

"I made the worst mistake of my life," Alberta Fullem told herself repeatedly last fall. Her beloved husband of nearly 66 years had just passed away and she had listened to her family who encouraged her not to continue living home alone. She went along with the plans to move to New Horizons, in a nod to the efforts her children were making, but her heart was not encouraged by the move. "My husband and I had built a house to meet our needs, thinking we would live there for the rest of our lives. What did I do when he died? I up and left our home. Why did I move out?" She continued to be filled with lingering doubts about her decision, coupled with guilt and grief. Some of these thoughts she shared with friends, never wanting to concern her family. One of her friends, who had helped in caring for her husband, told her, "Mark my words; just give it a couple months and you'll be glad you're there."

Nevertheless, Alberta hoped that her house, now on the market, would not attract any visitors and she could still go home. She knew that she could live alone, but her concern was for being lonely. "My daughter advised me that it would not be healthy living alone. I would need to exercise my brain beyond talking only to people at the grocery store." She had hired home care support when she needed it for her husband; she considered that she could always do the same for herself, if necessary.

A new friend at New Horizons, who listened patiently to Alberta's repeated concerns, pointed out to her one day, "But, Alberta, you can go back to your house if that is what you really want." That made Alberta pause and realize that, to her surprise, she had established friends that she would really miss. "I am not an outgoing person; I tend to be rather shy. But the people at New Horizons are so kind, caring and friendly. If I moved back, I would be leaving them. How could I do that?"

So she stayed on into the winter, slowly warming to her new life. Her new apartment displayed selected pieces of art and furniture from her home, all intending to breathe familiarity into her days and a strong sense of belonging. She tried to recreate some of the routines she and her husband had enjoyed together. Afternoon tea with cookies was one of those events. "I went to my room to make tea and realized that I did not have to be alone. I can go downstairs to the French Village Café where I can have tea and be with friends! That is what I do now."

Over the Christmas holiday, Alberta stayed at her son's home and enjoyed the cheer of being with family. "But after that time away, I returned to my apartment at New Horizons and really felt that this was home!" She remembers her friend's prediction and smiles. "I apologized to my daughter for giving her a hard time," she confesses. She is sure of her decision now.

"Sometimes I want to be alone, and I can have my space, too. New Horizons gives me opportunities that I could not have living back in the house. I have exercise classes and friends to walk with. I rediscovered that I could knit! I never would have started that again living at home. I go on trips and read to children at school; I enjoy piano concerts, too. I am Catholic and attending Mass is very important to me; I can walk into the sanctuary whenever I feel the need and it is so comforting."

Alberta has become a resident ambassador for New Horizons. She is pleased to greet others who are now considering the choice she made. "I met a woman who was worried that she wouldn't know anyone and I told her, 'You come and you'll see.' Her daughter thanked me yesterday because her mother is going to move in!"

Alberta Fullem, Charlton