



DJJ FORUM

Where DJJ employees gather to stay informed and celebrate our victories

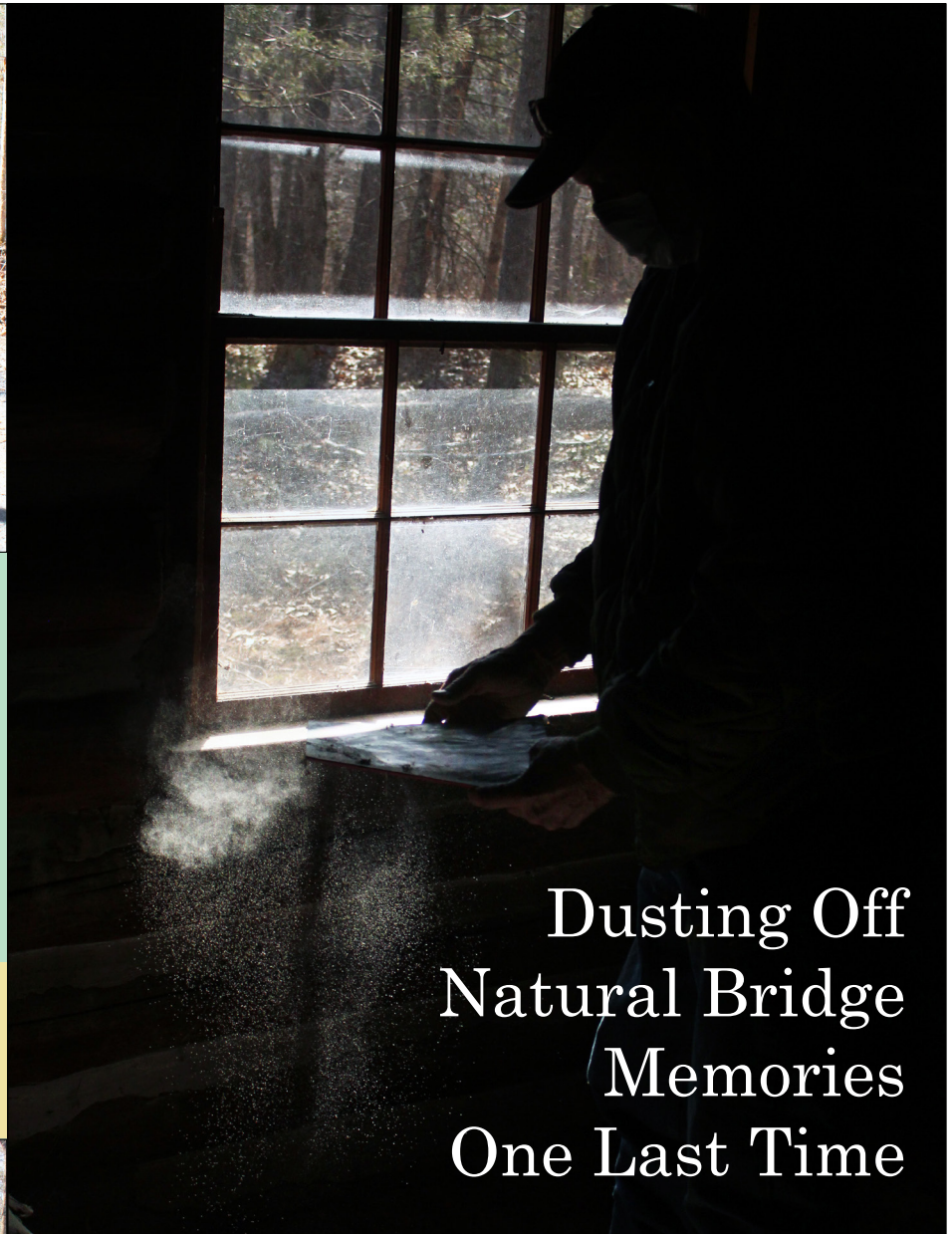
Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

June 21, 2021



Above: DJJ Training and Development Director Patrick Bridge salvages a sign that once marked the entrance to Camp New Hope at Natural Bridge Juvenile Correctional Center. Right: Maintenance worker Ronnie Marshall dusts off an old magazine in one of the two resident-built cabins. Below: CSU 25 Probation Officer Lisa Hutzel, who worked at Natural Bridge from 2004 until it closed in 2009, reminisces with Marshall.

