Interview with Marty Jezer and Verandah Porche
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
December 6, 1995
MJ = Marty Jezer, VP = Verandah Porche

Q: --with Marty Jezer and Verandah Porche on December 6, 1995. So Marty [unintelligible] ... about your background, like where you grew up, and some of the events that led up to.
MJ: I was older than everyone else on the farm. I was born in 1940, and I grew up in a pretty standard at the time Jewish family in the Bronx. I had a happy childhood, though I stuttered, but at the time I didn't -- it had an impact on me, but I tended to ignore it and just plow through things. I think I still do. At the age of 14, we moved up to the suburbs to Grand Plains [?], and I hated it. I felt a change from growing up in the street on the block, having friends, having all my aunts and uncles in the neighborhood, to this kind of isolated and status-driven society that I had distinctive [unintelligible]. I just hated it. And I was conscious of it, that things had changed.

Q: How old were you when you moved to Grand Plains?
MJ: I was 14 I think. I mean, I went to the school yard to hang out, and it was empty, there was no one hanging out! And I felt, "What is this?" So I always had this kind of, this ... urge to be part of a community and I always took that path, as it became possible. In high school I read [unintelligible], and I thought, "Wow, that's who I want to be, that's who I am." But I was a pretty timid -- it was [unintelligible] ... I was pretty straight, I was a [unintelligible] ... I was really out of it. In college I went to Lafayette College. I was the campus writer as a student [unintelligible] ... Democrat. That's how constrained I was. One of the first Civil Rights sit-ins happened -- I thought, "That's who I am also, that's important." And I thought that the students that sat in were great heros. And I joined CORA [?], but I wasn't too active. It was still too scary. And I went to grad school in journalism, and I had some friends who were involved in SDS who wanted to go to Eastern Kentucky to work for a coal strike, a coal miner's strike, and I had a car. So I dropped out of school and drove them there. And that kind of changed everything. The cops [unintelligible] ... threatened us. They just kind of [unintelligible] ... embarrassment also. And the coal miners took us in and were great people. So it was kind of, as the old strike song goes, "Which side are you on?" I chose sides. I was still a tenant [?] so I went home and got a job in advertising. I was still trying to uh, prove that I could be a success in the straight [?] world. Then the Vietnam War started up, and I became active, and I got drawn in heavier and heavier. I helped start a magazine [?], I was active in draft resistance. I was a kind of a Abby Hopkins [?]. I was at the heart of it, and I dropped out of the career tract and through [unintelligible]... I read the [unintelligible] ... and we talked of starting a commune. And it happened to my surprise actually. I just thought it was talk, and [unintelligible] ... another, and I had some bonds and some stock even from my bar mitzvah that I cashed in and helped to put the down payment on the farm.

Q: When was that?
MJ: In the spring of '68.

Q: Were you living near a city?
MJ: Yeah. I was on the lower east-side at the time.

Q: And you met Verandah and Ray just through some of the radical activities you were involved in.
MJ: Yeah, yeah.

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Q: Would you have considered yourself a hippie, or a flower-child at that point?
MJ: I saw myself in a rather pompous way. I was organizing the hippies. I was an organizer. But in the end I think they just organized me. I was older.

Q: Yeah? You weren't that much older.
MJ: I was 8 years older.

Q: Than I am? How old are you now?
MJ: Fifty-five. Five years older. But the teenagers who were the hippies, were the actual hippies, --

Q: Oh, them! Right, you weren't that much older than we were. Yeah I suppose the difference between 18 and 23 can be pretty big. Oh yeah, yeah. Wow. Well, Verandah, do you want to tell me something about your background?
VP: Well, my background, I think, was pretty similar to Marty's. I came from a Jewish family in New Jersey. Same grandchild immigrants, Russian-Jewish, Russian-Polish Jewish immigrants with, I guess my father's side of the family were socialist -- I mean my mother's side of the family were socialists, my father's side were, I mean my grandfather was a Trotskyist [?]. And he discovered that the revolution wasn't going to come, and so he decided to have a sweat shop, you know, composed of his own children. You know, self-sacrificing person was the way that he was described, and I never met him, he died long before I was born. But my mother's family were, my grandfather was a union organizer for the International Ladies Garment Worker's Union. And I would say, you know, my whole family was in the garment business, and were sort of ambivalent about making money, but ... but they, my father's whole life was about providing. And I spent about 8 years in an entirely Catholic town in New Jersey, which was fascinating. I just loved watching the church. And then we moved to an entirely Jewish town, and I would say that in some way my experience paralleled Marty. That, Marty's -- just that, you know, my memories of the first place that I lived were very funky. Like, a kid could be quite independent and -- I mean apparently it was quite anti-semitic there, according to my older siblings. But, I loved it. And, in Teneck [?], New Jersey, I got, I'm sure, a much better education than I would have gotten in Palisades Park [?]. But I think I've had the notion of some kind of lost Eden. It might be some common thread to ask people who did seek communal experiences, where there was some real or imagined experience that they had. You know, once we were together, now we are apart. You know, once we had a kind of, ... schmaltzy -- well once we were pleasantly in one another's hair at some point in our lives, and then there was a period of alienation, conformity, just -- I really did grow up with my mother saying, "What will the neighbors say?" You know, "You can't go to the supermarket in Dungarees." You know, my parents were very conscientious and very scared about all the things that could go wrong in the world. And since they never told us about all the things that did go wrong -- you know, which were profound -- I just thought that they were crazy. Or, uptight. And I wanted to go out and look for adventure. All of the deepest stories about hardship and death that formed my parents, were not told to us. There wasn't a whole lot of um, passing down of real experiences. It was much more just, "This is the way our family runs, this is the way we act," and no exploration of how people get to be the way that they are. My parents worshipped privacy. The only people that really came to our house were our relatives. But we

