

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: This is March 7, 1996, and I am interviewing Jeanne, who lived in community in religious community called New Creation Fellowship and I'm going to ask her a few questions. Jeanne, in what communities did you live? He uses the term community, commune style in here, but I never thought of, I guess in the strict sense of the word it was a commune but when I think of commune usually I think of ... and the hippies. When I think of New Creation or Regal Place, I think of community, Christian community

JH: We called ourselves intentional Christians.

Q: Yes, okay, well that what we're going to use. And did you live in any other besides New Creation?

JH: No, I actually started in late teens getting to know people in New Creation in October of 1974 and joined as a member in January of 1976. It's always been called New Creation and it always been here in Newton.

Q: You're anticipating my ... Okay, you remember, it was located here in Newton. What year, in year was it founded, 1973? And the ideology of the group was Christian?

JH: Right.

Q: I know it identifies with the Mennonite church now. You were not ethnically Mennonite?

JH: No, at the time it was formed, it was not a member of general conference of Mennonite Church or Mennonite Church in conference. But many of the people had Mennonite backgrounds. It was founded on Christian ideology, but also people who had a very strong social issue, peace, justice concerns.

Q: Who were the ...

JH: Well, it was Steve and Wanda Schmidt, Jake and Irene Pauls, Fred and Donna Kletsy, Dave and Joanne Janson, and Gene Stoltz..., I think

Q: Was one of the originals?

JH: I think he was.

Q: What about Randy and [Geaneil]? I though they probably said they were one of the founders. And what about Anita and George?

JH: I think they actually were all part of ... But very soon Randy and [Geaneil] and the laymens

Q: Anita and George

JH: Although, actually, they may have been part of the pre-New Creation groups, because there were two smaller groups, one called the Bridge and I forget what the other one was called, that came together to form New Creation. So they might have part of those earlier ones.

Q: The Bridge and another one, I never heard of that

JH: I know Gene was a part of the first one, but he was, by the time I came around in '74, he was already not a member here.

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Q: As the way I understood it, I'll clear this up with Dorothy, is that he had to join New Creation Fellowship in order to be able to marry Dorothy because Virgil at Reba Place wouldn't allow her to marry outside community and then he was not, he didn't really want them to get married because he didn't think they were a good match or something. I don't know.

JH: I think he was an early member, but like I said, by the time I came in October of '74, I don't remember him being around.

Q: Interesting. He may have been back. He may have quit ... and had this community marriage anyway. Okay. I'm sure we'll get to that. I'm interested, you said a pre-New Creation group, The Bridge, and another group.

JH: (yes)

Q: Were they living in community at the time?

JH: What were they called?

(Doorbell rings)

Q: I'll stop this.

Q: Either we're off. Okay, we weren't taping it. Maybe it will come to you. Were they Bethel people or were they living in community?

JH: No, they really weren't living in community, but I think they were trying to explore all that. They had small groups together and things like that.

Q: But do you think they knew each other from Bethel?

JH: Sure.

Q: And that's how they got. ...

JH: And they lived in this neighbor block. Randy and Geaneil lived on the 1200 block up there. And Steve and Wanda lived in this house actually right here. And, oh boy, who should you ask about that? I don't remember who would know. Well, Randy, but he's ...

Q: Well, I could still ask him just for, you know. That's true, because..

JH: But there were two smaller groups who actually disbanded about the time New Creation was forming.

Q: And did most of them then join New Creation?

JH: Some did. But I don't really know if the [Laymens] and the [Craybles] ever did actually join New Creation after the '73 trip.

Q: So The Bridge and the other community were not, they didn't have holdings in common.

JH: No.

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Q: They were just like a house church.

JH: That may have been one of the reasons they went off that direction and New Creation went here. One of the key events that I've always heard about that's passed down through the lore that helped New Creation was that these people went to Reba Place in a van in February of '73. Just had this marvelous experience up there together and this great love for one another and so made the decision actually to become a community around that trip, or after they came home, or when they came home, or whatever. And so that New Creationship, they started looking for houses in this neighborhood, and things like that. I think Steve and Wanda already lived here.

Q: So these people, it's like Steve and Wanda, that they would have been in their twenties..

JH: Yeah

Q: Early twenties, kind of early married.

JH: I'd say mid-twenties, probably.

Q: Okay, yeah, they were just a little bit older than I am.

JH: ... Because like Steve and Wanda had been in ... in Chicago and come back from that. And ... had been in Africa with ... and come back. So mid-twenties probably. A little bit later even.

Q: Yeah, okay, why, the next question, why did so many people flock to communal living or to this particular community? What was... Well, you said that one reason was that they had gone to Reba Place and had such a positive experience.

JH: Well...

Q: How large did the community get at its peak?

JH: I think at one point we owned maybe eleven different houses people lived in, ten maybe, or not ten different houses but different households or living units.

Q: And how many lived in each one of those?

JH: Well, ... household was the big thing. So there maybe 10-15 people in a household. But then that got a little sociologically complex. So we started buying some more properties around here. So lots of ten different living units it might be a single person. Living with a household, living with a family, or living in an apartment of whatever.

Q: So would there have been 150 people at one time?

JH: No, no, no. Much smaller than that. Adults probably around, I don't know. Actually, you're talking about communal membership, not just the people who came to the church...

Q: Right.

JH: to worship. Call it 35 or so. I don't think it ever got any bigger than that really.

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Q: Thirty-five adults at one time. But there would have been more than 35 adults who would have been members here.

JH: Oh, yeah. In and out. I'd say 35, maybe.

Q: What drew them to this particular commune? Was it community?

JH: Ideology, for some. Gordon had read the New Testament and Acts and thought, "This is the kind of lifestyle that Jesus was talking about, and that they lived in the early days. And so, I think for some, it was ideology. This is how we should live. I think for ... like myself. I belonged to some really small active Bible studies in college and when I got out of college and came to Newton, I just couldn't find anything that seemed to be really active, faith wise. Churches didn't really fit where I was at. So I think I was looking for closer relationship with people who were trying to be faithful and I suppose if we were really honest with ourselves we were also affected by fads of the time and communal living or thinking in that time was probably much more acceptable than it is now, in the '90's and the '80's. So we were probably, people were more open to it, I think. I think one of the reasons I came was that people here modeled an acceptance and a love and a concern that I didn't find in a lot of other churches. A real concern about faithfulness, but without having authoritarian rule, kind of stuff, I think. Oh, some people probably thought it wasn't very authoritarian...

Q: Did it ever become more, more of that developed, authoritarianism as time went on, in your views?

JH: I think we thought that off and on. And there were certainly people who felt abused by the unwritten, unspoken power of the Elders. That they were maybe counting more than some other people's words in a decision making discretion. So I think ... struggled with that. But very early on, I think, one of the beliefs this was all founded on was the fact that it was priesthood of believers and everybody had input, was equal in the sight of God. And women were some of the first Elders. Men and women both. So women were also included in that.

Q: Did that change?

JH: Well, it did. And I'm not exactly sure why it did. Certainly Reba had an influence on that, because their position was that women should not be Elders.

Q: Was that always the case at Reba too, as you remember?

JH: I think that maybe evolved for them too. I don't know if they've ever had women Elders, or not. But certainly their position now in that is much more clear to me. And again, I speaking of this from a distance, 'cause I'm really not in touch with them, but they seem to be much more clear about that now than I ever thought they were.

Q: About man Elders?

JH: Yeah, and women's roles. I think New Creation has always been more egalitarian with men and women's roles, but, and men and women have always shared things in terms of childcare, and dishes, and workout, and all that. But somehow, we've always had more men Elders than women, always, for whatever reason that is. And lots of women, at different points in the church, were asked, "Please be an

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Elder. Please take a position of leadership on the council.” and whatever and it was hard getting them to do that.

Q: How many Elders did you have at one time?

JH: I think four.

Q: Four, and were they elected or kind of chosen by a committee or how were they ...

JH: Well, see that's the other thing. Decision making at New Creation was always supposed to be by consensus so that somebody might suggest a person and then everybody had to come a consensus on that, had to come to agree on that. And you could say, "Look, I'm too close to this decision. I don't think I can be very fair about it." or whatever or "I have my own issues to work with before I can even get to this decision. So you go ahead and make it." So, you know, the whole group would've had to agree who was an Elder. That's basically true.

Q: In a public meeting?

JH: Oh, we had meetings all the time, yeah, sure. We had two basic forms for decision making. One was the small group. Everyone was a part of a small group, and that probably was your household, for the most part, and maybe some other people. And then you were also a part of a member's meeting. So the small group usually met once a week and the members met once a week. And the members made all kinds of decisions. How much should we have for our food budget? How should we be allowed to spend on vacation? Should so-and-so be allowed to quit their job and do ... here in the community? How were worships going? Who should be our next Elder? There would be lots of beforehand meetings with individuals and whatever. But there were lots of things that really were hammered out members' meetings, which could go 'til eleven o'clock at night.

Q: What night of the week was that?

JH: I remember Tuesday being members' meeting.

Q: Like a school night. What would you do with the children?

JH: See here's the other thing. In those days too there were lots of young kids and when you lived in a household situation and your small group was there, then you could just have a monitor on upstairs or if the meeting was next door, you could have one the younger high school girls in the neighborhood babysit, or whatever. We often started the meetings at eight o'clock those times so that those kids could already be in bed or pretty much on their way before the meeting started. And single people didn't really like that because they still had to get up and go to work the next morning. And, you know, course the Elders, and other people had to be up working too, but we tried to accommodate the children as much as possible. But there was lots and lots of time spent in meetings. And people were accusing us of ... spending so much time focusing on our own agendas that we didn't have time to minister to the world. But if you can imagine how much energy it would take to come to a consensus. I mean it's hard enough with husbands and wives, and then you get twenty-some people trying to decide something.

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Q: Yeah, right. I've heard it would take a lot of time, but you're actually laying the groundwork for less future problems if you do it by consensus. And so you really don't take that much more time because you don't have to hash it out later.

JH: I don't know if we ever got to that point. On some things, yes, but then you're always having new people come and ...

Q: Was it easy to incorporate new people? Did they feel, did they immediately jump in? Or was there sort of a once a community was established then there were members who had been there longer than others were there...

JH: Are you talking about the communal part of this started in '73.

GH: ... about Legos, wasn't it?

JH: Logos?

GH: Legos. It was related to the Lego pieces, the toy.

Q: It's a mystery. We'll get to the bottom of this and then I'll let you know. I'll call a ... Okay, I'm sure other things will come up. I thought I knew a lot about this community, but I'm realizing that there is a lot of pieces here.

GH: Co-Lego...

Q: Co-Lego?, yea, Gordon's right. Okay, how did you get involved in community?

JH: I moved to town in 1974 in August having experienced these Bible studies back in college at K-State. Looking for a deeper kind of a fellowship thing. But coming from a Catholic background and not finding that to be where I was at, didn't want to go to a Catholic church here. Visited some Baptist church. So I went to the Faith and Life Bookstore and I asked, "Do you know if somebody studies?" and what's-his-name?

GH: Ralph.

JH: Ralph Weber said, "No, but there's this group called New Creation." This is crazy.

