**Transcription sponsored by Cuyahoga Valley National Park**

**Brandon McGhee** [00:00:04] Hello, my name is Brandon McGhee and I will be interviewing Ms. Sandra Blakely. Here, I have with me Antoine Poke, Stanley Jordan, and Ms. Epps. So, what is your name?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:00:16] Sandra Blakely.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:00:18] And what year were you born?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:00:21] 1949.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:00:23] Where were you born?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:00:24] In Cleveland, Ohio.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:00:26] Okay. Can you tell us about the neighborhood where you lived when you attended Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:00:31] Well, I was a counselor here, and so my parent's home was first in the Lee-Harvard area of Cleveland. And, I was a counselor in 1967 and '68 and I did about six weeks in '71.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:00:58] Okay. In addition to Camp Mueller, what other kinds of activities were available in your neighborhood?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:01:04] Well, there were some shops that you could work at part-time as a student. I was in college at that time, so any work I had I'd done earlier, like during junior high school and high school. And my father was a businessman, so I worked in his office a lot. And there were guys who worked at gas stations pumping gas because they didn't have self-service then. And others worked mowing lawns, raking leaves, shoveling snow. And I think Krogers used to open up their night shift bakery or it was evening anyway; it was like from nine to about two o'clock in the morning. Some of my friends worked in the bakery then. And then cashiers at different shops or stores. And working at what was now, what was, [Woodhill] or Woodland. Woodhill Park, which is something else now. I can't remember the name of it now, but they worked concessions or renting skates to people who didn't have their own. And so there were a lot of those little neighborhood kind of things that you did for employment.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:02:35] Okay. How old were you when you were a counselor at Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:02:40] I was 18, 19, and 21.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:02:46] Okay, and did you ever attend Camp Mueller as a, as a?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:02:50] Camper?

