

Interview with Gerald Keller, Northern Michigan University
June 15, 1995

RMM: OK, Gerry could you tell us a little about your background, in terms of when you came to Northern you started working ???

GK: I started in June of 70 in Magers/Meyland Hall working night shift.

RMM: Could you tell us a little, I know we have discussed this in the past, could you tell us a little about what your jobs were, what your duties were, and what it was like working in the dorms at that time.

GK: Well we were custodian/maintenance and at that time we had to cover all the dorms rooms if they had problems with sinks, toilets any little problem we had to go take care of it. It was alright for a while but then they started getting out of hand, they would call you in there in different ??? and they would say well we got a plugged toilet or the faucet is running and we can't shut it off and we would go up there and somebody, couple of girls in the dorm or something would say well come on in the shower with us or something trying to get you in there and we ended up kinda getting in a little trouble there for a while because one one custodian against two people I think overtook you. So we made up our mind then that we were going to have an RA with us or somebody that was in charge of the desk at that area with us because it turned out that everytime that we turned around we were getting hung for something that they were just trying to pull. And we just, after a while it got out of hand and we just had to give up going into the rooms, so we wouldn't go anymore.

RMM: so was there actually anything wrong in the rooms, I mean was the faucet leaking or

GK: Well yeah sometimes the faucet would be running but they wanted to get you in there and get you in bed or some darn thing with them, ?? these kids you know about 16-17 years old. And it was just getting too much for us because it was giving us too much trouble.

RMM: Now you mentioned you would get in trouble, I think we mentioned when we talked about this before, how far up the line did the trouble go?

GK: Well that went on up into about 75 to about 82, see they had all these ???? kids, they were I don't know if it was just for the summer or during the summer and the fall and they were the ones that caused most of the problems because they'd break stuff or they would have parties or they were breaking bottles in the stairways. In the girl's dorms they would have the girlfriend in their with them and then if they wanted their boyfriend then they would kick the girlfriend out. Well then if they had a party and

she would be all bent out of shape they would be out there in the hall and they would leave her out in the hall and she had her boyfriend in the room and there were many of nights, at least once or twice a week, especially on weekends were we had to pick whoever was stretched out in the hall and put him in some side room but it was just ridiculous.

RMM: So these kids would be sleeping in the hallway?

GK: Well they would be sleeping or passed out and some of them didn't even have clothes on. We would go through our three, four, five o'clock check and when you would find someone laying out in the hall stoned with no clothes on you don't want to leave them laying there so you have to go and get somebody to help you, you get them covered up and we put them in one of our storage rooms where we put our blankets. We would put them in their so that when they wake up in the morning they can get out but, if we did see them they would never even have to talk to us because they were embarrassed.

RMM: Now you said, you got into, earlier you said you got into trouble because these girls would try to seduce you into the rooms and so forth and how far did the trouble go in terms of who

GK: They would call us up there and we would go into their room, they would say we need this fixed. Well there would be two girls in the room, one would be laying on the bed with no clothes on wanting you to go to bed with her and the other was in the shower wanting you to go in the shower with her and two of them were trying to get you to go to bed with them and then when you would turn around and you would walk out they would get mad and howler at me? and when they hollered at me? they would go and tell the person at the desk that he tried to rape us, well two against one you ain't got a chance. Well it went on like that for well the whole semester or whatever it was that they were here. We had trouble maybe I don't know, maybe a dozen times with the kids and they would try pulling the same thing. But one time I told them I just wasn't going in there and I called over to I think it was John Bucklin? that was our boss at the time. I got called over in his office and then the president came in and he is asking me questions, "well what was the deal" and supervisors were there and they said what was the deal and I told them we get a call to go into to do something a room, we go up there and their is one laying on the bed with no clothes on and there is one in the shower and then you don't want to monkey around and you turn around and go out they howler rape, when it is two against one what are you supposed to do? So I ain't going on any calls at Northern? any more unless I got someone with me or there are two or three of us together because it was getting to far out of hand. After having a good job here I didn't want to jeopardize it, I wouldn't have went to bed with one of them anyhow.

RMM: Now you said that when you first worked in the dorms you used to have to patrol the building, I mean someone was on call

all night.

GK: Yeah, well we were custodians from 9:30 at night to 6 in the morning. We would have our areas to take care of and when we got those areas done then we had to be on call like if something happened in the bathroom or a toilet plugged or flooded or something then we would have to go up and check it out, fix it or whatever had to be done and that is where we ran into the problems at night, especially in the girl's dorms. But then on the weekends they would have all kinds of parties, pulling fire alarms.