Q: That's all right. I don't think it'll. It's fine. No. That's just the plastic bag going into the microwave or something.

JH: Um, told me that New Creation and he said, "You know, this is a group where they all kind of meet together and live together and share finances." That's ... qay more than I want to. But he gave me Ann Weather's name, but as weeks worn on, I mean I have this name and I finally thought, "Heck with it. You know, I'll just call 'em and..."

Q: Were you living in an apartment on your own?

JH: Yeah, I moved to town to work for SRS. I would have been in an apartment on my own. So I called Ann Weather... and she told me when worship was. And I just drove up one Sunday.

Q: Where were they meeting then?

JH: The five hundred house on west 11th.

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Q: Okay.

JH: And that was a household. We had households then... Let's see, who was there? Jake and Irene, and Fred and Donna, and Gene, I think. And they had kids that were elementary age and pre-school, babies.

Q: But, they, other people were members, right, and lived elsewhere?

JH: Steve and Wanda were members and they lived down the street here. And Dave and Joanne were members and they lived back across the alleyway there. So, yeah, those were the members, and then like Ann, oh Ann was a member. She became a member. So she was already a member of the ...?

GH: (says something in background)

JH: I don't know. I'd have to think back. I think Stackleys ... they lived on 2nd Street then, but they were already around.

Q: Oh, that's right, Marianne. Were they members?

JH: Not then, but they became members.

Q: They did?

JH: Yeah. And before I actually became a member, Len and Gene Lots... became members, I mean, there were just a lot of people in those early days. So, let's see, I came to worship, and Fred and Donna Kletsky happened to be from my neck of the woods. I came from ... and they came from ..., 13 miles away. I knew their aunt, his aunt and uncle. That must have been the phrase in which it leads together. So they sort of legitimized this thing for me. My ... if people from western Kansas can be a part of this, maybe it's not so weird after all.

Q: But your initial feeling when Ralph told you about this in the bookstore was?

JH: ... than I wanted.

Q: This group was weird, okay.

JH: Well, it may not have even been. Yeah, I think I thought it was kind of weird. But I also thought, "This is more than I want."

GH: (says something in the background)

JH: Just want a little simple. Do you guys wanna eat in the dining room?

GH: Yeah.

Q: And the family is exiting.

JH: So then, went down over there and we all went out to eat and it was like, they seemed so real to me and so down to earth and so loving and just sort of open, just normal. And I think some of the Bible studies I was a part of back in college, it was like to be a Christian you had to be this way. You had to witness and you had to do this, you had to do that, and you had to do this. And I never fit the structure very well. And so here are some people who seem to be, they didn't fit this box real well either, but it just seemed more genuine and more real and more, I felt more accepted right off the bat. So I just started coming and started coming and I realized I was more real as a person with these folks. I was

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more honest about who I was, about what kind of troubles I really had. I was involved in a relationship with a somebody that I was kind trying to figure out whether I should stay in or get out of. And back in college, you know, the word was gee this is not a quote Christian person. So you just need to end it. Where as here I felt like people really wept with me and struggled with me and I thought, "God, well is it? Could this be right or not or. And we're open to talking to him... So there just felt like a whole, like a whole bunch of acceptance and understanding and yet a fairly clear call to yeah, you know, what it means to follow God and ... You know worship and be honest, and live simply and I mean, sort of a whole 'nother set of rules in a way that ones I felt like I could maybe grab onto.

Q: But those were, those came with the territory, after you started getting to know, you didn't come to the community with "I want to live in community. I want to live simply."

GH: No way.

Q: "I want this kind of involvement of other people in my life."

JH: Gordon didn't.

Q: Gordon's was a different story.

JH: Gordon read Acts and said, "This is how people ought to live, and this is how I ought to live."

Q: That's right, the Acts.

JH: "So here I am."

Q: The Acts.

JH: Not me. I came kicking and screaming. I did not want to show my finances. I did not want, you know, not be able to buy clothes except at the second hand store, you know.

Q: Or sew them.

JH: It's not for me. Those were hard things. My family did not understand it. So they were not supportive. People at work were not supportive. In fact, I felt like, I either needed to, and I also thought that if I joined the community it probably meant saying no to that relationship too and the possibility for marriage. So I felt like when I joined the community pretty well leaving everything else and putting all my eggs in this basket. That this is were I felt like I was growing as a Christian. Not that I never felt loved by my family, or anything like that, I really did. And I felt really torn that they asked me questions about it. That just felt pretty safe.

Q: Yeah. So it took you about a year and a half so to..

JH: (Laughs)

Q: Do you think you would have done that?

JH: How many people did that sooner? Not me.

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Q: Do you think that was because you had these other relationships with like your family that may not have understood it. You would have joined earlier and had been easier?

JH: Probably.

Q: So it wasn't you so much?

JH: It might have been. But I think I had a pretty strong will. I mean I wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Q: Did you know Gordon when you joined?

JH: Oh, no. He wasn't here when I joined.

Q: Oh, okay, so it wasn't as if.

JH: No, when I came here...

Q: Sorry, sorry! A really good-looking guy and thought, "Hmm!"

JH: Actually there were no males, there was one male, a single male when I was coming around and I...

Q: Wasn't interested?

JH: No I wasn't and I also thought, "I maybe saying that I'm going to be single if I do this."

Q: I was, that was my next question.

JH: I feared that I might be. I knew there were guys in other communities and all, but I really..

Q: Because you thought you would live in community for the rest of you life.

JH: Exactly.

Q: That this was it.

JH: Exactly. My commitment was forever.

Q: Okay, you, you, one of the next ones is to ask whether you had any predisposition to community. Do you think, I mean, you said that your parents wouldn't understand this so you, you're like.

JH: Well..

Q: Your birth family or?

JH: I think they did.

Q: Did you have any relatives that were nuns or...

JH: Well see, there's the thing, I think when I was growing up, you know, people don't say this, but I think in the old Catholic church of 40 years ago, if you were a nun or a priest, you were a little better, if you want. That you were more, somehow holy, or acceptable or, it was just a better choice to make. People who couldn't make that choice, well, heck, they went ahead and got married or whatever. So I

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think I had on my own shoulders put that I really follow God's will, in fact I used to be afraid of this, if I really follow God's rule, I have to be a nun. This is what God will require of me.

Q: Interesting.

JH: Even whether I want to do it or not. Yeah, so I kind of had a very negative view about God being a judge and an authoritarian and telling me what I need to do and no matter how I felt about it, this was the right thing. None of my family or none of the priests, but my family was very religious in Catholic faith and Catholics were very important, going to church and the sacraments and kind of living our righteous life. That was emphasized in our church. Being good was very important. So, I suppose one of my ... was to drop out of the Catholic church and at the same time cannot give up on God, I guess.

Q: Did you drop out when you went to K-State?

JH: Yeah, I went...

Q: That was kind of the break.

JH: about the first year and then I started going to average... churches. Actually I had, what I called then, a religious conversion there. Where I was in a Baptist church went forward ... and just had an amazing change in perspective, but I didn't question in the Catholic Church for a while.

Q: ... understanding that's what you did. You ... to the church, did you?

JH: The way that folks coming out saying, you know between this, this, and this I mean you know this just didn't call ... but I didn't really get involved with the new ... and with the Catholic things I really didn't get involved much. That was sort of small ... I had already plugged into rather than ... I mean I did the Campus Crusade stuff for a while

Q: Did you?

JH: Yeah, again I ... box but I tried but I had too many, too many questions and too many ... and I think I sat in my College room and all I was trying to prove that I could be truly Christian too.

Q: (laughs) ... think Christian.

JH: There were a lot of us doing that.

Q: (laughs) So anyway, what was your free ... in your ...

JH: I think there was a strong face, so in that sense I guess, you wouldn't believe how close Catholicism and these Mennonites are in some ways. Maybe because I think they in ... just to church on Sunday mornings, then for both it's more of a ethnic familiar expectations from w...

Q: Ah, and it was that way for our families,

JH: And good works count, and lifestyle counts, as supposed to just be saved by grace

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Q: Yeah, maybe, maybe much, yeah right

JH: So I really think that my movement towards God that happened there and that my family and my parents really ingrained to me and they always prayed for us and I think that probably had some kind of effect

Q: So maybe it was a way to be faithful and to rebel, you know? That's interesting now

JH: What?

Q: Your interpretation of that, 'cause I thought of that too. Ahem, did any kind of books or literature like influence you when you read

JH: ... to coming ?

Q: Yeah

JH: Hmm, good question. I think not, prior to first becoming involved, but when I once became involved with it. ... one day me and Jackson living together ... and there were articles and some of the Christian magazines about ... our own papers, you know. So I think that I was immersed in a different kind of mind step than I was before. Lot of devotional kinds of books and things, we got a shelf down there and every time I looked at that shelf I felt like feed on high places. I think that had to do with personal faith, but somehow ...

Q: If you think about the books rather than ...

(Both speaking at the same time)

JH: Can we go down?

Q: Yeah, we can do down. O.K. so you joined the community ...

JH: But see, I really didn't join, because of the ideology anyway. So it was the people.

Q: Oh, that's interesting. O.K.

JH: It wouldn't have mattered what books, as much as the people.

Q: O.K. so you joined them and led the books with the people you liked were reading

JH: Yeah, exactly

Q: Yeah I understand that. Because you liked the people if they were doing this and that

JH: Hmm, and you admire them

Q: Yeah, yeah. So when you joined in, you said January of '74,

JH: Yes, well I was starting to come around in October '74

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Q: and then you joined in January '76. O.K. what was that like? I mean how did you finally after a year and a half make that decision?

JH: Hmm, well I think that in those days it was not acceptable to be a part of a community without joining. I mean we did not have, I should say a member of the community, membership we defined as those people that would ... members. Those were the ones ... membership in that year, in those years ... So that if I really wanted to be part of that church, I had to join it and all what that meant, all ... that that meant. So I really felt like if I want to be a part of these people's lives and this experience I have to join, I mean, I can't just come and worship on Sunday mornings and view. I think probably I spent a month after my first visit I probably had already ... let me in and ...

Q: Without being a member you could be in a small group? You just couldn't go to member meetings and vote? Or you could go to member meetings and not vote? Or what kind of status did you have?

JH: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I went to small groups

GH: (in the background) They were our neighbors, remember?

(all talking at the same time)

JH: O.K., anyway, I went to our neighbors

GH: (in the background) ...

JH: O.K.

Q: and worshiped services on Sundays.

JH: and worshiped. Oh, I had ...

Q: (at the same time) a social event, yeah.

JH: ...or whatever, yeah. But in these member meetings certain distinction were made, you know.

Q: But didn't have to bring any communal property into the... So they didn't have any kind of authority over your life, or how do you..., other than what you gave to them, perhaps.

JH: Well, when you join it was expected that you would bring all you property and throw in

Q: When you joined...

JH: but no I didn't ... to ...

Q: Was it at all a difficult decision for you to finally to it? Or was it originally relieve, or fear or what, what were your feelings.

