



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL EASTON

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIBER: KEITH LUDDEN

FINAL

Keith Ludden: Do you mind giving me your name again?

Paul Eastman: Paul Douglas Easton.

KJL: Okay, and do you mind if I ask when you were born?

PE: Yeah, I was born November 2nd, 1955.

KJL: Okay, and where was that?

PE: At Maine General Hospital.

KJL: Here in Portland.

PE: Yeah.

KJL: Okay, I guess we're in South Portland.

PE: Well, it was in Portland where I was born.

KJL: Yeah. What were your parents like?

PE: They were good people. My father he was—when I was about three years old, we lived in Gorham, and we had at Westbrook and the house got on fire and the firemen came and got me

out. I was three years old; just a little baby when they took me out, saved me from getting burnt up in the fire.

KJL: That was a house fire?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: That was here in Portland?

PE: No, it was in Westbrook, way back when I was about three years old.

KJL: So, do you remember any of that?

PE: Yeah, my mother told me about it before she died and she died in 1969 on her honeymoon. She was just getting—going to her honeymoon down in Connecticut and she died. [I don't know] from what. Probably from all that stress she had.

KJL: A lot of stress, you said?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: From what?

PE: Well, you know how it is, your father has the right to decide everything and he took me out of the school when I was [in] third grade or sixth grade. I think it was sixth grade. And he took me out of school and my mother didn't like that so well. I think that had something to do with all that stress.

KJL: I see. What was your home like?

PE: It was pretty good except my father, he smoked in bed and I think that's what started the fire.

KJL: Do you remember your home?

PE: Yeah, it was 502 Main Street, Westbrook. It's remodeled now, new people in there

KJL: Can you take me on a little tour of it, describe it to me?

PE: It was right across the street from the car dealer thing. Now they got it into a business thing now, like a hardware store. Of course, when I was three years old, the state took over, took care of me, you know. I was three years old. And then [when] I was about ten years old. That was back in 1966. I went to Pineland and I was there for four years. I left in 1970, and what happened over there was there was some good and some bad. What did was [get rid of] the bad. I went to the gym to shoot basketball, play softball, baseball and all that stuff (inaudible) Special Olympics and I met the people that owned Pineland and the father, he got me out of Pineland.

KJL: So you were ten years old when you went to Pineland.

PE: Right.

KJL: And why were you taken to Pineland?

PE: Well, it was partly because I wasn't very, may I say—At the time I wasn't very good. I was like, ripping the wallpaper off the bedroom wall. That was a long time ago and of course I've changed a lot since then. And I tell you what; what I did in the past, I joined the Guardian Angels in Portland. I was one of the twenty that made it. Of course when I was at Pineland I went to church every Sunday, and I was an altar boy and then I got (inaudible) taken to the church before I got into my altar boy stuff. I was doing that for four years, then I left.

KJL: Do you remember the day you arrived at Pineland?

PE: I think it was like on my tenth birthday, November 2nd

KJL: Do you remember what it was like when you arrived at Pineland?

PE: It was like going to a strange place. I had to get used to the place. What they did was my mother and father drove over to the building where they did the signing to let the person come to Pineland and then from there I went to a hospital, stayed in there for about a year or two. I'll say about a year, yeah. I got out of there. I went from the hospital to Pownal Hall and after I went to Pownal Hall, I went to Staples Hall. Then I went to Gray Hall, then I left.

KJL: When you were at home who took care of you?

PE: You mean when I was with my parents?

KJL: [Affirmative]

PE: They did.

KJL: Your mother and father?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: You said you stayed in some of the dorms there, some of the buildings at Pineland. What were they like?

PE: Well, they were like—us boys would be in one room. The girls would be in another. And there'd be the bedroom, with our bed and then they would mark your clothes, like put your name on your clothes. (Inaudible) do that. It didn't make any sense to me, but they did anyway. And then if you do something wrong, there, this is what they would do. (Inaudible) in bed, because they were so rugged. You'd be in the middle and they'd be over here like this and they'd go [vocalization] squeeze. If that wasn't enough, they'd have you go up and down the floor with heavy stockings until you got tired.

KJL: I'm going to stop for just a moment to make an adjustment (handling noise). I didn't quite understand what you said about the bed and the squeezing.

