

Irietys and Roger Burrows Interview, May 2017

J: June

R: Roger

I: Irietys

J: Hello.

R: Oh hello, Jill?

J: This is June. How are you? Is this Roger?

R: Hi, this is Roger, yes and Irietys is on the phone too.

I: Yes, I'm here also.

J: Very good. Can you both hear me ok?

R: Yes.

J: Very good, so pronounce your name again, Irietys?

I: Yes, it's I-Ree-Tis.

J: Ok, I'll try to get it straight. You're the only Irietys I've ever met in my entire life.

R: The only one you'll ever meet.

J: Yes, one-of-a-kind. Well, let me start by thanking you first of all for making time in your day for this interview. I want to go over a couple of things before we get started. One is that we are recording this conversation so that we can get an accurate transcript and so that we get your quotes and sentiments correct.

I: Ok.

J: But should you happen to divulge something that you feel is too personal to share with everyone just say so right then and there. You might blurt it out and then go, "Oops, I shouldn't have said that." So just say right then and there, "Please don't publish that part." And we will honor your wishes, ok?

I: Sounds good.

J: Alright, and then I also just wanted to review the purpose of the interview. I've been interviewing residents of The Fountains at the Carlotta and other Watermark Retirement Communities all over the country for years and it's really quite an enjoyable thing for me to do. I get to meet the most wonderful and fascinating people. The reason we do it is we like to share our own residents' stories with people who may be just in the beginning of thinking about their own futures and maybe don't know so much about retirement communities so we find it very helpful for people to learn through our own residents' experiences how they planned and what kind of hurdles they had to go across and everything else. That's really the purpose.

I: Ok.

J: I will be getting into some specific questions about when you moved and why you moved and where you moved and that kind of thing but I want to take the first part of this interview to give you the opportunity to introduce yourselves and let us know who you are as people, maybe where you're from, what kind of hobbies you enjoy, anything about your careers or your family that you want to share, just give us an introduction to who you are and then we'll go from there, ok?

I: Ok.

J: Either of you can start and you can go back and forth and finish each other's sentences however you want to do it, ok?

R: You go, Irietys.

I: Ok, I'll go first then. So a little bit about me, I was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota. My parents moved our family to California when I was 12. So I really think of myself as a Californian. I did graduate from high school. In fact, it's very interesting, I graduated from Mark Keppel High in Monterey Park California

and, lo and behold, here at The Carlotta is another Mark Keppel High School graduate, if you can imagine that.

J: Wow.

I: And so he was two years ahead of me in high school, we didn't know each other but what a surprise to find, after all these years, a Mark Keppel High School graduate in our independent living home. Anyway, so that was kind of a fun thing but also then I graduated from USC. And then I was a teacher in the elementary schools. First in Los Angeles District and then later on in a private Christian school. Oh and I'm a mom. Loved being a mom, I felt a very special calling to be a mom. Roger and I have two daughters and we have six grandchildren. And we have one little great granddaughter who is 16 months old. We just enjoy her. We have, of our grandchildren, four are boys, grandsons, and two are granddaughters. And the granddaughters, I have to tell the special story about our granddaughters. We only have two but one of my granddaughters was born on my mother's birthday. And the other granddaughter was born on my grandmother's birthday.

J: Wow.

I: Now, what are the statistics on that?

J: That's interesting.

I: Yes, I just feel as though that was a special blessing that God gave me. My two little girls, it was just amazing. I've enjoyed that. Let's see, what else about me? Oh, present day, what do I do? I do teach a bible study class. Roger and I attend church together.

R: Tell them you are doing the bible study here at The Carlotta and the attendees are the residents of The Carlotta. We have about seven or eight people that join us once a week for bible study here at The Carlotta.

I: We had ten but this past week one person moved to Arizona to be near family. And, Lowell, one of members went home to be with the Lord this week, yesterday in fact. Anyway, now we are eight in our bible study. Let's see ok, so that's here at The Carlotta. I also mentor a young woman once a week. Roger, can you help me? What do we do? I do work out in the rose garden that we have here. Our casita looks out on a beautiful rose garden and there's about 30 rose bushes out there. And I have taken it as my kind of responsibility I guess, to kind of take care of those roses.

J: How fun.

I: I fertilize and aerate and dead-head and do all that stuff. Once a week that keeps me busy out there in the rose garden.

