

Interview with Education Staff of the Willowbrook State School by
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Collections.

JAMES KASER: Well, the natural place for us to start is for me to have each of you go around and talk about how you came to work at Willowbrook, and how long you worked at Willowbrook. And if you don't know the exact dates, that's fine. We can fill that in later, as I said, on the transcript, but if you have some idea.

JOSEPH MARKOWSKI: You were there before I was.

MARIE MARKOWSKI: I started in 1970.

JM: You've got to project. [Laughter]

MM: I started in 1970, and I worked until 1975.

JK: So, one of the things about doing the group recording, and this has suddenly dawned on me, of course—

JM: Have to identify yourself.

JK: Is that, yeah, it might seem tedious, but we just have to do it, since it's a group of people. So, Marie was saying that she started working here in the 1970s, and what about—?

ANTOINETTE SANSEVERO: Toni.

JM: Toni.

AS: I started working here as a teacher assistant, when I was going to college, in the summers.

JK: Oh, okay.

AS: So, I started in 1968.

JK: Oh, great.

THOMAS SANSEVERO: Tom Sansevero. I worked at the PX, a store that they used to call a PX. Residents used to come with cards as spending

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money to get food, to get clothes. I was a summertime employee as I was going to college there. I worked side-by-side with residents. We scooped ice cream together and it was quite busy. It was a little facility but it was quite busy, because on Saturdays and Sundays a lot of the parents did come and visit, and the kids would come with the attendants. So that's when I started, around 1969, I would say. And then I became a teacher assistant. I went to the College of Staten Island, it was Staten Island Community College at that time, and worked as a teacher assistant, and then became a teacher, around 1974.

JK: Okay, all right.

WILLIAM ROBERTS: Bill Roberts. I actually started the at the same place, in the PX. It was the summer of 1965, between my junior and senior year in high school. Did the same thing, worked the ice cream section. The first day there—actually, it was Tom's brother who was the manager—he sent me down to the end, and said, "Just go down there, and you'll learn what to do in the ice cream section." So I spent the whole day down there, learning milkshakes, ice cream sundaes, the whole deal. Didn't find out until the end of the day, that the person training me was a resident of the institution. [Laughter] It just shows, at that point, the higher functioning and capabilities of people who were residents here. They worked in the store and at other places throughout the school.

Then after I finished high school I worked in the recreation department for a summer, which is separate from the education department. I had contact with residents, taking them out, just different activities either in the building, or on the grounds. Then,

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after the service, I came back to work as an attendant part-time while I also went to the College of Staten Island and finished work toward my degree there. Then, in 1972, I became a teacher assistant in the Education Department, and stayed there until December of 1978, when I left.

So, I did a lot of different things, and had family connections there. My father ran the Radiation Department, he was the senior x-ray technician. He started here in 1956. Both my sisters worked here. One worked in the baby buildings as an attendant. My other sister worked in the administrative offices. My mother was also in charge of housekeeping for a number of years. So we had quite a connection to Willowbrook.

JK: Interesting.

JEAN ROBERTS: I don't have all of that, so. [Laughter] Jean Roberts. I moved from Ohio after college. I had jobs in upstate New York, and I worked with special needs adults and children, two different places. But I kept looking in *The New York Times* for jobs that would bring me closer to the city. That's where I wanted to be. So I saw this ad for Willowbrook State School, had never heard of it before, but I came for an interview. And after that interview, I did get the job.

So, I started here in January of 1972, so I was here just under three years in the Education Department. My background was as a teacher, a special education teacher, and I worked in three different buildings while I was here, which I am always grateful for, because being in education for, well, many years after, I feel like this was—it taught me so much, that nothing's impossible.

JK: Interesting.

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JM: You go first.

MM: I'm Marie Markowski. I started in 1970 as a teacher's assistant. My neighbor actually worked here in the administration office, and she had said they had jobs in the Education Department. So, then I applied and I got a job as a teacher assistant. And I worked at what they called the Baby Unit in the back, with the younger residents. And I worked, actually, along the same time frame as Tom, because I would go to school at night to finish my degree. I think we both graduated together from Richmond College at the time. And then I taught for a year, and then I left in 1975.

JK: I see, okay.

JM: And I need to apologize, because I didn't check my resume or history. So, I have no idea of dates.

MM: That's Joseph saying that.

JM: This is Joseph, Joe. Joseph is so—[Laughter]. I like the name, but.

JK: That's okay, we can fill in the dates later.

JM: Right. My wife was working here at the time. Let's see; were we living across from you at the time? I don't even remember.

TS: I think I was—do you know?

AS: You were there; I think we came a little bit after you.

JM: Oh, okay. Well, we actually lived across from each other in Westlake.

AS: You started in '77.

JM: And I think my wife made the suggestion because I had gone to school to be a teacher, but never was really teaching, so she suggested I apply for a job. I did, was accepted as a teacher assistant, and came day one, and then went home that night and said, "I'm not going back there again." [Laughter] It's not the kind of teaching they tell you

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about in college and prepare you for. And I worked in one of the outbuildings, Building 13. Was it 13?

MM: Ten.

WR: Ten.

JM: I worked in 10, right.

MM: In cerebral palsy.

JM: Right, cerebral palsy, down in the cellar that you access through the laundry room. Worked there a few years, then went to Building 3, eventually became a teacher, eventually became the Science teacher. And then I was there nine years before I finally moved on, and wound up going, I guess, to the city, for the big bucks. [Laughter]

JK: Well, you touched on something that I did want to get people's reaction to, which was, it sounds like a lot of you were from Staten Island?

MM: Right.

JK: And so before you got jobs here, you would have had perhaps some awareness of Willowbrook. But I also want to go back even further, and this might be through family members talking about this. But obviously even though this campus was initially planned and created as Willowbrook, it was, during World War II, Halloran General Hospital.

WR: Yes.

JM: Right.

JK: Did any of your family members ever talk about that?

JR: No.

JK: Yours, Tom?

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TM: Tom. My dad was in World War II for six years, and he talked about Halloran Hospital. We lived on Staten Island all our lives. He lived on Staten Island all his life. I don't remember too much about what he used to say about it, but certainly he used to talk about it.

JK: Yeah, it was a very big facility, and a lot of people on Staten Island volunteered at Halloran to improve troop morale. They'd have dances, and that kind of thing. I was just curious if anyone, any family members had ever talked about that? So, that was probably part of your impression of the place, then, that it had been Halloran. Your first awareness of it was as Willowbrook?

AM: Right.

JR: Right, correct.

JK: And as we know, people's attitude towards the developmentally disabled have changed and improved, in many cases, but I'm guessing—I mean, what would you say about your impressions of Willowbrook before you actually started working here, if you have anything to say, if anyone has anything to say about that?

JM: This is Joe. Before I started working here, I really, I didn't have any negative impression of it. I thought it was a school for people that needed some kind of support. I really didn't think otherwise about it.

JK: Okay.

AS: Same.

JR: I had no awareness until I addressed the ad in the paper that said that there was a job opening for a teacher at Willowbrook, so I addressed it. My first time coming and ever hearing of it, you know, was then.

JK: Right, mm-hm.

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WR: This is Bill. There were negative impressions out there. Growing up nearby, it could be referenced in a negative way, one person to another, just guys and kids kind of going back and forth and saying things to each other. Like, “You belong in Willowbrook,” or something like that, in a negative way. That’s the kind of perception that was out there. My knowledge through my dad was significantly different because of the service that he provided here, the help that he gave—and I had come here a few times just to kind of hang out and visit and see what was going on. So, you know, I had a different impression of it.

TS: This is Tom. I remember this was a place with kids, kids who went to it if they were retarded. And people, kids, were put into this type of an institution much more readily, obviously, than today. So, there was an acceptance of the fact that if you had a child who had retardation, this was the place where they were going to come and live.

JK: Okay.

WR: In many cases—Bill again—that was, in some cases, that was a decision made at birth, especially with, like, the children with Down syndrome, where the choice would be given to the parents right there, immediately after birth, because Down syndrome was identified so readily. And common language would be for the doctors to tell the parents, “You don’t have to keep this child. We can do this.” And Willowbrook was the option for it. So there was a significant number of Down syndrome children that were residents here. Others were placed later on, depending on when their developmental disabilities manifested themselves, at whatever age.

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So and again, a lot of them were here that shouldn't have been here. A lot of them were misplaced in being here. It just became such an easy thing to do that we had a lot of residents here who didn't belong.

JR: I was thinking cerebral palsy. I know Toni you worked with a lot of the children; so did Tom, with cerebral palsy. And I'm thinking, today we know so much more, just because the speech might have been off, not easily understood.

xx: Right, right.

JR: But some would be very bright people. So it just is such a misunderstanding, and just not knowledge of what they could actually do.

JK: Right, yeah. So, getting—I guess, sort of picking up again on what the place was like as a physical place when you were first coming here, you, Joe, seemed to have not such a great first day, for instance. [Laughter] And I was wondering—

JM: Putting it mildly, yes.

MM: Not at all.

JK: —if you had some things to say about that?

JM: I don't know how much detail you want to get into on this, [laughter] but the entrance to the building, like I said, you came to the front steps and there were steps down into the cellar, and when you walked down the left series of steps you had walk through the laundry room. And the laundry room was piled full of dirty, feces-covered—

TS: Soiled.

JM: —soil, we used to call it soiled at the time.

TS: Soiled.

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AS: Soiled clothes.

JM: And it smelled like nothing I had ever smelled in my entire life. And after going through that room, down this long hallway, and then at the end of the hallway there was a classroom on one side, and I think Occupational Therapy, they used to call it, on the other side. And you walk into a room and there's all these kids in wheelchairs, and crazy carts—

AS: Cripple carts.