PE: That was when you did something wrong. And they would do that, squeeze you like this.
[You'd get] a stomach ache from having them do that.

KJL: They pushed on your stomach?

PE: Yeah. Squeezing it there.

KJL: One person got on either side of the bed...

PE: Not on the bed; like in the room. Like they was [in] the kitchen or something. They would go like this, with the stomach; squeeze you and that was the punishment and plus going up and down the floor with the heavy stockings.

KJL: Explain to me about the stockings again.

PE: You had to put the heavy stockings on the floor—put you feet on them and go up and down the floor right up until you got tired.

KJL: These were stockings with weights in them?

PE: No, just heavy stockings.

KJL: The material was heavy.

PE: Right.

KJL: And they'd have you walk up and down the floor?

PE: Right. That was the punishment; that and the squeezing.

KJL: How long would you have to do that?

PE: [Anytime] you do something wrong. I'll tell you what I did—It wasn't my fault, but I took the blame for it. A guy named Andrew, or Dick, or whatever his name was, he took someone's wallet. He took the money. Instead of him taking the blame for it, like he should have. I liked the guy, and I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll take the blame," which I did. I had to go through all the baloney because I didn't know any better.

KJL: You say you had to go through all the baloney. What was that?

PE: Well, I was being squished and going up and down the floors and stuff like that.

KJL: Did that happen to you a lot?

PE: No, maybe just maybe twice and that was it. And I didn't like it, but you know you had to do what you had to do.

KJL: How many were in the dorm with you?

PE: Oh, I would say a dozen, maybe about twelve, I'd say, and the girls, they had about the same in the other room. All the girls would be in one room. The boys would be in the other room.

KJL: Did you get along with the other boys in the—

PE: Yeah, I got along good. I never had any problems with anybody.

KJL: What were your favorite things to do at Pineland?

PE: Well, we went to the gym and we had movie night, dance night and of course I was in the Special Olympics. I was one of them in it. I was on the basketball team and I kind of liked that. I'll tell you what part of the court I played—center court. And softball, baseball. I was always pitching or playing out in the field. What I did one time. I didn't have my glove on. The ball was coming and I caught it bare handed. I couldn't believe it. I was only about ten years old when that happened.

KJL: And so did you get the guy out?

PE: I caught it and got the guy out.

KJL: So did you enjoy softball?

PE: Yeah I did. My favorite baseball team is the Boston Red Sox. Hopefully they'll get the wild card this year. And I'm a Patriots fan is my football team and they're playing their first real game Sunday against Pittsburgh.

KJL: So you like sports a lot.

PE: Yeah.

KJL: You played a lot of sports there at Pineland?

PE: Yeah, I did.

KJL: You mentioned softball and—

PE: Soccer, football. I did that quite often. I was pretty good at that. Like I said, we had dances, movie night, and that's where I met my wife. She was there, too.

KJL: Tell me about the dances.

PE: They were in the gym, of course and what was the gym now they call it the YMCA. I can go there anytime I want. I only have to pay like ten dollars a month, which ain't bad. I just have to make sure I get a ride to go. I had a lot of friends at Pineland.

KJL: You had a lot of friends?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: Tell me about them.

PE: They were—like I met my wife there. Her name was Carol Tracy and when she got married to me she took my last name, instead of having, you know, her own name, which was good. That was the way I wanted it to be. I was married to her for twenty years.

KJL: How did you meet here there at Pineland?

PE: Well, I met her at the building she was in. I met her on the Fourth of July and they had (inaudible) come to Pineland.

KJL: Who was that? I'm sorry.

PE: [Tennessee Kinsey?] He's a cowboy, a singer. Yeah, and he'd always come every fourth of July. And then one time, I think it was—Yeah, it was 1966—Batman and Robin came to our building and I got to see the Batmobile. I didn't get a ride in it, but I got to see it and it was a 1966 Pontiac, What happens is if you get a flat tire there's a button you press and the tires come back up.

KJL: So did you and your wife date there at Pineland, or was that after?

