

# Conversations

## BRANDON TRAINING SCHOOL

Established in 1915, the program served Vermonters with mental retardation and developmental disabilities continuously until 1993. Founded as the Brandon State School for Feebleminded Children, the name was changed to Brandon State School in 1929 and later to the Brandon Training School. Begun as a working farm, many original structures still exist, including remnants of a horse racetrack visible from Route 7. The campus grew to include over 30 buildings and 400 acres, and served over 650 persons at its peak in 1968. In the 1980's the population of the facility declined as persons were served in community based programs. The Brandon Training School maintained a proud tradition of quality care and active training throughout its history.

-Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation  
1993

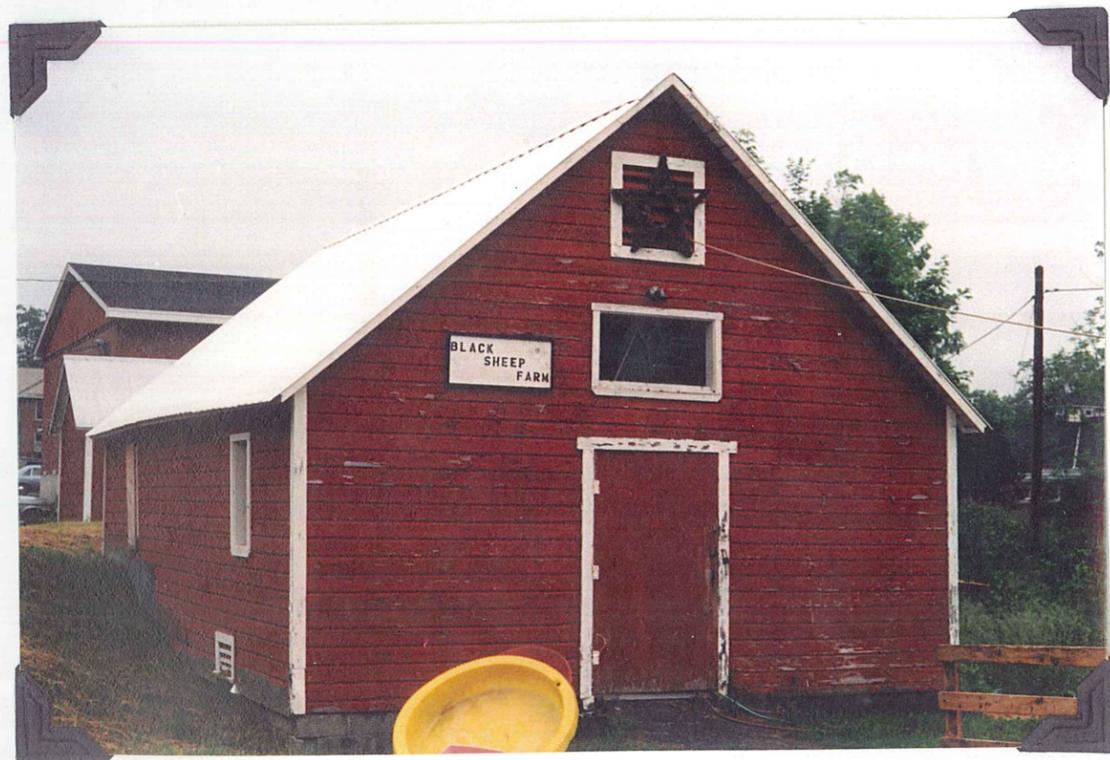
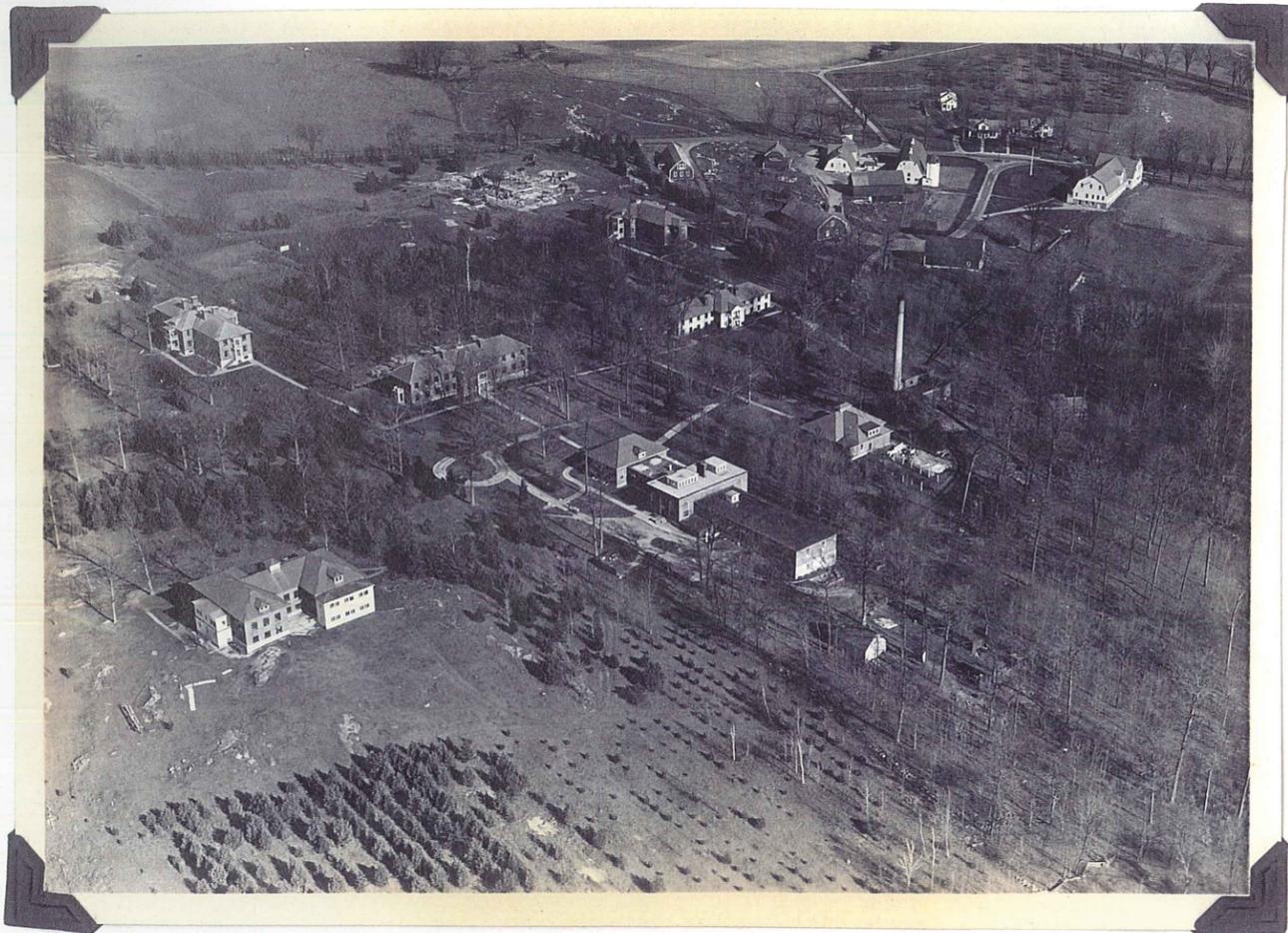
During the time the Brandon Training School was open, many children and adults spent some or most of their lives there. The dormitories, staff and other residents became significant parts of their lives; to some it was home. Friendships lasted beyond life at BTS.

After leaving BTS, people moved back to their communities or to other Vermont towns. Some went to group homes, some to live with families, others to their own apartments.