RMM: Now were these the ?foreign? students or just any of the students?

GK: Well even the other students would pull fire alarms and have parties but we never had as much problem with them as we did with the foreign students. But we had to go through two to three times a night, walk through each floor, check our stairways to make sure someone didn't drop a bottle or break it or something because we had kids go down the steps, someone would be chasing them down the steps. A boy would be chasing a girl or something, she run down the steps and there is busted glass down there or something, she run through this glass and cuts her feet all to heck.

RMM: And that happened?

GK: Oh yeah, that happened quite a few times. So that is why we had to go through, and kind of patrol and check the stairways because especially on a friday and saturday night because they were pretty rowdy on those nights. Friday and saturday nights. And so we would go through and check all of that stuff and sometimes we would have problems with the guys, they would come in and they weren't supposed to be in their and we would say you know you ain't supposed to be in here would you just leave and backed them out ?of this?, three or four o'clock in the morning. They were either on dope or drank too much beer and then they get mad at you and some of them pull a knife and want to cut your throat. Well what is one guy going to do against two guys? All you can do is try to reason with them and there was a few times that I got backed in the corner by a couple of dark ones and I didn't know if I should jump out the window or run. Sometimes you cab get into situations where you don't really know what to do, but you just got to play it cool and hopefully that will hold your head together and just you know ???? Then we had other kids that on the weekends tried to have parties and again dope or whatever and they would have it out at the loading dock. One morning at six o'clock one kid is sitting on the window sill. We were just getting ready to leave then, standing out there having a cigarette, the kid is standing on the third floor window sitting on the window sill. He said "I can fly". I said well ?? go ahead. He jumps out the window, lands on the sidewalk and broke his leg. So I just took the radio that I was carrying and

called security, well I said send someone over here to pick him up I said he just jumped out of the third floor I said he didn't flap his arms hard enough. He is sitting down there on the sidewalk, he busted his leg. But they

RMM: This is about what year did this happen?

GK: This is around, between 82 and 85 somewhere in there.

RMM: What was the year ???, were there any problems with drugs, taking drugs and so on?

GK: There was a lot of kids at that time, I think it was from around 75 to 80 when it was really bad, there was a lot of them taking pot, they were smoking it. And you could walk through the dorms and you could just see it clouding, a cloud and by the time that you walked from one end to the other you were half high. But we knew that some of them had it, we were supposed to report it but if you do the guys know you and they are going to come after you. So all we would tell them is hey if you want to smoke it, go outside or go somewhere else. Don't stand right out here in the lobby or right out here in the open because I said if you get caught and they know that I seen you then I am going to get in trouble because I am supposed to be turning you's in and I don't want to be turning these kids in because then you got everybody against you. So we just tried to talk to them and reason with them and most of them, o.k., they didn't realize and they said o.k. we will go outside or go someplace else and smoke it. One the weekends when they had the beer in the dorms then there was kids that had it right in their rooms and we could smell it, but

RMM: Was there so much of this going on that you would have had to turn everybody in?

GK: Well, there was there that one year that it was really bad. I think just about every kid on campus was smoking it.

RMM: What year was that about?

GK: That had to be around 84-85

RMM: Were things, you said you came in 1970, did things change? What were they like in the 70's when you first started and how did they change over the years?

GK: Well in the 70s is when I came, we always had two custodians working together, especially at night and if we had like this building here there was two of us, custodians, we would work all night or we would have two or three students work with us for three or four hours. We would ?? binding and ??? or whatever we had to do and then after that we would go ahead and do the other maintenance work that had to be done but they would help us do the cleaning. But now, it is no help at all over the years they

just kept ?? and ?? and ?? and ??. We had one custodian who had, like this building here now you have three floors, ok you had one custodian covering each floor.

RMM: Now this is when there was students living in this building?

GK: Yeah. We used to have one custodian covering each floor, but then around 85 they started cutting it a little bit, they said well two guys can cover this or one guy can cover this area and it is down now where they are just going to have the buildings run down because the help isn't there to do the work.

RMM: Now in the earlier days you said they had a custodian and a ?DD?, someone was their 24 hours a day in shifts.

