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## John Kolarovsky interview for the Lest We Forget Collection of Oral Histories

John Kolarovsky

Judy Leasure

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*John Kolarovsky*

**WRIGHT STATE  
JOHN KAWLAROSKI  
TAPE #26a**

**QUESTION:**

Why don't we just start with you... introduce yourself and tell us what your role... what your position here at Apple Creek is and, uh, I know maybe earlier we talked a little bit about, you know, you've been doing this, uh, since 15. So, maybe go back to 15 and talk and then about your first experiences at Apple Creek when you were younger.

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

O.k. well, my name is John Kawlaroski I am a staff trainer here at Apple Creek Developmental Center. Uh, that I have been doing for almost 27 years. Uh, worked 3 years as... what were we called back then? HA's... hospital aids which is the equivalent to today's TPW. Uh, came here in 1974 and about 3 ½ years prior to that I started at a private facility which was actually a nursing home. Started out as nursing home and they had a wing, uh, and this wing was 20... maybe 20 guys with a variety of issues. Uh, issues I think is putting it mildly. But, uh, at any were from mental retardation to mental health issues, autism, dual diagnosis the whole thing. That was my baptism by fire. My training there consisted of here's the door, here's your keys, good luck. And, umm, you know, at 15 years of age there I was, uh, fortunately with some other staff who had a little bit more experience than I. Umm, but they just basically turned us loose there. Uh, and we were pretty much on our own. We... are training was provided by the people who already worked there. Here's how we do it. This is how we do it. Here's how it's always been done. And, that was my first introduction to that way of thinking in this field. Well, we've always done it that way and

this is...this is how it's done so don't rock the boat. Umm, it was also my first introduction to rocking the boat. Because, I... I didn't understand a lot of it. At first you go along with it, you know, because that's what you're told. You know, you're 15 years old, your scared out of your mind, you know, here's all these guys at least my age very few of them were younger than I. Most were... were older, that... that was a big adjustment where I had... I had guys my father's age. Uh, on a functioning level, you know, of... of an 18 month old child or something like that. Umm, so you kind of go along with it at first and then... and then you kind of start to question things. Well, why is it this way? Why is Ronnie tied to a chair all day when he just sits there not doing anything. And then you're told, well, that's... that's because Ronnie gets into things. You know, he... we do this, uh, every day and it's for his own good... blah... blah... blah. And, you know, after a while that's not good enough and one day I just tried untying Ronnie and letting him loose to see what happened and, uh, he never got into anything. And, that was kind of my first inclination that you can kind of rock the boat. You can kind of, uh, try a few things here and there. You can't always trust everything somebody tells you when they say this is how we always do it or this is for their own good. Umm, so that was my... that was my start. Uh, gosh we had so much fun there it's hard to believe we had that much fun in just 3 and a half years. Umm, we also at that point we learned that you don't have to put diapers on people because they can't... they haven't gone to the toilet. Uh, they haven't learned to go to the toilet. We can teach them to go to the toilet. Even though somebody's 45 years old they can still learn to use the toilet. Just because somebody hasn't taught them that yet doesn't mean that they can't learn. Umm, so it was... it was a pretty good introduction. Uh, nice evolution. So, then in 1974 after I graduated from high school, umm, my father

worked here. He was a social worker here, he worked in, uh, a couple of the... the buildings. Uh, specifically the red delicious building or C, maximum security building at the time. And, Spartan Hall which was unit E. Uh, he was a social worker there. Umm, both my sisters had worked here. I don't believe either one of them lasted more than 2 weeks. If even that. Umm, so, it's been kind of a family affair. In fact, my mom worked at the other facility where I started. So, it's all been kind of a family affair kind of thing. She was a... she was a nurse and then Director of Nursing and then an administrator at the other facility. Uh, so I came here the money was, uh, uh, much, much better. The money was a dollar more an hour than it was at the other facility. So, I was making I think it was 2 dollars and 25 cents an hour or something when I started here. Uh, that was... that was some good bucks. The only, uh, the only people who were making more money than us at the time I think were people at Rubbermaid. So, isn't it kind of ironic where we've all ended up at this point (LAUGHTER). Apple Creek and Rubbermaid, uh, we're all looking for jobs somewhere. Umm, I came out here it was a little bit of a culture shock because even at the time even in 1974 when things were as archaic well by today's standards as... as they were. They were still ahead of the facility I'd... I had worked at before. At 3 weeks of orientation... 3 weeks of classroom orientation and then they... they take you and put you on your area, give you a tour. Now, I started in what is now Ruby Hall and this is before Ruby was renovated so instead of the 6 living areas that are there now, there were 3. And the living area I started in was, uh, good old ward 28 or the great 28 as we used to call it, which is now 24 and 25. Uh, you can't keep track with out a score card so were going to write all these numbers down. But, the first question I had, uh, after my co-worker at the time kind of showed me the... showed me around. Here's the... here's the

mop room, here's this, here's that and the other thing. Uh, do you have any questions? And, my very first question was, where do you keep your restraints? Because we had used restraints at the other place, I mean, it was standard procedure. Somebody, uh, acts up, somebody, uh, as we would say, blows up. Uh, you'd tie them down. That's... that's the way it was. It's not something that I'm necessarily proud of but that was state of the art. Uh, Johnny throws a fit starts hitting himself, starts hitting somebody else. You go out; you tell the nurse Johnny needs a shot. Nurse says, o.k., comes back with a shot, gives him a shot, he's unconscious for 6 hours. Umm, I came here asked where the restraints are they laughed at me. They don't let us use restraints anymore. And, I'm like, o.k. well, what do you do when there's a problem. Well, we still have the hole. You know, they still had seclusion. Uh, basically, uh, it was, uh, at least hours in, uh, in Ruby. Ours was I'd say 6 by 8. Uh, metal door about that thick and, umm, you did what you had to to get somebody in there if you really had to. Umm, it's you know... it's not...

