

**Interviewee:** Henson, Dianne  
**Interviewer:** Tiffany Baker  
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**Baker:** Dianne, I just need to get your permission to tape record this conversation. Again, this is an oral history interview with Dianne Henson, I am taping it, do I have your permission to tape the conversation?

**Henson:** Yes.

**Baker:** Okay, I am going to be asking you a few questions today about your relationship with your husband and also your time that you spend at the Lexington Country Club. So, I guess, to kind of get it started, how long have you been married to your current husband?

**Henson:** 15 years last November.

**Baker:** Fifteen years last November. How did you meet Mr. Henson?

**Henson:** We met on safari in Africa. In Kenya.

**Baker:** In Kenya, how were your early interactions with Mr. Henson? Did he approach you, or did you approach him?

**Henson:** Well, it was a very small group. There were only 13 of us, with zoo officials, from Knoxville. And we traveled for almost two weeks. It was a very close knit group.

**Baker:** Okay, almost two weeks. Now, after you returned from the trip, did he start calling you or did you call him, or had you make plans to meet up afterwards?

**Henson:** No, but our group had plans to meet in Gatlinburg, in December, the first of December, where we could share all our pictures and tapes and slides and all those kinds of things. So, that's when everybody got back together again.

**Baker:** Okay, and so, how did your relationship start then, how did it kind of get started so that you were seeing each other regularly?

**Henson:** I was, after, after we were all together in December, I was coming back to Knoxville in January to do recruitment, and I called to see if he wanted to meet me for lunch.

**Baker:** Just as friends, you didn't-

**Henson:** Yeah, just as friends.

**Baker:** Yeah, you didn't think anything of it at the time –

**Henson:** No, not at all.

**Baker:** So you didn't live in Gatlinburg with Mr Henson, you lived somewhere else, at the time?

**Henson:** I lived in Nashville.

**Baker:** Ok, and so, about approximatelely how far are Gatlinburg and Nashville from each other?

**Henson:** Oh, four hours.

**Baker:** So, after you started seeing him and you seemed interested in each other, how did the relationship progress, especially since you were living so far apart?

**Henson:** Well, it got to be every other weekend, I was there or he was in Nashville. That's basically, if it was busy season, I was in Gatlin - excuse me - I was in Gatlinburg more than he was in Nashville.

**Baker:** Okay. And what-

**Henson:** He had his business.

**Baker:** Okay, so what did you do? You were employed at the time, what did you do? What was your occupation?

**Henson:** I was in, let's see, I was in recruitment for Baptist Hospital.

**Baker:** Okay, and that's in-

**Henson:** Baptist Hospital.

**Baker:** And what was Mr. Henson doing at the time?

**Henson:** A motel owner

**Baker:** He was a motel owner. So what kind of activities would you do on the weekends that you would see each other? Would you just kind of stay in because of

his work, or did you go and do date activities, you know, like the movies?

**Henson:** We did day activities. We left the tourists, and we would usually bop over to western North Carolina and tootle around in the mountains, or-

**Baker:** And by tootling, you mean driving around in the car?

**Henson:** Yeah.

**Baker:** [laughing] Okay, I just have to clarify that for people who might not know.

**Henson:** [laughing] Yes, we would just go see different cities, different places, do different things in the mountains, go out to dinner.

**Baker:** Just date, normal date things-

**Henson:** Fun things.

**Baker:** Little date activities. Bad, before you met Mr. Henson, did you date anyone seriously?

**Henson:** Mm, hmm, yes I did.

**Baker:** How did you meet those individuals? You don't have to outline your entire dating history, but maybe one or two that-

**Henson:** Most of them were either through friends or business acquaintances.

**Baker:** The people that you dated, were you dating them when you lived in Nashville, or was it when you lived somewhere else?

**Henson:** Both.

**Baker:** Did that make any difference, I mean, where else did you date people? What other places have you lived where you were dating?

