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Jack Carroll interview for the Lest We Forget Collection of Oral Histories

Jack Carroll

Jeff Moyer

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JACK CARROLL

Jeff: This is July 14, 2003 we're in Akron, Ohio taping for the Lest We Forget project and I'm interviewing Mr. John Carroll III who goes by the name of Jack, Jack Carroll. Jack, thank you for coming in for the taping.

Jack: Well, I'm glad that you invited me, my pleasure.

Jeff: It's our pleasure to have you. As you know we're talking to people that had first hand experience with living in state institutions ??? Do you remember when you first went to Apple Creek?

Jack: I think it was 1966 I went but before that I was in high school. And somehow the - principal kicked me out. He wouldn't let me graduate. At the time there wasn't no programs for the disabled, there was nothing. I remember he kept pounding in my head that I was no good, worthless ?? and after a while I almost had a nervous breakdown. I was crying. I was screaming. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. My parents—at the time my sister was about 13? Mom looked into everything possible and finally they came onto Apple Creek. I needed to get out to a home away from home. ?? was going to put me in but instead I signed my own papers to get into Apple Creek. But I needed a place to be happy. Mom and dad wanted me to be happy. At Apple Creek people liked me. I always did have a great personality when I was little. Of course mom and dad ?? came a couple times with mom but I could never understand why they kept keeping that old ?? . It was mostly like a jail cell. I couldn't understand it. That's why I got ? privileges. Why I got to go to the commissary like staff. After awhile I got to go ?? . The first job I had and I never can forget is what a courtroom guy. They needed somebody who can read labels and record and put them in the bins. That was my job. I knew how to read very well after all I taught my sister how to read when she was little and I taught myself how to read. Well, mom helped me. Everything I tried to do. Like Margaret said I grew up with a lovely family—always very supportive. At the first beginning I wasn't ? take me to the doctor because I had trouble standing up in my playpen. They thought something's wrong. Found out I have cerebral palsy but I wasn't supposed to walk at all. I was supposed to stay in a wheelchair the rest of my life. I was always ?? I could walk. ???Did I give up, heck no, I didn't give up. I went to public schools. I was in Cub Scouts, then Boy Scouts like any normal kid. I taught one other guy to read. He was from Paris, France. I taught one guy at Apple Creek how to read.???Cause my parents came up every week. ??We just went outside to take walks. We got to go to the commissary and have snacks with them. Then they took me back. ?? I always enjoyed their company but after they left I felt sad. I felt really sad. In my own way I missed them. I missed mom. But I always ?? come back and see me, visit with me. I always was looking forward to it. ?? well she was away at college. I guess she didn't know at the time. Of course she was 13 when I had the nervous breakdown. Kate couldn't understand. What's wrong.

Jeff: When you were in Apple Creek when you first got there do you remember what it looked like? Describe where you lived, where you slept. What you do every day?

Jack: It was kind of like a ward. Had like maybe 40 clients?, 40 beds, ?? kind of bad smelly, some people was naked? I enjoyed my freedom.

Jeff: Did you go to school?

Jack: Not at Apple Creek. ??That was a bad memory in my mind. I hated Apple Creek it was the pits.

Jeff: What did you hate about it?

Jack: Well, mostly the ???? poured sawdust on the floor and expect me to sweep it up with a dustpan and broom. Well I asked a simple question wouldn't a vacuum cleaner be more ? Every time they moved me around they never told mom and dad where they was going to move me. So mom and dad had no clue. ?? got up to this half way house ?? and had to take my laundry clear across town to do

my laundry. Does that make sense, no it doesn't and my mom and dad found out and my mom had a fit. So finally when mom finally looked into like Hope Homes I couldn't believe they had washers and dryers. I couldn't believe it. They had outside a basketball court. I couldn't believe that. I was amazed. ?? I got to make my own choices. I was thrilled. I was so happy. I never got to make the choices. I lived at Apple Creek for 17 years.

Jeff: You lived at Apple Creek for 17 years.

Jack: But Terry knew me more than that, he knew me about 20. We've been friends ever since then. I hope I don't make you blush, Terry. But we had some great times. We planted our garden one time.??? Course I used to live with eight other guys. It's all in the past. ??

Jeff: Let me ask you a few questions about Apple Creek. It sounds like you got along there very well because of your hard work and your personality and your willingness to adjust. But I know there were people there that were punished for the behaviors they had. What kind of punishments would happen? What happened?

