

Interview with Bill Hardwick
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
March 29, 1997

Q: ... Bill, and I don't even know your last name.

A: Hardwick

Q: Well, I don't know much about your group living experience, so maybe you can tell me a little bit about your background and what led up to you becoming involved in group living.

A: It was back in the middle to late '70's that my wife and I were looking for a different way of living, trying to open up the way we were living. We started to search, and we found people who would advertise in newspapers and magazines and so on, we would answer those ads. And we found a particular ad that was being done by a person who had a masters in social work, and was interested in alternative lifestyles. He put together, by virtue of this ad, a group of 7 couples. And those 7 couples met every Tuesday night for a year. In that period of time, there was never a single absence. I've never participated in anything that was so solidly attended. We got to know each other really well. Then we decided to, at some point, stop the year long meetings, and start to expand into a community of sorts. The idea was never to have any landed property or anything, but to honor the relationships, the processes that people were going through. We were looking for, in many ways, the structures that the family would take in the 21st century, how many adults there would really be in a family, how could we get away from the old monogamous process with just having two adults, one of which was generally a dominant adult, and would in many ways cause dysfunction in the children by not giving them options, and controlling the love process, making it dependent upon what the children did. We needed a way to allow children to have a lot more love and a lot more options. So we had the idea that families would contain more than two adults, like 3 or 4 or 5, or whatever number, and the new paradigm would contain that structure. So the things that we were working on constantly were, how would those families relate to each other? We dealt with issues of jealousy, and issues of finances and sharing and space, all of the things that eventually you have to deal with when you're living together. Amazingly enough, there were several families that formed out of that, probably 5 or 6, of 3 or more adults each, that are to this day still functioning.

Q: Wow. So 20 years later, they're still going?

A: They're still going. The children that came out of those families have grown up, are in their late teens, and it's really amazing how they function. My own personal involvement was to be a co-founder of the group. My children were already pretty much grown. So I was -- my function was to coordinate and provide a newsletter, and provide functions and so on, leadership. These people are still my friends, they've been there all this time. Wonderful people.

Q: So did you become part of one of these extended families as well?

A: No, I didn't. I've pretty much been -- I've lived with them. And I have kind of looked, I've continued to search for that structure, tried to lend whatever experience I have toward helping other people to put that together for themselves. There was a long dry spell in there for me. I was out of it for 6 or 8 years, and away from anything actively, and have just in the last few years come back to start again.

Q: So you're now back involved in this whole network?

A: Yes.

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Q: Does the 21st family, does that organization still exist?

A: No. We found it was detrimental to have an organization. It was really detrimental to have a name, because -- and you've seen this happen over and over again. It happened to the Rashnishis [?]. They had structure and they had presence. They wore colored clothing that was pretty much the same color, and they had a name, and they isolated themselves and so on, so they were easy to attack. They spent a lot of time defending themselves, rather than continue with what it was that they believed in doing, and then they had a lot of internal -- they kind of blew up from the inside out when they had hierarchical problems. So I think the trend has been, for some time, to stay away from hierarchical structures at all. To stick with the individual dealing with his own world, solving his own individual problems, and sharing with other people, through transparency and honesty and caring. And shying away from names and structures and those kinds of things. Reality is that community comes from two individuals accepting a third, accepting a fourth, accepting a fifth. So many times, people have tried to bring groups together to make a community, and eventually it falls apart, because the relationships weren't created first. I think society even has the idea that you can take a whole bunch of people and put them together and make a community out of it. The problem with that is you bring so many dysfunctions into the community that it doesn't have a chance. It doesn't have a chance to grow from someplace. I think a new paradigm can't contain the old paradigm. I think it has to be something that's totally separate, but there has to be some kind of transition space in there, which we really had a hard time dealing with. There's always been this urge to step off the cliff, say, "Okay, this is the way I'm living, this is the way I should live," whatever, and so just jump right in, and try to flail around and make things work. It doesn't seem to work. We haven't discovered yet how that transition has to take place.

Q: So just so I understand the 21st Family, that was something that just existed for a year or two in the late '70's that kind of got some of these other extended families going?

A: Seventy-eight to '85. Those were a number of years.

Q: And it basically stopped because people felt like it was no longer needed? Some of these families got going and you didn't need a central organization?

