

Barwick School

Bonnie Jean Carol, Zona Akemon, Peter Edelman, and John Malpede
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***This transcript is at present incomplete. The DAT tape it was transferred from was a recording “joined in-progress.” First part to be added later.**

Peter Edelman: How long had you been here when we came? Had you been in this school?

Bonnie Jean Carol: For a long time after THAT!

P: So had you just started here?

B: No, no, I had started, had been teaching before I came here. Another one-room school. Yeah.

P: How hard was it to teach in a one-room school.

B: I enjoyed every minute of it. It wasn't hard.

P: Well maybe we should've kept up!

B: It wasn't hard at all.

Zona Akemon: They had to learn to work for themselves in a one-room school. They learned to study for themselves, didn't they Bonnie?

B: Sure did.

P: We call that self-paced learning.

John Malpede: It's being reinvented right about now.

B: There was unity in the community back then too. Yeah.

P: So it was grades kindergarten through, uh...?

B: Uh, eight.

J: And you were saying the older kids would help teach the younger kids.

B: Yeah, yeah they did. They helped a lot. And it helped them to be responsible.

P: Are there any of your students who are here today?

B: Yeah. Where are ya? J.D.

J: Come on up. Come on up here.

(Applause)

J: You also cooked for awhile Zona? You cooked for awhile too?

Z: Yeah, I cooked up here, but I cooked a bunch of the food at my house and the boys would have to come carry it out here for 'em to eat. That's before they made a kitchen. And uh, so then, later on, they made a kitchen and this was the cook.

(Applause)

Z: The boys had to carry it out. One day one of the boys was carrying it out and I had chili that day and he dropped the kettle of chili on the railroad tracks and spilled some of it and said, "Oh no! I won't get two bowls today!"

(Laughter)

J: How long were you the cook here?

?: Going on six years.

J: That was, you were here 'til the very end. Was J.D. in the school all that time?

P: And J.D., where did you go after you finished here?

J.D.: We went to LBJ, on towards Jackson.

J: We passed that on the way down. We passed the sign for it, the big sign.

Susan Martin: How many students were there in that, in the class that day?

B: There were 37 or 38 of 'em. I don't remember. I think it was 32.

P: But you regularly had over 30 students here over the years, something like that?

J: Now, what was the cooking regime like? What did you do?

?: I helped.

Question (unknown): JD – how did you feel when you had to leave this school and your community and go all the way to Jackson, basically?

J.D.: Well, when we left, it was a longer drive. We had to get up earlier. We usually left around 6:30, then we didn't get home til about 4:30 in the evening. Yeah, so it was a big change. But when you go to school like this, you know, we was all bonded together. The older ones helped the younger ones, so that helped out in that area. We was all just real bound together, you know, all close.

?: (Unintelligible from audience)

B: That's another one of my students.

J: We thought you were posing as a member of the press.

? (audience): He went to school here too.

P: Yeah, I know, why aren't you up here?

J: Come on up. Now what is your name?

Jeff: Jeff Combs (or Thomas?).

J: Jeff, how long were you here?

Jeff: Uh, two year I think, from the third grade and the seventh and we went ...they shipped us down to Jackson after that. But those older guys, we were older than J.D. and them and we would have to keep the firewood and stuff, be a part and stuff like that.

J: How early did you get here?

Jeff: Well, schools probably about 8:00?

B: Seven.

Jeff: Eight, Seven-thirty, Eight. Some of those guys, we'd come in and build a fire.

B: He was very faithful.

P: He was a good boy.

(Laughter)

J: So Bonnie, you're still teaching down at the Head Start at Chavies, right?

B: Yeah, kindergarten.

J: Kindergarten. How's teaching today compared to teaching then?

B: There's a lot of difference.

? (from audience): What did they pay you for teaching here then?

B: Honestly, I don't remember, but I know it's increased an awful lot.

P: Well, when you say it's different now from then, how is it different?

B: Well, the kids now, the little fellas, they are more able and things. You know, they're more, well they're closer together, in kindergarten. And our kids here was just sort of straining, you know, with transportation and getting' out and havin' fun and things like that. And they're rode – everybody's brought to school now. They had to walk five acres – lot has changed.

P: Some good changes.