JH: Both. It was a difficult decision. I was very relieved to have to decide in it, it felt like the right decision. So, it was hard, but it was good. It also helped that my family kind of went to their own religious experience around this time, and they became more open to what I was doing, too. So, like my sister who'd come and stay for a week-end from college and just be supportive and be there for me. ... happy days commune, but .., you know So I think that helped me to deal with it too, but I think you finally come to a point where there is a ... where we have to decide if we're doing it, or not. So, I think it really ...

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Q: So, was it like a gradual thing or was it one time you advanced the plan with the ... 'I'm joining it'?

JH: No, it was gradual.

Q: You kind of kept from ...

JH: I remember this was a very, I remember thinking 'why don't I get my car payed off first?' I told Jane that, "I pay off my car first". Well, gee when I came the car was turned over to the community. But I think I thought 'well,... if I ever believe, after it occurred to me that I might leave, if I ever leave I have my car?' And then I found out after I got here that if you left you wouldn't necessarily leave with everything you came here.

Q: You would leave with a ... Like that's another one of those questions.

JH: You didn't know what you would leave with.

Q: You didn't sign a contract that you got access to...

JH: Oh no

Q: But that was still, that was O.K.?

JH: Yeah, that's how it was. A lot of people regretted that later what they did. As you said. We threw everything in and...

Q: What, I mean I can see Sally. What about if you came with your grandmother's gibe and broach? That's been in your family for...

JH: There were personal little things like that, or pianos, or special things like that. People pretty well kept and that was respected.

Q: You did have a limited amount of private property.

JH: Oh yeah.

Q: Land? Oh yeah, what if you inherited a farm?

JH: David Jansson ... a community. ... the money...

Q: Is that like...

JH: ...

Q: ...

JH: But the retirement fund I had, in that way you see, I did not believe in retirement or insurance. We were our own sort of retirement, retirement or insurance. So I cast in my, what \$8000 of papers and whatever I had put in that, and ...

Q: Doug came into the community and then it was Doultter, back out to...

JH: ... it was just part of the ...

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Q: Hmm, hmm

JH: So, ... amount of money you just keep this thing going, too, because you had to remember ... in fellowship full time. And so they weren't bringing in outsider into this among the rest of us. Now like ...Ruby, Brown for example, I suppose were workers.

Make ...

Q: And everybody received the same?

JH: We had ...

Q: If you were and adult?

JH: An adult, oh my gosh, if you were an adult you got what \$40 personal, or 45 if you worked at file, and if you worked in file like if you were a mum staying with the kids you got less, but then you needed less for clothes, but then you got \$30 instead of 45 or whatever.

Q: Per month?

JH: Ahem (yes).Did take care of all entertainment, all the clothes, all the gifts, I mean...

Q: \$30 per month

JH: Yeah. Everything. But other things were cared for, like gas, we never payed anything on our gas, that came out of fellowship ..., we didn't pay medical bills, we didn't pay toothpaste, things that were common we didn't pay for. If you wanted to eat out you... Each household had a food budget which depended on how many adults and children under age were in that household.

Q: And what food to buy then was determined in the house. We had just amount of money and how we can spend.

JH: Lots of means and ... Lots of means and... And some of those amounts were originally determined by FRS, by...by...preparing our families with Interest guidelines, so if they called up Interest and OK I got a family of four what would you, what amount would you allow for food, and they'd say oh well, \$120 or whatever, so that's what we'd get. So there was an average to ... you know pretty low

Q: Was there ever a hardship?

JH: Definitely

Q: It was

JH: Definitely

Q: It was difficult.

JH: Everybody was living together.

Q: Yeah.

JH: That made it a lot easier

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Q: Yeah, yeah

JH: I didn't waste as much as I do now. (laughs)

Q: Yeah

JH: Gordon talked about that when we were in the early part of our marriage and we were still part of the family treasure, but ... six years in our marriage, we had never been to Chicago ever,... we never had hot chocolate, I mean things that are sort of part of our routine now, we just couldn't afford. But all this group of people who were doing it together and we thought and knew that we ... that money so ... this woman over here thought kids could live with us, you know, we were ... her, and we could see that was what we were doing. And we could do it. But now that was the hardship that sometimes when they weren't making financial budget we would go on half personal ... We'd always get our free money, but ... 45 and you'd get 22.50 for that money.

Q: And then when you were married you could maybe the job ... , did you still get bad or did it go down, because

JH: All it..., I think it stayed the same, stayed the same. I think ... because there were two of you which you can... But people ..., most of them bought second hand clothes, you could some people size- wise couldn't, you know, they were very tall and you could ..., you know, you had to find ... clothes shops.

Q: She could have ... herself

JH: So I think some people ... than others. Here's the thing that became difficult, when it is hard to stop comparing to each other and for example, in my own family if I am not thinking about what anybody else is doing Gordon and I get together say and this year will big family vacation and we're going to have piano lessons, OK, that's where the money gonna go. And in ex-family they'd say you know these in not that important we're doing ... And we're going hey we're saving all out money to go on vacation. And you tell me how you gonna make guidelines that given that flexibility for each family to meet the needs in the way that they ... we spent a lot of times to come up with fair guidelines about these things. And I think one of the problems we encountered was maybe we weren't flexible enough, you know, to allow one family to put all their money in their vacations.

Q: So you could make certain choices and get more to fund that

JH: I'm just saying that somehow in all our guidelines we come up with, and there were guidelines on everything bedspreads to vacation 500 mile latest, and look you were ... I mean there were all these things you tried to work out and be fair. Probably would have been easier if we had a lot of extra money a lot of the times. Most of the times we didn't.

Q: OK, if you had more money, more money coming into the community, you may have expanded.

JH: Maybe have been

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Q: (Says something at the same time)

JH: A bigger community I think they has a lot more ... And that is what in the community everybody knew about, ...

Q: What about if your parents called up and said "honey, we going to give and Gordon a trip to Europe this summer for your anniversary "?

JH: Gordon and I got this way, we could have accepted gifts up to \$100.

Q: Ugh

GH: I've forgotten the amount, but one of those

JH: Yeah

Q: So, but you couldn't if your parents said we wanna fly you to Paris for your anniversary for a week, we'll watch the kids.

JH: We'd probably said no.

Q: Would you have to say no? I mean were there guys...

JH: Not to hear this should probably ... Not unless you could find some...

Q: ... Christian reason for doing it

(both laugh)

JH: There are no communal reasons, are there? There is a community in Bergo (?), Spain, which there is, we could have probably went

GH: There's actually you know

Q: There is a community Bergo, Spain? Maybe I need to go there and ...

JH: Yeah

Q: (Laughing) I need to go there and interview them I think.

GH: But they work for prisoners and drug addicts

Q: Oh blame well I'll speak to him, OK, well I fit right in there, right?

JH: Yeah, a lot of those things you do. Now I do remember though one of the women who parents wanted her fly out to the East Coast where she lived, and she did that. And I remember that friends of ours invited us up to, go on a trip to Portland, and they had tried to ... to Eugene and so his ticket would be payed for his works, so they decided to offer to pay for my ticket to go out there ...

Q: Yeah

JH: You know, so I think within certain times and means there was that kind of flexibility

GH: (in the background) They used to pay for that.

JH: Not mine. M ... Cathy payed for it, 200 bucks.

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GH: ...

JH: You were an editorial system then.

GH: Oh we were administrator, that's right.

Q: You mean now they pay for your life ...

GH: Administrates that. Yes.

Q: Alright.

GH: ... old year

(all talking at the same time)

JH: Go to Toronto. Hey, where you gonna go and find your College, ...

Q: That's great good. What's daily life like, I think we tried to ..., talk about it. You got in a household, what time?

JH: Of course that changed after we got married.

Q: What year did you get married?

JH: '79

Q: '79, and the community lasted until...

JH: The actual ending of the financial part of the community was 1985, December 1985.

Q: Aha, and you were there until the end. You did not leave until it was ... the community.

JH: Right.

Q: When everybody then left.

JH: Well, we must have been stayed around, but we weren't sharing our finances and resources and all.

Q: Right. So you were married six years while you were in community.

JH: Right, almost six years.

Q: And did you have children, yet?

JH: Yeah.

Q: OK. So either was born while you were ... community.

JH: Right.

Q: Alright, I understand that. So you got up in the morning...

JH: OK, ... living in a household, this house hadn't been added on to, yet, so I lived over there and I walked across the backyard to breakfast in the morning.

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Q: To the others?

JH: Right. And in our house we had two single people and family living. Sometimes three single people.

Q: Did you have to...oh, did they all come over?

JH: No. There were people in this house who lived here and people across the backyard in the back. So those ... together formed one household. So that we had our living room and our kitchen and our dining room over here, bedrooms and that house and bedrooms in this house.

Q: So all the activity was in this house.

JH: Right. ... So you know had to a bath and shower schedule and that whole bit, and you came over for breakfast, 'cause usually everybody, not everybody, usually the men cooked some of the breakfast, some of the women too, but I never has a breakfast routine. So somebody would cook breakfast, we would all eat breakfast, not , I don't remember devotions ..., we tried that off and on, but basically just eat and get up and go to work. And then whoever was on dishes would clean up dishes, usually one of the women whose home was and who ... a man who was also working and ... So as a single person I would go to work, 'til noon, I'd usually come back to the house for lunch, we would eat lunch, be an our off, I'd go back to work, come home at five. I usually cooked as a single person I cooked on the weekend, I didn't usually have to come home and cook supper for fifteen people. Now, the one household that I was in a baby was born, I did cook there one evening I usually just had sandwiches and that's about all I could manage. So somebody was on supper and...

Q: One person?

JH: Usually one. We'd eat our supper and then somebody when there were little around was on childcare. They would take the kids down in the basement, play with them or outside or wherever, and everybody else would do after-supper-sharing. So you would report on your day and sort of catch up 20-30 minutes then two other people would be on dishes and clean up. Parents would usually be off with their kids by then, some of the kids were on dishes too, and then you'd get kids down for the night, and once a week was a member's meeting, once a week was a small, household meeting. They were originally called household-meetings, because everybody tend to live in the same household, they were a small number. And then you, a week, or... then you had different committees, OK, the finance committee sometimes, that meant that I would meet with three other people who were talking about the financial situation what decisions do we need to make, or guidelines for new clothes, but we also payed for ... we didn't have enough money to pay them all, how would you stagger that, and all that sort of thing. That might meet once a month or every other week. But we there's a group that meets a group that kind of decide that they meet once a week. They get 25 hungry during the day, ehm, but then we also had a little pasturing like I met with the men in the house for, most of my senior years there was somebody I planned to check in with once a week or once every other week.

Q: So it was some kind of a Shepard?

JH: Yeah, very much so. ...person

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Q: That's interesting. Did they purposely assign you to a male, or just...

JH: ... I never think about it. Some were women.

Q: Did they assign that, or did you chose them as a mentor?

JH: It was often. OK, any household that was a household head family, OK, so that little boys here, but there was one main couple who kind of ... final decisions and things like that, and they had final, you know... .. last ... you'd be checked with, you know. If I'm ... and nice so I can do this, or whatever, you know. So actually usually it was the man of that couple that we meet with. That I think about that know. So when I lived in this house here it was Jake and in that house over there it was Lynn.

Q: And how did you choose which house you lived in, how did you got...