PE: Well I was at Pineland, (inaudible) get to see her again. And then 1985, November 3rd, the day after my birthday, we got married. We got married at the Church of God on Park Avenue, Portland and the pastor paid for it. It was a small wedding, it wasn't big. We couldn't afford a big one, so it had to be small. He took it out of his on pocket. He knew we couldn't pay even for a small one, so he just made it easy on us. So that's quite a bit of history there. Like I said, I

was a Guardian Angel in Portland and that was 1983, yeah. They started in Portland in 1979, but i didn't get involved with them until 1983.

KJL: What was this?

PE: The Guardian Angels.

KJL: Oh.

PE: And what they do is take care of the streets when the police department won't do it. They take over. They do what the police don't do. I kind of miss that. I did that for I think four years. Then the Portland Police got jealous, so the whole team had to drop out.

KJL: Why did the team have to drop out?

PE: Because the police department was jealous, so we had to call it quits.

KJL: You said you left Pineland four years after you got there?

PE: Right.

KJL: So you would have been what, about fourteen?

PE: Right.

KJL: Okay. Why did you leave?

PE: (Inaudible) got me out for a reason because he said I wasn't supposed to be there, so he got me out, and what I did was, I went and lived with Grace Patterson for ten years. And then after ten years I went and visited my brother for a couple of years and then after that I was back out on my own, started to take care of my own self.

KJL: So your brother took care of you for a while?

PE: Yeah, for a couple of years.

KJL: What was that like?

PE: It was pretty good. I get along good with my brother. He always dressed as an Indian because he is an Indian, I guess he was brought up that way. He goes to powwows. He don't no more because he died, but when he was alive, he went to the powwow and I just never wanted to go because I like to go to church. That's where my religion is, church.

KJL: So your family has Native American roots.

PE: Yes

KJL: So you were never in group home, then, is that right?

PE: I was in a foster home and that was pretty decent. The only thing is, I'll tell you probably nineteen—let's see—1963, I think it was—that was the year that John F. Kennedy was shot and my mother, when John F. Kennedy was running for president, she went to see him and he gave her fifty dollars to put clothes on my back. Fifty bucks! Back in those days things were a lot cheaper. So he (inaudible) too much money.

KJL: This was then Senator Kennedy.

PE: Yeah, Senator Kennedy. That was good.

KJL: I haven't heard any stories like that before.

PE: That was the first time—this is a true story, too. Everything's true that I'm saying.

KJL: Did that happen while you were in a foster home or before you went to Pineland?

PE: It was happening while I was in the foster home.

KJL: What was the foster home like?

PE: What they do is—see, my foster home, that I was in in Saco, it was (inaudible). Like they would put me down in the cellar. The cellar was dirt and there's no floor in the cellar, except dirt. It was dirt on there and they put me—put my hands like this, tied them up so I couldn't.

KJL: They put your hands behind your back.

PE: Right and then tied them up on that thing there that holds (inaudible). When they had visitors I was like that. I couldn't go up to—I don't think I could even go to the bathroom. It was that bad. But their daughter, she didn't like that [when] they put me in that kind of a condition, so she went to the state.

KJL: So this was before you went to Pineland? Before you went to Pineland or after?

PE: After

KJL: Ah.

PE: Yeah, it was after.

KJL: So you would have been around fifteen or sixteen.

PE: Yeah. Then I went and lived with Mrs. Patterson for ten years. I went to her place when I was fourteen and I got out of it—I left her place when I was—let's see, fourteen, ten years added to that, that's be twenty-four. So I left when I was twenty-four years old.

KJL: You left where when you were twenty-four?

PE: Mrs. Patterson's house.

KJL: Now, was that a group home, or—

PE: I'm not too sure. I think it was probably a foster home. They wanted me to be in a—on my own—kind of away from Pineland, so they put me with her.

KJL: What happened at that first foster home when they tied you up?

PE: That was way—I think that was—that was back in the '60's.

KJL: So that was—

PE: Probably the '60's—wait a minute. I left Pineland when I was—that was back in 1970. I think that was before I went to Pineland.

KJL: How did you come to leave that foster home? What happened that you left the foster home?

PE: When I left the foster home? That's when—1966 they took me to Pineland. Yeah, so that was before I went to Pineland. I lived in that area.

KJL: Why was it you left the foster home?