R: Do you want to mention that for many years you were involved with Stephen Ministry program, you were a director, leader, trainer of Stephen Ministry for 20 years or more in previous churches that we were members of. June, are you familiar with Stephen Ministry? Oh well, Iriety's can tell you about it in 25 words or less.

I: I was a teacher, that was my occupation. First of all, I always liked to say I was mother. I always felt like that was a very special occupation. And then I was teacher and then for 20 years I was what they call a Stephen Ministry Leader so I taught people about Stephen Ministry and also did connections with people who needed someone with whom to walk through a crisis. And to have, it's a one-on-one.

R: They are lay ministers from the churches that have the Stephen Ministry program as part of the churches.

I: We have just one relationship, we meet with them once a week at the beginning and then help them to they make their own decisions, what would be helpful for them to get through the crises, to get to the other side. So I did that for twenty years.

J: Wow, that must have been rewarding work for you to stick with it for 20 years.

I: Yes, I enjoyed it very much. Yes, as I did teaching and as I did being a mother. I was very very blessed. I had three things that were very special.

R: We're both involved in our local Lutheran Church here. I'm an elder in the church and Iriety's directs the prayer ministry, that is she prepares each week for the prayers of the church, praying for different people's needs and that sort of thing. So that's her job at the church. And as an elder I get involved in quite a few other things around the church. Our church has always been very important to us as part of our life. We hope that we were able to inculcate that into our children's lifestyle. And we believe that has been successful. We're hoping of course, praying for our grandchildren. Some of them have different ideas about life than we would suggest but that's alright. We just keep praying for them because God knows what they need.

J: I understand you two met on a college trip.

R: Yes, Collegians Abroad. This happened in 1958 when I graduated from college and my father said, "What would you like to do?" And I said, "Let's go on this tour, I guess you'd call it, of college age students." And so there were 24 women and two men on the cruise.

J: Those were some good odds.

R: Yes, so that's where we met in 1958 and then the following year we had a reunion, I hadn't seen Iriety's in the interim, we had a reunion and at that reunion I asked her out for a date. They say the rest is history. We've been married for almost 55 years now.

J: Wow.

R: We've been very blessed in our marriage. We're thankful for all that God has given us. As far as myself I graduated from USC with a degree in Zoology and worked for the Food and Drug Administration in Los Angeles and in Chicago and then back in Los Angeles. Well, no, it was just to Chicago, then when we were in Chicago I switched over to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission. And then I was transferred back to Los Angeles. We lived there for about 15 years then I was transferred down to San Diego area where I worked for CPSC and then retired there. We lived in Encinitas, California which is Northern San Diego County for about 25 years. And we started looking at our house. We had a beautiful home with the view of the ocean and we really loved it there but we had three floors and stairs up and stairs down. And Iriety's kept saying, "Well, someday it's not going to be as easy as it is today to get things up and down stairs as we age a little." So we said, "We need to find a place to live where everything is on one level and we're kind of watched over if necessary as time progresses." So for about a year we did surveys and tours and visited about a dozen places in Southern California and Arizona. And we just had a criterion that we wanted when we moved. We wanted three levels of care, that's very important to us. If they didn't have that then we didn't even bother to look at them. So we did this at quite a few places that offered that. And another thing is since we had been living 25 years near the ocean and spent a lot of time outdoors on our patio and deck and different things we said we want to place we can spend some time outside and enjoy the weather. Of course there's, much of the year it's very nice here in Palm Desert. So we said we need a place with a patio of some sort. So when we got here and we looked at the casitas and they were just perfect, just exactly what we wanted because the one we have, we have a nice patio and a table out there and chairs and things. We spend quite a bit of time, as weather permits, eating our meals and different things outside.

J: How many communities would you say you looked at in southern California and Arizona combined?

R: I don't know. I'm coming up with a figure ten.

I: I'd say 12.

R: We considered some but we didn't visit all of them.

J: In Palm Desert, did you have any ties to Palm Desert? Or was that just part of the geography on the map that you were willing to move to?

R: You can say, Iriety's, why we're here.

I: Well, we had, during these 25 years, we spent 25 years in Encinitas. We had also been 18 years in Burbank so we had come to Palm Springs often with our children especially when they were little all the

way through high school. We would come and vacation in Palm Springs and we would often vacation in August because the prices were cheaper then.

J: Oh, right.

I: So when you have a family and you have a budget you plan things that way, you know. Our children, they were little. We started bringing them when they were in elementary school. The pool was the big thing anyway, you know, so they wanted to be in water all the time and so we started that way and then of course as time passed, we came out to Palm Springs other times too, other months so we like the area. We didn't really know Palm Desert, you know, we looked online.