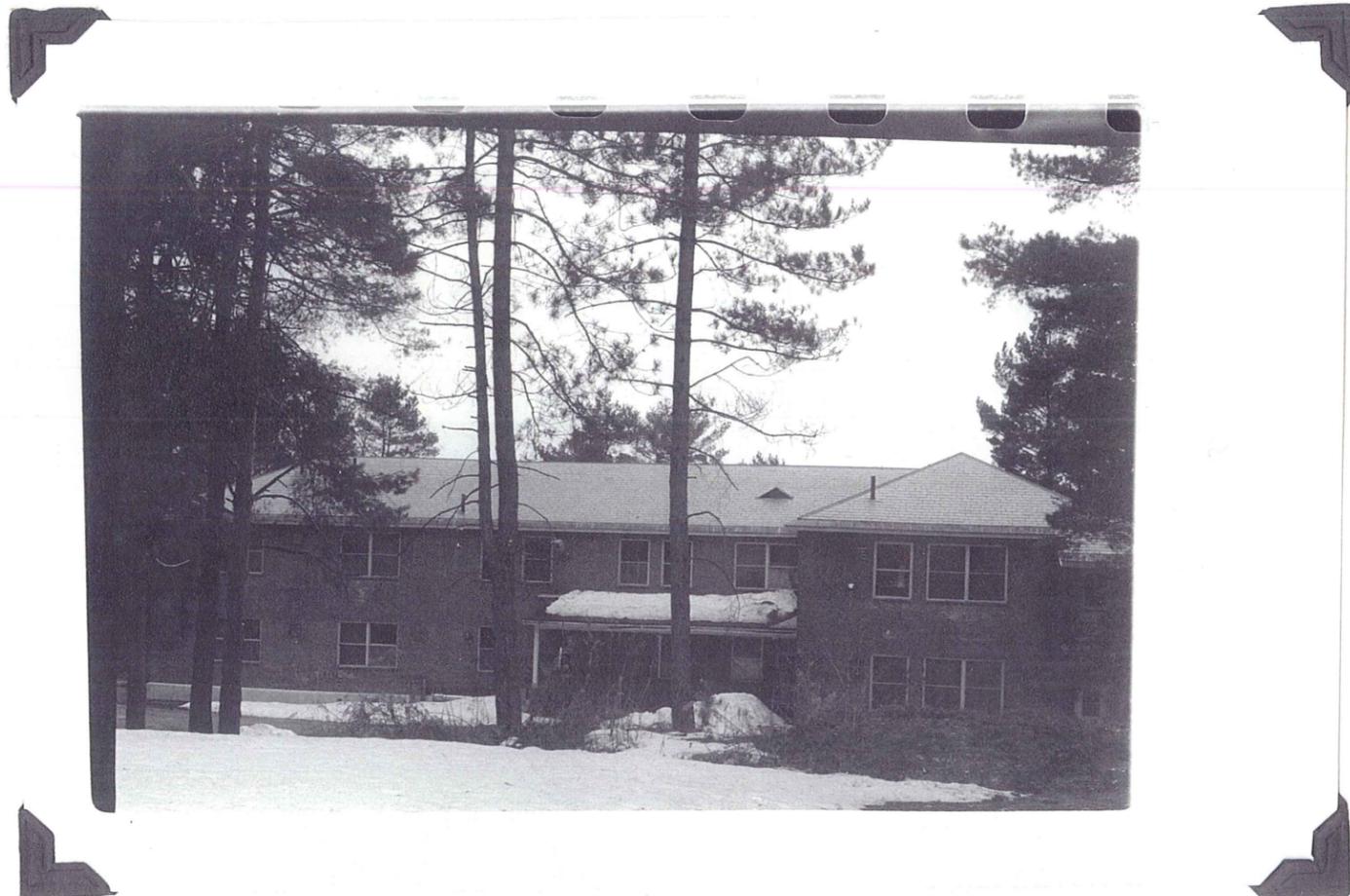
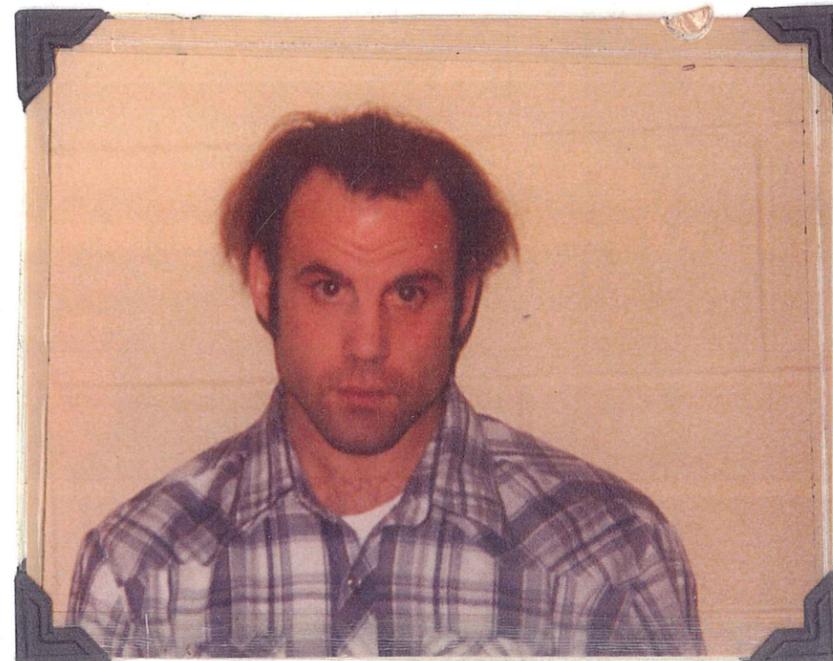
Following, are brief conversations with four people who lived at the Brandon Training School. I was introduced to Joe and Louise for this project; Dan and I have been had been acquaintances. Irene and I have known each other for 11 years.

Each person was willing to sit down and talk about his experiences and to share details of her life. Despite the hardships they faced, what was most striking was the lack of anger and resentment. More significant it seemed, was the loss of family and friends they had loved. All four were clear that they liked where they lived and that the closest people in their lives cared about them.

My thanks to Irene, Joe, Louise and Dan for being so kind and telling me their stories.



Dan F is a 46 year old man who lives in Bristol, Vermont. He lived with his family in Hancock, Vermont until admission to Brandon Training School in 1963, when he was 8 years old. He lived at BTS until 1982, when he moved to a men's group home in Middlebury. About ten years ago he moved to his own apartment in Bristol. Dan has two part-time jobs, one at a restaurant and one at a bookstore. He has a third seasonal part-time job shoveling snow for the Town of Bristol. Dan's sister and brothers live in Vermont and he especially enjoys holiday and birthday celebrations with his family.



I lived with my family, my brother Doug. My family lived in Hancock. My mother died; she's up in heaven. My father died too; he's up in heaven. My sister lives in Lincoln and she plays piano. My uncle played the fiddle, that's him right there in the picture. He's buried out there, he is.

My brother, Doug, was at Brandon Training School, in dorm A. He lives over in Williamstown. He just moved there, he did. I lived in dorm H, big room with other people. Rather have my own room. It was noisy there.

I went to the workshop at Brandon Training School, over at the Men's Cottage. Put paint rollers together. No other job there. I like Cubbers better. I get paid. I take it to the bank when I get paid. I like to have money.

Didn't visit any places. Didn't go on vacation there. Don't remember any friends there. Some of the staff were good. Wanted to leave there. Don't know who told me I would leave, felt good when I left. This is my home.

My sister Fay lives nearby, in Lincoln. Talk to my sister on the phone. We get together on my birthday. We pick up Doug in Williamstown for his birthday. Doug's birthday is after mine; it's in the spring. My birthday is in February and people came and Amy made a small cake. Shared it at the job, the bookstore. It had 6 candles on it, blew them out and made a wish.

All my other brothers are married. My sister has children and they're grown up. Like being around them. Like being Uncle Dan.

I have jobs in Bristol. I work at Cubbers and I make pizza boxes, on Monday and Tuesday. I go to the (Dearleap) bookstore other days; I clean the bathroom and the rugs. I have another job, at the town job I shovel. At the bookstore, they made two stores and they put in a new rug. No music at the store any more.

I work out at the gym. I go there to exercise, to lift weights. Someone meets me there.

On the weekends I go to Special Olympics. Cross country skiing, bowling, basketball. I like them all. I go bowling. I have a bowling ball. I got a ribbon for it.

Basketball this week. The notice is on the refrigerator. Practice, then next week we wear uniforms and the tournament up in Burlington. I do skills; bouncing, shooting baskets.

Played bocce ball, and I got a ribbon for it. I ski. Skiing for Special Olympics makes me happy.

