

Lawrence and Mary Odom

Founders of Advocates for Special People and Volunteers on behalf of the Otherwise-Abled

Interview conducted by

Mike Wisbrock

On May 6, 2018 in Arlington, Texas

Disability Studies Minor

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Biography

Lawrence and Mary Odom are parents of a Special Needs individual who were instrumental in the founding and establishment of many of the Special Needs charities in the city of Arlington, TX. Lawrence was born in Sanger, TX. He worked on his father's farm and is a veteran of the United States Army. Mary, his wife, was born in Denton, TX, and became a stay-at-home mother and housewife upon the birth of their son, Kevin.

Topics discussed

- Biographical Info
- History of ASP
- Changes in the Organization
- Future Plans
- Negotiations for Living Facility
- Current Needs
- Helping Restore Ability

- Scouting for the Disabled
 - On the Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Familial Recognition
 - Other Comments
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-

Wisbrock

This is Mike Wisbrock interviewing Lawrence and Mary Odom for the UT Arlington Texas Disability History Project. Today's date is Sunday, May 6th, and I am in the Odom's residence in Arlington, TX. I am here today to discuss their advocacy on behalf of the otherwise-abled through Advocates for Special People and Helping Restore Ability, as well as through other means.

Thank you for participating in the university's Oral History Program. If we could, I'd like to get a bit of biographical information, before we get into your advocacy.

Lawrence

<topic>Biographical info</topic>

Well, I was born in Sanger, TX, I grew up on my father's dairy farm and graduated from Sanger High School. I went to work for my father upon graduation, until Uncle Sam called, and I joined the Army and went to Korea. When I was discharged, and came home, I went back to work for my father. As my father got old enough, I bought his dairy herd from him and ran the farm as my own, until I went to work for General Motors. That's what brought me to Arlington.

Mary

And I was born and raised in Denton, TX, I graduated from Denton High, and went on and got a degree from North Texas State, which is now the University of North Texas. I became a homemaker and stay-at-home mom when we had our son.

Wisbrock

And what led you to your work with Advocates for Special People?

Mary

<topic>History of ASP</topic>

There was a...there was a summer day camp that the City of Arlington had for Special Needs kids, but it was only in the summer and it was school age. So, we approached the city and asked them, "Would you consider making that a year-round program and taking the age limit off?" So that's how we got started with our day camp.

TCC [Tarrant County College] was new in Arlington, they needed students and we needed them, so we approached them and said "Would you consider some adaptive classes for special needs people?" And,

of course, there had been individual parents approach them before, and they couldn't start a class for just one kid. So, the Dean of Continuing Education asked "How many kids are you talking about?" and Lawrence says, "At least twenty, possibly more." Well, she immediately said, "We can start that in September.", and this was like in June. The first thing I said was "You're talking, like, next year?" and she says, "No, this coming year."

In September of 1997 we had thirty-three kids start at TCC, and that program is still ongoing. It spread to the second campus then, the next year. And, as far as I know, we're still on three campuses.

Wisbrock

You mentioned TCC was in 1997?

Mary

Our organization formed in 1997. Our organization is Advocated for Special People. Our day program is called The Special Connection. And, then we also do Special Olympics and that's our athletic program.

Wisbrock

OK. Guys, it sounds like you all have been really busy. (laughter) The previous interview I had done with Mr. Brooks, he goes into the financial detail with Advocates for Special People, we've got a lot of information on that. Would you talk a little bit about how you've seen the program grow? Since you been in since the very beginning, obviously, there's been some growth, there. What have you seen, between 1997 and today, that has changed in Advocates for Special People, for better or worse, whatever you think needs to be included? We'd like to know those details.

Mary

<topic>Changes in the Organization</topic>

Well, we have certain criteria in our group. The kids have to take care of their own bathroom needs, they have to be able to feed themselves. We have one camper that's in a wheelchair, and she was with us when we were with the city. Because of the Privacy Act, the schools can't give us lists of the graduating seniors, so we're basically word-of-mouth, but we have people who come to us and say, "Gee, you've been here twenty years? Well, why have I not heard about it?" Well, there have been some write-ups in the paper and so forth, but, you know... We're over 400 members strong, we started out with about a dozen, and we've just celebrated our twentieth birthday. Gee, you have anything to add?