[Editor's Note: Since these interviews were conducted, Mr. Marshall passed away from complications from cancer. See tribute to him, page 7.]



Dusting Off Natural Bridge Memories One Last Time

*Former JCC Property Sold
To Private Party; Gave
DJJ Residents An Outdoor
Experience For 45 Years*



Above: DJJ Training Manager Guillermo Novo, Residential Training Program Supervisor Jerry Johnson and Training and Development Director Patrick Bridge inspect the main cafeteria. Right: CSU 25–Lexington probation officers Michael Taylor and Lisa Hutzel both served at Natural Bridge and were staff members at the time of its closing in 2009.



The Natural Bridge Juvenile Correctional Center is in Richard “Gayle” Patrick’s DNA.

For almost 40 of the 57 years Natural Bridge has been a DJJ property, Patrick has come to work each day to the 100-acre facility located along a remote country road about 20 miles south of Lexington, nestled next to forested hills and bordered by a mountain stream.

Hired in 1981 as a dorm supervisor, an early version of today’s resident specialist, Patrick spent 12 years working with residents – camping with them, teaching them outdoor skills, showing them a way of life they had never known before.

In 1992, he transferred to the maintenance department as a carpenter, and never looked back. For nearly three decades, Patrick has come to know and love every square inch of Natural Bridge.

He often walked the property on his normal rounds, appreciating the natural beauty around him. As Patrick walks these days, however, the memories are stronger than usual. The property on which the former Natural Bridge JCC now sits has been sold to a private family, which plans to turn the property into a resort. “I don’t regret my 40 years here at all,” Patrick says. “It’s been good to me.”

On a recent morning with a crisp late winter sun shining down on wide fields of grass just deciding to start turning green again, a few Natural Bridge alumni gathered to have one last look and swap a few stories.



For about 15 consecutive years, Natural Bridge JCC staff members went on a fishing expedition as a team-building exercise. This group is from ca. 2004, front row, from left: Roy Cash, Eddie Milliner, Kevin Fauber, Ronnie Marshall, Morris "Germ" Turner, Carmen Brea. Back row from left: Ed Godfrey, Chris Milliner, Andrew Flippen, Barry Staton, Wendell Fitz, Al Davoll, Timothy Turner, Arthur Price, Timmy Slagle, Michael Taylor.

Michael Taylor was just 21 years old when he joined the Natural Bridge staff in 1993 to help oversee the residents. He became a fulltime juvenile correctional officer in 1995, eventually serving 16 years in various roles before the facility was permanently closed in 2009 due to budget cuts.

One of the first things



Taylor did was put together a resident softball team, which he arranged to have play in the Rockbridge Area Recreational Organization's men's league. "I was approached many times by people in the community expressing their positive comments about our young men participating in that league," Taylor recalls. "We won one game that year...by forfeit. But it was a great experience for the kids."

In 1998, Taylor started the Youth Industries Program, in which youth who had obtained

their high school diplomas built things out of wood, such as cutting boards and outside storage buildings, to sell to the community.

"We were lucky enough to be able to share the wood shop operated by Thunder Ridge High School," Taylor says. "Two years later, we were given our own building that used to be a five-car garage used to



Michael Taylor, now a probation officer at CSU 25's Lexington office, was instrumental in starting several successful programs at Natural Bridge. At left, Taylor and Ronnie Marshall inspect an "NBCC" basketball jersey; at right, Taylor finds a softball glove in a box of athletic equipment that had been untouched for 12 years.



store forestry equipment. It was transformed into a fully-equipped wood shop.” The high school hired Taylor to run a carpentry and cabinetry apprenticeship program, which required in-classroom time and hands-on experience in the wood shop.

Two log cabins were built in the forest by residents in the 1970s and received plenty of use during the warmer months. Groups of residents would come eight at a time to spend a weekend in the cabins on a true outdoor adventure. “They’d clean up brush around the cabins, chop wood, then we’d have cookouts and recreation activities, like

pitching horseshoes,” Taylor says. “We’d make a weekend out of it.”

Patrick, who also brought his share of residents to the cabins for weekend camping, recalls a “solo test” they had to pass. “They had to go out for one night by themselves. We monitored and watched them ... but they thought they were by themselves, anyway,” Patrick says with a wry smile.



