

Interview with Brandon Lerda and Paul Heavens

Interviewer: Tim Miller

March 20, 1996

BL = Brandon Lerda, PH = Paul Heavens

Q: I'm here with Brandon Lerda and Paul Heavens, they both lived at the Farm. It is now March 20th, 1996.

BL: Happy spring!

Q: Happy spring, just barely. So, what were the two factions, that's a good place to start. There was an in group and an outgroup?

BL: From the beginning it was like that. It was like a vertical hierarchy that you had the teacher and the students, that was kind of the structure of it that started, although there's a lot of lip service about, "Well, we're all zero at some point, we're all equal at some point." During the first meeting it was kind of like that too. There was the concept that the best thing that could be said about what we were talking about could come from anybody, whether you were somebody who's really carrying the work all the time, or whether you were a slacker.

Q: That was the theory?

BL: That was the theory, it was that it didn't matter who you were in communities, when you got to the highest kind of place, the inspiration could come from anybody. But that didn't last very long.

PH: It was always...

BL: Yeah, as long as you didn't know each other too much, but I think the more we got to know each other, the more it just kind of stratified around.

Q: There was an article in the Whole Earth Review, about six or 8 years ago, called "Why We Left the Farm." I was just going to say, they say things like Steven was so powerful, you couldn't question him, basically. There's a great story in there about, Steven decides to join the Farm band as a drummer, but he can't really drum... but you couldn't say that, because...

BL: That was Walter, Walter saying he was an asshole.

Q: But that wasn't the theory. When you read Steven's writings, it's all very...

PH: His writings are great! Monday night class, right on. Most of his stuff, the stuff that turned me on...

BL: That's what it was...

PH: ...he went from being his version of, "I'm in the heaven's [?]" kind of thing, he was just going to be the tame deer, sort of walk around amongst us, and we were going to do the thing,[?] and he was going to be like the sort of pastor, the local priest. Okay, that was fine. We never went to that; it just became the normal experimental hierarchy with Steven at the top... power structure... making most of the decisions.

BL: ...manipulating the community like it was a...

PH: So, the government became this humongous sort of, started to get kind of stupid, because there was too many "yes... men" and not enough, "Hey, let's check this out," men. We were doing things like; we were going to buy this giant factory boat [?] from Beliz [?]. This boat, with like, millions of ... so right about that time, there was this whole rush of people who want to be on the boat. This whole crew, it all sifted out through the hierarchical thing.

BL: I went to the meetings.

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PH: I got kicked out of the meeting. So, they had this whole thing, and then you started to see the split, because then these people started talking about, "We're going to get this giant boat, and the motor pool's [?] is going to go fix it up or something?" Unbelievable. They said, "Yes... " and he went down... down at the motor pool [?] thing, this guy's out to lunch. And so, then it, those instances kind of accumulated more and more and you got this widening sort of gap of, where there was a whole another two distinct sides of the farm, the Kaputy [?] golden... who thought Steve was an icon, somewhere out there. And then there was we had our own kind of life down in the trenches. So, while he was doing his thing, and then there was this, like Steven would... somebody out. And the other, the nonperformance... on the Farm, they would throw a big party, present with a golden box... Two total opposites went on for years and years. After a while, most people could handle it. And then it started getting serious. It started getting real, it was just too many people wanted to... , be healthier, just have a better... not live in poverty. It became obvious at that point that poverty sucked.

Q: I've heard people say things like, "I would just like for my kids to have shoes."

PH: Yeah, exactly.

Q: It's hard to believe it was at that level, but I guess it was. That's pretty poor.

BL: It was pretty poor. I don't mind it myself. I'm still a poor kind of a person. When I feel like I'm moving down to the bottom, I just take a step back, and take my vision out of Santa Cruz, look at what I think the rest of the world...

Q: Well, sure. Absolutely. Well, to start with, from where you are now, are you sorry you did it?

PH: No way. Actually... nice to look back at my life, the moment when I walked out on my engineering job... drove to New Orleans, that was one big trip ever since.

