

FRED'S STORY & MANSFIELD TRAINING SCHOOL PANEL

DISCUSSION SEPTEMBER 24, 2024 5:00 P.M.

KEN CORMIER: I'm going to turn the light on, you may want to prepare for that. It may be a little harsh. It is bright though.

Okay, so, I should say, that documentary was made in 1996, by Eric N, in connection with Gail K. And so, that's the sort of context.

This is about three years after Mansfield Training School was closed. And before I invite our panel up here, I want to thank Dr. Brenda Brueggemann.

Part of the inspiration for this event came out of an event last spring for the Mansfield Training School and Memorial Project which has an entire team of students working on research, along with Dr. Brueggemann, and this is in conjunction with that project.

All right, so, I guess we'll invite our panelists up to the a table.

We have Ashten Carter, and we have Nadia Scott, and we have Kathy Hanowitz.

So, what I would like the panelists to do -- we didn't establish an order -- in the context of this documentary, and Mansfield Training School and this field in general, we asked you to bring some comments, five minutes or so, and we will go

through those and have an open discussion.

ASHTEN CARTER: I think the main thing I approach this work with is, Mansfield Training School is not a unique case.

There's disability institutions all over the country, and they have different lasting impacts on the area, and just nationally, it was part of a larger eugenics campaign in American history.

And we really saw a push for deinstitutionalization around the 80's and 90's, and Mansfield Training School closed during that time, after years of litigation.

And from a human rights perspective, the field still doesn't always acknowledge disability and the role of disability and medicalization, as used to restrict access to rights, as you can see with people being institutionalized up to 40 years, and that's not uncommon with places like this.

I think, in my work both with the Mansfield Training School project and the memorial alliance, we try to dig deeper on the history and the historical context. We see these personal stories, and that's rare especially with Mansfield Training School.

And the property, UCONN owns the land and it's been closed for 30 years, and there's no memorial, there's no -- nothing that's been done with the land, and we lose a lot of the personal

narratives, and they are all medicalized, and redacted in the archives because of the institution and that is now medical information.

And seeing Fred's story in his own words is something that I value, because not everyone got the chance to have their story told.

NADIA SCOTT: To jump off what you were saying, about the importance of voices, that's the first thing that struck me. Having no background in this type of work, and I was like, what am I going to say?

But the importance of voices, and many times we will get documents from administrators or nurses, or other official people that give this official master-dominant narrative of how a situation played out.

But documentaries like this are important and they challenge what we already know. And if someone comes in with a presumption of what institutions like this look like, we push them to think more critically about the situation, and the historical context and how far we still have to go.

Also, when I was looking at this, it really made me think a lot about how, even when we get great documents, and pieces of these stories and archives, we have to read them critically.

Just because this is Fred telling his story, we cannot say this is true 100 percent. It's mediated through the producers

and it's edited, and we have to think about what is and is not shown and what things were cut together and who are we introduced to, in this space?

And I think the documentary shows the leading questions they would ask, like 'how would you feel about this', and 'how did you feel about that', and we can see the narrative they are trying to construct -- and I'm not saying they are bad trying to construct that narrative, but it's what humans do. We have to be evaluating bias, when we come across sources like this.

And I think this documentary, in specific, is interesting, and it's an exercise on truth claims, and you see Fred's story juxtaposed with this newscast.

And I will say to students, which do you believe more? The documentary was cut together and made choices; and the newscast is the same way.

And thinking about how people have the same set of facts and present it in a different way.

What else did I have in my scrambled notes?

I said something about media literacy, and source evaluation, and the newscast is just as valuable a source as a documentary, one is not better than the other and they all tell different stories. And that's important when we do stuff like that.

And also, to not take Fred and his story as representative of every experience that everyone had. He represents one

perspective a lot of other people may have experienced. But when we're dealing with marginalized groups, it's important to not say, this is the experience everyone else had. We cannot make one person the voice for an entire population.

