

# The Marlboro Man

A year and a half ago, state Senator Richard Codey, "on intuition," ran background checks on employees of three of the state's psychiatric institutions and found that the hospitals had hired a number of people "with serious criminal records" to work with mentally ill patients every day. The Department of Human Services acknowledged the problem, Codey says, "and promised that it would never happen again."

As most New Jerseyans now know, it *has* happened again — vividly demonstrated by Codey's recent undercover investigation of hiring practices at Marlboro State Psychiatric Hospital.

As chairman of the Senate Institutions, Health, and Welfare Committee, Codey, a Democrat from Orange, says he has developed a wide range of contacts with the families of patients in the state's mental-health system. His sources indicated that the hiring systems at the institutions had not improved. For example, Codey says, "They were taking fingerprints but the prints were not checked." In addition, Codey had been hearing for years that ex-convicts knew they could easily get jobs at Marlboro: "The street people know that they can always get a job there and don't worry about the record check, they're not doing it."

So the senator decided to become a criminal himself, and see just how easy it is to get a job at the Monmouth County hospital.

Codey culled the state's prison records and came up with the name and address of a convicted felon, James W. Kirkland, who had died in jail at the age of 42 (Codey is 40). The man's record contained arrests for assault, burglary, drug possession, flight to avoid prosecution, and sexual assault. Codey also obtained the Social Security number of another recently deceased prisoner whose

record showed drug convictions and armed robbery. If anyone were to run the name and number through the police computer, the extensive criminal record would show up.

The senator took his adopted Social Security number to Times Square at one o'clock one morning, and approached some street people, saying he "wanted some ID." They told him it would cost \$40, and they would need the money in advance. "If I did that, I would have been the biggest chump in the world," Codey says. So he went back during the day, to one of the stores that specialize in making ID cards, and bought a "Social Security card" for \$10. The quality was not what it would have been if he had bought it on the street, but it didn't matter. The card worked.

In December, Codey called Marlboro and had a job application sent to him in the mail. He filled out the application, listing "restaurant and kitchen work" as his previous experience, and "placed was closed" as his reason for leaving one of the jobs. He listed legislative aides as references, none of whom was ever called. As for why he wanted a job at Marlboro, Codey wrote, "I am looking for a job that is steady and gives benefits. I like my last job but the hours were not regular. I would like to work in a mental hospital and helping other people." He sent the application back and, after two follow-up phone calls, he was told to come in for an interview.

What follows is Codey's account of his experience at Marlboro, as told to *New Jersey Reporter* Assistant Editor Jeffrey Kanige:

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1987  
11:00 AM**

Codey has scheduled an interview with personnel administrators at Marlboro. An aide drives him down from

West Orange; they arrive on time, but he is told to come back at one o'clock. After an unappetizing lunch at a nearby shopping center, Codey has a cursory interview with a personnel officer, and is sent to cottage 16 to see a supervisor.

He arrives at the cottage — an old, two-story, red-brick building, surrounded by several old trees — to find a group of employees watching television. One employee is holding a make-shift antenna because channel 2 will not come in properly. The interview consists of the supervisor telling Codey that he would "see things that he had never seen before" — namely, sex between patients; "girl to girl, boy to girl, girl to boy."

He is then sent back to personnel, where he is told that the supervisor has approved of him. Before he can start working, however, he will have to be given a physical examination, and undergo a "background check."

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10**

Codey is back for a physical. To begin, he is given a bottle and told to go to the end of the hall, make a left, and produce a urine sample. No one accompanies him on his trip to the rest room.

When he returns, a technician tries and fails twice to draw a blood sample before giving up and getting someone else to do it. Codey's arm is black and blue for a week.

During the course of a TB test, another prospective employee strikes up a conversation. The young male tells Codey he cannot wait to start working so he can "get my hands on some young flesh." It is the first in a series of encounters with Marlboro employees that illustrate the problems with the hospital's hiring practices. The system does not produce even minimally competent employees — people who are at least sensitive to the special problems of dealing

with mentally ill patients and can understand why compassion, caring, and simple human kindness are important in such a setting. One would expect the orderlies, or Human Services attendants, to look at the patients and see people in need. Instead, the hospital hires people whose eyes see only "young flesh."

It quickly becomes clear how these misfits end up as Marlboro employees. During the physical, Codey and the other hirees are asked to provide some identification. Codey hands over the phony Social Security card, and starts sweating, wondering if he will be found out. The records clerk looks at the card, makes a photocopy, and hands it back. In the eyes of Marlboro State Psychiatric Hospital, Senator Richard Codey, chairman of the Institutions, Health, and Welfare Committee, has just become James W. Kirkland, convicted felon.