Q: What is that? Is that before you went to the Farm?

PH: Yeah.

Q: Tell me a little bit about that.

PH: That was Rock Bottom ...

Q: Oh, that was Rock Bottom? You lived at Rock Bottom?

PH: Yeah.

Q: Oh, I didn't get that part of it. You said you knew about it, but...

PH: I lived there for a while... wooden shoe... it was great.

Q: How did you get on the whole trail to begin with, then? You didn't join the caravan or anything?

PH: No, I didn't, actually, I guess I started, I've lived on this sort of co...op in Chicago for a few months, that kind of sprung out of some sort... group, back in that, late sixties, or mid...sixties. ... Chicago Riot.

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Q: But was it residential, or just a... ?

PH: No, it was this group in downtown Chicago, it was open... about 60 or 70... Out of that sort of sprung this little, I guess it was about nine then... in downtown Chicago.

Q: With encounter groups, you're dedicated to complete honesty and openness?

PH: Yeah.

Q: And from that you went to Rock Bottom Farm?

PH: Yeah. I trashed my job as an engineer, just walked out the job I was about to take. And... to Rock Bottom.

Q: So, you must've known someone there?

PH: No, I didn't know anybody there, it was like cold turkey, it was a really a far-out thing. ... and it's a far...out place. It's the most beautiful place, unbelievable beauty. You go up above the Ridge of Burbon[?], that was incredibly beautiful.

Q: How big was Rock Bottom? It was just 10 or 20 people, right?

PH: About that. It sort of fluctuated.

Q: And did they all live in one old farmhouse or something?

PH: Yeah. And in the wintertime... to keep warm... we just had sheets between the rooms, and thin walls, it was like... people getting it on. And the bathtub was in the hallway on top of the stairs. We used to share that; it was just out in the hallway. You kind of had one bath every week... share a tub with.

Q: The Farm had common showers, didn't it?

PH: Yeah... too many visitors.

Q: ...

PH: ... something like that.

Q: How long did Rock Bottom go on?

PH: I don't know how long it actually went on. I was only there... so

Q: That's how long you were there?

PH: Yeah.

Q: So, how'd you get from there to the Farm?

PH: I was in Philadelphia, visiting... and a... came through, and it was...

BL: His sister...

PH: Yeah, real sweet, and a few other people... beautiful, peaceful, it was really... so we hung around for a while... stayed at our house for the weekend. And that was it. I was sold... Monday night class, of which they happened to have several.

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BL: You guys had several Monday night classes?

PH: Yeah.

BL: ...

PH: No, I wasn't at that Monday night class. No... the book.

BL: Oh, I see, I thought you guys had some... on Monday night or something.

PH: ... these guys and decided... Rock Bottom.

Q: So, there you are.

PH: There I am... a couple of years.

Q: So, you had to go through...

PH: Yeah.

Q: What year?

PH: 1970, just a year after...

Q: No, not '70, it wasn't there until '71.

BL: Yeah... the Martin party [?]. We left... so we moved...

PH: Yeah, the little... house, and Gary and Don...

Q: ...

BL: No... and I don't think he got really...

PH: ... Majorie[?].

Q: So, were you already there then, Brandon? Did you go on the caravan? Did you really?...

BL: ...

Q: I was just reading a dissertation of this... he wrote the doctoral dissertation in soc., in Berkeley, it's kind of unbelievable that they'd allow this, because it's not their kind of technical deal. It's just memories of living in these communes in the Haight, about '65, '66. One of the figures in there is Steven Gaskin [?], who at that point is just talking to people in apartments and stuff. And they go... Steven... house. It was very interesting to see... started building. But I guess the Monday night class was quite a hit...

BL: ... a lot of... events at that time. That was like, well, it all depends on what... what... things are starting to happen. I grew up... went on, I was in high school... really attracted me, just the creativity. It was like, I couldn't run away... so, I waited until I graduated in '68... Haight... Ashbury... really regretted not... started... beach [unintelligible for a long time]... a year and a half... then we had to go through...