And it's an example of language, and what is acceptable changes over time.

KATHY HANOWITZ: You guys have it all covered.

First, I thank you for the opportunity to be here and enter this conversation from a variety of perspectives and input.

And the other person that's important to thank -- and I don't know where Fred is -- but thank him for the courage to do this story and the people that engaged with him. And oftentimes, that has not been our experience.

I want to bring more some more information to the conversation here, and questions, what your perspectives are.

There's still 106 people living at Southbury Training School. And I'm hoping, as a people that have recognized how important history is, and all the important disciplines are that come together for the lived experiences of people, that we are gaining a better experience of how to empower the individual and for them to live their best life and what they want.

KEN CORMIER: All right. Very good, thank you so much. So questions for one of our panelists, or all of the

panelists?

BRANDON: I'm going to go swing with a big concept question. With the talk about the Mansfield Training School and it's under ownership by UCONN, it screams to me a degree of irony.

Mansfield Training School is an institution associated with multiple other institutions, and here we are 30 years after the closure, with no real vision and under the guise of it being owned by another institution -- being UCONN.

That has to make me really ask, was UCONN's involvement in purchasing the land, was that a business decision and saving face on their involvement with the facility; or the fact they did want to do something with it, but they never figured out the vision of what to do after the fact?

ASHTEN CARTER: There were proposals of what to do with the land that have been floated by several times, and that's a concern that I carry with me as an UCONN student and someone affiliated with the institution, not removed from the harm.

Going back to 40's and 50's, we see UCONN Foundation's connection with establishing the Mansfield Training School board and Southbury. And it's important that we understand that positionality going into work with this, because it's -- it's

something that I try to be conscious of.

And unfortunately, Fred did pass away in 2005. I'm involved with cleaning the graves of some of the residents throughout the state.

But a lot of people never got the chance to kind of speak out about this. And again, with UCONN still owning the land and UCONN working so closely with Mansfield Training School, they would have volunteer programs, as we mentioned in class and have that Take a Resident Home For the Holiday program. It's not a coincidence that UCONN owns the land.

BRANDON: I would raise the point, to access this documentary today, you would have to go into an UCONN archive site to do it, with UCONN authorization as well.

And it feels less like we're trying to have the right to view these things and we need to be involved with institutionalization ourselves to break it down.

And at that point, what's the point in having these conversations, if at the end of the day we're tied down to the institutions as the basis of our actions?

Okay, so I kind of went in swinging.

ASHTEN CARTER: I appreciate that, and I take in inspiration from other states and I take that in from other memorial projects. And I run a group of institutional survivors,

and we are asking the question of what we want done.

And unfortunately, the reason that it's slow going now is because we need to make sure that as people with connections to UCONN, we're taking care with the stories.

I'm not going to assume what anyone wants. And like you said there's no one way that people experience this.

BRANDON: But there's a lot of overlap in terms of how the incidents are reported, and what exactly the people are reporting in their experience, so let's keep that in mind as well.

KEN CORMIER: Thank you very much. Other questions?

>> I know this is a juvenile training school and there's debate about whether or not it should open and if it does reopen, in what capacity it should be used in.

And do you think it's important to kind of -- I guess, do you think it's worth using training schools with concerning histories -- whether it's through past abuses with children -- do you think they should be utilized in that form, or do you think they should be completely not a training school and not used at all, I guess?

KATHY HANOWITZ: I got part of the question, but I didn't hear it all.

I guess we would take the history of all the things we are talking about and they go into how we as a society have valued humans, and value integration, and the different cultural things.

Personally speaking, you raised an issue, but our initiatives in DEI and equity and inclusion are involved, and the thoughts behind what society then told moms, dads, children; and how services and supports for individuals have changed over time.

And I think, with that, comes with the evolution of our thinking and how is it that we empower each other and who is it that we value and how is it that we bring the values and cultures and integrations.