TS: Cripple carts.

JM: —cripple carts, we used to call them cripple carts.

WR: Cripple carts, we used to call them cripple carts.

JM: And again, it's nothing that I was expecting or prepared for.

MM: And then—this is Marie—we were just married at the time. So, he came home and he goes, “That's it! I can't go back.” And I said to him, “You are going back, because you are in one of the best classes.” [Laughter] “You have the brightest kids, I think,” because he was working with the cerebral palsy children. So I said to him, “You have one of the best groups,” I said. He said, “I don't know,” he said. I said, “Yes, you will go back.” [Laughs]

JM: And this is Joe, and I came to realize that after a while. These were kids that were highly verbal. They would joke with you. I mean, you could joke with them. Over time, that changed. But you asked for the initial impression.

JK: Right.

MM: Right.

JM: The initial impression was, “Wow, this is not nice.”

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JK: I'm curious if other people had an initial reaction? Now, some of you, of course, the ones who were working in the PX, that was a very different kind of experience. But eventually you would have been exposed to other parts of Willowbrook.

TS: This is Tom. There was a difference between the outbuildings and the education building. The education building here was called Building 3, and I don't know how familiar you are, but that was like a school. It was pristine compared to the other places. It was chalkboards, and bulletin boards, and beautiful windows, and a nice facility.

AS: Decorated.

TS: Yes, and there were about 100 teachers employed at Willowbrook, at the time we're talking about, in those early 1970s, doing a great job with a huge population of kids with disabilities. The outlying buildings, and a number of us were teachers in the out buildings—was—it was dirty. It was smelly. It was dark. You were down in a dungeon. It was not the same. And you had to put that into some kind of a context and live with it, and work with it, you know. It was difficult.

JM: Right. This is Joe. I mean, when they left the classroom and you brought the kids back up to the ward, it was—

MM: Despicable out there. [?]

JM: —not a pretty place. I mean, there were bodies all over the place, and it was, the smell, and it just.

MM: Rocking, sitting there rocking and crying.

JM: Right, sit there and watch kids just rocking for hours on end, many of them with a limited amount of clothing.

AS: Because there was nothing for them to do.

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JR: Right.

JM: Yeah.

MM: There was a TV—this is Marie. There would be a TV on. I worked up in the baby unit, which was a building that connected about, I think, five resident buildings. And of course, the classrooms were beautiful. But a lot of times, if someone had to bring them back to the ward and the conditions there were better than some of the outbuildings, but still not great. And like I said, there would be a TV on, and just kids sitting around with no stimulation whatsoever. The only stimulation they got was in the classrooms, or with the Recreation Department, when they did things.

WR: This is Bill. The buildings, they mirrored the classification categories, which at that time were borderline, mild, severe, and profound. [Phone rings] Oh, excuse me. And of the borderline and mild, the level of functioning was higher among the residents, so the buildings were better-kept, and more pleasant places to be. But then when you got to the severe and profound, those were real challenging individuals to be with, and it was reflected in the condition of the buildings. There just wasn't a sense of [sighs], I guess, I don't want to say pride, but just the people employed in those buildings, they just did what was necessary. They maintained them.

As the functioning level got a little bit higher, the people working with them were more engaged, because, like Joe said, you get responses, you know. If it wasn't verbal, at least you'd get smiles. You'd get, eyes would light. So, there became more of a connection; you wanted to do more in those other buildings. And specifically,

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those are the ones that became newsworthy in the early '70s, that the conditions there were very, very difficult.

JM: Oh, yeah, bleak.

JR: I remember my first day.

TS: Who. Jean, identify—

JR: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Jean. [Laughs]

WR: You certainly are.

JR: My first day on the job I was taking over for somebody who left to get his doctorate, so temporary time away from the classroom. So, his classroom was in an outbuilding, and it was Building 77. And it was all little boys, and quite active little boys. And I had anywhere between 10 and 12 on a given day. Most of the time, at least on a piece of paper I had a teacher assistant, but she was mostly pulled for trips and things that were going on with the school. So most days it was me with them. So I thought, "I have to teach them how to sit." Sit at a chair, that was number one.

But the thing that really caught my eye was that I really had no supplies. So, like you were saying, Building 3 had a lot of supplies, beautiful supplies, and very generous with those supplies for all teachers and teacher assistants. But in the outbuilding, I needed—after that first day of going in and realizing that I don't have anything to use, but I sure needed a lot of stuff, So you know, you really had to go out and purchase it. But Mrs. Glasser, who was there.

JM: The director.

AS: She headed up the Education Department.

JR: She was in charge, and she came to visit one day when I was there. I was the new teacher and she came to see what I was doing. And so

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then I had supplies that I had bought, and everything. And I had a little easel that I was teaching the kids, and she came in and she goes, “Oh!” She was surprised that I was teaching the children in that outbuilding. So, I said, “Yeah.” I said, “But these things weren’t here.” She says, “I’m going to work on that. I’m going to make sure the teachers have these supplies.” So, I don’t know how that worked for other buildings, and that, but she recognized that maybe these kids can learn. They were low-functioning, they absolutely were, but, you know.

JK: It may have had something to do with the fact that you were engaged, that you had—if she had shown up and you were maybe not as engaged, do you think she would have—?

JR: Yeah, well, the thing is, I went home after the first couple of weeks and cried, because I said—like you, Joe—I thought, “I’m not sure if I can go back, because I don’t think I learned any of this,” or, “I was not prepared for this situation in school.” Certainly, there were no guidelines for this, what to do, what direction to take. So after a couple of weeks of going home crying, I said, “You’ve either got to get in there and do it, do it right, or you look for something else.” So, I had these conversations in my mind, and I decided to go back in and get something done.

JK: If I understood correctly, you had already worked in another setting.

JR: Mm-hm.

JK: Can you make any comparisons, or not?

JR: Well, it was very—I worked with adults in one setting and I worked with children in another setting. The children, that was called Rainbow Camp, and it had taken children from the inner city, and they

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had all behavior issues. So, that was the challenge there. But they weren't low-functioning.

MM: Were they living at home, or were they institutionalized?

JR: They lived at home, but not at the time I was there. So they were away at this camp to, you know, learn some skills, learn some behaviors, more appropriate behaviors, so they stayed there. They did stay there for a time. And then the other place that I was working at the same time was a residential place, and it was adults with schizophrenia, all adults. So it was a residence, and I was the housemother.

JK: I see.

JR: So, very different situations from coming to Willowbrook. But for me, I wanted to teach in a classroom, so that's what I got.

JK: Because you created a classroom. [Laughter] Do other people have comments about that?

AS: Well—Toni—I started at Willowbrook as a teacher assistant in the summers, and then when I graduated I became—I went back as a teacher. I liked my experience as a teacher assistant at Willowbrook. I enjoyed working with the kids, so at college I majored in Special Education and Early Childhood as a way to be involved with those special needs children.

JK: And as a teacher assistant, what population were you dealing with?

AS: I was dealing with different groups of children.

JK: I see, I see. Okay.

AS: Yeah, it was no—it wasn't cerebral palsy, or anything, so. The children I had when I was a teacher assistant were children whose parents—Willowbrook got overcrowded, and the only way that you

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could get into Willowbrook was to sign the child into a study. So I worked in the Medical Building, and those children were—parents signed those children in to do observation on them, to do testing on them. They were given—weren't they given shots, and stuff like that, and tests?

JR: Different kinds of tests.

WR: They studied hepatitis, I think, and things like that.

AS: And studied hepatitis and different diseases. So, those were the kind of kids I had at the beginning when I was a teacher assistant. Then when I became a teacher, then I had severely mentally retarded children, which was difficult, because I was in the outbuildings, too. And all those classrooms were in the basement. But the children that went back to the wards had nothing to do. It was a big room. All they did was walk around it or sit in the corner and rock, and the TV was on all the time, but there was no stimulation for the children. The only stimulation they had was the education.

JK: During the education part of their day?.

AS: Right.

JK: So, all of you worked here for at least a couple of years?

JR: Yeah.

JK: And so, and a number of you mentioned being in college at the time, and so you were studying education, one guesses. And a couple of you have touched on this, but was there much of a sense of what one would study to prepare to work in this kind of setting as a teacher?

AS: Yeah.

MM: Well they did have—this is Marie—I had Special Ed classes.

AS: Special Ed classes, yeah.

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MM: At CSI at the time, and Richmond College, you couldn't get a degree in education, I don't believe. You had to do—

JM: You had to have a major.

MM: You had to have a major. So, my major was Psychology-Sociology, but all my minor credits were in Education and Special Education. So, like, you had that broad—

JM: And she still married me. [Laughs]

MM: —background of that. And Tom was—

TS: I majored in English when I was at Richmond, and then minored in Education, yeah. When you talk about the Special Education component, you did not have the type of classes they have now when you get into Special Education. It was very new. It was a very new field, and I had to learn as I went along. I don't know how everybody else felt about that, but I think Toni, your preparation was a little better than some?

AS: Yes. I got my degree in Special Ed.

JK: I see.

AS: So my college had a lot of classes that I had to take, so I was prepared.

JK: Are there other people who want to comment on that? What sort of preparation that you got, either as theory or practice, to prepare you to work in this setting?

JR: Well, I was also in Special Education in college. I started out in Psychology, then I decided to major in Special Education. It was new at that time, late '60s, early '70s. So, I was able to visit a lot of schools and take part in some of the programs. That was a big part of the college experience, so you would have an idea of what that was like, whether it was hearing impaired, multiple disabilities, a lot of

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different experiences like that. I thought that was a good experience, which it was. The information was great, but it did not prepare me for my first time at Willowbrook; it really did not.