Q: I'm sure that's an incredible tale. So, you know Elizabeth... then?

BL: Yeah... I see her occasionally. I don't know if it... Sometimes I see... south... she's on the radio... get together...

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Q: Hope I hear... what is it? A weekly show?

BL: It was, I haven't heard it on the...

PH: ...

BL: ... oh, okay. Station...

PH: ... I'm trying to think.

Q: Well I'm going to go see her tonight.

BL: Oh, great. She's just recently put out a book.

Q: Yeah, the scrapbook of the Haight...Ashbury...

BL: ... a real good...

Q: Yeah, it's one's person's... experience.

BL: And after you meet her... that's pretty much...

PH: ... for me, it's really... far from... my... I have a lot of friends that all... tended to be the working class... And so, we tended, as a whole... also... supportive, and so I think all that... reality, I mean, this is reality... became...

BL: Well we were...

Q: Even though you were the guys that were actually supporting it.

PH: Yes...

Q: ... The Farm...

BL: It did well. As I... understand... talking to people... a lot of our... project, early on, in the early '70's, before..., from what I understand.

PH: ...

BL: Three hundred grand... on that... And then... and all kinds of dumb stuff, amazing opportunity... excellent.

Q: And that was pre...break up?

BL: I left just before that. I left really optimistic, because I was a big complainer... just when people were starting to kind of speak up... started to kind of stand up... trying to... so it was like, it had just become...

PH: Yeah, to... so it was all kind of working drones [?], we were all sort of... this thing out, "Come on, guys," this was... and they kind of... their reality in the Farm...

BL: ...

PH: ... much more, being realistic... which was... mostly... Steven's alter...ego... he was kind of the... ridiculed.

BL: ... too shy with those things.

PH: ... this is the story that... this... in his way... never heard of... up until now. He was part of this subculture, really a major part of the Farm. And it was the best of times... look at ourselves in the process. And that was way more enlightening, I thought... was being the alter...ego of Steven, way

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more... ego. It's fun... he was... at the end, was kind of pushing... Steven and... couldn't push any further... and that was a shame... on the other hand... somewhere else. Well, that was back, I guess that was about 1980.

Q: The Farm has kind of evolved into a small country town... but it's not a community, it's a town, more private dwellings.

BL: ...

PH: They've still got their major...

BL: ... that was the thing, we were just a big collection of people... we thought we had this common thing... we did, and we played it, and then after a while, people just kind of got tired of playing it this way and that way, that maybe didn't want to play it that way, and we just kind of settled into whatever... or whatever way we kind of just settled back into. USA, America... That's what it looked like to me. On the caravan, my bus was called the care...bus [?], and it was... you know those people who had... they were closer[?]

Q: Those buses are still all there, I think.

BL: And then there was a bunch of us who wanted to go along but didn't have... so we kind of... we somehow got together... six, 8, 12 people on the bus. And this one guy who was my bus, his name was Richard... and he was like, he was... I guess... lots of them. He was the kind of character that was like solitary woodsmen... so he was... little apartment... and so he had his little hibachi there. Maybe cooked potatoes, because they were too hard... well, no... anyway, he was... So, the Farm's always looked to me... about ten years... problem with... modern...

Q: ... I guess... did a lot of women come to take up the free baby offer?

BL: That was one of the big complaints. I think there was a number, but I don't know...

PH: I think it was just more a bad decision... resources. It was just stretching the manpower to where we were all doing dumb stuff. A lot of us had much more potential than that.

BL: There was a lot of a... like the California farm was one thing... a lot of... like '77, '78, we were in the Bay Area, and we ended up... firm press chunky tofu... it was like slaves [?]. And we had to jump on it... green...

Q: Oh, it does at our co...op in Lawrence... staple. Now they have yogurt, and nonfat.

PH: It gave us a real chance to do something... to have some real financial leverage and do something.

BL: ... basically... wanted to establish... in San Francisco, with Steve Gaskin. And that was... it was very... there was a time in San Francisco where they had anti...commune laws. There were laws that were devised to eliminate communes in San Francisco... not more than 3 people in a household. A couple of other things like that. Another thing was the gay explosion was exploding, and they were jumping into all the... because they were single, they were...

