. I can see that I am definitely slowing down.

J: Yeah, well, I suppose that happens when you get to be 90.

C: I told you I'll be 90 but actually I think I'm only 46.

J: Well, we all think that way, right?

C: I picked that as an arbitrary number a long time ago. I tell everybody I may be 90 but I think I'm only 46.

J: Well, I'm glad that you take advantage of the exercise fitness facilities there.

C: Oh sure, I do all the other things there that are offered. In fact, I went to the yoga this morning and we have a new fitness instructor that comes twice a week now. I participate in those things too.

J: Good, are the classes pretty full?

C: Well, they were with the new instructor. It remains to be seen but we had a good turnout I guess it was Monday that she came and yesterday afternoon, yes, there were quite a number of people.

J: Good, so there's like-minded people who know that exercise is important?

C: Right, that's true, there are.

J: What other kinds of community activities have you gotten involved in since you moved in?

C: I'm in the book club. I'm an avid reader. I read a lot. I'm in the book club. I'm on the resident council. That's about it. I'm fairly busy.

J: Sounds like it. So would you say you are more busy since you moved in than you were before?

C: Yes, if you want to be alone you can be in your apartment. If you want to be with other people all you have to do is walk out in the hall. I like that. I was tired of eating alone.

J: So when you were in your condo, you mostly ate alone in your own condo?

C: If I wasn't going out, yes, yes I did. People used to ask me if because I lived alone did I go out to eat a lot and I said, "No, I did not." I always felt it was lonelier to go out to a restaurant filled with people and sit at a table alone than it was to stay home.

J: Yeah, I know what you mean. When I traveled for business and had to go out to dinner by myself it does feel very lonely that way.

C: That's what I always but I did have a lot of very good friends there though that were wonderful. We went out to dinner two or three times a month and so forth, did a lot of things together.

J: And how far away is your condo from where you are living now?

C: 27 miles. The girls that live in the condo, I told you we always went out to dinner, once a month they still come out here to Milford to go to dinner, so they can pick me up and I go too.

J: Oh good.

C: Even the lady that bought my condominium comes and goes.

J: Nice, well, that's wonderful. What kind of advice would you have for folks out there that may be just in the beginning, whether they are couples or widows or singles, thinking about their own future and how they're going to live their best life, what would you recommend?

C: Well, that's rather difficult. I think you have to deal first with your own personality, whether you are a people person or whether you are a loner. Some people are very happy to live alone; I was not. I was more outgoing. It was more of a people person. I think that's one of the first questions you have to ask because you are with a number of others then once you're in this atmosphere, this kind of community. I'm not sure, I think everybody would have their own personal agenda to think of. I know that I had a list that I made. I had pros and cons. I put the pros on one side, the cons on the other and the pros won out.

J: Did you find it helpful the more communities you looked at? Did it start to get clearer to you what actually you were looking for? Describe that whole process.

C: Yes, it did. The other communities, first of all I like Pinebrook because it's small and it is more of a family atmosphere. Some of the places that I looked at, two in particular that I did look at, they were too

large, you'd get lost in the shuffle. At Pinebrook, you know everyone. I do anyway.

J: Well, good and then location, were you familiar with the area because your daughter lives kind of nearby?

C: Only slightly, no I was not that familiar. However, I've been experimenting. I go to Hyde Park, which is another community here in Cincinnati and I've experimented on ways to get there. I have a sister-in-law that lives over there in another retirement community. No, I did not know this area at all but I'm becoming, with going out and driving around, I am becoming more acquainted with it, yes.

J: And what was the name of the town that your condo was in?

C: It was a suburb of Cincinnati. I was in Finneytown, all one word.

J: I see.

C: Our house was in Finneytown, too, so when we scaled down we only moved about two miles from our actual house.

J: And so did you go through, when you moved from your house to your condo, how much of a downsize was that? Did you have to get rid of a lot of stuff?

C: No, we had a fairly nice size condominium but yes, we did have to get rid of some things.

J: What about when you moved?

C: I was never a collector so I didn't have a lot of so-called stuff.

J: So when you came to Pinebrook, did you have to get rid of more furniture?

C: Yes, I did. Yes I did, but I was able to bring all the things that were important to me. And the other things, except for a couple of items, are in the homes of my children and grandchildren.

J: Oh, nice. So tell me about the physical move itself. Did you do that with the help of your kids, or did someone else help you or how did that go?

C: Well, in the beginning the kids came and we went through a lot of things and they took what they wanted and so forth. And then, yes, I had Senior Movers that was recommended through Pinebrook here and they packed me though. I did not pack myself. They came and packed me and unpacked me and that worked out beautifully.

J: That must've saved a lot of trouble.

C: It saved a lot of trouble and it saved a lot of anxiety trying to pack yourself.