But I have to say, throughout that experience, it prepared me for when I moved to New Jersey and I taught in a public school, and I was in my school district, I started when it was the second year with students who had multiple disabilities. And I thought, "I can do this. I can do this because of the Willowbrook experience." Yeah.

WR: This is Bill again. Prior to, I think it was 1974, when the federal law came out mandating an appropriate public education for all children. At that point I think it was 5 to 18. Prior to that, there was no mandate. A lot of the children here weren't in the education program because of their level of functioning. But also prior to that law, there was no requirement for teachers to be certified even as a teacher, to have education. I mean, as long as you had a degree you could come in, but we had a lot of teachers who were working toward their doctorates, who were working toward their law degrees. But there was no mandate for that, there was no requirement until after that law passed. And then you did have to have that Special Education certification in order to teach here. So, initially it was, not only wasn't there sufficient preparation, but even once you were here, it was mostly on the job.

MM: On the job training.

WR: We really didn't have—public schools now have workshops and training that you go to to keep you updated, and I don't think we did any of that here.

JR: No.

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WR: We just came in and went to our classrooms and did the best that we could.

TS: You attended—this is Tom—you attended things on your own. Like, I can remember going into New York City to a conference on learning disabilities. How the learning disabilities were presented in that conference in New York City were very different from what we were experiencing in our classroom on a day-to-day basis. It was the leading edge of public education, of kids with disabilities getting into public education, and learning how to deal with reading disabilities, math disabilities, the type of things that you see typically in a public school, not the type of things that you saw when you were dealing with profound retardation.

MM: This is Marie. And a lot of times, I mean, you always didn't have a perfect day. Some of these children lashed out. I mean, he had a cabinet thrown at him. Some days you went into that class and it was very rough. It was very rough to try and control the children, depending on the students that you had. I was fortunate that the children were smaller than me, but you still, they had such strength, and any little thing could set them off, and then, of course, set off the whole class. So you didn't always have such great days.

JK: No.

MM: And some days were pretty difficult.

JK: I mean, there were a hundred teachers, I think?

MM: Yeah, something like that.

TS: At least, 110, 110 teachers.

JK: Was there a network? Obviously, this gathering is evidence of the fact that there was some network of support for each other.

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MM: Mm-hm.

JR: Yeah, definitely.

JK: But I guess that wasn't, it wasn't anything that was a formal thing?
Was it just something that happened?

AS: Well, they did, though. They had teachers' meetings and stuff, didn't we?

TS: We met with our supervisors.

AS: Right, yeah.

TS: We met as a collection of—Tom—maybe, I forget how many teachers were responsible to a supervisor, maybe a dozen. Does that sound about right?

AS: That's about right.

JR: Mm-hm.

TS: And we used to have monthly meetings, and we used to talk about what we were doing. And I think that the Education Program was a very positive thing, especially when you look at the rest of the institution. And so when Geraldo Rivera came to do his investigative reporting, I know I felt that he was being one-sided, and he was definitely not being fair to a lot of the positive things that were taking place in the institution around that time. In hindsight, looking at everything that was going on globally in the institution, it needed to be done, and they needed to break up the institution. But at the time we really were feeling that we were being overlooked, that the positive things that were happening with the kids at Willowbrook were not even being touched upon.

JK: Actually, I want to point out that one of the reasons why I like doing these oral histories is to broaden the number of voices who talk about

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what Willowbrook was like, because the scandal part of it is what people know about.

MM: Right.

JK: And any institution had to be more complex than that.

JM: Mm-hm.

JK: And so, that's why I'm always eager to talk with people who can talk about what their experiences were, and can point out some of the positive things. So I'm glad to be able to record that for posterity.

WR: This is Bill, and there were a lot of them. I think that we were all in our 20s, so young and energetic, and there was a lot of camaraderie where we did things together outside. We had softball teams, we had things that we did—

AS: Holiday get-togethers.

WR: —after school, where it was a lot of bonding. And I think that if there was maybe 110 teachers, I think total in the Education Department was well over 200, if you included all of the teacher assistants. So it was—and most of us were in our mid- to upper-20s. There were a few older teachers. But I think that there was a lot of camaraderie, and I think we just had a sense of what we were into, and looked to support one another in what we did. We knew that the jobs were difficult, but we looked to balance it with a good social life and have fun and interact with each other, and it helped.

MM: This is Marie again, and also we would do the shows together.

WR: Yes.

MM: We put on talent shows, which included the staff and the children.

WR: And the children.

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MM: And the residents. We took them on trips. They went on a lot of trips. We would take them out of the building. So you were with other teachers, other classes. So we did have a lot of—

JM: And I think those trips kind of mirrored the overall public impression of the type of child we had there, because when we started rolling those wheelchairs off the buses, some of them wouldn't—

WR: Got looks.

JM: You got everybody's attention.

WR: Oh, yeah.

JR: Right.

JM: Because again, remember, they had been locked away and hidden from public view for so many years, even when you went to a zoo, or to a show, or went to Radio City, wherever we went, we got their attention.

MM: Yeah, and this is Marie again. I mean, you're talking early '70s, so people weren't exposed to special education the way they are today.

JK: Sure, right.

MM: Where there's whole schools, and things like that. I mean, when we took them on trips, people got quite nervous.

JM: Right, and this is Joe. And it ties back to what Tom said earlier, the general view of how you handle a condition like that was you institutionalized them. That was the good, normal thing to do. And then, when they started sneaking out every now and then, ooh.

AS: And this is Toni. There was no public education for special—there was very—

MM: Right, none.

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AS: —little public education for special needs children. I mean, public school did not have special needs classrooms at all.

WR: Not at that time.

AS: So parents didn't know how to handle their special needs child, so that's why a lot of them did institutionalize them in Willowbrook.

WR: This is Bill. What happened is the fact that they were institutionalized, that led to false and incorrect assumptions about predictability, so that when a doctor would say, "A child with Down syndrome, there's no capability, so you might as well put them in the institution." And then in the institution they would become institutionalized, as Toni's described it: no stimulation, no support, nothing to really get out what they were capable of. Fast-forward to the later '70s and '80s, and now you have children with Down syndrome, multiple disabilities classes in the public schools, they're reading, they're writing, they're developing much more appropriate social skills. So, the environment clearly did have an impact on where they would go.

Go back to probably the 1950s, there was—the Civil Service Employees' Association was the representative union for all of the people who worked at Willowbrook. And every year they would do a gala at the Waldorf Astoria as a fundraiser. And one of the main attractions were a group of residents would be brought to sing, dance, play instruments. I mean, there was some significant talent here, some through the autistic spectrum, savant level, where, you know, what they were capable of doing.

TS: That's true.

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WR: But a lot of other things, Marie referenced the shows that we would put on, and initially it was each teacher would have their own class prepare for a presentation, and they would get out, they would sing, dance, do whatever. But then as we started the decline of the institution, the kids weren't capable of it, but we still did the shows. When the teachers and the teacher assistants did them, we put on *The Wizard of Oz*, and we did it on the stage in the auditorium. We took it to the baby buildings. We traveled around. We used to stay after school, come in on Saturdays, and learn our parts and do that.

I think that those were examples of how we became engaged in the process, and wanted to do whatever we could. Maybe some of it was self-serving, because we wanted it to be interesting and engaging for ourselves as part of our job, but we had kids that responded to it and that could participate at that level, and we just wanted to continue to do it for them.

MM: Well, so speaking of collaboration, that project that Joe did with Science and Woodshop, that involved a lot of people, and that went on for over a year, correct?

JM: A few years.

TS: A few years, yeah.

JM: Hey, we got to eat the veggies. That's good stuff.

TS: That's right.

MM: Grew vegetables, they built the log cabin, they cut down the trees.

Did you cut—?

TS: Oh, yeah, they took them—

MM: They cut down the trees.

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JM: You might have to edit that out. I don't know if we're legally allowed to. [Laughter] We found trees.

MM: That were dead.

JM: Right. Well, they weren't dead when we found them.

TS: We have a lot of acreage here to choose from. We took groups of kids out into the woods and came back with logs that were, we built a log cabin.

JM: Mm-hm.

JR: I had a student in my class that ended up graduating into your programs, Joseph. I don't know if, can I say the name?

AS: Yeah.

JR: Jose.

JM: Good, okay.

JR: But when I was given my list of names of children in my—some of them were a little bit older, so I can say young adults in my program, it was all under-20 IQ. So, That's not even on a list that I studied in school, I don't think, to be able to work with. But the one, as I found out, he was quite capable of more, and ended up graduating to Joe's classes. He flourished. So given the opportunity, that's what made the difference! It made the difference for him, and I think just throughout there were opportunities like that to discover what somebody really could do, rather than sit, watch TV, or that. But when given that opportunity, you see, oh my goodness! That wasn't an under-20 IQ at all. You could see that there was so much more.

JK: Of course, that was very motivating, and touches on this issue about our understanding of what having a certain IQ meant, and the impact

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of institutionalization and how that can be counteracted. But, I was sort of curious—the institution itself is, it's a big place.

AS: Oh, it's huge.

JK: And all of you were just in the Education Program.

MM: Right, right.

JK: So, I was wondering if you have any observations about other facets of the institution? I know that there was something called, like, a recreation program?

AS: They worked with us.

JK: So, what was the relationship between recreation and education? Does anyone have any comments about that?

MM: Again, I worked up in the Baby Unit, and we had our classes, and the Recreation Department was separate. It wasn't part of Education; it was separate. But they would come and take some of the kids out of the classes, and work with them. We had a big rotunda up there, and they would take them out and do exercises with them and things like that. But I can't remember too much exactly what they did, but.