A: What started to happen, actually was happening all the time, and it became more of a problem, was that through our outreach, people would come into the 21st family who weren't really looking for, who weren't necessarily concerned about how the family would be in the 21st century, who weren't necessarily concerned with the multiple relationships, and the honesty and the love and caring. They were just looking for relationships. And there were people who weren't successful having relationships, so they were bringing their own dysfunction into our midst. So eventually, we had to say, "We can't do this anymore. We have to pull it all apart, and just allow ourselves to grow in small units, and communicate with each other, and go from there."

Q: And it sounds like you did some networking with some other groups, like Carista [?] and --

A: We did.

Q: And the Herod Experiment?

A: Yeah, Synergy, and Family Tree, all those people.

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Q: And you shared some members?

A: Yeah. One of the guys who really helped a lot of these groups expand themselves is a guy by the name of Stan Bail [?]. I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He has the Human Awareness Institute in San Francisco. He lives in Santa Rosa, and has workshops almost every week of the year. These things are really heavily attended. Workshops last for 4 days, and they generally have 50 to 100 people at each one. He promotes love and openness. He was the guy -- this is not in your generation -- but he was the guy who used to introduce the Lone Ranger in the old radio shows years ago out of Chicago, and the Green Hornet, and all of the superheroes. He has a really heavy voice, like this, you know. He would say, "The Lone Ranger rides again," and this kind of thing, and he was really good, he has a tremendous, thundering voice. As a matter of fact, if you've got a couple of minutes, this has to do with what you're doing. I have a video of him on the Geraldo show. I have lots of 21st family stuff, I've got archives back here. Yeah, I found it. Those people are out of -- in fact, that's Stan right there.

Q: Lake Osweega [?] ? No, that's where one of their workshops were going to be.

A: We brought him up here.

Q: That's right, you said he was from California.

A: We brought him up here for his #1 workshop, then we headed out at Cherry Grove, and had a small one in Lake Osweega. Then, I guess I did his second workshop in Harbon [?] Hot Springs, in California. The third in the series I did in Seattle. And the fourth and final, which, in those days, there were only four, was at Harbon Hot Springs again. There was 111 people at the last one.

Q: And at his workshops, what does he talk about? About new families?

A: No, he doesn't really talk about new families. His main concern -- he calls them "sex workshops," or he used to call them sex workshops, until the conservative process came along and made it necessary for him to change. But what he tried to do, and has been very successful at, is a little bit of what he was talking about there, is that people will come to a sex workshop, and they'll go through the entire series, and by the time they're finished with the series, they'll discover that sex wasn't really the thing they came there for. What they came there for was to find out more about the honesty that they have in their lives. The fact that we're all alike. What he really, I think, tries to show us, is that when you love someone else, you're actually loving yourself. Because we all have the same senses. We see, we smell, we taste, for the most part, everything we like is the same, and everything we dislike is the same, in a very general sense. And by showing us those commonalities, it allows us to love people better. More people, better. Because we can empathize instead of keeping everything projected out away from us. When you're with people and you really know how to be intimate with people, then you can be closer with everyone. It's kind of like learning a skill that our culture has taken away from us, for a couple of thousand years. Getting back to that skill is wonderful. I mean, the people I know, the men and women, we don't shake hands anymore, we hug. And we kiss, and we share our lives, we share everything that goes on inside of us with each other. It's so much more -- you never go back. You just don't go back.

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Q: What was the community's reaction to the 21st family in the early years?

A: I think in those years, straight society always looked at alternatives as people who were sexually decadent, and that they had no morals, and that they were swingers, those kinds of things. We were constantly working against the image of swinging, which was not what we were about at all. But the swinging population was so large in the '70's. If you belonged to a swinger's group, you could start in Seattle, and you could travel 50 miles a day, and spend a night in a different bed, with a different person, all the way to Miami. It was a huge network, unbelievably, and it was all -- it was pretty much a male-dominated hierarchical process. Even the idea of "wife-swapping," the statement was, "This is something I own, and I'll trade you something I own for something you own for awhile," was totally against what we were talking about, what we were trying to do. I think Stan did a really good job there of saying what it was that we were trying and still are trying to do.

Q: Has any sort of organization emerged now in the '90's like the 21st family?

A: I think the Network for New Culture, the extension of [unintelligible] . . . was definitely emerging. There are smaller groups here, there, and elsewhere, that have learned a lot of lessons over the last 10, 15, 20 years, and are not -- they don't have the exposure, they don't want the exposure that groups were getting in those days, because they don't want to put up with the problems that they get from the public.

Q: So Network for a New Culture, that's a Zeg [?] inspired group here in the United States that has chapters around the country?