R: We just go on and say "Palm Springs retirement communities" and it would give us a whole list of everything in the valley here, really. And then we would go on their websites to see what facilities they had and that sort of thing before we made a decision to visit.

J: So you spent about a year, you said, doing all this research and then when did you actually move to The Fountains at the Carlotta?

R: It was in August 2014.

J: So going on three years.

R: Yes, 2 1/2 years approximately.

J: Ok, so of all the places you considered and some that you looked at, what was it about The Fountains that appealed to you and made you want to make it your choice?

R: You can tell them Iriety's.

I: Right, well, first of all, we just made an appointment to come and talk with someone. And I had a list of questions that I brought with me and it was the same list of questions that we asked every place we considered. We actually had interviews. Roger says ten and I thought it was 12 but anyway, whatever, it was a few and so I had a list of questions but also when we walked into a place an important thing to us was to observe if the residents knew the staff, if the staff would be able to call the resident by name. We also liked to see what the residents were doing, were they just sitting or did you not see anyone at all, you know. And then each place we interviewed we were invited to have either lunch or dinner in their dining room. We always like to see the interaction between the staff, the servers and the residents to see what was going on there. So really our criterion was we wanted a place, first of all, of course, that would be able to have this indoor outdoor living that, so much of our married life that we knew we were going to miss that if we didn't have it. So the fact that when we visited they had a casita available in, we walked in and they had not only a patio but we have a front porch and we have a little table and chairs on the front porch too so we do use that like in the morning for coffee or something like that. So they had that. We walked in and we looked out on this beautiful rose garden and we just were, "Oh my goodness." It really expands the casita. It almost seems like it's mine. So we have this beautiful rose garden that we overlook and of course everything is on one level. They have the three levels of care. We don't know what's before us. Right now my husband and I are both very healthy but we don't know what's before us. We wanted to have that availability. I also like their philosophy at the Carlotta. In talking with Lynn, she was telling us that what they want to do is to keep each person in their own home. I mean they do have assisted living, they do have the skilled nursing that's available but their philosophy is that they like to have people remain in their home as long as possible and they prefer to bring physical therapists into the home, they prefer to bring caregivers into the home so that you can feel comfortable. They feel as though that aids in your healing and getting better.

J: Right.

I: And then of course another part was that we were able to financially afford it. That has to be a criterion.

J: Right, it sounds like you had a very methodical approach and a specific list of what you are looking for. Had you had previous experience with retirement communities in your careers or in your volunteer work where you kind of had a knowledge about the whole concept?

I: Yes, I suppose just through Stephen Ministry, part of what I saw is that as the people aged and they needed different types of care, there were times that I observed a husband and wife being in separate facilities and that the distance was too great that they couldn't even visit one another at the end of their lives. And to me that was heartbreaking because I would be with one of them and that would be something that was hurtful. They had maybe been married 50 or 60 years and then one would be in maybe assisted living and the other would be in skilled nursing but they would be in actual different facilities several miles apart.

J: Yeah, that's hard.

I: And so the fact that they do have all three facilities on this property that was an important factor for Roger and I.

J: And was there anything magical about the time or your age, the time in your life where you decided that it was wise to make the move when you did?

R: Well, I think that was what we were saying about all the stairs we had. We just said we can't live in this three-level home when we're in our 90s. And we were moving into our 80s and so we said, "Well, we need to move, we need to look for some other place."

I: We were still at the place where we were doing fine but we knew that there were going to be changes ahead of us and so both Roger and I decided that we wanted to be in charge of our changes. We wanted to be in charge of our choices rather than waiting too long and then our children having to make the choices for us. That was another reason: we were able to travel. We went to, let's see, I think Roger wasn't it Santa Barbara was the furthest we went, Goleta, yeah and then we went to places in La Jolla and Carlsbad, Oceanside, Escondido, and then we went to five places in Arizona. But we had time, we weren't pressured, we weren't ill. We didn't have to leave so we had time.

J: You went about it the right way, I must say. I wish more people would think about it the way that you have. What advice would you have, now that you've been through that process and did it very thoroughly? What is the important thing for people to remember who are just embarking on such a journey? Can you share some tips, time-saving tips or just tips in general?