**Brandon McGhee** [00:02:50] Yeah, a camper.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:02:51] No. I was in Girl Scouts, so I went to Girl Scout camp instead.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:02:59] Oh, okay. Who made the decision for you to be a counselor at Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:03:02] Me. It was really odd. I was going to school in New Orleans and on the bulletin board for summer jobs, they had Phillis Wheatley Association camp counselor and I said, perfect. So that was that. I came down to interview and got selected.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:03:20] What were your favorite memories of the camp experience?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:03:28] [Laughs] The other counselors and some of the kids were terrific. The, at the time, the camp was referred to as a social work camp and I was majoring in social work. So primarily inner city kids, maybe kids who were in foster care or kids who in families that were kind of financially strapped to give them an outdoor experience. A lot of scholarships were given for campers to attend. The fun parts were. Yes. The other counselors, because they came from all over the country. And, the times. Still, a lot of civil rights activity going on around the country. And music was expanding into, you know, you had R&B and you had rock like Jimi Hendrix and things like that. That was taking off. So there was a lot of social interaction, a lot of mingling, and music drove it a lot. So having the counselors' cabin here after hours when they were all kids were asleep. That's where we'd go to dance, and stuff, and have a good time. But I loved the little boys because it was so funny. To this day, little boys and old men, I attract. [laughs] And there was one little boy in the first boys' unit who just went head over heels, and he would come and make sure I was up in the morning. And I'd go, What are you, what are you doing over here? Get out. You know? And so he was very charming, very darling. And so and we had some really fascinating kids. I had two little girls in unit one that were four. No, six and seven years old and they were from Argentina, I believe. Either Argentina or Portugal. They spoke no English. And their parents gave them two weeks at camp and they all had dresses. Both the girls had dresses. They had no idea what camping was about. So not being able to speak the language and not physically [prepared] to be a camper. It was quite a challenge to win over their trust and get them to understand English even though they couldn't speak it, or didn't know anything about it before, but. And then, there were the kids that were tear-jerkers because their circumstances were so harsh. And, we did our best to support them and helped them evolve, even though it may have only been two weeks out of their life.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:06:43] What did you have to do to prepare for your visit to Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:06:48] Well, not much, because I've been going to Girl Scout camp for years. And so, probably just getting a new duffel bag and that was it.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:07:03] And what did you feel the night before you left to come for Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:07:09] Oh, I figured it was going to be a lot of fun. And the fact that we had like a weekend in between each session or something, three or four days, maybe two days or something. So we were running amuck. But, yeah. No, I was excited and fun. It was nice to be back out in the woods.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:07:33] How did you get to Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:07:35] Well, counselors met Down at Phillis Wheatley and we rode the bus in with the kids.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:07:47] How long did you stay?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:07:48] Well, whatever. I stayed for there were either four or five sessions each year and we were here from the first to the last session. So that was really like second week in June to the end of August, something along those lines. And, that last year I was transitioning from one aspect of my life into another one, and I had a period of about six weeks in there, so where would I go? Camp Mueller.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:08:26] Who was your best friend at camp? Did you have a best friend that was a counselor, maybe counselors?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:08:37] [Laughs] I would say yes, and then I would say no. There's a little. You get a bunch of teenagers together. You kind of... Guys would find a girlfriend. Girls would find a boyfriend. But usually became very good friends with the assistant counselor.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:09:04] Okay. What kind of activities did the children, the campers do at camp?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:09:11] There were arts and crafts, lots of hiking, swimming in the pool. We'd teach them songs, we'd do campfires, we'd put on shows; anything to expand that child's horizons. Sometimes, well, for in the most part, this was the first time the kids had ever been away from home. So we had to kind of deal with some homesick, sick, homesickness and things of that nature and then mosquito bites and falling down, getting hurt somewhere. So we had a very active nurse's station. But we did. We put on a lot of shows. Some were the kids only. Some were counselors only. A lot of, oh, the nature trails and things, identifying objects, but the camp had so many really nice sections to hike to. It was always quite a great experience for them.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:10:33] So would, can you describe the typical day of the campers?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:10:36] Yeah. When the bell rang, you got up early in the morning. And in the woods, it's usually much colder in the morning than it is if you were at home. And so everybody would go over to the wash trough and brush your teeth, and wash up, and get dressed. And we'd march down to the mess hall for breakfast. And then like the classes that were done, certain units went on certain days at certain times for arts and crafts in the arts and crafts building. Quite often when we'd do a hike and a picnic, it would be at least two units going at a time. And then, of course, the kids had to clean the cabin as well, make sure their beds were made up and all their things were tidy underneath. And on the nature walks of things like that. It was a learning experience for them as well as the counselors too. So you'd have, you swimming, you know, breakfast, maybe swimming and arts and crafts. Then you'd do lunch and there might be a program in the evening. And sometimes there were some, some naptimes especially with kids that were six, seven, and eight because they get worn out pretty quickly. Then there might be a hike next, for the next morning. So after you go to breakfast again, go on a hike. Get back. Buy lunch or if they made lunches with us, then we could keep going further out and... A lot of, you know, just mother/father maintenance kind of things that, you know, if you were your mom would say, you know, come on tie your tennis