

Interview with Rebecca Walls
[at AMHI for 15 days]

September 5, 2003

Interviewer: Karen Evans

KE: We are going to start out talking about your experiences while at AMHI. I would like to start out by asking why did you go to AMHI?

RW: I stopped taking my medication. I stopped taking my Lithium and they blue papered me to go to AMHI.

KE: When you think about AMHI, what memories come to mind?

RW: Oh, my gosh, med patient time. My room was right across from the medication room and I got it drummed into my head don't ever stop taking your meds again, because it is so unhealthy and dangerous to stop your medication all of sudden, very abruptly. They taught me there at AMHI that I need to take my meds every single day.

KE: Would you like to relate your experience about how you got to AMHI and what happened around that?

RW: Yes I would. I went to Maine Med one night with Jim, my husband, and I was with my friend Kim, and they said, "Have you been taking your Lithium?" I said, "No, I stopped." They said, "Well we are going to blue-paper you and we are going to put you in an ambulance, we are going to tie you down, and we are going to take you up there." So that's exactly what they did to me, and I was very scared and kind of anxious and kind of worried about going there because I had never been there before. I just said to them, "Do you have to do this?" They said that's policy and that when someone stops taking their medication, they have to be sent there to learn that they need to take their medication. I was like in denial. "I don't need my Lithium. Oh, it just makes me gain weight. I don't want to take it."

KE: When you were there, how long were you there and how many times were you there?

RW: I've been in AMHI once and I was there for 15 days. I am trying to remember. We had nice staff there. They were very nice. When I was there I had my own room and my daughter called me one night, she was very worried about me, and they let me have visitors. My mom and dad came to see me. Jim came to see me. My friend Kim came to see me, so I had kind of a positive experience there because they let me have visitors every day and my workers were very, very supportive. The staff was wonderful to me when I was there. I didn't enjoy being there, no, because it wasn't a place I would want to go back to again. But I want to share this with other people now that it's not as bad as they think it's going to be.

KE: Were there any negative experiences? Did you have any kind of negative experiences while you were there?

RW: Yeah. At the time, you know, I kept telling everybody I was pregnant with Jim's baby, right, and I was, but I had a miscarriage. I said it to one of the girls there and she said to me "You're not pregnant," and I said, "Yes I am. I am pregnant with a little girl." She said, "No you're not." She said, "They told me that you weren't pregnant because you stopped taking your meds." So I got angry at her and I just kind of walked out the room. I went back to my room and I lay down for a little while. I got up and then I came back out and talked to the staff about it, and I said that was a negative thing. She shouldn't have said that to me because I was going to have a baby. I just miscarried. I said I went to a lady on Forest Avenue, right at the – what do you call it – Mercy Hospital right there and she gave me a PAP smear and I was pregnant and that's why I miscarried Jim's baby. That was a negative thing, but every one here gave me support and got me through that and my faith in God got me through it.

KE: Who was the most important person while you were at AMHI and who helped you the most? Can you think of one outstanding staff person?

RW: There was this girl that worked there. She had long black hair and she was a young girl, she was probably in her 20's or 30's and I can't remember her name when I was there, but she was really good to me. The whole time I was in there she supported me. She said, "Rebecca, you're going to get out of here, you are going to get through this experience and you are going to be better and stronger because of it." She would really back me very, very well. I can't remember her name, but she was very nice.

KE: What was the culture at AMHI and your relationship with the people there? Were you more connected with the staff or were you more connected with your peers?

RW: I think with my peers because I talked with them every day when I get off and we sit and we would have field trips and sometimes I could go out with them in the van and we'd go out. We went to this mountain I remember this one night, we had like a hike, and they took us out in the van and I was able to go out on it because I had gotten permission from my support team there and I just enjoyed. I loved it. It was great. We looked out over the view as we looked over the mountains I was thinking it was really pretty, and I had good relationships basically. The psychiatrist there at the hospital had me and in some ways I liked him and some ways I didn't like him. He was kind of stiff and kind of – what do I want to call it – maybe just dry sense of humor that he had, and – but I liked him. I got along okay with him and all the doctors there were very nice to me, very supportive.

KE: Were there good interactions between staff ?

RW: Yes, very much so. Very positive.

KE: What treatment did you receive at AMHI and can you talk a little bit about your treatment plan?

RW: We met together pretty much every day and they talked over my meds. They talked over my pregnancy. We talked about that. We talked about how long I was going to be there and when I could get out and when I could be released. We talked about food, the food there and when breakfast was, when lunch was and when dinner was. What our TV viewing was, what our trips were when I was there because I did sign up for a lot of the field trips and I went on quite a few of them. They let me out quite a bit when I was there.

KE: You talked about the trips. Were there any other activities that you went on?

RW: I'm trying to think what I did while I was there. I think I also went out for walks on the grounds – outside walks with the other people that were there. That was helpful to me because I need to get out in the air and get some exercise.

KE: They didn't have group therapy, though did they?