PE: Well, they had to send me to Pineland, so that's where I went to Pineland.

KJL: What was a day like at Pineland? What did you do during the day?

PE: I guess I was in a lot of sports and I went to school at Pineland and I went to workshop at Pineland, which is good. I get to meet a lot of shop masters there. One of them was named Jim, I think that's him, yeah. He taught me how to drive the shop truck slowly, like try to stay on the road, without getting off the road. He taught me to do that. Then I went on the John Deere tractor and learned to drive that. What we did with that, we went and sprayed the apple trees and cut the grass down there at that apartment. Then we went and cut around the duck pond. And we had the pheasants, too, up in one of the buildings—out in back of one of the buildings—pheasants.

KJL: Pheasant, like the bird?

PE: Yeah, We had to go and feed them, so I was pretty busy.

KJL: So, did you have a job there at Pineland? Was that—

PE: Yeah, that was a job, and I worked at the [infirmary] at night, doing the cleaning. I got paid for that. So that's (inaudible) the stuff I've been doing.

KJL: Do you remember what it was like when you left Pineland?

PE: Well, I was happy that I left Pineland, but like I was trying to say that I'm one of the people that talked about maybe keeping Pineland open so they could have it for people that have nowhere to go.

KJL: You wanted it to stay open.

PE: Right.

KJL: And why did you want it to stay open?

PE: So the people like—people who had no had no house or anywhere to live would have a place to go to, like homelessness.

KJL: So how did you feel when they shut Pineland down, when they closed it?

PE: I felt pretty bad that they did that.

KJL: Have you ever been back there after you left?

PE: I go there once in a while with Matt. He takes me over there. That's how I got this interview. I went and had an interview at Pineland. There was a woman that gave that to me, the interview.

KJL: What was life like after you left Pineland?

PE: Well, life was a lot better as far as—because I was married and didn't have any kids, of course, but I was married to a good woman. I liked her and loved her very much. I still do. I miss her a lot. She died in 2005.

KJL: I'm sorry.

PE: She died in 2005.

KJL: Okay. What were the harder things about living at Pineland?

PE: The rules they had. It was pretty hard to live on that.

KJL: What did you enjoy most?

PE: Mostly sports and being an altar boy.

KJL: Did you have choices about how you spent your time or things you wore or things like that? Could you make your own choices?

PE: Probably not, because like I say they take a black marker and mark your clothes with your name on it, so

KJL: Now, when you came out of Pineland, did you have a guardian?

PE: I think I did. I can't remember who it was.

KJL: Have you had opportunities to speak up for yourself, to advocate for yourself?

PE: You mean at Pineland?

KJL: At any point.

PE: Any point. Sometimes, sometimes not.

KJL: Can you tell me about any time when you did?

PE: Most of the time they would say, well, “You have a chance to speak.” And if you don’t speak—what they would do is they gave you a canteen card. You’d get that when you go to Pineland and you go to the canteen and you get things you want, like to eat with that card and [I] would do that too. I would go to the canteen.

KJL: Did you go to the canteen a lot?

PE: Yeah. Yeah, I did. In fact when I was in Staples Hall there was a dead bird and I was going to go bury it and give it a little funeral. It was a redbird, with a red stomach, kinda—red robin. My idea was to put it in the ground, bury it and give it a funeral. That’s the way I did with my own cat that I had, way back. It was fourteen years old when it died. Then my other cat died, it was seventeen years old. Now I got another cat, and it’s a year old.

KJL: Could you have a pet there at Pineland?

PE: No, you couldn’t have any pets there.

KJL: Dit you play any role in disability rights?

PE: Disability rights.

KJL: In advocating for better living for people like yourself?

PE: That, I'm not sure. I don't think so.

KJL: When you came out of Pineland, or a while after, did you try and find a job?

PE: Yeah, I got some jobs.

KJL: Tell me about them.

PE: Well, I had—the five and ten [cent] store in Westbrook. I worked there for quite some time.

KJL: What did you do there?

PE: Janitor. Cleaning up the place, helping move stuff in the truck and unload it, all that stuff. That's where I met the governor, Angus King.

KJL: Tell me about that.