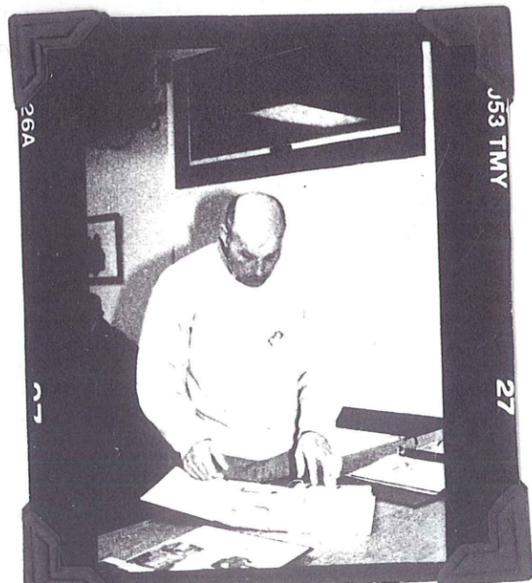
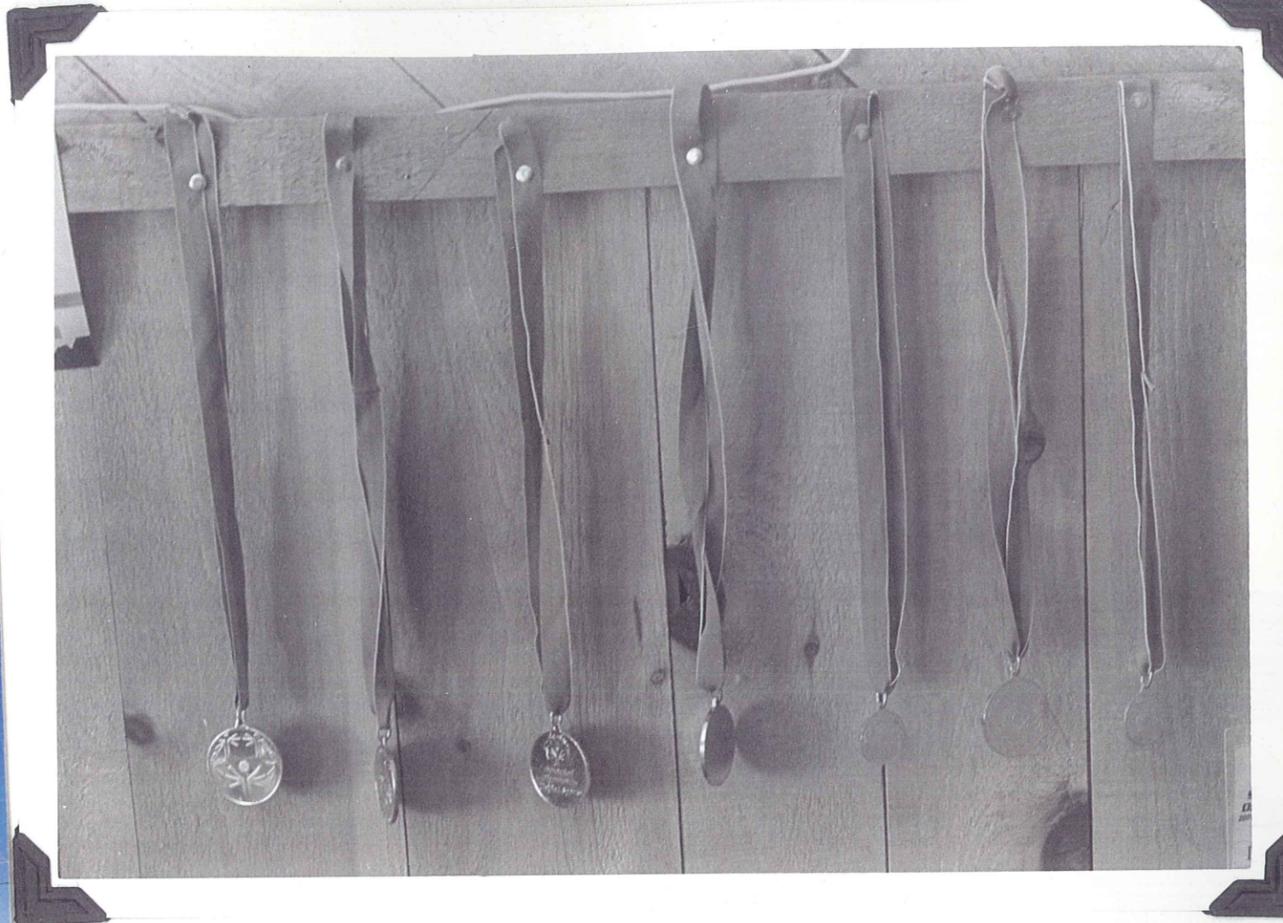
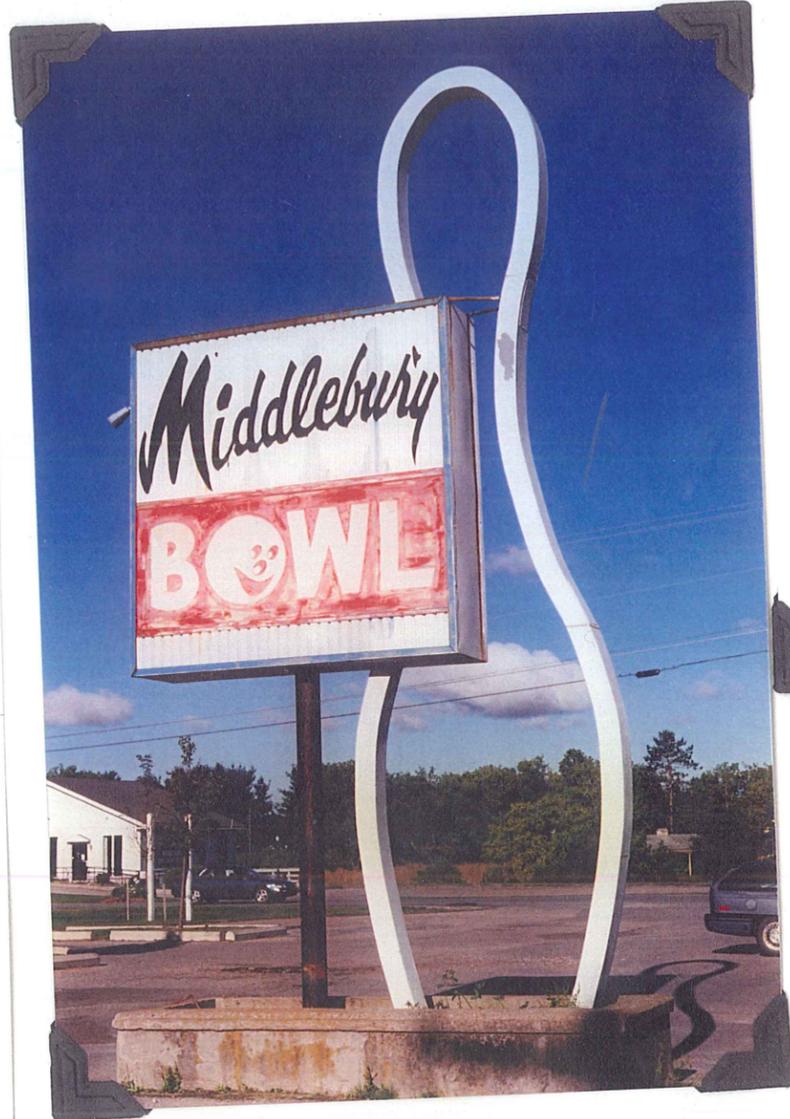
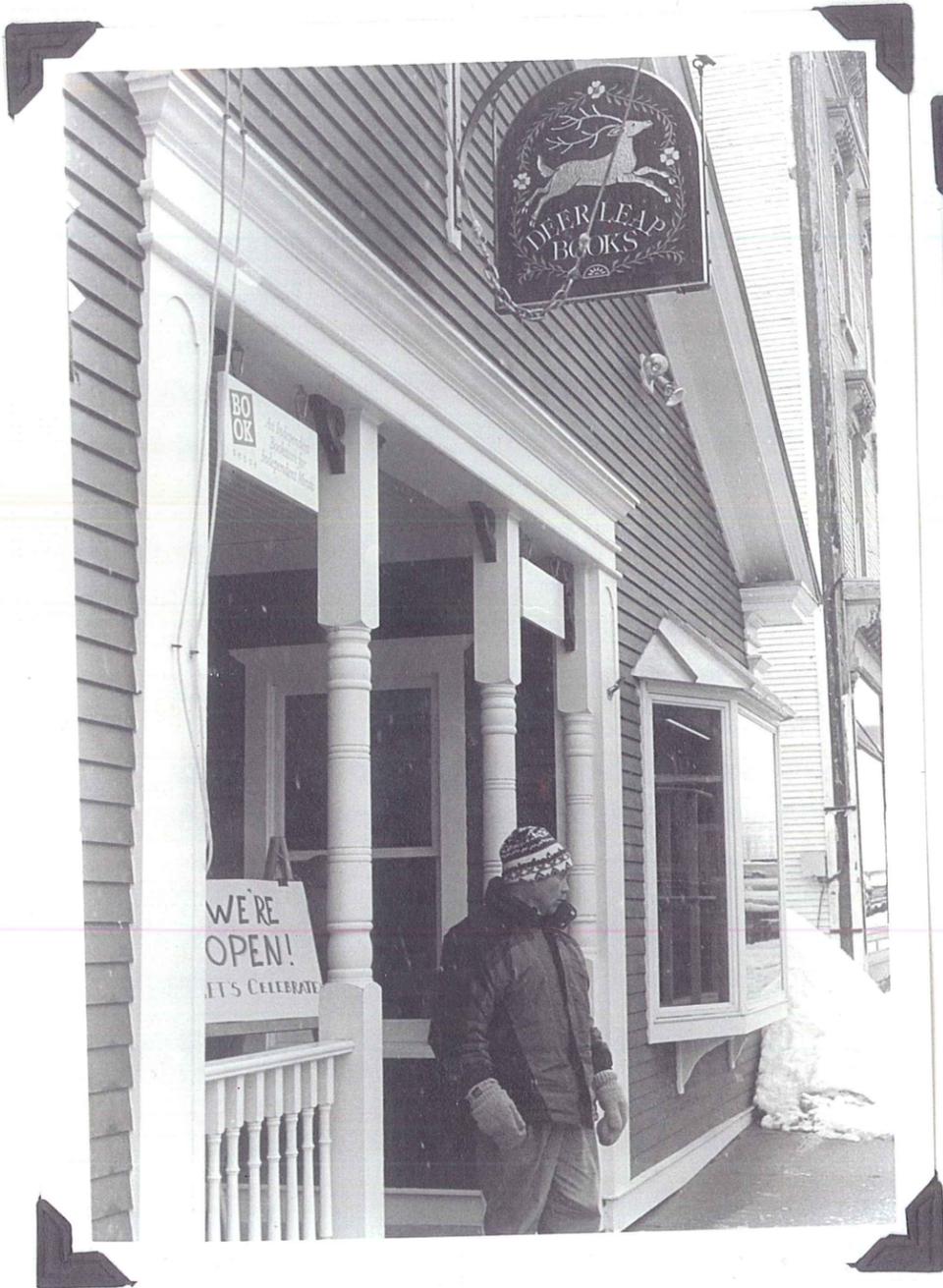
Sometimes I do art, paintings. Same day as Special Olympics, taking a break.

Last year I went to Walt Disney World in Florida. I have pictures going down the slide into the water; you go down fast and it takes you all the way to the top, just like that. Makes a big splash. I wasn't scared. I stayed at these campgrounds. They have fireworks they go up in the sky. They light up with colors in the sky and I like the colors and the noise.

I flew down. I had to get an ID card in Middlebury; when you go on a plane you have to have one. I like to fly on the plane, first time.

I'd like to go on vacation again, to some place else.

Good town, Bristol. Looking for a good place to live? Bristol. It's my home.