After the physical, Codey is fingerprinted, as per state regulations. But the prints are apparently never checked. The person who takes Codey's fingerprints asks him why he wants the job, since it does not pay very well. Codey replies that he is looking for benefits and wants to work his way up. "Maybe someday you'll be running this hospital," the fingerprinter says.

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13**

Codey returns for the rest of his physical, eye test, blood pressure, etc. He signs more forms, and an assistant tells him to come back on Tuesday for a one-day orientation. Codey asks when he will start working with the patients. The lat-

*The assistant tells Codey his chest X-rays have not been read, and he cannot start work until they are cleared. Codey is aghast. 'What a joke,' he later recounts. 'Here I am, a rapist, and God forbid my chest X-ray isn't read.'*

ter part of the next week, he is told, provided he is cleared by then.

Again, Codey's heart starts racing. Is the jig up? "What do you mean, if I'm cleared?" he asks. The assistant tells him that his chest X-rays have not been read, and he cannot start work until they are cleared. "That's for your health and safety, as well as the patients'," the assistant says.

Codey is aghast. "What a joke," he later recounts. "Here I am, a rapist, and God forbid my chest X-ray isn't read."

The physical exam is, in fact, the extent of the hospital's efforts to determine whether Codey is mentally and physically fit for the job of dealing with mentally ill people on a daily basis. There is not even a hint of psychological examination of employees for whom stability, patience, and an ability to stay calm under unusual circumstances would seem to be necessary qualities. The hospital makes no attempt to determine whether or not Codey has such characteristics.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17  
8:30 AM**

Orientation Day. Marlboro employees give a couple of lectures and the fire department shows movies. No one in the class pays much attention. During the film, nearly everyone seems to have dozed off. When the lights are snapped back on, Codey asks loudly, "What is this, a dormitory?" and gets a big laugh. During one of the lectures, a female trainee turns to Codey and wonders, "Why would they have to train you to work with crazy people?"

The handouts are equally useless.

Among the materials is a rather graphic, full-color pamphlet on venereal disease titled "The Love Bug." There seems to be no ostensible reason why such a booklet is given to new employees at a psychiatric hospital.

Another handout is a memo from the hospital's management concerning "Pro-

cedures of modalities for Individualized patient treatment." Under Section I — classification — Part A begins: "Psychotherapy is a formal treatment procedure based upon a wide range of modalities of either verbal or nonverbal communication which primarily involve an agreement between the therapist and the patient to form a special therapeutic relationship. Each psychotherapeutic modality generally includes a theoretical or conceptual framework in a body of practices or techniques."

This is handed to people who might have high school diplomas.

Codey is able to fit in fairly easily with his fellow employees. Dressed in a flannel shirt, jeans, and sneakers, he slips comfortably into the role of street person. "I'm from the streets," Codey says. "And I happen to be a basketball freak, so I talked a lot about hoops. I knew more than any of them. One guy came up to me and said, 'James, you sure are a regular guy.'"

His ability to assume the appropriate persona during his time at Marlboro is important, since the other employees trust him enough to talk openly with him about themselves and their attitudes toward the job. For instance, at lunch, Codey introduces himself to a recently hired orderly and asks what it is like to work the midnight shift. "You can play with the pretty girls while they are sleeping," the man replies.

When class starts again, a social worker asks everyone what his or her dream is. Most reply "hitting the lottery." She then talks generally about how employees are supposed to treat the patients. The instructions amount to "treat them

nicely." At the end of the day, Codey is told to report for another class at seven o'clock the next morning.

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18  
7:00 AM**

Codey is in a class with 20 recently hired employees, some of whom, he suspects, will not make ideal workers. One new orderly warns Codey not to hit a violent patient in full view of the rest of the staff and patients; such an action can only lead to trouble, he says. Instead, take the patient into a closet to quiet him down.

A woman tells Codey that some male patients will pay for sex. This is the sort of "advice" he receives. What is most striking is the notion that the patients are unfeeling creatures to be subdued or taken advantage of, rather than human beings requiring care and attention. Based on these and similar conversations, Codey decides that about half of his classmates are unfit for jobs at the hospital.

Codey talks easily with several of his new colleagues, and they share bits of their stories. One has just gotten out of jail for failure to make child-support payments. The judge had given him the choice of selling his 1977 Buick for a couple of hundred dollars to settle the debt, or go to jail. The man chose jail. Another employee is a former drug addict. "Imagine, me, a rapist, sitting next to these two," Codey thinks to himself.

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19  
3:00 PM**

After a three-hour class, Codey and some other new employees are taken to a cottage, where, as part of their training, they have their first contact with patients. One female patient tells Codey he is cute and suggests that they could have sex. Later on, however, apparently forgetting all about her earlier attraction to him, she asks Codey if he is going to kill her family.