**QUESTION:**

**(INAUDIBLE)**

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI**

A facilities you mean as far as restroom? Oh, no... no... Of course, there's no restrooms, uh, in those. In fact, in Macintosh where I ended up in staff development where... when I first came to staff development our... our offices were in Macintosh. Uh, that was our third floor is where we were... on the third floor. Like a museum because they had time out rooms up there. Steel lined walls with a drain in the middle from the door jam that he was able to crawl out and he crawled out and ran down towards the room. The other staff looked at me and said, now what do we do? I said, I.. I don't know, pray he doesn't kill us.

You know. And, after he got out he just went down to his room. He did expend enough energy getting that door bent, umm, that, uh, it kind of tired him out a bit, but, uh, you know, you tried not to use a lot of the things, you know. A lot of the perception people have about the old days is that we were a bunch of monsters; we were mean people that mistreated the people that lived here. And, that's certainly not true at all. It was the system that was the monster. The people that worked here... there were so many people that worked here for years and years and years and years. When I started here, you know, I looked at... at some of the people who had been here 20, 25, 30 years, you know, and, uh, you know, I remember thinking, you know, God how could you ever spend so much time here? Uh, how could you possible stand to stay here so long? And, now people are asking me that question, you know. Uh, I'm looking at retiring in a few months, you know, and I'm going where did those 30 years go? What... what happened here? Where'd they go? I want them back. Uh, all I have left of my youth is my immaturity, you know. Umm, and there... you know, people were here for years and years and I couldn't understand it. You know, how could you tolerate this for so long? But, you know, when people ask me that now, what's kept you here for so long? It's... it's... it's easy, I mean, how much fun can you have somewhere else. You can't have this much fun anywhere else. You won't see the kind of things that you see here or hear the things or have the experiences that you have here. It's not like, you know, Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan at the water pump every day and the light goes on and, ohh, you know, and we're saving the world and everything but every little thing, every little step if you're watching out for it, is what helps keep bringing you back. Somebody picks up a fork on their own without having to be asked or initiates something on their own. Rather... and... and you see... you

see we're chipping away at that institutional mind set that they've lived with for so long and... and the... and they're catching on that we have the expectation that they can... they can do things, you know. I tell you what makes me crazy, you know, with the closing and everything. And, people have told... I'll express my opinions about certain things. People say, oh, you don't care your, you know, your just, uh, you're going to retire so you don't care. But, that's not true, I do. That's why I bring things up sometimes at the risk of pissing people off. Umm, there's been in the paper... newspaper several times. Pictures from one of the initial meetings. When they announced the closing and the parents group gets together and they... the.... the staff people and concerned people and the representative, state reps are here and things like that. Somebody had some t-shirts made up and on the back in big bold letters it says, mentally retarded and underneath in parentheses it says, defenseless, helpless. And, I'm really offended by that. It's like taking giant leaps backwards. Our people aren't defenseless, they aren't helpless. If that's the... the attitude that some people have if that's what their mind set is... if they truly believe that... that the people who live here are helpless and defenseless then we just might as well throw up our hands and give up. Because that's... that's not the way it is. You've got to have the expectations that people can learn things. We've all got limitations. I'll never be a nuclear scientist or mathematician or, you know, anything like that. But, I think I make a pretty decent trainer and I try to be the best trainer that I can. Everybody's got limitations. But let's push them and, you know, if... if people are saying, well we don't really believe that we're just, you know, if they're just using it for their own agenda then that's morally wrong as well. Umm, it's really sad to see things come to this state. I mean, it's... it's a shame that I'm going out at a time when there's so much turmoil and feeling of

hopelessness and that with people, uh... People have asked me, you know, well, don't you want to see it all the way through? You know, cause I don't have to retire at the end of 30 years. And, there is part of me that says, you know, I do want to be here. I mean, this has been a part of my life over half my life. And, it's been a part of my... literally a part of my family and I've got some great memories. My life would no where near be as much fun as it has been. If it hadn't been for Apple Creek Developmental... Apple Creek State Institute, whatever it was at the time. Umm, and there is part of me that is kind of like sitting with a dieing friend or relative. You want to be there with them to the end. But, I don't think in this case I really want to. I don't want to see as bad as I think it might get. And, I want...(AUDIO OVERLAP) I want to leave on happy notes... I want to have happy thoughts.

**QUESTION:**

What do you mean get as bad as, umm, do you mean the condition of... of residents in facilities like this or institutions like this? Do you mean the conditions or what do you mean?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Well, what I mean by as bad as it gets or as bad as I think it might get, I'm talking specifically here this particular facility, this particular situation. We are going to eventually get to the point where staff are going to be leaving in droves. Are we going to be able to keep up our staffing levels to the point where we can provide any where near any kind of decent care for people. I mean, already, uh, this year alone, uh, this is March and 24 people have left or are scheduled to leave at the beginning of next month. And, that's a lot of people. And, as far as, you know, hiring people temporarily. Well, what kind

of person are we going to get coming in to fill out an application? Umm...

**QUESTION:**

When is the anticipated closing?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

The anticipated closing is June of 2006. If things keep going the way they're going I think it will happen way before that. Now, of course, we have the... everything's on hold because the Commission has to take a look and make a recommendation to the Governor and the Governor can do whatever he wants. I really don't expect the Governor's going to back down. It was... it was... I thought it was... call it coincidental I don't think so, but in all the newspapers when the stories came out both in the Beacon Journal and the Daily Record the stories came out about, uh, you know, placements of Apple Creek on hold and this that and the other thing. They're were also articles about the latest news that the Governors office had released on the condition of the budget and all these revenues where we're falling short and we're going to have to make more cut backs. So, I really don't see this Commission doing us any good. And, in fact as a tax payer I've got problems with it because, umm, why are we have... why do we have a Commission that is supposed to spend time and effort which means money... my tax dollars in to something to make a recommendation that has no teeth. That the Governor can look at and say, o.k. thank you very much and do whatever he wants. What's the purpose of that? If you want to set something up with the, uh, a review process or something like that, you know, uh checks and balances fine, but something like this is just a show. And, so many people have put their faith into it. So many people have said, oh, they passed the bill they're going to have the Commission, oh, we're saved. And, I

feel bad for those people because it basically means nothing.

**QUESTION:**

Well you're holding out false hope and keeping that fear going, you know, longer for them.

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

And, fear has been such a (AUDIO OVERLAP)

**QUESTION:**

And, that's what we saw with these families was fear. We saw the real fear...