shoes. Everybody's got knots in your tennis shoes. Okay. Why do you think we have not seen your tennis shoes? Okay. So it was a learning experience from that point of view. So I think we also had a basketball pole near the mess hall. So once in a while, the guys would do basketball and. One year we put a choir together and so that was a lot of choir practice. And we've had, we had talent shows. Things of that nature. So that was always wild because you never know who's got a talent or who doesn't. You know, and you go, nope. And then the person that surprises you, it's like, wow, this kid can really sing or that somebody could dance, play an instrument. So, yeah, we did as much as we could. And you have to keep in mind the, you had, how many kids did we have? At most, 16 to 20, I think in each unit. I can't remember. So we're dealing with everybody's issues. You know, it's like, I got to go to the bathroom. Can I go back to the unit? Okay. Well somebody's got to take you. All right, let's go. And, you know, just the everyday maintenance stuff that you're doing it by 16 to 20 kids. So a lot of it was. Okay, you don't have any clean clothes. What do you do? Okay. What, you know, and just solving problems that would arise with the kids.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:14:08] What were the facilities like at camp?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:14:12] At camp back then? We had a swimming pool that functioned. We did some water shows there, as a matter of fact. The arts and crafts cabin was there. And. I think this was the caretaker's house. I'm not really sure. And the director's house was there. The newer cabin next to it wasn't there, but the old cabin behind it was the Counselors' Recreation Center. So after you guys went to bed, one person would stay in the unit and then come down to the counselors' cabin and listen to music, dance, play cards, whatever. And then you'd switch off for another shift. So the person got left would either go later on in the evening or the next day. So it worked out. the craft's cabin was there. There were two cabins up the first hill for the girls, six, seven, and eight, and then nine, ten, eleven, and twelve in the other cabin, but there was also a staff cabin. So the arts instructor, the swimming instructors, the music instructor. I think we had a musical instructor, but they lived in, up that same hill, too. So those were the three cabins. Right at the bottom of the hill was the older girls' unit. And if you kept on that trail up ahead, they were the two boys' units. And the mudslide was there between the older boys unit and the middle girls unit. There was a mudslide down in the ravine and I think it was just by fluke. Kids were fooling around outside and we went back there and it had been raining like crazy. One of us slipped and went all the way down the ravine and we're going and you get down there. Are you hurt? And you're falling out laughing. Going, oh that was cool. So we started pouring water down and the counselors on the other side of the ravine they could hear everybody laughing and whooping it up. They started pouring water down their side. So the mudslides would meet in a real narrow path right at the bottom. And. You talk about mud on your face, in your hair, and your clothes everywhere, but it was so much fun that they kept doing it year after year. And not too long ago, maybe ten years ago. I don't know. I think it was The Plain Dealer because my mother sent me the article about the infamous mudslide and they had pictures all on paper. It was really terrific and I was screaming yay we started it and it's a tradition. So it worked out well. You don't do the mudslide anymore. That was fun. And then trying to get the mud off in ice-cold water. It was rough.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:17:19] What was the food like?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:17:24] Uh-huh. [laughs] Well, food was always an issue. Let's put it this way. We had more baloney sandwiches than we [prob] as councelors would probably care for. But there were three squares a day, so you couldn't complain too much. You know, it just... There was no KFC. I think a good breakfast. You've got scrambled eggs and a piece of bacon and a piece of toast, cereal. You know, that kind of thing. But maybe once they did pancakes, maybe. But. Mac and cheese. You know, meatloaf. No. That was probably the weakest point was the menu.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:18:17] What were your impressions of the environment around Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:18:22] Well, having had been a camper through the Girl Scouts, my first impression was, oh, this is easy. But I had always gone into what was considered the survivor unit at Girl Scouts. So you had to. Put up your own tents, dig spit holes and bathroom holes and set up the fire, you know, a fire for cooking and things of that nature. We'd go fishing and. No, that was at Girl Scout camp, anyway. But what you had to do, all of that hard stuff. You built your own tents, you built everything. Sometimes there was a hammock unit. You know that in survivors, you slept in hammocks in the trees. So when I got here and there were cabins and big tents, I said, oh, this is a cakewalk, you know? But yeah, it was. It was still fun. And the hiking trails here are terrific. One of the trails takes you up to Blossom Music Center. And we used to sneak in the back because Blossom has the dome and then there's seating, but the rest is in grass. And we would just come up behind the hill and sneak into the crowd and sit down and watch the show. So we got a chance to see Chicago, Earth, Wind & Fire. We saw a number of concerts. And so then they started putting police up there at the entrance. But what was interesting, there were five trails that led to this point behind Blossom Music Center. And only one was from the camp. So there were always other people sneaking into the shows. And if you got up there and then another group appeared. It was like [pause] and everybody would stop. And it was like, are you okay? You okay? Yeah, okay. But they started putting guards up there along that one particular opening where the five trails came up. So one group would always go in as the sacrificial group and they would run in and sit down and the police would go over where they were and then the rest of us could get in, you know? So that went on a lot, but it was so much fun. You run into the craziest people up there. Like, where are you guys coming from, you know? We came in from State Road and, you know, going, wow, where are you guys coming from? Oh the other camp on the other side of the hill, you know, and going up there at night to see the shows was wild because if the moon wasn't out or if it was over, overcast, it's dark. And you can't take a flashlight with you because they'll spot the lights. So you'd have to go up there and, you know, walking through. But it was, it was really nice. And then there's a pine forest here where it's really tricky to get to. But the floor the ground was like this deep in pine needles. Pine needles are the softest things in nature to lay on. And we'd hike up there and it take us a long time to get there. And then everybody would just go to sleep underneath the trees. But it was really cool. So there were a number of places. There's another. There was a model train museum somewhere near State Road. And that was. Yeah. We also did outside activities outside the gates of the camp. And most fascinating thing was that railroad museum because it was all a miniature track. So when you go in. It's a huge room covered like a table, and it just would go all around and around. It was just a million trains going at once. And the guys operating the trains would come up in the little openings, you know, and that was really fascinating too. So, yeah. The, what was available here at camp. If you are if you like camping, it could be done or you could find it. And we'd collect pine cone needles and stuff like that. And once in awhile we had big bonfires between the younger boys' camp and the older girls. There's a big field. At least there was a big field over there. And we would build a six-foot bonfire and everybody would come down and we'd sing and tell stories and stuff like that. And those were neat. Those were neat.