JH: That was kind of a neutral decision, but there was a fair amount of pressure involved in that, sometimes. You know, there would be this planning "oh, do you think this would work best for living?", and ...

Q: The oldest made that decision?

JH: Oh, they'd come up with a proposal and we had to chew it over and decide whether we could come to consensus on it, or not. But the way they made the proposal could be an impact on ... life, what do you want, do you want, do you want... but sometimes those things ... inside. I remember a single woman who was gonna be in her first year of teaching and for some reason when you had to be at this house over here the single women were living in we had everybody make a new household, I forget why we decided that, so she was asked to live in this new household, and she really didn't want to, because she was in a ... teaching and she doesn't want, she was an introvert and she did not all this extra work And I think she felt quite a big pressure to do that and talk about years later how she really feel like she can say no.

Q: And she didn't, she didn't move into the new house. Did you switch houses once in a while just to get people living with different people?

JH: Well, when I first moved in, I moved into this 500 house, and we, at that point there were... (pause), not that many people wanted to live in a household, OK, so then by the time six months had gone by more people wanted to live in households and join the community. So I would go over to David and Darien's (?) house over here. So lived there for a year and a half. And then in January '78 more people wanted to join us and wanted to live in households and have this experience. So then we were able to make another household and those who had been there quite a while, you know ... a long time these days, were chosen to be a part of the new one.

Q: So, you basically changed households when a need called for it, because you were adding households. As supposed to ...

JH: Adding...

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Q: Yeah, yeah...

JH: And then when people left and such a thing. Now there came a point, and I don't really remember when that was, it might have been in '77 or 8, before it was kind of like everybody is in a small group, every body is in a household, and then it got to be household is getting kind of crazy for some people, you know, it's just too much. So it became more acceptable to live in single families. I didn't really approve

Q: Did they buy a house, or what did they?

JH: Ahem, they bought more property and the family that, one of the original families, moved from their household over to this house. ... wow, you know, ... is this OK.

Q: Are we still a community? Yeah.

JH: Worked fine, you know, and so when changed happened that way people moving out. So this house was added on to fit 18, 20 people. When this community folded we were living here and there was a separate apartment that already has been made upstairs where a couple lived, and there were two ... in the basement. By the time we even moved into this house it was pretty much separate, ... living in a household, and that would have been June '84, we moved here.

Q: Did just you and Gordon and Even lived here?

JH: In this part of the house and some of those who're involved as church members, upstairs Willy and Andy Grad, in the basement were the ...

Q: So, even before the actual split of the community, or the dissolution of the community, you were living, you were moved towards kind of regular independent family living?

JH: Yeah.

Q: Even for single people, they would have been, or have a little more time of...

JH: Yeah.

Q: And you were suggesting that was because it just finally for some people got too much with all these different bodies together?

JH: I think it was very complex.

Q: Yeah.

JH: And I think ... happening that way it looked pretty attractive to people, you know, that little bit more freedom, and ..., I think they didn't take seriously enough how sociologically complex it was, we had like two families with two different child bearing ... in our family. As long as you were single people in a family, that one worked longer. But we had two different families and two different kinds of styles, it was hard. And again, because of the regular defined household, we've been a household where we eat together, where we meet in the evening, a household that... You know if has build complexibility into that thing, on Tuesday night everybody gets \$7,50 to go out to eat, whatever you wanna do, we maybe

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would have lasted in households longer, this is my idea, because I think we had everything so structured and so tidily structured that ...

Q: Could you see structure building over that time that you were in community? Like legislating more than rather less kind of the things, becoming less flexible, or was it pretty much consistent?

JH: I don't think we became less flexible. I don't think we became less flexible, I think kids got older, I think the society at large wasn't as supportive, maybe, I think, because we were so small it was more intense, maybe, and because finances were always struggling, maybe, I don't know.

Q: That kind...

JH: And maybe we finally gave ourselves permission to pray, we could be really committed to the Lord without living in the same house, how much energy this takes. So, who knows, what was all was reason for it, I know that households had at least a part of it ...

Q: How concrete is ..., concrete ... But they never had to do a membership.

JH: Yeah, ... you are a member you are in

Q: Yeah, yeah, I know a lot of people who related to the New Creation as a church, but had not, but probably were not considering joining a community. I'd college students who were here during the transitional time and they ever leaving, but

JH: No, see I think that's not really the point, because I think that it contributed to it, because we were closing in by some of our members to stay, and I can't reasonably be a member and not, I mean, even if they do not contribute financially, or that part of it, can a person be a member even if they are financially separate? I think that always ... finances being an issue. Not behavior so much, but that. Because I think that is when most people got hung up from joining, they could agree with the positions on leadership, or worship, or divorce, or whatever, but when you got down to putting your dollars in, they said "no I can't do it". So when we finally we opened that membership up, and I can't remember what year that was, (Asking Gordon) what year did we open up that membership? Like '83 or something?

GH: I think '82.

JH: '82? At the community itself we said at that point you can be a member of this community and not be in the common treasury.

Q: And that means you can live here, and live under the allowances?

JH: No.

Q: What did that mean?

JH: That just member that he could come to the member's meetings.

Q: Oh, OK.

JH: And this ..., all the decision making, and the worship group and whatever, no such thing were limited to ...

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Q: You could just come to church.

JH: Yeah.

Q: But you could always do that.

JH: Yeah. You could always come to church. But in terms like making back it seems like none ...come to church and that was no longer second class citizenship. You could be a member and not be in the congregation. And I suppose that gave people a chance to say "Gee, I won't even have to do this," and you were still accepted and be OK

Q: And that had been happening in '83?

JH: '82, '83, but it was certainly true by the time we ... that we had that for a couple of years.

Q: And was that an attempt to ...at keeping membership, or at a certain level, or why...

JH: Some people really thought it was a matter of conscience.

Q: (At the same time) true to God's words

JH: We should not have that kind of stipulation to be a ... which is what we ... and we should not have that ...objector, they, they come to a difficult process

Q: Oh, I can imagine

JH: Plus people who had given ..., you know, like he would talk to some of the people who were around at that time who had then intentional neighbors and join then at members without making a financial commitment, after thought they were second class members anyway. Because we still has to have common treasure means to decide all the other stuff, you know, so I think it probably stole some of that duel, but there was a real attempt to ... Consider a level ...

Q: But I wonder now has that done for the week-end? In some ways our membership ... Well, it..., see we would take away like you were struggling between a d and a t, it was all the different personality at that time now, and while you were doing that, could have opened the door some kind of question.

JH: But the other thing I think is true and we have always determined that we have our sit in the community and our foot in so much in the world. We always send our kids to public schools, we've always been involved in community, Ahm different kind of things, like a limited amount, but seen our role in nature, and life ..., ... how much energy do you put doing that, still keeping time with our own families and our..., that was like a ... cut that off quite a bit so you'd be totally isolated, well, if you're trying to do both, I think you almost ... about two things, because it takes so much energy to develop that community identity. We put lots of energy into that and there were all these needs in the community around us, the ... community in the world, and so how much inward and how much outward and..., very difficult. But I think probably one of the most difficult things that happened was in 1982 we met the ... and what they said to us was, in a nutshell, "you cannot to give money to this community and have it detouched deductible, because you are benefitting yourself." So for example, I'm as a single person if I earned \$17,000 a year and I as a single person only used, and we kept track of each person's

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costs were, medical and whatever he needs for gases and ... vitamin and ... people and all that, so maybe it cost me \$5,000 to live, according to our calculation, but with that community was considered \$12,000 then it was something I gave to this church, 'cause it wasn't I who paid the bills, it wasn't my vacation, it wasn't my ..., you know, it belonged to the church, well I ... You still benefitted, so we got audited for '81, '82, '83, '88, '81, '82, '83 all those four years of back... and they basically..., one of the reasons we also chose to work together, was because we wanted to avoid ..., we tried to keep our living at the very minimum. So when they came around and said you can't whatever your access income is you haven't really ... to other people, you still benefit, you haven't really given it to the church, a tax deductible entity, we had to pay back taxes in the thousands. And I think that for probably all of us ... for why in the world are we trying to do this? When one of the reasons why we were doing it is actually we're paying more taxes when we ever paid if we just lived on it. So I thought that was a very big backlash, about the whole tax thing.

Q: Yeah, so you remember that. So how did you, like did you have a file?

JH: Jeannie on your ..., individually

Q: But you then said you gave \$12,000 to the church.

JH: I had several contributions that were like..., and it think my was about 5% of my ... of course we're trying to get it back, you know, what? ... we gonna give that much money? But even the people that worked in the fellowship and elders had to report a communal income and so they'd payed taxes, too, different kind, but they had to pay some, too, but partly what happened was our fault, because we thought ... common or monastery defeated. And we never heard that we were accepted or rejected, so we always filed taxes on the consumption that that was what we were, ... IRS when they did this ... to us, I said "no, we are not gonna consider that."

Q: They wouldn't consider you in the same light, or...

JH: We'd never asked to approve that we also not going to consider you that. So, the way you've done your whole book-keeping and all that, doesn't work for us. And you owe, thousands, and thousands, and thousands of dollars.

Q: Did you consult a lawyer, or anything?

JH: Oh yeah.

Q: Was there a lawyer in the community?

JH: There was one that we ... that we worked with, and then we had similar consults, although there is ... differently because of the interpretation of our indication.

Q: Puh, yeah right, yeah.

JH: So we did consult ... and be sure that when we ended up disbanding the community we'd work through a lawyer and SPA and the whole that. But you know, if it comes to IRS what can you do? I mean Gordon and I had a meeting with them, we had to go and testify and all this kind of stuff, but we didn't...

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Q: Where did the money come from?

JH: The IRS agent visited this house. And that was when our elders lived in the basement. Saw the house we lived, saw the cars we drove, to make it different. So...it was very, very, very difficult. Probably one of the most difficult ... in the community, communal ... was the most difficult thing, after that faced.

Q: Where did the money come from to pay that? Did you have a ...

JH: That's a good question. Once people started leaving them, we had property to sell, it was ... and we used it. some of the people who'd already left had to pay the room, because we didn't have money to do it, we were ... the money to ... , recontributed money ... some people sent to them... you know those sorts of things.

Q: And you ventured kind of plain?

JH: Yeah, and again that was when it cleared world's apart between who walked away and people who were still here.

Q: Back who people who left then, since you brought it up. What did they leave with? We were talking about ...

JH: OK

Q: ...in the beginning.

JH: Usually not much, because everything was tied up, you know, we were living on everything we had and there wasn't that much cash to give them, so people would leave with the poncho, and clothes, and personal possessions, and stuff ... in the refrigerator, and one month of rent, and that is about it.

Q: Of course if they still had a job they could live on that.

JH: Oh yeah, but it was not much ... compared to the how little it was, because it wasn't much.

Q: But like Dave Janson who came in with my aunt, but he had inherited it, and that was to indorse her, he didn't get that back.

JH: No.

Q: Course he was still in community, wasn't he? So that might not be the issue for him. But, yeah... I could see the potential of that ... hard feelings with other non-member ... perhaps, although in that particular case ... family that might have dealt with it.