PE: Well, he was running for governor. I said, "There's Angus King!" I said to Angus King, I said, "Are you running for President?" He said, "Yeah, I am."—Not running for president, running for governor. He said, "What do you think about that?" I said, "Well, first I'd like to know

if you're pro-life or pro-choice." You know what he said? "Pro choice." I said, "Well I'll pray for you. Hopefully you'll turn around and go pro-life." I don't know if he's pro-life now or not but I worked for him, I did. This last time he started running for—I think it was for president or something like that, or for U. S. Senate. Yeah, U. S. Senate, to get a second term. I worked for him on that. He got it.

KJL: How hard was it for you to get a job?

PE: Well, I had help, of course, to get a job. I couldn't do it by myself. It was pretty tough. You have to sign papers and things if you want to get a job. You know how that is.

KJL: Tell me about your first day on the job.

PE: Well, my first day on the job I did the janitor work, cleaning up the place, then I helped mark prices down on the stuff.

KJL: What were the people you worked with like?

PE: Oh, they were pretty good. The boss is very nice and the time I was sick—I threw up. He said, "Yeah, you'd better go home and come back when you get better." I said, "Okay," so he let me go and I came back and so after a while he had to close up the place so I lost that job.

KJL: How did people there respond to you, did they treat you pretty well?

PE: You mean as far as seeing me (inaudible) Pineland?

KJL: At the five-and-ten.

PE: Five-and-ten. Oh, yeah. They were good. I always had to take my own lunch with me, unless I had money or something to go out and get something to eat.

KJL: Were there other jobs?

PE: Yeah, there were other jobs. For a couple of weeks I had—It was a training job to see if I could handle it or not. It was that Christian thing where—it was a Christian job. I forgot what the name of it is. It as a Christian thing. You can speak about religion all you want, but you've to to do it at lunchtime, when you go for lunch.

KJL: Did you enjoy both of your jobs?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: What did you like about them?

PE: Well, I liked the bosses that I had and I learned quite a bit as far as getting a job and all. I always had a job. I have a job now.

KJL: What's that?

PE: It's in Westbrook, across from the Subway, that yellow building. The guy that owns it is named Steve. He's the boss and him and I get along good.

KJL: Now, you work at the Subway, or you work—

PE: I work across the street from Subway.

KJL: And what's that? What's across the street from Subway?

PE: It's a coffee, donut and food restaurant type of thing. People go in there and they play games, or cards, and stuff like that. And (inaudible) gets involved with that when he's not busy.

KJL: And how do people there respond to you?

PE: They respond to me really good. They like me a lot, and I like them, too.

KJL: Do you enjoy that job?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: What do you do there?

PE: Janitor work. Clean up the place. In the wintertime I shovel snow. I shovel the steps and little bit of the sidewalk.

KJL: Who's been the biggest influence on your life?

PE: I would say Steve, the boss.

KJL: At the coffee place?

PE: Yeah. Yeah, you should come sometime when you're not busy. Pop right in and say, "Hi, I work with Paul and had an interview." I thought I'd come in here and have a coffee and a donut." See how I was.

KJL: I might do that. when do you work?

PE: I work on Mondays and Thursdays. I get in there about 8:00, but I don't start until 8:40, be there until 10:40.

KJL: In the morning?

PE: In the morning. I usually hang around there until ten after eleven then I take off. So if you're ever around that area, Westbrook on Main Street, drop in.

KJL: I might do that sometime. What have you most enjoyed in your life?

PE: Most of my life? I like what I'm doing. I'm out campaigning for Sarah Palin and Lou Dobbs for president and vice president, for 2020. Hopefully if I'm still around [in] 2024 this guy will be running for president too.

KJL: You're going to run for president?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: Oh

PE: I thought I'd bring that up.

KJL: Tell me about that.

PE: Well, If I become president, which I hope I do, I probably will make it so people can afford the wall. Like right now, I think I know why the Democrats don't want the wall. Too expensive.

KJL: What's too expensive?

PE: The wall.

KJL: The wall?

PE: Yeah

KJL: Like the wall?

PE: Yeah.

KJL: Oh, you mean the border wall?

PE: Border wall, Yeah.

KJL: Ah, Okay.

PE: I have an idea for that.