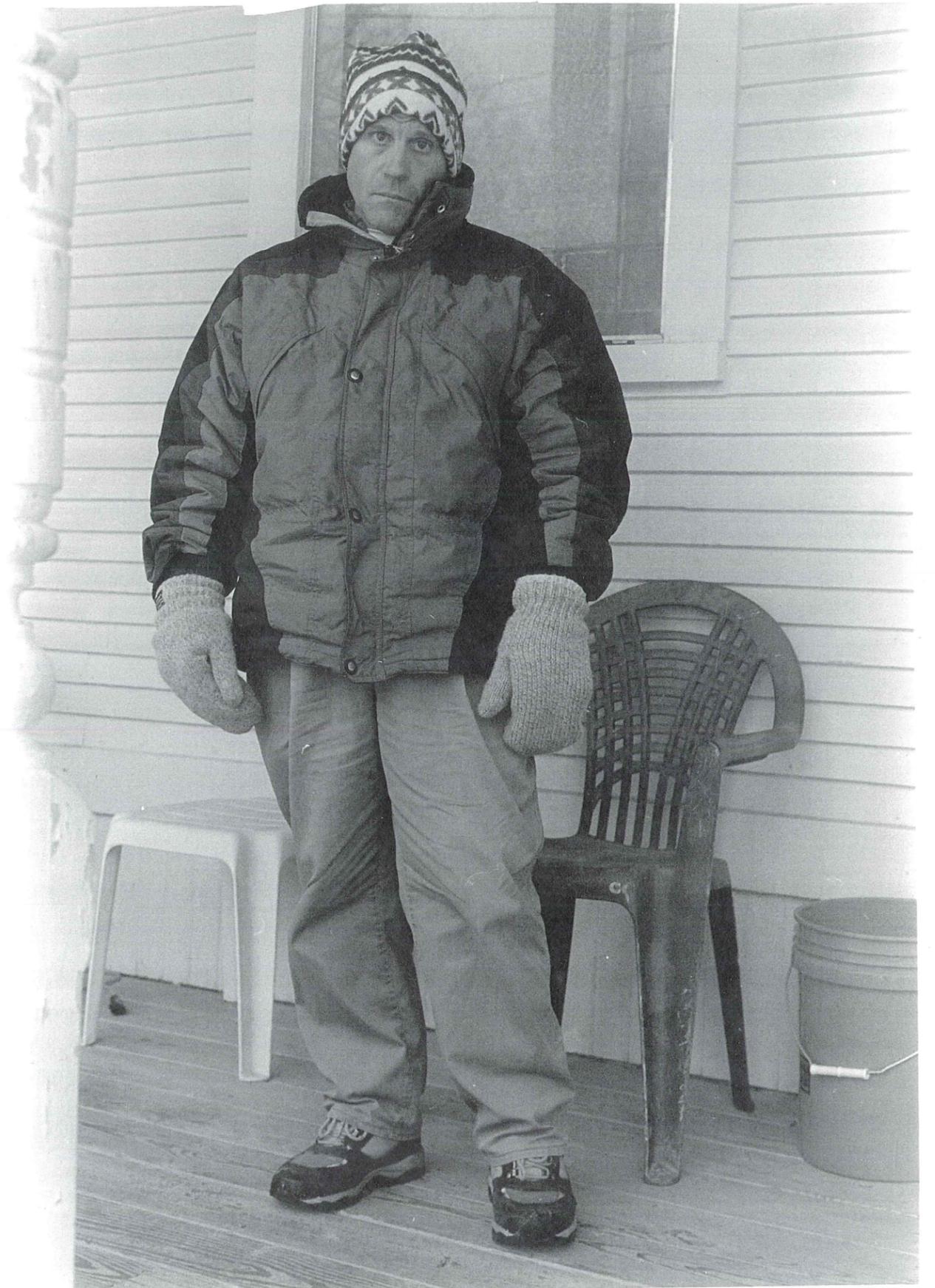
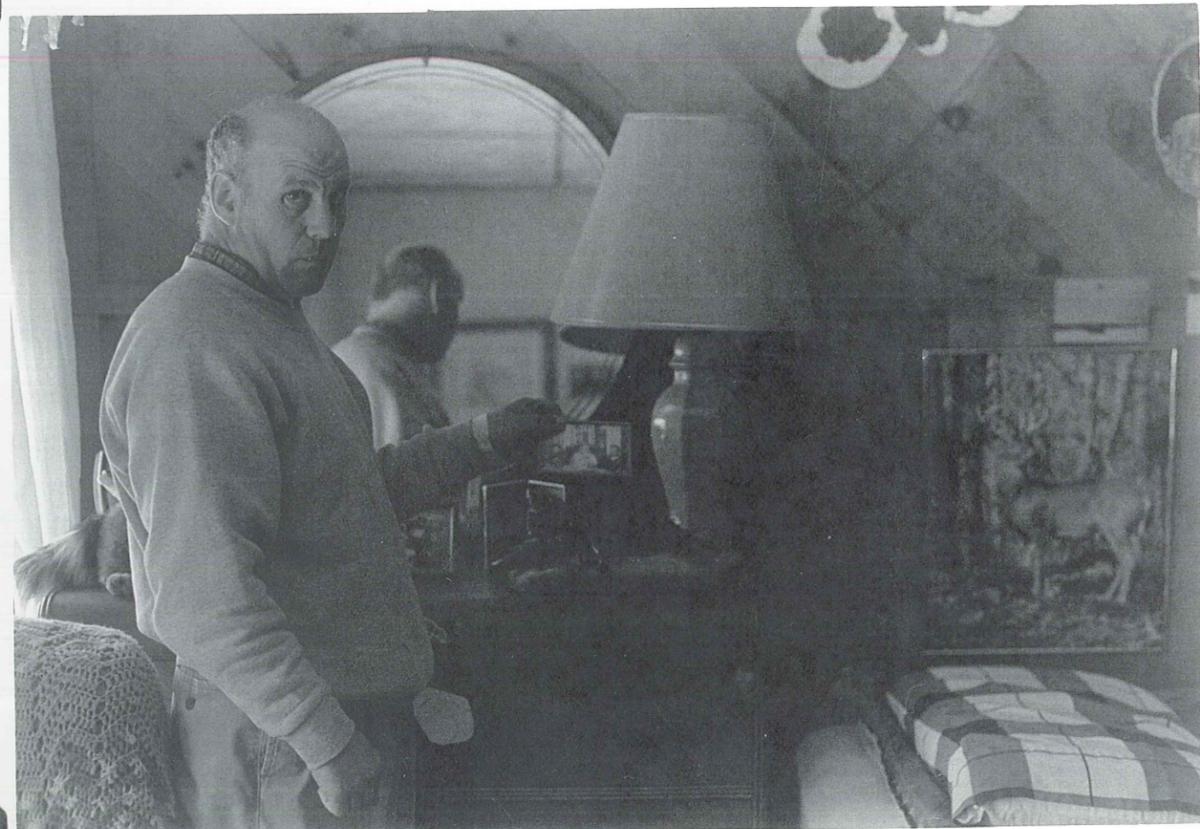


I like living in this apartment. I like my pictures, gold medals from Special Olympics, ribbons. Used to live in Middlebury. I lived in the men's group home in Middlebury and then I moved to Bristol and I got help finding my house in Bristol. They don't have apartments in the group home. I'd rather live by myself. I like this apartment. I like where it is, close to my jobs, I have to walk to my jobs.

Someone (Amy or Norm or Jean) does the cooking here. TV dinners in the microwave. I can use it myself. I like spaghetti. Yes, I say what I want to eat. I go get groceries. It's Shaw's now. I buy my own, someone helps me cook it.

I like music. Kenny Rogers. That's a map of my trips on the wall, I go fishing for trout, clean them and cook them up. Get my fishing license every year, my own pole. Use worms for bait, I put the worm on the hook. I go fishing with Norm, he takes me.

Two clocks in my house, so I get to work on time.  
Bristol? Good. Everything I want.



I went to live at Brandon Training School when I was eighteen after my mother and father died. My other brothers and sisters went to live some place else.

I lived in E dormitory, the highest dormitory. I used to take care of the babies in that building (the Infirmary). I fed them and gave them a bath and changed them, take them for a walk and get them ready for bed. I took the babies' temps and gave them aspirin. I miss it; that was kind of home to us.

I worked in the sewing room. I sewed, I mended things. I liked taking care of the babies the best.

I worked in the kitchen. I baked, I cooked, made bread, cakes, cookies and pudding. I didn't stay long, only 2 months. I had spells, epileptic fits. I had convulsions, took medicine when I was small.

I worked in the cannery. I worked in the garden; we had a great big garden. I pulled weeds out. I like to pull weeds. I liked being outdoors in the summer. We planted everything, peas and beans, beets and radishes and onions and cabbage. A lot of people worked in the garden, boys too. In the barn they had horses there, pet horses and work horses. Used to have pigs, hens, roosters, chickens and cows.

I went to the Workshop and I sanded and made things. Cut up things for Indian slippers, billfolds, key rings, things made out of leather.

There was a loom. I worked on it. Rugs and blankets. I took them to the main office. They sell them and then give me the money.

I used to go to movies up in Brandon and basketball and football games.

