

**Interview with Kathy Black**  
**[at AMHI for 7-10 days; 3 times from 1990-94]**

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*Interviewer: Karen Evans*

**KE: We are going to start out by talking about your experiences at AMHI and then we will go on and talk about where you are today. I would like to start out by asking why did you go to AMHI?**

KB: I went to AMHI because I was in Spring Harbor Hospital many, many times and they just couldn't do anything for me. I had multiple personalities and AMHI was the only place at the time they thought could help.

**KE: What are your remembrances when you at AMHI? What do you remember about it?**

KB: The only thing that I really remember is that it was like a prison. I stayed in my room and slept for like three days. Then I felt comfortable to come out in the lobby. What you did is you just sat around. You didn't talk to nobody. The staff didn't come up and talk to you and I just felt like I was a prison in my cell. I really didn't get anything out of it.

**KE: How long were you there and how many times were you there?**

KB: I was there between 7 and 10 days. I was there three times back in '90, '92 and '94.

**KE: Of those different times that you were there, did you notice any changes that happened over time?**

KB: No I didn't. It was the same thing—I felt like I was a prisoner.

**KE: What was life like at AMHI? You kind of said a little bit, but could you give me a little more?**

KB: My day at AMHI was I slept a lot. I sat and watched TV. The people there I didn't think was very friendly. The affection was kind of negative. There were no classes that you could participate in and it was like just sitting there all day long and doing absolutely nothing, thinking about your problems.

**KE: Were there people at AMHI that affected you in a positive way or a negative way and can you explain that?**

KB: The negative way is that people really didn't come up and talk to you. It is like you were an outsider, so there wasn't much communication. The staff was the same way. Like there wasn't

much communication. They didn't come out and say, "How are you doing today?" I really didn't see much positive in the program myself.

**KE: Was there any one person that affected while you were there, whether staff or resident?**

KB: No. I didn't feel that there was anybody that I could really communicate with PTSD and multiple personality. I felt that I really couldn't communicate to other people and I was communicating with the people inside of me.

**KE: So you stayed pretty isolated?**

KB: I stayed pretty isolated.

**KE: So it doesn't sound like there much treatment there for you?**

KB: No there wasn't.

**KE: You didn't have a treatment plan while you were there?**

KB: No.

**KE: Did you do any activities that were offered?**

KB: No I didn't. There weren't many activities offered while I was there. I didn't notice that there was any activities. Like I said, I might have been into myself and didn't really notice any of the activities, but I didn't notice of any the activities that were going on.

**KE: When you were staying at AMHI, I want to get out at how it affected your family, your friends and your community. Did you have an involvement with those even when you were at AMHI?**

KB: No. My family was not involved with the program. My family wondered why I am being there, sent there. My husband couldn't understand why they would send me to a place like that, especially for the third time. My daughter kind of rebelled, didn't like the fact that I was there for the three times. My son understood in a way that well if I could get treatment this time that maybe it would work. It didn't work. I got out and I ended up back in Spring Harbor and at that point they sent me to Chicago at Rock Creek Hospital. They thought maybe that would work and I ended up staying, I had to stay there for like eight months...

**KE: That was my next question, what happened with that, so thank you for answering that. Do you have anything else that you would like to say about your stay about AMHI that you can think of?**

KB: Let me go back to my family because my they thought...the involvement with it was very crazy. My daughter was rebellious, my husband kept asking why am I have to be there in the first

place? He asked the doctor why I had to be there and then the doctor finally said after seven to ten days in there, well she don't need to be here and they don't know why they sent me here. They couldn't do anything for me and that is why I ended up going back to Spring Harbor and then going to Rock Creek Hospital in Chicago.

**KE: We are seeking your experiences and your thoughts for today. I would like you to just answer the question of how are you doing today and what are you doing today?**

KB: I am doing really great...I was on eight psych meds. Somehow I ended up back in Spring Harbor. I got out of Spring Harbor and that night being home I ended up with a seizure. I was having seizures for two days straight. I almost died. This might sound a little crazy, but when I almost died I actually saw God. When I saw him and the black tunnel and I keep saying this that I actually saw God and he is telling me it is not my time to go. In the background and in the distance I can see my whole family crying, they are saying, "Don't go mom, we need you."

That is when for some reason I came back. My husband noticed a big change in me. I stayed in the hospital for three days. I was there for another day and did not have seizure. I am on some medication that I will have to be on for the rest of my life. I just think it was a wonderful experience to happen to me feel this good to come out feeling good. Like I came out to be one person instead of 25, 30 different people and that is how many personalities I had. I figured when people hear that, they think it is kind of crazy that who in the right mind ever sees God, but I swear I saw God and it was just a life-time thing. It was a very changing experience and that is when I started feeling good. They took me off of the...meds, and now I am on four. I have my family back.

My daughter is starting to be a daughter and I am not just a mother, I am a mom. My son was always very supportive, but my daughter was kind of rebellious because she was at a young age when she really needed her mom. She has got her mom back and I feel wonderful. It is just a wonderful experience that some other people could experience it because it was, I don't know what to say, it was just an experience that happened and I just hope it never happens again. But every once in a while I will be daydreaming and I will actually see God.

**KE: Kind of an end of life experience.**

KB: End of life experience yeah.

