

Alice Schmidt Interview, February 2019

J: Jill

A: Alice

J: So, we always go ahead and start by asking residents to state your name and the community where you live so we get that just right.

A: I'm Alice Schmidt and I'm living at The Watermark in Philadelphia.

J: Wonderful and when did you move to The Watermark?

A: About August 31st.

J: Oh, not too long ago, so how is your first winter being in a community where you don't have to be out and about in this weather we are having?

A: It's wonderful, really made my day although I like winter. I don't get upset about winter. But it's very nice not to have to shovel any snow.

J: Right, you can just look at it, that's the best part about snow. I'm from Ohio so I remember.

A: Oh, you've had snow.

J: Yep, yep, yeah, when we get it, we really do get. That's the same thing with Philadelphia. So, before The Watermark were you in the Philadelphia area?

A: Yes, I grew up about five miles from here. I lived in Haddonfield, New Jersey which is a population of about 13,000 and my husband grew up there. So, this is home for a long time. My husband passed, it was a wonderful community, I was very active in the community, we both were and my husband passed three years ago and I was still in my house. But I was doing well but then I developed wet macular degeneration and my eyesight has gone in one eye and I knew that I could not drive any longer. My family did not want me to be in the house alone any longer. I knew it was becoming time because the maintenance of the house was becoming impossible because my husband had always taken care of everything and I knew nothing so it was a big learning process but the unreliability of people coming to help you and it was just, I had had enough, it was time to move. I knew I wanted to be in Center City because growing up in this area we were always in for theater, orchestra, that kind of thing. Philadelphia was the natural place for me to go. Sorry?

J: Oh, I just said I love it too. I also love Philadelphia. You received something?

A: I received an invitation in the mail from The Watermark. When you get old you receive these invitations from all the retirement communities nearby and I never went to anything, there were two really beautiful retirement communities near Haddonfield where I lived and some of my friends are in each of them. They're really beautiful and I like them but they are far out, not far, like five miles from Haddonfield which meant even though they would have the bus service here and there I really would miss a car. I knew with my eyesight I had to stop driving. And so being in Center City was just going to be perfect. I attended a luncheon that they had in my next community, Cherry Hill, it was lovely. They chose a wonderful restaurant which I knew but when I listened to the presentation it just sounded good to me and I was with a friend and I said, "Let's go look it over." So, we did and as soon as I came here, I just knew this was the kind of place that would be good for me. I did not do any other shopping around or anything because

I just felt this is it. And I made the right choice at the right time. My house sold in four days, it just looked like everything was meant to be and I do believe it was because I've been very, very happy.

J: That's beautiful. What were you looking for in a community when you said everything looked just like what I needed, did you have a list of things that you were seeking?

A: No, I just knew I wanted a friendly community because I'm a very gregarious people person kind of thing, everybody seemed very friendly and nice. And I approached someone in the hall that I saw and I asked her, I told her I was thinking of coming here and she said she had been here four years and she was younger than me but she said she was very comfortable and she just said all good things about it, that made me feel good. But I just like the idea that I would be within walking distance to the center of the city if I wanted to. The Loop bus services are provided many times a day, take you wherever you want. I just like the food. I have a wonderful apartment with a wonderful view of the city, I'm on the 23rd floor so the views are wonderful.

J: What is your view?

A: I look at the Ben Franklin Bridge. This facility has two views, one looks at, they call it the Logan view where you look at Logan Square, the art museum and things of that type but on my side, and they get the afternoon sun, I get the morning sun, I look at the Delaware River, at New Jersey, the Ben Franklin Bridge is beautiful at night. All my New Jersey friends are very envious when they come over here and look out the window. It feels good.

J: Perfect, did your friends or anyone else help you decide? I know you brought a friend and that was a really good idea, something we really encourage folks to do.

A: No, she would like to move here too but her husband recently died and they both had been married before and their finances are so entangled with children and whatever she doesn't know when she could move. But anyway, I wanted to do it on my own. My children, I only have one child but two granddaughters who live in the city here and the girls really wanted me to get out of the house because they were so afraid an old lady would fall down the steps and nobody would find her that kind of thing. But anyway, I didn't, no, I made the decision myself. I've always been independent in that way. Right or wrong I make a decision and I live with it, whatever. But this was a good one. As I said, my family, they were happy that I was going to make a move and they said wherever I wanted to go was going to be fine with them. No, I really did it myself. I have to operate that way.

