

Interview with a Former Patient Who Wishes to Remain Anonymous
[In and Out of Augusta State Hospital/AMHI Many Times from 1955-1985]

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Interviewer: Diana Scully

DS: Why did you go to AMHI?

ANON: At AMHI my very first time, I was 15 years old. In 1955, I was sent there through the court's juvenile system. I destroyed a house...a summer home, a camp. And why I did that I don't know; I was in a rage...I hid out in Litchfield, where I lived, and I was very confused and disturbed and so forth, and I didn't know why I did the destruction; it was rage. I suppose I was reacting to some of the things that I felt had happened to me that I didn't know at that time... They sent me to AMHI after a court hearing...I believe [I was] the very first child that was in there.

My memory of that time of being brought there was very frightening and shocking. There was something like 2,000 patients or 1,800 patients. I remember seeing this printed up on the board. I was in the operator's house...The men were dressed in white pants, white shirts, black bow tie, black shoes, and I remember it was frightening to me. I was very small; I was about a 100 pounds probably, and 15 years old. I stayed there for a couple of three months; it's hard to remember that far back, as far as time is concerned.

I remember the Superintendent...he took me in his Cadillac to the Bangor State Hospital for a big conference. Why I don't know, I can't remember that part of what they did, and I was there as a participant. But initially I can't remember the questions; they really weren't relevant to me at the time. And they brought me back to the state hospital in Augusta. I stayed there for a couple, three nights.

I saw [Dr. X]...who was a very frightening character. As I found out over the years, he was a very big man, he was very heavy-handed, and when he came into the wards he wanted people to be afraid of him. We were afraid of him. I had to sleep by the office, being a child, and I didn't know why then. I figured it out later on. He used to come in and holler and scream at me, and call me scum and trash and put me in a circle with the nurses, in the center, and he would do everything he could to make me feel unworthy of living or breathing the same air. And he frightened me. I wasn't the only one I guess he did this to. I know that I can only remember him doing this to me. He would threaten me with shock treatments [though] he never did that.

DS: Were other people getting shock treatments?

ANON: Oh yes, as punishment. I remember that I was just aching to get away from him, to get out of there. I was taken out finally by the state police and put in a boy's home in South Portland. I stayed there basically until I was 17, almost 18, I guess, and I was released. From that point on I didn't seem to be able to focus on working. I didn't have interest in working. I didn't grow up with a normal childhood. I just felt like rolling around...I went to Portland. I got lost there. I came back to Maine. And I eventually ended up in the Augusta State Hospital.

DS: What was the trigger event?

ANON: I got into the habit of going out into the woods and hiding. I felt an awful need, a pressure, to get away from society, to hide from everybody. I would go out into the woods and curl up and daydream for days, fantasies. I don't even remember now what they were about. And this happened to me and I would do these kinds of things well into my nearly 40s, I guess. I would wind up back in AMHI. A lot of the admissions people told me that I had the distinction, "you've been admitted and discharged from Augusta State Hospital more times than anybody in history." I said that's not a distinction I would really want; nobody would. And AMHI over the years became different because of different superintendents.

DS: So the different superintendents really affected the place?

ANON: Yes...I don't know if it affected other patients, but it didn't affect me much in a positive way. [Except] we had a superintendent...Mr. Roy Ettlinger who was a wonderful man, a little guy. He was kind and considerate. He made some changes that definitely I think had a very adverse affect on Dr. X, who was bullying everybody. And even though he couldn't get rid of him, he demoted him, with no powers, no medications, right, nothing. Dr.X died I think because his power hungry struggle was taken away from him, and he died the day I was a patient there on the ward. I can remember that I didn't feel anything. I just felt like maybe things would get better for me and other people, but it really is isolated to one person's demise.

And Mr. Ettlinger made some very positive changes. I think to some degree staff resented some of his changes. [There were] some very good staff people whose hands were tied because what they could do or couldn't do was very limited. I felt that a lot of the behavior of some of the staff certainly had to improve toward the patients. That part was a welcomed change...