RW: I am trying to remember if they did. I almost had to go to court too. I almost had to go to court about me stopping my meds, but what happened was the day that they released me, my lawyer had met with me and he had talked to me about my med schedule. I had seen the doctor there on a regular basis and they had told me that as long as I went back on my medication and stopped saying I was pregnant, because they had sworn up and down that I wasn't, but I was, they said that as long as I got back on my medication and got back on my feet and did what I was supposed to do, they would leave it in a good light.

KE: How did staying at AMHI affect your relationship with your family? With your friends? Was that still pretty much the same or did being at AMHI in anyway affect you?

RW: That was a very positive thing. Kim came to see me. She took me up to see my daughter Adelia up to Hiram to my ex-husband's house. She came to visit me. My mom and dad came to visit me regular. Jim did. My daughter Adelia called me one night. She was worried about me. She expressed it. "Mom, I hope you get out of AMHI soon. I hope you do well in the hospital." My son Matthew knew I was in there, I think, but I don't think I even had him yet, my other child. Matthew probably doesn't even remember that I went there, because he's only 10 now, and it seems like, you know, I can't remember exactly when I went there, but they would have it down in my files when I was there. You know I can't remember when I went there or what year, but they will look it up and it will be in my files probably, and I got a lot of support from people back here. My family and friends supported me and the day that I left. I will never forget the day I left because my worker came in and we were sitting in the visiting room. I am trying to think of this girl's name. There was this girl that was in there with me and she had been there for months and months and she was saying "Oh Becky you're getting out, I am so happy for you." She came in and met my husband Jim and my mom and day and my worker, my social worker came in, told me I was being released that day and I said, "Oh mom, we have to get a picture of this, so we walked outside the hospital and there a picture of me and Jim and my mum took it, and my mum drove me back from AMHI and Jim was there too."

KE: Anything else you would like to say about your stay at AMHI?

RW: I think it was a positive thing. I think it taught me that medication is so important when you are mentally ill and I should not be in denial of that and I think that if I can help just maybe one other person by saying this is that if you do end up going there, do what they tell you to do and they will let you out because they did that with me and I was there 15 days.

KE: The next part we are going into is your experiences and thoughts today. I want to start out by asking how are you doing and what are you doing?

RW: Okay, I am doing good. I am going to take some classes at the Caleb Center or at the Career Center on Lancaster Street. I am going to be taking current events and geography. I am going to be taking computer and I am going to be doing this with some people I live with at the group home. I have got a lot of support behind me and I am looking forward to learning a lot. Hopefully, I won't talk during the whole session while the teacher is teaching me. I am still connected very closely with my family and friends and to the community, Portland, Maine and I just think that if I can help one or two people get through this experience it is worth going through this. It really was worth it for me.

KE: Have you experienced discrimination or stigma, and if yes, can you explain that to us.

RW: Yeah, because there was a little bit of that there. When I got to the hospital, in the room where they have the TV and they have the telephone and they have the table and you come out in the morning and see what you are going to do for the day, a couple of people there were kind of negative towards me and I said to them, "You know, there is stigma around this room." [I said] how come that still goes on and shouldn't go on anymore. I said everything is more open today and you shouldn't have that kind of stigma with mental illness. I said, "So what if I am mentally ill? I'll take medication for the rest of my life and I have accepted that." You know, I took the recovery course here twice with Peter Driscoll and all the people here. I took it twice. I took it once and I took it again because I figured I needed to take it twice and God helped me a lot with my spiritual side and Jesus and I thought that I learned a lot and I thought it was a challenge.

KE: What does recovery mean?

RW: Recovery means getting better and it means to overcome obstacles and meet every day with a smile on your face and meet a challenge with, okay, I am going to get over that hurdle today and tomorrow I am going to tackle the other one, and then I still have a lot of hopes for me and goals. I want to stay married to Jim. I want to be able to live together in the near future, but you know, because of his drinking, we have had to live apart. I still want to be able to live with him in full service and I want to be able to keep close to my family and friends and my people here and my friends here at Amistad and the coalition and the Project for Supported Living because I am affiliated with all three different clubs for mental illness and if I was going to give some advice to someone who would go to AMHI today, I think I would just tell them to hang in there. Just hand in tight, and if they are going to have a new hospital, just tell them they will get through it and you will be a better person because of it. You will be a more improved person.

KE: Thank you very much. Do you have any thing else to say?

RW: You asked here what are your hopes or advice for the new River View Psychiatric Center? I would hope that somebody could hear my voice in this book and this tape and that they would learn that like I did. I got stubborn about taking my medication; that's my Irish in me. I would hope that they would learn that, like me, their goals and their hopes and their challenges would be like me and that they would go to the hospital and listen to the staff and listen to their friends and family and basically just learn from it.

KE: Do you have anything else you would like to say?

RW: Karen has been good to me and my family and friends have been good to me. My heavenly father has been good to me, and my friend Jesus; I am very close to my friend Jesus. He is always in my heart, and I just want to say that whoever hears my voice on this tape that I hope when you go to the hospital that you listen to your staff people and you listen to your family members and friends because they will back you 100 percent.

KE: Well, thank you very much, Becca, for the interview.

RW: You're welcome.