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AGEING TRANSITIONS

Interview

Hazel: It was my perfect house, and I did not want to leave it. But then Norman became sick.

Celia: Sometimes circumstances force dramatic changes in our lives. Hi, I'm Celia Fielke, and this is Messages of Hope.

Transitioning into another phase of life brings changes we're not ready for. So, how do we cope with the things that we lose, and is there anything to gain? Today we're talking with Norman and Hazel about their transition from the family home into a retirement village.

Celia: First of all, tell us your age, and how did you two meet?

Hazel: We're the same age. Norman will be 89 in April, and I will be 89 in May.

Norman: I'm very well looked after!

Hazel: We went to school together.

Celia: Is that right?

Hazel: Yes, we've been married now, I've forgotten. 68 years next month.

Norman: And we're still talking!

Hazel: We can still make each other laugh, which is a good thing.

Celia: That is a good thing. So, you made the decision to move into the retirement home here. What led you to make that choice?

Hazel: We had a big house on a large block of land, and it became too much when the children left home. So, there was still a lot of garden. We couldn't find a smaller house in the area, so we said, "Oh, we better build something. So, we took the house down and put three townhouses on it. That was so lovely. We had a wonderful builder and he did exactly what we wanted plus things we didn't think of!

Norman: There was a lot of maintenance emerging at the house. We'd been in the new place, what, 10 years?

Hazel: 17 years!

- Norman:** 17, was is that long? Things were needing to be done. It was getting more and more difficult to do. In that respect it was time.
- Hazel:** It was my perfect house, and I did not want to leave it. But, then, Norman became sick. He had Parkinson's and the doctor said, "I think you should be looking around at nursing homes," she said.
- Celia:** So, you knew it was time to move. Norman's illness really forced you to make that decision. Instead of a nursing home, though, you've ended up in a unit in a retirement village. You didn't want to leave your dream house, so how did that come about?
- Hazel:** I really believe God works in mysterious ways. We have friends that had moved in here and one Friday evening we were going to dinner there. We were driving down Henry Street and I said, "Stop the car!" I said, "Look at that lovely red cottage." I said, "Pity they don't offer us that. We'd move in. Although we'd decided not to come, we'd move in, wouldn't we?" Norman said, "Oh, it is nice, isn't it?" That was on the Friday night. Tuesday morning I had the call from Jan (from the retirement village). She said, "Meet me in the office and I'll take you down." I nearly fainted, because she stopped at the house we'd looked at!
- Celia:** That's amazing! So, how did that turn out, making that move?
- Hazel:** Well, the first thing, we live in the court. It was very close knit. We introduced ourselves to the next door neighbours, and I couldn't believe it. On the day we moved in, that dear lady watched the removal van go, and she came in with a tray, and she'd made a huge quiche, and she said, "You don't want to cook, here's your meal." And everybody in that court, during that next week appeared to see us, ask us to go in and have a cuppa or whatever. But, not obtrusive. That's the end of the story. "You know where I am if you want me." It's just like we've got another family. It's extraordinary.
- Celia:** Hazel, I know you loved entertaining in your family home, and you were worried that you wouldn't be able to still do that in this new place, or have the room to do that. Were there any regrets at all?
- Hazel:** Yes, well, that's an interesting thing, you see? You shouldn't think that way, because you change your lifestyle. Although we didn't have a separate dining room, we bought a table that we can let out, so we can seat eight. That's all right, and we realized that, okay, so you don't have a lot of people at once. You have to make sure you have eight, or 10 at the most. You organize yourself. You start thinking like an old lady! "Well, I've got to lay the table in the morning, in case I'm too tired to do it later." Whereas we could do that in the family home and close the door, you could do it the day before. You just change your way of thinking.
- Celia:** A lot of people really worry about the things they're going to lose or leave behind. For some, that's their independence. How did you feel about that, Norman? Especially in light of your Parkinson's Disease.
- Norman:** I think you're gaining your independence, somehow, in that there's so much support around you that you can do what you want to. I'll say the natives are friendly, which sums it up. We have a wider group of friends here than we have ever had, I think.
- Celia:** So, you still have that sense of independence and control, being involved as much, or as little as you want to be.

Hazel: Yes. I started working in the little op shop that we have here. I realized, that is not there for the shop to sell things. We do make money, of course, and do things with it, but there are certain people that go in that shop every day it's open. They come in to talk to us. Lots of men come in. Loads of people that are on their own go in there and have a cup of coffee and just play cards, or a board game. You know, lots of people say, "I'm shy, I don't..." Just go in the coffee shop and have a cup of coffee. If you want someone to talk to, you can. If not, you just sit and watch the others talking. But, you have companionship. You need not be alone. Only as much as you want to be.

Celia: What would you say to others who are wrestling with this idea of moving into a retirement village?

Hazel: Some friends of ours are having very bad health troubles. I said to Peter the other day, "You really need to go into a retirement village." He said, "Oh, no! I don't like looking after. We wouldn't like to go in a nursing home." And I said, "Peter, you've been to my place. You know it's not like that." "No, no," he said, "we'll stay in our home."

They don't understand. You don't know until you move in, but it isn't a nursing home, as such. You've just got to stick with it. Don't get upset in the first two or three weeks, because it seems too hard, because it really is a good thing to do. I haven't met anybody yet who hasn't said the same thing.

Celia: So, it's actually quite a positive thing once you've got your head around it and embraced that change?

Hazel: Absolutely. Be prepared for change, to change your life, change your whole attitude to life.

Celia: People are afraid of change, aren't they?

Hazel: I am. I don't like change. I've had too much change. But it's good for us. Gives you a new spark of life, you change.

Celia: So, all in all, it has been a positive move for you guys to be here?

Norman: Very much so.

Celia: Did that surprise you?

Hazel: It did me.

Norman: I thought it was going to be life-changing, but it turned out a much nicer way than I really thought. The support we get here ... Hazel had a new knee a few years ago and the staff here were absolutely first class. Everything she could have wanted around the house to help her, was supplied.

Hazel: Without asking! They just turned up.

Norman: Things we'd never have thought of ourselves from the raised toilet seats to-

Hazel: The little trolley thing in the kitchen.

Norman: All sorts of things.

Hazel: We didn't know anything about it. You're supposed to tell them in the care office if you have surgery or anything. So, Norman did, and they said, "When's she coming out of hospital?" The day I came out of hospital, they came with a van and they unloaded all this stuff. "You'll need this and that." How nice was that?

Celia: So, you felt very secure and supported? That's great.

Overall, what was the most important thing for you to make that transition from your family home to the retirement village?

Hazel: I think it was just the love and care in the village. You just felt everywhere you went ... If you just came into the office and talked to the girls, you felt nothing was too much trouble. You were all part of everything. Don't worry, you know? It just felt really nice, as if it was meant to be. You're just in another chapter of your life. You have to realize that your whole life is a series of chapters, and this is a totally new one.

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