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Well, yeah and you know, that's... that's real and that's valid for them but the problem is is so many people have scared them. And, you know, they've been comfortable with their... with their son or daughter her. And, they've...they haven't thought that there would be a reason for their son or daughter to go somewhere else. So, they don't necessarily know about some of these other places that exist. I feel sorry for the group home operators. Because they've been getting such bad press. I saw one letter to the editor in the Beacon Journal. One. From somebody who works at a group home or owns a system or what have you. One person. I don't know why only one but they said, uh, you know, hey, we're not so bad people because there's been all these letters to the editor. Uh, about, you know, oh, they're going to move people out of Apple Creek and they're going to go to group homes and then they're all going to die. I mean, that's crazy. It's for a lot of the people who live here it's about time. Apple Creeks time... developmental centers as we know them today are... they're time as come. It's time we've moved on.

**QUESTION:**

The next phase will be called something else just like we went from institutions to DC's.

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Yeah, I mean, it's, yeah. What 1980 something like that. We changed the name to Apple Creek Developmental Center. We're not an institution anymore. Yes we are. Anytime you have a whole bunch of people living in one place it's institutional.

**QUESTION:**

Of the same disability or the same needs or whatever...

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

I mean, we go to the movies, we uh... pile people into van, we go in a van... we travel in groups. That's what I tell a lot of my... my classes, you know, people... people with mental retardation aren't used to traveling like one on one. They're used to traveling in groups. You know, we have a pride of lions, a herd of elephants, a murder of crows. I call it a spectacle of retarded people because it's what it is. Here we are at Kmart. Everybody off the van and off we go or into the movies and this that... we're always traveling in groups. It's time we get away from that. And, you know, the public isn't ready for it but yet the public wasn't ready for marches on Washington, the public wasn't ready for integrated school systems, the public wasn't ready for Rosa Parks to sit in the front of the bus. And, if people have a problem with it... that's their problem we're going to have to work at that. You know, one of the biggest prejudices we have is that people... a lot of people think that people with mental retardation are these cute cuddly children.

**QUESTION:**

Down Syndrome children?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Oh, yeah, that's all you see... when... the Special Olympics coverage.

**QUESTION:**

7 year old Down Syndrome.

**JOHN KAWLARSKI:**

Special Olympics coverage on the news makes me nuts because they take the kid with the Down Syndrome they show him running in slow motion, they play the syrupy, sappy music and then the newscasters... they use words like bravery and courage. It's somebody having a good time. You know. This is really special. Shut up with special.

(LAUGHTER) I get very offended when somebody says; you've worked with the retarded for 30 years it takes a very special person. I'm like, just shut up. I'm having so much fun. Today was pay day. I get... I get my paycheck and I go HA, HA, HA. These people are paying me for this. Don't tell anybody.

**TAPE 27**

**QUESTION:**

Paint us a picture of what, uh; in the 1970's what did... what was Apple Creek like? What was the... what did it look like? What did it smell like? What did it sound like?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Oh man. In the 70's uh, I think the one... one of the things that sticks out the most are sounds. I still occasionally will hear something that... not in my head but (LAUGHTER) but somewhere, I'll hear a sound or a certain voice inflection that somebody says it; it will remind me of somebody. I worked with a guy and I have since given up trying to remember who it was because I was asking what staff were left at the time, umm, you know, I would... he... his phrase was, you want some ice cream? And, you know, it was

kind of a sing song kind of thing and I was going around asking staff who used to say that? They're like, oh yeah, I remember that I can hear it too, but we couldn't so, uh, I've pretty much given up on it. But, that, uh, the sounds you would here. You would walk anywhere on grounds any time of day, any time of year, you would hear somebody screaming. Not that they were getting beat or anything but somewhere, I mean we had 12 hundred people. We had, uh, that we've torn down more residential buildings that are standing now. So, we got 3, there was like 7 residential buildings. Uh, somebody somewhere would be screaming about something. You would always here somebody screaming. Umm, Macintosh, or at the time the hospital building, the DD unit, the front. Just seems like every building around here has 3 or 4 names that it could go by or has gone by. Umm, that held the crib wards. There would be 50, 60 cribs per ward. Now, were not talking necessarily babies, we are talking about adults who now a days are getting physical therapy and occupational therapy, where we've got walkers for them, we've got wheel chairs for them. In the 70's people didn't... if they had a wheel chair, the family bought it for them. Hardly anybody here used a wheel chair years ago. And, so if you couldn't walk or couldn't walk well you were in the crib ward. So, we had, umm, not necessarily huge people, but people who were most physically effected were in those wards. Also, the, uh, hospital type ward was in there too. Umm, if you walked into that building and that building housed more people then, then live here today. O.k., I once did the math and kind of roughly figured it out. There were approximately, uh, 400 people living in that building at one time. You walked into that building and you smelled urine. You got used to it. In fact, I went on a vacation once... that was the building our office was in and I went on vacation once, it was kind of an extended... I was gone for 3 weeks.

And, uh, when I came back it was a nice warm day and when I walked in the back door of the building... just as soon as I walked in I smelled it. And, within 2 or 3 seconds I didn't. You know, so I was gone long enough that when I walked in the building I noticed it but right away the brain goes, oh, you know what that is. You know, and... and I just didn't smell it anymore. Uh, in the summertime those crib wards were pretty bad. Now, we had to work as part of orientation we had to work a week in the crib wards before we went out to our regular work assignment. I think it's so we didn't complain too much about our work assignment because the crib wards... I sounds harsh. And, anytime you use the word ward, you now, that sounds very archaic and that. (COUGH) But, the crib wards, even though there were 60 people... even though the place stunk like urine and feces, they had probably the tightest family feeling. The people that worked in those crib wards were people who worked there 20 and 30 years. I couldn't wait to get out of the place. I really couldn't. I was very much like factory work. Because you had, well with, uh, uh, a new person in there you had like 3 people that would work in there. But, normally you would have 2. And, you'd get in to work first shift 7 o'clock. Talk to 3rd shift, what happened? Nobody died everything's fine, o.k. hunky dory. Then, shortly after that breakfast would get there. And, you would go through to each person and feed them their breakfast it was usually oatmeal or mush or something like that. And, you fed each and every person and you went right down the line. And, once you got through that whole process and got the... all the bowls and dishes and everything sent back down to the, uh, kitchen area. Then we started cleaning everybody up because everybody wore diapers. I mean, people didn't get out of those cribs for like days at a time. If every at all because everything was done right there. Umm, so, we go a long with this wash cloth, at least we used a wash cloth... a

