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Spring 2022 Oral Histories: Athens Farmers  
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Spring 2022

### The Ridges Oral History

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Unknown 0:09

Hello Are we good? Yep, we're good. There we go. Good. Technology's not always my friend.

Unknown 0:23

That's all right. All right, I guess we can just jump right into it.

Unknown 0:30

Okay, sounds great.

Unknown 0:32

All right, I'm gonna start reporting in progress. All right. So the just the first part is just your name and your age for the record.

Unknown 0:44

Okay, Mary Cochran, and I'm 50 years old.

Unknown 0:48

Okay, and then what's your educational background?

Unknown 0:53

I received my bachelor's degree in social work and psychology from Ohio University in 1993. And then my master's degree in social work from Ohio State University in 1994.

Unknown 1:10

Okay, all right, and then what's your professional background?

Unknown 1:14

So currently, I'm a social worker with Mount Carmel health. And I've worked with Mount Carmel health for 30 years this fall as a social worker, and I've worked in various departments

and areas oncology emergency, room. OB, outpatient OB clinics, labor and delivery and most recently population health which is like a outpatient ambulatory community based service. position.

Unknown 1:47

Okay. All right. And then I guess now we can move into the richest part of the interview. And so I'll just start with asking you about your experience at ODU. What was that like?

Unknown 1:59

Well, I absolutely loved being at ODU and I would say it was very good growth opportunities. For me. I came from a small town. I was the first to be to go to college and my family on both sides of my family. So big experience with a whole higher education. So a lot of personal growth and development for me, so I had a wonderful experience there.

Unknown 2:32

Okay. All right. And then so I was campus like when you attended.

Unknown 2:39

campus was beautiful. Very peaceful. I'd say there were a lot of young people around her youthful feeling. I came from a town a lot of older residents, I guess so it was very nice to be around a lot of younger people a lot. Of Energy. always something going on fun activities. Things to do. So. Yeah. Great campus.

Unknown 3:06

Okay. And then so, this is pretty similar, but what was Athens like back then has it changed? Since you've since the 90s?

Unknown 3:15

Yeah. Um, surprisingly, a lot of it's very similar. Although I think the past couple years of COVID has changed a lot for campus since I've been back. Just with some so many places closing which is you know, disappointing to see a little more growth obviously, on the outskirts of town with the hotels and stores. Those definitely weren't out there. So they had a small mall and had a grocery store Kroger, that small ball but no Walmart, none of the extra little chain stores. were around. So that's changed quite a bit. But uptown actually I think was thriving more

probably in the 90s when I was there, now privileges because people didn't have all that stuff outside of town and really not as many kids have cars as they do. Now. Or weren't quite as privileged to have the ability to go off campus to get some of their needs met. So I think uptown was a lot busier all the storefronts were pretty full. There was nothing really close a lot of mom and pop shops and stores. Biggest change.

Unknown 4:27

I can definitely see that. And then so lastly for you what activities or organizations did you participate in while you're a student?

Unknown 4:39

I I personally myself was in student my work and with Student Alumni Board, I was their chair like their community events and services. So while I was there during those years to quarterly I would plan an activity or event with different social service programs in town. We went to like a nursing facility and did like Valentine's cards with the elderly adults and brought them desserts and there was a halfway house that we worked out for Thanksgiving and made a big Thanksgiving meal. We did stuff with the after after school programs with some of the kids were the single moms. So mostly I was involved with student loan my board but I was within Student Alumni Board. I got very involved with the community and some of the community based programs I would say, Okay, so some volunteer work. I did some volunteer work throughout school too, and I worked at the library. I worked at the library, like for my work study program, so I don't know 12 hours a week or something or 15 whatever they assign this to I did that as well.

Unknown 5:51

Okay, awesome. All right. And then so now I'm going to move on to your your work at the asylum. So how did you first hear about the asylum?

Unknown 6:01

So, as a freshman, I initially went into school to be a teacher. I thought I was going to be a teacher, but I did not like my first class and right away I decided I needed a different major. So I just started taking some random classes and one of the classes I took was social work. In the introductory to social work class, you're required today 16 hours a quarter, we were on quarters at that time, volunteer work, and the volunteer work was, you know, just a couple hours a week somewhere. So one of the places they offered the school offered was for us to do volunteer work at the state hospital or at the asylum so they would pick us up weekly in a bus and they would take us up to the top of the hill and drop us off for about two hours and you know, bring us back so I did that an entire quarter. To really meet that requirement for my class. I had to have 16

hours of volunteer work. And that actually helped me decide my major very much so so it was very impactful experience for me.

Unknown 7:11

Okay. All right. And then so what you kind of already answered this a little bit, but how did you become interested in volunteering at the state hospital? What drew you there?