In my early careers, when I left social work school, I was a young thing and I was the youngest thing at the trade school and I was the social worker and I was getting everyone out and I had never seen so many things that I learned about quickly.

But I think that, with that, I had to take -- in order to really, I think, empower the disenfranchised and give power to everyone we have to hear the voices and the ugliness of people's experience.

And we also, when I learned the history of Southbury, what I learned was that it was created with the thought of it being -- you know -- a college institution for those that were most

challenged.

And how it was designed, and how it was set up, and how it was thought to be an all-inclusive integrated community where people that lived there and the families come on campus and the people did things together and the community came in, and people went out.

But it was a different lived experience.

And there's people that have struggled with any part of institutionalization and to learn from it and move forward.

We must acknowledge it happened, whatever that history is, whatever that value is.

It's strange how I got here today, I'm not sure how that happened. But as these things unfold, I am thinking, Ashton mentioned he's doing the project with the gravestone cleaning.

And tomorrow in Southbury -- we do it in the second week of September -- and tomorrow is our annual remembrance day. And there are no people that are buried at Southbury Training School, there have not been, but that is a history of institutions, and forgotten people.

There was a time when I was like -- the local funeral home was like, "what are you going to do with the people on the shelf?"

what do you mean there's people on the shelf?

Acknowledging that's a part of people's history, and people that we, in society, have disenfranchised. And what does that do

to us, ultimately?

ASHTEN CARTER: I wanted to mention, going back to the question of reusing the land. They did attempt -- in the late 80's, they built a prison on the Mansfield Training School property.

And that's closed again.

And at this point, Mansfield cannot be repurposed in that way for the juvenile center, more recently, because of the contamination and neglect over the last few decades.

A site like Mansfield Training School would not be able to be repurposed. But other state sites, I mean, that it's important, like you said, to learn from the mistakes of the past and have a proper acknowledgment of what happened.

KATHY HANOWITZ: Because I live that experience, right now, it's really important to have this multidisciplinary understanding.

And I think -- my background is social work and I have been a clinician for a long time. And the other piece is when Southbury was built, Mansfield was exploding.

And moms and dads were told, to give us your babies. And the thinking was: we will take care of them for life and you can come on Saturdays and Sundays and it's all good.

That was the professionals of the world, the trained

educated people. And it took families saying, 'I'm not going to give away my baby'.

But Southbury was built with the WPA and it's on the national historical register, and there's architectural stuff, and it's great.

But there are so many studies engaged with the town, and what do you do with the property?

It's some of the most beautiful property in the State of Connecticut. And I'm blessed with the sunrises over the lake every morning, and I watch it come up and go down. But it becomes, are we going to spend money to preserve the buildings, and preserve things?

It's probably been ten, fifteen years, but there were all kinds of task groups, and everything from -- part of the property at Southbury is under the Department of Agriculture, and it's not under DSS.

And it's similar to Mansfield, in terms of all the different etiologies that things go through.

And the problem is, we all own it as taxpayers of the State of Connecticut.

I'll be quiet now.

>> A question?

BRENDA: Two questions, and I guess, they are kind of

connected.

I'll start back with Fred's story, and how we think about that as a memorialization, itself. Right?

But more, because I love these narratives, and it's a work that I do, but what do you think we learn from Fred? Not just about Mansfield Training School, but about him and his experience?

That's the question, for the film. What kinds of things happen on a memorial that's there?

ASHTEN CARTER: I'm glad that you asked, and this stuck out to me, with Fred's story, he's trying to introduce people; and that juxtaposed with his story about how he felt no one was listening to him and he felt isolated, and he had to go somewhere with the supervision of an employee.

And now that he's out in the community and with the brief interactions, this is how I know so-and-so.

And this struck me. And for 40 years you do not have that ability to interact with the community. And even as he narrates his daily experience to the camera, and 'this is the clock, it's 8 o'clock', and that may not be notable to me, but to me it reads like, he's on TV, and it's important to him, and it's his life. This is something that we may not think twice about.