Q: Yeah, they pay the rent for sure.

BL: The alternative was... that was a natural complaint. So, moving to San Francisco, at least to me... trying to steer... and yes, people were... including the very people that... California... but after...

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Q: Did they buy land and all of that?

BL: No, they were... for... which was a great idea. San Francisco... great place to do that. Actually... this is when... in the ghetto.

PH: Smack in the middle of the ghetto.

BL: And a lot of farm people were really... it was a real hard...

PH: ...

Q: You must've been getting some satisfaction out of it, even...

BL: Oh yeah.

Q: It must've been a really good... I would have loved... on Sunday mornings.

PH: It was truly a psychedelic experience for me, the whole time, the time that...

BL: ... that guy... where he had to go get –

PH: ...the punishment is to do...

BL: ...

PH: Yeah, you just get driven to town... kicked... and I had a very psychedelic experience... doing it. It was fun. What can you say? For me, I was definitely kind of unaware of the... real... kind of life, up until that point... living in Chicago. And so, it was kind of... kicked off, you know... and I got kicked off... one of my best friends, I love this guy, but he's sitting there... trying to be real cool. I get kicked off, thrown out, didn't get a ride all day, and at the end of the day, I think, "Shit, I've got to... two days." So, I started putting some... smiling, and zip, I got picked up right away... takes me all the way from Nashville to Chicago. Then puts me up for the night at... it was like bang, bang, bang, one thing after another. It was an amazing time... scored the key, made it... amazing... A girl had stolen the key, we got this key, and walked out of the building, and these police cars come roaring up and stopped right at the end of the driveway. I've got this key... big bag... running up to the driveway, and they... said, "Hey, there's a robbery... where is it?" And I'm standing there with the bag. I probably looked like a robber, and they just zoomed on by. I walked out back to my car, jump in, and peeled out and drove around the block, pulled over, turned off the light... kaboom, kaboom... but I made it back...

BL: ... the number of people who wanted to live this dream got to live the dream. That dream was kind of big...

PH: ... best friend... my best friend, and I love these people... have a great time... laugh over it, but then it got to be where, hey, look, we've really got to do something... revolution... and it got more serious, and it got more... and this really sucked.

BL: ... at one point. I went back and visited in '82. I think that was just when it was beginning to...

Q: Lots of people came down very hard, I know that.

BL: It was really crazy, people...

PH: And the funny thing is, the people who came down the hardest, the most... , was the people that were closest to Steve. Those people came down hard.

BL: ... because there's a lot of people...

PH: Well, the generally accepted...

BL: ... like who?

PH: ...

Q: ...

PH: People who were up in that apex of the pyramid.

BL: Well, tell me.

PH: Band people.

BL: Okay, yeah, right.

PH: The support groups, of like the band, the company, the... support groups... close to decision making. Those people came down really hard. Whereas people down there just doing their own thing... at all... moved on. They had a lot of fond memories of their dear friends, right. That's, to me, that's... all my friends in that...

Q: ... Farm... colony, as far as I can tell is Austin. There's still quite a lot.

PH: ...

BL: I haven't been there... nice place except for the... They say you can't... anything.

Q: Is that right?... Tennessee has chiggers real bad then. Chiggers are the worst.

PH: I don't miss them chigs.

BL: In fact, Alan[?] just called this morning from... Springs... ten... six, or eight inches of snow, coming down...

PH: ... a lot more...

Q: Is that right?

PH: Yeah...

BL: Yeah, I was asking...

PH: ... cabin.

Q: Very close to the park[?]?

PH: Yeah...

BL: ... was sold. 650 grand.

Q: So, what's left?

BL: Got parceled out... bought it.

Q: The whole thing?

BL: Yeah, the whole thing...

Q: The whole farm is in...