new wash cloth for each person but you usually dipped it out of the same bowl or bucket or whatever it was you used. Umm, so you'd usually... you'd clean people off, you'd wash them down... if anybody was really messy then of course they would get a bath. Uh, but, uh, you'd clean a person off, you change the sheets, they got a fresh diaper, they got fresh clothing and everything. So, you went through like the assembly line kind of thing. Each person and you worked your way from crib, to crib, to crib. And, then you got everybody all cleaned up and it was time for lunch. And then lunch would get there then you would go around and you would feed everybody and it was the same thing as breakfast. You go from one crib to the next and you feed people. And, there was, of course, some interaction there. Uh, even though I had had some experience prior to coming here. The crib ward was new. And, it was still kind of frightening. Uh, I didn't know how to act. I didn't know. Do you talk to these people? And, you know, and some of 'em did talk. It was mostly parading kind of things. They would repeat things that they had heard before. But, it would, it would scare you if somebody would say something. Uh, but we would go through the whole process, feed everybody, come work your way back up the other aisle. And, once we got down with lunch and all the dishes and everything that's in the way. You went back through and cleaned everybody up again. And, it was time to change diapers and you, so that whole shebang and usually had to change sheets if you had to change diapers. So, you went down through each crib and back up the other way while the other person did it on the other side. And, by the time you got done with that, 2nd shift was coming in, and you would tell 2nd shift how their day went and, uh, er, how your day went. And, they would take over and you would go home. I mean, that was the day. It was a very methodical factory like kind of process. But the people that worked

there, I mean, they had these big rocking chairs. Whenever they would get some spare time. Many times they would take these people out of their cribs, and, and talk to them and rock them. It was something like that age appropriate, well maybe not necessarily release was human contact. And, those people stayed there. There whole time here. And they loved it. And I really admired those people. You know to put up with the conditions. The smell, the odors. I mean we didn't have air conditioning. It was unheard of in those big brick buildings. And, and, and, the smells just permeated into the bricks. I mean that, to the day they tore the thing down, if you walked in there you could smell it. Um...but the people that worked there, in those, in that building were just incredible. You couldn't, you could offer them twice the amount of money they were making somewhere else, and they would refuse. Because they loved what they were doing. Lot a love in that building. Um... so smells and sounds I think were some of the biggest ones. Um... you know... you don't really, lookin' back, I don't really have a lot of a feeling of, of tragedy. Ohhh, the poor people that lived here. There were a lot of people that cared very much about them. Um... in fact, up until the time my son was born, I insisted on working every Christmas. Because, it was, Christmas was the one time of year, like with our guys, it was the one time of year when the few families that did come to visit; we had some family members that came on a fairly regular basis. We had other family members that would maybe come once or twice a year. Christmas seemed to be the time. And one time I really would feel bad, was for the guys who either didn't have any family or the family didn't give a rats ass about 'em and didn't show up any time of year. And, those guys needed somebody. They needed somebody that would be there for them Um, and there was a few of us, and I'm not the only one, there are a lot of people who love working here Christmas Eve and

still, ya know. Um... because who else, who else do they have? So, you know that was a good time. Um... but, you know, for the most part, it, it was fun. We, we did what we could to help the guys out. Cut a few corners here and there. Broke some of the rules. So that the guys could get a break. Um... looked the other way a couple of times on a few things just so that somebody could have some, you know, a bag of chips in their room or something like that, you know? I mean, um... it was an us against them kind a thing for the benefit of the people who lived here. And, and it was fun. It was kinda like they were payin' you to break the rules. And, that was kinda neat.

**QUESTION:**

Um, so you say you don't have a sense of tragedy? And, that, Um, Um you keep the staff people that lived here really loved and cared for them as well as they could, because of the system? Um, let me ask you this way who, you know. I look at some of the pictures that I've seen (inaudible). And those are tragic pictures to me as an outsider. You know. And, Um, I wonder what kind of society allows this to happen to human beings? No matter what their condition is. You know, and I believe you that, that probably the majority of the staff were hardworking and well intended. So, who, who do, I don't want to use the word blame, but, but who is responsible for some of the (inaudible) conditions that were here and at other institutions in the state of Ohio?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Ok. Um. I don't know if blame is such a bad word, a horrible word to... you know where'd it all come from? You, you know you look back hundreds of years, it's a cultural thing. It was from you know, the, the, the village idiot, the court jesters, you know a lot of those people had mental retardation. Um... it was just the thing as far as society knew. We

didn't, the society didn't know any better. Thankfully, we eventually got the idea Um, but, for, for decades the thing to do, and you ask a lot of the parents, they were told by their own physicians this child will never really amount to anything, you just should find the nicest place you can and put him away, ya know. People weren't encouraged to keep their, their children at home. Um, and I worked with a lot of people who had like that much mental retardation. Um, had no business being here, but, this was the place, this, this was best for them. It's best that we protect them. It was a naïve protection instinct. We just didn't know any better. We thought it was for their own good. We thought it was for society's own good. Um, they would be better off....(paused-Who's to blame for poor conditions back in the old days?) Who's to blame for the poor conditions back in the olden days? The government. The government/society because people with mental retardation, they don't know any better to know how bad things are so, we can just shove 'em in these places and they'll, they'll not know the difference. They don't know if they're living in a hell hole. Uh, we don't, we can put 'em in these places and just not look there anymore and we won't see it and we can, ya know, delude ourselves into thinking everything's okay. Um, it's, it's like the facility that I worked before I worked here, it was a private facility. It was a nursing home. Most of the, the parents who had children there, by children I mean, I'm talking anywhere from ages 12 or so up until, I think our oldest guy was, I think in his 60's or something. Um, they were very well off. Doctors, lawyers, and people who had a lot of money. And, they could ease a lot of the guilt that they might have had by paying a lot of money, thinking that, okay I'll put my son or daughter in this place, and it costs a lot of money, but it'll be worth it because they'll be getting a lot of, they'll be getting really good care if we go there. And, that, that wasn't true at all. I mean