WR: Yeah, I worked a summer, and then part-time while I was going to school, in the Recreation Department. And the reason I was able to work part-time was because they wanted you there in the evenings. So we would kind of pick up from when the school day ended and do things for them in the evenings, and also on the weekends. That's where they were supposed to function. Not really a great connection with the Education Department. I mean, where it was a plan, there might be interaction where people just got along and did things together, but not that it was planned specifically for that to occur. There was also a separate Occupational Therapy Department.

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JR: Right.

WR: The Occupational Therapy Department goes back to before the mandate for education. The resident population that were not thought to be able to benefit from the Education Program, were put into Occupational Therapy. They would learn to sew, they would learn to make things, and whatever was going on. Usually each of the outbuildings had a room with an occupational therapist, or several, that worked there and provided a service for them as well.

JM: Bridgette had them sewing for years.

MM: That was Education.

WR: That was in Education, yeah.

MM: She was in the Education Department.

JM: Education Department.

MM: But Occupational Therapy, maybe that's what I'm thinking about when they took them out, because they used to work with a lot of hand-eye coordination, things like that, too.

AS: They had a Home Ec. room, too.

TS: That's right.

AS: And they had the kids come in and cook, and taught them how to make different things, so.

WR: This is Bill. There would be, like, comparable to, like, the specials that teachers have in public schools today, where kids would go to library, gym, and computer lab, where in the Building 3, in the Education Building, this wasn't in the outbuildings as much, but there was a woodshop. Science was one of them. There was a woodshop, there was a sewing class, there was a the Home Ec. room. There was also ERE, which was an electronic reading laboratory.

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TS: Oh, yeah.

JR: Yeah, I remember that.

TS: That the higher-functioning kids would go to, to learn how to read.

AS: I can remember that.

JR: And Thomas.

TS: So, these were other services. Now, technically there was a Phys Ed. Teacher. The Phys Ed. teacher, the Music teacher, Art, we had art as well.

AS: And Gym.

TS: Those were in the Education Building, but they also had those who traveled, and went around to the classes in the outbuilding to go in and provide services there, as well. So, it was more, I guess, than what you would think an institution would have.

JM: But it got lost in the shuffle.

WR: It did. It did.

TS: Tom again. The outbuildings again were different. We worked in Building 2 together. I was an assistant; Toni was a teacher. Each outbuilding kind of was like its own institution, a little mini-institution. And so I can remember the dietary staff—my aunt actually worked in dietary. I can remember them preparing meals for the kids. I can remember when we would bring a kid back into the ward. There were attendants who had a line of about 40 kids, that they would start at one end, and they would have to change them and wash them.

AS: Shower.

TS: And make sure they ate. And by the time they got to the other end, they had to turn around and come back. It was a very difficult

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situation. They had their own coping mechanisms. Scotch and milk was one of them. [Laughs]

MM: Maybe not everybody.

TS: It wasn't easy, but it was memorable, in that we did take care of kids, and we did care about kids, and we did take them out. Most of us took kids home, had dinners with them, had lunches with them. You got to love kids; you have to care for kids. It was an interesting thing that obviously has stayed with us for 40 or 50 years. It's been something that's had a profound effect on us.

JK: I was sort of curious about, so when you were talking about occupational therapy, you're talking about specific kinds of things like sewing and woodshop, and so forth. And I was wondering about when you were teaching in a classroom setting, what was it that you were teaching? What kinds of things did you do with the students in that setting?

MM: This is Marie. We did a lot of sensory material. Again, I worked with the younger children. You did such basic, basic academics. You started at the very lowest level. Obviously we didn't teach reading and things like that. A lot of it was sensory-based, and more, at least with the classrooms I worked in.

JM: This is Joe. In Science we did basic science. As each season was came we would think about the elements of a particular season. We had lots of creature in the Science room. We had mice, and gerbils, and hamsters, and snakes.

MM: Birds.

JH: That crazy kid who brought me that snapping turtle. [Laughter] I don't know what they thought I was going to be able to do with that. And

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then do you remember the day they announced over the loudspeaker that the snake had escaped and was down the hallway, and I had to go running down to catch the snake. [Laughter] We did a lot of things like that. And then again, a lot of it was also preparation for the outdoor activities, because it was good to be able to get out of the classroom. So we would go on a lot of walks to the woods when we were scouting out trees, or when we were preparing the garden to plant, and like that. So, honestly I think it was more of a—I tried to be a little traditional science-type thing, just at a basic level.

WR: When I first started as a teacher assistant in Building 3, the Education Building, we had pretty high-functioning students. I remember doing math sheets with them, and reading with them. We had older students, probably early teenage, mid-teenage years that I was working with, but they had those capabilities. So a good portion of the day we did some significant academics with them. That was with—those in the Education Program in that building fell into that borderline and mild category, so there were a lot more capabilities there. When I was in the outer buildings, no. And again, you're doing sensory stuff. You're doing daily living skills, things like that where you would teach them how to button, how to snap. You're going back to working with infants.

JW: Colors, you did colors and things like that.

WR: Yeah.

JM: Right, this is Joe. Even towards the end, when they weren't doing Science anymore or anything like that, we worked into basic skills, because as the more skilled children were moved out of the institution,

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as they started de-institutionalizing the place, we were left with kids who were really...well, the outbuildings started coming in.

WR: Exactly.

JR: I know for myself—oh, I'm sorry, Jean. When I planned the lessons for the day, it was life skills plus whatever skills the students were able to learn. And just like in any other classroom anywhere, the kids were at different levels. You'd have those who could maybe learn some words, read some words. And those who couldn't? They could recognize pictures; what is this? So it was a lot of communication skills. I think probably throughout the entire day, you're thinking about communication skills, appropriate back-and-forth, the rules to follow. But pictures, some words, and a lot of hand-over-hand to, maybe you're going to learn your name, maybe write your name.

So it's a lot of hand-over-hand to learn some skills. You do it often, do it every day, until they can become a little more independent. But it was a variety of things, life skills. Like, you have a snack time, and now you're going to focus on eating appropriately. Use your napkin. You're going to wipe your mouth. Maybe you're going to take a mirror so they could see it. Just things like that, but always that variety in any classroom that some can do those things, some can do these, and it's just, try and provide for that.

JK: And how long were you working? So, during the course of a regular workday, were you seeing your one group of students throughout that whole workday?

JR: Mm-hm.

TS: Mm-hm.

AS: Yeah, we did.

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JK: What was your exposure time? How long were you with them?

AS: 8:30 to 3.

MM: 8:30 to 3.

MM: And then they go back for lunch.

JR: Regular.

JM: Right.

MM: They had to go back to the wards for lunch.

AS: Right.

JM: So we could have lunch. [Laughs]

AS: And then we'd have lunch, yeah.

MM: About an hour. Yeah, they had about an hour for lunch, and then we'd go back; they'd bring them back to the classroom.

AS: And then, you're right, then I remember bringing them to recreation at 3 o'clock sometimes, right. That's when they would go to recreation, you're right.

JK: And over the course of working here for a couple of years, were you seeing the same students each year?

MM: Sometimes.

AS: Sometimes, sometimes.

MM: Sometimes, depending on what building you worked at, or, you know.

AS: Or you got transferred to a different building.

MM: Right.

WR: If you were with a different group of kids, it's because you moved. They weren't going anywhere.

JM: Right, yeah.

WR: They weren't graduating. They weren't—it wasn't set up for them to go to a different building. Where they were, that's where they stayed,

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so if you were teaching in, say, Building 10, cerebral palsy children, if you were there for five or six years, you could have the same group of kids all the way through.

JK: Of course, the supervision of teachers has changed so much, even I am aware of this, in a public school setting.

JM: [Laughs]

JK: But at the time when you were at Willowbrook, what was supervision like? I guess some of you have already mentioned that you would meet together with the other teachers who were supervised by one person. Maybe that would happen once a month. Was that really sort of the extent of supervision, or did you more frequently have people coming into your class and observing?

MM: Your supervisor came and observed. We had—again, in the baby building, we had one supervisor for all the teachers up there. So what would be maybe 20, not even, like 10 teachers, whatever we were, and then assistant teachers. And she would come; you had to hand in your lesson plans every week. She would come around and observe in the classrooms, give you formal observations, write you up.

TS: Conferences.

MM: You had conferences, things like that. And like they said, then you had your teachers meetings whenever. I forget how often we even had them.

JM: Probably once a month, I'm assuming.

MM: Yeah, I don't know, I don't remember. But I had one supervisor, they had different supervisors, and there was one head of education, Heather Glasser. She was the head of education. What was Halloran? What was her position?

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TS: Supervisor.

AS: Supervisor.

MM: She was a supervisor.

JR: Yeah, I mean, I think that, the way that was handled by supervisors, very similar to a public school.

AS: Oh, yeah.

MM: Right.

JM: Mm-hm.

JR: Same kind of thing, where you have the certain number of observations, certain number of evaluations being called in and talked about things, and addressing things that they saw that maybe you could improve upon. So.

WR: This is Bill. But there were no report cards, no parent conferences, no standardized tests that they had to take at the end of the year, none of that.

JM: Right.

AS: Mm-hm.

TS: Assessments, what you did in classroom.

JM: This is Joe. No parents?

MM: No parents.

JK: That's what I was about to ask.

MM: I never met a parent.

JM: I was there, what, nine years?

MM: Nine years.

JM: I don't think I ever met a parent.

MM: I never met one.

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JK: Because that would have been a—if parents had come to visit, that would have been a different part of—

MM: That would have been the weekend.

JK: Right, it would have been the weekend. It wouldn't have been connected in any way to the Education Program.

AS: No, no.

JR: Right, mm-hm.