had so many relatives, that you know, the house could be full. But I don't remember my parents as a couple having practically any friends at all. It was all just family. So I grew up the youngest of four children. And being -- I mean I thought my sisters and brothers had inadequately trained my parents to accept rebellion. And so I fashioned myself as the bad child who would just go off and break all of the rules. I mean, the rules that I broke weren't -- they weren't that bad. But in my family, it caused my parents a lot of heartache. You know, staying up late at night, and going and hanging out with people they didn't like. There was just no -- having parents and children know each other, that wasn't an idea that people had in those days, that people would be really personal. You know, now, as I reflect on my parents, I just think what great people they were, and the whole period of time from puberty to, oh, to, I guess when I really broke away from my family, that was just a period where neither of us were really set up to bridge the gap between us. And I never understood them, and I thought that they didn't understand me, because they didn't tell me anything, and I didn't tell them anything. So anyway, so I went to Boston University, I wasn't a brilliant student, I was very distracted. And I was good at some things, really bad at other things, and politics seemed like a much more consuming pursuit -- poetry and politics. You know, those were the things that I cared about. And that's what I made my world around. I met the people who would later start the farm with me. Really, on the first day of college, I met my best friend, who still lives up here -- Richard Kuzansky. Yeah, I mean, I went to college with Richard and Ray, and Peter Simon, and Lori Dodge, was part of our community in Boston. And we were all, you know, kids involved with the Civil Rights movement, and later Vietnam, draft resistance. As it turned out, most of the people that I was friends with were gay. That got to be an interesting strand of experience in my life. So, uh, I left to college without graduating. I was quite close to graduating, but I was sure that I just had to get out of there. I mean, I really [unintelligible] ... as I look back on it now, and yet I never chose to go back. Anyway, I uh, Ray Mongo, who was the editor of the B News [?] and I got to be best friends, and he started, uh, he went to work for the United States Student Association and then broke away and formed LNS, you know, Liberation News Service. And I went to Washington to go to demonstrations, and joined them. And that's where I met Marty. And, ... it was very heady times. This was a really exciting chapter of people -- you know, this is long before the internet and e-mail and everything, it was just this sense that I'm sure everybody can, you know, everybody in your project has to share a frame of reference, that we could talk to each other in our own language, and that language could make change. As a poet, I felt as if my language could have force, and -- I mean I had a lot big ideas about the conversion of language, and what my responsibilities were. And I also had a lot of fun. It seemed like the big idea in those days was to uh -- I mean, we didn't really overthrow anything, but we had a lot of fun acting ... acting out. Acting with pleasure, acting with principles. And I never had the sense that I had anything to lose. That was the strange thing. I mean, I never felt in danger. I mean, there were a few times when I was scared. And um, so anyway, after Martin Luther King's assassination, Ray and I decided to [unintelligible] a farm. And Ray knew somebody who had a little hunting camp on the road in Gillford [?] where the farm that we later bought went up for sale. The farmer had died, and the widow -- I [unintelligible] -- was singing and dancing. A hundred acres of callouses, the widow was singing and dancing to leave behind her. You know, she moved to an all-electric apartment in Greenfield, and we were her Social Security check, $220 in, and ten cents a month for ten years. So, I've lived there ever since with a brief, oh maybe five year's of being married to someone and living elsewhere. As soon as I

broke up, I came back. And I'm the only one of the original people who still lives right there in stage center, but the community -- I mean there are other people there. Even on the land.
MJ: And two of the children. Three actually.
VP: Yeah, three of the children who were born there, almost four actually, if you count Missy -- you know, Emily, Eli. The first child who was every born there is part of the community, living on the land, and the second child, my daughter Oona, she uh, she lives there with her now husband, and my younger daughter Emily, who's 14 and best friends with Marty's daughter, lives there. And Marty's daughter knows, that she could move there any -- that this is a place for her. So over the 26 years of the farm, it isn't really like you're on the boat, or off the boat, I mean to me anyway. It's really important to me that the farm is the home place and the physical location for a community that's my own world wide web. And that just being there, having the farm being there, is a sustaining force for a lot of people, and it's also in some way a safety net. You know, if we ever did get to the point where everybody had to come back and we had to figure it out from there, that we would be physically able to do it. There's 88 acres, and room to grow. So it's not that that's a big force in anybody else's head, but it's something that I think about. And you know, I've had a lot of time to think about why I want to live in something other than a nuclear family. It got to be an issue in the break-up of my second marriage, when we were thinking, after separating, about getting back together again. I mean, when push really came to shove, I just, didn't want to be alone with a partner and kids, no matter, really, who it is. It's just not my realest way. And so, that's that.

Q: Can you guys describe a little bit about the early years of the farm? I'm curious, um, well first of all, why you decided to go back to the land, and what was your motivation in doing that, and if you had some sort of purpose or goal in mind?
MJ: I don't think at the start we had any goal other than to be together kind of. I don't think at the start we had any interest in agriculture or --
VP: --Certainly no knowledge!
MJ: It was a kind of an impulse to do it. We didn't plan or have discussions about it --
VP: --We never went inside the house before we bought it. I mean this is -- when I think about that now, I mean, no we didn't check out the sills to see if they were rotten. The house was locked, and we just looked in the windows and figured, "Well, it will probably be alright." Did you ever go with us?
MJ: Yeah.
VP: Yeah, I'm not mistaken. We just had this tremendous faith that we would, that we could find out why we were doing it, we could figure it out along the way. And I think that [unintelligible] wasn't such a bad idea. I mean if we had really looked in the house and seen what a dunk it was, we might have gotten discouraged.
MJ: It didn't have a toilet, it had an outhouse.
VP: It did have a toilet, we took it out as soon as we got there. I mean, it had a toilet and like a three gallon barrel out in the back yard or something.

Q: Why did you take it out?

VP: Well for practical reasons, there were too many of us, it wouldn't have been practical. And also we thought that shitting outside was better than shitting inside, and you know, when we got a composting out house -- I mean, I still use it, and have used the composted old shit on the flower garden, and it works.

MJ: Well I think the first year I would say, we just kind of fumbled.

VP: And to a certain extent it was nice to have the freedom to -- nothing bad happened as a result of being all thumbs. Marty and another person, maybe there were three people there, who had ever been outdoors before. I mean, I never had any consciousness of being on land. I mean, to make a fire, I wasn't a girl scout, I wasn't even a brownie of any successful sort, and so I knew absolutely nothing, and it was so exciting.

MJ: I got a book out of the library on trees, and it had pictures of different trees, ash tree, maple, and I would go and say, "Here's an oak tree, it has uneven twigs, it's an oak," "No, it's something else," and we were starting out totally [unintelligible].

VP: But we also had a lot of faith that you could learn things from books, and later from old-timers who took on almost mythical status, they were so great. But we, we learned a lot of things from books. We went out with a field guide and started identifying different kinds of weeds that would be good for this and good for that, and it was just, it was like, I mean for me it was, uh, the movie changing into color from black and white. And I think that individuals had a fair amount of inner strife -- I mean, we didn't always get along great. But I think in general in our history, we've been a fairly amiable group. I think certain characteristics -- there wasn't a lot of back-biting and conflict. I mean, people either kept things to themselves and left grumbling, or complained to somebody who was a special ally, but there weren't big blow-outs with people encountering one another in traumatic ways. And I think that this was both a strength and a weakness. I mean, it goes with our personalities. I wouldn't have liked to have been in a place where people were in a state of struggle with one another all the time, but probably our problem solving skills could have improved a little bit. You know, if we had -- we were very un-process oriented. We didn't like having meetings, and over the course of 26 years, we never really got into a rhythm of sort of getting together and airing issues and planning, we weren't good planners.

MJ: Quite unstructured and haphazard.

VP: Yeah, and I think this was a product of everybody's personalities, that if we had wanted it to be some other way, we would've made it that way, and the people who wanted it to be more structured, wrung their hands and gave up. We had no religious ideas, in fact, I mean, our commune -- we didn't even call it a commune -- but our household was -- among the things we agreed on was that most people there were relatively literary. At least half of the people there wrote or wanted to write.

