

Dan Moriarty Interview, August 2017

J: June

D: Dan

J: Hello.

D: Hello, this is Dan Moriarty calling.

J: Hi Dan, this is June Hussey. We seem to have a bit of an echo. Can you hear me ok?

D: I can hear you fine, is that better?

J: That's much better, great. Hey, thank you for calling in and making time in your day to do this interview. We really appreciate it.

D: My pleasure.

J: A couple of ground rules before we get started. I'm going to have you do most of the talking but I just want to make sure you are aware up front that we are recording this conversation so that I don't have to take notes and that we can make sure we get your words and sentiments accurate. Along those lines, since we may be talking about personal things with your family, if you should say something along the way that you don't want to make public, just say so right then and there in conversation, say, "Please don't publish this part." And we will make sure we don't, ok?

D: Very well.

J: And as far as what we do with this information I just want to explain, I'm sure they already have but just to make sure you are aware. We like to share the information that we have about our residents and their experiences of how they decided it was time to move and how they went about looking at different communities and how their move went and all of that kind of information we are after. We share that with folks in the area who may not be familiar with retirement communities and we find that it's helpful to sort of learn through our residents' eyes what they went through and how it is working out for them. In your particular case being the son, I think it will be especially helpful to other adult children to know your mom's story from your perspective as a son, how her choice makes you feel. With that said we can go ahead and get started and I'm going to start by asking you to tell me a little bit about your mom, her name is Lily Moriarty and she is a resident at East Village Place. Tell me a little bit about your mom, where were you raised, anything that will sort of bring her to life for us.

D: Well, mom grew up in and around East Longmeadow. My mom and dad moved to Florida for a number of years. When my dad was in declining health we helped them move back to East Longmeadow, modified the house for dad, he had a stroke and mom was his 24/7 caregiver for a number of years. And when dad passed away about eight or nine years ago, mom was on her own and did very well for herself for a number of years. But then, you know, we started seeing things happen. Mom is a very outgoing person, always had a smile for everybody, we tried moving people in. Home health caregivers would stop and help with the meals and that sort of thing. We had Meals on Wheels for mom and she just wasn't eating right. The turnover in personnel the home health care providers have, it was always every week there was somebody different coming in and mom didn't really like that happening in her house. So, we came to a point about two and half years ago that we had to make a change. Before that mom and I looked at a number of assisted care facilities in East Longmeadow area, probably four or five. The one we went back to was East Village. We both liked the way we were treated, the way other people were being treated there, the respect from all the caregivers there, the longevity of the personnel. These are just huge points to me. It's not a flashy place but it feels like home. Some of the other places we visited had a lot of chrome and mirrors and large open spaces, that's not what mom came from. She wanted something that felt like home and that's really what East Village is to mom.

J: Wonderful, so when did she move in?

D: November two and half years ago, the end of 2015 I believe.

J: How did she respond, first of all, how did the move go, did you help her obviously make the move and get all settled in?

D: Yeah, I was a big part of that. She wasn't real happy to start with about leaving her house. I don't think anybody is but what we did is we arranged her living area where she spends most of her time very similar to her sitting area from her house so when she got in and sat down and saw the pictures and saw everything was kind of homey it helped a lot. But it was still I would say a good month before she felt comfortable there. It's just a huge transition but it worked. I try to have lunch with mom and spend some time with her almost every week and you know, she will have lunch and she will put her hand on top of mine and say, "You know what, I'm really very happy here." And that's all I need to hear. That does it for me. If she's happy, I'm happy.

J: That's great. How long had she been, I take it it was your family home she was moving from?

D: Well, no, they had only lived there in that house, they had lived there for probably about 12 years or so. But she grew up in that area. She grew up in East Longmeadow Springfield area where I grew up. I grew up in Springfield so she is familiar with the surrounding area. Her doctors are all the same. She didn't come from a long distance to be there and she's comfortable with that. Pam, the director there, takes a personal interest you can tell. Every week when I go down, if Pam is there I give her a wave and say, "How are things going?" And I get an honest answer. The same thing from the two nurses on staff. If you ask a direct question you get a direct answer. That's really important to me. You know there are times when mom can be pretty obstinate and she is supposed wear her support hose every day and they do their best to make sure that happens but there are days when she just says, "Nope I'm not wearing those." So, it's tough. Other than that, Dee, who is the activities director there, she and my mom are pals and that's just great. Mom and she along with the other residents go out and do things in the area. They saw the last performance of the circus when it came to town and a lot of things like that. I mean concerts. They're always getting them out and that's probably the most important thing is that constant activity that stimulates mom and others there. Mom's memory is not the best. Her short-term memory is failing. It's a tremendous challenge to deal with that. When I see the patience that the staff has working with that short-term memory loss, I'm just amazed. I don't think I have it in me to be that patient on a daily basis the way they are. It's really comforting to see that, to see the way they do that. They redirect and help. And they'll cajole. They get things done and it's pretty special.