J: That's right and all the people who are out there thinking should I, shouldn't I, should I, shouldn't I. Well, if you made a decision and you thought later well, that wasn't the place for you, you could move.

A: That's right.

J: You just made a good decision and that's a good thing because it is not fun to move but it is doable and we just find that folks are kind of frozen in their tracks a little bit you know.

A: I've always been a gypsy. I had hoped to marry a traveling salesman so I could go all over the country with him but I married someone who stayed in the same place for 40 some years. But we did travel a lot, but no, it was easy for me to move. When I knew it was the thing to do I just did it. I was very happy.

J: Nice, and now your daughter is happy, your grandkids are happy?

A: Both granddaughters are very happy and my son, I only have one son. He lives 200 miles away up in State College, Pennsylvania and he is very happy because he sees how happy I am and that makes them feel good.

J: Perfect, that is just perfect. So, you are happy because you know things are different in your life, what would you say is different now than it was before you moved?

A: I'm much busier. I was always busy. Well, there is so much to do here that you can't do everything, at least I can't do everything I would like to do. I've gotten involved in some committees and doing things here and it's just wonderful. My friends in New Jersey are always calling to say, "Let's do this," "Oh, I can't, I'm doing this." It's good, it's very good.

J: That's a really good challenge when you have too many choices. Love it. And you are finding the cuisine to your liking? Do you take advantage of the different venues?

A: It's wonderful, I like the food very much and there is quite a Jewish population here in the building and so a lot of wonderful Jewish foods are on some of the menus and I love it because it is all new to me. I love trying different kinds of foods so the food is wonderful.

J: You are a natural traveler so food is a wonderful way to travel, isn't it?

A: I know, wonderful.

J: And that's another reason to be in Center City.

A: I know and both my daughters love ethnic food so they find all these funny little quaint ethnic restaurants here and there and it's really a lot of fun.

J: Perfect, if I were to move to a Watermark Community, we shouldn't pick favorites but Logan. I just love Philadelphia. I mean when you think about what you can walk to there.

A: Exactly.

J: I mean it has been years since I've been there personally but the museum, what are some of the other places we can walk?

A: Of course, there is a Target right down the street.

J: Handy.

A: And there's a market, I always get the wrong name of it. I want to say Fresh Foods but that's, Whole Foods, that's it, right down the street. A 7-Eleven right across the street if you need something quick there. There are many nice restaurants on the walk down from The Watermark to the Whole Foods there are several. There's Japanese, there is a really fine dining and there is a bar with good food, all kinds of things on the way down. Wonderful, you must come to Philadelphia again and sample them.

J: I agree, it is my personal and professional duty.

A: Good, good, good.

J: That's right. And then of course there is shopping we can walk to.

A: Center City is not that far, Macy's, where it used to be Wanamaker's, Macy's. Walnut Street and Chestnut Street have all the fine shops and just everything is right at your fingertips.

J: That's beautiful. And the folks, the friends that you have in the suburbs they can come see you.

A: They do, they do.

J: Come and see you and then take all the walks and not have to worry about their parking and driving, they can jump right on the loop with you.

A: And too, we have the PATCO, the train coming from New Jersey into Center City and our town, Haddonfield, it's one of the stops and within 15 minutes you can be from our town right into the heart of Center City. I encourage them to come over on PATCO because it is not expensive and you don't have to worry about parking and it's just wonderful. So, the location is perfect.

J: You can go back and visit them.

A: Oh, I do. They pick me up at the station there if we aren't going to stay in right downtown Haddonfield. I think I've got the best of all worlds.

J: I think you are right. I think that has worked out just beautifully.

A: It has.

J: Well, we have talked about, I do have a question here in my list, the different things that you are involved in, you mentioned a couple of committees and do you take any of the Watermark University classes?