MJ: Artistically of some sort.

VP: Yeah. And we had the feeling that, especially in the early days, that there was something that we were trying to keep alive that other people didn't care about. I mean, I remember reading Tolstoy, and just thinking that I should memorize books or something. We didn't take a tremendous number of psychedelic drugs. We had sort of our period of, you know maybe 1970, 1969, 1970, '71 perhaps, when I remember, you know, we were off the ground quite a bit. But we had a lot of fun, and we also had intermittent casualties. It didn't change things very much except it passed the time in the winter.

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MJ: I think also -- that's all true -- but in some of our [unintelligible] anyway, was this kind of uh, ... thought that the straight society is crumbling. There was the time of the War, and there was Chicago, and the bombings underground, blowing up things, some of whom were people who were, that were kind of friends of friends of friends, in our circle kind of. And it was our thought that we had escaped that and were at the birth of a whole new culture.
VP: Yeah, some people thought that. Did you think that, Marty?
MJ: On and off, yeah. I don't think I believed in it as Steve believed in it, "It's happening!" But I saw it as a struggle to do it.
VP: Yeah I thought it would be nice, but then the more I met the people who were supposedly going to make the new, sort of new age family structure, the more, well, I just didn't want to spend time with them. And it seemed to me that the farm had sort of distinct periods, you know, that the first ten years were our paying off the mortgage, that was '68 to '78, and that could be divided maybe in half. You know, that we started out being very concerned with ourselves, and people very like us. And it sort of consolidated who we were, acquiring skills, falling in and out of love, trying to make networks outside of the place with like-minded people. And tried to make a living with the center and the base being home. And then gradually people started leaving for about -- not even leaving so much as sort of branching back into the community for what seemed like three basic reasons: one was that we were getting to know people who weren't real alternative, and we were starting to, you know, make significant friendships with them. Also that the people had to earn a living. We weren't going to make a living as a group through writing books probably, so people had to figure out how to make a living, and working in health food stores and weighing out beans, you know, might not work for a lot of people. And also, I guess, the third thing was love. People couldn't fall in love with the people they were living with because we knew each other too well. You know, and also, gradually over time, people developed, re-established political times. Became involved -- you know, there was a period when I wasn't involved in anything political, and didn't want to be. And then I started getting involved in the women's community in Braddleborough [?], and other people were involved in gay rights, when that started happening, and also people wanted better jobs. Of whatever sort. People wanted to make a contribution. It's a small state, and many of us really wanted to have an impact on our community, beyond the confines of the farm or the hill. And we had -- and it was a lot of heartache for the people who's lives were so deeply based at home and thought that working on the land and having animals, and haying and all that, that that was worth as much as working away, but that was a real struggle.
MJ: It still is. Hill Farm in Yokum [?] Kansas, said, [unintelligible] ... you just don't know how it is, hills, stones, [unintelligible] ... people who have farmed ahead of us back in town couldn't do it. We thought we could, have cows and [unintelligible] and hay and a huge garden and all this stuff, but it didn't [unintelligible]... it was very hard work, and it was [unintelligible] ... I think the happiest times I've had, ever, was haying and milking cows. But we didn't have the skills, --
VP: And didn't really chose to acquire them, and didn't chose to get organized in a way -- we had friends for instance who [unintelligible] cash crop of [unintelligible] in Chutney, in one of the few places that had a collective living arrangement, and someone wanted to do it. They organized themselves to do it, they spearheaded it, they did -- you know, when the people at Packard Corners wanted to take on a big project, it was probably to write a book, or to do a project that came out of some kind of artistic or

people kind of thing. They didn't have the passion to do that on the land. And maybe, I don't know. I mean, to me, the land is still extremely important, and having it be there and having a big garden, even though it drives me crazy, it's just a part of what makes me feel sane, and drives me up the wall at the same time. But that seems to be the country tradition anyway. It's not that hippies are the only ones that want to raise too much of everything and then can't deal with it. But, all of us, in the '80's, all of us basically were involved with our professional lives in some way. We had children on the farm, and I started working as a circuit writer for the Gremont [?] Council on the Arts. I started this in the '70's, with the CETA [?] job. Then I married the guy who ran the CETA program, and I put my husband through law school with my being a poet in schools. And I could do that. One thing with living on the farm was cheap, and the other thing, I had this kind of socialist, realist vision that by hard work and clarity, that my family within this community could accomplish whatever we wanted.
MJ: But it was interesting, what you were saying, [unintelligible] ... I got two book contracts, plus we had careers starting up as authors. And all we wanted to do was [unintelligible] mostly, and I just dropped all of it, and I wrote the books, [tape ends] ...

Q: So you were talking about the purpose of your poetry I think.
VP: Well, aside from the ups and downs of my personal life, I felt as if I was there to document milestones of my community. Not just the people on the farm. But the people who lived around here, whose lives I was engaged with, whether that was the mail carrier, the road commissioner, or the teachers of the school, or the women's crisis center, or my friends on their birthdays -- that one whole wave of work that I was doing was being a poet companion to the community as a whole. And I always felt that way, and now my work, my professional work that I do for money, it evolved actually, into that. After working as a poet in the schools for a generation of school kids, you know 12 years plus, of school kids, whom I meet all over the state. People would say, "Oh, I remember you. You came to my school when I --" you know, that sort of thing. Now my work is very much an upgrowth of accompanying people I write with, with people who can't or don't choose to write themselves. With old ladies in nursing homes -- I'm doing a big project with Meals on Wheels recipients. And, with adult basic education students, using told poetry, things they tell me, as a literacy tool. And so, it's both very -- I mean, there's a political, um, motivation behind it. It's just doing what I felt I was doing, with people in my own home community. You know, everybody there could speak for themselves, everybody in Packard Corners [?] was extremely articulate. But, you know, on New Years or on people's birthdays, or when a child was born, or somebody died, you know, I felt as if it was my place to add into that. And, so it wasn't a big leap to, you know, go beyond that.

Q: Now, I'm curious about some of the specifics of the farm. Like, were you income sharing, for example?
VP: Yeah.
MJ: We didn't have any income to share basically. It wasn't an issue. Like, whoever had just kicked in.
VP: Yeah, I mean there were times when we had sort of organized plans for kicking in, and now the people who live on the farm each contribute $200 a month plus more money if that isn't enough. And there are always people who don't have it, and always people who make up for those who don't. And it

isn't a great source of bitterness. It hasn't -- I mean I think that there's a kind of, ideological or emotional basis in giving rather than getting. Maybe that's why we haven't got a strong capital base to fix things that crumble. But on the other hand, we -- there's a very strong nurturing atmosphere, I think. So we did share our income, and people kept what they felt they needed to run their own lives.