**Henson:** New York.

**Baker:** That's very different from Nashville, was there any difference in the activities that you did between Gatlinburg, Nashville, and New York?

**Henson:** Well, if you took-one place it was in New York City and one place was

out of New York in suburbia, so there was a dramatic difference cause one was mostly dinners and movies and theater, and the other, in New York City, it could be anything.

**Baker:** You could do all kinds of different stuff!

**Henson:** Yes, it could be anything.

**Baker:** But I mean, it still seems, did the relationship still seem similar, like you went on dates, it was just different kind of dates, right?

**Henson:** Well, in New York, you were more very small groups, where the other, and it'd be more casual acquaintances, where in suburbia, they were people that you knew very well and they were your friends, your close friends.

**Baker:** So, you often went on group dates with other people, or you—

**Henson:** Well, mostly did dinner parties and things like that.

**Baker:** Oh, dinner parties, now that's different than it was when you were dating Ed, right —

**Henson:** Right-

**Baker:** And more singular dates-

**Henson:** Right-

**Baker:** At that time, okay, so that was different. Did you prefer one ito the other or was it just, you know, different people so different circumstances -

**Henson:** Well, it was different people, and it was the way it was because of the environment.

TB : The environment?

**Henson:** It was more environmentally induced probably.

**Baker:** Mmm, hmm ... cause everyone kind of lived redly close together in New York-

**Henson:** Yeah, right, right-

**Baker:** Whereas in Gatlinburg, it's a little more spread out. Okay, so, obviously you liked your dating relationship with Ed, because you ended up getting married. About how long after you started dating were you engaged, and can you tell me a little bit about how you got engaged? If it was, you know, an instance where it just kind of happened or if you had talked about it beforehand?

**Henson:** No, we had talked about it, and it was probably, well, it was in May. It was the next May, so it was only, you know, like three months, three or four months.

**Baker:** Was there anything like, you know how -

**Henson:** We knew, I mean, we knew before that.

**Baker:** Yeah, you had, you kind of -

**Henson:** In fact, it was only a couple of months-

**Baker:** Did you pick out your ring, or did he pick it out for you?

**Henson:** No, my dad had a jewelry store, and we told him what we were interested in, and Dad got some diamonds for us to see, and we picked out the diamonds and then we picked out a setting.

**Baker:** Well, that seems fairly easy. [laughter]

**Henson:** It always helps when there is somebody in the family.

**Baker:** Yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure it helps.

**Henson:** Then, when you get what you want-

**Baker:** Exactly. When you can pick it out, that helps. But, so after you were engaged, you were engaged in May, how long was it until you were actually married?

**Henson:** November.

**Baker:** Okay, November, so just about seven months, that's not too long. Were people really surprised at your engagement or did they kind of expect and were they happy about it? Was your family happy about it? About your relationship?

**Henson:** Well, they were ... friends knew that something was brewing because we were back and forth every other weekend, and my father thought it was a hot, taking him to Rotary and introducing him as his next son-in-law, and their age difference wasn't that terrific. Or great, rather.

**Baker:** Okay, at the time, how old-what was the age difference between you two, how old were you when you got married, each of you?

**Henson:** Oh shoot, I don't know. Well, the age difference is 18 years.

**Baker:** Okay-

**Henson:** And we've been married, let's see-

**Baker:** Fifteen –

**Henson:** We've been married fifteen years, and I am 58, you've got the pencil and paper, you start subtracting.

**Baker:** So, 43 –

**Henson:** No.

**Baker:** No, were you 43?

**Henson:** No, that must have been, let's see 58,48, yeah, early forties. Yeah.

**Baker:** You were in your early forties, and then he was –

**Henson:** In his late fifties.

**Baker:** Late fifties.

**Henson:** Well, yeah.

**Baker:** Yeah, just about coming up on 60 right then. So no one reacted to the age difference in a bad way? Everyone was pretty –

**Henson:** No, cause we had friends that have age differences that were considerable, and I've always had friends that age differences were considerable. And I dated somebody for quite awhile and the age difference was considerable there, too.