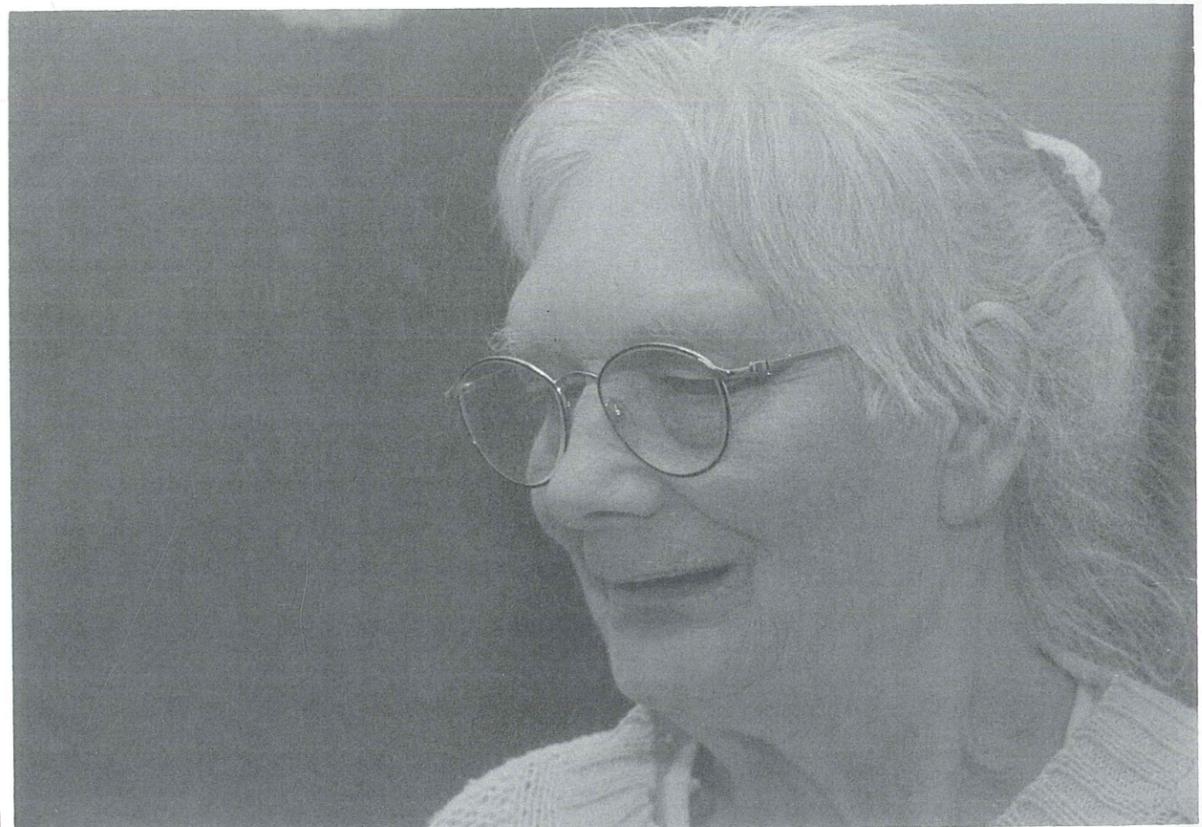
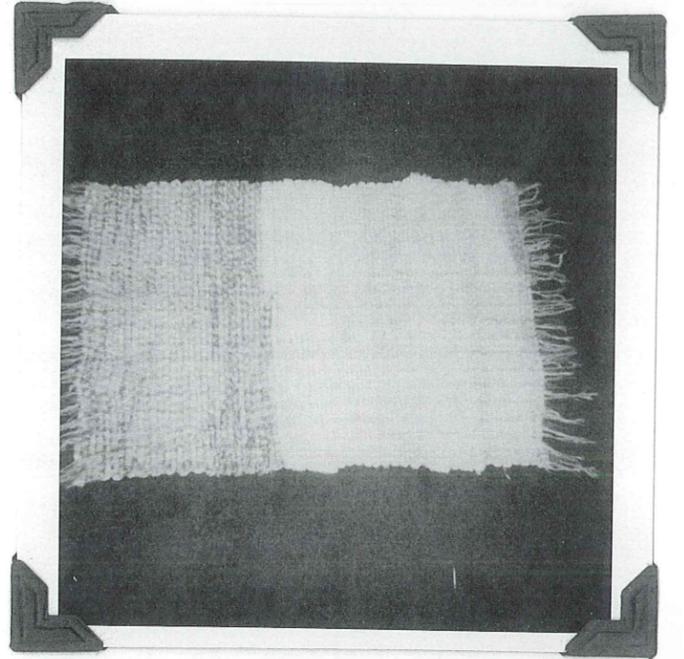
We had a big room at Brandon with lots of beds. I had a cat in the dormitory. I have my own room here.

Friends? One was Theresa and her 2 brothers were there. Edith, another friend. Carrie was another one, a cousin of Edith. We used to sit around the table and play games, any old games. Tiddly Winks. You can put a cup in the middle of the table and try to put a penny in the cup and win the money.

Miss Madeline was a nice woman. She came to the day room. Miss Jones from Rutland used to come and visit us every week. Frances Jones and her husband was Bill Jones. I knew her before I went to the Training School. She used to live in Northfield Falls. I knew her husband, Bill Jones.

I used to put mineral oil on my hair up at the Brandon Training School, then wash out my hair with baby shampoo. I used to put it in my bath water and it makes my skin soft.

At Brandon we got fourteen presents at Christmas, everyone got them. A lot of them said Brandon was like a home to them.



I lived with my parents and brothers and sister in Northfield until my parents died. I went to school up to Route 2. My father worked and I would go visit him when he worked at the village dump and he was happy to see me when I came by. I finished school and then I went to the Newport School. I liked going to school. I used to like adding. I learned to read. I read books in my room. Sometimes I read to Amy.

After I got out of school, I used to live with Mrs. Little in Newport. I did things around the house, dust, vacuum clean, help cook and bake, things like that. I helped her make wreaths out of pine needles. I didn't like it; my fingers got all picked. I told her I had to wear gloves. I liked living in Newport and after that I went to Miss Vickers and then when I got done with that I went to Ken and Marlene's, by the yellow hotel. I liked Montpelier and Barre the best. I used to walk up to my mother and father's grave. I used to walk up to Northfield and back. I walked by myself. I used to put flowers on their graves. My sister and I used to. I still go to their graves sometimes; I went last year. My sister, Virginia, and I went. There's just my sister and me now.

Virginia lives in Hartford, Connecticut, down by the water. I write letters but I don't get any back from her because her husband, Jake, has asthma. None of my family, not even my mother or father or brother, liked to read.

After I lived at Brandon, I went to live in St. Albans. I lived with Miss Heldley and her daughter and son for 3 years. I went to Barre and Montpelier and lived with Miss Week and Miss Towns. She had a dog. After that I moved again to Barre. I liked Mr. Morgan's house the best because he had a cat and a dog and chickens and ducks and roosters. I helped with the animals, used to feed them and get the water for them. I used to have a dog named Buddy.

I lived in a nursing home, Wanda's first. I had a little kitten, she'd sit in my lap and go to bed with me. At night she would sleep in my bed. Wherever I went I took my dogs, 4 of them, with me. I used to take my cat, Pollyann, to school with me. Animals are my friends, that's why they like me.

I got a new book, they gave it to me up at the church. I go to church. I go to church on Sunday, to the Methodist Church in Newbury, 4 miles from here. I lived in Newbury 2 years in March.

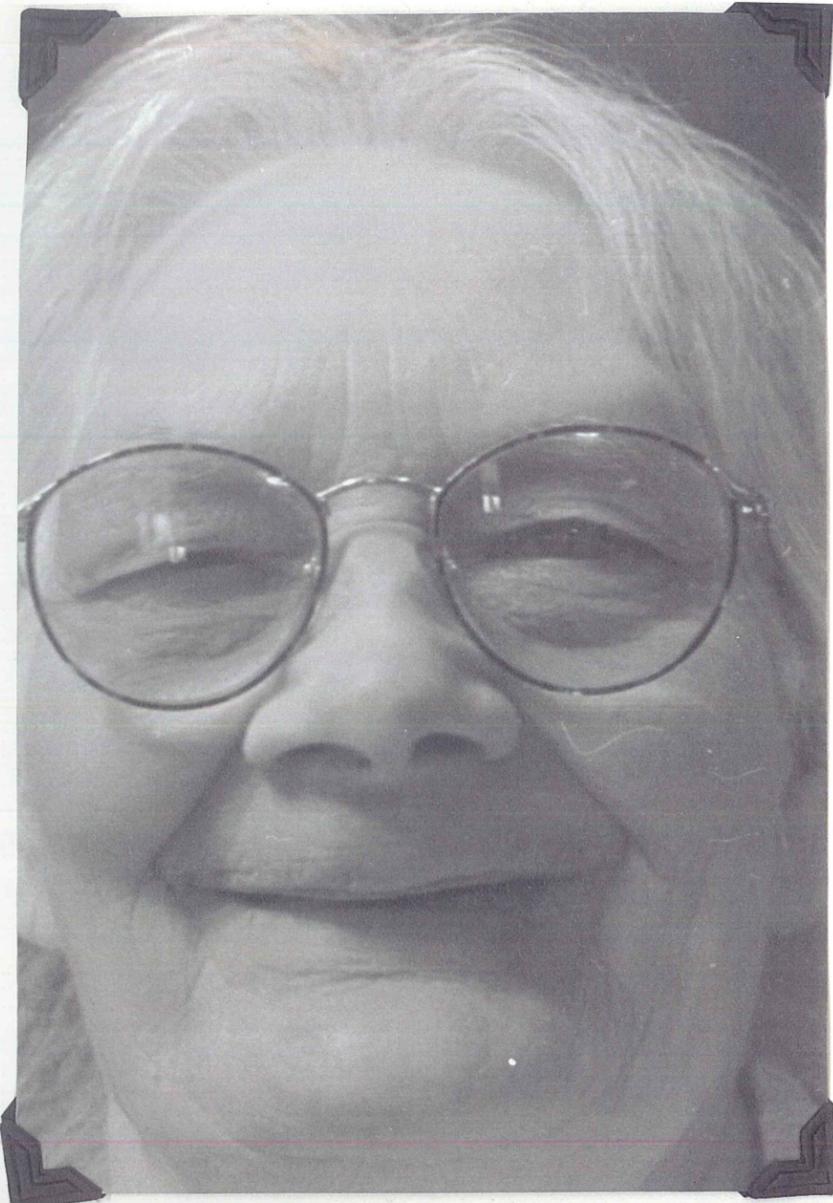
I have a friend who lives in the white house, Lillian, and she has a sister who lives on the other side. My friend gave me this nail polish. Another friend gave me the sweater.

We play Trouble. I play cards sometimes and I put puzzles together and we do arts and crafts down there. I just come from there. We go down to the high school and play bingo. I go to Amy's sister's games in the summer, baseball.

I have a lot of patience. I wasn't patient when I was little. My mother used to hit us and my father would say not to hit us. My father used to take our part when she hit us.

I have my own room. I have stuffed animals in my room, a big rabbit and a big seal. The seal's name is Francis, like my brother. He's nice and soft. My sister got him at Avon.