And there were people who worked there...you just have to realize that...they're there for only one reason, to get a paycheck and go home, and that's the extent of their vision...A lot of the social workers at AMHI and the psychologists that I had had to deal with and the psychiatrists, which changed all the time...I felt had no more ability to deal with the people who had psychiatric problems than I would to walk in the operating room and do general surgery. They just weren't equipped...They weren't interested enough. I felt that the attitudes of some of the psychologists...I know some of them worked there forever; they were mental health workers. They'd take a test or two and be able to put a pin on that said psychologist, but they took these boards and could never pass them. Why? I don't know; they just weren't that gifted. They had a very negative effect on many patients. They had a negative effect on me. I never could figure out whether it was my negative lifestyle that was the total problem or was it the result of how I was living that just gave them ammunition to behave more negatively towards me and my life. I never really could put a pinpoint on that. It got to the point where they had patient advocates, which I think was a good thing in many ways, and there used to be battles between these patient advocates and the abuses that some of the staff would heap on patients. I was never one, I felt defenseless. I felt no matter what hospital it was that I was unworthy and I remember Dr. X and that I was unworthy to fight back and speak my mind.

DS: That's a sad thing.

ANON: Yes, it is...I didn't dare; I didn't have it in me. I was found with so much thorazine in my system, that when Mr. Ettlinger came, it was a wonder that I had survived. I can remember

taking various medications against my will. There was no way I could battle these people; I was defenseless. I was a nobody; I had no family. I never knew my mother. I met her when I was 34. She was a sad woman. I don't hate her; I don't blame her. I never met my father. I didn't like what I heard about him; he was a cruel and mean man. I didn't know him except that he tried to kill me as a baby, and that's why I became a ward of the state. My life led to AMHI and I saw the changes but AMHI never really helped me. AMHI never helped me...They didn't care. I would drink. I discovered that booze was, I thought, an escape, and I would get drunk, and I would become ridiculous. I would become very annoying to the police, to the ambulance people and the hospitals. And I just felt terrible in those moments. I went through a very long history of this business.

DS: Were you trying to really kill yourself?

ANON: No, I don't believe I was. I wished that I could have. I wished that I had the courage to, many, many times. I wished, but I knew that I couldn't. I felt that people in the hospital would insult me, the doctors would insult me, the nurses would sneer at me. And all they would see was the basic, the surface. Often times I thought to myself, I guess this is what I had to suffer, and I didn't understand that. I would go back to the hospital and they would get me straightened out a little bit, with food and get cleaned up. I would feel a little better physically, but I'd be thrown out again. I was committed by the courts—by Courtland Perry, the blind judge—at AMHI three, four, five times. I know him quite well and his wife Gail. I started going to church, and became somewhat familiar with him on a different level.

But AMHI, basically, I've been in worse places. I was in Danvers State Hospital, different ones across the east coast, not very far away, of course. But the last time that I was there at AMHI was, I believe, the very last day of May that I walked out of there in 1985. From that point I've never been anywhere. I have been here 9 years. I lived with a woman up here...for 8 years. She invited me to stay at her house, because she had a big house and she was a member of my church. I stayed there for a while. And it seemed to have given me enough space to get straightened out a little bit.

I applied for a job with Gerald Rodman. I never believed for one moment that I would actually be hired, and I was right...He had a lot of applicants and I guess he told me how many he had, 29, I think. He worked it down to 12, 7, and 5, and I was one of the very last 3, but I wouldn't dare to let myself think that nowadays, for good reasons, I had no administrative training or skills. I had been there a lot, and this was why he was interested in me. I was able to, I think, look at what I had seen. I believed that I could have been very fair in all of my views. I think that's what struck him. I'm not overly intelligent, okay, but I think I'm as qualified as average. I think that I do have gifts that I've never been able to capitalize on. I have a great ability to observe people and situations and places and form my own, well I would like it to be, the right thing, the right thing, to do, and it's not a fantasy. It's just that this is the way it should be, welcome to Maine, the way life should be. And I have a gift in that sense. And I think that I have a real gift in being able to express some of my observations. And that's not very common in settings like AMHI. Most people who have money, power that become mentally ill they go to private psychiatric hospitals. I used to sit around and observe other patients and I would think I have nothing to complain about. It's not quite that easy. Life is filled with sadness, void. You

know that there's absolutely no reason for you to be here. I haven't found AMHI helped much of anybody.