But again, spending 40 years in an institution, those connections are very important.

NADIA SCOTT: what would this look like for a memorial?

I think -- I'm hesitant when I am doing stuff, just to put a documentary in a room.

You can go to a museum, and you have the gallery space, and you see someone's boot, and a wall of text about why that's important and it's in a room like this, and it's dark and you have the documentary going, and you walk in and you miss half of it or you come in at the end, and you don't get the whole story.

I'm hesitant to do stuff like that. But I like stuff like this, when you clip it up.

I hate blocks of text on the wall. There's nothing that drives me up a wall -- on the wall -- more.

I think, I don't know how much material culture is preserved from spaces like this, but I can envision a space where you have -- I don't know, what is the object that's common?

ASHTEN CARTER: with Mansfield, a lot did not make it out of the buildings. And this memorial museum project is a web project and there's no physical space.

And yes, the museum is important and it can be boring, and take for granted the artifacts, but when there's nothing and no space, that's where we are at odds with how to move forward with this.

This summer, I spent time in Pennsylvania, in an archive in

special collections with the Self-Advocates that came out of the hospital there.

And a lot more came out of that, and a lot more people got into the community and were talking to each other and organized chapters called Speaking For Ourselves, and this is part of the readership.

We don't have that in Mansfield, and I feel like a lot of people in the archive and curation spaces take that for granted. And we are happy to have the space in the first place.

NADIA SCOTT: I think, I didn't know -- I think, digital exhibits, it was a thing in COVID. And no one could go to the museums, and it's how can you bring people into a space, where they cannot get to, physically unable, financially unable, and think about how to make it more inclusive.

And now you're talking about bringing back the materials.

I think that -- I don't know -- I'm imagining, I don't know if that's what it's like to take the voices and you as a person, and putting it into the space and it's your first day and what your role is.

And I don't know if that would be something that you guys would be taking and would be helpful. But that's helpful for me, a more first-person experience.

ASHTEN CARTER: We don't have a lot of people like

Fred that documented their stories, and we're starting to try to compile community stories from people that worked there, and family members that reached out to us.

It's not that we lack the material, a lot of it is preserved in the Connecticut state archive. We don't have the space, but we also don't have the luxury of having these stories accessible, because they are medicalized.

These are people's lives, and obviously, when you're institutionalized, your story becomes the medical story, and that goes back to the human rights aspect.

I'm sure you're familiar with the amendment, where it's like: Slavery is ended except as punishment for a crime, and it's also if you're disabled.

If the state can insinuate that you're not capable, we see the human rights questions come into play.

And that's the part I'm interested in, and is there a way for the state to restrict your access to rights.

And that is not the intention of the facility, and that's not the design, but because of the power imbalance, it's hard to separate the person from the medical record sometimes.

NADIA SCOTT: The archive of decolonialization, and there's an article by an artist, and she talks about how after imperialization and all that, there was a big rush for the archives, and deciding where the archive is going to stay, in the

colonized country or England or France.

And she was talking about, with the research, and how we can trace decolonialization through the welfare state in England.

And more times when she was denied access to the materials and the laws, if it will endanger our relations with another country, or if it's someone's personal -- if they didn't expect when they went into the offices that their personal life story was going to be put into a book somewhere. And that was why she was being denied access to the archives.

And that puts us in a weird ethical place. We want to tell the stories of the people, but I think you have to check on yourself. Would they want their stories told in the way that we're doing them?

ASHTEN CARTER: That's why, something like a first person walk through of a digital site would probably be something that I would not -- not -- I would lean away from that. And there's no way to experience the institution.

The institution that was here before, was the Connecticut Colony for Epileptics. And it's been here.

And there's no one story of the institution. And there's many institutions and administration changes, and each superintendent had a wave of new policies, and some people were there for a few years and some decades and some people died there. There's no one way to tell the story.

>> I want to say, I really appreciate the project, the effort to memorialize. I have been living there for ten years and it's hard to know what it is.