Codey spends about a half-hour at the cottage, where the employees, he recalls, are not the least bit friendly. At the end of his time there, he is told to report for his first full shift at 11:30 that night.

**11:30 PM**

Codey is assigned to the first floor of one of Marlboro's cottages, with

another male employee, a young, dark-haired man who barely says a word to Codey. He sleeps a lot. A head nurse is in charge of the entire cottage.

The cottage has two floors and a basement. The first floor is divided into two sections. One section is a day room, containing 10 or 12 worn-out chairs and a television set on a shelf. The walls of the room, like the rest of the cottage, are beige in color, and fairly well maintained. Unlike the rest of the cottage, the

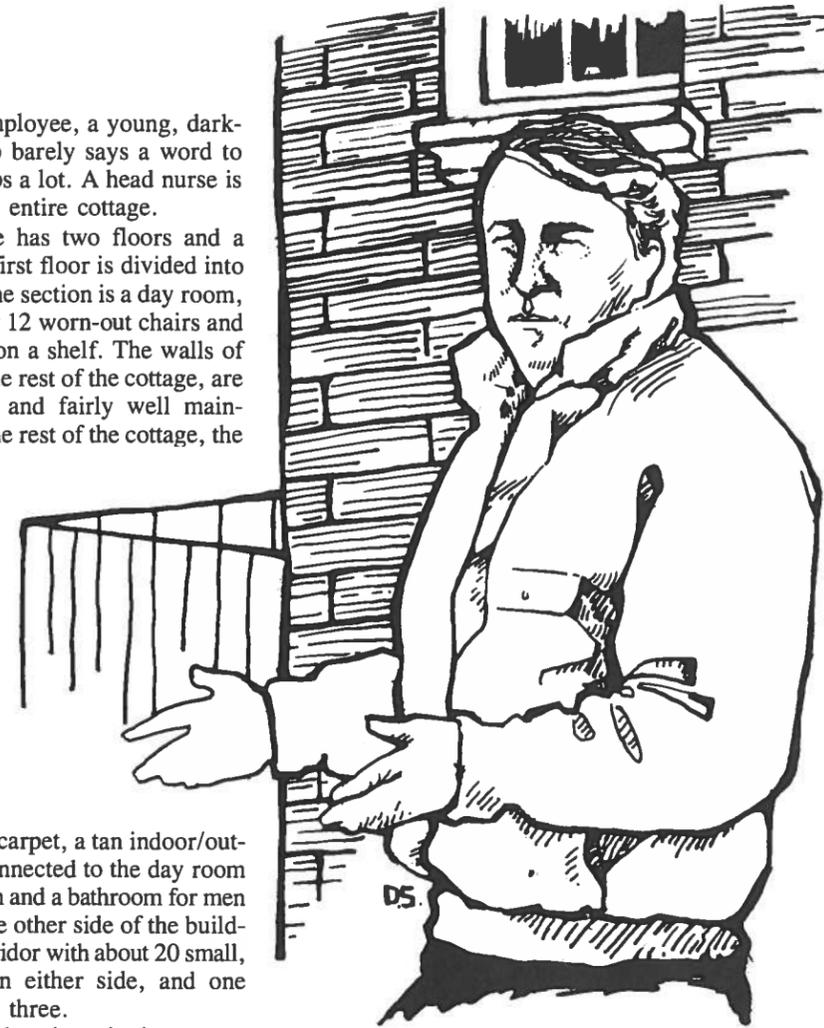
day room has a carpet, a tan indoor/outdoor carpet. Connected to the day room is a small kitchen and a bathroom for men and women. The other side of the building is a long corridor with about 20 small, single rooms on either side, and one larger room for three.

There are 11 patients in the rooms, which Codey likens to prison cells. The single rooms have stone floors and "army surplus" cots with single sheets for sleeping. The second floor is divided into two large rooms that house about 16 male and female patients — males on one side, females on the other. The patients sleep on beds "that you give an eight-year-old to sleep on," Codey recalls. Two female orderlies are responsible for the second floor.

Codey reports for work on time and sits alone in the day room for 45 minutes. The head nurse shows up a half-hour after Codey arrives.

Finally, Codey asks the other male orderly to show him around. The orderly does so — grudgingly. The only instructions Codey has received up to this point are that staff members have to make rounds every 30 minutes, to make sure the patients are still there, and still alive. This is accomplished by turning on the light from outside the room and peering through a plastic window in the heavy wooden door.