**Baker:** Really, so it wasn't the first time you had dated someone that was older?

**Henson:** No.

**Baker:** Do you think, do you think it makes it difficult for the two of you? Did you find it difficult to relate to him at all, because of the age difference, or was it not a big deal ever,

for you? Like at first, was it-

**Henson:** Well, I suppose it would be different \$1 was 16 or 18 years old, because then it wouldn't be real legal. So when you get older, it doesn't make any difference when you get older and you are established, and you know who you are and where you are coming from.

**Baker:** How was the wedding itself? How was the event set up? What are some of things that you-who did you have in your wedding, was it a big party or a small wedding?

**Henson:** Well, initially, the groom almost got shot because he forgot to tell everybody that it was the University of Tennessee-Notre Dame football game in Knoxville. And, we invited 225 people, and 68 showed up, or 69, and most of them were from everywhere in the United States, and there were just a couple, just a handful of people from Nashville, because everybody else in Nashville wished us the best, sent us wonderful wedding gifts, and they took their season tickets and went to the Notre Dame football game. [laughter] So, it turned out to be very economical.

**Baker:** Where did you have the wedding and the reception?

**Henson:** We had a wedding in Brentwood, in the big Methodist church, and we had the reception at home.

**Baker:** Okay, at home?

**Henson:** Mmrrn-hmrrn.

**Baker:**How-now that you have been married, how do you view your marriage? Do you feel like it's an equal partnership, or do you feel like one of you is more in charge than the other, how did you think your mamage is set up?

**Henson:** No, it's a partnership, and both of us do whatever you can do for each other

**Baker:** What kind of changes did you make after your marriage? Since you both were living apart-

**Henson:** I had to resign my job, and I had to sell my home, and I moved to Gatlinburg.

**Baker:** And you moved to Gatlinburg. And at this time, was Ed still running the motel?

**Henson:** Yes, he was.

**Baker:** You both work in a business now together, correct?

**Henson:** Yes.

**Baker:** Can you describe the business for me and kind of explain how that partnership came about?

**Henson:** Well, we had our motel, and somebody offered to buy it, and they wanted to move it. So, we had to do something, and we decided living in a resort community that, and being our business, our land, was across the street from the convention center that it would be smart business move to put a parking lot in, and that's what we did. And we have been running a parking lot ever since.

**Baker:** Now, at the beginning, did you run the parking lot yourselves, or did you have people that worked for you? How was it set up?

**Henson:** Well, we had a couple people working for us, but they decided they didn't like what they were doing, so we had some bouts where we were working 24, well, not 24, 15 or 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. And then we finally found some extremely capable, honest, hardworking people that enjoyed what they were doing, and they have basically been with us since.

**Baker:** And so, you trust them to take care of the parking lot when you are not there. As a result, you and your husband have started going to Florida, correct? And spending time?

**Henson:** That's right. It's enabled us to be away for longer periods of time.

**Baker:** Okay.

**Henson:** So we keep in constant touch with them.

**Baker:** About how much of the time each year do you spend in each location? So, you live still at home in Gatlinburg, and then you also spend time in Florida in Ft. Myers, correct?

**Henson:** Well, we spend probably half the year in the mountains and half the year at the beach.

**Baker:** Okay, how long ago did you first start going to Florida?

**Henson:** We went tewe, we went to Florida, probably the second year we were married.

**Baker:** Okay.

**Henson:** Cause the first year, I was still working full-time in Nashville and Ed was living in Gatlinburg.

**Baker:**How long did you spend in Florida the first year?

**Henson:** Probably two or three weeks.

**Baker:**Why did you decide to go to Florida as opposed to the Carolinas or Georgia, and were you originally-you weren't living at Lexington when you went to visit, so how were you coming down?

**Henson:** No, we had friends that invited us to their home on Sanibel, and that's-and Ed had gone there for two or three years before we were married with them in January, so that continued.