GK: Yeah we had four different shifts. We had a day shift an afternoon shift and a midnight shift. Well when the afternoon shift would leave there would be a night shift and they would have certain things to do and then when the day shift would come in the day shift would have things to do so there was people there all the time and did certain areas. Some of the areas they just had a night shift, it depended on if it was a building that had a lot of students, if there was a lot of students there late at night you can't clean during the day so they would have to have a night shift come in say from 9:30 to 6 in the morning to clean after the students are gone. Especially over in the Feildhouse were they had

RMM: Jamrich Hall

GK: Jamrich Hall, they had kids in there until midnight and you can't clean in there until they leave so that is when we would have a midnight shift come in there. But I don't know now what kind of set up they have in some of the buildings because it has changed so much that just about everything no has just about gone to day shift. One, two I think there are four guys who will work night shifts when they are called in and that is just to shampoo carpets. I think most of it has no all gone to days and a few afternoons but otherwise its ????

RMM: Do they have a custodian, is there still a custodian in the dorms around the clock?

GK: No, they don't have in any of the dorms anymore have a custodian at night. They got one guy, like in this building I come in from seven to seven thirty and when I leave at seven thirty there is no one in the building. Over at the olympic training center the guy over there leaves at three-thirty, they have a student who is in charge of people who need stuff. In fact some of the buildings they have student help, most of the buildings they don't have anybody.

RMM: Probably over at the olympic training site they probably

have students because it is so used, you have people living there.

GK: Yeah, well they got people coming in there at seven o'clock at night so they have the student there to take them to their room or to give them whatever they have to have so.

RMM: Has the number of custodians declined over the years?

GK: Yeah, we had I think we had over 500 custodians when I started in 70 and now I think we are down to about 150 custodians. Each year they will drop four or five and put them in different places, or some one leaves, or transfers, or goes somewhere else ??? or whatever, ??? custodian from there and say we don't need this one over here so we will put him over there. Double up this area so they are doubling everyone up and all they are going to do is hope there is help in the long run because you can't keep the buildings up the way they should be kept up. I have seen places where they have custodians and maybe they have one or two and the place is a mess because you can't keep it up and then people are saying geez is this ever messy. That is the way it goes I guess when they don't want to keep the help.

RMM: How did they, what is the situation in Magers Hall. I know when we first moved here in about 1988-89 I know there was someone in the building until late in the evening, til maybe ten o'clock or so now that ?? more people in the building

GK: Now they had a custodian for each floor and they had a day shift, three custodians on day-shift and then they had three on afternoons. So the afternoon shift would be two-to-two thirty to eleven / two-thirty til midnight. So the day shift would have certain things to do and the afternoon shift would have things to do and it worked that way because you had coverage most of the time, the few hours in the night the kids are sleeping anyway so if there is any little problems the RA or whoever is at the desk could take care of it.

RMM: Now in Magers hall when we were as an office we had the day shift and the afternoon shift, and that has been eliminated?

GK: Well we still have the day shift and early morning shift and I don't know what you want to call it, a day shift or whatever, it's

RMM: You start work at what time?

GK: eleven, eleven to seven-thirty. Then after seven thirty it is empty. So you can come and go as you please but if you have any problems, if the water break or something then whoever finds it would have to call security or the heating plant and then they would send someone over from the ??? plant there to fix whatever needs fixed.

RMM: Can you recount anything that has happened, like I know a number of years ago when we first moved in here we had a water pipe burst and they had the whole education section was filling with water. Do you have any stories like that, big problems that occurred in the building or anything like that

GK: Well this one here has had four floods so far since 1970. It four floods, the last one was about two years ago when the pipe broke up here in that women's lounge because they didn't insulate the ceiling and the water pipe was right next to the outside wall and it wasn't insulated and it was just lucky that it didn't break through in the night. It broke at about quarter to seven in the morning when the day shift just came in. Otherwise if that would have broke during the night you would have had a lot more problems because we had water all the down from there to the pop machines.

RMM: You are talking about the time that it burst open in the education department? Was that the time?

GK: No, that one there was, I can't remember what happened over there with that one.

RMM: I think there was, no there was a gasket or something that broke or a pipe burst it was just like a jungle over there the heat the humidity and the water and what not. You are saying it another

GK: Well we have had three or four here and we have had them in other buildings but if they had floods over there the only time they will call the whole, everybody in is if its a real big one and there is only a couple times everybody, every custodian got called in.

RMM: It is that usually caused by frozen pipes?

GK: Yeah, that is the only time that we will have trouble with water pipes breaking is in the winter time. Either they don't have, the heat circulation ain't good enough, one office stays cool and the next office might be hot and your pipes ?? might freeze but the next office no so if yours breaks your room is going to get flooded and it is going to run out the door and into the hall or whatever. And it is hard to say because the pipes in this building and all the buildings are old. They should be gone through, checked and fixed before they break and then they wouldn't have all these problems.