Q: And I assume you shared everything else, like food, you ate meals together?
MJ: Yes.
VP: We always have eaten meals together.

Q: And did you live together in one house?
VP: No. There was one sort of decrepit main house, that had a large kitchen, livingroom, and kind of mediocre bathroom... . And --

Q: Is that where you have your group meals.
MJ: Yeah.
VP: Yeah, and then in the late '80's we tore down the old house, and my husband and built a new one, you know, had the neighbors come, hired them to build a new house on that same site. And, you know, and so our economics have always been kind of "voodoo economics." It's just, Richard and I owned a house and have a mortgage on the house, and will for another twenty-something years. And, you know, that's sort of my burden, well our shared burden -- I mean, it's just not, there's isn't -- I don't know what anybody who was really interested in systems would do with the kind of duct-tape and bungee cord arrangements that we have that hold the place together. You know, the 88 acres of land is owned by a land-trust. Marty and I and maybe four other people are trustees of that land trust. But the house isn't part of the land trust, because we had to buy it in order to destroy it, in order to save it. You know, so, it's just one of those things. I don't think that we would be an inspiration to anybody who wanted to figure out how to order the future.

Q: How many other houses are there?
MJ: There was a whole bunch of old farm outbuildings. There was a hayhouse, a slaughterhouse, garage kind of structure that we turned into a cabins, little apartments that are crumbling now, pretty much.

Q: So, where do people live now?
VP: People live in, let's see. Three of us live in the house, and then there are outbuildings that people live in, a house that Marty built, there's somebody that lives there, and there are a few other people who live in the building that was originally an equipment storage shed. And then my daughter and her husband live in a house that uh, one of the former residents built. And it's a constant, aside from my house, it's maintaining the buildings is always difficult. Because, you know, there's a lot of attrition with weather. And some of the places weren't built with a whole lot of knowhow.
MJ: Yeah, I built my house without any background in carpentry at all. Basically read a book on it and I just did it. And it's got [unintelligible].

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Q: So from the beginning, did people kind of have their own individual spaces then?
VP: Yes, everybody has always had --
MJ: Tried to, anyway.

Q: Do you think that contributed to the longevity of your farm?
VP: Yes, I do. Everybody always thought that you needed to be away in order to be together. That was an idea, an actual shared idea, that the children, that each person, if you were in a couple, each person in the couple should have a private room with a door to close. That autonomy was, it was one of the few shared ideas we had. And I do think it contributed to the longevity of the place. I think that we had a lot of tolerance, that that contributed to the longevity of the place.

Q: Would you say your group had a shared ideology or shared spirituality?
VP: Spirituality -- our spirituality was mainly hostility to organized religion of whatever sort . It's odd, it's funny that now, individuals in the group have, uh, more of a willingness to become involved in things that are "spiritual," whatever that means. But we always made fun of the neighbors who held hands and were quiet before they had their meals, or -- I mean we were always very intolerant of great shows of righteousness, except for if we happened to be making a great show of some sort of righteousness ourselves. But, no, I think that simplicity -- we had some idea about how there were many things you could do without, and in return for that you got a lot. That, we believed in talking, listening to the sound of our own voices, preferably with an audience. That, you had to make something. You had to ... I don't know. I mean I feel as if I believed that people had to grow, while they were there, and that there was a hostility toward people stagnating. We didn't know what to do about people stagnating, but that -- you had to make something --
MJ: --It bugged us, it bugged us if people were just kind of stagnating. We thought ourselves as part of the vague tradition of activism for social change and justice, and of course it never spelled out that it was the path, but we were all like conscious of it always.
VP: Yeah, and you know, it sort of appealed to us how flaky the 19th century attempts at communal living were, you know, Fruitlands and Brook Farm, and stuff like that, and it seemed like, you know, we could imagine that they had personalities that were not unlike our own. And we believed in giving people a lot of latitude to uh, ... to ... do their own thing. I mean, and we, and we didn't think, we believed in people being relatively unselfish and unselfindulgent, and I think that we believed in hard work, even though we didn't work very hard. No, I mean I think that we did uh, we sometimes were, I mean, that part of making things happen was, for me, getting up in the morning and feeling as if I was part of sort of, the change of the day. And I still feel this way. I get up in the dark and feed the fire, and start turning over a day, whatever that day will include, I would know that something would be different by the time I was feeding the fire, before I keeled over and went to bed.
MJ: That's an interesting thing, because the difference between us and the communes up here than say the communes in California was to survive, we had to cut wood, stock it, stick it in the fire. We couldn't just space out day after day, hour after hour.
VP: And there was this sort of New Englandy feeling, you know, of , I mean my joke has always been that you have to believe in original sin to live here, because as soon as you could take your shirt off,

something will bite you. And then most of the time it's cold enough so that you have to keep on moving in order to ward off the chill. And that that seemed okay.

Q: What was your source of income ?
MJ: Books. A tiny bit from books. People had jobs in town. But just kind of uh, counting bean type jobs, at the bottom. And we didn't have any trust funds to go back on and everything like that. It was a constant hustle.

Q: Sure. Did you live off the farm a lot in terms of getting your food from the farm?
VP: Yes. We grew a lot of food and put it by, and had a lot of meat and milk and funky dairy products, and eggs, and we sold stuff at the farmer's market. Actually this year people revived our farmer's market booth that we had in -- when did the farmer's market start Mart?
MJ: Seventy-two, maybe.
VP: In the seventies. And you know, we paid, we would say, the farm would make a big push to pay the taxes. Whether that -- which was a major expense for us, whether we did it by everybody pooling together and making cider, or uh, or logging, you know, there was one year that the land was logged, that paid the taxes. Um, and the food from the farmer's market, the income from that was used expressly to pay the taxes, and with the number of people that we had, the work uh, ... people, you know, at their day jobs, could somehow suffice. And when people had good jobs, then they contributed more of their income. And so, money really, you know, it was just so funny how ... I, I mean, at some point I wanted to have us talk about long-range planning, and nobody ever wants to do it! They would say, "Oh there you go again." You know, and I would get quite crestfallen because I wanted to know, uh, how do we, where do we want to be in ten years? I learned these concepts -- I didn't even know what a job description was until I got involved with our local women's crisis center. And then as a board member for that group for ten, twelve years, I learned all this stuff about how organizations work, you know, that you step back and you think about it and you plan for it, and you fundraise for it, and I thought, "How come we're not using these skills?" And everybody just said, "Oh well, it's fine the way it is." And then they went about their lives. And so now, you know, I see myself going through this process with whoever else is interested in looking at what our projections are. I have a big jar of money that I'm actually -- it's sort of symbolic. It's the "Save the Barn Fund". You know I want to restore and improve the barn.
MJ: Yeah. It was hard to get us organized always. Back in '75 and '76 Bobby Payne, [unintelligible] and I tried to have meetings and get everything structured and have plans and agendas and everything, and it was pushing a boulder uphill.
VP: People just really didn't want to do it.