JH: People who left didn't get property. By the time we ended this thing, brrr oh..., there were four families left. We all took over the houses to eliminate the payments. So we had ... the property ... but I always...

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Q: Yeah, you've talked to me about that before, about some of the bit...
(both at the same time)

JH: ...because that didn't seem fair either. Six months, eight months earlier, or a year earlier we didn't get any property. But I think also some of the people who left, people didn't want to be in the IRS stuff either, and so ...

Q: Nobody has ever tried to sue. 'Cause that have to happen some communities we've been studying about, when people would come back let's be all set...in community

JH: They didn't, but I know that it was hard. And I did talk, I remember talking to one ... and when they left, and, and didn't have much to live on and they actually, around that time I got inherited things, that was in the '70s and I was ...careful by ..., even though, you know, it wasn't the best situation, we didn't know what was coming from, but look it worked out. I think it was one of those things that happened to the people that it just kind of worked out.

Q: And of course suing is not a very Mennonites and a Baptist thing to do. Is it?

JH: I can imagine anybody suing having hard feelings, yet.

Q: Yeah, hard feelings definitely Mennonites and Baptist thing to do, but suing was, I mean was opposed, Biblical opposed.

JH: But I wonder if some of the people who left in ..., they looked like a ... to be, so it was hard to ... that they were guilty,

Q: To ask, yeah

JH: And hard for them to ask, and so, you know, I think probably it was enough, everybody felt enough guilt or sadness or whatever to go around, so ...

Q: OK, we're getting there, did the community have any central religion ideology, we talked some about that. You're a pacifist is that correct?

JH: Right.

Q: And would you, would you...

JH: I would say, really there was this thought and that is on Jesus is Lord, I mean ... Christology or New Testament conscience of brother and sister

Q: Matthew 18

JH: Right. Sermon on the Mount kind of thing, real strong emphasis on that, but you also could ... service

Q: Would you describe the community evangelical? In the kind of modern sense, not in the door-to-door sense, but in a kind of ...

JH: Yes.

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Q: ... of evangelical. Even...

JH: No, we didn't have the energy to go too much out of..., but I really think we saw ourselves (end of side)

Q: ...you can guess, I mean, you can give that is what you have to give and that is important, but that's what you get, you don't just go one author and source, but the real joy is to find some commonalities what our people are saying and that's , I mean literally you probably have to talk to them.

JH: All of them. Oh definitely.

Q: That's what I would love to do, I mean I just ...

JH: Few ... wouldn't be hard to touch down on New Creation.

Q: Because the whole IRS thing it's just amazing

JH: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, I'd loved to track on everybody. ... the reason that ... in the fellowship of hope we changed name from Walter Holster (?) to Michael Freedman, and I remember Michael Freedman from seminary, he is at the River Heard (?)she told me. Because I remember I was, I don't know if I was class where he was hanging around...

JH: He is the brother in law to Jo and Jane(?)

Q: Is he really?

JH: Yeah. I hurt their ...

Q: Who's his wife?

JH: Francis.

Q: Francis?

JH: Francis River.

Q: Is married to Michael?

JH: Yes, he's back to Walter now.

Q: Oh he's back to Walter again. Oh he changed his name back. 'Cause I was telling my Professor about this and said that he changed his name from Walter Holster to Michael Freedman, and he said "oh, Holster would have been a good ...in law", we just did that the sort of ... OK, ...

JH: What was I saying, I forget. Anyway...

Q: We were talking about central religion and ideology, we were talking about Jesus is Lord and ...

JH: Yeah, and it's also in the sense that we really thought what we were living, and maybe it comes as arrogant, but we were living...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Yeah, you mentioned that on the phone

JH: ...as God wants us to live. I think I personally thought a little bit arrogant about that. You know, this is really the faithful way to live.

Q: Yeah, I know.

JH: So there was quite a little bit...

Q: But don't you think you needed that to be able to deal...

JH: To survive in another way? And because it was so difficult to do.

Q: Yeah, that's what I mean. You had to...

JH: I think we really did speak ..., be a witness, by a life maybe more than by certain words.

Q: When did you join the general conference?

JH: Is it as a church?

Q: I'm gonna ask you, I mean, in some ... how the religion was practiced, was the law in just your life style and trying to live simply, and that kind of thing. We also talked about having a church on the premises on one of those households, and the church services, I'm not sure how that word is outlined,...

JH: OK.

Q: ...but how would they compare to a kind of mainstream Mennonite's church service?

JH: Well, the first church services that we had were in a living-room, so they were very informal in the sense that people would leave in songs, and some people often bring a message or a little kind of sermon thing, there was lots of ... we were sharing, lots of prayers, people could suggest their own songs, that sort of things.

Q: So it was really informal.

JH: For one thing, and lots of anticipation by everybody. But again even then there was a little strong emphasis on worship, through singing, through prayer, through scripture, prophecy..

Q: What, yeah, I remember when David Janson (?) had a prophecy of our ...

JH: The world ...

Q: Yeah, was it...

JH: In San Diego.

Q: It had something to do with..., I remember it was published in "The Mennonites"?

JH: Yeah, right.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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March 7, 1996

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Q: I need to get a copy of that. I remember that the thing looked important to me. When did you go to more of that, or did you go to more structured worship service, more the kind of mainstream type of thing?

JH: I think that worship service, just like everything else, just kind of evolved there were end and closes on that, it became clear that we needed a, I think pretty early on there was an emphasis on having ... bring the scripture and that sort of thing, and so there always was a certain order to it. I know we had a bunch of useful girls for a while and then others suggest things, but then we accidentally ...

Q: You mean they attended ...

JH: Yeah, yeah, really was ... when they came. But I think the worst was always having ... money for that building.

Q: That's a new point.

JH: So that it was pretty small, pretty ..., and we worshiped in the basement for along time. The basement of a brick house. We had some very significant occurrences that changed the worship, too, like that house was given to the community.

Q: That's what is called a free house?

JH: Yeah, ...doctors building a doctor's clerk. So it was a huge basement ... we had our worships in, and I guess what I remember were times between and ... kind of an emotional end, ...pretty thankful, expecting there to do things to ... to people, to talk to people and to minister to ... and to began to pray. I think when a group gathering ... 50 people attending worship ... New York, 16 instead of 40, we moved over to the north ... in the area of that basement and there was a building, that wasn't our own building, we came in on Sunday morning and basically took tables down and set up ... and thing were already then a little less formal maybe, a little less, more hesitant to speak out, and the "sister of freedom" (?) between the two...

Q: When did you move to the "sister of freedom"? Before the break of the community?

JH: No (hesitant)

Q: After. You were still meeting at North ... when the community dissolved, or...

JH: I think so.

Q: OK. It's interesting when a community dissolves, the church community of the church as the members of the general conference continued. That also I think in my mind...

JH: The church continued.

Q: Yeah, speaks very well.

JH: We quite resolved the church.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: But the people who'd lived in communities could still go to church together.

JH: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Q: When people left the community part, where some of them able to still stand with the church part? Or did most of them leave the church?

JH: I don't know. There are two ... examples: one of them got married and then left, she had a husband, we're not ..., and so, yeah, actually two, I mean two single people who did that and they may not... Then we had another family that left, when we ...apart and go to a different church.

Q: Oh really?

JH: So, but that last year or so, in 1984 and '85 probably six different couples left, for six different reasons, Cal and Jane (?) moved to ..., the Gravers lived at the ...white seminary and became a part of that community, yeah different people went to different places and some of the people just thought I take it happen to know ... and so they stayed as church goes and that was difficult

Q: Was it?

JH: For them and for us, too, in some ways maybe. I worshiped Jane, I think maybe when they moved to sister freedom, too, we also said in a kind of circle kind of thing, and even at North field was this kind of circle, and in this church we were faced with pews, and a more traditional setting, and a bigger space, and that was difficult, because we weren't used to that, so we changed the pew ... there were still some facing this way and a whole bunch back here, but I think people sad and started being more traditional then, too. I think over years since the break of the ... we had just evolved to a more traditional church set up, period. Partly by necessity, when you have to pay a pastor that person, man, does a lot more things, then your team of elders who were all in together kind of. And the expectations changed, too. So church is more, funda..., now they are still ... for some sharing, for suggesting songs, for prayer requests, still plenty of ... none of that we knew in our current worship service to what we used to be and is probably bah.

Q: What about the holy shift prophecy? Do you still...

JH: Some.

Q: Still stand up, and they distinguished prophecy from different from just sharing. Prophecy is in a different league.

JH: Not nearly as much as it was 20 years ago, but there is some. Still open to it. used to be there were different claims in our church where like speaking in tongues was more acceptable than it is now.

Q: I was going to ask earlier, I'm glad you brought that up.

JH: We did that, I mean it's kind of like ..., some people are more ... free about that than others.

Q: Do people still speak in tongues?

JH: Very quietly.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: While they are sitting in their pews.

JH: Yeah.

Q: During that

JH: Yeah, I think people do it quietly, but not..., we don't have..., I don't remember the last time we had a loud speaking in tongues interpretation following thing, it's been a while.

Q: So you have had speaking in tongues and then somebody being able to interpret it?

JH: Yeah. As a matter we had speaking in tongues, period.

Q: Without the interpretations. But you actually had people that would interpret it.

JH: Yeah.

Q: That's amazing. I'm reading another book for another class right now, I'm really into these experiences that ..., getting into that.

JH: It wasn't very common, but yeah, I remember we did that. Now we had a special ... with different people who ... and they were just kicked out, and a last ... paper work came to ... as he was ... as a general session ... that copy I have in my workplace.

Q: That's interesting, yeah. Interesting.

JH: So then, but I think we are more traditional in our worship now, in that way. Probably still have a lot more flexibility than some ... churches that don't ...

Q: OK, you did baptisms and weddings, did you do that..., you were married in the community weren't you?

JH: Ours was the first wedding New Creation had.

Q: How many had they have since?

JH: Good question. About 5, maybe.

Q: 'Cause it would be difficult with the size of membership and with a lot of them being already married to..., but, anyhow.

JH: Lauren, George, Melanie, Brooke, Anne, ...

Q: Does ... was with New Creation?

JH: Yeah, he became when he got married.

Q: Yours was the first wedding and one of the elders..., had you already discerned a head preacher by that point, or was one of the elders licensed to do that?

JH: OK, ... Jake was our ordained master already, and then later Steve was ordained by the ...western district, anyway after that, much later, but he was ordained I ...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: And you were married in what year, did you say?

JH: '79.

Q: By Jake then.

JH: Yeah, we were, I mean every..

(both at the same time)

Q: Yeah, I know, yeah, yeah...

JH: Everyone ... sisters, he's the one who probably signed it.

Q: He signed it as far as the state government was concerned.

JH: He didn't ... someone did the flowers, someone did the table ... someone did the pictures

Q: That would be, that would be a subject for another book, I guess. How would not non- community people emigrate into a communal wedding like that? Did you go on honeymoon then? They gave you ... a honeymoon.

JH: Yes, a honeymoon.

Q: Could you go more than 500miles?

JH: I could never..., we knew we had this allowance for the honeymoon, I could never, we got our wedding money for that, we could keep that, but I remember they gave us ... and a check with \$100 for the honeymoon, ... I certainly didn't expect, and I just cried, 'cause I knew how difficult it was to spare it together.

