

Megan Davies: Can you describe that boarding house system and the lives of people in those early boarding houses. So... they start moving people out of the institutions...

Pat Capponi: Giving them a bus ticket and an address.

Davies: And a prescription.

Capponi: Yes. Prescriptions were ah... [laugh]

Davies: So they give them a bus ticket and an address to go to.

Capponi: And usually an appointment slip, which would get lost really quickly. There were no calendars or clocks in the building, so you never knew... There was one day, and that was cheque day. That was the day, right. And that came and went so damn fast. And the rest of the month was like, ahh.... But you get used to anything.

Davies: And in those early boarding houses...

Capponi: It was pushed, to the rafters. My operator decided that we would, cause there was nobody there. There was no staff. No staff. So he would say to me, "If there's a problem, I'm psychic. I'd be there in 20 minutes he would say." Well, he wasn't psychic, and he wasn't there in 20 minutes. So, people were raped in that house. The old lady Anna, who was so afraid of dying alone, that's what happened to her – she died alone. You know. Nobody there.

Davies: And these were old large buildings in the Parkdale area...

Capponi: Yeah, they were nice from the outside, right?

Davies: And they were... so every bedroom...

Capponi: Carved up. Totally carved up. And you'd have like beds of all different sizes. Walls with chunks falling from... from the ceiling and ah fists through the walls. I was very fortunate that I had my own room.

Davies: How big was your room?

Capponi: It was tiny, but I'm so. I'm institutionalized, I still live in a room. It was small but the walls, because they had been plastered over so much they were... If you have seen the movie "Repulsion" where the hands reach out from the walls, it was like that. It was puck yellow and there were cracked attic style windows. And it was freezing. But there was a sink. And there was a metal---framed bed with the weirdest mattress. And I had brought a knife because I thought I was going to kill myself of course. You always have to have an exit. I keep that under my pillow. Uh,

and it had an eye hook, on the door. That was the lock. Which with a comb you could just – the guy showed me how [laughs].

Davies: So there was no... no personal stuff.

Capponi: No. I didn't have any clothes even. Nothing. I'm not quite sure how that came about but I had my jeans and a couple of shirts. Because when the lice outbreak came and I was washing some of the ladies I got the lice and I had nothing to change into. Which is really not nice.

Davies: In these boarding houses an owner would be in charge of your welfare cheque...

Capponi: Yeah, well, you didn't have a right to get your own mail. One mailbox with a key.

Davies: And he or she would also be responsible for dealing with your medication.

Capponi: Yeah. They shouldn't have been, but you didn't have any rights. So we had a right to... but we didn't know those rights.

Davies: So these places... and the food was...

Capponi: Oh god! Oh god. The funniest thing was a box of macaroni... Cause, I'd go with the owner to Ushers, which was the mystery cans. Its like cans with no labels or that got squished so.. and there was another place where pigeons would be flying... and he's also pick up any cash register receipts. He'd pick those up I guess for income tax. So he's get big boxes of stuff, so a big box of macaroni. I remember being in the kitchen helping with lunch and ah I would kick the cupboard to let the mice know that I was coming in. You know, startling like. So I saw the box moving and I said, "S., they're eating the spaghetti." He took it out into the back, opened it up so the mice could escape and brought the pasta back in.

It was starch starch starch and anti---psychotics left you ravenous. You were always hungry. Always always always. The worst was the cereal in the morning cause that was like puffed wheat or shit like that. It seemed like you could never get it off the floor. It was always there. And dinner was unpleasant. Ah. I think I described that in *Upstairs*.

Davies: You do. Yeah. Yeah. And was that size of that boarding house kind of typical?

Capponi: It was the second largest.

Davies: And how many people? Approximately.

Capponi: Seventy.

Davies: Seventy people?

Capponi: Seven zero. Yeah.

Davies: Oh, cause it was three houses joined together...

Capponi: I... when I started to feel responsible... being neurotic. It was trying to keep...

Davies: I'm sorry, but that is a small institution.

Capponi: It is...

Davies: Considering its supposed to be deinstitutionalization.

Capponi: And you gotta know, are they alive? Is everyone alive? You gotta know whose there. We had, you know, little fire---starters, which I describe in the book. It was like, you gotta know whose there otherwise, you know, you gotta be last out. So, but you'd rather know that everybody's out. Oh... God, it got really bad. It got really crazy