

## Richard Wheaton Interview, August 2016

J: June

R: Richard

2:37

J: Hello.

R: Hello.

J: Hi, is this Richard?

R: Yes.

J: Hello Richard, this is June Hussey. Can you hear me ok?

R: Yes, I can.

J: Very good, well, thank you for calling in and agreeing to do this phone interview with me.

R: Well, that's my privilege.

J: Good, well, let me take a few minutes to give you a little bit of background about why we do these interviews and then I'll let you do most of the talking from there. They may have explained to you we do interview residents all over the country who live at Watermark communities and we try to find out a little bit about their lives, and what brought them to this point in their life where they decided to move to retirement community, how they selected it, what they went through to figure what they were going to do, and now that they're there, what kind of things they enjoy doing. And we find that no two stories are like and it's just a lot of fun to get to know our residents in this way and then share their stories with people out there who may have never thought about moving to a retirement community and help open their eyes to those possibilities. So that's the purpose of the call. And just one note: I want to make sure you realize we are recording this call. And the purpose of that is to produce an accurate transcript so that I don't have to take notes and make mistakes. But should you happen to say something that's too personal that you don't want to share, just say so right then and there and we'll make sure that doesn't get in the final transcript, ok? Alright, so I'm going to start by inviting you to state your name and share a little bit about who you are. You might want to mention where you were born, something about growing up, where you lived, your career, anything along that nature and then I'll ask you more questions after that and drill down a little bit, ok?

R: Ok.

J: So go ahead and start with sharing a little about yourself.

R: My name is Richard Wheaton and I was born about five miles west of The Fountains here in Independence. I grew up, well, the family spent about seven, eight years here. I was born in 1922. My father was a missionary, and an elder and an apostle of our denomination. Our ministry is not paid and so the ones that are on missionary work, their family is boarded but they still have to work for their (inaudible). So, in 1931 the depression had gotten pretty severe and my father decided to take us with him in the field and that way we could live more economically. And wherever we were when school started, we would find a house that needed work and we would do that for the rent for the year. I had three brothers, older and one sister younger than me. I'm the youngest of

four boys and so we traveled with him. The first year, we stopped in Douglas, Arizona right on the border and we learned a lot about the Mexicans and Spanish. Then the next year, we were in Ogden, Utah and learned a lot about their culture. Then the next three years, we were in Sagle, Idaho. That's about 50 miles south of the Canadian border. We rented a farm there and my father continued missionary work and us four boys ran the farm and went to school. Then in '36, we returned to Missouri, which was always our home. And there I started school in William Christian and graduated in 1942.

Volunteered for the Army Air Corps and graduated with commission as a Lieutenant at Kirkland Field in Spokane. From there we went to, no, not Spokane, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Spokane was one of my training stations as we were preparing to go overseas. I was bombardier on B-17s and we shipped out to England and convoyed in 1943 in the fall. My first combat mission was November 1st around that time. I was selected as lead bombardier on my seventh mission. From there I flew whatever the lead crew was but the war was over. Well, I flew two tours with the same station. D-Day was the last mission of my first tour and I was home on our (inaudible) back as squadron bombardier and faced the world overseas and came home we (inaudible). The war was over in the Pacific before we got into training. I had been in construction with my father and grandfather before I went into the service, even when I was in high school, and so I continued to work with my father for a short time. And then he returned to the mission field and I carried on the business for three or four years but all the time I was working toward my bachelor's degree in engineering. I had taken the state exam, the Missouri state exam for a licensed contractor and engineer, so then I worked for the government and back and forth. When the finances budget would get low on the project I was working on, I would go back to private companies. I finally worked in the Wasatch Mountains, that's the range in Utah. The water was on the reservation and actually where the work was done and we built a reservoir and then we had an aqueduct that went through seven miles of 12 foot diameter tunnel through the Wasatch to take the water down to Provo for irrigation. I was married in 1953 and we had five girls and two boys. They're all living yet. My work took me to the Navajo reservation. I was facility manager there for the government and the DIA. That's where I retired. But we still worked there, my wife and I. The children had all grown and married and were gone and so we were working with a group of the Navajo and cleaning out a hogan that they were going to use for the healing ceremony of one of their elder ladies and my wife caught a virus and very severe. And that was about the time that they were having the Hanta virus that was brought from Asia. And she wanted to come back to Independence and I tried to get her to stop at a number of places, Albuquerque and Oklahoma City and she wanted to come home. Well, we got here and they found it wasn't the Hanta virus but they were not able to identify it. It left her with congestive heart failure which was pretty severe but she lived 11 years under my primary care. It's been 11 years now since she passed away. So, I had lived in a house not far from here, Kings Highway and 35th Street. I lived there after she passed away about eight or nine years. It was getting pretty rough. I had contracted asbestosis from the barracks in England. It has now gotten pretty severe. I have to use an electric chair to get around.

J: You were telling me about your previous home that wasn't far from The Fountains.