Q: So you never have had regular meetings.
MJ: We have, but they're always horrible.
VP: Yeah, and you know, now that -- in our household, there's another woman who's my age, and then there's a bunch of twenty-somethings, and then there's my daughter Emily, who's 14, she's the youngest person there. And we do meet more often now, and we discuss things like whether people should take

off their boots in the house. And I hear the young people debating -- you know, the children that I diapered are saying to each other, "You tracked the dirt in, how would you feel if we unstacked the wood in the woodshed? Don't you respect my work?" And I just lie on the sofa and laugh, you know. It's like, "Okay, do it. Have this debate." But I do think that the young people are very receptive to the idea of planning, even though they don't have any money to plan with, because they grew up with parents who, at the time anyway, were pretty ga-ga and self-involved. So maybe the next sweep of life in the farm will be more organized.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the number of people who lived there, and if you had any sort of membership policy or open-door policy or anything like that.
VP: We had a closed-door policy always, and the only way that you could get there was by falling in love with somebody, or else showing up and being wonderful. There were always people who just kind of came and --
MJ: --Stayed!
VP: And stayed. You know, like you just had an affinity. But for each one of those people there were scathed of people over time, and we still do get phone calls from people, essentially saying, "Is this the place?" And we've always said, "No."
MJ: And they were at times, cold and hostile to people. I was always nice I think. I was always hospitable to all that came, during the day anyway, and I would always choose to the play the, how did Richard put it, sell off the farm kind of. Because anyone came up the road, and there were scathes of people --

Q: In the early years mainly?
VP: Even in the middle years, there were a lot of people. I mean, it goes in waves, you know. And, so while people would some-- a friend of a friend would come and everybody would just love that person, you know, the vibes were right.
MJ: It's always obvious too.
VP: It was always obvious . Or else somebody would fall in love with somebody, and then what were you going to do? Sometimes it was wonderful, and sometimes it was awful. Sometimes it was just in between. But we never had a policy about how to get to be part of the place.

Q: And so, how many people have lived there, at one time? Like at the beginning, how many of you were there?
VP: Well I would say that the population ranged from, well the top number was probably about 17 --
MJ: Fifteen, 16, 17, 18.
VP: Yeah, that was really crowded. And um, yeah there's a -- and the smaller numbers were, five, seven.

Q: How many are there now?
VP: Well let's see... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, maybe ten or eleven.
MJ: I always said, if anyone had asked in the old days, I would just say 12. Because, the people the extended family, who have other homes, but can come in and kind of fall in again.

VP: --open the refrigerator, yeah. There are a lot of people who have refrigerator rights there, and if there's anything in the refrigerator, you know you open up six yogurt containers that don't have yogurt in them, and if you can find something, it's yours. That's always been something that we've wanted to preserve.

Q: Now you said before that you didn't consider yourself a commune. Did you consider yourself a family?
VP: We didn't have a lot of language for it. I mean, we didn't say, "Oh, let's start a commune." And I don't really think that, I mean we loosely considered ourselves a family, and we were some kind of relatives, and friends. And we replicated certain --
MJ: --There was an element of snobbishness in it too. Johnson Pasture, that's a commune, because it was chaotic, it was horrible, but not us!
VP: And we also, we sent many people who came here, came down to our place saying "Is this it?" we often would send them down the road.

Q: Does the Johnson place still exist?
VP: Well actually there is some kind of, uh, commune there now. It's called Full Circle, and I can, we can probably find the phone number of somebody who lives there. They're much more, uh, sort of alternative, at this point, than we are.

Q: Was the Johnson commune --
VP: --Johnson Pasture.

Q: --Johnson Pasture -- has it remained as some sort of intentional community for all these years?
VP: Well they have way more intentions that they don't fulfill. Now I think they're probably a bunch of nuclear families who live on the land. They had a nice garden, they had a good-looking hen house, and periodically they have gatherings. I think they might have home schooled their children. You know it pushes my buttons, I start imagining that they're sort of crystal gazers. This is just one of my areas of intolerance. I mean, not that there is even a they. I have no idea who is there or what they think. But my fantasy about them is probably just as irrelevant to who they are as any local's fantasies about us. Years ago.

Q: What was your relationship with the surrounding community like?
MJ: That's an interesting thing. It started out with they were afraid of us and we were terrified of them. But there were certain people in the town who took steps to get to know us.
VP: And we were extremely appreciative. And ... Marty has two pictures on the wall over there: the maple sugaring picture and the one below it, our friend Fritz, who's in both of those pictures, was -- he, he had lived on the Johnson Pasture. He lived all over, all over the hill, as we call it, lived at our house for awhile, and Fritz just always had a feeling that he belonged. And so he would drag everybody else along to go belong with him. And Marty was one of the main people that he dragged along. And that's a picture of him below, at May Day. He died of AIDS, and he was very beloved. And he took risks, you

know. He tried to join the Grange, at the time that the Grange didn't want him. And now the Grange is going around begging for people to join, old hippies joining the Grange, it's just the greatest. But Fritz was a very pivotal member of our community. And he taught us that we could just walk down the street and be friends with whomever we wanted, and if we acted like friends, then we would be friends. And parenthetically, our whole community, not just the alternative community, but many of Fritz's town friends, you know, we all took care of him till he died and after. And so he was, he taught us that we were pillars of the community, and I certainly, and I'm sure that Marty certainly feels like a pillar of the community, very deeply involved with the school in our home town. It's a great school now. Maybe it was good for some people in the old days, but it was horrible for our early kids. And now, by, you know a community really putting its collective shoulder to the wheel, it's a great school. And many of the things that we care about, we influence, and are influenced by whoever is here. You know, this is a real cross-over town, you know, community, Gillford [?], Brattleborough. There aren't too many, I don't hear too many people thinking always, "It was better before anybody else came here." You don't hear that that much.

MJ: In some towns, Putnam for instance, there's a split between the old timers and the counter culture people, the alternative people, the old hippies who settled in. It's not that way here. In Gillford, I think there's more of a blend.

VP: Yeah, and I think the key to it is service, and respect, and leadership. That people ... that ... you know, we got the message that if you wanted in, in Vermont, you had to buy your time and hold your tongue. And maybe some of us took that to an extreme of thinking that we had to sort of pay our dues to be full members of the community. But it wasn't a bad thing. Now it's considered very unseemly when somebody moves up from away and starts mouthing off at town meeting, as if, you know, they're John Q. Public. And, I think that there's just a fair amount of respect and work offered in exchange for understanding.

Q: So you guys didn't home school your kids then, you sent them to the public school always?

MJ: Yeah.

VP: Yeah.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about child rearing and how that was handled?

VP: Oh, you should talk to the children themselves!

Q: Oh I'd love to.