You know, it isn't that it was deliberate. For the most part, the people who worked there had families. It wasn't deliberate. Some people were mean; that was deliberate. Some of the staff was evil; they loved to hurt patients. That's deliberate. But they were a small number. You never got a real chance to talk to psychiatrists. All they do is warehouse you. Sometimes I'd be there so many times, they'd just come in and sign the paper and walk out and never say a word...

What they'd do, they'd have group sessions. They'd have psychologists and social workers form a group. Most of these patients would be so disorientated or so damaged brain cell-wise by their disease that they couldn't focus on positive rehabilitation, mentally or emotionally. Those like myself who might have benefited from real therapy, we'd sit there and this guy would read the paper. Well, he'd read a story that meant nothing to these people, nothing to me; it was a joke. I'd see him over here sometimes. Somebody asked me about it the other day... He said he knew me, I said "yes, I know him." He said, "Well, what do you think of him?" I said, "no comment." He kind of looked at me funny, and I said, "Well, I really have no comment." He was only there for one reason. He sat in his office and he slept. For one hour a week, he'd gather these people. I'd be one of them. And we had to go; we had no choice.

DS: What was his position exactly?

ANON: He was a mental health worker who took a few tests they gave at school. A staff person told me he took the tests 12 times and couldn't pass. And I always viewed him as just a coaster; he was dead wood. But then I again I'd say to myself, well, I shouldn't do that, because who was I, what am I, am I any better? He's got a paycheck coming; he can go home. I can't; I've got nothing. So those things would enter my mind, but sometimes you try to justify your own situation.

And I don't know, maybe there's some justification for my life, the way I acted and behave; maybe there isn't. I don't know. But I saw a psychologist...down in Hallowell...I saw her for a couple of months, 5 or 6 visits. It was very nice. But...what's the point, you know?...It really isn't going to do me that much good. I've been able to stabilize myself emotionally. I don't take any medicines now. I used to take a lot...I have suffered a great deal of self-humiliation, and a great deal of embarrassment because other people were always too willing to jump on that. And in some ways I don't know if it's worth anything except maybe to me for a few seconds. I thank whatever it is that...I'm not mean, I'm not a monster, I'm kind, and I try to do whatever I can for anyone...

Evidently I had some kind of mental disorder. I was committed by Judge Perry I guess 4 or 5 or 6 times. I thought it was mostly related to the alcohol-induced ridiculous behavior, your inhibitions go. I knew that I was simply looking for attention. I wanted somebody to know that I was here...That was very juvenile, asinine behavior. I know that now. I didn't then...I kind of figured out at some point that some of this stuff might have been because I was looking for my mother, and those nurses represented my mother, and I wanted them to love me, to take care of me, but that's the way it works. All I got from them was dirty looks, you jerk. And I thought I have

learned, quite maybe by accident, a lot about myself about my own behavior, by trial and error. AMHI had not really been responsible for my education, but they were the cause of it.

DS: What do you mean, your formal education?

ANON: My education of life. My formal education ended at the 8th grade.

DS: When you got sent away to AMHI?

ANON: Yeah. And I took the GED test at AMHI. I just barely passed it. I wasn't able to study, or absorb things in the sense that scholastically. I thought and worried that when they did the IQ tests and that sort of thing I would probably register moron.

DS: That would be highly doubtful.

