

*"Most of the boarding houses are enormously large. If you're on welfare, you're allowed two, three, four, five to a room. Most of the places don't have a dresser. Generally, you get one blanket which is kind of threadbare. And it gets cold in those houses, 'cause they're old and the heat doesn't rise in the winter. The bathroom is shared by nine or ten people. There is a central dining room with institutional-type tables and chairs. There's usually a poor, frightened lady working in the kitchen. Breakfast is cereal, toast, sometimes jam or peanut butter and tea. Lunch is a sandwich, soup, tea. Supper is hot, with lots of starch — heavy on the potatoes, heavy on the spaghetti, heavier on the rice. Medication makes you very hungry, especially the younger men. They can't appease their hunger on what they get. They wolf it down, go back in line and try again. Sometimes, there's seconds; sometimes there's not. Sometimes there's a TV room, two couches; sometimes it's a little more elaborate — three couches. A lot of places don't have proper smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. People get up and go for breakfast, which starts at 6:30 or 7:00 A.M., go back to bed, get up at lunch, nap 'til supper, and then they play cards or watch TV until they go to bed."*

*"They can now discharge who they want to discharge from hospital, because they know there's this bed and three meals a day. The person's not going to embarrass the shit out of them by dying on the street. When somebody's that's not too well tries to leave a boarding house and get a room somewhere, they begin to starve to death, and to get crazier and dirtier. And at the point where they're dying, they get admitted to hospital. I've seen it happen over and over again."*

*"Emotionally and personally, there's no dignity; there's no sense of being human. It's a very paternalistic atmosphere. I sometimes think that the people in boarding houses play up to that, because when you're institutionalized, authority is all. Somebody once said that oppressed people forget to look at who's oppressing them. They bitch at each other so much, they tear each other down."*

*"Some people get very comfortable in the boarding houses, which is frightening. Some people get angry, which is more reassuring, but frightening for you because you don't feel very good. How can you feel very good? You feel the world has really written you off. You know it in everybody's face when they look at you, or don't. And you know it when people are walking by and staring at your house."*

(Pat Capponi)