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John Gill interview for the Lest We Forget Collection of Oral Histories

John Gill

Jeff Moyer

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JOHN GILL

Jeff: This is Monday, July 14, 2003, Bastille Day. We're talking to John Gill. We're in Akron, Ohio for the second phase of the Lest We Forget taping. John, you said that you're 43 year old.

John: 43 years old.

Jeff: Where were you born?

John: I was born in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Jeff: John, you said that you were sent away to school.

John: Well, I went to a couple public schools in Shaker Heights. I remember one and that was Sussex and I was able to stay at home a long, long time but then things got bad with my sister and brother and then things got bad with my dad personally. We couldn't get along with my dad very well because he was very sick at that time and my mom and I were having a small bad time. Right after those times my mom and dad decided to send me away to a private school and I hated it. It was lonesome. I hated to leave my family and be sent away to school. This school was located in Lancaster, Massachusetts and it was called the Dr. Franklin Perkins School. It was sort of like, it had men and women and boys and girls in the same school where I was at and I really enjoyed it. We also had a summer camp up in Friendship, Maine, Camp Oceanward. We had our own places to stay for the men and women at one place and for the men and boys at a separate place I mean for the men. The boys were all in one place together. We all had meals which was called the Jolly Ranger which is nice. We all got along really well together. We never got into any fistfights or any problems. That's far away before I went to leave Shaker Heights. I was having a hard time dealing with criticism and discipline with adults and stuff like that. But I'm able to handle that better but sometimes I have that same problem still but I try to work it out with them in a positive way.

Jeff: Good for you, you sound like a very positive gentlemen.

John: You know I have polar management depressant disorder and that's something I've had to deal with for years. Lots and lots of medication, I also have a medical condition with diabetes which is really hard for me to deal with. I don't know if you want to know the types of medicine I took for diabetes or not because I can name all of them for mental health and stuff.

Jeff: Well, I think the important thing is that you're managing circumstances today in a positive way. I want to go back to when you went to the Franklin Perkins School. You said two things; first of all you said you hated it.

John: Well, I did when I first went there because I was scared at first but after I got used to it I loved it because the staff were wonderful, the students were great and we had lots of fun together, watched sporting events on TV and I took part in sports, long distance running and I tried basketball a couple of times but it didn't work out too well, swimming, things like that.

Jeff: How many years were you there?

John: From 1971 to 1980.

Jeff: Then what happened.

John: Then I graduated. My mother came to my graduation and we all celebrated. I blossomed and came back on the plane and we were having a happy time when I got back in Shaker Heights and felt super. Then things went bad with my father's health and my mother's health and stuff like that. My mother and father were married for awhile and then my father passed away. Then my mother remarried and I used to have a stepfather but he passed away. Then my mother passed away. All I have now is foster parents who I dearly love.

Jeff: Do you have any contact with your brothers and sisters?

John: My sister lives in Birmingham, Alabama and my brother lives in Omaha, Nebraska. I have a stepbrother and a stepsister but I never get in touch with my aunt and uncle who live in Shaker Heights. We were real close but I guess they're just too busy.

Jeff: So where do you live now?

John: I live in Stow on Lakeview Boulevard. It's a beautiful neighborhood. I mean the neighborhood is nice and it's very quiet which is very nice. Judy has a real nice garden planted in the front yard. I look out at the garden every single day before I leave to go to Tallmadge Center where I work right now. I've started living with Judy in 1992-2003. I think I've been at Tallmadge for I believe it's 13 years. I was on program plan for release committee and I had liked that very, very much. This Friday I'm going to meet with and talk about transportation, about how well transportation is at Weaver and maybe a possibility Metro and ?? We've got some nice events coming up. This week end I'm going to Judy's family reunion, this coming Saturday. This coming Saturday I'm going to the Rum Maha? for the company picnic at Six Flags.

Jeff: Looks like you'll have a very fun week end.

John: Last week end we went up to Huron Lake Erie and saw the tall ships, the old cars and I couldn't believe how these motorcycles we saw plus we had dinner at a friend of Judy's, had a good time there too. Judy's going to take us over to the church that is just getting ready to be built. I mean we have to stay at the same church until the new one is built. Once this new church is built we'll move in there.

Jeff: So it sounds like you've come a very, very long way from that boy that had troubled discipline and criticism back in Shaker Heights.

John: I didn't get that part right there. My brother, Jim, Jim and I had some very good times and some bad times but we had a wonderful relationship, same way with my sister. And I usually fly down to Birmingham, Alabama to spend like last Thanksgiving. It was beautiful. Everything went well. I want to go back again.

Jeff: Your family is wonderful, isn't it? I didn't mean to misstate what you had said about your life before you went to the Franklin Perkins School. But today you're contributing to your community. You're involved with volunteering; you're involved with your family; you're involved with your foster family, you appreciate the blessings in your life. That's wonderful to see a man that is appreciative of the good life that he has and that he contributes. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

John: There's one thing that I really didn't like in being institutionalized was being in all these hospitals for so long. One time I spent in the hospital for a year and four months this was at Falls View before they turned into a nursing home. I was out of there before they turned it into a nursing home. They had to have the doors locked and I didn't like that but I got privileges to go out and walk around the grounds and that was a big privilege right there. And then I went to some other hospitals which I really didn't like too much either. But the doctors and the nurses were unbelievable. They were very nice and very helpful when I needed it.

Jeff: So you got privileges, what about people who lived there that weren't behaving and cooperating, what happened to them?

John: A lot of them had to be put in seclusion rooms with the door locked and that was something very scary which I didn't want to see—really, really scary.

Jeff: Scary to be alone like that.

John: No, I mean I was in there for a very brief time but it was scary because I didn't have anybody to talk to but when all these people were in seclusion I just felt horrible for them. I

want them to have freedom just like I did. There's a bunch of institutions in this area like Akron General, University Hospital up in Cleveland where I was one time had a really—he knew how to hit me on the right meds. Have you ever heard of the name Celebreeze, he was remarkable. I went to group therapy a lot. I don't even know where to end on that part right there.

But I haven't been in an institution since maybe Judy could help me out with this. She can give the number of years I was in them. But I haven't been in them and it's been wonderful.

Jeff: I'm delighted for all your many successes. You're a man that comes across with real character and a lot of integrity. Anything else you'd like to add.

John: It's really hard to not be able to see family members that I'd like to see because they're out of state and I'm not able to see them but I would like to but you have to have the money to go visit them but mostly I'm very happy to see my sister who lives in Birmingham, Alabama. I've been there a couple times and I was real great. I did a great job. Another thing I'd like to say too is I have a remarkable boss and associate boss at Tallmadge Center and I also want to say Wayne has been a very nice friend to me too. Larry Cassidy, I can't name them all. There's so many of them.

Jeff: Well, I'm sure they're as appreciative of knowing you as you are of knowing them.

John: I just want to thank you all for coming. Because I don't think I ever remember doing anything like this.

Jeff: No, no one has ever done anything like this, that's why we're doing it. It needs to be done.