

Interview with John and Patricia Stapleton

November 25, 1989

Interviewer (I): Interview with John and Pat Stapleton.

John Stapleton (JS): John Stapleton, graduated in 1969.

Patricia Stapleton (PS): Pat Stapleton, 1968.

I: What was Northern like in the mid '60s?

JS: You first Pat, you had books out today. [Laughter]

PS: As I'm looking through the books I was reminded of how really, organized and strict it was at that time. Things were very orderly and it struck me the difference between even the first yearbook in '64 and the yearbook in '65. The yearbook in '64 starts out with all of the professors, and the '65 one started out with the kids on campus having fun. I think the first year there, Northern was just kind of getting a hold of what potentially was going to happen to it, it had been used to being a very small, closed campus, tight campus and it was suddenly a larger more, I was down in Spalding Hall which was like a half a mile block wherever I had to go to class and it was, they were trying to keep all of the rules out there, the same as inside, like I had to be in the dorms at 9:00, and on weekends it was 11:00, and that was even if you were 25 and a senior. You had written permission from your parents if you were going to be gone for a weekend or anytime of any extent and they really kept a watch on you, I felt they were keeping a watch on me behavior wise but I didn't feel like I was being on a close watch academically, looking back that would have been nicer, I had a real hard time meeting with an advisor and getting good advice I thought. It was changing, but I think you had an influx of some of the teachers that were coming in, and some that were just getting ready to pull out. And it was like I have been really busy I am ready to leave this place, there were a lot of teacher just hitting retirement age.

JS: Yeah a lot of them. I think the thing that I remember the most about it was how close the people who lived on campus were. Everybody seemed to know everybody, except the suitcase students, and we would run into them in the classes and then they would be gone and you wouldn't really ever get to know too many of them, although the few people that we did get to know off campus were close people there, you know Munising, Manistique or Marquette area, Negaunee a couple of people from Negaunee that we got to know a little. The teachers were well older, I remember a lot of teachers having some real difficulty with the amount of money that they were making, they were finding better jobs, and a couple of the really good teachers were leaving. And then moving in younger people, and they were moving to different schools, Texas one of them went to Texas, there were a few who went downstate, because they just weren't getting paid... we both came from a big city, Chicago area. And we love, we both really enjoyed the campus and its closeness, and the smallness of the community. And you know not being a number... as we were growing up and wanted to go to a big university like Michigan where you have 40,000 people and all you are is a number and half the people ____, we really enjoyed that aspect of it. I didn't have the same feeling about lack of effort on the teacher's part of community as much as them being overburdened so much with the amount of work they have to do with the time they have. Although there were teachers like that, when Dr. Barnard gave of himself constantly, there were always

people like that. He was just honored by all the students, all of my publications were, I don't know if named something after him, I can't remember what it was, but he was our freshman English teacher on campus in '64.

PS: He was very interested and he was... I didn't have him,

JS: Oh I thought you had him too.

I: When Northern was going through a period of ____ expansion, how was it?

JS: That's the way it seemed, there was a lot of building going on constantly on campus, Dr. Harden was the president I believe at the time when we came in, and he was progressive but he was also the one that had ordained and determined the Right to Try theory. And frankly with the grades that I had in high school, the right to try was the only way I could get into a college, I didn't have B's and A's in high school. But I prefaced that by saying that I went to a college preparatory school that wasn't just, I didn't get any vocational training, like my kids right now are in woods and metals in high school and I never had the opportunity to get a good grade just by cutting out a piece of wood on a band saw or something, I was in four years of math and part of that had to be reflected. I am a little defensive of that situation [laughter]. But there was a lot of change going on, there was a lot of change in the town of Marquette, thinking about what Northern Michigan was like at the time, we as a campus community always felt like the town of Marquette didn't appreciate the students of Northern, I don't know if that is still the way it is now, but every once in a while I hear the same basic things within the last 20 years. It seems that from the publicity that goes on about Northern on the television and media and other media, that it seems that Marquette appreciates the university more now than in the past. But I think that also may come from leadership, the fact that Jamrich wasn't the public relations person, Dr. Harden certainly was, Harden was a public relations person and I think Dr. Appleberry is a public relations person.