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:23:20] And what were the natural sounds?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:23:22] You know, I really couldn't say. You saw rabbits a lot, especially up in the younger girls' unit. You saw cardinals and robins and blue jays. Lots of butterflies in certain spots around the camp. Grasshoppers. Worms. Lots of worms. One, one year we had a snake in the girls' cabin and they came running out screaming. And my assistant refused to go in there. So I went in with a broom. And you don't think about it, but trying to kill a snake with a broom? It is long. It's a long period of time and it's like, will this thing die? You know, and I just felt bad about it because it was a cool snake, but it had to be about this long and we had to get it out because we didn't want it to climb in a bed somewhere or climb in their bags underneath. So I had to kill a snake. That bothered me a great deal.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:24:42] Did you go other places near Camp Mueller that were part of the camp?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:24:46] Some. Yeah. Like we went to the rail model railroad train museum. We hiked to some other places around Peninsula. But I can't remember specifically what they might have been because I know when we get down to the road on one time, we went this way. I can't remember where we were going. But this way. Going left was to the railway station. But, you know, those are like planned events and things of that nature, so I can't tell you too much about that. I really don't remember.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:25:29] How did you feel when you had to leave?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:25:33] Well. It was always pretty tough because, like I said, counselors had boyfriends and girlfriends and some people you may have known from the city etc. Like that. So it was like, okay, the end of the boyfriend-girlfriend thing, you know, because everybody was from all over the country. And so that was kind of sad. And we, we had so much fun. We probably had more fun than the kids, but. Yeah, you said goodbye. And I fortunately in '67, which was my first year. A lot of people came back in '68, so that was cool. But there was always a new crop. And so, yeah, we had a great time. So it was always kind of sad to leave, you know, but that's what you did because you didn't know. You know, most of everybody, I think, was away at college. So you don't know what's going to happen the following year, etc.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:26:40] Do you have any other favorite memories of the camp you'd like to share?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:26:47] I may have mentioned them. But. Yeah, I think among the. Well, everybody had to do their name. You know, you had to create your own Indian name or something like that. That was always wild, because somebody would name themself and we'd be like no that's not you, you know? Oh, got a better one for you or something like that. That was fun. The waters show we did in '68 because we didn't do one in '67. That was a lot of fun because we got an opportunity to show the kids that there were other things you can do in a pool other than splash and kick around. You can, you know, create something really nice. The bonfires, because we would make them huge if you took all the chairs in here, maybe around back that might have been one of the sizes. And then six feet high and, and a bonfire and stuff, that was cool. You know, almost every day there was always something. Some days it wasn't the best thing. Like if one of your kids get sick and you have to take them over to the nurse and try to take care of them, make themcomfortable, and things like that. Nobody. It never got out of hand where a parent particularly had to come out and pick up their kid or anything like that. But when we did the choir getting the kids to sing. That was, that was really nice. That was fun because you've, you never know what someone's talent is until you present a format for which they can get involved in and jump off from. So the little, the little surprises were always kind of nice. The talent shows, those were fun. Those were fun.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:29:01] So later in life, how do you think back on your experiences at Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:29:05] Oh, that's wow. When I asked my kids if they wanted to go to camp, they did a resounding no. And I said, oh, you don't know what you're missing. And I'd tell them about, you know, as a Girl Scout camper and then as a camp counselor here. And it's like, no they don't have hot water. I'm not going, you know? But it was a different time. You know, it was more contemporary time where people's living standards improved enough that going away to camp was not that big an issue as it was enjoyable for our generation because and you had little Tetris games and whatever. They were starting to get popular and small Nintendo and what was that other one? It started with a T. I can't remember. It was a little computer stuff. So. They had other things to do rather than go to camp. But it was always about sharing with them the fun of going to camp, and we had a great time. Like I said, probably the camp's counselors had more fun than the kids, but it was a great experience. I really, I really enjoyed that.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:30:32] And how were you experiences at Camp Mueller important to you?