See my skin? Amy takes good care of my skin. She puts that new kind of lotion on me. She washes me hair first and then puts that crème rinse on it. She takes good care.

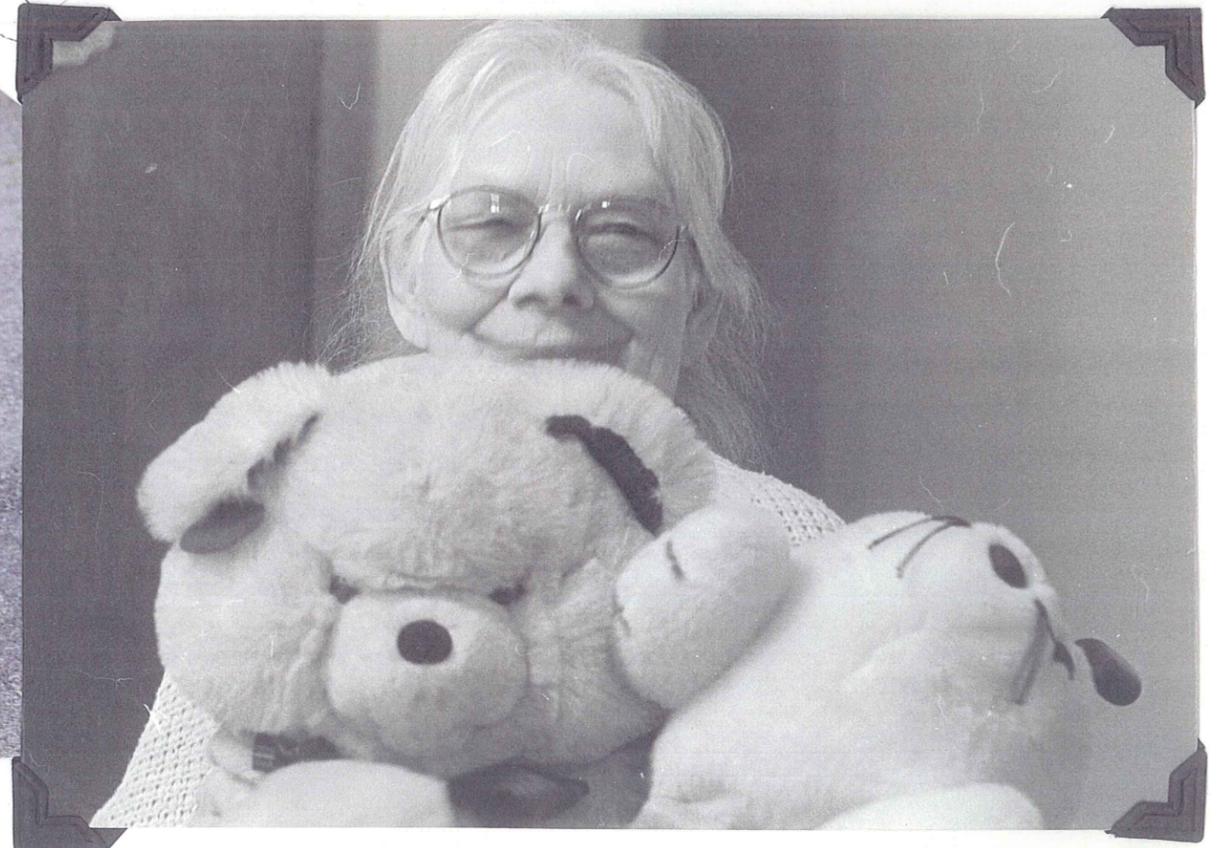
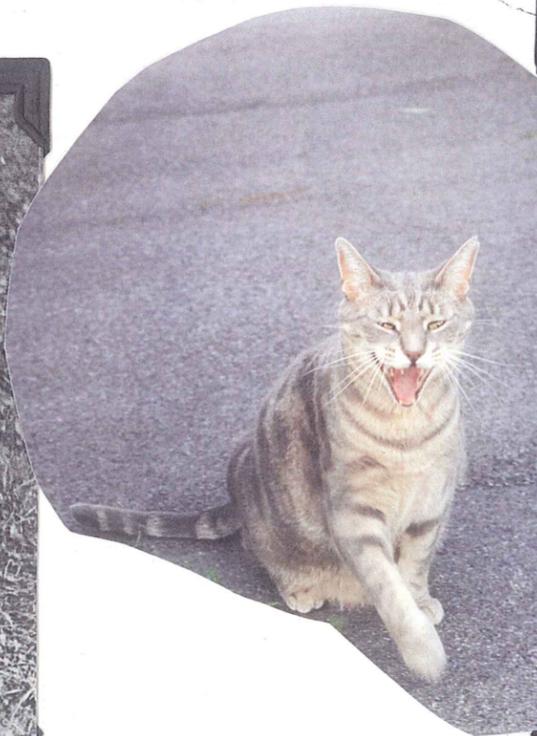
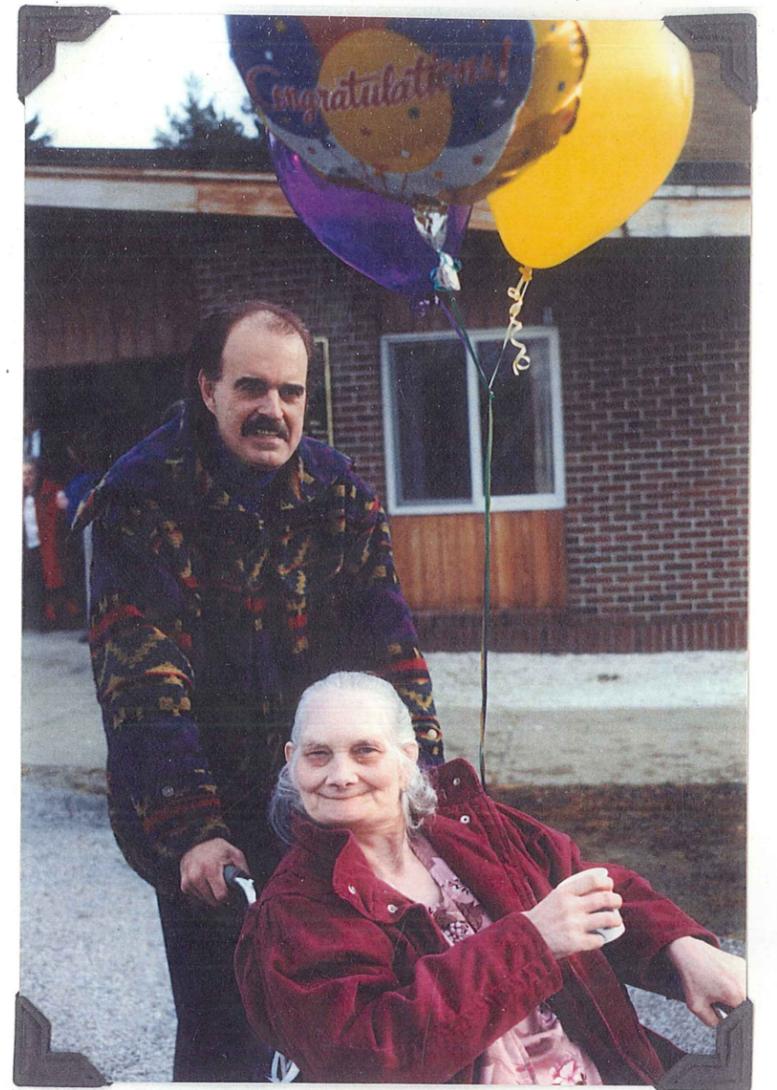
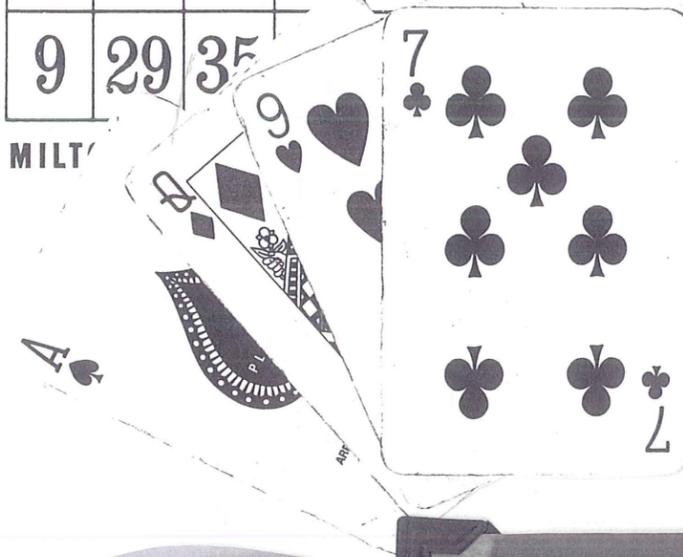


# BINGO

56

5	24	37	46	74
13	23	44	51	62
8	20	FREE	54	65
2	28	41	52	75
9	29	35		

MILT



Irene P is an 82 year old woman who lives with a family in New Haven, Vermont. She was born in Grand Isle and lived with her parents, four brothers and a sister until she was 12 years old and admitted to the Brandon Training School. She lived at BTS for 50 years and left to live in boarding and community care homes. She has lived in Addison County for the last 20 years and moved to New Haven to live with a family about 7 years ago.

When I was 12, I went to Brandon Training School. My mother didn't like it either; they were taking her good help away. I didn't like it there. I used to get the blame for all the patients. They would do things and I got hell for it. They didn't believe me. They used to punish me in the corner, till she said I could go back to my chair.

I lived in Dormitory E. A big ward, a lot of patients all slept in a big ward, a lot of people. Seventy people lived in Dormitory E.

I helped the little kids down there. I used to help to get them up in the morning, dress them, carry them, take them downstairs. Feed them. I don't remember their names. They had an infirmary up there of little babies.