Q: But the first wedding, that's pretty amazing. OK, how did people relate to each other, is a question ...

JH: Intensely.

Q: Did you, you didn't refer to each other as brother Gordon and sister Jean.

JH: Not in some offense, what we really did was see ourselves as brothers and sisters.

Q: OK, alright, but not like a, like a...

JH: And that's what made the ... female realize, we are safe. I always felt safe around the men in the community. Maybe that's even why I joined, because I felt like Steven ... was safe. Not sexually exploitive in any way.

Q: How long was it after you met Gordon that you kind of disserate the rubber...

JH: Three years. He was a brother for three years before he was a husband.

Q: I remember Gordon back then, something would have taken me three years, but ... And the food, you talked about the food, what was the food like, was it a lot of beans and rice, and ...

JH: Yeah, pretty simple.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: What about holidays? Did you do Thanksgiving and...

JH: Oh yeah. Holidays were an important celebration time. Again you often had to ... between your own family, when the family gets together. Holiday felt like being torn between ... for a while. I remember one Christmas morning staying on Christmas Eve, and a few days before Christmas driving back Christmas morning so that I could be here by, I think it was 12'o clock, for Christmas ...

Q: That's when you were single.

JH: Yeah. So yeah, we did lots of..., and celebrations were important, even if there was simple candlelight and kind of things, ..., or walking on Saturday nights, and...

Q: Did you ...on regular basis?

JH: Some households did, more than others, yeah, depended on the household.

Q: But did you have Christmas at households or did you exchange gifts or...

JH: No, often we did like draw a name, or ...

Q: In the household?

JH: Yeah.

Q: Each household could decide how to do that?

JH: Hmm (yes)

Q: Was there ever any kind of rivalry or jealousy, about which household was doing a better job at this, or was happier, or did you ever know anything like that?

JH: I think that would be hard to avoid. Like looking at another household and saying "gee, I wish I lived there, they're doing much more"

Q: Well, well, ... were all the men lived.

JH: Not at that age. No I ... Oh I think that I do remember at the household ... "oh look...", but these people were so much like brothers and sisters...

Q: Yeah

JH: ... I guess I remember one difficulty was with the guideline about who got this much money from this, or who would get this and that, not so much individual people, I think we ... the system on each other.

Q: That's interesting. For instance when you said that you got back for a new ... was that with your household or was that whole group?

JH: The whole.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: But that's..., I found even when I was minister at ...church, we were torn in between we wanted to be with that church family and doing the holiday thing, and I do remember like attending New Years's Eve, giving on the all might aim track at like 2:30 in the morning And again at noon next day for Christmas in Illinois. Because the Illinois people couldn't understand why I was drawn here and it was pretty...

JH: I think families, I think birth families often struggle with that ... and I think we struggle with how to make that work. How do we understand that. And I think initially we spend more time here that with our birth family , but the further we lived into it the more we were relaxed about that.

Q: That's a good point too. How ... and how for ..., you made that decision like in the household.

JH: Yeah.

Q: Did you have like household meetings to decide the schedule?

JH: Yes.

Q: And volunteer, or...

JH: Everybody had interest, everybody negotiated, try to work it out.

Q: On a weekly basis to that...

JH: No we essentially scheduled what we were going to effect for a couple of months or something, you could always come back here I need a change or so, it had been negotiated.

Q: And the choice where cleaning, and cooking, and cleaning up after cooking, and...

JH: Garden.

Q: Garden, yeah.

JH: 'Cause everybody did his own laundry.

Q: Oh.

JH: I mean a lot of single people did their own laundry, 'cause families and households did their own laundry.

Q: And each household has a laundry, or did you have a communal laundry...

JH: Right, most household had their own washing and dryer thing.

Q: Did you ever happen to community-wide meals together?

JH: Yes, we did. By about every, ... people wanted it each week, and then it was like every two weeks, we were trying ... often goes ... church ...

GH: (something in the background)

JH: I remember my birthday. When did we have birthdays? One a month?

GH: (answers something in the background)

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: ...

GH: ...

JH: Yeah, paint somebody's house, or wash the windows what ever.

GH: ...

JH: Better than... yeah, it was pretty often. And I think sometimes as a single person I felt like 'I ... my bud all week and here we have to go to this...' But I watched the ... of other people like I could talk ..., ... Cook for thirty people, you might be assigned that, and we would normally see so much, so that's kind of fun. But I think sometimes there was a little..., how do I say, tension between people who worked out and people who worked at home, because I think each saw the other one had the better end of the stick. When in fact both were very time and energy consuming. And sometimes I remember after we were married, when we got out of hospital, after we were married I was working at the hospital I would come home so peopled out, I could just not..., had no desire to go to one more meeting, and hash things out with more people. But I think people ... tensely, helping kind of professional or people orientated professions had a hard time coming home and go to meetings.

Q: So you said after you were married and you were out of household, did you and Gordon live as an individual couple in your own house?

JH: Right. And I made a suggestion after that, while we were living together, couples living out of households, we where used to all these people around, and it felt like it wasn't near enough to ... when he came around and we had only one person to pray with.

Q: ...

JH: We lived together for from '79, yeah, once we got married we never lived in a household.

Q: Was that decided by you?

JH: Ahem (yes), I didn't want to be in a household. I was in a very tense social work and I did not want more people around, plus I think that the people that stayed home, they were sticking out for the rest of us and doing all that sort of menial sometimes, even though maybe they had small kids at home or whatever, and I think that sometimes they thought 'wouldn't it be nice to go out and you know, work outside, a little bit.' And than by then, I mean I didn't have kids or anything, I was working, and I just kind of imagined, coming home to a household, and having more responsibilities and very thing, you know, and it was just kind of, and it was just that I kind of just couldn't figure it out.

Q: OK, we talked about economic arrangements, did you, where there any college industries, you did have a kind of a...

JH: Builders groups.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Yeah, that people could hire to come and build. Because I heard people say " Oh New Creation can build that for us." And they did and they were actually hired out as a construction... Any other carnation industries?

JH: No, a part of a communal garden, but I would say nothing that I..., oh I think that the answer is that people were just working separate, ...

GH: Well, there was counseling.

JH: Oh yeah.

GH: I sometimes feel that we always, that we were always counseling.

JH: We've been on this discussion, Gordon. Counseling, that's right. Our elders were hit up with all kinds of people, all kinds of...

Q: But did they charge for that?

JH: No.

GH: No, that's not..., we just donate.

Q: OK, so there was sort of like an offering

GH: Well, it wasn't expected, but people were just...

Q: Yeah, just donate.

JH: Like on Sunday morning.

Q: So basically the source of the money was from initially what people brought into the community and then what the people who worked up by the community, what if you wanted to quit your job?

JH: I did.

Q: Did you have to OK that with the community?

JH: Yeah, and they said yes.

Q: OK

GH: They processed it.

Q: They processed everything.

JH: As long as I needed to quit.

Q: That was your hospital job?

JH: Yeah.

Q: And where did you go from there?

JH: Hmm, ha, I stayed home.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: But did you have Ian (?) by then?

JH: No. See that was a really interesting thing, because ...

Q: That was...

JH: I really burned with my social work and I just wanted to quit ... I think the reason we were not competing was because of the stress, at the end of the year Betty Jane was gonna stop being the ... and we needed a new book keeper for the books which she had bought before... week job. I can do this plus the milk-one if you want go to ... and I just needed a break, and so they... Now it was financially a very difficult thing, ... not bring an income in, but yeah, I remember doing that and then I quit in January and my ... was pregnant so by then a had a legitimate reason to say OK...

Q: And then you ... again when after you got your M.S.W.?

JH: Yeah, but see by then the community and all that was long gone. But yeah, I never worked for pay after that. Had Ivan in January '83 and basically did, well, I was the bookkeeper ... (noise in the background)

Q: That was Gordon putting the dishes away. Ok, money was held in common, who made the

JH: (To Gordon) I'll do these dishes later, OK?

Q: I'll help her.

(short discussion over the dishes)

Q: Ok, spending decision were made by elders, no everybody, right?

JH: Guidelines yeah.

Q: Everything...

JH: Right

Q: And who owned the land? Was there a cooperation?

JH: OK, ... we had a finance that met to make policies, but all had to be approved by the group. Well, land cooperation.

Q: So New Creation was a cooperation. OK. The formal governing structure was the elders, or...

JH: The elders and the group consented ...

GH: There was ...

JH: OK, but there were preliminary decision making things, made by smaller groups of people, worship committee, finance committee, elders, and then all was brought up to the larger membership...

Q: Did it work pretty well?

JH: Process, process, you cannot... that's the one thing I heard ...

GH: ... (in the background)

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Yeah, that's how it...

JH: But I would say it worked.

Q: Yeah. The community actually was in from '73 to '86, '85? Twelve years, that's pretty long.

JH: For a church community, yeah. And if IRS hadn't happened, I think it would have probably gone a long distance.

Q: That's really then...

GH: I think, I mean later when it...

JH: People were enjoying the common treasure, either once the other kind of membership opened up people just...

GH: ... the IRS thing

Q: There was a single leader now in, being that you have a pastor, but still would you suggest that you don't have to do things by consensus anymore, is it more...?

GH: just in the last year we'd got a new model that's ... consensus we had alternatives, that kind of thing.

Q: And people were chosen right? That's how they got power, there wasn't any more...

JH: Yeah, like the elders or ...

Q: Did you ever sense at all that there was more power given to the people who had been here longer? Or did you work...

JH: I think some people had more power than others, I think it was an unspoken thing.

GH: Yeah, one division was that people who were emotionally helping, and that kind... there was a lot, and all of us could be in an intense situation, we have to deal with, OK. And there were some who were very emotional people and gained a lot of help, through the thing, but the people had enough help to be pretty stable, I think and it showed any kind of leadership ability for main leaders, because there was such a need.

JH: But I think there were certain people who ... weight carried more than that.

GH: Yeah, there wasn't always this ...

JH: ...

GH: Yeah.

JH: You know, some people had more. Sometimes the most ..., ha.

Q: ...

JH: ...

Q: OK, some of these are just..., I don't know. Did the group gardener farm?

JH: Sort of a ...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: So you didn't seek self-sufficiency, you made grocery-store runs, things like that.

JH: Yeah.

Q: And the group did, did you build buildings or buy buildings?

JH: We bought houses, and we did add onto this one in a major way, and part of the house we ...

GH: ... there were no full houses, no.

Q: But you basically bought houses in the neighborhood.

JH: That's right.

Q: When one came up, four block areas?

JH: What did we decide for? Three?

GH: No, in terms of square blocks, two. I mean, this block and...

JH: We also rented sometimes.

Q: So when a house in the neighborhood came up for sell, New Creation might buy it. Did you ever get any crab from neighbors?

JH: Yes. ...

GH: Early years especially.

JH: Misunderstandings where our group was involved. But that changed, as they saw that we were pretty decent neighbors.

Q: Like what? That you were a Hippie commune, or a sect, or...

JH: Yeah, oh probably.

Q: Interesting. Did..., what about energy source sufficiency? I know you did lots of stuff in solar, but...