MJ: Well I was off the farm, for Katie anyway, so I don't think you should speak with --

Q: --Is Katie your daughter?

MJ: Yeah. We spent summers at the farm, and in her eyes, it's one of her homes. She's comfortable there, but I didn't have a hand in raising her or Eli or --

VP: Well I think that -- well you actually did, whether you know it or not. I mean, you're certainly somebody that they look to as part of the weave of their lives, very important actually, much more than you, than how many hours you logged. But, I mean, but Katie is, for instance, completely comfortable

there, even, I mean, especially, when neither of her parents is there. Then she's a kind of a ward of the state, and is, you know, she's just -- anyway, how the children were raised. I think that you really ought to talk to them and if -- how long are you going to be around for?

Q: Oh, a couple more days, although I'm kind of doing some travelling. But if we can arrange an interview, that would be wonderful.
VP: Well I mean they might be willing to talk to you, I don't know.
MJ: [unintelligible], and Eli, and ...

Q: Well we have time this afternoon, that's probably too quick.
VP: Yeah, they're hard to get a hold of.
MJ: But I don't think we had a conscious philosophy about childcare.
VP: Well one thing that I know, is that when uh, when the children were young, a lot of the grown-ups sort of acted like children. Just that everybody was very preoccupied with their own stories, with their own process, and that the kids sort of had to fit in to that. You know, there were a lot of people around, and the kids had a lot of autonomy, because they were expected to be on their own and amuse themselves. And Oona and Eli and Missy liked to brag about how they used to run around with machetes behind our backs and make forts and -- I mean, every square inch of the land, those older kids knew as sort of their place, and they had the Packer Corner's Kid's Club, the PCKC. And, they ... when they were young, that was the backbone of their world. Everybody, I think, loved the kids, and didn't think they should be spoiled, but I think in a great part their upbringing was left -- the decisions about their upbringing were left to their families unless somebody else really had a problem with it. That, the other people at the farm were support staff. And they were extremely important. I mean, this Richard Luzansky, he taught Emily, my younger daughter, taught her to walk. Took her into the kitchen where he always shooed her out, and said, "Emily, use your concentration." And, you know, she walked across the floor to him. And the kids, ... one of the main influences of having so many other grown-ups around is that our kids are very poised around grown-ups. They knew from the earliest years how to flim-flam grown-ups who were outside of the community, so that if they had to talk their way into something that they wanted in general, that was a skill that they had. And that we brought the values that we wanted to have to raising them in that, we wanted our kids to know us and understand us. And probably told them way more than they ever wanted to know. And, also we wanted them to know that we took seriously. We took their ideas seriously, and that they were ... that they were themselves. And, there were, you know, a lot of kids who were sheltered at the farm, that if other people were having troubles in their families, you know, the farm was a safe place where their kids could be. And I think that the fact that three, that three of the kids, for them that was a pivotal place, have chosen to spend this part of their lives there. Shows that either they didn't have the wherewithal to make it out in the world just right now, or that the farm is still a good nurturing place for their own future plans, and that they want to give back. I think that they want to add their weight to the value of the future.

Q: What were attitudes toward sexuality like at the community?
VP: Well, we were pretty prudish I think.

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MJ: Well, by what standards?
VP: By the standards of everybody coming to interview us and assuming that everybody slept with everybody. I mean, there was a lot less, I mean, people went to be lonely a lot more time than they went to bed with each other just for the sake of having a warm body beside them.
MJ: I wouldn't call us prudish, I would call us circumspect. We did things on our own.
VP: Yeah. I mean, and if somebody, people would often have assignations of one sort or another elsewhere, and if a person was really important they would bring the person back and subject them --
MJ: It was hard, to either go out and have an affair and then have everyone gossip about it, and it was even harder to bring someone home --
VP: --And subject them to the, you know, "Well!" My mother, we had a joke about how, my sister brought her lover home, and I said to my mother, "What did you think of him?" And she said, "Oh, you're sister's lover?" I was really shocked that she used that word. And she said, "Well, I didn't have a chance to ask him about his philosophy or his interests. " You know, and anybody who came to the farm, any potential lover, spouse, you know, everybody would just kind of screen them. And just want to know just who they were. Were they good enough for our so-and-so, did they make a mess? Each person had a different issue that they would bring.
MJ: It was also a good scream at times. I brought home Anna [unintelligible] ... and we sat down for dinner and everybody's all like starving, and says "Aren't we going to hold hands?" And everybody looked around, and I knew in an instant that Anna isn't for me.
VP: And you know, it's interesting that Oona, my older daughter, would bring home boyfriends, and would subject them to a room full of bossy women. And she sort of would sit there and watch to see if the guy could cut it.

Q: That was a test for her.
VP: So it was both a trial and just a place where people are loyal to you, but it is very hard for the person who wants to come in, because even, throughout the history of the place, we've been eccentric and sort of self-involved, and like, "It's really happening here, and who are you? What are you going to add?" And also let's see, another element about sexuality was people being gay. Because, a few of the members of the original household were gay, and coming out.
MJ: Or at the start they tried to hide it.
VP: Well like Richard Lozanski here, I knew he was gay. That was his lover. And I couldn't -- years later he said that he thought that that, you know, he and his lover tried to hide it, that they , you know, that they could have acted this way, but instead they acted that way in order to be discrete, and I thought he was crazy!
MJ: Everybody knew.
VP: Everybody knew, and nobody cared. But, you know, a pivotal time at the farm was when our friend Marshall Bloom who lived in our sister farm in Montague killed himself. And when he killed himself, he was terribly worried about the contents of the second floor closet where all of his sort of boy magazines where. And this started a whole revolution in consciousness where all of the, many people that we knew who were gay, just finally realized that they had to do something. And that was all for the best. I mean, it was, it was hard at times. When Ray came out and I realized that he had been among my best, best

friends there, and that he hadn't told me. And I felt so used. I felt as if -- well I really had to sort out my feelings. And they were quite confused. I wouldn't have cared if he was gay, he could've told me the day he met me. But instead I felt as if we had this kind of charade. That, now as I put it in perspective, you know it was the times, that anybody's critique of anybody could be completely invalidated by them being a "fucking faggot." And you know, as a straight person, I was incapable of realizing how deeply wounding that would be. But now, gay issues, gay and lesbian issues are a comfortable part of, you know, everybody is involved with the AIDS project in Brattleborough, or whatever comes up. And I would say that the community at large is , relatively speaking, quite unimpressed with disclosures about anybody's sexuality.

MJ: I don't think we've ever been conscious of a quota to gay people, or five Jews, or three of anybody, that just never was an issue.

VP: Yeah. As it turns out, many of the people whom we've been involved with are Jewish. Of Jewish extraction.

MJ: Gay also.