B: Good changes. All of it's good changes.

Jeff: One thing about Ms. Akemon, she made the best homemade soup in the country. Bonnie's a good cook also. I always loved hot meal of soup.

Mitty Owens: So the good changes that have come about over the years, have many of them come about as a result of a lot of government programs, government assistance? Or has there been suddenly much more industry that has helped out. Has it been government or the market?

B: A little bit of both.

M: A little bit of both?

B: Yeah.

M: What are some of the government programs that've really been helpful to people here?

B: Uh, well, food stamp program's one that was good. WICK program for the younger children. They have lots of resources that they can get help now that they couldn't get back then. But they're all kinds of resources, which makes it a lot better for everyone.

P: Are there more jobs down here now than there were?

B: Oh yes, yes.

? (audience question): At the last place we were at they were talking about that it would be a good thing to get rid of the one-room school houses. Why did they say that?

B: Well...I think what...really I...I think that uh...well they're consolidatin' the schools. It's a lot better than the one-room schools because they're exposed to better learning and exposed to more...like the computers and the uh, all these things. It makes it a lot better for the kids that we didn't have.

? (audience question): Did they lose something too? Did they lose their friends or their community?

B: Oh no, no, no. Friends remain friends.

P: Well what did you all think, this hoard of people descended on you. John read that letter from Bill Gryder. How did it seem to you that day, when we came trooping in here?

B: Well it was a shock. I really didn't know...

(Laughter)

B: It was a shock to everybody, but now I really am, really am glad that he came.

P: So you remember it fondly, but it was a little bit strange at the time.

B: Yeah. And I think we've got some wonderful programs. I think really what originated that. He had started.

P: Well he helped on some things. Carl Perkins helped a lot too.

B: Yeah, he was a good man.

P: He was the Chairman of the committee and he really looked out for people.

Z: He sure did.

J: Now, Zona you made the lunch that day, right? You made the lunch that day when Kennedy was here? Didn't you make lunch over at the trailer?

Z: I'm not sure I heard you...

J: Didn't you make lunch when Kennedy was here that day?

Z: Uh-Uh.

J: Oh you didn't?

Z: Yeah, I made lunch for him out at the house.

J: At the house?

Z: Out at the house. At my house by the railroad tracks. I fixed lunch for 'em to eat because they were goin' onto Hazard from here. So I fixed lunch for 'em and he thanked me for that. And uh, two later he was gone, I said, "well, I didn't mean to feed him and kill him, but anyway..." But no, I, really, he was real nice, real pleasant person to deal with.

J: And did he, um...when did you and your husband open the community action...when did community action open the community center.

Z: We built the community center was completed in '69. We had box suppers, whatever we could to raise funds and uh, Mennonite church fellowship men did the block work on it, and just different ways. Different groups come in. We finally got it built. WE used it as a community center, church, use it for funerals or whatever they wanted to use it for, and we still use it for that.

J: At what about, what other programs was community action program doing in?

Z: Well I don't know what community action's doing anymore, do you?

J: No, but when you and John were active in it, what were you doing?

Z: Well at that time, we had the garden project, we had different things going here. We had a greenhouse up here on the hill. We started the plants for the people to have gardens. And we got plenty for that. And they said, "Instead givin' 'em one month of food..." we'd buy seeds and plant, fix up plants and they could grow a garden and that'd be the year round. They could can – we got canners, we got jars from an organization that would send us money for that. And we give 'em jars and taught 'em how to can with pressure canners. Most people canned with a wash tub. Build a fire built up, outside – that's the way they can. But we've tried to teach 'em cannin' pressure canners. It won't – the food'll last longer. It won't ruin, whereas pressure can was like it was with the open type. And uh, so, and then the organization came in. It was a work group, I believe it was a work group from new York, came in and gave us funds to buy a tractor. So that they could...and they had a man that went from garden to garden plowing the gardens for 'em. Otherwise they had to use a mule or whatever they had to plough their garden. And they'd plough the gardens up and then that way it was handier for 'em. So that was how the project really started. We worked from that.

J: And you also did stuff with animals in that project too, right?

Z: What?

J: You also did stuff with animals in that project too, right?