JK: It would have been something outside of that.

MM: And no parent ever asked to, like, speak to the child's teacher, or anything like that, if they did come.

WR: Nope.

MM: I don't think many parents came, actually.

AS: Yeah, I don't think so.

JM: On parent-teacher night, you were all alone. [Laughter]

JK: Of course, as an archivist, I have to say, have any of you kept your lesson plans?

TS: No.

JK: Those would be great. Those would be great to have.

MM: It's funny, because I just threw away—we just purged—

AS: I know. I did, too.

MM: I had my evaluations, actually. It's funny, I just got rid of everything.

JR: And, Jean again, I'm thinking when we clear out our attic—

WR: We might find something.

JR: —we may have something in there for you. [Laughs]

JK: I'll try to keep my hopes up.

TS: Okay.

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AS: You might, Bill, because you taught, and did you reference anything that you had when you were teaching?

WR: No, not—

AS: No?

WR: Just like this, I taught at Stockton College in New Jersey for 11 years, educating children with special needs, and whenever I got to the chapter on mental retardation, I mean, I just, I did four hours of Willowbrook. And believe me, I would have classes of 25 to 30 students, and that one particular class they were just, they were mesmerized. Just talking about what we did and how we did things, what it was like, and they had no concept of what that was all about. But all of the stories I was able to share with them.

AS: This is Toni. I don't think kids know about institutionalization anymore.

WR: No.

JM: Good. [Laughs]

WR: Right.

AS: And that's a good thing, that's a good thing.

MM: It's a good thing.

JK: It is, but of course, we all know why it's so important that information about what institutionalization was like gets recorded—

TS: Yeah.

AS: Yeah.

JK: —particularly as political climates change. It's not necessarily the case that we can't take a step backward. But it's also important to understand what that meant, what institutionalization meant. So, I've touched on a lot, most of the questions that came to mind before our

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meeting. A couple of you mentioned Special Programs, and I guess you've already touched on some of those, the field trips, and special shows, and that kind of thing. But are there other things that come to mind? Was the public usually invited in, or not at all?

MM: Never.

AS: No.

TS: Hm-mm, no.

JK: Never?

MM: They used to actually—this is Marie. Actually, when they did tours, a lot of times they came to the baby building.

AS: Oh, right, tours.

MM: Because we were, like, special.

AS: Pristine.

MM: Pristine, clean. It was a newer building. Again, it connected outbuildings, so it was like a maze in there. So sometimes you'd be teaching—and the classrooms were set up kind of like that. You had the big glass window and a door, so you could look right in. We would paint the windows and stuff. But all of the sudden you'd be looking at, working at the table with a child, and you look up and there's, like, six people looking in. So they did bring tours around.

TS: Mm-hm.

MM: But I don't know who they were.

AS: Yeah.

MM: I can't remember. I don't remember who came on those tours, but I do remember tours.

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WR: Yeah, this is Bill. One of the things I remember very vividly from the Baby Buildings, and why some of those tours went back there, the bird babies.

MM: Right, a type of disability. The child's have very small heads, kind of like the Zika case.

JM: Zika.

MM: The Zika virus now.

WR: Very bird-like, bird-like movements.

JM: It's why that was scary.

AS: Yeah, the public did come into the institution, and they would go into an auditorium, and they would have the children on the stage, and that they would point out, I guess doctors would point out—

WR: Right.

AS: —different—

WR: Medical.

TS: Birth defects.

JR: Yeah, right.

AS: Yeah, birth defects.

JR: Right.

AS: There was one I remember. He was an autistic child, and they would drop matches on the floor, like in the movie, and he would be able to count how many matches were there by sight. So they did those kinds of things to show different kinds of—

JR: Disabilities.

JK: But it wasn't something the Education Department was involved in?

AS: No, no.

JR: Mm-mm.

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AS: No, no, no.

JK: It was maybe—

AS: More on stage.

JK: Yeah, what you're describing in part maybe is, like, a public relations thing to build a positive impression, because after all, the whole place is supported by tax money.

AS: That's true. That's true. Probably could be.

JK: That kind of thing. I don't know.

AS: It was, probably.

JR: I remember when I started—Jean, again—that was my orientation. So, I don't know if everybody had that orientation. I was told to go to that, so it introduced me to Willowbrook.

WR: Yeah, I had that.

JR: Okay.

JK: You had that, too?

WR: Mm-hm.

JR: I was thinking at the time that this is what everybody does when they come, they go to this orientation. I just thought that was a part—I thought it was part of the Education Program, that this is how you're introduced. But I guess not.

AS: Yeah.

JR: I learned something today.

JK: It's been such a long time ago, but do you remember anything more about what that—?

JR: I remember the children, they called them the bird children. I remember a sister and a brother, very tiny, and their movements were just like, just bird-like. And I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I

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had worked with—through college had worked with kids with Downs syndrome and everything, and had never seen anything like that. And then when they would be describing, too, like, they had talked about someone with no face, I guess holes for a face. There were many, many different residents that lived there. So that, that resident was not there, but they mentioned that.

MM: There was a very wide range of disabilities, tremendous disabilities.

JK: And so this program seems like a way of giving an overview of the kinds of disabilities that were in the population?

MM: Right, right.

JK: And I'm sorry. Bill, you said that you had attended that program, a similar kind of program, too?

WR: Yeah, the orientation?

JK: Did you have anything to add?

WR: No, just that, just as Jean said, they brought residents in to show us, and kind of go over things that, I don't know, more like day-to-day things that would be expected of us. Because it was mixed, there was a mixed group. It wasn't just teachers or teacher assistants there. It was those that were being hired as occupational therapists, ward attendant. They were all together to get this overview of the institution.

JK: Well actually, that touches on one of the things I was curious about, because when we think about work culture, most of what we've been talking about, when we've been talking about anything related to work culture, has been all related to the Education Program, mostly related to the Education Program, your relationship with other teachers, with your supervisor, and so forth. But I was curious if you

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had comments about larger work culture. What was it like to come here to this campus to work? Did you come into contact with ward attendants?

MM: Mm-hm, yes.

JK: Did you come into contact with the whole range of people who worked here? Was that something that happened informally? Were there union activities that brought you together? Were there—

MM: This is Marie again.

JK: —institutional activities that were sponsored?

MM: You got to know the people in your wards, because obviously you were bringing the children back and forth. So you really did get to know them. You got to know the recreation staff. You got to know the occupational staff. I don't even remember a union. I guess maybe we were unionized.

JM: This is Joe.

MM: Oh, right, yes.

JM: Forgive me for getting into this, because you might have to delete this section, but [laughter] most of the ward staff were parts of CSEA, was the operative union here at the time.

MM: Oh, right, yeah.

XX: That's right.

JM: And another union came in and wanted to challenge, and I think that union focused primarily on professionals, namely the education community and probably occupation. And that was, what, PSCIU, or something like that?

MM: How do you remember that? He doesn't remember anything and he remembers that.

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AS: [Laughs]

JM: I'm sorry. [Laughter] I know it created an issue at the time.

MM: You had to actually work one Easter.

JM: I worked one Easter Sunday.

MM: Because there was a strike, right.

AS: Where there was a strike.

JM: Because we were afraid to cross the picket line.

MM: Picket lines, right.

JM: So, instead of going home I slept in one of the buildings.

AS: This is Toni. There was a strike. The attendants went on strike.

JK: Oh, I see.

TS: The Easter Sunday Strike.

MM: Right. That's right, because he worked that Easter Sunday.

AS: And that meant that the kids weren't being taken care of. So a lot of the teachers crossed the picket line, because the attendants were on the picket line in the front of the building, the same front that's there now. And we had to cross the picket line, which is not an easy task to do, but most of the teachers felt terrible that the kids didn't—

JK: Sure, yeah.

AS: —weren't being taken care of. So we did cross the picket line, and we did work with the kids, made sure they got fed and got taken care of.

JK: Did the strike last very long, or was it just a—

MM: No.

AS: No, no.

JK: —one-day thing?

TS: A one-day thing, yeah, thank God.

AS: One or two at most.

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JM: It was short.

AS: It was short.

JM: And again, this is Joe again, in the section that you're going to delete. [Laughter] But I don't think the attendant population thought well of Education, and in all candor I don't think we thought that most of the attendants were as caring as they should be. And I'm just speaking personally. I guess it's part of being naïve and young at the time, and not fully appreciating—Tom's comment of 40 chairs lined up in a row, and what they had to do as an attendant, and being the ratio of attendants, I mean of clients to attendant was so overwhelming. I don't know how those—in retrospect now, I don't know how they did those jobs.

JR: Mm-hm.

JM: I couldn't walk through a silly room without getting skeeved out, and here these people went and did this day after day, and so I just, in retrospect, I owe them an apology.

WR: [Laughs]

JM: And they're a better person than I.

JK: Can anyone speculate why some of the attendants would have had this attitude towards the Education Program, or not?

JM: Probably because we had, probably a superior attitude.

TS: Well, and this is Tom. I think we had much better working conditions. I mean, that's the biggest thing.

JM: Better working conditions. That's true. Right.

TS: Right.

JR: Yeah.

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TS: They come in, we have 8 to 10 kids we're responsible for, the nicest kids, the cleanest kids, the brightest kids.

JM: With the cleanest rooms, and they have to go back to that? I don't—

JS: If anything, it was inherent in the responsibilities.

JM: Right, good point, right.

JR: Yes. I agree.

TS: Bill, I think that when you worked in the outbuildings, you tended to get, it was a little bit closer, because our rooms were in those buildings, and there was a lot more contact with them. So you'd go up to the ward, you'd get to see what was going on, and you understood it a little bit better. But I think for their part, it was just, it was a very difficult, tedious job, one for which I don't think there was much training or support for them. They were just put in there—

AS: Mm-hm, it's true.