Unknown 7:21

Yeah, I mean, I honestly did it initially because I had to have this requirement for my class. And we could have done volunteer work at other places, but that was one of them that they offered us and I just was kind of intrigued by the whole facility and the patients who would be in the facility. I always had a lot of interest in mental health care. So that was a little more appealing to me than some of the other populations where some of the other students went. Yes, I see. The mental health piece really pulled me there. Probably the most.

Unknown 7:51

Okay. All right. And so, was that your freshman year that you started volunteering there?

Unknown 7:57

Yeah, it was my freshman freshman year, fall quarter. So I would have been 1989

Unknown 8:03

Okay. All right. And then so how long did you volunteer there? Was it just the quarter?

Unknown 8:09

I did. I did it just that quarter. And honestly, at that time, a lot of the silent was already closed. And they only had kind of a smaller section still open. And I kind of got to live the process of them, having some of those patients be discharged from that facility that had lived most of their lives there. But yeah, as far as the time at the asylum, just that semester, or just that quarter,

Unknown 8:37

quarter. All right. Okay. And then so what did your volunteer work consist of?

Unknown 8:42

Yeah. Really, they would take a big group of us up there on top of the hill to see the patients and they really just wanted to us to socialize with the patients. Engage with them, just help them learn some you know, typical basic communication skills and socialization skills, I guess. So no real specific assignments. At that time, the only patients really left at the facility had quite a bit so I don't think they trusted us doing a whole lot of socializing with them.

Unknown 9:22

Okay, so were they mostly older patients

Unknown 9:31

you know, kind of a range. I would say there was a range there was definitely some younger people that were still there. They just had high mental health needs, like really struggle functioning on their own in society. What's going on at that time, because I think most of the other patients had been discharged or maybe moved to other facilities, but that's my guess, I guess. I didn't really know that at that time, but that's my guess. But the ones that were still there just had a lot of outbursts. A lot of anger issues needed to be supervised and guided a lot. So I don't think they let us do much other than just socialize would play board games we would you know, play board games. With them watch TV.

Unknown 10:37

Shoot, connection went out Oh, are you there? Hi. Hear me. Okay.

Unknown 10:48

I gotcha now.

Unknown 10:49

Alright. Alright. I think it just cut out there for a second. But okay, sorry about that. That's alright. I think we're good to go. So you were just talking about playing board games with them. Watching TV with them. Exactly. All right. So the next question is what was the environment like for you at the asylum? Kind of sort of how did it make you feel walking in there? What was that feeling?

Unknown 11:22

Well, it definitely felt like it should have been condemned. Very, very dark, dreary, very uninviting. Kind of scary, very depressing. Hard to believe that they kept people in those conditions, I guess. Yeah. I felt really sorry for people that were locked up on this units.

Unknown 11:45

Okay. All right. So were there any like, sort of, I don't want to say parties but kind of like gatherings or events or things of that nature. That you went to?

Unknown 11:57

Yeah, they definitely had a couple bands I think they may have done like for the

Unknown 12:06

for some of the patients they may have done like some you know cookouts and stuff that were supervised for the people that were able to leave under supervision. I didn't participate in any of that but they did have like, like dances and having dances. And I don't know if it was like, you know, once a month or whatever, but they would bring bring us all into this room and that's when they they kind of had to lock units at that time. They had a female lock unit and a family locked unit. So they kept them separate. And they would bring them all together and let them have like little social dance and they would play music and have popcorn and things like that. So I do remember participating in that event. Once or twice and I do remember being kind of intimidated at that time, my age. And in that environment, because I wasn't sure especially with the men I knew most of the women because I stayed on the lock women's unit but it was not in the locked men's unit and I knew there were a couple of really aggressive men that they had kind of kept locked but I was concerned about I guess so. Yeah, it was. And I do think there was a couple of little arguments or a couple things that would start or someone would say something and staff is always bringing people apart when they were bringing them all together. So one settling a little unsettling.

Unknown 13:28

And then so did you ever did you witness any of the treatments that the patients underwent sort of their care? How did that go?

Unknown 13:37

Not really. Just because we came in the evenings and I'm assuming most that stuff occurred during the day they would pick us up in the evenings and take us up there for you know, a couple hours early evening. Time. I mean, of course, there was still staff, I would assume nurses are passing medications and stuff. So I would definitely see them, you know, passing medicine and giving medicines to the patients. But other than that, no, we were not really prepping to be you know, part of any of their treatments.