Z: Yeah we had uh, from the one down through Jackson, the main project out in Jackson they give each family – they could get a cow and the first calf the cow had they had to give it back. That’s how they paid for the cow. OK. They get a pig, the first little of pigs, you kept one pig, you give the rest of the littler back to them. That paid for your pig. You got to keep it then. And uh, they had rabbits. When the rabbits, you know how rabbits do (Laughter)...you gave the rabbits back. They had goats. They could get a goat and when they had the baby, you’d return the baby. You got to keep the goat. And I think that was all – oh bees. They also had honey bees. People who wanted to raise, have honey bees. They also put out bees too. That’s all I can remember. My husband was always – worked with that more than I did. My we got a hog and a cow and a goat, but we didn’t get no rabbits.

P: Now what did you do politically:~? You were active in trying to change things, right?

Z: Just trying to help people to be able to help themselves and do better. That’s all, that’s was the main thing. Because here, there was nothing in here really. There was no trains goin’ through – the trains were still goin’ through when I first moved here. Then they quit and they finally – the only way we got a road in here – they was wantin’ to take the school – take the kids to Chavies and take ‘em to Jackson. They told ‘em no, we couldn’t do that. So we finally got the first road in here down here Miller’s Branch. By gettin’ that, we finally got to where we could haul the kids to the – they couldn’t close this school ‘til we got the children out, the transportation out. When you come in here, the only way in out of here was by train or walk.

P: Oh my.

Z: Or horseback.

?(audience member): Amen.

Matt Schwartzman: Can I ask a question? Ms. Carol? Do you remember anything that the children said after Senator Kennedy left? Any memories of comments or impressions they had of the experience?

B: They all thought he was ‘pretty’.

(Laughter)

B: They all thought he was pretty.

M: Anything else?

B: No. I don’t know what all he said to them. I just didn’t.

P: He was whispering, wasn't he?

B: He, yeah, he sure, yeah he was.

P: (Addressing a former student) Were you here then, or?

?: No I wasn't here that day. I was outside.

P: Uh-huh. So you were, you were in community then? Yeah, but you just weren't in the...

J: Were you here J.D?

JD: Yes.

J: J.D. was here.

P: You were in the...?

J.D.: I was sittin' about right, about right there.

P: Well what did YOU think?

J.D.: When President Kennedy...? What did I think, is that what you wanted to know? Well, John's wife had asked me and I thought, well, you know, to me, at nine years old, I mean, you know, your imagination, so I just think it's like meetin' somebody you know... (unintelligible), somethin' like that, you know. And he also said, you know, "you can be what you want to be if you want to be it."

P: How 'bout in the back – what did you think?

?: He just shook hands with me. Sorta scared me, like I am right now.

J: John Akemon, did he talk to you?

Ak: I wasn't here.

Henriette: But your wife was here. Is your wife here, John? Did you bring your wife?

Ak: She's here somewhere.

H: 'Cause she was here.

J: John! John, did your wife come in the room or not?

P: Of course, a lot of the media that were with us, uh – we had, you know, like, thirty or forty cars and you could see what it was. How many cars we got today? Maybe fifteen or something. Uh, so by the time they got here, we were about done with the visit. They weren't too pleased about that.

B: Oh, that was when you come here before?

P: Yeah, when we come here, came here in nineteen...

B: Yeah, yeah, I remember that. I remember they had come...

P: Remember there was just a long line of cars and uh...

? (audience): How did you come to pick the Barwick community?

P: Well, uh, I can't say exactly, you know, but, what happened was that Tom Johnston and I came down here a couple weeks earlier to figure out what sort of a trip to suggest to Senator Kennedy and Congressman Perkins. And there were people down here with the Appalachian Volunteers and some of the other organizations that we knew about, that we got in touch with. And so, we drove around with them and they suggested places and they would take us somewhere and so that we could see for ourselves what it would look like and talk to the people and so on. But they basically helped us set it up. WE had, by the time we were done, we kind of knew what the whole itinerary was, in a physical sense, but, uh, we wouldn't have been able to do anything without know people down here who lived down here and worked down here.

J: So, John Akemon's wife, Carolyn, and it looks like their son is also in the room. And Carolyn, what do you remember when you were in the class when Robert Kennedy came? Did he talk to you at all?