the conditions there; it was just a smaller version of Apple Creek. Um, here, Um, it's a tough thing to answer. Whose, whose fault was it? Who, who was responsible for the conditions? Ultimately, it would have been the government. It was the government that uh, uh... I forget the house bill number and I'm ashamed of that fact, because that's a big piece of history, (INAUDIBLE) 336! There we go. Bill 336, I believe. Um, that was the one that was supposed to correct all the problems in all the institutions in the state of Ohio. And it got passed because our representatives down in Columbus are just; they want what's best for everybody. And they passed and they outlined all the rights and all the care that everybody's supposed to get, and now that's all wonderful. But then when it came time to a lot money, it didn't happen. There was one place, one area of one building they fixed up. That they brought all the camera crews in and said, "look at what the wonderful things that are going on here!" They called it the humanization project. Now that name didn't last too long, cause if you look up humanization in the dictionary it says to make as or, to make human. So, the implication of a humanization project is we're starting out with some thing that's not human and we're gonna make it as human as possible. So, that got changed to normalization. Uh, but they, the bastards just took one place and fixed it up, and, and put some money into it and said, "Look what we're doing for our mentally retarded people!" And, it was a sham. Everything else here. There's still people lying on the floor, still people pissin' their pants. Uh, being neglected, being uh... there were, you know I mentioned time out. There were, ya know people who abused that. And, of course, I can hear it now, "well there's, ya know, any time you use time out its abuse". Okay, but back then, I'm talking about. Um... sometimes it was a matter of survival, ya know. Uh... there was a couple of times when I really wondered if I was going

home. But, Um, you know there's, there's always going to be times when you have people who are going to cut corners and aren't going to be the nicest person or the most therapeutic staff people that they could be. Um...

**QUESTION:**

What kind of ratios were there? At the height of the population of Apple Creek? What kind of a staff to client ratios did you have?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Actually, when I started here, the population was coming down a bit. I wasn't here at the peak time; it was just before I started in late '60s, maybe very beginning of the 70's the population was at, I think around 1400. And when I started here it was around 1200. But, in the area that I worked in, it was generally, we had 35 to 40 people to an area, and you had two staff people working that area. Depending if we had, we had such a wide range of functioning, okay? Overall at the facility. The areas that I worked in, we had higher functioning people than a lot of the areas.... So you would see, ya know the ratios wouldn't be as, uh, uh, as nice as some of the other areas. But, yea, we could have, we'd have 40 guys in one area and two staff people. And, when that staff person, ya know, they went to supper or something like that, uh, or if they called off sick, uh, you were stuck by yourself lots of times. So, there would be nights when I'd be working with 35, 40 people by myself. Um, but fortunately, most of the time as far as self-help skills and things like that. The guys could take their own showers, you just kind had to keep, try to keep order, try to keep people alive (laughing) including yourself. Go home in the evening when you're done. But, uh, some of the other areas were better. Uh, some maybe not so good. But, uh, you know I couldn't give you an overall. I'm sure we could, you know look at the

numbers and crunch the numbers, but the area I worked in, there was about 35 to 40 to well 16 to 20 to 1 staff person overall. Today, um, what is it today? I think, oh, okay. If we take overall, overall, everybody to everybody, um, it's a hell of a lot better. TPW's I think it works out, as far as direct care people, overall direct contact staff it's a one to one thing. Of course, that's considering all three shifts. Considering nurses, and, and, and people like that. But, as far as groups and that goes you generally have uh, around four to six to one ratio. In some of the program areas, uh depending on that area. Like say the retirement center. Yea, you'll see four to one. Those types of things. Uh, so hell of a lot better than what it used to be.

**QUESTION:**

Do you see uh, in those days um, when abuse did happen from staff, and when it did, was there something inherent in the system that just didn't want to address that or just couldn't address it, or?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

(long pause) Now, you're getting really uncomfortable cause I'm saying... I'm saying some things that might really ruffle some feathers. The amount of abuse has changed. It's no where near the amount of abuse as what there used to be. I mean, you could look at what 30 years ago was kind of the standard approach. Even, even something of the physical acting out situations. Some of the situations that I was involved in where I was attacked by somebody, you know, half a foot taller than me, and outweighed me by about 30 pounds. The way I may have handled that situation by today's standards, you might consider abusive. So, in a way it's kind of comparing apples to oranges. Um, I didn't see much flat out abuse. In fact, I'm having trouble actually thinking of a particular situation of

what I would call flat out mean-spirited abuse. We had a guy that I, that was highly suspected, but you never could catch him at it. And we tried. We tried, because you know, you couldn't have... first of all you didn't want anybody making waves in your area. And, you had to... in our situation you had to build up a trust and a respect with people. You couldn't just... you know, people didn't buy into it, just because I'm the staff person you gotten listen to me HA, HA, HA. You were outnumbered (laughing), you know. If they wanted to kill you, they could kill you. So, it was a matter of mutual respect. So, we didn't tolerate it. We didn't want it. These were our guys. You don't hurt our guys. So, there was, there was, mean people back then. There was that intimidation factor. People would, would try to intimidate other staff. You didn't see nothing you didn't hear nothing. That mentality is what still exists today. We're, not necessarily a rampant abuse standpoint, but that here's how we do it, if you don't like it, shut up. I tell every single orientation class, every orientation class that comes through, I tell 'em within a week after you leave this class somebody's gonna tell you, forget what John told you in staff development, forget what he told you in orientation, we're gonna show you how we really do it. Now, that doesn't mean we're gonna take somebody around the corner and punch their lights out. But it may mean we aren't gonna... we don't have time to secure somebody in a vehicle during transportation. We're supposed to be running maybe this program, but we don't necessarily have time for it, so here's what we're gonna put in the books. And, if you don't like the way I talk to this person, don't worry about it. You're best off keepin' your mouth shut. That still exists here. I know that exists, 'cause I've had people come back to me after that week, after that two weeks and being out of class. And their saying I don't know how to react to that? I, I, I don't know what to do? And, I've even