Unknown 14:03

Okay, so what were your interactions like with the staff? How are they? Um,

Unknown 14:11

I honestly don't I mean, just cuz it's been so many years, you know, ago. I don't really recall any significant interactions good or bad. Like I said, I do remember the nurses passing medications. And they were pleasant enough with the patients. I think they knew the patient's names. You know, I think that while we were there students, it gave them a great brain to probably do paperwork or work on things while we kind of entertained the residents. So I don't know that I really recall one way or the other. I mean, like I said, No, none of the residents that I worked with or interact with seem to have any issues with the staff. They seemed annoyed when they had to do medicine. But you know, they were pleasant enough to the to the residents from what I can tell.

Unknown 15:03

Right, well, that's nice. I know you're already you already talked about the grounds of this the facility but is there anything else that you would like to say about it? Maybe the outside or?

Unknown 15:13

Yeah, I mean, it was just you know, worn down, beat up facility, although it has has such a presence up there on that hill. You know, you're, you're like up there and you kind of look over the entire university. I mean, I think everybody should go up there and see that area. But it you know, it's hard to believe at one point that it was cool, high functioning, heating, you know, they use it to its capacity, because when when I was there that needed to be closed, it was in bad shape.

Unknown 15:46

Okay, so were you there when it was shut down completely? Yeah,

Unknown 15:51

so during the time I was there, not volunteer necessarily at the asylum, but during the four years that I was in school there, that's when they officially closed it and the residents that were

Unknown 16:09

there that kind of went into Athens or received at some of the halfway houses and they did you know, officially close it during that timeframe. I don't know the exact year but I know during those four years I was there. It did occur.

Unknown 16:24

Okay. All right. So what was the so what uh, what did the shift sort of feel like? What was the impact of the shutdown sort of before and after?

Unknown 16:33

Yeah, so I know that. Probably my sophomore year may my junior year I started working at a place called the gathering place. And it may still be an app and so it was there for many years, but it was like a halfway house for people who were at the state hospital.

Unknown 16:53

And, but they didn't really have a place to go or place to stay. So some of them were homeless, or just, you know, didn't know what to do with themselves during the days because they always had planned activities structured state hospital, so the gathering place took these residents in throughout the day and evening, they're always available. So I started volunteering there. So a lot of the people who were at the state hospital ended up coming to the gathering place. And they would kind of the patients would kind of like go up and down port Street. And we'd be walking around campus, sometimes trying to borrow money for people to you know, get mature or something or get food but they could always go to the gathering place was always an open you know, option for them to come in watch TV did sit around smoke cigarettes together and play cards. And there was always snacks in the kitchen and stuff too. So, but I would say that the streets and Athens probably became a little more full of a lot of these residents that used to stay at the asylum.

Unknown 18:00

Okay. Alright, so do you have any idea? Do you know anything about what the effect that the shutdown had on the employees or was that sort of you didn't really close with them?

Unknown 18:13

I wasn't really close with the boys. I mean, I'm assuming obviously just employment will be huge for many people to add to it just because it's a more impoverished area. It probably was a large other than Oh, you it was probably the next largest employer, I'm assuming in the area, so I'm sure just economically I had to hurt a lot of the staff members. And I'm sure finding other jobs would be challenging at that time in Athens, because you know, other than you, I'm not sure a lot more a lot of other of those boys would have found jobs, or that had to leave the area. So I'm sure that was really challenging. And I'm sure they were worried. I mean, I'm sure some of them are really, you know, worried about the residents and how the residents are going to be able to function on the road and the community.

Unknown 19:01

Okay. All right. Did you? Did you have anything else you'd like to say about the effect that I had on the patients when they were released from the state hospital?

Unknown 19:15

No, I mean, I think for some of the patients that I saw later, the gathering house, I think that was, you know, good for some people and for some people, I think it was maybe not so easy because they didn't have to have structure or some of them have lived there for so long or had spent so much time in medicine. I mean, it really was their family. And they may not they may have been estranged from other family members or had no other family. So I would just think it would have been very lonely. For some of them. You know, that social contact, they did have they lost and then they were kind of wandering around on their own. I'm sure they were linked with outpatient services and resources, but to not constantly have that security piece I'm sure is very challenging for some of them. So yeah, good and bad. Yeah. I think good and bad.

Unknown 20:09

Okay, and then the last thing I had about the the shutdown is what affected the shutdown have on you how to how did that make you feel at the time?

Unknown 20:26

Oh, no, I don't know that. I had. I mean, I was I was concerned I felt bad for some of the residents that I would see up on the streets and like I said, most of them when they were asking

for money, I'm sorry. Mostly when they would be asking for you know, money or food. I was concerned. A couple of people honestly, I remember being a little bit concerned. Again, just because I was younger, at 19 female. When they were on the streets, I was a little concerned at times, with some of them who knew me or recognize me from the facility like if they would follow me back to my dorm or something because they would shout at me like across campus or across board street and be like, Man hurry, you know, I'm and I was like, Oh, how am I gonna you know, get back and realize not bring them with me to my dorm. Just from a safety standpoint, so a little bit of safety concern was there. But also I felt bad that they lost their homes. It was tough.