KJL: What's that?

PE: Okay, it'll be the schools, the churches and the banks and the credit unions will come up with eighty percent of the wall, and taxpayers will have to come up with the twenty percent. People like myself who pay taxes on my check. I would only take twenty percent of my check to pay for the wall, the rest of the wall.

KJL: What's the hardest thing you've ever had to do?

PE: Hardest thing to do? That's a good question. If it's anything hard, I usually would ask people about it before I do anything about it. Ask them questions. Like if someone told me of a

thing—any other ideas about the wall? That's the best that I can do. I think that's a good thing I was making plans for.

KJL: Have you been able to help other people?

PE: I helped a guy that was drunk when I was a Guardian Angel. I called 911 for the ambulance to come and get him. That was in the Portland area.

KJL: Tell me more about the Guardian Angels.

PE: Oh, okay what they are is they do things that the police department don't want to do, which means patrolling streets. They do that morning noon and night. I did the night shift. That's where things get really bad. You gotta be prepared for that, the night shift.

KJL: What goes on at the night shift.

PE: Well, things can happen pretty quick. You have to be alert. And that's why we go out and have coffee to keep up awake and alert. In case someone starts (inaudible) or something. Then we—we didn't have no weapons; the only weapons we have which would be our hands and feet and what we do is—would you like to see some action, a little bit?

KJL: Sure.

PE: I'll do it over here, so you can—unless I got room over here. Yeah, I got room. Okay, yeah right here would probable be alright. Okay. I haven't done this in a while, so here we go. Like

that. Then my back kick. (Inaudible) back kick. And then I got this—Like that. And if someone's pointing a gun, you go like this. Real quick. where we move the arm with the gun (inaudible) knock the gun out of his hand. So, yeah, I did all that and prepared at nighttime. I was out doing that. Hard as steel.

KJL: I imagine you saw some interesting stuff.

PE: Yeah.

KJL: You talked about getting married a while back.

PE: Yeah.

KJL: Tell me about your wedding day.

PE: My wedding day was November 2nd or November 3rd, after my birthday. We got married. My best man that I had, when it said, "Do you wed?" when I put the ring on, I was a little bit nervous. My wife was not nervous, but I was. After that I relaxed a little bit. I put the ring on finally. Then we got, like I said, husband and wife (inaudible) we did that.

KJL: I imagine that was a pretty happy day

PE: Yeah.

KJL: So you and your wife were on your own.

PE: Right.

KJL: It sounds like that worked pretty well.

PE: Yeah, it did.

KJL: What do you wish had been different in your life?

PE: Well, I wish what had been different is that I wasn't at Pineland, but now I'm not, so that's a blessing in disguise. I just wish they kept Pineland open for people that need it.

KJL: What was the staff at Pineland like?

PE: Well, they was pretty strict, but there were some of them nice, too, like the shopmasters and all that, at shop. I got along good with them.

KJL: You learned to make things?

PE: Yeah, make things.

KJL: What kind of things did you make?

PE: Birdhouses, bird feeders. And we'd have that metal, where you peel the paper off the metal. We did that, and those things that you put your light bulbs in, (inaudible) put your light bulbs in. We had to go like this (taps) make it so it comes to something. (Inaudible) they call it.

KJL: What did they call it?

PE: (Inaudible) That's what they called those things. (Inaudible) It's in Portland, the place where you get that. We did that. Of course, we went out and cut the grass at the duck pond. And there was the apple orchard. We sprayed the apple orchard trees so the apples would grow good. Of course we had those birds. We took care of those, feed them.

KJL: Now, which birds were those?

PE: Pheasants.

KJL: Pheasants, yes, sorry I forgot. What do you want most for yourself?

PE: For myself? I like to try to look after myself. A new wife, yeah, that's what I was hoping to get again, get married again. That's what I've been praying for. (Inaudible), too. Pray that I'll get someone again.

KJL: Well, I'm about out of questions, but I also want to ask if you've enjoyed this conversation.

PE: Yes, I did

KJL: Good. I've enjoyed talking with you. It's been interesting.

PE: Yeah, it is. It's the first time I've worked with you, too.

KJL: Yeah, you've got a nice home here.

END OF INTERVIEW