Jack: Well, I think some of them had shock treatments. Some were not allowed to have any privileges ?? at all. It was mostly sad. But after all I was in the first time I was in Ward 4. I think that was kind of bad. Then I was sent to Ward 2. I was very lucky. I didn't have too many experiences that were bad wards.

Jeff: But you knew there were other wards that were bad.

Jack: I still didn't understand why they had to slam the door shut. To me it was like security confinement. Later on I got privileges. The first job I had I watched ? guy. I went down every day to the laundry. Bring him back to my ward. That's how I helped. ??We put the clothes in the bins. Lots of times the clothes would get lost. And lots of times when I came home I'd have somebody else's clothes. They would get lost.

Jeff: You talked about you moved from Ward 4 to Ward 2 and you had more privileges. When you were on Ward 4 did you ever see anyone get hit?

Jack: No, but I can't say I have any privileges. I was mostly confined. I guess that's why I didn't like it at all. That why I wanted to move to Ward 2. I met a lot of nice people and with my ?? they always liked me. They always enjoyed helping me. I never could understand why they had to keep those doors shut and cling bells. It's like going to prison, almost in prison. I can't understand why. ?? They wouldn't say why they had to. Why they ? had to. When I moved up to the doctor's office I watched ?? cooking and stuff like that. I still had my cloak room job. Some people, I don't know who I can't remember now asked me if they came to Apple Creek if they?? come to see Cleveland. Finally I came to Cleveland and I moved in. ?? I hated it, I hated that place. Mom and dad hated it too. Lots of people didn't make sense at all. ? a social worker that ? and who ? about every day. Mom said ???

Jeff: Were there punishments in Cleveland at the CDC?

Jack: I think so. I can't remember but I think there were. I remember I had to go to school in the mornings. I had the workshop in the afternoons. I remember one day ?? It was Cleveland State Hospital at first and then they changed it to the Cleveland Development Center. I was kind of late when I got to work that one day ? ??

Jeff: So what happened when you got to work late?

Jack: Nothing. ??

Jeff: You just got to work late because of the weather.

Jack: Yes, because of the weather. That's it. Course I made a joke, I said ??

Jeff: When you were living at CDC and also when you were living at Apple Creek there were no doubt people who didn't have the kind of family support you had.

Jack: No, lots of people didn't. They didn't have really very much support from their families. I remember one day a client asked me if I would teach him how to read. I said, "Sure, why not." I guess when he went to school it was up to the teachers and they didn't stop and help him— wouldn't pay attention to him. I said, "Sure, I will." I took the book that I was reading and I pronounced the vowels to him. Boy, he learned quickly. I remember the other day I went to the commissary for myself and lots of staff and I came back and he was reading some famous book. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Barry, I taught you how to read, yes." I guess he didn't have too much luck with the teachers he had. I guess his parents wasn't that supportive of him either. I guess there was a lot of people whose parents wasn't that supportive like my parents always was supportive of me, even my sister. But like I said when I first moved into home in Stowe and I met Terry and Dave ? and I couldn't believe that Cub Scouts, plus a washer and dryer. I couldn't believe outside was a basketball court. My mom bought me a three wheeled bike. Everybody went past me on the way from Holt? waved at me and said hi, I was amazed. I was speechless. Now I was thinking now I can make my own freedom. One day my friend that I worked with at UDF he asked me if one day I would be his roommate. Nobody asked me, nobody told me I had to. I could make my own decisions. I had a choice. And that was amazing to me. I was thrilled. I'm still thrilled.

Jeff: How long have you been living in your new apartment?

Jack: It's not an apartment, it's a new house, home 25 for seven years. I live with two other guys. We moved in 1996, been seven years. The house we live in it's too small. The neighborhood is alright but it has too many, well it has steep hills. I used to play basketball and ?? steep hill. ?? I quit because I always did want to play basketball. I always remembered lots of people's names. It's amazing ??

Jeff: You've been living in the home you are now in for seven years. You're working at Goodwill. You attend a church.

Jack: In a way , last month I went to a chapel. I thought I'll try that. It's different.

Jeff: You're making all the choices in your life.

Jack: We've been going on vacations. I can make choice on that. Last year we went to Niagara Falls. One year we went to West Virginia. I'm going on a Disney trip in December. It's like a dream it's coming true. I'm making decisions that I've never made before. It's great.

Jeff: Have you had any opportunities to make friends with any women?