A: Kind of. Again, you're searching for structure. There isn't any.

Q: Well there must be a little bit of structure, because there's a newsletter, right?

A: There was. There were a few issues, and now it's gone. Now we're going to do it up here. We'll do one in the next month or so. That's one of the things we're working on right now, is publishing another newsletter. But it'll be there -- we spent a year, some of the people who we meet with, we would get together in large groups, and the big thing was somebody wanted a vision statement. Out of the old paradigm, there's a need to have a vision statement. What is our goal? How can we say what we're about? I always thought that was kind of funny. What they discovered over a period that year, was that if you are experimenting, and you're moving in a direction that hasn't yet been lived or done, then you can't have a mission statement. A vision statement is a scientific process. Like your research: you pick a theme, or an idea, or whatever, something that you want to prove. And then you work toward that. If you don't know what it is that you're working toward out there, you can't even envision it. So, that requires, I think, even more bravery, more daring. Because we don't really know what it is, if there is such an idea, or utopian way of living, we don't know what it is. And sometimes it's better that it be unstated. Because that's certainly -- if you had 50 people working on a vision statement, each person would come up with a different vision statement. You try to integrate them, put them all together, best job you possibly can. Get somebody who's really good at putting information together, and come up with one comprehensive vision statement, and you put it out to those 50 people, and they all reject it. Because it has aspects. One of the things that we're really having a hard time with right now, in the way of integrating the Zeg philosophy in the United States is the difference in the two cultures. Their culture,

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they have a totally different history than we do. They have the ability to follow. They have the ability to get together and work toward a common goal. It's much easier for them to link up themselves and work as one. The cooperative process works really well over there. It doesn't work in that way in the United States, because everybody here wants to be an individual. So we have that process working here. How do you overcome the idea that you need the ego thing. Why do you need to have the ego thing? "Well, because we've been stung so many times." You get cults out there, and we look at a cult, and we say, "Well, that cult is there because somebody just stupidly followed someone. They all went together and did this thing. Why didn't they think? Why didn't they bring themselves back, each one of them individually, and say, 'What am I really doing here?'" And would they have done that if they had shown their individuality? But then when you look at them and you say, "Okay, these are educated people who are doing this, really well-educated people, and you'd think that they would have --" and then we really don't understand, we don't know where they are, we don't know what they're thinking was. But it's -- I don't know. If you don't know where you're going, then it's more like you're going away from something, and that's maybe what most of us do when we work for a community outside the norm. We know that what we're doing is dishonest, and we know that we're, at this point in time, evaluating ourselves as human beings on the basis of external garbage, like money, and status, and all those other kinds of thing. We're not concentrating on learning the things that make us good together, that make community a wonderful thing to participate in. I'm not condoning the idea of going back someplace, because I don't think there was any place back there that was any different, because the hierarchical process has been with us for such a long period of time. I think men and women working together in some way, where there's equality, as a sense of equal human beings, not equality in the sense that we all have the same abilities and so on. I think where we're looking back, we're pushing so hard to live up to these external processes. People identify themselves by their externals, not by their internals. They identify themselves by what kind of watch they wear, what kind of furniture they have, what kind of house they have, car, what job they have, what kind of social organization they belong to, how much money they give to charity. All of these things are what people are using to identify themselves with, instead of who they really are inside. I guess that's something that we want to get away from. So we can identify things to get away from. We have a hard time identifying things to go toward. I think it's a frustration that creates communities outside the norm.

Q: Are you familiar at all with The Children of God?

A: No.

Q: It's a Christian communal group that practices, I don't know what they call it, open marriage, or whatever. But it's kind of different, because it's a Christian group, and not many Christian groups are like that. But they're all over the country, in little pockets here and there. It's kind of an interesting group.

A: I should think so. It would be cool. It sounds like an oxymoron.

Q: Christian and open marriage?

A: Yeah.

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Q: They believe that there's this law of love, that comes from the Bible, that you should love everybody, and that applies to sexuality as well as other types of love, I guess.

A: Well, they've glommed on to something from the past, and they're trying to make that work.

Q: It's a real unusual group. I really liked them a lot, though, they seemed like really wonderful people. What has been the best part for you, being involved in the 21st family, and this sort of -- ?

A: The people. The people are wonderful. They're open. I love it when people are truthful to me. I like to see their tears, I like to see their anger, I like to see their fears, you know. It's so wonderful to be able to associate yourself with other human beings and know that you're not separate. It's an inclusive process for me.