Lawrence

Yeah. When we first started, we started with fifteen kids at Hugh Smith Rec Center [1815 New York Ave., Arlington, TX; 76010], through the city, and we went to City Council and asked them to do this, and they agreed to do it. So, we were there but we only had fifteen kids, and we didn't go out and do very much. We did most of it there. That was fine, because we didn't know a whole lot more than that, right

at that point. But, after that, in [20]03, the city had a budget cut, and we were one of their cuts. But every year, when we was there [sic], we had to sign up every year for the next year, and we'd have a long line of people to sign up to get fifteen people in.

Mary

It was kind of first come, first served...

Lawrence

...served, and they'd only let us have fifteen. So, when they cut the program, two ladies from the City Council members called me and said, "We need to talk." And, they didn't want to cut it, but that was the city, they didn't have any funding. So, they came to us and,,,I can tell you their names if you'd like to know them. Kathryn Wilemon and Lana Wolff.

Mary

We actually met them for lunch, one day.

L.awrence

She said... Kathryn's the one that called me, she said, "Let's go out for lunch." I said, "Come on. I'll buy it." She said, "No, you can't buy ours." Said, "The city says you can't." So, we went out to lunch with them, and they sat down and told us that, "Why don't you all start your own program?", and, then, that's when we said, "We don't know anything about it!" So, then they said, "Well, we'll help you with it."

So, they said, "First of all, it costs us 'x' numbers of dollars to run this program at the city. We will give you a grant of that amount of money so you can start your own. But," she said, "you are going to have to put in for this grant, because we are going to have to put it in the paper and other people will be there trying to get it." (laughter)

Mary

We have to put it in every year.

Lawrence

"But", she says, "we'll word it so maybe you're the only one that's eligible for it." So they did. And there were actually several people there that was eligible, but they gave us the grant. We still get the grant today, from the same place.

Mary

It's been lowered considerably because there's more people that they're funding.

Lawrence

Right. And so, we started with about, uh, twenty people in our group something like that. Our first day camp was there at Epworth [United Methodist Church]. And people just kept going, and we had a waiting list, so we said, "We need to start another one." So, being Methodists, we went over to Saint Stephen's [UMC] and talked to them and met with their board and they agreed for us to come there. And then it filled up.

Mary

That was '06, I think. '03, '06 and '13 was the last one.

Lawrence

And then that one filled up and we said, "We need another one." So, we went to the city again, and they said, "Well, go to Hugh Smith [Civic Center] and we'll... I actually went to the Parks Department, and got the OK from them, and got a contract with the city, and we started out there. And we're still out there. And we have... It's full. So now, we have three that's full..."

Mary

And a waiting list...

Lawrence

And a waiting list, so now we're at the point, "Do we want to start another one, or do we need more than one, to start?"

Wisbrock

Mr. Brooks and I discussed that in our interview, actually...yes

Lawrence

<topic>Future Plans</topic>

And we're looking at other places, we've talked to the city about properties to build. Our long-term goal, from day one, was to build a living facility. Because of our age and most of the people in our age [group], we'd like to have something... Our kids are living longer, now, than they used to, with special needs. And that's great, but (pause) what's going to happen to them when we're gone? So, we'd like to have a living facility that's better than what we would want.

Mary

Kind of like assisted living where we could have more than four people in it, like the group homes.

Wisbrock

That's another subject that Mr. Brooks and I talked about. It sounds like a fasc...not just fasc... It sounds like a wonderful facility.

Lawrence

<topic>Negotiations for Living Facility</topic>

We've been several places, talking about it. We went to the... City told us they didn't have any property for us, to go to the school. Well, we went to, Steve and I, went to the City Council, I mean, the Board at School, and they talked to us about it, and, we even talked several times to Dr. [Marcelo] Cavazos [Superintendent of Schools, Arlington ISD], and thought we had a place. He told you that, too.

Wisbrock

Something across Village Creek.