**Baker:**Did you ever consider visiting anywhere else, or was it always just Ft. Myers because of your connection with your friends, you decided?

**Henson:** It was basically just that, because of the connection with our friends. And we weren't gone for a very long period of time.

**Baker:**How did you decide to eventually start time-sharing at the Lexington Country Club? When you were I guess it's not time-sharing, you were renting from-

**Henson:** No, we started out renting because our friends, he became very ill with Alzheimer's, and they sold their house and eventually he died. And we watched Lexington being built while we were still on Sanibel, and we decided that we would rent for a month, and see whether we liked it, we liked the people, and things like that. So, that's how we started out, it was just a trial test.

**Baker:**Did you-were there any other places that you had considered looking at? Or just Lexington seemed like it would be the best.

**Henson:** No, because it was only this because we'd watch it be built, and we looked at all the models every time they opened models. We just watched it as an outsider with binoculars. So we thought we knew what we were getting into and wanted to find out.

**Baker:**And the other thing-how did you find someone to rent from? How did that process work?

**Henson:** Well, initially, the first year, we went through the company that built Lexington, because they had not-they were still selling, and they were renting, and they were renting sold units, and they hadn't turned it over to the owners yet.

**Baker:** Oh, okay.

**Henson:** So we went through the realty office, and then thereafter, we rented directly from the owners.

**Baker:** And then you ended up eventually purchasing one of the condos.

**Henson:** Yep.

**Baker:** How long ago did you purchase the condo?

**Henson:** It will be three years on February 27th.

**Baker:** And how-what are some of the requirements for the community? It is obviously not a retirement community, but-

**Henson:** No, there is no requirement, so anybody can live here.

**Baker:** Anybody can live there, and if you purchased a home, do you have to also have a golf membership? Because it has a golf course, correct?

**Henson:** No, we have a golf course, we have a golf village and we have a lake village, and we live in the golf village cause we wanted to play golf.

**Baker:** So, if you belong to the community, do you also have to pay clubhouse dues in terms of – like for the social activities, is there a social activity fee? Or-

**Henson:** We-yes, you have quarterly fees that take care of running the: business because this is a huge business. And depending on what your housing type is, that determines your maintenance fees, but the running of the complex is shared equally by everybody, but your personal maintenance fees depends on the neighborhoods that you live in.

**Baker:** What are some of the other options for living there? You have a condo, but what else can you-

**Henson:** You can have condos, you can have villas, you can have carriage houses, you can have attached villas, detached villas, what they call estate homes.

**Baker:** What are some of the other activities that you can do, besides the golf course, what are some of the other things that are offered by the community?

**Henson:** Anything that you could think of in your wildest dreams. There are some people that participate a lot in planned activities, like oil painting and book clubs and

bridge, bus trips. There is a group going to see the King Tut exhibit in Miami or Lauderdale in a few days. The symphony, theater, it's basically whatever, they have very active golf and tennis, and it's-they have teams and leagues that compete with other areas in the community.

**Baker:** In terms of the demographic of the people that you kind of came into contact with there, what type of people do you meet? How old are they? Are they typically older, or are there young people?

**Henson:** I would say that the majority of people who live here are probably, 50 to-the average would be maybe 50 to 75. I am sure there is a lot older and there are some younger people, but we are seeing more baby boomers buying property.

**Baker:** So, you think that maybe it's as people reach a certain age, they have enough disposable income that they can kind of take advantage of that. Do you think that everyone you are friends with is in about the same income range, or do you think they -

**Henson:** No, that's why, well, that's why this community is as nice as it is, and the people are interesting, is because sometimes you get into communities, and they will attract similar types of people and that's fine, for some people. We like diversity, and that's one thing neat about this community, the diversity is tremendous. And when the community needs to have special committees, we have special projects where they need to spend money, they can find people from the diversified backgrounds that the committee actually has people on it who in their prior business, or if they still own their business, they had the expertise. In some communities, they have to [beep] everything, because they don't have any in-house volunteers expertise, and we're very fortunate at that. We have doctors and lawyers and people that were business owners that worked for big corporations. They owned their own business. School teachers, I mean, it's just 4% real mix. In our building, we have, well, we have a doctor, we have somebody that owns a printing company. We have somebody that worked with the FBI, we have a dentist. Just real mixes.