I: Were sororities and fraternities a big thing in campus life?

PS: Very big.

JS: I was a GDI.

I: GDI what's that?

JS: I damn didn't _____. [Laughing].

PS: Neither of us joined a fraternity or sorority but they were a real controller, always a big initiation. I know I stayed away just because I didn't feel like I wanted to go through any type of initiation that they asked of people to go through and the inspection. It bothered me. And I've got enough to worry about.

JS: And what it cost too.

PS: School.

JS: There was some extra charges of that if you wanted rush for a week. It wouldn't benefit us to pay for it.

PS: I never thought of that. I just thought I don't have time for this. I've got classes. You know I can barely handle what I am doing. I know a lot of people, ended up dropping out of school because of I think really

because of the different fraternities and sororities they were demanding, and then they started looking at them as being more important than their goal of school. Of course that could have happened anything they were into, they just weren't ready for it.

JS: Yeah football could have done that, or cheerleading could have had the same effect on people. But once we got there I didn't know that much about Northern Michigan University when we came from Chicago, I didn't know that much about the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I didn't even really know where it was or what it was. But once we got to campus we understood that Northern was considered to be a pretty good party school, and if you did want to party, and you know spend a lot of time doing that, there were certain fraternities and sororities that that is what you do, you join them and you kind of __ which would take away a bit from those things.

I: So campus life and campus government was pretty well dominated by the fraternities?

PS: Yeah I think the student council was dominated by fraternities at that time.

JS: They were dominated by fraternity members. I was a member of student government for I think sophomore year for sure, as one of resident life's representatives. And most of the people on there were people from sororities or fraternities but all the sororities and fraternities didn't have their own houses at the time, so some of them lived on campus with everybody else. But yeah I would say that is probably true. They seemed to be people who would go out and do things and in cases a lot of the other, a lot of the people who were sororities and fraternity members were on campus students as opposed to suitcase students, you know back and forth every weekend or every night. And the suitcase student was every weekend, and they didn't get involved in anything on campus. They were there from Monday until Friday, immediately gone for the whole weekend, back to Munising and Manistique or Iron Mountain, or the Copper Country up in that area and they just never really got involved in anything else so a lot of the fraternity people, many of the fraternity people were on campus students. There was, in our opinion, there was a lot of partying and a lot of wasted time, something that maybe weren't always,

PS: I think they were fine for the student council board, I think they,

JS: Yeah I don't think they affected negatively the university

PS: I don't know how much power our student council had, I can't remember it making any really major decisions other than when we were having homecoming court and helping to coordinate the homecoming list. And when the dances were, and that was something that people were very concerned about,

JS: And some disciplinary activities that they had, that's probably where they had more control, made more decisions over things that effected people was the discipline of some of the students.

I: What year did you say you started?

PS: '64.

JS: '64.

I: Do you know approximately how many black students were there?

JS: By number not really.

PS: I would guess in '64 if there was any there was one.

JS: No it was more than that,

PS: I guess in basketball,

JS: For instance a couple of them on the football and basketball team.

PS: I don't remember girls, it was hardly at all. Not until my junior year. Then there was in '65, junior year there was definitely an increase,

I: You played football?

JS: Mm hmm.

I: For how many years?

JS: A year and a half.

I: A year and a half. Which year was that?

JS: '64 and '65 I began in '65 when I quit in the middle of the season.

I: And you said there was blacks on the team then?

JS: There were blacks on the football team, there weren't a whole lot of them it was mostly a white team but a couple of black kids would play. A lot of Canadian kids.

I: Had there been more and some quit because they didn't feel they were treated right?

JS: No. Not a number that would stick out in your mind. When I first moved on campus I was on Gries, in Gries Hall and most of the athletes were in Gries Hall because it was easier to get to the locker room. And there were a few basketball players and a few football players, frankly I don't remember that many. But I don't remember not having that many either, I don't remember if there weren't a number of blacks that came to school.

I: Do you remember when the Job Corps started?

JS: No.