Mary

Mm-hmm

Lawrence

Yeah, right there by your church.

Wisbrock

By Trinity.

Lawrence

And they'd even sent us to their finance office, to start working on it. And then they got the bond package, that three- or four-hundred-million dollar bond package, and they came back to us and said, "You know, we really like what you're doing. We want to continue this, but we've got a bunch of things we need to build. So, we can't do anything with the property until we get all this done." Now, they've come back to me, now, and said, "We may be ready to talk."

Wisbrock

Really?

Lawrence

Yeah.

Wisbrock

That's great news!

Lawrence

In fact, I've got a sign out in the yard that's for the President of the School Board...

Mary

Aaron Rich

Wisbrock

Aaron Rich?

Lawrence

Yeah. So, I'm trying to help him so he can help us.

Wisbrock

I understand. And, you know having these names in the Archive will not only be of benefit, not only to the Archive, but, if other people hear these names... (laughter)

Mary

<topic>Current Needs</topic>

You know, one of the greatest needs, though, is still a day habilitation for the more severely disabled. Because of transportation and the way, we go out all the time, it's difficult to have a lot of wheelchairs. We did buy one of the old handitrans, so we do have a vehicle with a lift, now, but it's really, it breaks my heart... I'm one of the interviewers that decides if a client is suitable to come in or not, to turn away somebody simply because, um, they're more dependent, it would almost have to be one on one, and we're just not equipped to do that, right now. Plus, our insurance would be extremely higher than it is now, but there's a great need for that.

It's sad to turn away someone who, mentally, may be ahead of some of the kids we serve now, that are doing nothing but sitting at home all day. So, you know, I hope we can address that in our next day hab opening.

Wisbrock

(laughter) It sounds like you all have had very busy lives just with Advocates for Special People.

Mary

We have. And, it's sad to say, I guess we found our mission in life when our child was twenty-two and aged out of school.

Wisbrock

(haltingly) How do I put this? I know several ministers that would say it's not necessarily sad to say. You all have done wonderful work, from what it sounds like.

Mary

You know, it's a fun group to work with, it really is. Even if we had not had a special needs child, I think that if I had volunteered or gotten to know a group like this, I would continue to volunteer there. It's fun.

Wisbrock

Let me ask you, were you involved in the establishment of Helping Restore Ability?

Lawrence

<topic>Helping Restore Ability</topic>

Not establishing it, no.

Wisbrock

But you were involved in that charity, as well?

Lawrence

Pretty soon after it started, yeah, I was.

Wisbrock

Yeah, I think I mentioned to you on the phone, a few years ago there was a benefit for HRA at Bob Duncan [Civic Center], with a band. I was in the band. (laughter) How would, if I may, how does HRA work, what are its goals, how does it go about doing what it does? I don't think there's anything in the Archive on Helping Restore Ability, I'd like to get something in there.

Lawrence

Helping Restore Ability was started by, and for a guy named Sam Provence, and he was at UTA, and he couldn't get around and do anything, I mean, he was in a wheelchair. Some way they started a program for him.

Mary

He's the one that sat in the middle of Cooper street, protesting the fact that it was difficult for him to attend classes. He couldn't get his wheelchair over the curbs, and et cetera, et cetera. And that kind of started...

Lawrence

So, it started from that, and they had two or three different directors. And the one they have now has been there several years, and she's a go-getter. Her name is uh...

Mary

Vicki Niedermayer...

Lawrence

Vicki Niedermayer...

Wisbrock

OK...

Mary

They're more of a home health _____? I'm thinking.

Lawrence

They, uh, they started out small, here, and they started locally, and they got a lot of the health providers to let them be a...

Mary

Kind of a service coordinator...

Lawrence

Something for them, and, now, they have people statewide that go out... If there was somebody in Far West Texas that needed service, and this is not just for Special Needs, this is for anybody...

Mary

Right...

Lawrence

That, they go out and they do... They take Medicare, they work with Medicare and Medicaid, all the insurance companies, and they do everything for the people. They furnish, they order, like, a wheelchair, any of the services they need for them.