GH: We were self-sufficient, but we, I never felt anything in...

JH: Always was considered, always the light in houses, and ... so that we can do something with solar ...

Q: But, more from the environmental point of view...

JH: Yeah.

Q: ...rather than trying to not depend on...

JH: Right. Environmentally.

Q: And you did have an open-door-membership, people could come and join and then leave.

JH: Aha (yes).

GH: ...

Q: And then visitors could come...

JH: Many.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

GH: In fact Sunday morning worship was when people would ask about New Creation, and ...

JH: But people could come a week-end and check it out. Yeah.

Q: What about migration between the communities, like Fellowship of Hope.

JH: Eddie married, Eddie and Andy both married ... community, which were from other communities, and then when Vivian moved from ... and Jo-Anne moved to ... and they were ...

Q: And Anne were given from...

GH: ...

JH: ... moved from ... to here.

GH: And ...

JH: ...yeah

Q: And you've talked about the living arrangements and you had a family household and a ... household, we've covered that. Is that... And then about dressed. Were there any rules or ... about dressed?

JH: Long hair, no... (laughs).

Q: Long hair and ...(laughs too)

JH: ... I get that..., what kind of a rule., I mean you wouldn't go to...

GH: ... like ... and if you feel like dress up more worth, we gonna give a bigger allowance to them.

Q: So that you..., yeah.

GH: Otherwise, ... at least there were some recognitions..

JH: But we did not try to stand up by our clothing, no head-covering style, I mean, people tried to seem modest and content.

Q: Not ... and ...

JH: Ahem, we ... that you did.

Q: So people still tried to express some self...

JH: Oh yeah.

GH: Yeah.

JH: And I remember when I Donna ... go into Fred's Christmas gallery and she'd been asking and the... I got this, this and this, what do you got for ... I mean lots of that.

Q: Oh yeah, when she was going to something outside. OK, what were the relationships with the surrounding culture? Were there hazels of resounding sanitation, drunk use, or other things?

JH: Some toward the original neighbors, I think, but ..., probably did bet exempt from all that family.

GH: This house, I mean I didn't pick up special..., we had a special permit even now, ... family and part of it understands that maybe somebody ...in our church this year.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

JH: That's what we're concerned about now. But I think not only for this one was it very difficult. I think when those apartments, twelve of the apartments ... down with our landlord ? wasn't residential, or wherever, multi-family style. But nothing big time.

GH: There was a case where we took a woman with five children who's separated from her husband, who she claimed had abused her, and he would visit and then he told IRS we were giving ...

JH: SRS.

GH: SRS, yeah SRS, and so they came to check this out, and Jeannie ... because she's delivering, and they didn't find anything wrong, but there was that kind of a thing. And they, she ... tell you more about curfew there on their own this type ? management.

JH: Suspects.

GH: So they decided they would be helping find something.

Q: Did people, yeah, did people at your work ask you a lot about your religion, did they now you were going home to a community?

JH: Yeah, my did initially. Initially. I think it was difficult for the kids in school, you know, you're suppose to ... your house. Well...

Q: Oh yeah, right.

JH: The kids that grew up now, we talked to Natasha and Julie, say it was always embarrassing to try to..., they were little and kind of confused, and kind of proud, anyhow they were kids, of sixth graders like, you know. So I think sometimes it was kind of hard on the kids.

Q: Yeah, trying to keep up with the fashions.

GH: Must be ...for someone...

JH: And they ... all the toys.

Q: Yeah. Watch the same TV programs, and ...

JH: No way.

Q: Where did you ... holidays?

JH: One black and white in an other house.

Q: Black and white on Christmas?

JH: Well, in those days most people had black and white.

Q: Oh.

JH: I got ... color, big deal.

GH: Yeah, I mean there's...

JH: ... gave it to them.

GH: ...there weren't ... most of them.

JH: We ... had a black colored TV.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Any unforgettable character? That you...

JH: I don't know what you mean.

GH: Me neither.

Q: Oh, you are all unforgettable (laughs).

GH: Yeah, they are OK.

(Everyone laughs)

Q: No, there were probably fifteen.

GH: ... is not enough.

Q: We won't put that in. I mean what did distinguished them, like..?

JH: You also thing that you have to be sort of unforgettable to join that thing like this, I mean...

(all talking at the same time)

Q: Yeah, that might be, yeah. Questions for another tape. You talked a little bit about child..., were handled within the household with people doing childcare, that being one of the household duties. And children were send to public schools, so that's.

JH: I think that we assumed that parents would have major responsibilities for the discipline and welfare of their children, but they were under an other adult's care, your kid, you know, in whatever way you needed to, but basically we were ... families being ...

GH: Oh yeah, there were certain parents who wanted help disciplining the children, and you could help and ...

JH: Right, that's true.

Q: And your kids had their own rooms in the household, or did you put all parents and kids in one room?

GH: Oh no.

JH: No, kids and the siblings had the same bedroom, and that's about that, you know.

Q: Artistic expressions? Did you have a lot of art ... people?

JH: There was a man of wood working.

GH: Bands.

Q: Music, what about music?

JH: ... in the community painting, writing, sculptures, ... and ...

GH: No. Carl ... was a professional painter.

JH: And he did writing.

GH: Yeah. Writing.

JH: Well, what about Ian Sander? He was an artist, he related to the ... I think we guaranteed the more Unitarian gifts than opposed to the more artistic.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: OK, I think that answered the question.

JH: (At the same time) like wood working, yeah, or sewing, yeah.

GH: You ... we were sound people, sound people in worship.

JH: People liked music.

Q: ... in mind, with worship in mind.

GH: With worship in mind, yeah.

JH: We liked flower gardens ... vegetables.

Q: I ... to mean that this was not a ... community.

JH: ... anybody would use ... with everybody.

Q: That doesn't surprise me, somehow. (Laughing)

JH: ... (laughing)

Q: (Still laughing) And what about free law going on in this community, I mean, like changing partners and things like that?

JH: Absolutely not.

Q: Had that to be policed at all as an issue, or?

JH: I mean Gordon and I ...

(M. Klaus still laughing)

Q: But you reached that my marriage.

JH: Actually Marilyn, I really felt safe with the men here. I never thought...

GH: (at the same time) Yeah, I don't know ... and well, with one man, of all the men, he had history ...security, and he went , had a ... not in the community, ...

JH: As he worshiped with us.

GH: As he worshiped wit us, and I was confronted pretty strongly, and forgiven pretty strongly.

JH: But I think adultery or pre-marriage sexual activity was pretty much understood that that was not the way...

Q: And it really wasn't a problem as far having to process it? At least...

GH: I mean, it was, we talked about it, in counseling. I mean,...

JH: And people, certain individuals struggled with it, but it was held in confidence by their own pastors, and counselors, and so we had ...

GH: We didn't talked about everything.

JH: We didn't, no.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: There wasn't any big scandal, or... Was that one of the things that this group was accused of initially, though, being kind of a free love party...?

JH: I think that was a suspicion.

GH: I never heard that, but I'm sure it was.

Q: There were sexual..., there was the assumption that New Creation members were not engaged in pre-marriage sex or extra ... adultery.

GH: And it's an argument.

JH: We had actually,

(Gordon is going on in the background)

JH: We'll probably do now.

Q: Early things, yeah.

JH: We were probably pretty conservative on that.

Q: OK.

GH: Now, that's pretty bad.

JH: ... seem to be a pretty liberal sort of thing. We were really conservative in our sexual stand. That's basically absence until marriage.

Q: ...

GH: There was a concern because we had to process if we gonna have children.

Q: Really!

GH: Oh yeah. Well I mean look, it seems like every decision was seen like that, as an economic point, that's every body...

JH: Yeah, that's true.

GH: ...and everybody in the community was affected by them.

JH: We processed when we wanted to date each other.

Q: Yeah, you talked to me about that.

GH: Yeah, having a tolerance.

Q: It was a community decision.

GH: Well, it was processed in a small group, in a small group...

Q: Could they actually tell you they didn't think it was the right thing to do at this point.

GH: Oh yeah, and it was said. That happened, the said wait ...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: ...

JH: And I remember a situation were we ... elders and we think you should wait, but we gave you the freedom to do whatever you want, and they did what they wanted to do.

GH: ...

JH: Well it was assumed that they decided to wait, ... time, so.

GH: And they were the kind of couple that...,...

Q: Hm, interesting. So in that sense they were very pro-group ... in that. They wouldn't say don't say don't have it by being absence, they would say ... your family.

GH: And they were ..., there were several nurses ...

Q: That's interesting. So...

GH: and in one ...

Q: That a pretty fundamental human right to kind of give over to community doctors.

JH: ... who you gonna marry.

GH: That's one that people would, I mean people outside would hear about that, oh man, ... like that. But check it out, I mean, ...

Q: Sure, sure.

JH: And if you trust ... too high, I believe that they had the best interest...

GH: That's why when you make an economic decision like that it effects everything in your life. And economics is really at the base of our lives, and we felt it should be our faith, should be the faith.

Q: Yeah, that's very consistent with... We talked about daily life, the best and worse things about communal living?

JH: The best and the worst thing, probably for me, is kind of the same thing. The best thing was just the strong support of relationships, just there were people who know me, and that were honest with me, who accept me, and all that bundle. At the same time relationships in the community got very tangled, and kind of confusing, it sort of got, the issue got intermeshed. So the intensity of it was a ban, but it was also a salvation.

GH: I think of people, being around people too much. It was bad, but it was also my salvation, because I needed that.

Q: You were around a lot of people, you both mentioned it's good and bad, were members screened, I mean who had to live with these people.

GH: it was very intentionally that which house you lived in, and who you lived with. And putting people together there were a lot of things taken into consideration.

JH: But when this woman with five kids, knocked on our door, and she said she was following the Lord, and she felt like this was were she needed to be, and she needed help, we took her in. So in that

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

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sense..., but not very many people wanted to make that commitment either, I mean we had a lot of people banging on the door, that we didn't want to take.

Q: Course you didn't have a whole lot of property.

JH: Ahem. (no)

Q: Then it would be less of a sacrifice and you would gain more by joining the community.

GH: That's (at the same time) and a lot of people would join advent, and that was when they were desperate.

Q: Because I, you know we talked about a member that had a history of sexual promiscuity, I think I would be not afraid for my own life by having ... daughters, and I don't know what kind of promiscuity leads in to, but that would worry me.

GH: And it was a concern.

JH: That was definitely..., yeah, we talked about that, yeah.

Q: I mean I would hate the fact that I wasn't trusted. But yet, you know, the older I get the less willing I am just to kind of...

GH: Sure, we were fully aware of his history...

JH: No, we didn't. But I'm thinking of the other guy who came who ... and I think there again, when we talked about taking him, I remember the household or the ... they didn't actually built a household, they were in an apartment close by, there was ... talk about he's gonna join the ..., here are the issues, and you know... I thought he was pretty open.

Q: You're trying to be this Christian group, and not everybody, but yet...

JH: You have to commit yourself to live it! And probably was reason that had us deny him, was because it is so difficult. ... quit healthy people, than... so much.

GH: And a lot was learned by doing. You learn from your mistakes.