C: No, I was actually here later, but...

J: Oh, you were here later?

C: Yes.

J: Oh.

C: So I wasn't here when he actually came.

J: Did you ever hear anything about it?

C: Oh, yes, I heard plenty.

J: What did you hear? What did you hear about it?

C: I heard that, um, Robert Kennedy came to our schoolhouse. And I had two brothers that was goin' here at that time and they got to talk to him. We all thought that was pretty neat.

J: So, John Akemon, in back there, who went to the high school in Jackson, he's been doin a lot, he's been working with us a lot, on this renovation on the school that we've done today. I mean, uh, he got, like he got this stove and all of that. And it's been really, uh, special that he's been so involved in the whole deal. Right?

Ak: Yeah. Thanks a lot.

(Applause)

Mitty Owens: Are there any plans for doing anything with this building now?

Nell Fields: I thank this is an appropriate place to thank the four young Dutch people who worked so hard here. Very, very hard. Day after day.

(Applause)

J: We have four young, uh, we have five interns actually here at the moment. We have one before, who's gone back, who'll be around tomorrow. Went back to Antioch. We have four Dutch people. One went back to Holland and the other one is actually a German who is studying in Holland, Heiner. But Heiner and Marloes, why don't you talk a little bit about working here on the school.

Marloes Van Der Hoek: Yeah, at first, when we came here, this was all filled with books and book shelves all over the place. And we thought, OK, do we have to get the book shelves out? It's going to take a lot of work? But then we thought, yeah, well, if we really want to change it, then we just have to DO it. And then, thanks to John, really, he has, I think, done most of the work. Yeah, he really helped us out. He came up with all ideas and he showed us around. "Now here the desks stand, and this was there, and there was an alphabet, and it was Valentines Day at that day..." and so we had to cut heart shapes and so we just watched the video and then tried to make it the same as it was then. So Yeah, yes. But it was really good to work on, because we got to talk to all those people. And we didn't really know anything about this. But then, yeah John told us a lot, and then we met all those people and then there were two ladies that were in the school – I don't think they're here today, but one of them make the curtains for us and then, it as just...And they talk all these stories and that's really great thing then. When you work here, with the people. Yeah.

J: Who made these drawings on the back wall?

Mar: Oh those are actually from the children in the Head Start Center where Bonnie Jean is teaching. We asked her to give an assignment to the children and she – to give the same assignment as she did with the children back then in 1968. For Valentine's Day.

J: What was the assignment that you gave in '68.

B: Well it was hearts I know.

(Laughter).

J: Well they're pretty beautiful drawings, I gotta say. Heiner, you want to add to that at all?

H: No.

J: One thing, for people who were up in Vortex, afterwards, Peter and I were talking about, in that hearing, the question about the welfare bill and why Kennedy and Carl Perkins had voted against it, because Mary Rice Ferris had raised that. And Peter was explaining it to me, and I thought it'd be worth updating people who were wondering about that.

P: Uh, well, there had been, you know, we really had had a politics of arguing about welfare in this country for a long time. And President Johnson had made a proposal in 1967 to improve welfare, to, uh, you know, the way the old system was, which is also like now, it was up to each state how much it would give to a family. And some of the states had very, very, most of the states had very low payments. And so, President Johnson was actually trying to improve that. But, uh, there was a lot of resistance to that. And Congress came up with a bill that went in the opposite direction, which imposed mothers with young children to have to go to work and have no choice about it for the first time, of course, we now have that in a major way in our welfare law, and also, which actually froze the federal payments for welfare. Essentially that if anybody – more people wanted to come on welfare in the states, the states would either have to lower their benefits or just cut, you know, just deny them. So, Kennedy had voted against that. And, uh, I don't know whether Carl Perkins had voted against it or not. He probably did. And that's what she was asking about was that bill. And, apparently, Kennedy didn't want to get into the details of it. Maybe it was a little bit technical. And his main message, which I think is right, was, the first thing we want to do is jobs. And I think he really didn't wanna, you know, he didn't wanna make it more complicated than that. You know, and I would say, of course, and he said many times himself, that if you can't find a job, or if the government isn't going to create jobs in some way, you have to have income for people. You have to have help for people. You don't want to just leave them out there with nothing. Um, so, his view, if you said the whole thing was jobs, and welfare is just a sort of a safety net, or a fallback kind of a thing. Well, I think, in terms of the hearing in Vortex, what he wanted to say was, just, the most important thing is jobs. And, you know, I think we all think that's right. So that's what that was about. She was asking about that piece of legislation. And he had voted against it. So, he could've explained it more, but I think he just decided not to.