I used to work in the laundry. I used to iron the boys' clothes and fold the clothes and take them to the mangle, a big long machine that ironed sheets. I worked in the sewing room, mending clothes, when kids tore their clothes. Worked in the

service building, making food for the dormitories. Didn't mind the work. Not paid. No money to spend. They bought all the things.

We didn't leave BTS to go places, but my people used to come to see me when I was there. My father and mother would come and take me home for the day. I wanted them to come.

I used to have a lot of friends at the Training School. Hazel, Marian, Janice, Flossie. A girl named Florence. And Ruth was another friend.

My best friend visited around with each other. She was younger. was Janice; she lived in Dormitory E. We just visited around with each other.

Hazel and I met at the Training School. We were both in Dormitory E. I don't remember just what she did, but she used to work. She passed away. I miss her.

I liked mostly all the attendants. One of the attendant's names was Sarah. She was kind of a tall lady. She was nice to us. She used to help us do the things we wanted done.

I was glad to get away from there because I got the devil for all the patients.

I was born and brought up Catholic. Be kind to people.



### Hazel F. Cook

Middlebury  
Hazel F. Cook, 90, died Tuesday April 19, 1994, in Porter Medical Center in Middlebury.

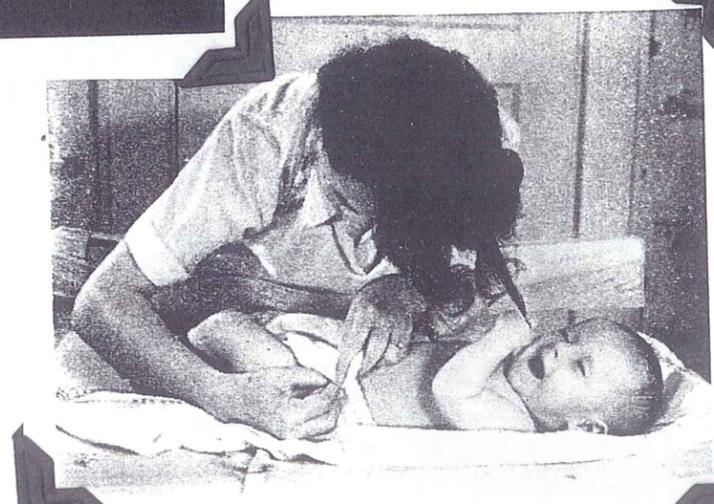
She was born April 20, 1903, in Burlington, the daughter of Joseph and Ina (Bishop) Cook. Hazel was a member of St. Mary Catholic Church in Middlebury.

She worked at the Brandon Training School for many years. Also she participated at Project Independence and

Russ Sholes Senior Center and enjoyed many activities.

Hazel is survived by her dearest friend, Irene Poquette of Middlebury; a brother, Melvin Troyham of Morrisville; and many close friends.

Funeral services will be held Wednesday at 11 a.m. in St. Mary Catholic Church in Middlebury. Interment will be in Lake View Cemetery in Burlington. There will be no public calling hours. Brown-McClay Funeral home in charge of arrangements.



I was there (BTS) when I was 12 years old; before then I lived in Grand Isle with my brothers and sister, but only one sister Catherine, I would have had 2 sisters but my sister Ella didn't live to grow up. I lived out in the country. My father worked; he used to draw logs. He used to work in the woods; he cut down trees. A tree fell on my brother. He kept telling his father he didn't want to go out in the woods. He must have had the feeling the tree would fall on him.

We had cows and hens. I used to feed the hens and gather up the eggs for my mother and bring them in. At 4 o'clock I would go up to the pasture and bring the cows down for my father. The cows came down when I went to get them.

I used to do all the housework, made the beds, swept the floor, did the dusting, washed the dishes after the meal, set the table. I helped cook. I did mostly all the work for my mother, she didn't have to do hardly any work. The rest of my brothers were in school. My sister wasn't born yet. I had 4 brothers in all. My brother, Earl, was the brother who got killed by the tree.

I went to school as far as the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. My mother asked the school director to take me out, cause she needed my help at home. I used to do arithmetic and spelling.

I lived in Orwell with Mary until she passed away. Hazel and I lived There. I helped out, setting the table and cleaning up afterward. When we left there we went to Middlebury. Hazel and I went to Mass. Hazel and I were together for a good many years. I miss her.

I came to live with Alice. I asked Alice the other day if she had any relations that worked in the woods. And she told me yes and I said they better watch out a tree doesn't fall on them because I had a brother that a tree fell on him.

I went to live with them. Cody (Alice and Chuck's son) would take me out in the chair and he got on my lap in the chair and he wanted to go to Independence with me. He mother took him out and he cried. He watches out the window and when he sees my bus going down, he'll run out and get in the bus.

