



ORAL HISTORY

Project Preserves Greystone Memories

STEPHANIE KIP has left few stones unturned in her mission to document life and history at the storied Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital. In addition to historians, preservationists, mental health advocates and former patients, her online oral history project includes voices more apt to feature in popular biographies, like Woody Guthrie's daughter. Also present: a former girlfriend of Bob Dylan's, and a nephew of the Paterson-bred poet Allen Ginsberg.

What all of Kip's subjects have in common is an association with the Morris Plains hospital that opened in 1876, was vacated in 2008, and was demolished in 2015, leaving mostly creepy legends in its wake. Guthrie's daughter Nora visited the folksinger/songwriter there from 1956-1961, when he was being treated for

Huntington's disease. Dylan's one-time girlfriend Jahanara Romney (formerly Bonnie Beecher) visited Guthrie as Dylan's companion. Ginsberg visited his mother there in the 1930s and told his nephew, Lyle Brooks, all about it.

Kip, a retired reference librarian who lives in Bloomfield, steers the ongoing project to cover all the bases. "The place has left an indelible memory for a lot of different types of people," she says. "I wanted to give them a platform."

For some patients, the Greystone part of their lives offered therapeutic gain; for others, it was distressing—as with the anonymous former patient who describes feeling numb and throwing chairs after being admitted in 1970. For singer Dionne Warwick, who briefly worked at Greystone, it was a blip. Kip pursued



JERSEY FOLK
Woody Guthrie in New Jersey, circa 1961. From 1956-1961, Guthrie was a patient at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in Morris Plains.

Warwick for two years before tracking down her publicist earlier this year. "She only confirmed that she worked there for two summers, in 1960 and '61, and that it wasn't the most pleasant place," Kip says.

To listen to the interviews—or offer your own testimony—visit greystoneoral-history.com. —*Tammy La Gorce*

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