**KE: Can we talk a little bit about discrimination and stigma? Do you feel that as a mental health consumer or as a resident of AMHI you have dealt with discrimination or stigma?**

KB: I think I was very discriminated because AMHI and my family, they kept saying, you know, she needs to be there and evaluation. They didn't really get the evaluation because they are like four or five days. My husband kept calling them and saying and talking to the doctors and why she is there, we feel she don't need to be there. Like I said my daughter was very rebellious. I don't know, I think I was discriminated because of maybe my illness and they didn't really talk to you or anything. I mean the staff, I didn't think was very friendly back in '92. I don't know if it is the same way because I haven't back there for a long time. I hope some of the things have

changed. I think they needed to have classes or workshops or things like that to get patients involved...

**KE: They do the classes about every hour on the hour.**

KB: Good, good, I am glad.

**KE: For the morning part and I think for some of the afternoon, but I am not sure. Have you felt discrimination in the community? You talked a little bit about the hospital. Do you feel your community has discriminated?**

KB: I don't think my community has discriminated. I have quite a few best friends. I have talked to one a lot who knows a lot of my personalities, young and old. I do see a therapist still, and I will be seeing a therapist for ten years and that has not been discriminated at all. You know, the community here has been wonderful at Amistad. The people here are so friendly. Since I have come, they have been very friendly. The staff here has noticed the big difference and the change in me. I do a lot of volunteer work that really helps. I enjoy life.

**KE: So tell me what does recovery mean to you? It is the lingo that is out there now when we talk about mental illness, so what does it mean to you and what was the process like?**

KB: I think I am recovered in some way. I feel very good that I could have this club and not be sick...there is one particular staff that I communicate very well with. She has helped me. I had a drug and drinking problem and she helped me through that. I have had other problems, but I feel my recovery, just to get my family back is something wonderful. My husband has taken me back and he has stuck right through me for ten years since I have been sick. I feel that I am on the [road to] recovery. I don't know; I might have to be on medication for a long time. But I don't want to try to go off of it, because I am doing so wonderful and the medications are now working for me. So you understand where I am coming from. If I go off it, my personalities are going to come back...I am going to be what I was like before and I don't want to lose all of that again. I lost too much; I lost a lot.

**KE: It sounds like it has been a really great experience for you to get your family back.**

KB: It is.

**KE: You talked about a spiritual experience, but has spirituality in itself played a roll in your recovery?**

KB: I think spirituality has played a role in my recovery, because I now read the Bible. I never used to read the Bible. I try to go to church sometimes. I believe in God. That kind of spirituality is there. I pray sometimes at night. I talk to myself. Some of the things that I do I think are spirituality that I talk with God and I talk to myself and I talk to just people in general.

**KE: In gaining your recovery, what was the greatest obstacle or challenge that you faced?**

KB: Losing my family. That was the biggest challenge—losing my family, losing my daughter. I never really lost my son because he always would stand by me, but my daughter was like I said rebellious and why does mom have to be sick, why is she this person today and why is she that person in an hour. They never knew who I was. They know who I am now. I am a 48-year old and I am now a three-year old. I was abused as a child so I have bad memories of being abused and beaten...I have been through a lot and now I can deal with it and I can say it and I was abused as a child. It is realistic to me now. Before I would never believe it. I have a problem—a little bit of a problem—thinking it is still my fault. I am working on that, but I for some reason I can't get stop thinking that it was my fault. That if I was a better child or if I was, you know, somebody different, you know, would have this happened to me? So basically I am just feeling very good and there are still some struggles that I have to go through.

**KE: How have your hopes and goals changed since you spent time at AMHI?**

KB: I don't think my hopes and goals have changed since I have been at AMHI. I think I have changed when I was at Rock Creek and I was fine. Then I came back and nothing seemed to be fine. My hopes and dreams were when I had the seizures and I came back as one instead of being 25, 30.

**KE: You know that we have a new psychiatric hospital, which is being built to replace AMHI. It is called River View Psychiatric Treatment Center. If you had something, advice that you would give the staff or anybody up there, what would that advice look like?**

KB: My advice would be for the staff to go and talk to the patient when they first get there. Don't let someone stay in their room for three or four days. Go in; get them motivated. Don't take no for an answer. Get them into the classes; get them into the workshops. I think you need staff that can do that with people to get them motivated to move other patients and not just sit around and doing the same thing or seven to ten days.

**KE: Kathy because I know you a little bit I know that you are getting on with your life and doing some really great positive things that you haven't mentioned. I heard you are running for the board.**

KB: Yes.

**KE: And that you also do a lot of volunteering. I am wondering if you could talk a little bit about what you are doing right now with your life that is kind of giving back to the community?**

KB: Okay what I am doing is I go to Amistad four days a week. I do the desk, answer phones two days a week, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I have worked in the kitchen; we cook. I am running for the Board of Directors. I have a good change of making it. I have a lot of people in authority coming and say that they are going to vote for me. What I want to do is when I get on the Board, I want to listen to the people, bringing their concerns to the Board and let the Board here what their concerns are. I want to let the people's voices be heard and not the executive

director saying, “No we can’t do that because that is not how it is done.” It is run by the members; it is run by the members of Amistad.

**KE: Sounds like you have great hopes for the future.**

KB: I do have great hopes...I do chores, when I get here early I do rubbish or bathroom or do laundry. I just, I have to be active, I have to be involved...I take people to the bank that need to go the bank. So I am giving out to the community to people that need my help that would not get help any other way. I was in a connection group. I just joined yesterday to be on a women’s group. I am looking forward that. Another thing I do for the community that I do plasma twice a week. I feel that it is helping other people that are giving something to them. The people have cancer or leukemia or children. I love working with children and I just love, or adults. I take senior citizens to shopping or doctor’s appointments. I have a couple of people now that I take to the store because she is blind and she can’t see and you don’t get out...Just when people need me I use my car and use it as a taxi and take them to different places and do different things around the community.