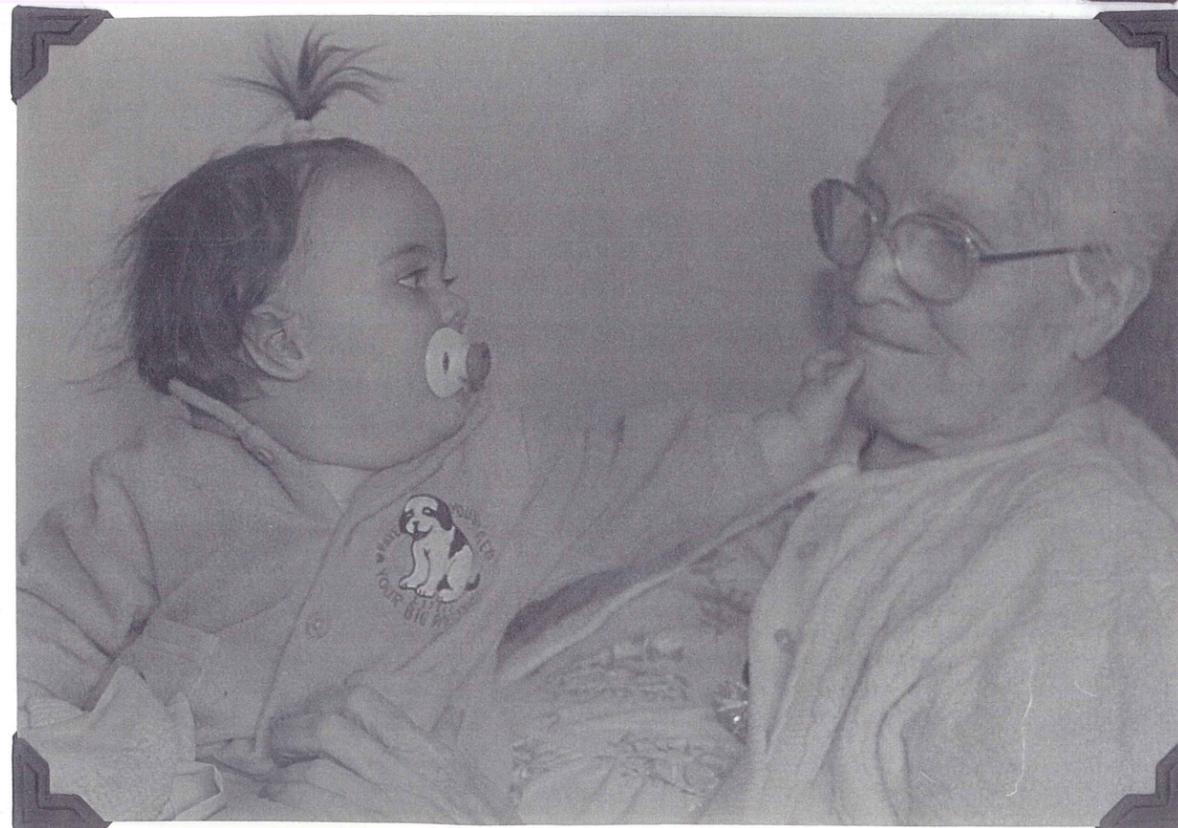
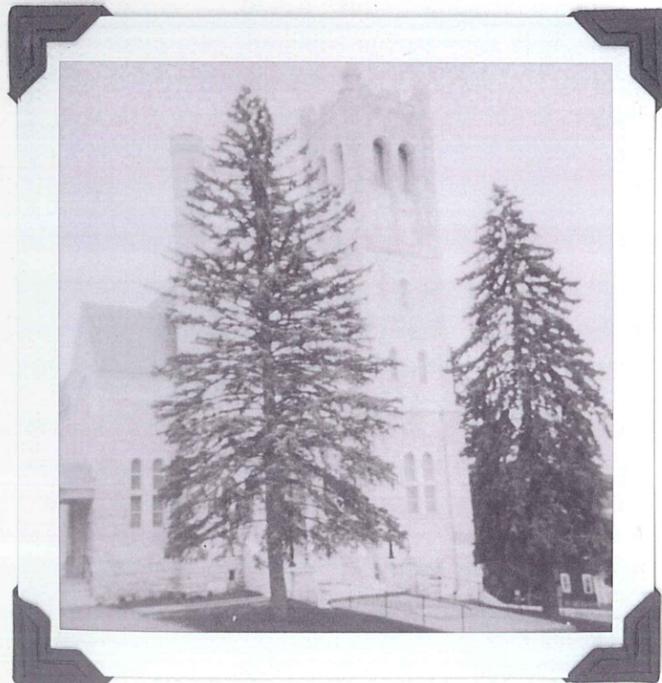
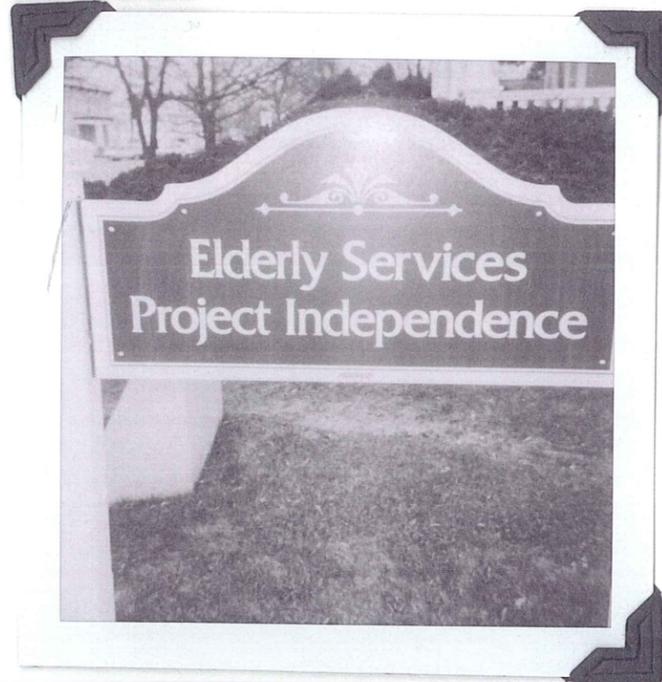
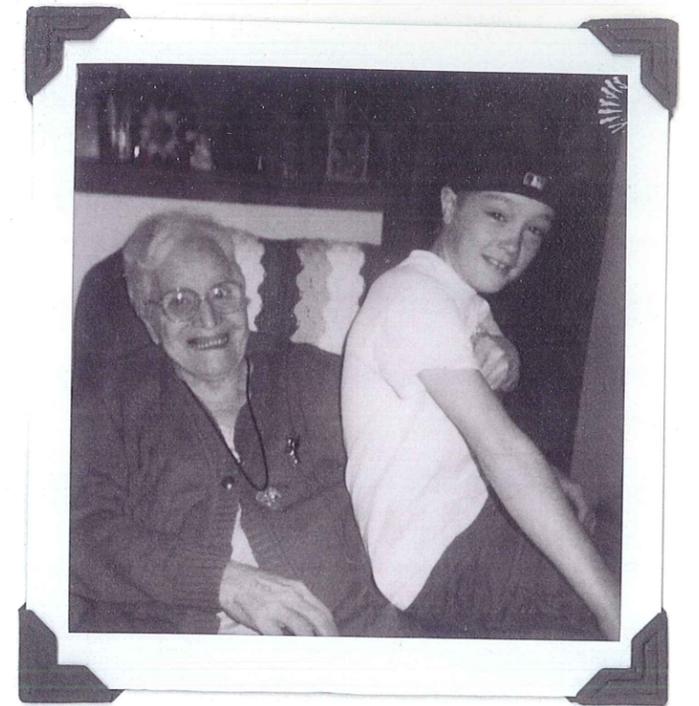
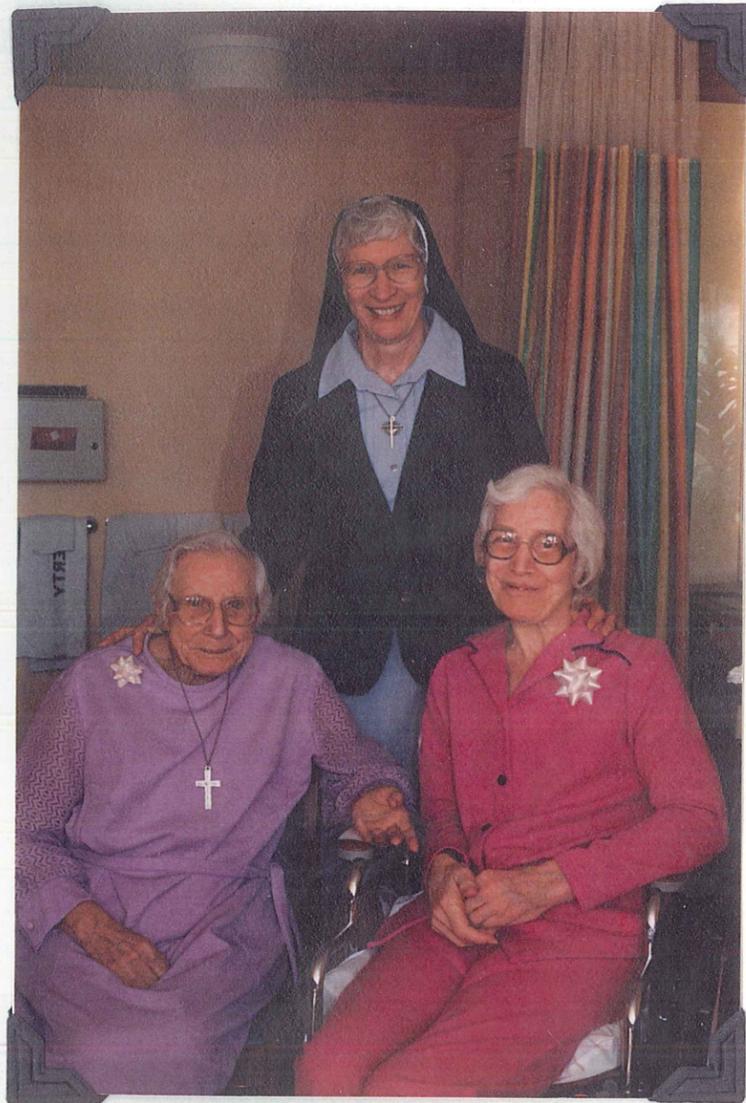
They have a dog and a gray kitty. At Addison House the cat would sleep on my bed and sit on my lap. The cat was named Smoky.

They're good to me here. On the van I go to Project Independence. We play bingo, they play music, good cooks over there. I win prizes. My sister Catherine might come up for a visit. She can stay in the RV. It's snowing. We should be talking to the man up above about it.

I do fancy work (embroidery) and cross stitch. I showed Alice how to do cross stitch. In the summer I sit out there on the step and watch the cars go by. I like to ride on the van. I watch the cars go by. I watch them go up and down the road. I like to watch the lights on them. Like to watch them plow the road so the cars can get through.

I wish I was back in my teens. I could get around better than now. I used to be able to walk to my entertainments, when I was young, like to the Project, going down to the dinners, going shopping. When I was young I used to be able to walk to my dinners. I can't walk to them now. I used to walk to church on Sundays with Hazel. Hazel and I went together. I was born and brought up Catholic. My sister's a nun.

The ones I live with listen to me and at Project Independence they pay attention to me when I talk.



Joe B is a 40 year old man who lives with his mother and stepfather in North Bennington, Vermont. Joe lived with his family until the age of seven, when he was admitted to the Brandon Training School in 1967. He lived there until he was nearly eighteen, and left BTS in 1978, to live in a community group home.

I went to Brandon Training School before I went to high school. I was very young, not old and I could walk and talk. I lived in Dorm F and J-2. My sister, Diane, lived in Dorm C; she's 45 and I'm 40. I didn't have my own room; I lived with a lot of people. I'd rather have my own room.

I can't remember any of the people (who lived there or staff). I remember the water tower. Do they still have that?

In the daytime I went to school. Bob Seawood was a teacher. Did you know him? He was a good teacher. He taught me words, to read words. I like to read books about horses. Dorm H had gardens; I didn't work in the gardens. No animals. I took a rest in the summer, no camp. Not too good. I'd rather do things. No job, never money, couldn't buy things. No job there except cleaning things in the kitchen.

I saw my sister when she lived there. Just saw her, didn't spend time with her. I liked it there; liked living there.



I was born in Bennington, almost didn't graduate from high school, but I did. I worked at Shop and Save, bagging groceries. I worked at BCIC, cutting wood to make things, boxes. Good job.

I have a friend, John. He lives in the same building as H&R Block, out back. Sometimes he visits me and we talk on the phone. He goes to Bingo with me at K of C, every Wednesday night. I win sometimes. I do it myself. I mark the cards myself. I take a marker and I take chips. At the door, I give them money. They give prizes and you know what the prize is? Money. If I won the money I would save it for my mother and go to supper with it, to Friendly's. I don't cook; my mother does and she's a good cook.

Joanne is my friend, from when I used to live at School Street in Bennington.

I like to take a walk for fun, up and down, to see the houses. I walk by myself. Denise lives up the street; I know her, she's a neighbor. Sometimes I take the dogs for a walk, two at a time. I like pets. Guess who takes care of them? Not me.

I need a job. Indoors. No way working at the grocery store again.

I went on vacation to Camp Thorpe. My friend John went to Silver Towers. Have you went inside the cabin? Nice. My second year there. It's a small building, where you sleep. I can't wait until the time comes. About time; I need a vacation.

I've been to Disney World in Florida. Me and Mom and Mike. With an RV, sometimes we take it down to see my sister and her husband in North Carolina. Good: Disney World, the stores. Minnie Mouse is in a picture kissing me. I went on rides and I wasn't scared at all, never am I scared.

I went to my reunion. There's a picture of Joanne at the reunion. Six women and me. Danced the conga. I had a good time at the reunion.

Here's other pictures; friends, my father, Pat, he's the one who passed away.

Around the house I like to watch tv. I choose what I watch. I like funny shows: Facts of Life, Three's Company. I don't believe in sports. I used to play in Special Olympics, basketball, hockey, track and field, I got medals and ribbons. I made friends. Special Olympics is a good thing.

I'm healthy. In school they helped me to read. If I need help, my mother will help me. If Mom needs help, I help her. I help with Avon. I put it in the bags. We drive house to house. I get out of the car to take the orders in. We have fun.

I like to travel. It's comfortable. This summer we're going on vacation to camp in the RV, to North Carolina. Sometimes I help Mike and Mom set up the tent.

I know Bennington. I could help you if you were lost. I love it here. People, any people I see, I like. They like being around me; I'm a nice guy. I'm kind to people.