BL: No, just the... part. When we first got there, Mr. Martin lended us 1,000 acres down in... Lane. We landed there, we got busted there, and then we moved, and we bought that... and... adjacent to there. Who was that?... and you kept saying, "Oh, you bought the... property?" I said, "No, not me." ... farm is just around the corner...

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PH: ... bought it up...

Q: So, you bought some land down at... ?

PH: Yeah, I bought some land... own land.

Q: I've been down there, once, actually. I talked to Robert Bates [?]. ... a good community there.

BL: With Robert Bates, I'd imagine so.

Q: He liked it.

BL: Oh, yeah, that's his life, that's his hustle.

PH: ... time warp.

BL: I played a little hard at...

PH: ...

BL: It sure looks like it.

PH: Melting into the hills.

BL: ... a corporation...

Q: ... ?

BL: Yeah.

Q: They're all apparently living there, as far as I can tell.

PH: Yeah.

Q: ... swimming. Some of their children knew... too... not in total poverty.

PH: ...

BL: Oh yeah, when they finished that thing, what I heard when I was leaving, after the fact, that... and so to me, it looked to me like they did really well... even though... that first winter, all we had was wheat[?] to eat... to get salt.

Q: Is that right? It was that bad?

BL: Steve got his grass and wanted to go off on a trip with the band, and be a big shot, and only one check left... took the check in... we were left there, with wheat. Somehow... now I can look back on it... dream... put up with that.

PH: Has this great... up there.

BL: ... pioneering the real world.

PH: ... that's part of the...

BL: We got to be pioneers.

PH: ...

BL: Originally, no one was doing a... job.

PH: ...

BL: I always here... I can't exactly... I can see that... I never see it.

PH: It's much more just a...

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BL: I don't know if...

PH: More just a... can't speak up... might get 50%... not very good...

BL: Yeah, it got to be kind of a... struggled hard... or it seemed that way, continually.

PH: ... our time at... someone else's garden.

BL: And someone's going off and buying groceries for themselves and [tape ends]... first two months, you're in the... the same room as James Earl... he said they were...

Q: Really?

BL: Our first night there, we get there in the late afternoon, we missed lunch. We get there, and we shave, we get... we stripped. Got all packed away and walk up to the... out there... strait jackets... and then start... just... you get all that, and get down to the classification... thing... and there's this loft, and... little shops, and... little guys... and then the... classification... Joe holds up... we get there, and it's just in time for... we march into... we're vegetarian. Everything... he says, "Yeah, you can go down there and eat the... " ... we walked down there... and he said... Tennessee, and... well actually... Black guys too, but there was also... still... so this guy sits down... and they have taken over the general hall, they did all the jobs. And they actually ate at a separate time. And then classification came down, and then they got done, and then the rest of the population came down in shifts. So, you go down there, it's dark... very, very black. When we go down there, I see these... standing around like this... like this... together in the hall... there's this guy with this long black coat, and he's got these 4 huge... guys. And we walked down there... and Steve says to me, "... I'm vegetarian anyway, so... "... they wouldn't acknowledge us walking up. They knew... were not correct to label them... people die in this place... without even turning around, just kind of... and his...

Q: Did you ever end up eating with them?

BL: Eventually, they skipped us in between... in classification, because we became this group... they first put us in separate cells. And then also... two groups. And then they realized we were too... some kind of energy... decided to put us altogether... so we slipped a... in between them, and we... our support, and... would you cut these?... a White guy... about that. So, we didn't have any of that. In fact, Margaret, who was a nutritionist, Steve's original caregiver... but she was into nutrition, and her advice was, "No... that's a protein source."

Q: Green peas, wow.

BL: We, we did that. But we got to know the Muslims, well the Muslims got to know us, because... like this. And you do this thing, and maybe they're eating meat? So, we got a little bit closer to there, when we came through the line... actually, we just lined up, and... classification right behind us... and... from underneath the cabinet... it was kind of neat. We actually got to know one of them, which was really taboo. They actually told us their Muslim name.

Q: Is that right? They weren't supposed to do that.