TS: —take care of them, maintain, and that was it.

WR: Mm-hm.

JR: Mm-hm.

TS: That was it.

JR: Jean again. I was in two outbuildings before I went to Building 3 for the Education Building. And in my first experience, when I had all those little boys, quite active, there was a time in the morning, I'd say, "Okay, we're going to go to the bathroom," so do a little toilet training, too. And the people on the wards, the attendants, they would watch me, because I'm taking all of these kids in, and I would think, "Are they going to come in and help?" I would always wish for that, because they were away. I took their kids; they were sitting and waiting.

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AS: Not doing anything.

JR: Until my class was over. But, no, they didn't. Of course, I have to say too, I never said, "Oh, could you help me?" I mean, I didn't feel I could do that. But today's—I would today. I'd say, "Could you help me, please?" [Laughter] But I didn't feel—

AS: In our 20s back there.

JR: Right. I didn't feel I could do that at the time, but usually when you see somebody who needs a little help or could use an extra hand, extra set of hands, you just kind of—my experience is usually people just go ahead and jump in.

AS: Jump in.

JR: But that was not the case. So it was like, you have your time, and when you're finished, no matter what's going on, no matter what, you're going to do it. We'll be right here. [Laughter]

AS: You're responsible for them at that time.

JR: Yeah.

JK: So, what about relationships with, like, the medical part of the facility? Did you ever have any?

JM: I don't think I ever met anyone in the medical facility.

TS: So I had—this is Tom—I had contracted hepatitis, so I met the doctor, one Doctor Frue.

MM: Oh. [Laughs]

TS: Probably not supposed to drop names.

WR: Wow! Right. That was his name.

TS: And he also was responsible for the kids when Toni and I were up in Building 2 with the kids who were being experimented with and stuff. They were responsible for those children as well. Kind of, again,

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personal perception, a little bit elitist and not caring too much about anybody that was not directly doing the type of things that they were doing. Not too good of a relationship.

JK: So they were very focused on whatever their research was.

WR: Right.

AS: Right, right.

JK: Yeah.

MM: I don't remember meeting any doctors.

JR: Jean again. I think when Bill comes back, he might be able to share a little bit, just because his dad worked so closely with them.

JK: Right, yeah.

JR: Being in the X-ray Department, he worked with them a lot, so Bill might be able to share a few stories from his dad.

JK: Okay. And we can put him on the spot now. [Laughs]

JR: Again.

JK: Exactly. I was just asking about anyone having contact with people who worked in the medical aspect of the institution, and Jean pointed out that we should ask you about that.

WR: My father was the senior x-ray technician in Building 2, which was the hospital building. And, well, there was my contact with him. He would—

AS: But with the doctor?

MM: But nothing with the kids and the doctors?

WR: No, no. And we really didn't have much to do with the medical staff.

JR: Did he have stories?

WR: Not that I remember.

JR: Oh, okay.

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WR: Not that he shared.

JK: And, of course, this was a residential campus for the children, but it was also residential campus for some staff members.

WR: Yes.

JK: Right?

WR: Yes.

JK: So, do you have any impression you want to share of what that was like, the fact that there were people living here?

MM: She did. [Laughter]

AS: Jean actually lived here.

JK: Jean lived here, oh, okay.

JR: A short time. [Laughter]

JM: Then we reevaluated.

JR: I lived here a short time, but actually, when I came, because they told me, I said, "I don't know anybody who lives here." In Staten Island I didn't know one person to call. So you know, they said, "No problem. You can stay in the residential place for the employees." And I thought, "That's a great opportunity for me. Maybe—I'm sure I'll meet somebody later on, and then be able to move on from there." But I can say that the food was very good. [Laughter] I know I ate it. And there were quite a few people.

JK: What was your living situation like? Were you in a—?

WR: Rooms.

JK: Was it like a dormitory room?

JR: No, it was a little nicer than that, actually. I'm trying to picture what it was like. It was more than a dorm room.

JK: Sort of more like a hotel room?

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JR: Probably not. No. Something in the middle.

JK: Not quite that? [Laughter]

JR: Something in the middle. I mean, I didn't have to really take care of much. Make my bed—

TS: Showers, bathrooms.

AS: Shared bathrooms?

JR: Yeah. You know, I'm trying to remember back. I think I shared; I don't believe I had a private bath. I don't believe I did. So that was shared with maybe a couple of other people in rooms. So, there were men as well as women on the floor, so it was kind of like back in the 1970s, when they switched over to mixed dorms.

JK: Co-ed, exactly.

JR: Coe-ed dorms, kind of like that. But I really only would see the people—it's not like we visited each other's rooms, or anything like that. But it was private. We would see each other for meals, for the dinner, dinner time. You know, it was fine. I knew that it was temporary for me, but I know that there were people who lived there for years, because they shared that.

JK: This is something I can try to look up, but how much housing was here for staff? Was there one apartment building, or—?

TS: The apartments, and there were homes.

AS: Yeah, the doctors.

MM: Oh, off in the back.

TS: Toward the back, there were homes for the doctors.

JM: They're still there, the homes.

TS: They're still there, mm-hm.

WR: Yeah, I think the homes are still there.

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TS: And the building that was the apartments, that's still there as well. So, not a great deal, though.

JR: Not a lot. I mean, during the dinner time, dining area was filled, so I know—I can't remember exactly how many people, but it was a significant amount of people who lived here. I know there was one of the teachers and her son lived here, lived in the residence.

AS: I don't remember that.

TS: Mrs. Lickerman.

JR: Mrs. Lickerman.

TS: Mrs. Lickerman, and Toby Lickerman?

WR: Toby.

JM: Yes. Ooh! I remember that.

AS: I don't remember them living here.

JR: They were right near me.

MM: [Laughs]

JR: So, yeah, I was pretty good friends with her. So it was fine. I mean, the thing is, I felt safe. I didn't feel like anything was going to happen to me. Locked doors, all of that. Nothing happened while I was there. But like I say, it wasn't a long time that I lived there. It was, once I met people and moved into an apartment, that's what I did.

JK: Okay. Well, the other part of culture that I wanted to ask about was whether the institution, the people in charge of the place, made much of an effort to foster or build more camaraderie amongst the people who worked here? Did you have, like, essentially like a company picnic?

TS: Hm-mm.

AS: No.

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JK: Or a holiday celebration?

AS: No.

TS: It wasn't a top-down culture; it was a bottom-up culture.

AS: No.

JK: Okay. Well, this is, that was one my questions. How would you characterize the structure of the place? So, you're saying that it was not—

TS: I'm saying that the people within the different parts of the organization, loosely coupled parts of the organization, made their own camaraderie and their own culture. And the pictures and things that we share and remember are kind of proof of that culture in Education.

JK: Right, yeah. Okay, interesting. And it was such a large institution, and so complex, and people were working in such different capacities that I guess in some ways that's not surprising. But on the other hand, if you were wanting to build an institution that was the most successful of institutions, it seems as though you would want more shared vision of the place, and so I was just curious about it.

JR: No.

TS: What comes to mind is kind of like running a prison, but what kind of culture there is in a prison, and what kind of—where do they get—it's just the place and the nature of it kind of prohibits, or doesn't lend itself to that.

JK: One thing, so you touched, Jean, you touched on this. You said, oh, you felt safe. So, I have a follow-up question on that for all of you, which was, did you at times not feel safe?

MM: Well—

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JK: I mean, you were working in the Baby Unit, so the people you were working with were—

MM: Right. Younger.

JK: —younger.

MM: Their adrenalin builds up, and there are times when they could lash out at you or throw a chair, Even though you're bigger and stronger, they'll pick up that chair and fling it across the room at you. So, you always had that in the back of your mind. But there'd be triggers, and you'd learn those triggers after a time. But, I mean, as far as any other way of not feeling safe, I was fine.

JM: This is Joe. I mean, I got a cabinet pushed over on me, and hit in the back of the head with a chair, but I never really—it's not that I didn't feel safe. I just, you kind of knew that [sighs], in the population, sometimes—

MM: That happened.

JM: —things happened. But I never really didn't feel safe.

JK: Okay.

MM: I think there was security, though, right? Was there security? I don't even remember.

AS: No.

TS: I don't remember any security.

MM: Remember?

AS: No, no security.

JR: Well, Jean again. I felt safe in my room. I could lock my door at night and go to sleep. That's where I felt safe. There were times that I wasn't completely safe. I think I shared one of those instances on the way over.

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AS: Well—

JR: I wonder if I should share this. But when I was taking my boys, when I was in the outbuilding, I was taking them for a walk. It was beautiful out. We had some playgrounds, and I wanted them to go on the equipment and have a good time. As we're walking out of the building, the one, little Johnny, he came upon a car that he was touching. And we headed to the playground, where I was surrounded by attendants. One knocked me down, because that was her car, and the others watched, you know. And not being a big fighter, I mean, I tried to defend myself, because I thought to myself, if there was a time at Willowbrook that I did not feel safe, it was at that time. I said to myself, "I'm outnumbered here, and I don't know what's going to happen. Am I going to live or die?" And I know I was thinking these things at that time. And it really was all about the car, and that I should have watched, and not let that happen, that he touched the car. So, and I got in trouble for [laughs]—Willowbrook, the administration—for fighting. So, I was written up, and I was called in for fighting.

JK: So, it was like an incident report?

JR: Right.

JK: Where they were getting the complete story?

JR: Yeah.

JK: Do you feel like they were getting your side of the story, and then they were getting the other side of the story, or did you feel like—?

