

7-15-2003

## Betty Weatherly interview for the Lest We Forget Collection of Oral Histories

Betty Weatherly

Jeff Moyer

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### Repository Citation

Weatherly, B., & Moyer, J. (2003). Betty Weatherly interview for the Lest We Forget Collection of Oral Histories. .

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## **BETTY WEATHERLY**

**Jeff:** July 15, 2003, we're in Akron, Ohio interviewing Betty Weatherly. This is the Lest We Forget project the Akron series. How are you Betty?

**Betty:** Fine.

**Jeff:** You're 56 years old. This is a project where we're talking to people who went to state institutions and I know that happened to you. How old were you when you went to the state institution?

**Betty:** About thirteen, not quite sure.

**Jeff:** Do you remember that first day what it was like when you went?

**Betty:** They had side rooms. They had treatments, like shock treatments.

**Jeff:** They had shock treatments. Did they give you shock treatments?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** Where were the shock treatments given?

**Betty:** Upstairs down the other end.

**Jeff:** Down at the other end upstairs. Did you know anybody that got shock treatments?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** But you knew it happened.

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Where did you sleep?

**Betty:** In the dormitory.

**Jeff:** Dormitory, how many people slept together?

**Betty:** They had their own beds.

**Jeff:** They had their own beds. How many beds were there?

**Betty:** Quite a few of them.

**Jeff:** What would you do during the daytime?

**Betty:** Work.

**Jeff:** You worked. What kind of work did you do?

**Betty:** It's been so long.

**Jeff:** It has been a long time. Most people don't know what happened in those places. Would you tell me what happened, what were the bad things that happened in the institution?

**Betty:** They put them in long dresses like chicken dresses.

**Jeff:** What's a chicken dress?

**Betty:** They're long and they had like funny things, they come all the way down.

**Jeff:** So you all had to wear the same kind of clothes.

**Betty:** Well, it all depends what you do. Side room with boys.

**Jeff:** There was another room with boys.

**Betty:** No, side rooms

**Jeff:** Side rooms, what's in the side rooms?

**Betty:** That's where they lock you up in.

**Jeff:** They lock people up in the side rooms. Was there a jail in there?

**Betty:** It felt like it. But it's not.

**Jeff:** Was there anything on the walls?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** Just lock you up in the little room.

**Betty:** Yeah

**Jeff:** How long would you have to stay there?

**Betty:** It all depends upon what you do. If you run away you're in there for maybe a month. Start a fight maybe you end up with two weeks, it all depends.

**Jeff:** Would you be able to come out and talk to people?

**Betty:** Well, it all depends if you behave ?? to like bedtime.

**Jeff:** From morning to night you were in the side room.

**Betty:** I forgot I was in maybe a half a day.

**Jeff:** Hal a day one time. Was it different for the men and the women?

**Betty:** I don't know about the men.

**Jeff:** But for women if you misbehaved you were sent to the side room. And if you ran away you might be there for a month. Did they ever hit anybody?

**Betty:** If you tease them, they'll get mad. They don't like to be teased.

**Jeff:** So if you teased someone you could get in trouble for that. Did you like the attendants?

**Betty:** Some of them.

**Jeff:** Were there some you didn't like?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** What did they do that you didn't like?

**Betty:** Some of them made you eat everything on your plate. If you don't want it you'd have to eat it.

**Jeff:** Some of the attendants made you eat everything on your plate even if you didn't like it.

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** What other things would the attendants do that you didn't like?

**Betty:** I guess it all depends on what we do to them. I hardly bothered with none of them.

**Jeff:** You behaved yourself and didn't bother them.

**Betty:** Yeah, so I was told.

**Jeff:** Could you make any choices there about what you wanted to do?

**Betty:** Not really, no.

**Jeff:** No choices. How was the food?

**Betty:** It wasn't that good.

**Jeff:** It wasn't very good. Were there any meals you liked or was it all just not good food.

**Betty:** Some was and some wasn't. Some of them eat just awful there. This one guy he just pick a whole sandwich and hog them in his mouth. It's horrible. I don't see how they do it.

**Jeff:** He would take a lot of food in his mouth at one time.

**Betty:** The whole sandwich.

**Jeff:** The whole sandwich, do you think he was afraid someone might take it from him?

**Betty:** I don't know. He got choked off of it.

**Jeff:** He got choked from the sandwich. So you'd have to wear chicken dresses. Did you wear chicken dresses all the time?