J: J.D., you were working for a locally-owned coal company and you told me your employers were really good people.

J.D.: Yeah.

J: And even after you were unable to work anymore.

J.D.: Yes, they took care of me real good, still do. I worked for 15 years for 'em at ..(unintelligible)

J: How are jobs around here now?

J.D.: Right now? It's not lookin' too good right now. There's a lot out there, but it seems like the wage limit is just not high enough.

J: So what are the wages – they're not good enough.

J.D.: I think maybe it's \$5.15 an hour, I don't really know.

J: Uh-huh. That'd be like minimum wage of the jobs that are around.

P: It's hard to live on that.

B: If you've got a family it is.

P: That's the minimum wage.

?(Audience): Are you all gonna be separating later about two things: the comparison of the schools then and the current initiatives, like No Child Left Behind? And are you also going to be speculating on the relationship of jobs then and the situation of jobs now being exported. Is there a place in this performance when you all will be talking about that?

P: Well, in the performance, they're talking – it's what happened in 1968...

? (same): I mean in this whole –

P: Well, I can say to you, and we'll have a conversation tonight at Alice Lloyd College, that as far as the school part of it is concerned, people from Kentucky know much better than I do. They've had a major, major effort to change the schools that goes back about 15 years or so. They had a citizen's committee state-wide, called the Pritchard Committee and, uh, they had a major lawsuit in the Kentucky state courts that ended with the Kentucky State Supreme Court deciding under the state constitution that the whole Kentucky school system was unconstitutional and needed to be rebuilt from scratch. That

happened at about the end of the 1980's. And, so, uh, there is a lot of changes in the schools here in the, you know, all over state, long before he had No Child Left Behind. This is something that they did on their own in Kentucky and it's been, I mean, obviously it's different from one community to the next, and there's some controversy and so on, but I think people in Kentucky, most people agree that there's been tremendous improvement in the schools. So that's on that. On the question of jobs and people leaving, people here are gonna have to tell you more about that. I can only tell you from conversations that I've had that it continues to be an issue for people. And so, for example, when the new federal welfare law went in, in '96 – is Steven Cawood here? His, anyway, his wife, Sissy, has worked on that, and she was telling me that they use some of the money to help people who wanted to go try to find a job elsewhere to help them move and that that was helpful for some people, you know, it's not for everybody. And what's happened, and this is really true all around the country is, you started out in 1996 with a certain amount of money for the whole country, which, at that time was pretty good because all of a sudden, you remember, we had a very hot economy and people found jobs and there weren't as many people who needed to be on welfare. Well, that amount of money's been the same for eight years. It hasn't been increased. So, we've had inflation, so that means that every dollar is worth about thirty percent less than it was just eight years ago. And that means the states have less money to spend. We've had a recession and trouble with jobs for the last three and a half years. And so there's more people that need help. And so a lot of the things they were able to do in Kentucky to help people either move or to help them with transportation to a job that's a little further from home, they're not able to do that anymore. And so, there was, things got a little bit better in terms of helping people with the whole question of jobs and moving and now it's, at least on that, it's sort of slipped back.

Mitty: Folks, we need to be heading out in about 15 minutes to Hazard, so should we wrap up this session and then we also need to make an announcement about lunch.

J: Oh, OK. I also wanted to make an announcement about WMMT, 88.7 on your FM dial is the Appalshop radio station, for those who don't know. And they are playing a mélange of '60's bluegrass. And background material on just the events that we're covering, and the issues of 1968 and on the Appalachian Volunteers, and Maximum Feasible Participation of the Poor, which was in the OEO legislation in the War on Poverty and uh, they'll be playing some of the events live also, and some of the events recorded. So, actually the Vortex hearing will be on the radio live as well. So you wanna stay tuned to that so you can have the, 'cause, you know, driving down the road is part of the performance, right?