[Laughter] Or was it mostly sort of imposed, you felt an imposition of authority, that however this happened, it shouldn't have happened, and don't happen again, or what?

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JR: Okay. I think the authority, they were definitely covering themselves. They did not want any problems in the future, so if I wasn't called on the carpet they could have more problems in the future. That's what I was thinking, and I really never—frankly, I thought, “You know what? I'm going to tell you my side of the story, because I know we were called in separately.” And I said, “This is what happened,” and then I was done. But I know I was written up. That went in my file, so that's what I was told. [Laughter]

JK: Not to pursue this too much, but I am curious. When you said that you were essentially, I don't know what phrase you used, sort of standing up for yourself or responding, you weren't just talking about a verbal response? There was also a physical response?

JR: It's just, like, kind of trying to protect myself. Like I say, I'm not really a fighter, but when somebody's—

MM: And they were pushing her.

JR: —on top of you, and everybody's watching, you're kind of thinking—I think your adrenalin starts taking hold.

JK: Sure, yeah.

JR: So, you don't want to just be like a rock, so I think I tried to defend myself. I wanted to survive. [Laughter]

JM: And we're happy you did.

JR: But, you know, it was a surprise to me it even happened.

JK: Right.

JR: I think later on in the day, I was just like, “Did that really happen?” Didn't even seem real. But, brought the kids back, and I never had another situation like that happen. In the classroom, there were times when I think it could have been a little bit unsafe, but you were

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always on guard for that. You were looking out for that. There were times that some of the students would be upset. Like, I had hearing equipment brought in for what they said was a hearing-impaired class. Now, I don't believe all of the students were. So, for the first time somebody's hearing this, and one of the students in my class, he obviously heard it loud and clear, but did not want this on, so he was knocking over tables, desks and everything.

And then there was a hole in the bathroom which was connected to the classroom, and he threw that equipment right in the hole. He was done with it. So, I mean, just things like that. I wasn't hurt. None of the students were hurt. But you were always on the lookout to make sure none of the other students would get hurt if somebody had maybe a temper tantrum, something came up that they didn't like. Didn't happen often. I remember that instance.

JK: Well, thanks Jane, so much, but I guess I'm just, sitting in this building today, I don't know if you've noticed, but we usually have a security presence in the building. They're right there, at the front of the building.

JM: Actually, I was amazed when we got out of the car. They're like standing there with the black gloves on! I said, "What the hell is this?" [Laughs]

JK: Yeah, and it's not only that. There are, first of all, the way they dress can be intimidating, but they also have—what are those called? They're those little two-wheeled things that they get up on.

JR: Segway.

JK: Thank you. They have these Segways.

JM: Oh, I love those.

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TS: Oh.

JK: And they zip around campus on them like some, you know, enforcer.

TS: Well, I know they want to look intimidating.

MM: Mall cops. They're like the mall cops. [Laughs]

JK: Yeah. So, and I know that here, if I'm at the reference desk, for instance, and if I feel a student is maybe verbally intimidating, or physically intimidating, there is a panic button that I would press to get someone's attention.

TS: Wow.

JK: So, during this time period that we're talking about, in the late '60s and early '70s—

JM: There was nothing.

JK: The public perception of people with developmental disability, mental retardation—the public perception is, these are violent people. These are people that need to be separated from the rest of society.

JM: They're dangerous.

JK: So, I was just curious about what sort of—why there's no security presence here.

JR: No.

JK: Was there, like, a fence around the place?

TS: No.

AS: Fence, there was a gate.

JR: There wasn't, no.

JK: Were people in the neighborhood—did you ever get a sense that people in the neighborhood were concerned?

TS: The neighborhood wasn't as close then.

JK: Okay, okay.

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MM: This wasn't built up like it is now.

TS: But, no, the front gate, back gate—

AS: No, not locked.

MM: Because we used to drive out the back gate. But, no, didn't they close the gate at night, the back gate?

AS: Yeah, I think—

JM: They could just walk around it.

MM: I think at night, because you had to, yeah, but, yeah.

JM: I mean, you couldn't drive. You would be prevented from taking a car through it, but we walked anywhere we wanted to.

TS: There was not security, no.

AS: And, but the buildings were locked.

TS: Yeah, the buildings were locked, yeah.

MM: Yeah. That's what I said, there had to be some kind of security.

AS: I mean, the residents couldn't get out.

WR: No, nothing—no uniformed security.

MM: That, but I guess there wasn't. Not uniformed.

AS: No, no.

MM: This is Marie again. A lot of the residents that were drugged a lot, they were given a lot of heavy doses.

TS: A lot of Thorazine.

MM: Thorazine.

TS: Yup, a lot of Thorazine.

MM: To make them calm.

AS: Calm.

TS: That was the security. The people with the Thorazine, that was security. This is Tom.

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AS: Yeah, they did get a lot. They were drugged quite a bit.

JK: But as Toni pointed out, there are those big locks on buildings and wards, with big keys.

MM: There was.

AS: Right, mm-hm.

JK: So, that has a certain—that conveys a certain mentality about—but if it's behind the door, why they're being locked in, I guess.

TS: Yeah.

JK: So, the kind of stories I have heard about Willowbrook that deal with things that people don't necessarily like to think about or talk about, one is that there were children who just sort of disappeared. Was that ever a subject of gossip or conversation?

MM: Children disappeared? There was the Rand, Andre Rand.

JM: This is Joe. I don't, I don't.

JR: You know, Jean again. I only remember that when Willowbrook was being dismantled, and a lot were being sent to the city, and they ran away, because they were in the high-rise apartments, some of the residents, high-rise apartments where they had bars on the door, and when they could get away, they did. So, that's the only thing I heard about those who disappeared.

JM: And some of them would be seen down at the ferry terminal. I remember hearing stories about that. Actually, I think seeing former residents down there once they started to downsize this entity, but I never remember—I can't remember any of the kids that I was working with ever just disappearing.

WR: No, no.

JK: So it was afterward?

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WR: No, no.

MM: No, I don't remember that.

WR: This is Bill. But I think that perhaps through the—again we don't have any specifics and documentation on it, but the medical testing and experimentation that was done with certain things, like, anytime you're dealing with that, that could lead to an unintended death, and then who knows how that was handled. I know that the testing itself, the experimentation itself, was very—you just didn't hear much about it. On the surface a little bit, but I'm sure there was a lot more that was done in that regard. So that's perhaps where that could have come from, and very well have occurred.

JK: A somewhat related thing, which I was reminded of when we were talking about the locks, is that there were attendants who couldn't cope with the fact that a child was acting out, and would respond with violence.

MM: That's—mm-mm.

WR: Oh, yeah.

JK: Is that something that, I mean, that?

WR: I think that was very fair—much more commonplace.

MM: I think that would have been common.

JM: This is Joe. I never physically witnessed it, but I think it was a common discussion at that time.

AS: This is Toni. I witnessed one incident that was very upsetting to me. It was an attendant and a child. The attendant put the child in the shower, in a cold shower.

JK: Mm-hm.

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AS: For the child, that was the only thing that I had witnessed that I was very upset about. And I did report that.

AS: So those things did happen.

JK: Yeah.

AS: I'm sure.

MM: More so than we know.

AS: That's right. More so than we know.

JK: It's not like you have personal experience or knowledge of them. And it doesn't sound like—because of the way the institution is structured, ward attendants are talking with ward attendants, Education people are talking with Education people.

WR: Mm-hm.

MM: Right.

JK: And so their frustrations, or incidents that they might have witnessed or been involved in wouldn't have necessarily have been something that would have come to your awareness.

JM: Correct.

JR: Right.

JK: So, unfortunately I didn't write down the exact dates of when all of you started and which years you were here, but I know that some of you were here when the Geraldo Rivera—

MM: We all were.

AS: We all were.

MM: We all were.

JK: Oh, you all were. So, I just was wondering what people's observations might be, if you have any observations about what that time period was like? Because you'd been working here, and you'd

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been doing what you consider to be a good job, and you can point to successes with individual kids you're working with, and programs, and then this exposé comes out. It must have been very difficult.

AS: It was.

JK: And I just wondered if people had—

MM: I go by what Tom said. They never showed, because we used to watch it all the time, and they never showed the positive sides, which I guess that wasn't his job.

TS: The news.

MM: That wasn't the news. He had to show the deplorable conditions in the wards, and they were. They were. I mean, I don't think it was exaggerated a lot, but it wasn't a balanced—and I think the Education department kind of felt offended, because here we were working hard, doing a great job, getting these kids motivated, and none of that was ever shown, that I can remember.

JR: Jean again. I agree with what you said, Tom. And I remember feeling angry.

MM: Right.

JR: I felt angry. I thought, "Don't you want to come through this building? Don't you want to come through Building 3 to see what they're doing? Because then take the best of what we've got, keep that, and encourage that, and support that. But instead, you're saying the whole place is bad, because that's all people are seeing." So, I felt angry.

MM: And you almost didn't want to say you worked here. This is Marie.

TS: It was an embarrassment.

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MM: It was almost an embarrassment that, then when people found out that you worked there, did you see this? So it was kind of—

JR: Mm-hm.

JK: Well, that's one thing I was curious about, because it sounded a like a lot of you lived on Staten Island at that time?

MM: We all did.

JR: Mm-hm.

JK: You all lived on Staten Island at that time. So the people are aware of where you worked, your family members are aware of where you worked, obviously, and then this exposé comes out. So you were experiencing that kind of thing from—?

MM: Right. Right, right. My father actually worked here; he was the barber here. So he also, you know, he went into every building in the outbuildings, because he cut the hair. And then people were brought to the barbershop. But it's funny, because we were talking about it and he saw both sides, but Geraldo never showed both sides.

JR: Well, it made him famous.