BL: I don't think so, because shortly after that, we didn't see him. We saw him moving away quickly... We saw the Johnny Cash show... Richard Pryor, in '74. He was very... He did a 45, 50-minute monologue,

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and the TV was there. When he was all done, he had the prisoners rolling. When he was done the TV [?] asked if he could come back, and see if he could get 7 minutes... He gave it a couple tries after he...

PH: ...

BL: ... yeah. Right across there was... cement.

PH: ... see the bag lady?

BL: I don't know who she was.

PH: She sent us off on this trip with a scrap car... find piles of scrap cars, and bring them back, cut them apart, and load the cars up on the truck... metal down to... and sell it... so we'd been sort of forced into taking anything... so we... some deal, which was like... get 50 cars, and... acres and acres of those fucking cars... in the middle of this was acres of fucking tires. So, this guy... , he's carrying...

BL: ...

PH: ...

BL: He had a three-syllable last night.

PH: ... he... us to our... , took it to him in the dark, given it to the bank. So now, between the 12 of us, we were basically... 50 junk cars... and 5, 6, 7 hundred dollars, we had acres of this shit to haul... looking at this stuff... a year... "... hey, we'll get it done."... big... truck, flipping cars up out on the road... with all these cars, like 5 cars stacked on the side, and then we'd drive up... go down the road, we'd rev up, and just plowed down through this... truck and smack... and then we'd try and load it, and then we'd load it on top of our truck and haul it down... but anyway... flatten that car.

BL: ... about as far as Nashville?

PH: ... about 2 weeks, during which time, they were... the police had come... had been arrested, the bank had been robbed half a mile down the road. All kinds of things happened. We were just living out there in the bus. So, we decided one night, "Shit, we'd better get out of here, it's too weird. Let's burn the tires at the nighttime! By the morning they'll be gone, and we'll be gone." So, we stood there and said, "Okay, yeah." So, it gets dark...

BL: ... Is that when Michael and... left their... ?

PH: I don't know, maybe. So, it gets dark, we light the tires. It takes a long time and burns like crazy. Four hours later we realized that we haven't even made a bite in the tires, but they're well under way... there's no way you're going to put them out. We're looking up, and the sun starts to come over the hill. We look, and there's this huge plume of smoke that goes up straight up in the air, and... and disappears over the hill, over this ridge... this plume of... we all stand and look at this... then we hear the police car. Brought about 5 cop cars, and everybody comes roaring in there. It was hilarious. These guys... "... okay, now arrest them!" It was... and me... so it... and me were sitting in the car in the back, and we go over the ridge. And as we go over the top of the ridge, you wouldn't believe it, it's just black smoke, it's like you're going down into the... and you just see tops of houses here and there, sticking out of this black smoke. It was unbelievable. And we go down into this black smoke in... and it's like so heavy when we get out of the car.

Q: Where was this?

PH: It was a place called Callanova [?].... so we were there for like 2 hours. It was unbelievable... he would've been pissed, and we understood why. It was horrendous.

BL: ... ?

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PH: Oh yeah... that was a major...

Q: How long did they burn?

PH: Well, the firemen came down... put the things out. But then what we had to do was skip town, that was part of the deal. We left John Snyder and the bus there, left him with the... we pulled out, and left him there, and he was supposed to leave the next morning. He said that night he got visited by the owners, the guy who owned the lot... had sons, yeah, he's a big old boy... "... and then I got the hell out."... we outran, on the same trip, this was how this trip was, it was like... we outran a cop car that got on our tail. I said, "Pull over, Gary," and he said, "No, no, no, I can outrun him." In our little mustang. He takes off, Gary just takes off, and I'm sitting there, hanging on there, and Gary's just turning around, down this little... stuff like that, didn't know the road, and we actually outran the guy. He disappeared somewhere, and we... do a lot of... think back, scrapping that she bought from the trucking dump. When you... the first truck we bought?

BL: I wasn't part of the...

PH: There was a few people involved, people that didn't have anything to do with the truck, were sent out to go and buy a truck. We had to have a truck for the... So instead of picking somebody who knows something about trucks...