J: Yeah and then how did it feel the first couple of nights in your new place, did it take you a little while to get settled or were you at home immediately?

C: Actually I think it was pretty much at home immediately. I had been out here several times asking questions and looking and I actually came to look at the actual apartment more than once. Actually I would say that my adjustment was fairly swift.

J: Good.

C: I was sold on the idea by the time I came.

J: That's helpful. Tell me about your apartment, what is it like?

C: It's very nice. You come into what is actually a full-size kitchen and then there's a nice size living room and bedroom and a small dressing area and a very nice size bathroom with walk-in shower.

J: Nice.

C: That's all the room I need. I have everything I need here.

J: And if you were to give a percentage, what percentage of your time do you spend in your apartment versus out and about?

C: Well, I say this, I don't know percentage wise. Like after dinner in the evening, I'm learning to play euchre, I play euchre once a week. Now, as the weather gets nicer, a lot of times a good many of the women go out front and sit, there are chairs. You can go out front and sit when the weather permits and talk. But otherwise I'm pretty much in the room in my apartment during the evening from about 7 o'clock on. But during the day, of course, I still drive. I still go to the shopping center or the grocery store. I go to the library at least once every week to 10 days.

J: Wow and then so when you shop at the grocery store are you shopping for, do you make some of your own meals?

C: No, I hung up my apron when I moved here. No, I do not but I shop for fruit. I eat a lot of fresh fruit and I like to have milk. I do eat my own breakfast here in my room. I do make eggs for myself in the mornings usually. Not every morning but a good many, yes. The reason I don't eat breakfast here is because it's early and I don't like to eat before I exercise.

J: So for someone who has never been in a retirement community, would you recommend that they come take a look before they decide, I mean I think a lot of people maybe get the wrong idea of what a retirement community is.

C: I would definitely recommend, they need to see, look around and talk to people and get a feel for what it would be like.

J: Well, good and you didn't know anybody when you first came there, is that correct?

C: Actually, I knew one person. He and I had graduated from high school together in Parkersburg, West Virginia in 1945.

J: Oh my gosh, what a coincidence.

C: Isn't that a coincidence, yes? I did know him yes.

J: Wow.

C: He and his wife had moved here about two weeks before, I didn't know that when I was planning to move here but I happened to see him in the dining room when I was having lunch with Amy one day and I asked, I said is that person's name, does he live here and she said, "Yes, they just moved in two weeks ago." So that was quite a coincidence. And there are a couple people here who are also from Finneytown that I know. One woman in particular, I just had lunch with her today, she taught my son social studies in high school.

J: Wow.

C: And another woman that lived in Finneytown, as well.

J: Was it pretty easy getting to know folks?

C: Oh yeah, people are very friendly. For the most part, people are very friendly, yes.

J: And as far as group activities, are there outings that you go into Cincinnati and do things, cultural things?

C: No actually, they do have outings but the outings are to restaurants and so forth. I still go out with my daughter and my friends often for dinner and so forth or lunch or meet friends for lunch. So I have only gone once on one of those outings. That's not to say I won't in the future but so far I have not actually gone on those. I have inquired about, wondered if they could have ever have musicians say, from Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and so forth. But they do have entertainment here, yes, musical. I would like a different type perhaps.

J: How far are you actually from Cincinnati?

C: Well, from here to Christ Hospital it's 23 and half miles. And Christ Hospital is just up the hill from downtown Cincinnati so I'd say it's 25 miles from here to downtown. I do not go downtown anymore because parking is a problem and once you get parked it's a lot of walking. I walk ok but I do use a cane because it gives me more security and stability.

J: Right, better to be safe.

C: Yes, that's exactly why I use it.

J: Ok, well, I think I've gone through pretty much all my questions, is there anything else that you are wanting to share with people that we haven't talked about that you think is important for them to know?

C: I can't think of anything actually. When I hang up I probably will, isn't that always the case?

J: Exactly. Well, listen Charlotte, I really appreciate all the time you've spent with me on the phone and sharing your story with other people. I think they'll find it very helpful as they begin to think of their own

futures. I'll let you go and get on with your day there in Milford. Is it a beautiful day?

C: Where are you in Arizona?

J: I'm in Tucson.

C: Tucson, ok, I've never been there.

J: It's going to be 101° today.

C: Oh dear, hot weather, now that's one thing I don't like. I like it cold, I feel better I always say I like it, I don't care if it's -10 as long as my car starts and I don't have to drive on ice. That's my criteria.

J: You and I are cut from different cloths, I think. I don't like that cold stuff.

C: I know, that's why you are in Tucson.

J: And that's why you are in Ohio. I guess we're both where we belong then.

C: I think so.

J: Alright, well you enjoy the rest of your day and enjoy your visit with your family later this month.

C: Oh I will, thank you. It was nice talking with you, June.

J: Thank you, you too. You take care now.

C: Alrighty, bye.