Mary

You need to interview Vicki.

Wisbrock

Vicki Niedermayer?

Mary

Because it's a fantastic organization.

Wisbrock

OK. I'm sure Dr. Rose has her on the list. If not, she will now.

Lawrence

If she doesn't, if you need help with her, I know her really well.

Wisbrock

OK...

Lawrence

And they're out off of [Interstate] 20, I think...

Wisbrock

They're off of 20, now?

Mary

Right back behind the Furr's Cafeteria, there's a bigger...

Wisbrock

Because, when we did the thing at Bob Duncan, I think their offices were up by, uh, the chicken place.

Mary

Off Fielder, yes...

Lawrence

Yeah, that's where I started for them.

Mary

They have a whole big suite, now.

Lawrence

I was there for six, well, I started when they were there, and I was on their Board for six years. And then, I got off and they asked me to be on the Advisory Board. Just this month I had an Advisory Board Meeting. I'm still on the Advisory Board.

Wisbrock

Now, do they get the kind of municipal governmental support that Advocates for Special People does, or are they something that's totally separate from that?

Lawrence

Totally separate. And they're a much bigger group than we are, and they have, their budget is, like...

Mary

It's probably getting close to twenty million, now...

Lawrence

Closer to twenty-five or thirty million...

Mary

Is it? When you got on the Board, it was like six million...

Lawrence

Yeah, they hadn't done a whole lot...

Mary

We're (Advocates for Special People) like about two hundred thousand...

Wisbrock

Wow. Yeah, that's a 'wow'.

Lawrence

They'll go to the state, and they'll talk to... Vicki has been asked to come to the state and talk to their group, the senators and representatives, about special needs and about healthcare. They're all about healthcare.

Wisbrock

I see.

Mary

But they build ramps and modify homes and things like that, so I can see why they need the huge budget.

Wisbrock

You mentioned healthcare, that puts me in mind of a connection. I'll talk to y'all about that later, though. It sounds like, again, between Advocates for Special People and Helping Restore Ability, you all must lead very busy lives, and you have a son who is getting an Eagle Scout (award). Could you talk a little bit, because, myself, having been through the (Scouting) program, I know nothing about Scouting for those otherwise-abled individuals. Could you talk a little bit about that? I don't know that anything like that is in the Archive and it needs to be there.

Lawrence

<topic>Scouting for the Disabled</topic>

Well, he's been in Scouts for twenty years?

Mary

Probably. Kevin is forty-four, now, I think he started when he was about fourteen.

Lawrence

Fourteen. So, it's a long time. But the Scout group runs like a regular Scout group. They modify everything, so they can do it. Like, he doesn't use his right hand, at all, so when he does the Scout Oath, he has to do it with this (left) hand, but that's all he can do, because he can't raise this (right) one up and put his fingers out. So, that's good. So, he doesn't read. He doesn't write more than just his name, but, he's higher level. So, they modify everything to their needs. They go on field trips, like, is it, May the eleventh they're going to have an overnight camp at the lady's home, here in Arlington, just to...

Mary

Sort of prepare them for Summer Camp...

Lawrence

...prepare them for Summer Camp. They're going to put up tents in the backyard. And they're actually working on their Eagle Scout (award), Kevin is. They'll have to teach him how put up a tent, do all the stuff that you'll do, and doing it, here, locally. And then, they'll go to the, wherever they go, they may go to the one out here...

Mary

The Longhorn Council, the Worth Ranch...

Wisbrock

Worth Ranch...

Lawrence

I'm not for sure what they're going to do, they've been there, before. We've been there with them, but they, uh, they try to do... They have a garden, up there. They just do everything in modification that all the other Scouts do.

Wisbrock

Certainly.

Mary

Plus, they have no age limit on it.

Lawrence

Right. Plus, just this past week, two weeks, now, they're working on tying knots, you know, Eagle knots. Well, Kevin only has one hand, but they hold one end of the rope and he can tie those knots.

Mary

It's amazing what he can do with one hand.

Lawrence

But they manage to work everything like that.

Mary

We've had two Eagle Scouts, the last couple of years, so...