**Betty:** Only had one on once, one time.

**Jeff:** What did you wear the rest of the time?

**Betty:** My regular clothes.

**Jeff:** Your regular clothes, your clothes or just any clothes they happened to find.

**Betty:** My regular clothes.

**Jeff:** You had your own clothes all the time. Well, that's good.

**Betty:** You're not allowed to wear nobody else's clothes.

**Jeff:** You weren't allowed to wear anyone else's clothing.

**Betty:** If they'd get caught wearing somebody else's clothes they would fight with them or ? chicken dresses.

**Jeff:** Or they had to wear chicken dresses. Were chicken dresses a punishment?

**Betty:** Uh, uh.

**Jeff:** Is it like a hospital gown?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** When you weren't working were there things to do that were fun?

**Betty:** No, they had like on Saturday they had movies and dances. Dances back on Wednesday, movies like on Saturdays. But I just go to the movies.

**Jeff:** You didn't go to the dances. Was there a church? Could you go to church if you wanted?

**Betty:** Not there.

**Jeff:** Could you choose who you wanted to be with? Who you wanted to sleep next to?

**Betty:** Huh uh.

**Jeff:** No, they just told you where to sleep. You were there a long time, weren't you? Many years, do you remember when you got out?

**Betty:** Not quite sure, I know I was working and they sent down for me. I was kind of scared because the doctor that we had, I didn't like her.

**Jeff:** You didn't like the doctor.

**Betty:** No, and I thought I was in trouble. Before all of that my one staff said, "Something's going to happen" and I asked her what. She said maybe one of these days you'll go home. I said, yeah and one day I was working and they sent down for me and I got scared because I thought I was going to be in trouble and then I came up and they said I had to get cleaned up and I asked them why for what. They said ask no questions just go get cleaned up so I did and then after I got done then I went down the hall and then I saw my sister there and I started crying.

**Jeff:** It had been a long time since you had seen your sister.

**Betty:** No, I see her just about every other day.

**Jeff:** So you started crying when you saw your sister and then what happened?

**Betty:** Then I ask her why they here for. They said why aren't you ready to go home and I said, home. I'm going home, huh.

**Jeff:** That sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

**Betty:** But my father, he didn't like the idea.

**Jeff:** He didn't like the idea.

**Betty:** 'Cause he was the one that put me there.

**Jeff:** Why do you think he put you there?

**Betty:** Because I got pregnant. He didn't want nobody to take me out except him.

**Jeff:** He didn't want nobody to take you out except him.

**Betty:** He didn't want my sister, or nobody.

**Jeff:** Your father once he knew that you were moving back home what did he think of the idea then?

**Betty:** He didn't like the idea. He came and got me one Christmas and we were going somewhere and I don't know where. I don't remember where. I saw my brother; I only have one brother and three sisters. My brother died and my one sister died. My brother was walking down the street one day and my father said Betty, "there goes your brother" and I kind of ignored him because I seen him. He got kind of real mean with me. He said, "Betty," he got kinda of real mean with me. I said, "I see him." Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? Sometimes we never could get along.

**Jeff:** Once you moved back into the community what happened then?

**Betty:** ?? Jean Tydings wanted me to move out before then, my friend. She wanted me to move out before then but I told her I was getting in trouble. After I got into trouble at home with my parents; I had some problem with my medicine, with the medicine that I'm taking now. I passed out before I moved out.

**Jeff:** You passed out, when you were living at Apple Creek?

**Betty:** No, mother came and I came home and I was getting ready for work ? and I passed out and ?? going to the hospital and stayed there, had an IV and all that stuff in me. I was sick for a long awhile and then I got out. Then a nurse came and saw me. My grandmother didn't like the nurse. She said she just came to see me to see how I was doing. She said was I ready to go back to work. She said no, she's not ready to go back to work and she's not going to go back on the ? bus. She said how about if we take her back to the doctor and get her checked out and see how she is doing. She didn't like that either. So they took me back any way and I ended up staying for two months, I think. Then my grandmother came and saw me and my sister. I had all these things in me, IVs and everything and she told the doctor to take everything loose, 'cause she ain't going to make it.

**Jeff:** They didn't think you were going to make it.

**Betty:** Yeah, my sister told them not to. She's going to come out of that. So I did, came out of it. Then for a long while after I got better and went home maybe about a month or so I went back to work. Then my grandmother didn't give me my medicine like they should.

**Jeff:** Betty, let me ask you some questions about how it's been. You've been out for a lot of years right. You have your own apartment, right. That's pretty exciting. Do you like living alone?