ANON: I tried to get the job with Gerald Rodman for one reason only. I said I have a negative picture. I had to convince him that I had lived a life of hurt and pain and suffering in many hospitals such as AMHI, and I wanted to stop the abuse and the suffering, anybody and everybody if I could. If I could have just one little corner to make it better, that would be worth it to me. I didn't know that I could do that. I wouldn't know how to go about it. I believe in my own heart now; it has taken me some time to get there. There's no substitute for kindness and not jumping to conclusions and judgments on the surface of how you see people behaving. And I learned that by my own self, by how I went through what I went through. And I have no education... *[tape 1 ends]*

[tape 2 begins] I think that the new hospital should focus more on things that really matter, not space, not ceramics, not the color of the walls, or they may have some bearings, colors do have bearing, I wear blue a lot. And I realize that it has some bearing on me. Blue is the color of peace. I like blue; I wear blue a lot. When I'm feeling guilty, I wear white. *[laughter]* I do believe that, I'm sorry that I never got to know Gerald Rodman on a more personal note or better. I have a real sense that Mr. Rodman was a fine human being. And I sense that about him. The new man, Dan Wathen, I've said hello to him a few times. I don't know him...I've said hi to him and so forth, but he doesn't really know me and I don't know him. I know that he used to volunteer at the soup kitchen; I met him there. I was the volunteer at the shelter. He helped a little bit to set it up. I felt that was very decent. I hope that he'll be able to do what's right for the patients...

But I also don't really feel that I qualify as a psychiatrically mentally ill person. I don't feel I ever did. I think it's because I felt I should have been far more responsible and done better with my own life and my own direction. Obviously I didn't. Now, I've learned to blame my own sufficiency, how and where I'm not sure, but I tried to relieve anybody else of the guilt that I'm responsible for.

DS: You've had some hard things dealt to you.

ANON: Dr. X did an awful thing to me, but I already had terrible things done to me as a child. You know something? Out of all the times I was brought to AMHI and other state hospitals, never once did they ask me why do you behave like this? What is wrong? Do you know what's wrong? They asked me questions like do you know who the President is? Do you know what date it is? And why you get like that? Don't you know there's AA? They never get to the core; there was never any interest. I don't think it ever registered to them, not with just me, but with

many people who might have been stuck in a parallel situation psychologically, as I was. I don't really think that they ever really focused in the right area...

DS: Other than going to that group therapy, that wasn't really therapy, were there other things that would have been considered treatment while you were at AMHI?

ANON: Working at the workshops for two dollars a week, so that they could make a pretty good profit.

DS: You didn't get any real money from that?

ANON: Two dollars a week, 30 hours a week for washing walls and floors in the old state hospital. Work therapy: if you didn't do it, and the attendant told you that you had to do it, it was brutal. If you said no, you were liable to land on the floor with a broken nose and some teeth missing. And they thought nothing of half a dozen jumping on you and pounding the hell out of you. They didn't do it to me because I was a child.

And there was one big, big nurse there. Thank God she was there, she was my angel. She... cursed Dr. X. She told him one day, "You leave him alone; he's just a baby. You leave him alone. You stop it." Honest to God, if it wasn't for her, I don't know what I would have done. And she treated me like I was her personal child. Thank God she did. And, then again, I never saw her after I got older. She probably passed away. But AMHI, Riverview, whatever they want to call it—there are very few good memories for me. I know many other patients who were there with me years ago whose stories are far worse than mine are. I saw what happened to them. I was there. I just felt pity that a human being suffered like that...physical beatings, and leaving them in seclusion rooms naked with no clothes. How could you do that to another human being? ...

The old patients and the rumors got up to [Mr. Ettlinger] real quick. I remember another situation at AMHI and I won't mention names here, but this was a woman, a case manager, a social worker, not really qualified to be either, who had a real macho attitude about men, period. "I'm going to make every man who ever lived bow and cry before me." She gathered groups around. I was one of her patients. And I very seldom spoke what I was really thinking, because I didn't want to; I was scared...

The superintendent called me up to his office about the [seclusion room] incident and he clapped me on the back and said, "Beautiful, beautiful." He said, "You're really something." And I said are you talking about the recent seclusion event? And he said, "Yes. We won't talk about it any more; you're not to mention it out of this office." And...I said, "It's true." And he said, "I know that it's true." I told her she should get some help.

DS: What happened after that. Did anything change?