RMM: So you are saying then this ??? pipes in the wintertime as a possibility?

GK: Yeah

RMM: Now were there any other stories going back to the students and the sort of life in the dorm with the student, do you have

any other stories to recount about the you know crazy time?

GK: Oh the students they, it is hard to say they, it just depended on what kind of mood they were in. What kind of party they were having. Some of them were in good moods and you could joke with them and stuff and other ones you couldn't talk to so you had to use your own judgement of what kind of attitude you had to have when they were having their ?shindigs? or whatever they were going to have. But most of the kids, we got along with all of them.

RMM: Have you noticed in recent years there have been fewer parties? Has that kind of tamed down?

GK: In the last five years there hasn't been any parties in the dorms and even on campus because drinking on campus isn't allowed.

RMM: So that pretty much has followed in your perspective.

GK: Yeah, every once in a while you will see a kid bring a beer in a bag but there is no more parties or stuff like that in the dorms like they used to have because it was causing too much problems and kids were getting hurt. It was when they drank, then they got goofy and broke bottles and kids get cut cause then they just made up their minds that they just had to eliminate it all together.

RMM: So then you would say life, things have improved? Life has improved?

GK: Yeah it has improved a lots in the last five years. Kids are more quite, if they are going to party they are going to go out to the beach and party. So it is pretty settled down now.

RMM: Now have you been working in Magers Hall, this complex, your whole time at Northern pretty much?

GK: No, I put three years at University Center I was working over there. I worked all three shifts that they had there then I left there and I came down here at Magers and worked down here on night shift. I was down here about 4 years, 4 or 5 years, and then I transferred from there and went to the Cohodas building. I went over there, I put fifteen years in that building. So then I figured that it is time for a little bit of a change so then I figured I would come down here on day shift.

RMM: So then you have covered really all the different types of buildings, the dorms, the university center, the administration building?

GK: I've been in a few of the other buildings, I went to the Feildhouse when they had to make set ups for different groups and stuff coming in. We would go in and help set up over there but

we usually didn't have to go into other buildings unless there was some big doings or something going on and then we would go help them. Because there was times when we would need help sometimes and then they would come over and help us. But now everybody has got their own area so you take care of your area and don't pull someone from another building to come over here and help you unless it is a major job. (end of side one)

RMM: OK, we are back on tape again. Do you want to make a comment about how things have changed?

GK: The only way things have changed drastically in the last ten years, I don't know how to explain.

RMM: In what way have things changed?

GK: I don't know it just seems quieter, settled down.

RMM: Are there fewer students living in the dorm it that the ???

GK: Yeah, I think that is part of it too because most of the kids know want to live off campus and the place that they charge them the kids can't see putting out all that kind of money, working work/study and then giving it right back to them, they aren't making no headway. Because I have college students working for me and even the little bit of money that they make each payday they can't get by on it.

RMM: They couldn't pay, they are not really making enough money to pay for room and board and tuition is what you are saying?

GK: Yeah, they would have to get work/study or a grant or something to help them because they would never make it on their own just working those few hours.

RMM: Did it, you know probably part of it, you talked about the parties and all the activities, was part of it maybe, like at one time back in when you first started working here they got three I think sometimes they had four students in a room.

GK: Yeah, they had three and four in a room. A room this size would have four student in it.

RMM: Do you think that probably caused you know more tension?

GK: Yeah that caused a lot of problems there too because the kids couldn't go any place and if they had to study, well if you put four people into one room and you want to study that don't work.

RMM: Those rooms are about 12 by 12 feet?

GK: 12 by 15 something like that yeah.

RMM: So four people in that.

GK: Four people in bunk beds. That don't go over to good because each one wants their own things and there just ain't the rooms for it and they are hot anyhow.

RMM: So it is really is kind of a bad situation.

GK: Yeah then they tried to expand too much after they did cut down on the kids in the rooms. They expanded but then they tried to go too far. Now they are to a point where they got buildings that are empty that they are not getting used. Either that or they are going to tear them down. And there goes wasting money again.

RMM: You mean there is actually some talk that they are going to tear them down?

GK: Oh yes, well they want to tear Carey Hall down they are talking about tearing that down. Now I don't know if they will or not but they got, well what it is, part of Quad II here, dining room, that ??? offices. They let it sit up there, it is alright to have a space there for meetings but they don't need the whole thing unless they want to rent it out for parties, that would be another way to go. Rent it out for wedding receptions and stuff like that to bring in some money. (phone rings and tape goes blank)