WR: This is Bill. I think go back to what Tom said, is that, as concerned as we were about it and the perception that it put out there, it was necessary.

JR: Right.

WR: It was necessary. Because this was such a large institution that there were too many here that didn't belong here. The care was substandard, and something else needed to take place. And it did, between his exposé, the federal laws that mandated the right to education, those things really brought about significant changes and did away with these large—the term that we haven't used here but

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was very common, “custodial institution,” not residential institution, but a custodial institution. I think that’s more descriptive of what many of the outbuildings were like, because I think that’s the level of care they were provided with. It was just custodial care.

JR: But at least people, and I can’t argue the fact that, yes, improvements needed to be made. But I have to say, families do not want you, they don’t want you in their home, and this becomes your home. And for how many residents, it wasn’t such a bad place. Like, the higher functioning, with the jobs and different things. We don’t have as many people with disabilities today. Number one, we don’t have places where they can reside, so people make a choice not to have them. And that’s what I think.

JK: It’s so difficult from—because I didn’t experience it, and so in part that’s why it’s so difficult, but it’s so difficult in many ways to think about these issues, because even the experts’ understandings of developmental disability, it was so different. And then, the acceptability of institutionalization. At the time, that was, that’s what —

WR: It was the norm.

MM: That’s what you did.

JK: That’s what everyone thought you should do, is have an institution. And then within a relatively short period of time, understandings begin to change, and then institutions themselves seem like a bad thing. So, that’s such a dramatic change in perception.

MM: And then don’t forget, once they started breaking Willowbrook down and apart, now they were putting these people into group homes, and

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all the communities were uprising because they did not want these people in their—living next door to them.

JK: Right.

MM: So there was a whole after-surge of—they put a group home right up the block from my mother. And having myself and my father work here, we knew that that's not a problem, but the community was all up in arms. So then you had that. Joe worked in the city at the time, because he had left already, and he would see residents in the ferry terminal just sitting around because they had nowhere to go. And so it was a little bit disheartening, once this whole—that's when we all left, at that point.

JM: Right. This is Joe. I think, though, that the whole Geraldo episode became like the tipping point for institutionalization, because Willowbrook wasn't the only state institution.

MM: Right, it was all over the state.

AS: Mm-hm.

JM: There were probably a dozen of them.

AS: Psychiatric.

JM: And I feel pretty safe saying the conditions there were probably not much different than here. But again, it was the way our society handled that type of individual with that type of condition at that time. And as I think even you're alluding to, that was what the experts recommended at that time. That was the best way for society to deal with that. We then learned that, well, no, it wasn't, and there was a quick decision to change that. And that's a good thing. But at the time, when you were looking for the TV cameras, and Geraldo and his crew to come running through here, I think many of us were angry at

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that for the same reason. We saw not only what Geraldo saw, but we saw a different side, and we thought that we kind of tempered that. Maybe, again, maybe it was just being young and naïve, and feeling that that somehow made up for the rest of what they went through. And you know, I think I've learned since then. But those were tough days.

JK: And, of course at the time it's not like—you're here and you're experiencing what the Education program was like. And then, so what is the alternative? There is no alternative out there.

MM: Mm-hm, right.

AS: There wasn't.

WR: Sure.

JK: But people are demanding that this come to an end, this institution be closed.

MM: Right.

JK: Then, what is going to happen to your students? Where will they go? What will they do?

WR: Yeah.

MM: And that's what, the group homes, and they didn't want them in their neighborhoods.

JK: Yeah.

WR: Or, even the education facilities were not available to them.

JK: Right, right.

MM: Right, right.

JM: They couldn't send them to a regular public school.

MM: There was no program.

JM: There was no capacity to handle that. And the privates didn't—

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AS: And the older children—there were older residents.

MM: Residents.

JM: Right.

AS: I mean, where were they going?

JM: Some of the kids who were in school were 17 or 18 years old. You can't put them in a grammar school with a 7 and 8 year old. Can't do that.

AS: Right, right.

MM: Right.

JR: I think so often this happens in society. Now we have a better idea, but where's the transition? Could we improve what we have, make that better, before we move on to something else? But that didn't happen. I mean, a group home, maybe that was the answer for some, but certainly not, we're talking about thousands—

MM: Thousands of residents.

JR: You know, where did they go?

JM: Yeah, I just wonder what happened to the kids at the lower end of the spectrum.

AS: Mm-hm.

JR: Mm-hm.

JM: Now, thinking back, where did they go?

AS: Where did they go?

JM: What happened to them? I have no clue.

AS: Yeah, don't know what happened.

JK: And so, a number of you were still working here through this time period when this institution is now being downsized, and the people who are able to live in group homes are being moved to group homes,

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and people are being moved to institutions if they're lower functioning. So, some of you have already touched on this, but if you have any comments about what that was like?

WR: The categorization that I said before, the borderline and mild, they were the first to go. It was almost like a draft, where other places would come in and literally interview, and make their selections based on higher functionality.

JR: Mm-hm.

WR: So, those are the ones that left first, and then as I described my experience in the Education Building and doing some pretty solid academics with them, then our classes were the severe and profound. So academics were gone, and we were, again, dealing with life skills, and we became more of a custodial program in the Education department because the level of functioning was so low. And nothing, I don't think even going through a college special education program would have prepared to deal with that level of functioning, because that wasn't—

TS: Changing diapers, and doing things like that.

JM: Exactly.

MM: Right.

WR: Yeah.

AS: Where did those kids go?

WR: Which ones?

AS: The kids that were severe and profound?

JR: We don't know.

WR: As Joe said before, we don't know.

JR: I don't know.

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JM: I don't know what ever happened.

WR: I don't know. They were the last to leave in, I guess, what, maybe late '70s, early '80s? When did it officially cease to exist?

AS: Yeah, because we weren't there at that time.

WR: No, we weren't there. So, I don't know what they did.

JM: But I know in Education, I was down to trying to teach kids how to button their shirt, and keeping them out of the bathrooms so they didn't do something disgusting.

WR: Mm-hm.

AS: Yeah.

JM: That was my day, and that was a far cry from this.

JK: Right, yeah, yeah. So, I'm guessing it was at that point most of you made the decision to leave?

AS: To leave.

TS: Yeah.

JM: Well, the handwriting's on the wall.

WR: Mm-hm.

MM: Well, they were closing, right.

JM: The place is closing.

JK: Closing.

MM: Right, the place was closing. We saw the writing on the wall.

JM: If you want to eat and have a place, you've got to find new employment.

TS: Yeah, and teach, and teach.

MM: And teach.

WR: Yeah.

JM: If you want to be a teacher, you can't do that here.

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AS: Right. Right.

JK: So I guess maybe we could just go around the table as a way of closing, then, to find out, what did you decide to do? Or, what happened then after you left Willowbrook?

TS: What did I do? [Laughter]

JK: In terms of your professional life.

AS: You went to work at—

TS: Huh? Oh, I went and worked for Chase Manhattan Bank in the city.

JK: There's a contrast.

TS: Well, actually, at the time I was working here five days a week, and two days on the weekend at the bank. So, eventually I just—I said, hey, I transitioned to that.

JR: Well, I married Bill.

JM: Oh, wonderful. [Laughter]

JR: And after all of these years I'm very glad. But we were expecting our first child and so I left. I actually didn't want to work at the institution during that time. I didn't think it would be healthy, so I didn't.

JM: But you stayed in education for how many years?

JR: Oh, a long time.

MM: She just retired.

JM: She just retired.

AS: So you were teaching.

JR: We moved to New Jersey, so I taught in New Jersey all of those years.

JK: But you stayed in special education?

JR: I did.

JM: Same with Uncle Bill.

MM: Bill.

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WR: Yeah, I just retired in August. Counting my Willowbrook experience, about 44 years. But when I left here, I got a job in our public school district where we lived as a sixth grade teacher. Taught that for 18 years, and then went into administration, and finished my career as a principal. But a lot of what I did in the public school, this was a foundation. I think I had a much easier time discerning when children had either learning or behavioral problems. I was able to see, is it intentional, or is this how they're made up? And being able to differentiate put me in a different path for how I would deal with them. And I think that I would never look back and say that there was anything I experienced here at Willowbrook that didn't have a positive impact on what I did later on with so many kids, over my years of experience.

JK: Interesting.

TS: This is Tom, and when I left Willowbrook, Toni and I were together at that time, and we went to work in a psychiatric center, different special ed, but special ed, in Elmira, New York. We stayed there for three years. Always have been in special education my whole life. Came back to south Jersey—or, central Jersey, Long Branch area, and worked in a public school setting there, but with students with disabilities, and became an administrator, guidance counselor, and administrator or principal. Worked in vocational education, was a principal for Monmouth County Vocational School District for 25 years. That's how I ended. I just retired, like Bill, in August. It's been a good—special education has always been good to me. I like to think that I've been good for special education.

JK: Great.

WILLOWBROOK GROUP

MM: This is Marie. I left in 1975. We were married at the time, Joe and I, and we were having a baby, so I left. And then eventually I went back and I taught first grade in a regular school, first grade. But again, you brought all of those experiences with you no matter what career path you took.

JK: Sure.

AS: And I was a teacher for special needs children, too. We left. We went to Elmira Psychiatric Center, and then I went to teach special needs children, three to four year olds, three, four and five year olds.

JK: Great.

AS: In Jersey.

MM: And you did that for what?

AS: Yeah.

MM: You're still actually, still—

AS: For 22 years. Yeah, and actually I'm still doing special needs children. I'm doing early intervention.

JK: I see, interesting.

AS: So, yeah.

JK: Well, thank you all for coming today, and it's been very interesting for me to hear what you had to say about Willowbrook