And I would add that from my perspective, as a resident in town and a faculty member here, the history is ongoing.

It closed in 1993, and while the buildings are there, in a state of disrepair, the stories are yet another wave of history.

And it tells us -- when I did try to do research on what the buildings were, what I found online was this was a site for students, urban archaeology.

And there were photographs of abandoned wheelchairs in hallways, and creating another narrative of a haunted space that's writing a kind of story, about the institutions.

I will share with you a story. I was teaching a course and we were talking about the history of psychiatry, and a student confessed they broke into the buildings and that's what they do on Halloween.

And they gave me a fat file, a psychiatric file of the resident, and it wasn't secured in the building.

And I thought, this is a Mansfield resident and the people still live in the area, and there's no way to report this. And all they wanted to know who broke into the building, and that was not the point.

All of this was online and the files are accessible to students that want to break in, and this was a whole other

chapter of neglect.

ASHTEN CARTER: I completely one hundred percent agree with that. And that's troubling to me.

And when I talked to people about there should be a history analysis of this, and get to know the community stories, everyone is like, 'I heard depot campus is haunted'.

And why is it an unsettling place to be? Think about the history.

It's upsetting juxtaposing the work I do in Pennsylvania versus here. There's been such prolonged neglect, and I don't believe that's unintentional.

And they have had so long to make any sort of acknowledgment, and you can speak to this, as well, being deeply unsettled by the history, and not being able to place that -- ground it in people and the humanity of all this.

People carried out these policies, and people were interned here, and we have to understand it with the limited resources to do so.

And it's very personal, and a very human connection that's missing.

NADIA SCOTT: How are you guys envisioning this memorial, digital space?

ASHTEN CARTER: We want to establish an advisory board with family members and people that worked there, to consult on the next steps of the project.

And it's not our position to make those decisions without input of the community that's been impacted, especially after so long of just the property being left and neglected.

We want to make sure that we cover our bases. This is not a pet project for me and not about my academic career. This is grounded in -- this is people.

Did you want to say anything about the people-centered approach?

KATHY HANOWITZ: I gave you my lecture, on being person-centered. I think that gives direction, and if there's anything I can offer, I don't know how much -- you have reached out, with Self-Advocacy, that being a large group, and the group in Connecticut is awesome and powerful.

And there's a lot of people -- and the people that lived at Mansfield are fewer and fewer, given age and what happens -- but there's still some folks.

NADIA SCOTT: I was going to say, we may chat sidebar about this, but as I'm thinking through it, the lack of materials that you have on Mansfield -- and I'm sure this is a whole to-do -- and what you're trying to do with this community and

outreach is talking to families.

And you get the archives, and you are talking about people coming to them and saying, 'give us your babies'.

If there's newsletters that families held onto, that would be important for the digital space.

ASHTEN CARTER: We have a lot of that from the Connecticut State Archives. Compared to other institutions -- it's less.

And when we have material it's in state archives, or personal archives, and it's scattered. And it's not even important that it stays here, but there's no central place.

KEN CORMIER: That's ironic, because UCONN -- the state has the actual facility, right, to be able to do that.

ASHTEN CARTER: And the circumstances.

KEN CORMIER: The space is there, but the struggle to value it in a certain way, is -- I don't know, practically, insurmountable.

There's a comment about useful tax paying citizens, in the board of health comments from the 60's, and institutions are coming in many forms, and the largest is the institutionalization of what human value is.

So, it's budgets, it's money, it's facilities. And I don't know if there have been conversations about converting actual space into museum space, and I would imagine that would be a difficult obstacle to overcome.

BRENDA: I will say -- I have been at UCONN eight years, and I have been in universities 32 years.

And the struggle to value it goes back to the fact that UCONN has to step forward with its complicity in the whole thing and it's better kept, than not opening the record.