Wisbrock

It's just amazing, what had been done since, well, when...

It seems to us, as students of disability history, that, to a large extent, this all came about with the beginnings of awareness that led to the Americans with Disabilities Act. What's your take, on that? When did you notice that there was more awareness on the part of the general public to the needs of the disabled?

Lawrence

<topic>On the Americans with Disabilities Act</topic>

Well, my take on the first one you said, the Disability Act, in my opinion, that's for people, like, if I had a disability but wasn't mentally challenged. That's different than somebody being mentally challenged. We have some kids that are not, physically, that anything's wrong with them. But, up here, they can't function like regular people. And, so, that's the difference in the two, for my part.

Wisbrock

So, from your point of view, what you're saying is that the ADA appears to be for the physically disabled, not so much for the...

Lawrence

More than the other, yeah.

Wisbrock

OK.

Lawrence

Now, the ADA does recognize them as being disabled, but not to the extent I think they need to.

Mary

Yeah, they don't all need the adaptive aids and so forth that the ADA requires. And, you build a new building and you have to make it accessible, and so forth and so on, but...

Lawrence

We do Special Olympics with our group, year-round. These kids can do, some of them are really good at it, you know.

Wisbrock

(chuckling) Yeah, that's what Steve (Brooks) was telling me. There was one young man that he was telling me about that can hit a baseball like Juan Gonzalez, apparently.

Mary

We have one young man that does just use one hand, but he's very athletic. That may be the one, Steve's talking about.

Wisbrock

That is the one Steve's talking about.

Lawrence

With one hand, he hits that ball. And he runs well, so, they're disabled but they're not...

Mary

They are differently abled.

Lawrence

We call it "differently abled". They're differently abled, because some of them are really smart in doing things, but they're not book smart. So, there's a difference there, you see.

Wisbrock

Well, it certainly sounds like you all have had quite a full, how do you put this, your volunteerism has led you to full lives.

Lawrence

It has.

Mary

It has.

Lawrence

<topic>Familial Recognition</topic>

And, we've actually won a lot of awards for some of the things we've done.

Wisbrock

You have?

Lawrence

We don't brag about 'em. We don't even have 'em out.

Wisbrock

Well, I didn't notice any, but I can certainly see...

Mary

Well, I see out Family of the Year trophy on top, there. There's one going up the stairs, we were parents of the year for the ARC of Greater Tarrant County. He won the first Sam Provence Award that HRA gave. We were United Way Innovative, I can't ever think of the title, recipients a couple of years ago.

Lawrence

But, it's not for us, we consider that for the kids, for what we're doing. I mean, for the group, not for us, personally. Although it was for us because we did that, it was still for the group.

Wisbrock

You've mentioned the Methodist churches. You've mentioned the government assistance through Advocates for Special People. We've talked about the Boy Scouts. Do you find any other providers for charitable organizations that have been noticeably helpful in your advocacy?

Lawrence

<topic>Other Comments</topic>

The first ones that come to mind, well, we went to Fort Worth to the, uh, hang a second, you know what I'm talking about (M. Odom indicates to the negative) forgive me for not thinking...we went to them before we won our first award.

Mary

To help them start a program like ours.

Lawrence

They helped us start ours, not helped us, but they...

Mary

You lost me. You lost me.

Lawrence

OK, it's the ones that, uh, the helped us get our 501(c)(3) stuff.

Mary

Oh, ah, we were umbrellaed under the ARC of Greater Tarrant County for maybe a year or two.

Lawrence

...until we got our 501(c)(3). In fact, we were umbrellaed under them, and we got bigger than they were. So, they came to me one day and said, "We need to help you get your own." So, they helped us get our first, I mean, our only 501(c)(3). Their lawyer filled it all out for us and everything.

Mary

Yeah, helped us write our bylaws. And, we had a lot of help, yeah.

Lawrence

And, of course, HRA. And, of course, the City of Arlington helped us a lot. And TCC did.

Wisbrock

Is there anything else that you all would like to add, any anecdotes or stories from your time as advocates that you'd like to get on the record?