BL: You mean who bought the first truck? We sent out our... biker. Because that was the closest thing to experience with a truck we had. He bought a good one, Oliver[?].

Q: I had an Oliver one.

PH: So, these guys go out... never seen... and go looking for this truck, and they go to this place, I forget what they guy's name is, and they see this '56... with all this chrome on it. So, these guys buy this stuff. Basically... so they bring this thing back, pull it into to the... , "Hey, we've got this great truck." We all get up and look around, and we can't believe it. This is a washing machine piece of chrome. It's unbelievable... other vehicles... laughing and laughing... "What you guys laughing at?" "You didn't buy this, did you?" They paid about \$4,000 for it... of course, they want to take it back, it doesn't even run . It was a Henderson walking... and when a Henderson... solid... hauling tanks, real heavy equipment. What the hell are we going to haul with this thing? Nothing.

BL: But the motor pool [?] had the greatest scrap pile... was doing the moonshining thing, I eventually started... a large... scrap pile... all that I wanted... "There it is." One of the few magic places left in my life.

PH: So, these guys try to take the thing back, right?... an appeal to... doesn't work. So, then they come back. "Well, we've got to give it one more chance." So, they take the women back this time, the wives. And he... "Where the hell am, I going to find another sucker like you?"... "Please, take it back." And he says, "Where the hell am, I going to find another sucker like you? No way." And his wife sticks her head out the door, and says, "Besides, you womenfolk don't wear brassieres, or underwear, do you? Ha...ha...ha." It's like, whoa. So, we ate that... the army built it . Took it right down, cab, rails... the car...

Q: I must've been a great adventure...

PH: ... I heard a lot more weird stuff after that one.

Interview with Brandon Lerda and Paul Heavens

Interviewer: Tim Miller

March 20, 1996

BL = Brandon Lerda, PH = Paul Heavens

BL: ... I changed it from "Back to Godhead" to "Back to Godhead," [?], and I just kind of, I wanted to draw a stone laughing hippie face. And I did that, and I put a bunch of time into it... and I heard... kind of blasphemous or something... what he really thought was that it was a self...portrait of me laughing at... it was a radio station... started playing radio music... don't play... I've... One night... , Joe... we were all going to... He came down, he was on the sacrament [?] crew, which had kind of developed into the... structure. He had really... herb is our church sacrament. There was more herb at the beginning at the earth, than... I worked with that for a while... and after that, it kind became... the important people were... at some point, people... and became this whole kind of tool of power. And so... that was a... black sheep... I knew what was... in fact, I knew Johnny, I was on the crew when he was like... and... and I were like partners in this... the whole thing... I didn't pretend like I was... Steve actually told me... I was, he got here, and we were, everything was... Because... came down one night... and he fired it up, and it was a good night, our show was over, and so I put out this disclaimer, I said, "... music..." so I... play a few other... tunes right now, doesn't... understandable... And Joe, the lawyer [?],... the structure, I guess he... and he... even though it was becoming a kind of a popular show. I think I had it like... stuff like that. It wasn't the usual thing. Mr. Kaputy [?], who actually started... broadcast of a previous station... either, he was off somewhere doing some kind of... He came back about a week later. He knew where it was at and stuff... that was kind of the dynamic that was being... It kind of became a regular...

PH: ...

BL: ...

PH: Yeah, I thought it was a lot more...

BL: A lot more?

PH: Yeah.

BL: It may have been just where you were living... lucky to see... It was a struggle to find a circle of..., if you were on the outskirts. And you were sort of on the outskirts...

PH: No... because... truck... I was there. But I mean, he was sort of more, it seemed like...

BL: In the hostel, I lived with a... "Think we should go hit on somebody else we hit on last week?"

PH: ... sorted out, eh?

BL: Yeah... to get high for the day... that's the person I was talking about, when we last were... I knew a... kind of...

PH: Who, Tony?

BL: No, Wilbur [?],... stab you in the back, lucky if...

PH: ...

BL: He pushed his power. I mean...

PH: I think a lot of people did.