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:30:35] Well, as far as. Oh. One of the things we had to do every day was write a report on every kid's behavior and/or issues and problems every day we had to keep a journal on every kid every day. Course you'd have to write it in a space about this big and about that wide. And that prepared me for a lifetime in the working world of documenting things as you go along. I'm sure you'll be able to say, you know, you understand how important documenting things that happen are on the job because you could say, well, it was Thursday no, maybe it was Wednesday into and this happened. No that happened after this happened. So documenting things were very good for were doing social work where you had a file on each one of your cases and getting familiar with keeping track and making suggestions as to how to resolve issues with that the kids might encounter or things we'd recommend that they may need in their life when they go back home. So the documentation was probably singularly the most important. But what I found, oddly enough, and maybe the parents never thought that we were as young as we were, that if you wrote something in there and you said, why do you feel that such and such should go see, excuse me, a specialist? And we would say, well, from what we observed when this would happen, they would respond this way and they should have responded that way. So you might want to keep your eye on how they perform or how their behavior is. There's a lot of kids who were really scared to come out here being away from their families for two straight weeks. And so we had to make it enjoyable. And it was for them that we did this. So keeping a record of everyone's behaviors, and issues, and the things they liked, etc. became very important. Appreciating nature that's. That's one of the things. I don't think it leaves you because I was telling my friend that. We were walking over to the counselor's cabin and I said, you know, what was so cool about walking around at night in the camp? If the moon was out, you didn't need a flashlight because the moon gave it such a beautiful lighting at night and I liked that. I'm a night owl. So I really liked being able to walk through the woods without turning a flashlight on, because you got to see things in a different perspective. You know, sunlight, everything's there, okay you see. At night, shadow takes on different forms, a trail that seem very easy might present a little difficulty or something walking around but I've come to respect and highly appreciate the sound of silence. And you know, you're in a city and you hear fire trucks, police cars, neighbors yak, yak, yak, yak. Kids playing and everything it's just a congested sound. But when you're out in the woods, the sound of the silence gives you permission to think within your own head and sometimes dreams you have can become possibilities. So the night, how it influences how you dream, how you breathe, how you function in life. In a very... You know, it sounds like a big camp and a lot of people, but in a microcosm, it's really a tight-knit little world unto itself. For two weeks, because the next batch of kids present another batch of personalities and things of that nature. But yeah, I really still do love. You know, between the beach and the woods, I'd probably take the beach first, but I definitely know the value of the woods. And I love being out in nature.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:35:28] And what did you tell other people when you talked about Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:35:31] Same thing I've been talking about pretty much. Yeah, that yeah, that it was a fun experience. It was very helpful, especially knowing how much you influenced the kids and. It was also a window into do you want to teach, you know, as a career. And I say no, but I said no because my mother was a teacher and I got tired of grading papers with her. So it was like no I'm not teaching kids anything. But yeah, no that it was utterly worthwhile and utterly enjoyable, period.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:36:15] How do you think these experiences influenced you?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:36:19] Well, like I said, documentation appreciating silence, especially if you're in a noisy world and how to go there. Teamwork because it took a lot of teamwork to pull off events. You had to coordinate it with the other counselors... Da-da-da-da-da. And how to make something out of nothing. I'm really good at that. And. Yeah. But I think it also enabled me to realize and then decide to use it as, as a tool that no matter what a person's circumstances are, no matter how they're feeling or what they may have to go back to, is that I'm too old to be naive. And even then, I was too old to be [naive]. No, I wasn't too old to be naive. But over a lifetime, I always feel that everybody has an A first. You walk into a classroom, everybody has an A. You have to work at losing that A and that even the "lowliest person," meaning their situation and circumstances. Poor, you know, maybe a single-parent household or what have you. No matter what, that kid has a potential. And. We have to find out what it is, and then once we find out what it is, how we can encourage that behavior in the kid, give them a place to shine; so the talent shows were really important in that regard. It's like that little 20-pound 8-year-old girl has a voice like Mahalia Jackson. Are you kidding? You know, and there was that type of thing. So it was letting you know what you learned... A teacher should... A good teacher should learn more from their students than the students learn from the teacher. If somebody is not getting it, I say it's the teacher's fault because there's always one way, more than one way to skin a cat. It's more one way, there's more than one way to do a math problem. There's more than one point of view when you're discuss, discussing two different points of view. So I felt we were responsible for giving the kids hope and possibilities. I hope we did a good job at it.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:39:27] Do you have any photographs we can scan of Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:39:30] No. [laughs] [sound is muffled] No. I regret it to this day I never took pictures like I should have. [full volume returns] And not just for this period through my kids' life, and stuff I took very few pictures, then it's like, well, I have them. So I've got the real thing. What do I need an image for? Yuh dummy you're not going to be here, so. No, I did have the last time I saw my lanyard, which would, had my camp counselor name on it was five years ago. My mother had a heart attack. She had to move in with her sister. So I was packing up the house and I bet I'm almost positive I don't have it. So I move a lot and I'm almost positive she doesn't have it at all either. So that would have been the only. Oh, one thing I do have, but it doesn't really directly related to Camp Mueller, but in 1967 there was a little, there was a counselor—he looked like Fat Albert—and he gave me his sweatshirt and I still have it. So I'm almost positive I still have it because I had the opportunity to throw it away and I didn't. So I have like a college sweatshirt and I think I still have this sweatshirt. And there's something really funny on the front. But I may have had that. I may still have that.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:41:14] And who else should we talk to about Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:41:20] Henry Curtis, but I don't know where he is or if he's alive or not. Oh, my God. And I can remember the camp names of some people and can't remember what their names are because one of the female counselors and Henry did get married. And so I thought that was interesting. There was a guy named Brent Anderson who was in Cincinnati and he went to Wilberforce University. And one person's dead that I know of. And I really can't remember the names of the other people. I got faces, but no names.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:42:20] Okay, well I want to thank you for doing.