had instances where somebody's come to me with, somebody came to me once with a situation they witnessed and uh, they weren't really sure if it was abuse, or a situation that could be considered abuse or not. And, they said, "I don't know if I should report this? I'm, I'm, I'm kinda scared. I don't know what to do?" And I told 'em, I said, now you don't have to worry about it. Because you've told me. And now I have to report... yea I have to report, you're obligated to report any kind of suspected abuse. I've got to report it so, let's get the ball rollin'. As it turned out, it did turn out, I guess, to be nothing. Um, it was a situation where the person heard some rather harsh words being used just before they walked into the room. And, the one person that had their back, uh, to the doorway when the staff person walked in, the new staff walked in, and they weren't sure if that person sitting there was a staff or a resident. So evidently, that person who was sitting there with their back to the door was a staff person. That's what I've actually was able to... the information that came back to me. Um, as a trainer, I get frustrated. Because I feel very lonely sometimes. I see people cutting corners. I see a lack of involvement with supervisory and management kind of staff. Here's another thing, a new person told me once. Actually, 'they'd been here a year. And, uh, they said, "You know what's really interesting?" I said, "What's really interesting?" They said, "if we hadn't seen that one videotape with the program director, in orientation, I wouldn't have a clue as to what she looked like?" She said, "I've been here a year now and I've never laid eyes on her." And, I know people have different jobs and different things to do, Um, but you need involvement from everybody. And training can be a very lonely thing, because if you're the only one. I have managers and supervisors calling and ask me questions about what policy is? Some of it I can remember forward and backward because I've trained it so many times.

Um, some things are being done on heresy because somebody thought this was policy and so, you know that's perpetuated itself to the point where it's what we're doing on a regular basis where there's no policy whatsoever. Um, and, I, I love being still out in the areas. That's, that's where you find me lots of times. I like to help with lunch. I still like to work with the people that live here. Um, but a, you know, I see, uh, so many missed opportunities for people to gain independence. You know, if we're having soup and I see a staff person pick up the crackers and open up the crackers and dump the crackers in the soup for somebody, it makes me crazy. Pick up the crackers; open... we can't do that. That's right, you can't do it today. Maybe twenty years from now, you know. That's been one of the beauties of being here for so long, ya know. I have been shown by life itself that changes can be made and sometimes those changes take decades. It doesn't happen overnight. It's not... at the water fountain where we're finger spelling, Oh the lights just gone on! No, it doesn't happen that way, it takes decades. Takes a lot of patients. And, if you miss those little baby steps along the way, you're gonna miss the whole point of it all. And, and the crackers thing is one of my favorite examples, cause I had that happen not to long ago. Guy I'd been working with at lunch time. He had soup. He had crackers. I've been working with him. He's an abled bodied young man, he's very capable of doing a lot more than he already is, but the expectations aren't there from a lot of people. They just go ahead and do it for them. He picked up his crackers and he looked over at me. And, I gave him that look and he turned back around and he tried. And, you know how hard those Saltine cracker things are to get open? He pulled on it, they opened up. Now you'd of thought I'd just thrown the winning touchdown for the Super Bowl! I'm, YES! YES! I'm just too easily amused anymore. I've got to find some other line of work.

But, it wasn't the fact that he opened up that package of crackers, it was that, that moment the communication that was there. The non-verbal communication. He looked at me, I gave him the look and he knew what I expected of him. I knew that he could open up those crackers. And, maybe some people opening up a package of crackers ain't know big thing. Well, if you're in this field, you're in the wrong field. If that's how you're thinkin'. Because that's just one step. Um, I'm stuck (laughing)

**QUESTION:**

Do you, from your own perspective, do you think we as society, or government or whatever label we want to put on it, have we moved dramatically forward or to where those days of the 70's could never happen again? Or where are we in that 30 years? Is there still momentum to move forward? Or, are we in danger of going back?

**JOHN KRAWLAROSKI:**

Um, I think, I think we're definitely moving forward. We've come a long, long way. Um, unfortunately, I think Apple has started to swing back the other way. Um, we made some great progress. Man, the 80's uh, 80's and 90's we really kicked some butt. We really, we were making progress left and right. Now, we've become experts of passing Medicaid surveys. We only put forth a strong enough effort when we absolutely have to. There's not that feeling that we, we have to do better. We can do better?

**QUESTION:**

WHY?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Because uh, I don't know. It, uh, because they can get away with it. You know, talking about expectations, I think there's a lot of managers that don't have the expectations that

people do things the right way all the time. Um, and I don't, I don't know where I went wrong. We had some excellent leadership here. Uh, Ken Gossett really carried us through. If it hadn't been for Ken Gossett, in the 80's we would have been closed a long time ago. You know, there was an effort to close this facility, I can't give you the exact year, but I know Ken Gossett was here in the 80's and it was around that time. He was out there, he was in the public eye, you saw his, he was going to speak at the Lyon's and the Kiwanis, and this that and the other thing. We had community involvement, uhhhh, we were recognizable at the time. And then we started getting career people in here. And, you know, I'm not really comfortable with giving you specific names of some of the people that might have kind of got us going in the opposite direction, uh, but people who were very interested in furthering their own careers and just not assuming the leadership, but proving to people what, how good they were at running an institution. Or running a developmental center or whatever you want to call it. They were definitely more interested on looking good on paper than getting the job done right. And we have that to a certain degree here. Uh, especially in training. In update training. Here read this, sign this in service sheet so we can put it in the file, so when Medicaid comes to look at, at the training we've been doing, we can show'em this.