Q: Yeah, you didn't leave, right? Did you ever think about it?

JH: No, I didn't. It's just, it became...

GH: ... I guess I thought about it, but...

Q: You never had a lot of..., angry enough and burned out enough that you just said ...

JH: No, as time really changed..., you know we talked about changes while ..., and I never thought about leaving the community, but changing the structure certainly. Yeah, I mean we did some of that.

Q: Did you ever have any second thoughts after you joined like right in the first few weeks?

GH: I had a lot of that, man, I was learning over the year ...

JH: I joined a Christian community and thought the ... (laughing)

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: (Also laughing) Floated, and then came the invitations...

JH: I went through a very serious whole searching time in, oh I don't know what year it was, well it was in... '81, no, well anyway, because what I did was I did some interwork and came to the conclusion that why I was doing I made a decision about, because I felt like that was the good thing to do, that God would love me if I did it. and suddenly I came to think, did I join this community just because I think that God will only love me if I make this kind of sacrifice. And so, now I know that God will love me no matter what, chute why did I join this place?

GH: ... it's better to not.

JH: So I went through a number of feeling like..., you know?

Q: Then you were married that ...

JH: I was only married. Probably didn't care, can't remember even if or not. I don't know.

GH: Wasn't Ian even here?

JH: He was here.

GH: ... does when he lived here. ...

JH: No, no, no, Ian wasn't here. I'm sure.

Q: I mean who was...

JH: He was a famous, what? ...man

GH: He was leader of the ...

JH: Yeah, he liked to work with people.

Q: Leader work, oh, I thought he was a community person, and I couldn't understand why after he was here there...

GH: ...

JH: But I think that was a question for me then. Why did I do this? And then I came sort of thinking I really am better of here, now if these things hadn't happened to me, this ... had not happened to me, I would have just ... and gone.

Q: That's interesting.

JH: I came around ... really the right choice, but there was some after-thinking.

Q: So when did you decide it was some kind of Christian duty.

JH: This is the way one should live, one ought.

Q: So it wasn't nirvana, it was, it was...

JH: I also understood that ... very acceptive and honesty, it's like on the one hand yes this is what I am going at, on the other hand oh wow, ... with this dumb rules and...

Q: But I guess I will ...

JH: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. Yeah.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Ok, well have you considered..., or are you glad you did it?

GH: We are glad we did it, and we don't want to go back. (Laughs)

JH: That's the thing I need to talk about if we'd do it now, all behind, it's so incredible much energy. And ... to give up your own agenda, it would be hard to go back and do it now.

Q: So have you resolved that God thinks it is Ok, now.

JH: Yeah.

Q: Or was it so that oh God if I didn't have the community it was all be wrong, so therefore...You didn't consider moving in to a ... place to continue with the community.

GH: Oh no, it's not just that it is all around us, with each others...

(All mumble at the same time)

JH: ... we would have loved to continue, if we'd have that choice, which was bot the...

GH: ...

JH: Are you glad you did it? Oh, we could go on and on about this.

Q: No, I'm worried about you.

JH: Oh no, please this is your time.

Q: Am I right that New Creation Fellowship ... just about to ... the place sort of balance for community some kind of special relationship. Was that because, was that intentional?

GH: ...

JH: Yes it was.

Q: Gerry Leavens said that living in a community every whisper is a shout. And if I write a doctor dissertation on this that is the kind of...

JH: ...

Q: I don't have...

GH: ...

Q: Doesn't that just say it? I wrote that down and I said "Dorothy, can I use this for the title of my dissertation if I ever do this, and that just grasps the whole thing and you know, even as an outsider, well I sensed that it was... the people.

JH: And there was another little one indirect certain points that, but those were the ... majors.

Q: What other little?

JH: Austin.

GH: Oh yeah, in Chicago.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Oh, Austin in Chicago, not Texas. Ok. Alright. How was your life after you grew honest. How was your life after community had been affected by this? Other than your friends came back and ...

JH: A lot of beer and vine.(laughs)

Q: (laughs) To make it easier.

GH: It's been a ... to ... in a war... they have ... about it, ... about it, and then they are glad it's over.

Q: Yeah.

GH: It's somehow like that.

JH: I certainly think I'm a happier (?) person as a more rounded person. I think I have some, found other skills I wouldn't have had before.

GH: ...

JH: And I think I'm kind of more humble, as a result.

GH: Yeah, I think there are kind of changes, when I ... I was very scared when person told me he used to make ...place, and he told me a year later he was a completely different person, and I had that fear. I know I needed to change, but was I really willing to be changed, you know? And so I've been changed and yet in a sense I've been able to become more ... I have a strong sense of who I am, and ... Where as before I was trying to ...

JH: I think we also have, I want to be careful with these words, but I think we have a certain attitude and appreciation of going deep in relationships. I think there is some ... stuff that happen, even now, I think we should pick up and help each other out. So...

Q: Do you keep in contact with a lot of people that you've lived with?

JH: Yeah, that's an interesting question. In some ways no, but when they come through there to pick up like the gentiles, but when they come through the door, look at us here, but you know, we can pick up. ... when they come through, very deep.

Q: Was there ever anybody that left like in anger and just cut off all ties? Did that happen at all?

JH: No, I think there were some very difficult leavings at times. I don't know if anger will remain, or sorrow, or ...

GH: ...

Q: I can't cut off relationships with people...

JH: (At the same time) I can't think of people that ... by. Can you think of people like that?

GH: I know Maggie (?).

JH: Oh yeah that.

GH: She was just so...

JH: Maybe so, but...

GH: It wasn't just because of ...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Other dynamics.

JH: But I think where as people came to our service got recognized kind of ...

GH: (at the same time) Yeah, it was difficult to leave.

JH: ...or it was just time for me to move on, or somebody was like oh it is really good to know that you can come to this and they never gonna send you, but it's hard to sort of...

GH: Yeah, most people just left not in anger.

JH: No, I don't think anger would be the primary ... or disappointment ...

GH: Several ... stability and maturity, they were able to be on their own, and I mean they were almost encouraged, I mean we didn't kick them out, but encouraged them, and we had a woman on their own for a while, I mean separate ... and they moved out.

Q: Was that for people who had joined the community for different reasons than...

GH: Yeah.

Q: ... to get help from the community and to get help as physiological...

GH: Oh yeah.

JH: I think that wasn't even stated really. Sometimes it was, but sometimes it just ..., you know.

Q: Did the woman who came in have by her children? You said ... from an abusive relationship.

GH: Well, I won't say that.

Q: Oh, did she, was that successful? Did she get out, and get on her own?

GH: Yeah, she went ...

JH: Yeah, I think some of her time was kind of rocky here and there, but she was not too long with us, a year and half, or two years.

GH: Yeah. (Laughs)

JH: It seemed much longer, because it was s intense.

GH: It probably did, basically is... coming her children all live in the same household and so... ... personality and ... the main people and ... the children.

JH: Ok, let's not, pretty ...

GH: And she could not, she could not listen to any of us.

Q: Yeah, that is not uncommon.

GH: No. And I think she ... a lot of ...

JH: I think that everybody who is in a community ... probably some real disappointment and some real tough time, as well as ... joy. And then some people maybe are only one way or the other, I don't know, there are maybe some people who really felt like this is more painful than not.

GH: Yeah, I think I agree.

JH: ... not ... people like that, but I think most people would say painful, harder times, but you know...

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: But so is life.

JH: ... helpful over the long time.

Q: What did people, did most people stay for a while and give it a chance? Or there were who people who joined and...

GH: Merely to join. Oh yeah, ...

Q: Did you have like a trial period before people could join?

GH: There was, why ... neighbor about, really get to know the community, what it is about...

JH: We didn't make ...

GH: I wanted to join another way, but they wouldn't let me. So I did, I kind of ... it in the community before I actually joined.

Q: You don't ...

GH: I went to college.

Q: From where did you put that?

GH: ...

JH: (At the same time)...

Q: And in...

GH: Tim... (?)

Q: Tim ... And you moved here for what kind of job?

JH: laughs

GH: ... no job.

JH: To be in a community.

GH: To be in a community.

Q: You moved here to be in a community and then found a job!

GH: Yeah, two years later I found a job. I was part of the builders.

JH: (Laughing) A job he hated.

GH: And I enjoyed ... bitter. Yeah, I learned a lot. But you know...

Q: At the Mennonite did that, a different editor, because you were living...

GH: Yeah, it turned out it was a good change, yeah a good change, but I ...

Q: And now you are headman. Huh.

JH: Partly ..., when he moved here, they moved here, he was part of the communion and he reacted to ... and found a job, ... would have never found a job.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: ...

JH: Yeah, Parkland, but not Mennonite.

Q: Oh, Ok.

JH: Everlean (?).

Q: And you came from Baptist?

GH: No. Well, pagan mentalist.

Q: Pagan mentalist?

GH: I went to Baptist Church and all kind of churches.

Q: You were a pretty evangelical Christian kind of...

GH: Yeah, yeah. Then I just two years ... there I lived like 700 guys in that house and ... And so my, my idea of church...

Q: ... developed then?

GH: ... developed then.

Q: How did you know about New Creation?

GH: Ahm, the word...

Q: Have you read about, where did you...

GH: No, this is the quest. I wanted to join them...

JH: Weird.

GH: ... and I went up there and ... and yet I was approaching them with my school graduation and ... did they got there and they called me and said "we can't get you in unless you belong to New Creation".

Q: How many people?

GH: I was, I was talking, well it turned out they were...

JH: What year was that?

GH: '76.

JH: They were turning members down? (whistles)

GH: They were allowing only so many people coming, I found out later. Actually what they told me was they thought it would be better for me since my family was in this linking And actually my grandmother were very close friends, very close friends, I mean at least with somebody ... I gonna be closer and encouraged by.

JH: And maybe they could be more ... in your eyes.

GH: Oh no, they didn't ... they did better than that.

Interview with Jeanne and Gordon Houser

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 7, 1996

JH = Jeanne Houser, GH = Gordon Houser

Q: Did anybody in New Creation would join New Creation with anybody of their family, not kidnaped, but I mean like reprogrammed?

GH: No, there wasn't anybody.

JH: A long ...

GH: But when I was telling about the ... to my mum and she said how are you... (laughs)

Q: Ohhhh.

JH: When I was considering joining, ...join something, my mum actually...

Q: Oh really?

JH: Had a real long and sad talk. Oh for one...

GH: Yeah really, once my parents ... when they came in they met people there that ..., I even from start ... great independence.

Q: Do you think anybody ... enjoying? Do you think ...

GH: We did ...

JH: Other than that I can't think of anybody.

GH: Yeah.

Q: Well, my mother cried when I went to the seminary "on no, I will never forget you". They wouldn't pay for it, they had several years to ..., and they were 'if you want to go there, you ... pay for you', they came right around.

JH: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. You know, they were just people getting really afraid of change and people were different.

JH: Their perceptions. My parents ... either of this place, but...

Q: Oh my mum thinks, I don't know... Every thing's fine now. And you know what? I'm hoping the recording went well, because this was a wonderful interview and I thank you so much. We'll see, we'll check it. and if not we'll sit here and this all again, right?