No one else makes the rounds, so Codey does the job by himself. At one point, he comes across a patient whose nose had started bleeding during the



night; blood has dried on his face. But Codey "couldn't excite anyone about taking care of him." Finally, the other attendant tells the patient to go to the bathroom and wash the blood off his face. The patient makes a futile attempt to clean himself up and drifts back to sleep on a blood-encrusted pillow. As far as Codey knows, he never sees a doctor or nurse.

**12:30 AM**

Codey's fellow orderly wakes all the patients on the first floor so they can use the bathroom. Later, he wakes up one of the patients to find that he has wet his bed and soaked his pajamas. While Codey stuffs the dirty linens and night clothes into a bag, the head nurse places six new sheets under the patient. Codey is puzzled by the procedure but says nothing.

**2:00 AM**

The head nurse recites the hospital's rules against watching television and sleeping on the job. While she is informing Codey of the regulations, the television set is on and she is making up



Drawings by Deirdre Sheehan

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her bed for the night. The nurse is as bound by the rules as everyone else is supposed to be. But she asks for Codey's sympathy, since she is in the middle of her second straight eight-hour shift, and prepares to go to sleep. Codey promises to play along.

### 3:30 AM

With the bedwetting incident in mind, Codey asks about waking the patients for another trip to the bathroom. He is told not to bother. That, apparently, is the reason for the six sheets. The order of the night is neglect. The staff does as little as possible during the course of the graveyard shift; the patients seem to be treated as irritants, not worthy of any extra effort.

### 6:00 AM

All the patients are awakened for the day and herded down to the basement, where they exchange their night clothes for what they will wear during the day. The scene, according to Codey, is "worse than anything in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." In one part of the room, two patients are sleeping on each other. In another, "one guy is kissing another guy" and another patient is hitting the second man over the head with an ashtray. One patient keeps hitting himself in the side of the head with his hand; others just pace quickly back and forth across the room. Still another keeps trying to rip the door off a bathroom stall.

Codey's first shift is over at 7:30. But this uncarpeted, windowless room, with cafeteria furnishings and a television set, and maybe the first-floor day room, are all most of the patients will see for the next 16 hours.

## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22

### 11:30 PM

Codey reports for work to find the same head nurse who was on duty during his last shift. This time, however, his fellow attendant is a 60-year-old man, whom Codey believes is one of the more capable attendants at the hospital. The

man tells Codey he is glad the hospital has hired someone who is more settled and mature than the younger people who had been brought in. Those employees tended to lose their tempers and physically abuse the patients, he says.

His new partner is somewhat more forthcoming than the surly young man Codey worked with in his previous shift. The man provides Codey with a more detailed tour of the cottage. One of the stops, though, is the room where the patients' records are kept. The records are supposed to be confidential, but Codey

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is able to discover that one of the patients in the building has committed several murders, including killing a four-year-old boy with a two-by-four.

### 12:30 AM

The head nurse goes to sleep. She has once again worked two consecutive eight-hour shifts.

### 3:00 AM

A patient wakes up screaming; he is found searching through trash cans and licking ashtrays. The older attendant says the patient is looking for cigarette butts to eat, so he gives him one. The patient eats the butt, and goes back to sleep.

### 5:30 AM

Another patient wakes up and begins screaming and ranting incoherently. This continues until the rest of the patients are awakened for the day. Codey's colleague says the patient is acting up more because

of the presence of a new worker. A half-hour later, the patients begin to dress for the day. The clothes they wear may best be described as rags, with no thought given to sizes or colors. An attendant points to one particularly disheveled patient and says: "Boy, if the commissioner could see you now." Codey's thought is: "If only the commissioner could see *me* now." If only someone had seen this a long time ago.

### 7:30 AM

When the head nurse wakes up, Codey tells her he has to leave. A snowstorm has hit the area, and he is asked to stay for another shift. He declines. A legislative day in Trenton is ahead, and Codey has to go back to being a state senator.

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Senator Codey's remarkable investigation has resulted in the reassignment of Marlboro's director, and has elicited another round of promises from the Department of Human Services to clean up the hiring practices at state psychiatric institutions. Codey says families have been calling him since the story broke to tell him of their own encounters with hospitals like Marlboro. The senator hopes to encourage as many of them as possible to testify publicly at hearings he is planning to hold to look into the state's mental-health institutions. "We're not going to let this drop," Codey promises.

It is unfortunate, though, that it took such a drastic measure to open eyes at the Department of Human Services — particularly since the problems had been brought to light a scant 18 months ago. How long have bloody noses in the night gone untreated? How many cries have gone unheard as indifferent attendants watched their favorite soap operas? How many screams from closets have fallen on sleeping ears? Indeed, how many violent criminals have been hired to spend lonely days and nights with helpless mental patients? And how much longer will it go on? 