ANON: Mr. Mullaney became superintendent, and with this other gal, she had kind of a problem, she just hated men, it was very obvious. She had groups, social, therapy things. She was very kind to the women. She hated me, but she hated all men. I never knew what was her problem. I never could figure her out. I never got a chance to. She made sure that every man, she used to make them cower. I'd just sit there and look at her. She'd start in on me about what a terrible guy I was, how irresponsible I was, carrying on kind of like Dr. X routine, and I'd say, well, what can I say.

DS: It almost sounds like a “therapy” to tear you down.

ANON: I’d just say, “What can I say? What do you want me to say? You’re the boss; go right to it.” And she’d get worse, she’d get mad at me, and then she’d say, “You know if you’re going to be a real smart mouth, I can take your pass away from you, and I’ll throw you in pajamas. How would you like that?” I said, “Would that make you feel better? By all means, I’ll do anything I can to help you.” Well, she really flew off the handle and went right to the head attendant and told him to take my pass away and immediately put me in pajamas...

And I’m sitting down in the hall in a chair by myself because I’ve been abused so much at that point I’m not being destroyed over that. Pretty soon Garrell Mullaney comes walking down the hall. He turns around and looks at me, and says, “What are you doing?” And I said, “Oh nothing, just relaxing.” He asked “Why are you in pajamas?” because they know that that’s punishment. And I said, “Well, I guess, you’ll have to go up to the office and read the board, Mr. Mullaney. Talk to the social worker there. I guess she felt that I wasn’t cooperating enough with her.” He said, “Who’s the one responsible for pajamas thing here?” And I said well, so and so. He said, “Oh.” And he just walked out again...

[The social worker] came storming out of [her office]. She gave me a look that could kill, and she said, “I’ll see you when I get back.” And I said, “Well, I hope so.”...Well, she came back and she didn’t say anything to me...She went right into her office. And then... the head attendant—he was a nice guy—said, “Get your clothes, get dressed. That didn’t last long, did it?” I said, “Well, I’m glad of that.” He said, “I can’t see why they did it in the first place.” So I got my pass back, got my clothes back.

And then she called me in her office, and said I was no longer her patient; I was not under her wing anymore. [She said she] thought that I was extremely vindictive and mean to go squealing to Mr. Mullaney. I said, “Well, you’ve got that all wrong. I didn’t squeal. He happened to be passing by and saw the results of your therapy, and he asked me and I told him. I didn’t say specifically anything. I said go read the logbook, Mr. Mullaney. Go talk to the lady.” I said I don’t know who he talked to. But evidently he had you come up to talk to him. So I said, “Well who knows, maybe one day we can be friends.” She said, “Get out of my office.”...She just had something about men. I don’t know, bad husband or something. But she didn’t appreciate my responses, and I think she would have felt much more powerful and better had I responded like I did when I was being treated that way by Dr. X. And it was unfortunate.

Mr. Mullaney called me up to his office about three or four days later. Between him and me he said, off the record, that he wanted me to inform him of any future abuses by that individual, verbal or otherwise. And I said, “I don’t believe there will be.” He told me he had a discussion with her, and that kind of retaliatory, vindictive behavior wasn’t going to be tolerated when he was superintendent. So he was a nice fellow.

I think that many of the staff people [were nice]. One of them passed away very young—Irene Roy, who was on the admission ward. I really thought a lot of her. She really touched my heart. She was a caring woman; she was an attendant; she cared about the patients truly. But they were

so limited as to what they could do. She died of a heart attack or stroke, thirty years old, and I really felt bad about that. What a waste; what a loss.

We had a lot of good people that worked there. A lot of good people. One in particular, and I will mention her name, because I had a great love for her. She was Pat Havey, she was a registered nurse at the clinic, I could count friends with her and her brother Dave...and she used to call me her favorite son because I was always being brought in and she was always kind to me; she never judged me. She didn't know that much about me but she was always so kind. She said the most memorable thing that she could remember about me was that...I used to escape from AMHI, get downtown, the cops would come and chase me. And she said they had all these big shots from Medicare, from Washington, D.C., doing the accreditation thing at Greenlaw, the nursing home for patients from AMHI years ago. They were out there in the driveway to the Greenlaw building and they had a whole bunch of beautiful shrubberies. I don't remember; I have no recollection of it. She told me, she said, "Oh God, there goes our accreditation." I had already escaped and they couldn't find me. I popped up, she said, out of the middle of that shrubbery like a woman out of a birthday cake, right up out of it, she said, and I was so fried I fell right over like a board. She said the people there saw that and started laughing so hard that one guy had tears and his side started to ache. He said that was the only thing that saved our accreditation. He said, "Who is this guy?" She said, "Oh, that's my favorite boy. He has a real problem. He's a patient and we've been looking for him." And she said we didn't lose our accreditation, and they told her that's the funniest thing they personally ever saw and that they would remember that for time to come. I don't have any memory of it.