R: Yes, I had been thinking about the kind of help I would need to hire. I have three daughters that live in town and they researched, unbeknownst to me, a number of

retirement homes here in Independence. They liked The Fountains so they popped in one Saturday and said, "Dad, how would you like to go to see a retirement home?" I said, "Well, fine, I've been thinking about something along that line." And they brought me here and David was our leader and they, shortly after I walked through the front door, there was greetings from all that was in there and as we passed down the halls David showed us different features of the home. I was sold. We started right away to make arrangements to move in. I moved in October 2015 I think it was, two years. So I have not been disappointed. I have quite a number of friends. We all are very pleasant here, very pleasant atmosphere. I am a retired civil engineer besides a minister. I am now doing archaeology research on the two scriptures. We believe in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. I'm working on that. We'll present a presentation here at The Fountains. They've asked me to and so we will cover that, probably a shortened version of my research when I get that finished.

J: So that's fascinating. What a fascinating life you have lived so far. Tell me, your kids had found The Fountains for you and did you look at some of the other ones in town or did you just look at The Fountains and that was it?

R: They looked at the others but I wasn't interested in the others. When I came in the door, all that friendly greeting, that was the place for me and I didn't look anywhere else.

J: And I find it interesting that it's so close to where you were born and where you've lived.

R: Well, I raised my family about five miles east of here on an acre, converted a seven room house into an 11 room house and it was very successful.

J: Good, so how do your kids feel now that you've been living there for a while? Are they happy with your choice?

R: Oh yes, they're very delighted. They all live within ten miles of here.

J: How nice. You have grandkids too?

R: Yes, I have 14 grandkids. The last count was 12 great grandkids.

J: Well, you have quite a prodigious family, very good. So tell me about, other than your history project that sounds very interesting, are there other pastimes that you enjoy, things that you enjoy doing there at the community with your neighbors?

R: Well, yes I did play chess for a while and I've been playing bridge with a group on Wednesday nights. I've taken a few of the tours but so many of them are in areas that would be hard to maneuver my electric chair so I'm limited that way but I do enjoy very much the atmosphere here.

J: Good, well, I'm glad to hear that. So you know there is probably a number of people living in the vicinity that have never set foot in a retirement community and have no intention of ever leaving their home. What might you say to those folks to convince them that it's worth looking at it?

R: Well, the thing that I would tell them is that they need to expose themselves to the environment and the people. They're all very friendly. The family of the elder people, they need to do some searching as well, like my family did. They will be surprised, very surprised.

J: So when you compare your life and your lifestyle now at The Fountains to where you were living before, what are the big differences?

R: Well, the big difference is that I have a whole lot more contact with other people. Of course, being in ministry, I enjoy people. We have a lot of interesting conversations with

them, not just on religion but, on religion some but, just family and what's going on in the world that sort of thing.

J: So you have a lot more social contact now.

R: Yes, very much. I had very little there at home before I moved. I did have some, but not near what I have here.

J: Right.

R: So I have very much.

J: Well, good. Have you been able to take advantage of your veteran's benefits to help you with your cost of living there?

R: Well, I am 100% disabled from the veterans and I also have Social Security. I was able to work that out and also a retirement from the government. So I have three incomes.

J: And that allows you live comfortably there?

R: Yes, yes.

J: Very good, well fascinating. Well, great can you think of anything else that we haven't talked about that you think is important for people out there to know about The Fountains at Greenbriar?

R: Well, the atmosphere is so uplifting here. I've been very well impressed and enjoyed it. They need to know, well, also the assisted living, they have it available here for those that need it, and the nursing staff is very efficient. And they just need to know that Greenbriar is something different.

J: Very good, nice. Well, I think that should just about wrap up the interview then. I thank you for sharing all of that with us.

R: You're welcome.

J: I think it's fascinating how you grew up. I'm in Arizona and I know Douglas and wow that must have been a different kind of place back in the '30s.

R: Yep.

J: And then all the way up to almost the border of Canada, so you went from one border to the other as you were growing up. That must've been interesting.

R: Yes and in my work as a civil engineer I worked on the interstate, I built railroads and bridges, power plants, aqueducts and reservoirs. I have had quite a wide variety and a very interesting career.

J: Yes, blasting holes through the mountains in Utah, that must've been something.

R: Yep.

J: Well, well it's beautiful country out West here and you've probably seen the best of it.

R: Yes. I have been in every state of the union except Alaska and Hawaii. I've always wanted to go to Alaska but I'm probably not going to make it.

J: Well, 48 states isn't bad. Not many people can say that.

R: Well, I can. I've enjoyed all of them but this is home.

J: Very nice, alright, Richard, thank you again very much for sharing your story and all your time today. I'm glad that you're happy there at The Fountains.

R: Yes, very.

J: Ok, well, you take care now and enjoy the rest of your day in Independence.

R: Ok, thank you.

J: Alright, take care, bye now.

R: Bye.