BL: Yeah, a lot of people did, sure.

PH: I think that's the far...out thing...

BL: You don't do that.

PH: ...

BL: Leprechaun, lift off...

PH: ... a lot of people... don't interrupt me...

BL: It was weird. It was really slippery and giddy, what happened with me, later on at that point, there were like people who... and they could stay... because, when I took over the gas station, that's when we

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came to... and then we came to... took over the gas station, gas station... boss man just came... the station, like he did every year, Drew what's...his...name, who was doing it for years before that...

PH: Well, see, yeah, but...

BL: ...And I complained because I was... most people didn't know how to do that... "What the hell... "... obviously... but I never... everybody... a little bit.

PH: Well, that's true, there definitely was this attitude of... work kind of thing, where... do... people, hierarchy, and fuck... just going to do it, because I'm taking care of my family and... because I can't leave it up to these guys.

That's how we'd get anything done. You don't want to leave it up to them, so you just go do it.

BL: ... that thing...

PH: ... take it too personally...

BL: You'd just step in...

PH: You take it personally...

BL: ...

PH: That was a whole... Kaputy thing. Just mockery, the whole stupidity of it. Because we'd be living like, in Steven's idea, the whole thing... he'd be out cruising around, and we'd be slaving away, living in poverty.

BL: The thing was it was... time... if we could've been allowed to...

PH: ...

BL: ... wasn't really... told us...

PH: ...

BL: He forgot that the energy was everybody's... his too. Spiritual creatures.

PH: But we hung in there.

BL: Monetarily...

PH: ... I would've stayed longer...

BL: I was at the peak, whole...hearted community, couldn't tear myself away. I was connected, and I was actually getting popular.

PH: I actually went back after, I came back there for a year, and then I went back, because... and... were there... we can win this thing, change it... okay, so I drove back... and then they wanted my van when I got back... I'm not giving my van. They sent everybody on the council, one by one, came, and visited me, when I went back, that last week, to get my van, and then try and figure out how I could give my van, but actually keep my van, you know. It's just all this time and energy.

BL: They were hot to take it.

PH: Yeah, I said, "No way." So, I hung onto my van and... I claimed sovereign rights... can't take me off.

BL: ... things get turned around. I guess things do happen... sometimes... set... you also know... that you made connections... on your own time. If you could swing getting a vehicle, if you could get the tools that you needed from the crew, whatever, you'd go out and hang some gutter for some old lady in town, and... Fifty bucks, which I did. That became a whole dimension that was... because the power structure basically didn't... You didn't have access to that.

PH: It was... like a government...

BL: ...

PH: Exactly... it runs around the same way as...

BL: ... I think there's excuses and general misinformation...

Q: Maybe that's the way humans' organizations end up naturally.

PH: ...

BL: ... like this, and like this.

PH: ...

BL: Some of those chances...

Q: I gotta take off, unfortunately. Before I leave though, I just wanted to ask you guys, I wonder if we should pursue this thing, you guys tell some of the most amazing tales... Also, I missed part of... unfortunately. I was just wondering, the other person who's working on this, Deborah, is coming out here in a month or two. I wonder if she could bring a copy... you said you had these letters and pictures? Could she do that? Would that be okay...

BL: Copy of our things?

Q: Like, what you gave me, one of those.

BL: I've got...

Q: I've got those.

BL: I've got... the lettering's not...

Q: Well, you have my e...mail address.

PH: We could write you stuff or fax you stuff.

Q: Can I ever call you?

BL: Sure.

Q: If you want to sit down and talk some more, that would be great.

PH: ...

BL: Yeah, there was the Community Kitchen, that was a whole institution.

Q: I'd like to know some things about the kitchen and the store, how that operated.

PH: And you have... The Society of the Golden Box, which was a...

Q: Is that kind of Dubious Achievement Awards?

BL: Major blunders. We dropped the water tower on the...

PH: Major blunders.

BL: The roll the dump truck and spill the whole gravel across highway 10.

PH: That was what was so funny, because people would usually say, some of the... something like that.