Q: Has there been a downside, a flipside at all to that, parts that have been hard or difficult?

A: The hard part, I think, and this is almost universal from my experience, the hard part is overcoming years of doing the same thing over and over again. You try to stretch yourself, or at least I do, to experience more, and to be more, and the old feeling from childhood -- you know, your mother's watching, your father's watching -- those things used to come for me a lot, when I was trying to transition. They don't come up for me anymore. I really feel quite good about having completed most of that transition. And I feel good about being able, now, to concentrate on growing, rather than dealing with the past. So the rough part is when you're standing, two people here, that you really care for a lot, you love. And maybe one of these people hasn't quite got the idea of nonmonogamy. And the other person has a pretty good idea of nonmonogamy. So you've got three people at three different stages of growth, realization of what's going on. And to protect -- you love this person, and you want to protect this person from hurt and from fear and from jealousy, from anything, really, because you love them. And, so there's a tendency to lie to her, to make her feel better. Or to say, "I love you much more than I love her." Those kinds of things. Those are very difficult things to get past for people who are transitioning from the old paradigm. Those are things people work on all the time. There's some really great books out about transparency. I think one is called Radical Transparency. It floats around the group.

Q: When you say, "the group," do you have a group that you meet with regularly?

A: Yes. Well, not regularly. We get together. What we've been doing lately is on the last weekend of the month, we'll go to somebody's house and lock ourselves in from Friday evening until Sunday evening. And we'll deal with the problems of just living together for over the weekend. We do a lot of processing, a lot of heart to heart stuff. We do what the Zeg group calls "forum," where everybody sits around in a circle. You sit quietly until somebody feels like they would like to get up and say something about what's going on with them, personally. And they get up, and they get in the middle of the group -- part of the rule is that you need to keep walking around, continue to move, because it seems like physical movement and walking confuses you to the point where, you can stumble and find out some real things that come up for you. I don't know if you're familiar with the process of automatic writing? The first automatic writing I ever did was reading a book with my left hand, and writing with my right hand while I was reading. This is kind of similar to that, you're doing two different things at once -- walking -- it's like they say, "I can't really walk and chew gum at the same time." But when you're

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walking and talking, around in a circle, with people watching and listening to you intensely, because that's the rule. You concentrate on the person in the middle of the room. You don't talk to anybody, you don't think about anything that's going on around there -- everything's here. And when you're standing in the middle of the room, you have all this attention from all of these people who are really, really concerned about your solving whatever it is that's really come up for you. And so you walk around, and you talk it out. You keep bringing up deeper and deeper stuff that comes to the surface as you talk. Nobody else is talking to you, they're just listening. So there's no process of dialogue, there's no process of whatever. And the moment you start to proselytize, or start to say something that even smacks of philosophizing or whatever, there is one person sitting over here, who it's his job to monitor. You can't do that. As soon as you start to do that, "Uh-uh. Let's go back now." I've seen some amazing things take place in forum. That's a standard for Zeg. They have forum, sometimes every day, sometimes three or four times a week.

Q: Have you been to Germany and visited?

A: No, but I have a lot of friends who have, and I'd like to do that one time. I'm still of the feeling that Zeg is good, and it's good for Germany -- we have to do something to overcome this ego problem, we have to do something different from what they're doing, and I'm not sure what that is. And I think we're all concerned enough to try to find out what it is. We had a workshop here a couple of weeks ago, up at Anderson Lodge at Washington, 22 people got together, and Rotrab [?] Rosburg [?] came over here from Zeg. She speaks English. She was our facilitator from Thursday through Sunday night. She learned a lot about Americans, and the way Americans deal with each other. She's a very talented woman, does a wonderful job with facilitating. She had to have an American counterpart, though, a fellow by the name of John Osle [?] out of California. But it was very intense, and very gratifying. Came out of that so high, it was unbelievable. It was a great feeling.

Q: So do you see yourself becoming part of an extended family that shares space together, or some sort of communal group?

A: I'd love that. That would be great. But I think you have to be ready for it.

Q: So that's what the forums and all are preparing you for?