**Betty:** Uh, huh.

**Jeff:** What can you do living in your apartment that you couldn't do when you were living in Apple Creek?

**Betty:** Couldn't go out by yourself.

**Jeff:** Couldn't go out by yourself, what else?

**Betty:** You had to have somebody with you every twenty minutes.

**Jeff:** Had to have someone with you all the time. When you are living alone you can do what you want by yourself. Have your own clothes, your own things, it's nice, huh? You work with People First, don't you?

**Betty:** I work with People First and then I work at the Regal Workshop.

**Jeff:** What do you do with People First?

**Betty:** We have different groups and their own sessions like me I have closing up institutions.

**Jeff:** There are different sessions and you're working on closing the institutions. Do you think the institutions should be closed?

**Betty:** I think so.

**Jeff:** Are they a good place for anybody, do you think?

**Betty:** I don't think so unless they had bad seizures or something or something like that. Other than that everybody can't control those seizures but that's not a nice place for them. It's not really a nice place for them either.

**Jeff:** Not a nice place for anybody. There are a lot of people wanting to see those institutions closed. What we're doing here is going to help people understand about people living in the community where they belong, where they can make friends and work, have their own places and have a regular life. I understand you travel. Where have you traveled to?

**Betty:** Lots of different places.

**Jeff:** Where did you go this year?

**Betty:** In September I'm going to Myrtle Beach.

**Jeff:** You're going to Myrtle Beach in September. Who are you going to go with?

**Betty:** Caseworkers.

**Jeff:** It's a wonderful trip.

**Betty:** We go different places just about every year, every other year.

**Jeff:** Where did you go last year or the year before that? Go to the Caribbean, Bahamas or

**Betty:** Did we go ? last year, don't remember.

**Woman:** To the Bahamas.

**Jeff:** You went to the Bahamas. That must have been a wonderful trip, warm, nice place to be. Are you happy with your life?

**Betty:** Uh huh.

**Jeff:** It sounds like you're helping other people too with People First. That's wonderful. What kind of work do you do, Betty?

**Betty:** I work with adults in a workshop.

**Jeff:** Do you help them? What kind of things do you help them?

**Betty:** Like they're working on straw and hammer by hand because they won't do it by theirself. ?? I take them for walks and we had this one lady that's blind. I take her for a walk.

**Jeff:** So you really enjoy helping other people. What's the best thing about living where you live now? You get to choose what you want to do.

**Betty:** Most of all I like to work with little kids. But you have to go to school to work with little kids. So they put me with adults.

**Jeff:** You'd like to work with little kids but you have to go to school for that so you work with adults.

**Betty:** That's what they told me.

**Jeff:** Are you a good cook?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** Do you eat your own cooking any way?

**Betty:** No.

**Jeff:** What do you do for food?

**Betty:** I sometimes go out. Sometimes I eat cereal.

**Jeff:** Ever buy food to eat at home? Do you eat anything in your apartment?

**Betty:** Sometimes. It all depends.

**Jeff:** What kinds of things do you eat? What kinds of things do you make in your apartment?

**Betty:** Not too much of nothing.

**Jeff:** Well, you know Betty your life has gone from very bad to very good it sounds like. If you could say one thing to people about why institutions should be closed what would you say?

**Betty:** I would tell them that they need to be closed. I don't think they will close, maybe some of them. They said they already closed some places but I don't know if they're going to close the whole thing down. It all depends where they would put them all. Where would they put them at?

**Jeff:** People can come back into the community like you did.

**Betty:** Where would they live at?

**Jeff:** In apartments and houses and same place everyone else lives. There's room for them.

**Betty:** In the institutions, I don't think nobody wants to be there.

**Jeff:** Nobody wants to be in an institution. You have really been a very wonderful person to talk to. Thank you for coming in.

**Betty:** Some of them run away. They'd get houses then run away where would they put them? Where would they put them if they run away?

**Jeff:** If they ran away when they went back to the institution where would they put them? Didn't you say they put them in the side room?

**Betty:** If they're going to tear the institution down, where would they put them at?

**Jeff:** When they tear the institution down before that everybody would have had a chance to move back into the community. People won't run away from the community because it's a good place to live. We'll find a place for everybody back in the community before they tear it down. What you told us is very important. We appreciate it. Do you have a CD player?

**Betty:** I have one.

**Jeff:** I have a CD I'd like to give you.

#### **NOTE**

**This lady was very hard to understand. Maybe you will want to listen to the tape.**

**Transcriber**