PS: There were three on Northern's basketball team. And I don't see any schools in the school, I don't remember any girls, I remember my first black friend, girl friend, being in my junior year, that lived in my hall but that was it.

I: Do you remember when the Job Corps started?

PS: Oh yeah. What are you are you...?

I: Would you explain that?

PS: Well there was such a change, it was a real eye opener for me at this time I was working in the health department at the university and those children, young people at the time, seemed to be so

much more sick than the other students and that was my first opportunity there, realize, I heard they were coming on campus you know, and that people were moaning and groaning about it and then that they had the Right to Try and upgrade things and I thought this doesn't affect me and it didn't really ever affect me other than working with them when they came in to sign into the health service. They just needed, there were often families where there was definitely ___ that happened and they were not well educated young people at all. And I guess I had never really been exposed to anybody like this to any extent and they were there all the time for the slightest little sniffle when they were coming in and I realized pretty quick, didn't take me long to realize they just wanted to come in so the nurse would pat them on the shoulder, talk to them. And I remember printing out the form the very first time they put out the form and a young man came to the window and I said fill this out and then I have to go get their charts after they filled it out, their medical charts. And so he stood there looking at me kind of dumb and I picked up the pencil and handed it to him and I said you have to fill this out so I can get your chart, and he stood there for a while and he wrote something, I went and got the slip and then when I finally looked at it I realized, this young man did not know how to write, he didn't know how to read anything, and I was utterly shocked to see an adult my age not knowing how to write, so in ways I guess it was good because it was an eye opener, to the real world and I never read into any problems with any of them, I just saw how needy they were and they were very needy and I don't know if it was the right spot to put them or not. It was hard for them. I know they had some, they had a lot a bad comments made about them at times. They were taking up housing and they were taking space and there were people that wanted to go to college they couldn't make it and they were getting all this free stuff. And it was hard for some people that had jobs and were working to get through college, and then there were these people that came that were just given a dormitory room for free, they would take them out and my them coats, and you were wearing a coat for the fourth year. So I know there were some pretty hard feelings with what the governments doing, but then I don't know if the government was really wrong in doing it, I really think people were looking at it a little selfishly, and you look back on those people that didn't have nothing.

I: So when ___ about isolated alienated?

PS: The Job Corps people? Oh yeah, they were very lonely.

I: There were various article sin the Northern News that like, ambassadors on campus and such and how they were going to welcome these people, it sounds like they didn't really do that.

PS: I know there was somebody always taking care of them, you would always see somebody, walking around with them.

I: But it wasn't the majority opinion that they were all welcome.

PS: No they didn't mix with the college students at all.

JS: They were basically off campus too,

PS: Well no they were,

JS: No I don't mean that I mean with their schooling, with their courses and everything, they were separate from ours. They all went up to the old army building up there on Wright Street. I didn't even

remember what job corps was until she started talking about it, I didn't know, I didn't hardly have any association at that point in time, I was a junior, I think that was about our junior year. ____

PS: _____

I: Can you remember any of the controversies with the fraternity council, the fraternities when the black students started claiming that they were racist?

PS: I remember it happening but I wasn't involved, I remember, I guess it was our junior year, it was before our, yeah it was our junior year, and that's when it was just starting, I guess probably our sophomore year the blacks started coming more to Northern and then by junior year there was quite a few. They were big enough to have a social life that was, there were enough people to go with and to click with. I'm sure it was hard for them to go to a dance when there was like 1 or 3, just like it was freshman year, there were a few more. I remember my junior year when that was going on, and I remember being at one of the dances and one of the Delt Sigs, walking up to a black girl at the dance, and he danced with the black girl, and then one of the black men said, we don't want to see you do that again, just leave our girls alone and he said I have every right to dance with her, and he brought me by the hand and he said you want to dance with her, he says it's not going to bother me but I thought I'm not getting involved in this, you know, and that wasn't exactly what I felt like doing at the time, I went home mad that day. I thought I don't like the way this dance is going to begin with, and I really didn't know, I mean I knew this guy and I had danced with this guy before, but he was just, trying to blend the road or something but it wasn't quite working and I could see that trouble was coming.