**Baker:** So you have a lot of different kind of people. And you were, in comparison to other places in the area, Lexington is a fairly reasonable place to live. I know that your property value has increased a lot since you-

**Henson:** It's gone berserker-

**Baker:** Since you've been there

**Henson:** In the last two or three years-

**Baker:** But in comparison to other places, I mean, realistically, it seems kind of, it seems like a more affordable place to live-

**Henson:** Well, the housing here now runs from, three, I would say 325,000 up to 800,000.

**Baker:** And then, when you first bought into the property, how much was it going for?

**Henson:** Across the board, I can't tell you that. I know that most of the property in the last couple years, well depending, the condos have doubled.

**Baker:** Doubled or so?

**Henson:** And the homes have gone up, well, you know, some of the homes have probably almost doubled.

**Baker:** Really?

**Henson:** Yeah, the whole community's close to doubled.

**Baker:** Well, cause it kind of gives a good indication of, you know, property costs, gives a good indication as to who can afford it and who would be coming in until-since it doesn't seem to be as expensive as other places, maybe that's why you guys have been lucky in terms of getting the people in that you have.

**Henson:** If our condo was on the-sitting on the Gulf of Mexico, it would probably be over a million dollars. I mean, not probably, it would be.

**Baker:** Well, I mean, I think the area is fine where you live. You are close to other activities, not just the ones in-

**Henson:** That's make us, we're very centrally located.

**Baker:** What are some of the things that you are located near?

**Henson:** We can at the beach in five minutes, we can be at Sanibel in fifteen minutes. We can be at the Mann Theater, which is where the symphony and Broadway shows and things like that are in five minutes. Shopping is ten or fifteen minutes, depending on where you are going. Downtown is about twenty minutes. I mean, actual downtown on the Caloosahatchee River.

**Baker:** So you're pretty much, you're close to everything. You talked about the different kinds of houses and stuff that you can own in the community. Do you find yourself, do you and Ed hang out mostly with the people in your building, or in the next couple buildings, or do you meet up with people that live in the carriage houses and the villas, or no?

**Henson:** Well, at social functions, it's a real mix, but our closest friends live in the-what our neighborhood is called is Waterford, and most of our friends live here.

**Baker:** The people that you hang out with, do you hang out with mostly couples or are there any single people that you hang out with?

**Henson:** Yeah, we have - we go out with couples and we also have friends here whose spouses have died recently or in the last couple years. In fact, we just had one of our good friend's husband dropped dead Saturday night. He had a seizure and died within forty minutes.

**Baker:** Who was this person who passed away? You didn't tell me about that.

**Henson:** John Fletcher. We used to play golf with him at 7:00 in the morning, and they live in our old building where we used to rent.

**Baker:** That's too bad. So you hang out with couples and with some single people? What are some of the things that you go and do with them? Like some of the activities? And do you always go with large groups or do you go sometime -

**Henson:** No, usually, well, if it's something going on here, that's different. Like pool parties for our neighborhood or whatever, but we have season symphony tickets with a couple that we go all the time with. We went to the art show down on the riverfront this weekend with another couple. We were at the beach this weekend. We were supposed to go to a concert at the Methodist church in downtown but things got criss-crossed and we ended up playing yesterday-it was such a beautiful day, we ended up playing golf at 4:15 in the afternoon, and then there was Super Bowl.

**Baker:** So there's a lot of options, like they aren't always physical activities, right?

**Henson:** No, last week, we were at the movies.

**Baker:** Do you-when you and Ed go out, do you ever go out alone? In terms of, you go with, for example, Leah, or whatever, do you guys go as "the girls," and go and do something? Like maybe go shopping, or do you always go as couples?