CSU 21–Martinsville Director Kevin Meeks considers the three years he worked as a juvenile correctional officer at Natural Bridge from 1995-97 as a valuable gauge to measure how much progress has been made



Counterclockwise from top right: Residents build a fire pit outside one of the cabins, 1976; a grainy photo found on floor of a cabin showing group of cabin builders, 1976; Jerry Johnson at creek; front steps of cabin as it appears today; resident chops wood, 1979; Michael Taylor with plaque found on floor of cabin dated 1976 celebrating “Bridge Builders;” Johnson inspects fireplace inside one of the cabins built by residents.

CSU 21–Martinsville Director Kevin Meeks, who served as a juvenile correctional officer at Natural Bridge from 1995-97, takes a moment of quiet reflection outside the dorms he once worked in.



in the practice of juvenile justice methods over the years. While he readily acknowledges that the outdoor experience Natural Bridge was able to offer to residents was valuable, he says he is grateful for the considerable advances that have been made since then.

“The staff were great, and memories plentiful,” Meeks says. “When I worked at the Discovery House, a halfway house in Roanoke, we would bring kids that never really had an opportunity to get out into this environment and we’d bring them camping, let them build a

fire and cook.”

But he also remembers that the four dormitories were often overcrowded with kids that probably would not be committed in today’s system. “It was a different culture 25 years ago,” he says. “When I look back, I am grateful for where we are now. I’m very proud of the reforms and transformation our department has made since the mid ‘90s. Working at Natural Bridge provided me with a baseline to see how far we have come. I am grateful for the clarity it has provided.”



Natural Bridge maintenance workers Ronnie Marshall, left, and Gayle Patrick walk across the field they have traversed thousands of times, enjoying the clean air and natural beauty of the campus one more time before the property permanently changed ownership.

A 12-Year Time Capsule



Left: Thunder Ridge High School bulletin board, unchanged since 2009. Above: Stopwatch, softball found in shed.



Left: Robert Foster displays can of dried food found in pavilion cafeteria. "Think it's past its expiration date?" he asks Kevin Meeks. Above: Jerry Johnson, Guillermo Novo and Michael Taylor inspect schedule board for campsite use, still reflecting 2009 reservations.



Above: Michael Taylor visits his old office and finds a clipboard he had used to take notes still on the wall, undisturbed for a dozen years. Right: Telephone abandoned in cafeteria. Far right: Lisa Hutzel photographs her old office.



A Tour Of The Campus Reveals That Much Has Been Untouched Since It Closed For Business in 2009

IN MEMORIAM
Ronald Dexter
Marshall



Jan. 19, 1954
✧
May 21, 2021

*Natural Bridge Was In
Ronnie Marshall's Blood
From Start To Finish*

Ronald Dexter Marshall, a lifelong resident of Natural Bridge who never moved far away from his roots by working a 40-year career at the Natural Bridge Learning Center, died Friday, May 21, 2021, from complications from cancer. He was 67 years old.

“Working at Natural Bridge was great, and still is,” Marshall said in a 2014 *DJJ Forum* feature about the facility. “It was like working with family ... and the scenery, fresh air and mountains aren’t too bad, either.”

The fact is, Ronnie was never far from family – and he considered his relatives, his work colleagues, and the Natural Bridge residents he worked with among them. “When he was working with the young men at Natural Bridge, he taught them how to complete a task and why it needed to be done correctly,” recalls his longtime colleague Richard “Gayle” Patrick. When the task was done, Marshall often would bring in strawberries, milk, sugar and an electric ice cream machine and make ice cream for all the residents and staff.

He is survived by his wife, Bridget Thompson Marshall; daughters, Sarah Boblett and Molly Marshall; four granddaughters, one niece, one nephew, and countless cousins, friends, and hunting buddies.

Ronnie was interred in a private family graveside service on May 29 at the Broad Creek Church Cemetery in Natural Bridge. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

“To put it simply (and Ronald Dexter, as I always called him, liked simple things), he was a good man who loved life,” Patrick says. “Those who knew him were blessed to have known him. After knowing this man for about 30 years, I can assuredly say he is not only going to be missed by me, but by everyone who knew Ronald Dexter Marshall. Farewell.”

[Click [HERE](#) to read Gayle Patrick’s full testimony about Ronnie Marshall.]