I: So there was a lot of antagonism on both sides?

PS: yeah I think so, I really think so.

I: Do you remember any of these things?

JS: I didn't really get, I didn't really go out and socialize from that standpoint, the dances and stuff, I was in college and I didn't want to do it. I, the few people that did have association with athletics were in my room, I had a couple in my dorm, when I was a Resident Assistant there were a couple of black kids. I just never had any difficulties with that, the fact that lived in Chicago and worked with them, I didn't have, I didn't have a prejudice I guess from that standpoint.

PS: Of course these people that work under the prejudice they were usually from the Detroit area, some of these _____,

JS: Where they worked with them and lived with them too all the time. Maybe just grew up differently, I don't know what it was. I enjoyed as many of my associations with the black kids and the black people in my lifetime as I did with the white people. And ____ 43 years. But I just never really knew what was going on from that standpoint other than little things like this, because I was off work and in between jobs a couple times and just trying to make it through school.

I: What were the attitudes of the friends you did have?

JS: Well they seemed to be good kids and they seemed to be accepted from the standpoint of the teams. I didn't run across any ____.

PS: They were big basketball fans ____.

JS: ____ Michael Jordan would have been very well received [laughter]. We had a couple of kids come in who maybe people looked at as fitting stereotype, Ted Rose [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], is the one that comes to mine. ____ his senior year of high school and he came to Northern Michigan University for basketball and nobody could really figure out why he came to northern if he was as good as he was supposed to be, when he got there he turned out that he was the, at least the perception that we had was he was kind of lazy. He was 6'6 and about 280 pounds when he got there to play basketball and eh couldn't move. In that day and age today, like the ____ of the Chicago bears he's got an attitude of weight and lack of work just make it hard for them to get going. But other than that we never had any difficulties with them, there were a lot of Canadians kids like us who when to school, hockey players, football players, they never had any arguments against the blacks or the Jews. That's the other area where we saw prejudices form the standpoint of the university, but I never ran across any of that that I could see. I wasn't in things I wasn't as involved.

I: You said you enjoyed the difference the more rural community up here. Do you think the rural community and the culture was harder for black people to assimilate to?

JS: Yeah I would say there is no question it would be because it was nothing at all like the city. I was a little different than most of the people that came from the city, most of the people that came from the city didn't really like the small town attitude and atmosphere and didn't like the things they were missing, they would go back home and do all the things that they couldn't do up in Marquette. But I didn't miss I didn't have ____ but I could certainly see where, and you could see where a lot of those Job Corps kids had a real hard time with that, because there wasn't, there wasn't culturally anyone where they came from.

PS: When I was looking through that year book I saw right in front, section of the second yearbook I saw the Vietnam, the "We Are for Vietnam" march. I don't really remember that march, and I thought, this made the front page of our yearbook? That's amazing. Because I remember the kids being against it, a lot of people being against it, of course we had an Am vets, and the Am vets had a lot of pull to it, a lot of swing. So that's probably what started that march. But I also remember a march carrying a casket, against Vietnam, and that never got in the book. I looked I thought, I remember that march, because I marched in it, but I hadn't been, I wasn't active in politics. But they said, today we are going to have some kids I heard them talking they were marching against Vietnam, so I did walk around the campus with a whole group just because I knew it was for against Vietnam, and I thought them all that I had heard and watched, it didn't see much sense in Vietnam, I didn't understand it, just like no one understood. And they had a casket and great big black draperies and that, and that wasn't in the book, and that was the one that was in my mind and I am looking through the book for the pictures of it and it wasn't there. So I wonder if they had any advertisements on that one. And I remember Dr. Harden did not like that one, and we got a lot of backlash about having it and then we had a second march for the death of freedom of speech and there were a few people you know, political science majors that were into this.

JS:...

PS: But there were a few political marches but never like Kent State and some of these other places, because it was a rural college and a small college campus and a lot of people like I said were vets, the vets club was very active and a lot of them were older people that went back to school too and there were like, I can't get involved in this young, I got other things I want to get on with my life.

[INTERVIEW ENDS ABRUPTLY]