Unknown 21:29

Alright, and then so I was gonna move on now to sort of the relationship between Athens in the state hospital. So how do you think having the state hospital right next to the university, what impact did that have? Um,

Unknown 21:48

you know, I mean, I think I'm sure some people definitely did not like it, although I think that Athens is kind of isolated from a lot of other towns and a little more roll and a lot of Ohio. I'm sure a lot people didn't like it, but at the same time, it was probably a good spot for Oh us pretty liberal. So I would hope that some of them would encourage them helping others. I also think, probably isn't a good thing that they had the pocket of students that they had to do a lot of volunteer work. You know, like I said, I was on the tail end of that, but I'm sure they did that for years and they counted on students for some of the employment or some of the help taking care of some of those residents. And I'm sure, like I said, gave some front from an economy standpoint gave some income to some of the families and Athens that may not have had it,

Unknown 22:42

otherwise. Okay. And so then where did you know of any other students who are interested in the asylum, whether that was professionally or maybe sort of the story surrounding and things like that? The I don't know, criminal activities.

Unknown 22:59

That I know other

Unknown 23:01

are not necessarily just sort of, I don't know what you heard what you saw. how other people interacted with the asylum.

Unknown 23:13

I would say probably just because I was hanging around, I was going airborne with people that were in my major my area, you know, so I don't think it would have been a whole lot different from what I experienced as far as you know, that wanting to serve and help others. I'm sure not everybody responds. But, so I don't know that I personally do.

Unknown 23:38

Okay. All right. And then this is just the last question is what lasting impacted your volunteer work have on the rest of your life? Sort of? What impact did it have?

Unknown 23:51

Yeah, well, I mean, honestly, I, I think I could probably that volunteer opportunity that I had probably helped me secure my major. I mean, I was really undecided going into school what I wanted to do and I realized I really enjoyed working with those that maybe aren't as fortunate. You know, helping others I really enjoyed the mental health piece. So I would say really led me toward my profession today. And what I'm still doing, still enjoy, and I've always had a big interest in the mental health piece that I think that probably all stemmed from my time looking at the state hospital, asylum as a student, so I don't know that I realized it at the time. But now I think it probably made a really big impact because I was really floundering and undecided about school and I know I had to get done in four years, because was too expensive. So I very quickly felt like that was my spot. To go into social work and psychology both my both my undergrads I guess. Yeah, I had a great experience. I would definitely do it again and encourage others to do it.

Unknown 25:00

Okay, that's pretty amazing. Honestly. That's that's pretty much all I have about the ridges if I don't know if you had anything else that you wanted to say about it. Um,

Unknown 25:14

I don't think so. Charlie, do you know what you're actually close? Close? They tell you.

Unknown 25:19

I want to say 1993 I'm not sure.

Unknown 25:24

All right. I was there until 94. Okay, so I knew it was kind of you know, process. Everybody kind of going out and out into the community. I don't think I would say some of the students were kind of frightened initially when there was quite a few of them on the streets, you know, because they were just loud, sometimes inappropriate or especially people with hallucinations every once in a while themselves here. There's pre extreme patients. And when you're seeing them on the streets, and they're not in a confined space, I'm sure it's probably very frightening to some students. I do think, you know, thinking back on it now that you mentioned this. We had worse it was in town when when I was a student there as a big store, and I do think that they probably some people did steal stuff from there and stuff. I did hear a few stories of that. So I personally didn't witness any of that. But I did hear that when I looked at the gathering place and people would say, How did you get that? No, I think they would pocket stuff. So Oh, not sure you know, not? No other way of knowing how to get their needs met or not having all that freedom they had before.

Unknown 26:40

Okay, yeah, that's my man. Kind of Miss phrase. That question. I was. I was trying to mean like, oh, you students sort of breaking into the asylum and things like that because I've heard stories about that. I just didn't know if you saw that or heard about that.

Unknown 26:53

Oh, gotcha. Got no I did not hear that. I mean, I I know that it was a big place for Halloween for many many years. Spooky spooky little area. They didn't take us on a tour of the whole thing when I first started working down there and you know, they took us to the basement and Oh, super creepy. So insert super creepy. Okay. Yeah, but overall good experience for me.

Unknown 27:17

All right. Well, I guess that ends the formal part of the interview, so I'll stop the recording.

Unknown 27:22

Sounds great. recording stopped.