VP: And gay. It's a certain kind of tradition, like a stream, like, how funny that we came here and did this. But it's kind of, all of the characteristics that Marty and I are describing are, you know, third generation, Russian-Jewish immigrant, um, characteristics, all over. We aren't doctors and professors because of, you know, we took another bend in the road. But, living off the ground as one of my relatives put it when I was describing "going back to the land." You know, that sort of living on earth but out of the body, you know, living in your head, and having a lot of big ideas, and being kind of amiable and not exactly proactive, these are all characteristics that have [tape ends] ...

Q: You mentioned a sister farm, in Montague or something like that?

VP: Yeah, have you been there?

MJ: That's Dan Caller [?] and Chuck Light [?] whose names I think I gave you.

VP: Neither of them lives at the farm there, but they're involved with the community.

MJ: They uphold the history of it.

VP: Well, yeah, when we left Liberation News Service, Ray, and Marty and I decided to move to Vermont, and then Marshall Bloom, who was the other mover-shaker, of the news service, decided to move to Massachusetts near Amhearst, where he had gone to school. And so he and some of the people from that news service started the farm in Montague. And the farm itself is still owned by the same people who started it, but largely the people who lived there are entirely different from the people who started it.

MJ: But from '68 until '78, clamshell [?] stuff anyway, we were close and had lots of interactions.

Q: Were there other groups around here that you networked with.

MJ: Yeah.

VP: Oh yeah. Yeah, I mean there were, it's hey day, around that time that Home Comfort [?] was written -- everybody had extra people around. That was just sort of the way.

MJ: Households of people.

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VP: Yeah. I mean, that was just, you know how old people were, it was practical, it was groovy. There was a women's commune that was over the hill.
MJ: It was not a women's commune.
VP: Well a commune with primarily women in it.
MJ: No, uh, one of the women in it would go to Boston and invite all the women to her commune. I had a girlfriend at this commune, and I'd be over there often and I'd be sitting on the porch, and a car would drive up, and a bunch of women would get out with short, cropped hair, and ask, "Is this the gay commune?" And I would say, "Inside."
VP: Well I think that in general things were pretty polymorphous, wherever. There was this Johnson Pasture commune that we were talking about, that was basically an open land commune. And very nice people who owned it with very good intentions. And they got a lot of, you know, just waves of flaky people there, you know people like, "The Bus People." You could just picture what the bus people would be. "The STP People." I mean, people's bus would get mired and a whole winter would go by and they would be living on popcorn and olio. And then there was -- yeah, when my future husband was working for the welfare department, members of the Johnson Pasture came in, and he just added up how many people there were there, and how many food stamps they would earn, and even though there was a very rudimentary computer in those days, he sent out an order for something like $800 worth of food stamps. You know, just being complete, dotting every i and crossing every t and taking every name, and it just went on tilt, they couldn't believe it.
MJ: And it was down and out Johnson Pasture too, it was very harsh.
VP: Yeah, and they had a fire there and four people died. There was also a farm that was bought by a couple of people with money, next door to us, called Tree Frog. And they, you know, we were friends with them. We -- I'm still friends with some of the people from there. And they sold the place and our neighbors, Andy Cupcont [?] and John Scagliotti [?] bought it, a gay couple. Andy was a world class journalist, he died last year. And his partner, John, is a film maker, very active in gay issues. And so they had their whole household of Nation interns. You know, Andy was one of the editors of the Nation, so they had their whole sort of intergenerational scene going there. And so, I mean, pretty much all of the households -- there were maybe 30 people who live on our hill, who, you know, at the drop of a hat, can collect -- I'm going to have our annual Lacka [?] party, I haven't figured out when to do it. Marty and I like to make lackas. And you know it's just like a few phone calls, round up the usual suspects. And everybody, the grown-ups and the children, feel as if they're connected. And it doesn't matter whether they want to be connected or not, they just are connected. And so, rather than breaking it up into who lived where, it's just when push comes to shove, uh, ... there are a lot of people who will come through for one another. Marty, how much money did we raise for Fritz? Was that $8,000?
MJ: Something like that, yeah.
VP: Yeah, we sent out -- when Fritz, our friend, was dying, we wrote a fund-raising letter, one letter, one letter, and we raised $8,000, with no effort at all. It was just, people considering it a privilege to do something. If there's one legacy, from all of this, communal stuff, it's the loyalty, that people know each other. Marty and I know what it's like to be with each other, and, we're loyal to each other.
MJ: There's a strong sense of shared history. And it isn't just us, it's up here, with ... this group of people who came up here, as hippies, or as -- the hippies, '68, '69, '70, who stayed.

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VP: Yeah, and who stayed with a certain style. It isn't just like, I mean, occasionally you run across people who stayed, and they just .. . really feel like burnouts. You know, I feel as if we've had the luck to prosper here. We've made our choices. There are certainly plenty of things that we could've done differently, that would have been more advantageous. We would've had more money. We would've had, perhaps, more influence on our generation.
MJ: In this town anyway, in this area, I think we have had an impact. There's a co-op here that's huge, that we all had a hand in. I don't think we started it, but we all had a hand in getting it going. The Common Ground, it isn't ours, but this whole community started it up. And it's still happening.
VP: Yeah, I think in terms of the "Think globally, act locally" idea, that the alternative community here has ... has prospered as cultural workers, as people who have exchanged real benefit. And made this what was it, the fifth most liveable small town, according to the Rauber Reformer? In the country. It used to be number 22.

Q: Now both of you left the community at different points and then came back, is that right? Can you talk a little bit about what caused you to leave, and why you came back?
MJ: I left in '82 because I had a child and my companion had a great teaching job up in Montreal, so I moved up there, although I stayed in strong contact there always. But also I think my dream of an agricultural empire had collapsed, and I was burned out on the work of trying to do it as a farmer, as a back-to-the-lander. I sensed that that dream had left course. So I was at loose ends. So it was easy for me to go up there. After we broke up, I came right back, and it was as if I hadn't ever gone, kind of. And I was there for two years, and I had a, I have a girlfriend in town who has four children and who had done the back-to-the-land thing also, and has started all over again. But also, I felt, and I'm getting older, there's certain things I have to do. I feel [unintelligible] ... I had to do, and I didn't have to time to cut wood, work in the garden, but I felt I had to it. It had to get done.
VP: Well it's a tremendous energy sink, you know? It's not even, I mean people could've said to you, "Oh, Marty, don't worry about it, just go write your book, other people would do it," but when you're there --
MJ: --I was always conscious of it --
VP: --and you sort of want to do it.
MJ: I enjoyed it also.
VP: And it's much harder to sit in your room and write your book when that's what you say you're going to do.
MJ: Yeah. So I came into town, because I thought I hadn't lived in town also. So it was the next step. But as I say I'm still -- I don't go out often, because I just don't have time, basically, I mean, I'm just overloaded here with stuff to do. But it's comfortable. I don't have any conflict. I'm not going, "Those people up there." I'm just here.

Q: And that feels okay to you.
MJ: Yeah.