And I'm coming to Connecticut from that side, and that's how I'm reading it. And when I travel, there are these sites. And there's not one here. And I think there is something behind that.

KEN CORMIER: This is part of the continuing narrative.

BRANDON: Another thing I want to point out about the lack of sheer neglect with this situation, another thing that I want to bring out that is getting under my skin: I don't know what it was like being inside the building.

I have so little foundational understanding of what the architectural space was like and what the rooms were like, bedrooms, and the ways of sleeping in that facility.

I can't physically or visualize it in any capacity, and that's getting under my skin and that's a part of why the situation matters to the people here.

The fact that I, even I as someone that has lived these circumstances similarly, have a difficult time picturing it is a massive red flag to me.

ASHTEN CARTER: We have not put pictures of the dorms on the website, and that's an intentional choice right now as we move forward.

And there's some pictures of the architecture, and some of the stuff at the Connecticut State Archive.

I feel an ethical protection -- I'm not going to put the worst of the worst just out there for anybody to go get it, and I'm not going to try to insert my narrative as an archivist.

But while we're in the process of taking the next steps, that will come up and those pictures exist.

And it's kind of a catch-22. You want them to be seen but not used irresponsibly.

BRANDON: Why are we not having these conversations openly? And why does it have to be in this room specifically, at this specific time, and this specific year?

Why do these conversations have to be considered at this point in the history of our lives?

ASHTEN CARTER: Unfortunately, no one was pursuing these questions earlier and we're left to pick up the neglect and I know it's unfortunate.

>> I grew up around here, and I actually met Fred. I went to eastern, and I took a class. I was a special Ed -- I was doing special Ed at the time, and an employee at Mansfield Training School would bring some of the residents to Eastern, and I was assigned to Fred.

He was Freddy, The Can Man.

Just watching that, I work at UCONN, and every day I come to work and I drive by there, and it's just a crime that there's not some memorialization.

You saw Fred. He was just like us.

And the stories need to be told. And thank you for everything that you're doing, and thank you for all of this.

But, like someone else said, we should all know what it was -- who these people were.

But, yeah, their privacy. But it is tough.

But people should know the general stories. And I would love to volunteer, if you take any volunteers. I know some former employees that -- I don't know if they would be interested or not, but just, thank you very much for doing this.

And any help I can give, I'd love to.

ASHTEN CARTER: I think we will definitely follow up with you, and I want to thank you for sharing your personal connection to Fred.

And I feel similar emotions watching his story, and as we continue to involve more of the community -- we're working on an oral history project next with this -- and you will probably hear from Brenda and I on that.

Thank you so much.

KATHY HANOWITZ: If I can share one story of a man I knew well that lived in Southbury, that lived in Mansfield before he lived in Southbury. And he left Mansfield and came to Southbury to build Southbury.

And he was one of the first people that showed up at Southbury, and he worked right alongside everybody. Until the day he passed, he was the mayor of the world.

He was able to travel and do his things, but the folks that I have met over the years that had time at Mansfield are amazing people. Like, everyone has their story.

But, yeah, his name was Ed. Fabulous man.

And the other thing, just recently I had some folks come into the office and ask -- because part of -- I still learn new things every day of the history of Southbury people.

There was a whole -- in the 30's, when Southbury was being built, actually, there was a group of people who were individuals

that were receiving services and helping to build the facility.

And when the Korean War happened, a group of them went to fight for our country, and for us.

And they were like, you know all the things that the towns are doing, if you're from Mansfield or where ever, and they are putting up pictures of servicemen? And these folks came in, and they knew that story, and they are like, do you have any pictures of the folks from Southbury? They fought and died for us.

There are so much of the story in the history of people that has to be captured.

>> I just wondered, if Freddy had not been institutionalized, if he had a proper education and interaction with everyone else in the community, you know?

ASHTEN CARTER: Unfortunately, this was the advice coming from the experts, what people are told to do. This is the professional advice and we say: This makes no sense to me and how can this happen?