**Michelle Epps** [00:42:28] We're still interviewing Mrs. Sandra Blakely. We've run out of battery, so we had to reload another memory card. I'm Michelle Epps and I'm here with three students. Do you want to go ahead and state your names?

**Brandon McGhee** [00:42:40] Brandon McGhee.

**Antoine Poke** [00:42:42] Antoine Poke.

**Stanley Jordan** [00:42:42] Stanley Jordan.

**Michelle Epps** [00:42:45] Okay, so we're at the facilitating interviews at this moment. So I'm just going to go ahead and ask them some follow-up questions. Shouldn't take too long. And I think we finished the last one by asking what business your father was in?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:42:58] Yes, he was a realtor and also he was a mortician.

**Michelle Epps** [00:43:09] How was that growing up with your father as a mortician?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:43:10] Oh, I've seen a lot of dead bodies. And, and been to a ton of funerals. Jeez. But, yeah. He sold a lot of houses in the area.

**Michelle Epps** [00:43:23] And you mentioned you went to college in Louisiana. Where did you attend?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:43:27] One of the historical black colleges, Dillard University in New Orleans.

**Michelle Epps** [00:43:33] And what did you major in?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:43:34] Sociology and minored in urban planning.

**Michelle Epps** [00:43:39] And earlier in the interview you had mentioned, when you were a camp counselor, it was kind of at the height of the civil rights movement.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:43:45] Yes.

**Michelle Epps** [00:43:46] How do you think that affected the activity at Camp Mueller?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:43:50] Well, it was interesting because you had students from all over the country, so it was pretty much 50/50, black and white, which at that time if, you know, certain high schools and junior high schools of Cleveland were fully integrated. The West Side, not so much, but the East Side was and it was like no big deal to be in a mixed group. So, what affected us in '68, we were in between sessions or at the end of the summer, but somehow I think it was in between sessions. We rode back into Cleveland and Glenville was completely occupied by troops. And it was like, what the hey? You know? What is going on? And it was a little disturbing because out here, pure simple truth and back there, it's like, wow, what's with all the military down the street? So, you know, that put a different spin on your attitude at the time you're there but when you come out here, you know, it was like, okay, okay, okay, we'll just [inaudible]. That's not why we're here. We just leave it an undiscussed topic. But yeah, it was popping all around us. And in the cities where some of the people were going to colleges as well, so it's a hard time. And in '68, April of, April 4th of 1968 was when Martin Luther King was assassinated. So. That was before, of course, coming to camp, but that was a pretty hostile time frame. But here it's a microcosm of other things good. So it was never brought into the picture here at camp.