I: I suppose one of the things I would say is to hold loosely of your material things. You have to think, "What are my priorities, what is really important to me?" That's one of the things we've heard from older people is, "I wasn't able to bring all my things." Also another tip would be hold loosely, which is really important you know and also, what was the other thing? It just slipped my mind right now. Maybe it will come to me later. It was in the same idea.

J: Tips for people to save time in making the move or making the decision. I like what you said about holding things loosely because that holds a lot of people back, is the unwillingness to part with material things.

I: Also, the other word I wanted to give you was right-size. Don't say I have to downsize and move. What you are doing is you are right-sizing. And I think if people would think of it more like the next step, the next adventure, what is before me, and look at it in a positive way and say I am right-sizing, I am taking those things that are right for me, right now.

R: We suggest that they make the decision to move while they are still relatively healthy because we see people coming over here at the Carlotta to look around and they are almost in a wheelchair. They are with walkers and having trouble moving and all that sort of thing and that's too late.

I: It's more difficult, it's more difficult for them. So often then people then have to go into their homes and make the decisions for them.

R: Their family sometimes makes the move.

I: That has happened.

J: And how do your daughters feel about your decision and where you're living?

I: Oh, they cheered us on.

R: They are very supportive.

I: They were just very interested in what we were doing. They allowed us to do it on our own. We would tell them what we had seen and share with them. Of course they could go online and see all these places you know that we had visited. Set up to date but they would just say, "Oh, mom and dad I think you're doing a great thing, bless you." Because I think both of them thought they were glad we were making the decision because then you know it is our decision. And they were very supportive and thought it was a wise thing to do and I must say, our one daughter's in Oregon so she's far away but our older daughter's is in Burbank and she probably felt the responsibility more and so she just said it relieves her mind to know that we are in a place where she feels we are safe. I think it makes her rest easier.

J: Beautiful.

I: I mean even if something happened she couldn't help us, she's too far away. It's a 2 1/2 hour drive from her home to where we live. It's really, I think it relieved some of the concern and worry for her because we have people we can call on that would help us.

J: Now, tell me...I know that you moved out of a three-story house into a single level house but how else has the move made your life easier or different or even the same as it was before?

R: Well, it's definitely not the same because we don't have the space that we had. We had a garage and cupboards in the garage. I had quite a collection of things that were "important" to me which I didn't have any trouble turning my back on it and leaving because I was looking forward to coming here. I was able to bring some of the things. We rent a storage locker but most of what I was attached to you might say is gone, is behind us.

I: I think also, one of the things he had, an amazing collection of automotive books, wasn't it six boxes of books, Roger, of automotive materials?

R: Mhmm.

I: That he was able to donate to the Automotive Museum in Balboa Park.

J: Good idea.

I: Oh, those books were just pristine and they were really nice. They were kind of like coffee table type books and they all were very important, informative and he received a very nice letter from the Automotive Museum of how much they appreciated his books, that they were putting them in the library and they said that would be very helpful as people used them for research. I think that made him feel good about letting go.

R: Oh sure, I would hate to just dump them somewhere.

I: Right, that would have been hurtful if he would've had to just take them. This way he feels as though people appreciate them.

R: We've never looked back and regretted our move. Every day we say we are thankful to be here, thankful to be in this nice place with nice people and we've met so many nice people here, other residents. You might say it's a new family, really is what it is because most everyone here is very friendly. We enjoy our fellow residents.

I: Yes, in fact that probably is a real plus here at The Carlotta, is the warmth of the residents, the friendliness. You see people and you're just glad to see one another. We chat and laugh. Roger, you didn't tell her that you're a member of The Singing Fountains; he's a member of the choral group here.

R: That's right; we've got a nice group of about 20 people who love to sing. We do a couple of concerts every year; just have a lot of fun. We're not real good but we enjoy ourselves and I think the residents appreciate it.

J: Nice.

I: And both of us are active on committees here at the Carlotta. Roger is active on building and grounds. I'm active in special events.

R: I'm the vice president of the Resident Council.

J: Oh great.

I: And I think that's important to take part in some activities, whatever interests you, because that's a good way of meeting people. Being on the special events committee, there are 30 ongoing activities every single week. In other words they're always the same, there's always bridge, there's always bunco, there's always bingo, there's always mah-jongg. Every week they have these on certain days at certain times and they are in place, 30 things are in place.

R: You need to tell June what your big special event is.

I: It's Jill.

J: It's June.

I: Oh, we were given the name Jill.

R: I know.