Lawrence

I would like to say that the state and the school system needs to be more open to groups like ours that want to help the kids after they get out of school. Why can't they give us... We say, "Give them our numbers." "Oh, we can't do that." Why not? We've worked with the school districts before. They have this twenty-one...

Mary

Twenty-one, oh, eighteen-plus...

Lawrence

Eighteen-plus. They would have a program, and we'd go set up a table, and only two or three parents would come out of the whole school district. So, they didn't do a very good job of advertising, we didn't think.

Mary

I think the parents are naïve, and we were the same. We knew our child was in Special Ed, we would have ARD meetings and I think we just thought, OK, when he graduates, we'll just step right in to the next thing, whatever that is. But it didn't take long to discover there was nothing out there that we were really wanting him in. We didn't want him in a workshop, where, if they don't have a contract they just sit and watch TV. We can do that, here. A lot of them were picking up bad language. We didn't want that. So, I was really surprised that a group of parents hadn't gotten together long before us and started something. Because too many kids are *st///* sitting at home watching TV because we don't know who they are or how to reach them or...

Lawrence

Just this morning, in church, a boy came in with his grandmother. He was out of school, special needs. We can almost spot them, anywhere. I went and talked to them before church, and she says, "Yeah!" I said, "Well, what's he doing?" and she says, "Well, he's in a group home. And he goes to a day program, but all they do is sit and watch TV all day long." And I told them a little bit about ours, and, we go to the movies and other things, and he said, "I *love* to do that!" Well, I gave her my card and said, "We'd love to talk to you." Of course, that's the way we get... We go to Costco, and meet somebody that has a child, an older person, like my son, out-of-school age. Mary says, "Be careful about talking to them," and I'll say, "If they're like us, they'll be glad to talk to us." So, I'd stop them, and tell them who I was, and hand them my card. Instantly they're ready to talk about something.

Mary

Lawrence is very outgoing and never meets a strand=ger, I'm a little shy-er, a little more reserved.

Lawrence

Do you, uh, what's the lady from UTA?

Mary

She's the head of Social Work or was before her retirement. Peggy Quinn.

Lawrence

Do you know Peggy Quinn?

Wisbrock

I don't know her, no.

Lawrence

We talked to her, and she was actually on our board for a while...

Wisbrock

I'm sure Dr. Rose and Dr. Saxon both know her very well.

Lawrence

Dr. Saxe? Is it Allan Saxe?

Wisbrock

No, it's Dr. Saxon, Gerald Saxon. Not Allan Saxe.

Lawrence

Yeah, I know Allan Saxe.

Wisbrock

Yeah, I... Most people do.

(laughter)

Gerald Saxon is an Oral History professor. He's a Doctor in History, he teaches my Oral History class. He's an attendee at Trinity, as well.

Lawrence

<topic>Employment</topic>

I'll tell you one other thing. Back several years ago, the school (UTA) had a print shop over off of Davis, by the stadium, there. You remember that?

Wisbrock

Yes.

Mary

Mitchell and Davis, yes.

Lawrence

I went over there one day and talked to them, and they let us volunteer there.

Mary

They actually got paid.

Lawrence

I guess they got paid, some. Yeah. But our kids would come in and work.

Mary

They correlated papers and stapled...

Lawrence

And, they kept telling us, they normally had regular people come in and do that, from groups, or temps, they said, "We did a lot better job than they did because our kids kept going. The other kids, they wanted to get up and talk, run around, drink cokes, and stuff." And we did that for several years, until they closed it and moved it somewhere else, or...

Wisbrock

Yeah, I'm not sure where they moved it to. I remember it being out there.

Mary

A lot of employers are hesitant to hire our kids, but the ones that do, for instance, Kroger hires a lot of our kids, and the manager told us, one day, said "I get 120% out of my special needs employees, where I'm lucky if I get 80% out of the general public." Because they're just so proud to have a job, and they stick with it.

Lawrence

The Rangers and the Cowboys...

Mary

Yeah, they both hire our kids...

Wisbrock

They do?

Lawrence

Mm-hmm. We have several people right now that's working for Ranger stadium.