Jack: Well, I want to say yes. I have a lady friend. I do. She lives Ravenna and our staff helps me, takes me to see who ?? She just moved into an apartment because her mom passed way recently. Of course she used to live with mom in a trailer park in Ravenna. Now she lives in her own apartment. It's close to where she works. So you could say, yeah, I have a couple female friends.

Jeff: That must be a wonderful part of your life.

Jack: Well, yeah. I always looked forward to see Evelyn, that's my girlfriend. I do miss the people that I worked with at UDF. But I decided one day to try again. I thought mom would want me to try again. So one of my caseworkers who has been retired and went to Florida to live, he suggested, he said well, ??call Goodwill. I worked at ? two years. ?? But it didn't work out because lots of time I have ?? I have lots of job tryouts before I start work at Goodwill. I have lots of job tryouts. ??? I used to try to work at a walkway as a janitor. But I had to give that up because I kept ? against the vacuum cleaner. ?? I blew some tryouts. I even worked 30 days at Marks? in Springfield. I tried to go to school and learn computers at ? Computers. It didn't work out. They couldn't slow down the program.

Jeff: So you're working, have a social life, vacations, you living with friends of your choice. You do your own shopping, you plan your meals, you take care of business in every way aren't you, living a regular life.

Jack: ?? yes and it's great. I still see my family quite often. I see my sister and her husband quite often and her little son, Timmy, my little nephew. He's great. It's just great. I've been friends with Larry Cassidy for a long time. I've been friends with ?? a long time. Every day I feel I've amazed. I feel like I'm grateful that I can make my own choices, have my own freedom now, and nobody will have to tell me what to do or how to do it or how to get it done. It's great. It's marvelous.

Jeff: So the difference between living in Apple Creek or in CDC and living where you are now it sounds like its all about freedom.

Jack: Yes, it is. That's what it is—about freedom. I just thank God that I always had loving parents to support me like mom always did support me in every way; a loving sister that supported me. I could have been a lot worse. I could have been still in the wheelchair to this day. I have to say this, you can accomplish, there's nothing that you can't accomplish if you're willing to try. You can accomplish anything if you're willing to try. Give up means nothing, keep trying. If you try one day and it doesn't go the way you want it to, don't give up. The next day might be different. That's been my motto all my life.

Jeff: It sounds like that philosophy of life has really seen you through some very difficult things.

Jack: Yes, 'cause I have to try a little harder ?? But it was worth it. I remember when I outgrew my walker and I started to walk with quadrant to get along. I did a lot of damage to my ? and my mom was ?? I remember one day I remember ??? Break my silly neck but I never did.

Jeff: What did you do?

Jack: I had one quad behind me ?? The next day some kids were playing baseball and they asked me would you like to play. Of course, like a normal kid I said sure. I'd like to play baseball with you. I'd like to join. Well I used the same quads as a cane as a bat.

Jeff: A quad cane.

Jack: Yes, like a quad cane, it wasn't really a quad cane it was a ?? I used that cane. I used it as a bat, to hit the ball. ??? I hit the ball ?? and I broke the bat, the quad, in two. That was my baseball career. ??? We had pets, I remember, we had cats.?? My neighbors had dogs for pets. I always did love animals. I always was an animal lover. 'Cause animals in a way are like people. ?? One of my staff is helping me write an autobiography of what happened. I remember a couple of years I wrote a story about ? and I dedicated that to my mom. I think mother has a copy, I'm not sure. But I remember Mary Beth she one of my staff at Home ?? She asked me if I wanted she would help me. ??? and I decided why not. I've been having fun. We've been laughing, crying but we're not through with the autobiography. We still have quite a long ways to go.

Jeff: You're starting your career as a writer now.

Jack: Well, yeah, in a way. ??Simply as another challenge in my life.

Jeff: How far along are you in your book?

Jack: I can't tell you that.

Jeff: Jack, you've been wonderfully candid and very clear. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

Jack: I would say that your family is very important. Like my family always was very important to me. Good friends and I met two. It's always hard to come by good friends. It's nice to have good

friends to cheer you up when you're down. I've met so many nice people in my life. I always felt I was blessed.

Jeff: I think you have that attitude that has helped you draw the best from the situations that you've been in and given you the opportunities that have opened for you. I really appreciate your coming this afternoon. I want to ask Judy if she has anything she'd like to ask.

Judy: No, I think we'll let Jack's word stand. You're a great philosopher.

NOTE

This man was very hard to understand. I am sure you will want to listen to the tape.

Transcriber