**Michelle Epps** [00:46:11] Do you keep in contact with any of the kids that you interacted with? No?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:46:16] Not at all. No, no. No, it was. I don't think that was something that was encouraged. In any way. I don't think it was encouraged. Some of the camp counselors either we knew them before or saw them once, once in a blue moon afterwards. But that was that.

**Michelle Epps** [00:46:40] Was there any child in the camp that, in, that you feel influenced your life to where you either made a change or, you know, that a memory that you kept with you, you know, throughout your adulthood?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:46:54] Yeah, there was a young girl. Besides the two little Argentina girls, the Portuguese girls, because just the ability to communicate without knowing each other's language, that was something I never forgot. But I had a little girl from Cleveland. Sweet little, sweet little girl about '68. So that may have been. Well, I think it was '67 and her household was pretty volatile. And every time she'd hear a counselor yelling, she would immediately constrict herself physically and to the point where she couldn't walk. And we were in the girls' unit up the hill. So we had to take turns carrying her up the hill. She would just bonk out, you know, and I would sit and talk to her and. The thing that we'd noticed the most was that, what it was doing to her physically, which is to constrict her body movements, and so that was one of the tougher cases I had to record over that two-week period. And it was really tough because. There were times we'd have to go get one of the guys to help pick her up and she was a sweetheart. I think she was the oldest of her siblings. And I don't know if there were three or four kids. I don't know. But anytime she'd hear anybody yelling it would remind her of her mother and she would just become almost catatonic. And so that was the toughest case that I had to continuously write up on. And we had to make recommendations and things of that nature. What got me was like I'm 18, 19. Is anybody really going to take my observation seriously? You know, and because there's never any, you know, contact. I think it was probably discouraged, really. We have no idea what happened. But yeah, it was, you know, sweet kid. And just yelling. It was so traumatic for her. She would, you know, constrict and become catatonic, so it was very sad.

**Michelle Epps** [00:49:34] Did you notice in that particular case, to factor into this, did you notice a change in any of the children when they would come to the camp to when they would leave? Seeing as for many of them it was their first time like interacting.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:49:45] Yeah.

**Michelle Epps** [00:49:45] With that particular setting?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:49:50] I'll say yes. And I would say probably the kids who were happy when they got here were happier when they left. The other kids who had. Serious issues like we had one little girl. She stole night and day. And she didn't get it. You know, when we'd have to discipline her or go to her bunk and pull out all the stuff and give it back and talk to her about we, you know, we had the director talk to her about things. And it was terrible because in the cabins, the walls only went up so far. So in my room in the cabin was a bunk bed. And if I stand up on the top bunk or kneeled on the top bunk, I could see over the walls and I could see her stealing, you know, and it never. She just could not stop. It was a compulsive kind of behavior. So even when confronted, even when the kids would find their stuff. She was just like a little tight fist and nothing got through. So the kids who came unhappy had the opportunity to express themselves but knowing, I think what bothered them the most was I'm not gonna have too much fun because when I go home, it ain't going to be nothing. You know, it was that kind of response and that was sad. That was the sad part. So. I think every possibility we had, every probable combination we had.

**Michelle Epps** [00:51:54] I guess I'm going to switch topics a little bit and talk about the the valley like how the valley has changed over time. How much has it changed from, you know, being here today and being here back in, you know, the late '60s when I imagine there's probably not as much, you know, commercial build-up.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:52:12] I have lived away from Cleveland more years than lived in Cleveland. So, this is new to me. I have no idea what's still in the valley, but we turned a corner somewhere and I was looking for the railroad museum and I didn't, but I remembered a like a little farmer's stand. That's all I recognized. Otherwise, it's roadway. That's all I know. So I have no clue. The new buildings and things on the property. Well, you can pretty much point those out, but I don't know how the community is done. But I was very surprised to hear about the incorporation into the park system, which will give the camp a life span. I think that's a good thing.