And it's really upsetting that Fred's story is not unique like that.

KEN CORMIER: I think the role of humor is interesting in that documentary, and how he's hilarious, and how you can process that as you're taking in the larger story of what

is being told. And it's a profound gift that he brings that humor in.

ASHTEN CARTER: We had a man that wrote down the stories of Fred, and he heard Fred's stories all the time. So, that was great.

NADIA SCOTT: I would like to see another idea, in this virtual space. For the people whose stories we do know more about, and we can get the documentary, and you get really great histories like yours, and the letters -- and you may not be able to reconstruct all of them -- you get a snapshot of what people were going through.

And what people went there, and agency, and showing what happened to them, it happened to the world. And showing that.

KEN CORMIER: We are nearing the end of our time, and we have the room until 6:30. But if there's another question or we have a few more minutes.

BRENDA: I have a question for you. You captioned the film, and Hannah tried to caption it.

And can you say something about that experience? You know, it's way past the time and the history of the film and there's names in it.

KEN CORMIER: I did caption the film. I had never captioned anything before, and I did it in Kaltura. And it was fascinating to go through it.

And I noticed things that I want to touch up and correct. And every time I watch it, I notice something.

I don't know, I think it was -- there's a lot of timing slides, which is another part of it.

Sometimes, there were spots I had to write (indistinguishable), and there were moments where I had to just go by what I was hearing. Some of the names, Licky, and it would be interesting to --

BRENDA: And Frenchy Bosie -- but that's really real, and that's how all of us hear or don't hear, the things that you miss in there.

I know, Hannah, you struggled with the use of the word retarded, right?

HANNAH DANG: Yes.

BRENDA: It appears so many times, and it's not a word that we use today. And it was a quandary about that for some time.

KEN CORMIER: There's a bound copy of a psychological

study at the UCONN stacks, and I forget the psychologists name,

ASHTEN CARTER: Z-E-M-A-N

KEN CORMIER: I did reach out, there's a Zeman Award that's offered here.

And those are -- again, those are written, and published I suppose, artifacts. That also should be -- I assume you found that in the archive as well.

BRENDA: There's a copy.

ASHTEN CARTER: There's a social work study from the 60's on integrating people into the community. And Mansfield was early in that conversation, compared to other state institutions, which was shocking considering the neglect we're talking about after the fact.

But I think, that also speaks to which version of the history we get, and from what source.

NATALIA: Just quickly, I don't know much about disability yet and I'm learning. I don't know if this thing exists, but I had an idea that would help in this regard, that this should be -- we have health inspectors. And there should be accessibility inspectors to go to hospitals, libraries, and check

to see if places are accessible for everybody, doesn't matter if they are labeled as disabled or not.

I can use it. I am short, I cannot reach the shelf at the library and there's no step stool and I have to go to the librarian, and she's the age of my grandmother and I don't want her doing that.

There should be more accessibility things and there should be people that have knowledge on this that are state-funded or funded by the town.

Does something like that exist?

ASHTEN CARTER: The ADA, and technically, there's ADA compliance, but that does not necessarily mean accessible.

Like the ramp at the library has been busted for the five years I have been here, and there's a family of mice living at the bottom.

And if I had a self-propelling wheelchair, it would be different.

And that's like all the other institutions. And yes, Mansfield existed and it was the best they had at the time, but was it working for people? That's an entirely different question.

So it's interesting. And I feel like -- as an activist, and not an academic -- I think that a lot of momentum in disability activism has dwindled because not everyone knows the history and

how we got the rights we have and how we have to fight to keep them.

And it's at the forefront of my mind. And in our generation -- in the post ADA generation -- they take that for granted, because they don't know.

Sorry, that was a ramble.

NATALIA: Thank you.

KEN CORMIER: I want to thank our panelists so much, thank you to the Mansfield Memorial Project and the signers and the support team and thank all of you for coming.

Let's keep the conversation going, and I appreciate that.
Thank you.

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