**QUESTION:**

Is there any validity in any kind of a, thought process that says maybe some of that is that we take for granted that we've done, we've done such good things now. We've got to where we need to be, and so we don't need to be challenged? And we don't need to be...be forward thinking, and we've got everything we need now, and it's just a matter of the status quo?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Yeah. Oh yea, the status quo's very comfortable and you know through that time that we were doing so well, and we were making progress, and we were getting lots of pats on the back, and things like that. And we still do, I mean, the PVA had a big lunch for everybody yesterday and that was great! Um, if (laughs) I was just joking around yesterday said, boy you know if closing the facility is what it takes to get this stuff, maybe it's not such a bad thing. Um, that didn't go over to well with a lot of people for some reason, but yea, we became real comfortable with the status quo. We just kinda said okay we don't have to work at it, so we kind of sat on our laurels and just kinda let it ride. And, we lost the desire, we lost the spark. Now don't get me wrong, there are still the majority of the people who are working here, are still doing things like, you know, they're taking ugh, people out to church and out to dinner and things like that. If they weren't initiating if TPW's and that weren't initiating a lot of the things that happen. Things wouldn't happen, okay? But, as, as a whole, as a facility, we have definitely back it down a notch or two. And become a lot more comfortable. Um, and we've had the people come through that want to kinda use us as just something, another notch on their resume before they move on. Um...

**QUESTION:**

What's the risk of that comfort level?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

The risk is going back to where we started. Um...

**QUESTION:**

How the risk of having these kinds of people in charge is? About being satisfied with the status quo is?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

OK. The risky thing about having status quo type people in charge, having the kind of person who just wants to make a good showing and charges. Those people don't care. All they care about is themselves. All they care about is looking good. And, everybody else is gonna pick up on that. It's like the person; it's like the program director who the direct care staff only see on videotape when they're in orientation. They, it's, it's the expectation thing. Well, if these people don't care enough to come see how I'm doing, to come see how things are going? If they're only interested around the time Medicaid is here, that's the only time I'm really gonna put out a good effort. And like I said, we've become masters at passing, uh, Medicaid surveys. You see a difference of night and day here. When Medicaid's here and when they aren't. And that has been perpetuated by the people who run the place. We've had, I don't know if they still do it, I was on the, what they called the monitoring committee. Where you had a little checklist of things and you had your area that you were assigned to, and you had to go to to check to make sure that people were doing things. And, all that... it was supposed to be uh, it was a substitute for good supervision was what it was. And, it trained staff, that when you saw somebody come walking into the area with a clipboard, you turned it on. I've had people ask me, when you walk into an area, are you here just to visit or are you monitoring? You know, why should it make a difference? Uh, (laughing), a couple of weeks ago, I walked into one of the program areas and I opened up the door and I said uh, what'd I say, I said, "Monitoring!" (laughing) And it was so funny the way people jumped up and started doing

things. Um, you know its kinda human nature that after a while people only will do what's expected of them. And, we've lost that expectation that we're gonna try to do the best that we possibly can. Um, you'd asked about society as a whole, you know, are we even getting any better there? I think so. I think, uh, it it's getting somewhat better. I mean there's still the people in the community when you go on outings that will point and laugh and make fun. Mental retardation and developmental disabilities seems to be the last sanctioned prejudice in our society. You know. You go through uh, its funny people don't believe me when I tell them this, but I've actually seen as a child, when we would go on vacation and travel through the south before the days of the interstates. I saw signs that said "No Coloreds Allowed". And, white restrooms, colored restrooms. Things like that. You know through the south that was normal. Of course, we don't have that today. Um, but we still have Special Olympics today. We have special schools. We have this, that and the other thing. And, yet people say, well, if we don't have Special Olympics they couldn't possibly participate in the real Olympics. Well, you know what, I can't either. (Laughing) Um, you know, we have Special Olympics that only reinforces the stereotype, reinforces the prejudice that people are different. So, should we even have the Special Olympics? Uh, and you know, those are, the Special Olympics are kind of sacred. People will say, well if we don't have Special Olympics you know, they couldn't possibly participate in the real Olympics. Well, neither could I. They don't have middle-aged white guy Olympics. I, I couldn't, you know, I can't think of any event in the real Olympics that I could participate in. Um, so the more special things we have for people, the more separation there is. And the more it's reinforced. Um, group homes, or assisted living homes, or even independent living, you know, you try to put a group home in a

neighborhood. People will come... this just happened in Wooster not too long ago, they wanted to put a duplex in a neighborhood that was primarily a home for persons with mental retardation. Oh, but no! That's a duplex! And, uh, we're zoned so that you can't have a duplex in our neighborhood! You know, come on you can't fool me. They don't want retarded people in their neighborhood. Um, we still have a way to go. At least we still, at least we have, we have handicapped parking spaces and ramps for people with wheelchairs. Uh, we're getting that far. Um, it always made me crazy though to see what the hell is the brail on the anytime teller things for? When you can't read the screen? Uh, you don't know if you're withdrawing a million dollars or what? But, uh, you know, we are making progress. There seems to be a little bit more understanding, but that eternal children thing is still out there. We had a nurse; this is just within the last three months. We had a nurse start, and she's no longer with us. She didn't last more than a couple weeks. Big surprise. I was glad that I was there to actually hear this. If somebody would have told me this, I'd a never bought it, I'd a never believed it. The second or third day this woman was in orientation she says, "you know this is entirely different that what I expected." And, I said, "Well, how do you mean? What's so different from your expectations?" She said, "well I thought all retarded people were cute and cuddly." And, (laughing) I didn't know how to respond, I think it's... "Well, welcome to our world!" Welcome to the real world. But at the same time I said, "Thank you, Jesus." You know, that I could be here to actually witness that. Because, like I said, I wouldn't have believed it if anybody would told me. Um, it's kind of amazing that that belief is still out there, but we're working on it, we're chipping away at it. Uh, can't give up. You know everything else takes decades, and ...

**QUESTION:**

If we're talking about the decades of the 60's and the 70's and 80's as a, you know, maybe as the last period of the ignorance of what really mental retardation was, or IQ's and all those kinds of things

**TAPE ENDS**

**TAPE #27b**

**QUESTION CONT'D:**

...that we used to differentiate between people and all. If that was like a, you know, a societal ignorance time, and we're into sort of a societal complacency now of what is. Which is the most dangerous?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Hmm. Which is more dangerous? Ignorance or complacency? I would say probably ignorance is more dangerous because at least you can learn. If you're ignorant about something, at least you can learn more about it. If you're complacent, you're comfortable and you're not going anywhere. Um, and, and, any field that you're working in that involves working with people, uh, we're always looking for ways to get better with it. Um, so I think that complacency is a lot better. That's one of the things that's holding us back. As far as getting people out of institutions. And into more appropriate placements. There are group home systems out there that just want the cute little retarded people. They don't want challenges. They don't, any kind of behavior challenge, we've been through that here.