J: Wow, I can definitely relate because my mom was in memory care for a while and I always describe those people as angels. I mean they're just angels, the caregivers. So, gosh, you've given us so much great information from your perspective. Do you have any siblings Dan?

D: I do, I have a sister in Minnesota and a brother in Oregon. My sister hasn't been able to get out this way since mom has been there but my brother tries to get out once or twice a year anyway. He will be visiting soon in August, this month in another couple of weeks he is coming in. He'll be with mom for a few days.

J: So, did you kind of discuss all this, before making the move with your mom, with your siblings and were they supportive?

D: No, neither one of them were supportive to begin with. Both thought it might have been too soon to move. But they weren't the ones who were going down to visit mom, taking care of the house, watching things not up to snuff where mom's normal way of taking care of things. You know before winter came on, I made the decision. November 1st we moved mom in and then we had the worst winter we've had here in quite a while, that particular winter. I don't know how we would've made it through.

J: Good timing.

D: I have two nieces that live right in East Longmeadow. I live in Taunton so I'm about an hour and 45 minutes away. My nieces live right in East Longmeadow, they are my mom's granddaughters and great grandkids and they are always taking mom out to ballgames, to basketball, baseball, soccer games,

going to plays and that sort of thing. That involvement from my nieces it's tremendous. It's more than I could do on a weekly basis. That's why it's an hour and a half for me or an hour and 45 minutes for me to get there and I don't mind it at all. Rather than be five minutes from me or five minutes from my sister in an assisted living in Minnesota with no other stimulation I'm just delighted that she is where she is.

J: Good, do you have any words of advice for other adult children who may be in a similar situation and kind of struggling with caregiving and all the responsibility and the guilt that comes along with not being there all the time? From your experience, do you have any words of advice as to first steps they might be able to take to convince their loved one that a different situation might be better?

D: The first thing is to really, to talk about it. If there are siblings involved, get them involved if you can. But then go out and visit. Lunch is on the house at every one of these places. All the different facilities around, they will all have you to lunch and you can take a tour, see how people are working out there. Then you will narrow things down and see what fits best. One of the things that convinced me, when we were talking about how mom was doing, is with the Meals on Wheels. You go in and you see the Meals on Wheels are not being consumed or being put away. A couple of times it was put away in the stove and she just kind of forgot it there. All these little forgetful things, you start to get worried. With a gas stove, you worry about it being left on, things like that. Or just with stairs. A couple of stairs can be a tragic thing. So rather than face that and deal with that guilt, the guilt I had of moving mom out of her house into assisted living was very short-lived and after my brother had the chance to spend some time there himself, I think within two or three months he spent a week there and he was convinced mom was in the same great place, also. It's a tough decision, no question, but the rules are reversed and you've got to make decisions that are the best for an elderly parent. There's no doubt about that in my mind it's time you have to step up to the plate, make the tough decisions and then live with it and find out shortly afterwards they are happy to be where they are, the pressure is off. I guess that's the big thing, the pressure is off them, too. But that's about it.

J: Excellent, that is insight that I'm sure many many many people can relate to and hopefully it will help them on their journeys to figuring out what is best for their families, so I appreciate your time, Dan, and all your insights and I'm sure glad that you and your mom connected with East Village Place.

D: Thank you so much. We appreciate what you do and your corporation evidently has got the right idea to keep things up to snuff. I don't know how you do it but you are able to retain some tremendous staff and that's appreciated also.

J: Thank you very much, that's nice to hear.

D: You have a great day.

J: You too, enjoy your day, thanks again.

D: Bye-bye.

J: Bye-bye.