**Michelle Epps** [00:53:13] And then going back to your story about Blossom. I'm just curious, were you ever caught trying to sneak into Blossom?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:53:21] We had it worked out that the guys would always take the fall, so whoever showed up at about the same time at the five points because at one point they just had like two guards standing at that particular break in the trees. But after a while, they had a whole line of them. So the guys would get together and they talked and said, look, you know when we do this. They can't find us this, that, and the other once we get into the crowd. So they would divert the cops to go after the guys. And then the girls would go this way and we said, okay, we'll just meet back up there later on. No, I did not get caught. I probably would have been busted as a camp counselor. But, no, it was a great show up there. [laughs]

**Michelle Epps** [00:54:13] Okay, I'm going to close with two other questions then because I know the guys are probably getting a little tired. But I know yesterday, [laughs] yesterday, Brandon was talking about the pranks. And I was just wondering if the when you're here as a counselor if the counselors ever got pranked and if you ever had an opportunity to prank the campers?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:54:41] Probably maybe once in that two-year period. Because it's, it's not something I'm not a prankster and I would vehemently oppose doing any pranks. Definitely not on the kids, but I think we may have done one. I couldn't tell you what it is, but it sounds familiar. But counselors pranking counselors, there was a sufficient enough, enough of that going around, but no, never with the kids because that just didn't seem right.

**Michelle Epps** [00:55:19] Okay and then this will be my last one. The way you talk, it sounds like you're... Are you an artist?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:55:24] Yes.

**Michelle Epps** [00:55:25] Okay. And I had a feeling that you were. And you talked about the night walks in the shadows.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:55:31] Mm hmm.

**Michelle Epps** [00:55:32] How, does that, has that influenced your artwork now as you create pieces or?

**Sandra Blakely** [00:55:37] Well, I'm not a painter. I'm a metalsmith.

**Michelle Epps** [00:55:40] Oh, wow.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:55:40] And yeah, the... I don't... I do one-of-a-kind pieces. This is silly. I've got my cards with me. I do one-of-a-kind sculpture. And I have some jewelry lines. I need to figure out where they are. And yes. I also worked in a jewelry store for a number of years and I carry two sets of cards because they have different images on them. And I, I have an issue about diamonds. It's not a good issue, but I have an issue about diamonds. So most of my artwork is at. It's all one of a kind. And a lot of it, the emphasis is on. I'm trying to figure what's the best way to capture it is that I try to do my pieces at in a technologically. A technological way that makes them look antique. So I don't have the big machines that just can pump out pieces and I don't do any casting. They're all hammered and molded by hand. And I hate diamonds for a political reason. So I use stones sometimes when I set pieces. And that's directly and uprooting from. I would say camp and as a kid, we'd go on a vacation somewhere or something. I'd come back with a box full of shells, things of that nature, so. Yeah, the antiquities and I and real antiquities like things that have been sunken treasures from centuries before that may have been dug up from the ocean, a lot of my pieces have that look. I do a lot of fiber processes which either look like knitting or look like stitching but aren't and I do a lot of sculptural pieces in music wire. One of my collections is called Oceana, which is based on cultures that live on islands around the world. And what are the things that, you know, how does an islander, somebody living within the ocean view the rest of the world? And since they're surrounded by water, a lot of things look as if they are sunken treasure. So it's and it's a cultural point of view that, you know, I... And I used to curate and run some art galleries and I was always attracted to works that involve natural materials. And that comes from my outdoor experience. Experiences and. Yeah, it does influence my work. Culture and the natural environment together and that type of thing.

**Michelle Epps** [00:59:27] Well, for now I guess that concludes all of my questions even though I have a lot more written down we could probably go on all day. But thank you for your time.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:59:35] Oh, my pleasure.

**Michelle Epps** [00:59:37] And thank you for hanging in there while we switched out memory cards. Unless anybody else has anything to add I guess then I will conclude our interview.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:59:42] Okay.

**Michelle Epps** [00:59:44] Alright. Thank you very much.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:59:45] Well, thank you, young man. Thank you very much, Michelle.

**Brandon McGhee** [00:59:48] Thank you.

**Sandra Blakely** [00:59:48] It was a pleasure.