Q: But there door's always open if you want to go back.
MJ: Yeah. I assume it is. I've always been amazed how I can go off and I can come back and I don't even have to kind of feel my way around at all. It's as if I've gone to town for half and hour .
VP: A long hamburger.
MJ: Yeah, for a hamburger.

Q: You have definite refrigerator privileges then. And how about you, Verandah?
VP: Well let's see, I went, I mean when I left it was so long ago, I left because I was pregnant -- no, I had a baby with someone who was impossible. And, I mean, nobody could stand to live with him, and I felt that I had already thrown in my lot so much that I would go. So I left in 1973, and I guess I came back in '77, you know, late '77, after a very trying, frightening marriage. And I came back and cried at the kitchen table, and everybody said, "We told you so," and I said, "You're right." And then they said, "Well we told you so," and I said, "Well you're right." After three "I told you so's", then I was back. It was kind of different from how I left in that when I returned it was a kind of bleak time on the farm. One of the other couples had just broken up, and it was just, ... I had to work more to raise morale. But it wasn't undoable. We just scared ourselves. It was very scary having a terrible marriage. And there was a lot of work to do to make the children comfortable and create a sense of ongoingness. And we did. And so, in my work, I've travelled -- I mean I travelled all over the state. I started travelling in the '80's. And that's made me appreciate the farm so much more, because the knowhow that I got living with that group of people has made me intuitively aware of what's going on in whatever room I go into -- I know how to check and find out who I need to attend to in order to get my work done. So it's been terrific on-the-job training, being able to read a room. Also, it relieves what could otherwise be the monotony of having lived in the same place for so long, the fact that I get to go out and do work that I really enjoy, that's deeply appreciated all over the place. Also, there has always been an influx of fascinating people who have come to the hill, I mean, people who have come to our house, people who are in the neighborhood, it's always been a magnet, for people with an interesting story. And so, ... it's a very mix-and-match existence. Our flexibility ... has meant that there are a lot of things that I would like to see us get done that we don't get done . But on the other hand, I've always valued, uh, earnest conversation more than I valued the plan of action, so I've had great conversations, and maybe that's what they can put on my tombstone: "Had great conversations here."

Q: So when you came back in '77 then, did you, have you stayed ever since?
VP: Um-hmm. Yeah, I've lived there ever since. I had another kid, in 1981, and despite the fact that my marriage, my second marriage sort of ... pulled apart over the course of ... from about 1989 until this year, it's kind of spent all of its time pulling apart, uh, I really know why I'm there, and ... and that, despite the fact that -- you know, as I hear Marty talk about how he has things that he want's to accomplish, and he doesn't have time for all that, uh, I mean, it's likewise true for me. I would get a lot more done, that I've said I want to do, if I didn't live there, and have the constant distraction of work and people. But I guess in great part, ... uh, part of what I want to do is see what happens next. What I want to write about is to see what happens when, when people get together and put their minds

together. And that's what's going on in the kitchen. So it's my own damn fault if I don't go up to my room and pull the plug on kitchen life.

MJ: I think both of us, especially Verandah, but I too have always liked kitchen talk. You just hang out and you talk about anything.

VP: Yeah, well that's how the great ideas happen, you know, you talk about post-modernism, the idea that everything is right here in the room with us, with it's whole big context flapping, and that's something that two people everywhere staring into the fire and smoking a joint, discovered, you know, that there's just like, you look at the motes of dust and suddenly you realize that the crackle is all there, so much more than you every assumed. And in the work that I've -- I've learned how to do the work that I've done, eliciting language from people by listening to kitchen talk. And to be able to recreate that essence in a room in a nursing home, or in a church basement with a bunch of adult basic education students. It's something real and it's something not everybody can do, because you have to have been there. Wherever "there" is.

MJ: And the thing about Packer Corner [?], and it's a powerful attraction, is you can go up there and with friends that are smoking, Charlie and Susan, can just stop in at any hour and get into kind of a session with however is sitting on the couch basically.

VP: And some of them are just world-class conversations that start out with just bitching about having snow in your shoes, and then it goes into, into something else. And I think that that's been consistent throughout, that we were very, I don't know, "snobbish" is the wrong word for it, but we always appreciated -- in the old days we might have called it a "first class freak," you know, somebody who was truly him- or herself. And that in the course of the years that we've been there, we haven't pretended to be doing a lot of things other than what we were doing. You know, I've written a lot of grants about what our nonprofit corporation does, what our mission is, and what I'm doing. And it is translating stuff into another language with measurable outcomes and goals and objectives. But I do think that the actual thrust of the place is authentic, that it's no better than it ought to be, you know, that things are composting all the time there, breaking down, and something else is burbling up.

Q: There's one thing I'm real curious about, and that's that, um, it seemed to me that most of the back-to-the-land communes kind of crashed and burned, and Packer Corner has survived, and I'm wondering -- I mean you and Verandah certainly talked about some of the reasons why you thought it has lasted -- but can you maybe summarize that?

MJ: I think we were a little bit older than -- I mean, I make a distinction between the hippies who in '68, '69, dropped out of high school, dropped out of college, and those of us who were a bit older had come up the Civil Rights movement, were activists, who kind of had a better sense of history, and who didn't go off on extreme tangents thinking, "This is the answer," and if that answer doesn't pan out, then "This is the answer." And after you go after the answer a couple of times, you just give up on it and you just turn your back on everything. I've always expected to stumble to so the fact that it was hard and we didn't have the answers didn't deter us I think. I have questions, I don't have answers, basically. And I think a lot of people half the time they had answers, and gave up when those answers were not answers at all. And the other thing is our farm is beautiful. It's a great piece of land, and it was always hard for me to go off of it. I have a strong attachment, even here, I'm really, I think also, ... this town has, as it

had, enough people like us so we felt and feel part of a community. I think also that after we had written books and articles on it, we had an ego stake in it, on keeping it going. I think that's part of it. It got tangled up with our public identities. I think it was a good bunch of people.

Q: Do you think the fact that you weren't a hippie crash pad probably helped, that you had that closed-door policy.
MJ: Yeah.

Q: And you allowed people to have some individual space?
MJ: Yeah, definitely.

Q: So this is sort of a simplistic question, but, um, would you view the farm as a success or a failure?
MJ: It's a good question! Because I've thought about it. I think it failed on its own terms. I think the counter-culture, the idea of a counter-culture as a vehicle for change has all kinds of problems. I don't think it works. But I think it's a success in terms of what it's done for each of us and what we have done because of it. I mean, I have experience in group dynamics, that most people don't have. And I've done stuff also that hardly anyone on this earth has done, and some of it at the time was horrible and hard an unhappy, and heart-breaking and all that, but it was also at times, just, I mean I've known ecstasy from every day [unintelligible] to action. When at times the commune worked, and everyone was into it, and it was, you know, it was just a great time. But life goes on also.

Q: Well great.