J: That's ok; people intertwine us all the time.

I: Oh I see, this is June.

R: Oh, two different people. Don told us Jill but I guess that's fine. No, tell her about your big special event this month.

I: Ok, just to finish, there's 30 events every week that are always in place. But then we have a monthly activity calendar and that's where we have field trips listed. We go out to eat in a restaurant twice a month and so they have transportation for us to these places. In other words there's activities for people and there such a broad scope of activities that you are bound to find one thing you like anyway. Roger wanted me to tell you about I happened to end up as the chairman of the residents pancake breakfast. Next Tuesday, well, there's nine people on the committee so let me tell, you all nine of us, all ten of us including me are going to do this pancake breakfast. It's going to be a lot of fun. They are closing our Carlotta Café that morning and we are only going to serve the residents breakfast. And the staff is helping us.

R: And what's the benefit of the breakfast?

I: The benefit will be to support our library. The residents have a library here at Carlotta. We have a lady who has volunteered as librarian and for the past 11 years and so we have to keep the books moving but that means that we, the residents, have to come up with the money to buy the books and stuff. We're doing a pancake breakfast as a fundraiser for our library.

J: Wow, I bet that'll be popular.

I: Oh, we've sold probably almost 100 tickets right now.

J: Well, thanks for doing that.

I: It's fun, you can see we're kind of active.

J: Yes, I can tell.

I: Go ahead, I was just going to say we're an active community here.

J: Yes and it sure sounds like you to have found a place where you can contribute and have a lot of fun and enjoy your next chapters.

R: Yes, definitely.

I: Yes, I think both Roger and I have a positive attitude of life and so just whatever we have in front of us to meet, we pray that we meet and of course we have a faith so we feel that God is walking with us through each phase of life. So that makes a difference too.

J: That's great. Well, you're never lonely that way, that's for sure. Well, thank you both so much. Is there anything else you would like to add, any final words of wisdom to share with people who may be receiving this information?

R: Well, I think it will probably be kind of a case-by-case situation because we have shared meals with prospective residents here several times. We get into conversation with them and ask them what they're looking for and tell them what's here, our experiences. We have enjoyed doing that.

J: In doing this we just hope that the information we share will lead people to a decision that is right for them, regardless of which community they choose. So once again, I appreciate all of your time and your efforts on their behalf.

R: Could you tell us, June, what the results are going to be, what is Watermark creating?

J: What we do is, we create from these interviews, first of all, a transcript, a complete transcript and then from the transcript we pull just a brief number of direct quotes from you and sentiments you have shared and put it into what we call a triple postcard. It is a full-color piece that we mail out and it includes an invitation for people to come to a discovery luncheon. At that luncheon, you will be invited to be there as well, and people can ask questions and learn about all kinds of retirement communities, not just ours but they can learn about just the concept of what are retirement communities and what are the different levels of care, what are the different ways that you can access these communities be it rental or buy-in, that kind of thing. So, as you know having been to so many, there are a lot of different options out there. So we just want to educate people and get them on the path to begin their own discovery process.

R: So would that be a one-time event then, the discovery luncheon?

J: Yeah, what we do is we offer a luncheon that goes with this particular story, your story, and then maybe a couple months later we will pick up another resident's story and offer another luncheon. I think they do generally one every quarter. Every community is different but probably you will be the featured one that quarter.

R: Will there be other residents there with us at that time for the luncheon?

J: That I'm not sure of but I would guess probably.

I: Roger, Don mentioned that there would be other residents there also. Yeah, there would be a few of us there at the luncheon, not just you and I.

J: It's a good way for people to come and get a taste of what is out there and ask questions and meet people like yourselves and, you know, get the information that they need to make their own decisions.

R: Might that luncheon happen during the summer here or might you know when that would that be do you suppose?

J: I don't know, you'll probably want to talk to somebody in the sales office there. They will coordinate it around your schedule for sure.

I: Actually, Roger, remember Don mentioned it is July 9?

R: Oh, ok.

I: It's on our calendar. Yes, Don has already given us the date.

J: Good. Perfect, good. Well, thank you very much. You've given us lots of material to work with and I'm sure it will be very helpful to the people who are reading it. So once again thank you very much. It's been a great pleasure to meet you and I appreciate everything that you are doing to help others there.

R: We enjoy doing that definitely. Thanks for the opportunity.

J: Ok, you take care and enjoy the rest of your day.

I: Thank you.

J: Bye now.