**QUESTION:**

Well, don't you think that the state supports that mindset because of the way they fund. They fund more for the people that, that are the easiest to take care of? And, you know, the people that need more, you know, one on one or one to two kind of ratios and all. They can't make it in the community.

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Yea, the state certainly doesn't make it easier for the people, uh, who might have more challenging issues. Uh, otherwise known as problems. Acting out behaviors and things like that. They certainly do encourage, uh, placements of easier people. And as long as they do that they're going to stay in the business of running developmental centers. I mean, Um, our people here are, really are experts at, at at handling our situations very well. Uh, we don't have that many situations. We don't have too much acting out behavior because that's that's something that people, they, they get it, you know. If we can handle the situation in the least restrictive way, the most therapeutic way and that's not confrontational so it doesn't blow up in our faces, in the long run people are going to learn better ways to handle problems. Um, there's certain systems out there, certain companies that, that at the first sign of trouble, they're trying to send them back to the institutions and somewhere else, send them elsewhere. But the, the funding is so God-awful complicating too. I mean, if you've been following the 10 Waiver thing, Holy crap! Would somebody please make up my mind?! You know, Oh we're gonna... no we're not gonna... Well it's been delayed.... And ... this, that and the other changes. Uh, no wonder people are throwing up their hands and walking away from a lot of this. Because, this stage is just complicating things. It's so cliché, ya know. That the government makes things more complicated. It's true! They do. Um, they really need to get out of this

business altogether. And, again, that's not anything that's gonna happen overnight. It's gonna take decades for that to happen. But, there are some really good companies out there. There are some, some people that see the potential. Um, and thank goodness there are those companies out there because there's some not so good ones as well. Um, it's a shame there has to be so much inconsistency. Even in county programs. Um, boy I've been in, um, ok, I'll mention the good people...In Tuscaloosa County, Starlight Industries. That's, I walked in there that place is a jaw dropper. Um, they are set up to have different tasks for different levels of interest. Um, different abilities and that, there's all kinds of different things that people can be involved in. Even move up the ladder as they go along. You know, we do here. We stick straws in holes in cardboard boxes. Everybody does that all stinkin' day. And then we wonder why Johnny won't stay on task? Because he's board! Um, there are good places; there are not so good places. There are places that get it; there are places that need some help along the way. I've been to those places too. You know, one of the cool things about my job at this point is Apple Creek's; one of Apple Creek's functions is to be an outreach kind of resource. So, I've been going to other facilities. That's how I get to see a lot of these different county programs and group homes. Uh, the systems, the group home systems and that, uh, they either come here for training, or I go there to do training. And, and that's been great. That's been a lot of fun. Uh, you see places that the physical plant, the building itself is not got the most attractive place in the world, but they've got really good staff. They've got really dedicated people. You walk into another place, that's all nice and bright and shiny and white and clean and not at all homelike. But the staff are good, it, it is clean, they just, they just need a little tweaking here and there. And, uh, then there's the places that really, really

got it. And, uh, are doing a real good job and you know, thank God we have places like that. We need more places like that, and the governments got to quit making it so damn complicated for places like that. And even individual people, you know a lot of our folks. I've even thought, you know what'd be cool to take Ray home? Um, but 30 years is enough (laughing). You know, as much as I love Ray, I've done, and I'm still gonna do it. I'm gonna go into business.... My wife and I were, paperwork's already started, the process is already underway to start our own business. Um, and we're gonna train. And we're gonna go after these places that need a lithe helping. Uh, a little guidance here and there and uh provide training. If the state of Ohio wants to contract with us, we'd be more than happy to... Lord knows they need it... and see the beauty of it is... the beauty of going somewhere and doing training, see here it's difficult, because here I train people; I have people go through orientation. I see them get out there and then be ruined (laughs). Uh, and I see I'm preaching these things and they're not happening. I don't know why? You know I'm not a pie in the sky kind of guy, but I train people as what is the policy, what is the philosophy, what is it we're supposed to be doing? I have, I'm very upfront and truthful with people. I'll even point out in some of our policies, where they are going to see breakdowns. They're going to see something different in this. But they'll have to make a choice. I might go along with the crowd and not secure somebody in a vehicle properly because everybody else is saying, nah you don't have to worry about it, but the one time that vehicle smacks into a tree your ass is in trouble. And mine's not because I got your signature on the in-service sheet. You know. So, I'm here. I see where there's a disregard or a lack of follow through where there shouldn't be. I can go to another facility and train on philosophies, and procedures and stuff like that, and leave. And all the way home

delude myself into thinking that now it's going to be a far better place because I was there showing them the light and the way uh, to providing better living, uh arrangement for their individuals, so. It's, it's a fun ride.

**QUESTION:**

Do you have anything that we haven't touched on that you think important to share about historically or the future?

**JOHN KAWLAROSKI:**

Well, yea. Maybe just one more thing and again it's something I tell a lot of the orientation classes. This is very, this field, okay and lets not just say Apple Creek, the field in general, whether you're working at a developmental center, at a group home in a county program or what have you, this can be a very stressful field to work in. it can make you crazy, Um, I had my moments, you know. As I was saying before, ya know, I could work more than 30 years, but 30 years is enough. Uh, I'm counting down the days. Uh, I love it here, this has been a great event for my life, but 30 years is gonna be enough. But, it's also been 30 years, the best years of my life. It's been a blast. It's been so much fun.

And, it's what you make of it. You see, you just walk around here, you see some people are going around going, "oh, this is terrible,, 0000hhh this is a terrible place to work." You know. Um, or you can just kinda make the best of it. One of my favorite sayings is, "I refuse to be annoyed, I choose to be amused." And it's just what you gotta do. You just, sometimes, you just gotta shake your head and just go on. (Laughing) That's the way it is and if you let it kill you it will. Um, I think it's the Grateful Dead, one of my favorite lyrics of any song. "We may be going to hell in a hand basket, but I sure am enjoying the ride".

And, uh, that's pretty much the way I look at things as they are nowadays.

**END OF TAPE #27**