A: I haven't, I have stepped in on some but I haven't gone regularly to any of them. I work, they have a thrift shop here and I work in the thrift shop and then I help out on the food committee where we read the reviews what people think of the dining and such. Then I'm on the gardening committee, we had a wonderful gentleman who had created this wonderful outdoor garden on our terrace in these huge urns and the flowers are magnificent and they entered and they won a prize for I don't know whether from residences or what. Anyway, they got a very wonderful prize and citation but the poor man he had Parkinson's but he was so capable and he died very suddenly about two weeks ago. He did not have a formal committee that was structured and written down or anything so we are scrambling to see who can take over this. We have tried contacting his family to see if they found any receipts or drawings or whatever and so far have had no success. We are really struggling because we want to get that going again but it will be a challenge.

J: Well, I have a feeling that there could be a committee with community life assistance or someone could even come up with something that we call a class where they do the research, find out all the different plants that we had and then we could all learn and figure it out together. Maybe at the end of the class you could make a plaque with his name, put it on the wall, something very nice, who knows.

A: They have done a couple things to honor him. He was also musical and they have a little drama committee and they just did a musical a couple weeks ago and he was one of the co-writers of this thing so they dedicated the whole program to him. There are going to be a few plaques here and there in his honor because he was just amazing. He did everything, was so talented.

J: His name isn't Mr. Rizzo, is it?

A: No, his name is Spencer Anderson.

J: Spencer Anderson, I used to know of an Al Rizzo who lived at Logan who was very involved with the garden but that could've been years ago. I've been with Watermark for over 10 years. And I haven't thought about or talked to anyone about those gardens in years. I am glad someone gave it so much love and attention, it will be a new legacy. That's wonderful.

A: We have to re-create them again because they were just so beautiful.

J: That's wonderful and that will be just perfect for those who love to garden but don't need to manage the whole entire yard and all the work that comes with it.

A: Yes, that was one of the reasons I wanted to let go of my house because we had a beautiful garden but I just could not maintain it anymore and even to hire people they just aren't reliable. Unless you want to engage them in a huge undertaking it was very difficult.

J: It's true, it's true and then the fun is doing it along the way in a way that is still fun. So, you hit that on just right. And that's another good, kind of another good angle at why folks might make a move because sometimes they don't move because they think they have to give up something like gardening, it turns out you can actually get it back.

A: And you can, I think anything in life you can make it what you want it to be, takes a little work but you'll find connections to be able to continue doing good things.

J: Beautiful, that's wonderful advice. Any other advice to folks who might be thinking do I, don't I, should I, shouldn't I, I would rather rattle around in this house for another hot summer?

A: As far as people that cling to their possessions, I tell them, it is just things, it's just stuff and let it go. You can bring what you want with you and either give it away or sell whatever. It is just stuff. When we're gone nobody is going to want half this stuff anyhow.

J: I understand that. Then, it sounds like you love to travel, I think that might be a neat reason to be in a community because then you are not traveling wondering about your locked-up house.

A: That's right, that's wonderful. What a difference, yes. Because you just lock the door and go. You tell them you will be gone for X number of weeks and when you come back everything is fine. I was never a worrier, we would go away every summer to Europe and we would be gone most of the summer and half the times we didn't even lock our door because we didn't worry. As we say it's only stuff. But it is nice, you don't have to worry. I'm going to celebrate my 90th birthday on Saturday and I think part of the reason is that I'm so old, I do not worry, I never did. I feel very blessed that I don't.

J: I think you're right about that, that can bring a lot of health and well-being that we don't really understand what stress does to us, I think.

A: I know when I was a kid, I was really a tomboy, was always getting into trouble and my mother would get upset and I would say, "Don't worry, everything will be alright." And it always was. It really was, anyway.

J: Thank you so much. I sincerely appreciate your time. If there is anything else you would like to add I'll take it.

A: Thank you for letting me talk your ear off.

J: Oh no, not at all. It's my kind of conversation too. I love to talk about what makes us tick and what makes life great. I think about someday, my own retirement, when I will be looking at a terraced garden myself.

A: Good, well, when you come to Philadelphia look me up, please.

J: I will, I will, thank you so much and happy birthday on Saturday.

A: Thank you, thank you very much, was good talking with you. Bye-bye.

J: Bye-bye. Have a great rest of the day.