Wisbrock

Really?

Lawrence

We don't get those jobs for the, that's not what we're here for, but they are doing that. I don't know who gets them. Actually, some of them probably get them through MHMR or through school. But...

Wisbrock

You mentioned Kroger a moment ago. You're talking, specifically, about the Kroger on Abrams and Bowen?

Mary

I'm talking about all the Kroger's.

Lawrence

Especially this one (Abrams and Bowen) ...

Mary

Well, we see the kids at this one, but I know (redacted)'s daughter works way south, somewhere, one of those...

Wisbrock

So, it's not just a franchise thing, it's a corporate thing, with Kroger.

M. & L. Odom

Yeah.

Lawrence

The thing that I think happens, if they hire a person here, they get credit through their Social Security, or something, Kroger gets credit for it, some way.

Wisbrock

That's interesting to know about Kroger and both the Cowboys and Rangers, I mean, the Cowboys and Rangers being large corporate presences in the City of Arlington, it's nice to know that they are taking an interest in this community in particular, as well as the other. It's not just people that are looking for a job that are going there, they are hiring people that are otherwise-abled, as well. That's really heartening.

Mary

There are other places that hire, but you just don't see a lot of the mentally challenged kids working out in the public. We lost one of our campers, recently, he just died very unexpectedly, but he had worked about three months for IHOP. And his boss talked at his services and what a dedicated worker he was. I think he, like, helped wrap silverware, and he approached his boss after about three weeks and said, "When are you going to make me Assistant Manager?", and the guy says, "Today! You're the Assistant Manager!", and so he called himself... Just increased his ego tenfold, but said the little guy just always got his job done, he only worked, I think, maybe six or eight hours a week, but so proud of his job, showed up on time, big smile... So that, you know, they just, they'll make a believer out of an employer pretty fast.

Wisbrock

Sounds like.

Lawrence

<topic>Elzie Odom</topic>

I want to put another name out there that helped us.

Wisbrock

OK

Lawrence

Mayor Odom. You remember him?

Wisbrock

Yes. Elzie Odom.

Lawrence

Elzie Odom. He was mayor when we started, and he helped us a lot. He'd come speak at our programs. He did a lot of stuff with us.

Mary

He'd show up at our fundraisers.

Lawrence

Showed up at fundraisers and everything. I got his card (laughing). And, the first time I talked to him, I asked him what I wanted to ask him. And when we got through, he said, "Now, what about this Odom name?" And, of course, my name is Odom. And, he says, "You know, we could be kin!" So, we went to the point that, he wrote a book, I don't know where it's at now but, we've got his book. His great-great-grandparents or something worked on an Odom plantation back in Georgia or Tennessee, up in that area. That's where I'm from, where my family is. So...

Mary

But we don't really know any that had a plantation.

Lawrence

Well, we don't know them, but they could have. Anyway, so that was a good start for us.

Mary

They call each other cousins.

Lawrence

And now, his daughter, this past weekend, Barbara Odom ran for City Council. I couldn't vote for her because I'm not in her district.

Mary

In her district...

Lawrence

She did not win, but she calls me cousin (laughter).

Mary

He was always very supportive of our group. And that man never forgets a name, every time we'd see him, "How's Kevin?"

Lawrence

Or anybody. Everybody he's met, if you tell him your name one time, he's gonna remember it for the rest of his ...

Mary

I think the first time I met him it was probably six months before I saw him again, and he remembered my name.

Lawrence

Hadn't been that long we saw him out at the Elzie Odom Rec Center, and he just called me by my first name, just like he always did.

Wisbrock

I have always heard nothing but good things about Mayor Odom.

Mary

Yeah, he's a really nice man.

Lawrence

And his wife, too, she always...

Mary

Miss Ruby, she is always dressed so attractively.

Lawrence

And she's very nice, too.

Wisbrock

Well, if you all have nothing else to add?

Mary

I guess not...

Lawrence

Not right now...

Wisbrock

Thank you both for your time. This is going to be a very valuable inclusion to the Archive. It means a lot. Thank you.

Mary

Thank you for asking us.

End of Interview