A: Yeah. I think this is something you're going to see a lot of over the next few years. It's really going to develop at an increasing pace. You can see it in the politics of the United States right now, in this president and vice president that we have. Part of the things we do have to do with a new way of dealing with problems, problem-solving. This particular president, he has come up against the majority, or the old paradigm, in that he has -- they are trying to make him fulfill everything he ever said, they're treating it as a promise. So if he says something one day, and a year later, he says something different, that makes him a bad president. And what he's trying to show the people is that, if you say something one year, and you say something different the next year, it's because there's been a change. It's because things are changing all the time. And the majority are trying to hold people to an old paradigm that didn't include change. And when it did include change, change only came in two ways -- one, over an extended period of time, gradually, and the other traumatically. That was war, or famine, or it was something -- those were the only things that caused change, before, under the old paradigms of

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presidents and so on, politics. So it's happening, and it's -- you can hear it in the news, if you're listening, to people starting to become more aware, more open, and in many ways, more compassionate, I want to say. We didn't used to see that.

Q: So do you see the 21st century family as being more of an extended family?

A: Oh yeah, you bet. You know, another good tape that you might want to get is a tape that -- it's a lecture by Bruce Lipton. Bruce is a microbiologist, and we include him every year in our summer camps and the things that we have. We're going to have a summer camp this year, it's going to be a 10 day affair, right off the trolley park outside of Portland. And Stan Dale [?] comes every year and talks to us, and this will be Bruce's third year. He has a way of explaining on a cellular level, what community is all about. It's like growth in the human body requires that cells cooperate. And he projects that on to the surface of the earth -- this very thin and very delicate environment, almost as thin as a line, if you look at a picture of the earth. Our atmosphere only goes out not only the width of a pencil mark, if you draw it around the earth. It's very delicate and very minute, in reality. And he talks about cells cooperating through everything. All the cells in that tree over there had to cooperate to form what's there. And he sees that as being the way that we're going to go eventually in order to form the cooperative community on the face of the earth. We have to cooperate, we can't continue to compete. In competition, there's always a number of losers. Not just one, a number of losers. With each one of those losers there is a mass of waste. But I'm getting off the subject.

Q: I don't think so. So he talks a lot about community?

A: Yes he does. On a cellular level.

Q: That's really interesting, I've never heard of that. I'm trying to think if I left out any of our questions. This doesn't fit our normal paradigm of a group living together communal, so I don't know if I've forgotten anything that I should ask about. Well, have any of these extended families been involved in home school at all?

A: No, but there are some communities here in the Portland area. What I'm going to do, is I'm going to steal you over to Cascade House.

Q: Where John lives?

A: Yeah. And John will show you a couple of communities in this area who have been around quite awhile and who do those kinds of things. So that will probably give you some more specific information that you're looking for.

Q: That would be great, because I don't know much about cooperative groups in Portland. **A:** John can do that. He puts out the Community Connection newspaper.

Q: Yeah, that's how Jeff Cozney [?] led me to him. Do you know Jeff?

A: Oh yeah. Jeff's a beautiful guy. He was a speaker at our last summer camp, last year. Jeff's a great guy. When he first came to summer camp, I'd never met him before, and I was kind of direction things I'd been working on, the physical layout, for a couple months, getting everything ready. He came, and he

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came a couple of days early, to the summer camp, and he was living in a tent out there. He came up to me one day, and he said, "What would you like me to do? I'm here to work."

Q: Sounds like Jeff.

A: Oh yeah, he's a wonderful worker. I said, "Well, there's a bunch of glass to clean up." I had a real long section, probably 80, 90 feet alongside this building that I needed all the glass picked up from broken paints and stuff like that, so that none of the kids would walk on it. So he says, "Okay." So he comes over with a bucket and a shovel and started doing it. Unlike a lot of people who do work before camps like that, Jeff was truly dedicated. He was very, very dedicated. Everything he did, he did with loving care. Everything. And I watched him work. And when he got finished with that, I felt that I really couldn't put this man to doing another menial task. So I said, "Are you an artist? Can you draw?" And he said, "Well, um, I can draw a little bit." I said, "Okay, I've got a trolley car over here, and what I'd like you to do is I'd like you to take the whole side of that trolley car, and put something on there that's entertaining. Enjoy yourself. Draw some things." So he did. He says, "Do you have paints?" I said, "Sure," and I got him some paints and things. He got himself a stool, and he went over there and he sat by that trolley car, and he started drawing things, white and red, all these different colors he would use, and they were really witty sayings, with arrows pointing this way and that way. It was beautiful. He did this fantastic job of all this really great stuff, and the kids would come and watch him. They'd want to paint too, and he'd get a little spot over here like that, and he'd let him paint on that. He'd cover it up later, but he let them. He was so much fun to watch. Just really a nice guy. And I didn't even know he was going to be a presenter. But that's probably just the sort of stuff he wanted to be doing, though.