**Henson:** Well, pretty much, we go couples, but the girls do go shopping. But, pretty much, we go someplace where we can both go, cause we both are interested in the same kinds of things, so it just depends.

**Baker:** It makes sense to just go together.

**Henson:** Yeah.

**Baker:** Is there anything else that you want to let me know about living in the country club? Cause do you think it's kind of helped your social life--kept ;your social life pretty active, as an adult? Do you think you would be as active socially if you didn't have these people living so close to you?

**Henson:** Well, it's in such an active community, and everybody's out ;and about, and that's what we were talking about yesterday after John died. We were talking to the GERMAN here, and we were saying it seems like we've had quite a few deaths in the: last couple months. And he said yes, and then he says it goes in spurts. And it does. It's really been interesting, cause the people that have died in the last few months, they were all different kinds of things, and it's in many instances, when somebody dies and they haven't been sick or not very sick, it's kind of a shock, because everybody is so active. Where if these same people were in a climate-a cold climate-not in a socially active climate, they probably would have more health problems and they wouldn't live as long. People here, I mean it's hilarious, the one couple that we play golf with, he's in his 80s, and he's out on the golf course five days a week.

**Baker:** You mean Mo?

**Henson:** Yeah, and there's so many people here that are in their 80s, and you would never guess it, because they look like they are in their 60s because they are so active and they are so involved, and they're so involved with what's going on in the: world. And everybody, we're not doing anything, everybody's reading. I mean, everybody's up on everything, everybody is computer literate to some extent.

**Baker:** [laughter] Yeah, I know, Mo.

**Henson:** And if it's pouring down rain, you go to the movies. It's pouring down rain, you sit in – curl up in the living room and you read a book. Or you find two or three people and you play bridge, or you play Scrabble, or you know there-if you don't want to do anything, you can sit and hibernate. But if you want to be active, you can, and activity just breeds good health and good mental health.

**Baker:** I agree, I think that it's true, yeah it is. When I come to visit you and stuff, it's overwhelming how many people are active.

**Henson:** Older people here are more active than people my age that I know other places.

**Baker:** Do you think-you really think it's because of the weather o:r do you think it's just because of the community, like the specific community?

**Henson:** Well, it's both. With the environment, it plays off the environment. Yes, we've

had some cold days in January, but I'm sitting out on the lanai and I'm talking, I'm sitting on a lake and on the other side of the lake is the 13th fairway, and the whole time I've been yakking to you, the golf carts are just going down the fairway. And like tonight, we're going to, down to the beach for dinner, because my sister-in-law is getting ready to go home in a couple of days, and some folks want to say goodbye to here, so we're all going down there, and everybody cares about everybody. And the other day, when John died

unexpectedly, I was over there for an hour on Sunday morning, and everybody in that building, and everybody that had been in the building when we used to live in the building were all there, sitting around and talking and whatever. And you would have that at home as well, but just depending where you are, how close your friends are, would be what it would be. But it just depends.

**Baker:** Do you think that part of it too is that the fact that it's not a retirement community like a lot of them are in Florida, and the people still remain active in terms of work and things too, do you think that has a bit to do with it?

**Henson:** Well, and there's people here that are totally retired, and there are people here who their sons and or daughters are running their business, and they oversee it. They are not actively involved, but they're on the phone to them every couple days if need be.

**Baker:** So they keep busy?

**Henson:** And they have figured out how they can have the best of both worlds and go from there. And we might go a week and not see our neighbors, but then I could see four times-

**Baker:** In a couple-

**Henson:** In one day. So it just depends.

**Baker:** Well, do you have anything else that you would like to tell me about it? Cause I think you have done a pretty good job of covering everything.

**Henson:** You can call me back if you think of something.

**Baker:** I just have to again ask you if I have your permission to tape this conversation, and that you were aware of it.

**Henson:** Yes.

**Baker:** And I want to thank you very much for talking with me today

**Henson:** Okey dokey.