DS: When you got out you were drinking?

ANON: I escaped. They couldn't find me.

DS: You just blacked out, so you don't remember?

ANON: I guess I don't. I had no idea. And I had a bottle in my hand, she said. I said, "I have no memory. You aren't making that up are you?" She said, "I wouldn't make something like that up."

A police officer over here became friends with me, since I moved in here; he's retired. He said, "Do you want me to tell you about the very first time I met you? I met you before. You don't know it. Me and four other officers got a call of a jumper on the Memorial Bridge [over the Kennebec River]." This was before they put the fences up on the bridge. I said, "It wasn't me. I wouldn't jump off the bridge; I'm too chicken. He said, "Well, let me tell you something. You got saved by a fluke—a miracle. Me and two other cops got a hold of you by your belt, we were just holding on to you dangling in mid-air over that bridge."

DS: You don't remember?

ANON: I have no memory. He said, "If you had gone, we wouldn't have been able to save you. You would have been a dead duck. You were so gone you couldn't have swam if you wanted to." I said, "Why didn't you just drop me? Everybody would be better off." And he said, "We thought of it." "Well", I said.

But he said one thing—a lot of them knew me from incidents like that. I stopped drinking; I stopped all that. They became my friends. They took me fishing, and I said to him, “Aren’t you worried about what people will say—the other guys on the force? Why are you hanging out with somebody like me?” He said, “What do you mean, somebody like you?” And I said, “Well, AMHI, all the other state hospitals...” He said, “You’re a good guy. You’ve always been a good guy. You’re the nicest drunk we’ve ever dealt with. Never have you ever been nasty, drunk or sober. You were just as nice as you could be. And that’s the thing that stuck in everyone’s mind, regardless of whether you were drunk. You were just as nice as if you were sober.” I said, “Well, I hope so.” And he said, “Another thing, too. I want to tell you something. Maybe not all of them agree with me, but most of them have an immense amount of relief and respect that you stopped all this. You got on your own; they gave up on you; nobody would help you; they wouldn’t waste their time on you. You did it; you did it on your own.” I said, “To tell you the truth, I don’t know why I did it.” ...

I lived with [a woman] for eight years [who had a son with] Down’s Syndrome...[He] made me chuckle, and laugh, and feel good...And any little thing at all, and they are happy. They’re wonderful. You know, I figured out why they call them special people—because they are special not because they have Down’s Syndrome or mental retardation. It’s because they’re special people. I’d like to be a special individual. And I think I was because they made me realize, they treated me...as if I were special. When I went to church...nobody would pay attention to me, a lot of people wouldn’t speak to me, because of who I was. But the Down Syndrome kids would all come up to me and hug me...And I’d say, “Yup. I’m with my real friends, and I’m darn glad to have them, too.” ... They’re real; they don’t put on shows.

DS: I’m glad you discovered that.

ANON: ... But I’ve moved here...because I became a burden for them. She was a nice lady, a really nice lady...I realized that she really thought that I could never take care of myself...And I know that she didn’t really mean it or understood that she meant it in a bad way...I decided to tell her, “I think I’m going to be moving.” Six months later I tried to discuss this and said, “I’m going to be sad when I go, because of you and [her son.]” She said, “Well we’ll talk about it some other time.” I said, “Well, some other time is going to come soon.” So a year so after that, when they were gone, I packed up the car and I had what I could carry, and I moved, and that was it. I’ve been gone 9 years and six months...I’m going to miss [her son] always, forever.