

Interview with Steve (Norudeen) Durkee

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

July 13, 1996

Q: Norudeen?

A: Norudeen.

Q: Norudeen Durkee. Okay. I'm not quite sure where to start asking you questions because I don't know enough about your background, but I'd love to hear about maybe some of the events that led up to Lama being founded.

A: The founding of Lama in 1967 and some of the events, from my perspective, anyway, that may have led up to ... the problem is that I'm a very thorough speaker, so this may be a problem for you because I'm involved in detail.

Q: Okay.

A: I don't know how much detail you want. What level ... in other words, all I can say is that if you lived in the time or it was an extraordinary time, certainly, it seemed to be an extraordinary time. Or it was an extraordinary time. I was a New York artist, I was an artist in New York. I was born in a very small village, though, in a rural area, but I was an artist in New York, so I lived in New York for a long time. I had been directed by my first teacher to people like Ramonama Harshi [??] and people like [unintelligible] in the very modern times, and in olden times or more, older times, people like Plotinus [??] and Saint John of the Cross, and in other cultures like -- at this point, that was in the '50s when [unintelligible] Suzuki [??] was teaching at Columbia University, though I was at that point seventeen years old. Anyway, he put me in that direction, towards a seeking of spirituality. I came from a very religious background. My family are very religious people. My parents and my mother's people were all teachers and my father's people were spice traders who traveled all over, maybe you've heard of Durkee spices.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: Yeah, well, my generations of people have traveled all over the world and they had intermarried in many different places. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: So that my family, though it's from here in Virginia, this is where it settled in Virginia, had settled all over the world and lived in many different places. In China, in India, in Malabar, in many places. So that's what I come out of, the world I come out of. So this man directed me towards seeking the spiritual realities of life at a point where many people were pushed into politics or into ideology, in other words, that crucial age of your life between seventeen and twenty-one where you're really trying to put it together, and some make sense in the sixteen years that proceeded you. Instead of being directed into that, I was directed towards seeking a spiritual end, that that represented the best and the greatest thing that a human being could do. That did not exclude involvement, as I say, in the Civil Rights movement and in the Peace movement, because those were clearly spiritual goals, as is the ecological movement clearly, in reality a spiritual endeavor. When I say "ideology," I simply mean the people who makes those the end. There are spiritual ideologies as well. You understand? I mean, who make that their thing or their business or their corporation or what they're selling or becomes another one of the many products that are being sold, which is later, what I'll say about Lama vis-a-vis the spiritual

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supermarket, which is my view of Lama. Or what it became. Because things become product, you know what I mean? Something is wonderful, and then somebody right away, just given the kinds of minds that are generated in our society, they try to sell it. They say that if people watch television five hours a day, they see 21,000 commercials a year. And it's not the commercials that they see, it's the idea of buying and selling and brand names and everything like that. So that people take everything and turn it into product. They sell it. Even spirituality. That's what I mean by ideology. They sell political ends, they sell religious ends, they sell philosophical ends, whatever it is. It's packaged within six months in America or two years in America. It's packaged and being sold, first at your health store, maybe, but then pretty soon it's being sold everywhere. So that's not what I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is the realization of truth insofar as that's possible to be. The realization of that not as something that somebody is selling you from someplace else, but something that you're experiencing for yourself, because that's what does it. Only if you experience the reality can it have any meaning. The fact that I may have experienced the reality or that some religious figure may have experienced the reality, in the end there is no vicarious salvation. Any salvation, in the sense of the Latin, "to be made whole," is your problem, or my problem, it is the individual's problem. There is nobody else who can do it for you. You either get it or you don't get it. We say [unintelligible], "who tastes it knows it, and who doesn't taste it, doesn't know it." So this is where I was coming from. You'll find that there were three people who founded Lama Foundation. My former wife, whose name is Asha, she calls herself Asha Grier [??] now or sometimes Asha Barbara Grier or sometimes Asha Durkee, different names, but that's only the confusion that she suffers as a result of our not being married any longer, which is a difficult thing for a woman in this society because of name problems. In any case, and a man by the name of Jonathan Auchman [??] in Santa Fe, New Mexico. You may have already contacted those people. Anyway, wherever they were coming from, and they were each coming from where they were coming from, I was coming from essentially that place. I was trying to find a place or to make a place or to become involved in a place or to live in a place where the majority of people were concerned with understanding the truth of existence, that that was the underlying [??] priority in a world of many different kinds of priorities, that that was the priority, and that anything else was really, in the end secondary to that. That's where I was coming from. And many different, by that time, which is nine years or so later, after meeting that first teacher, no, it would be more, it would be like ten years later, eleven years later, actually starting something like that, that ten year period, that decade in between contained a lot of things for a lot of people just socially in America, like the whole Civil Rights movement, the assassinations, the Vietnam War and how that just simply took over everything and just focused everybody onto death and destruction again and the various psycho-pneumatic chemicals which people used and saw that the world was not necessarily as it was being advertised on American television. They saw other realities that existed, or that could exist on a fairly large scale, which you can say what you want about whatever these substances were or were not, the fact of the matter is that a lot of people got a different view of reality, very different view of reality, than what was being purveyed in the marketplace. But vis-a-vis what I said before, within two years, that was being sold. It was a package. You could go buy hippie clothes, you could buy the stuff that made you look like that's what you were, even if you really weren't. It had become a style, something that somebody could sell. Because that's the way it works here, this is the genius of America, to sell everything if you like, in a certain level. So

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that's what was for sale, very quickly, but in that period, in that strange period, say between '64 and maybe '68, maybe '69, hard to say, in that period of time, a lot of things happened to a lot of people. You could almost say that there was a second Civil War that was fought in the United States at that period. There really was. And I don't know how long it will take historians to grasp that, but I think that it was, it feels that way to me. Clearly one of the things of it was, having been involved in the anti-war movement myself, then I was scheduled to go to some rally, which was like in New York City by the Russian embassy, and was going to be Ban the Bomb. So I saw the people and they were all marching around, and I thought, oh, great, and I got into the line to do it. I was walking for about five minutes and I realized they weren't saying "Ban the bomb," they were saying, "Drop the bomb."

Q: Oh.

A: This was a counter-demonstration against the Russians by some American right-wingers. And I had a great realization then, it's pretty much the same thing, that peace is a state of being that has to be arrived at in one's self. Peace is not an outer, external product. Again, it's not something that can be sold, like the "peace process," which is touted in various parts of the world be it Palestine or Bosnia or Northern Ireland, wherever it is, they always call to the "peace process." It's a product, it's not having anything to do with peace. The people who are involved in it are not peaceful people, they're never going to make peace. Because peace, in the end, can only be made by peaceful people. It's like love can only be made by loving people, you call it what you like, but in truth, love can only be made by loving people. So all of that external thing, which has benefit, there's no doubt that it has benefit, but there are always people who will occupy themselves with that, who will be caught up in that, and I didn't see that that was a way that led to peace. On the contrary, it led to further agitation and further polarizations. So to take this side or that side, obviously there must be some other way that this is going to take place, and you have to realize, I don't know how old you are?

Q: Thirty-six.

A: You're thirty-six, so when you were schoolkids, you didn't hide under your desks because they were going to ... ?

Q: I think we did have occasional drills like that.

A: Drills like that, uh-huh, well, we had them like every month. I was growing up in New York City at that point, there's all these maps with, you know, there's a central ring and then these other rings and where you would be and what your chance is ... well, we had no chance at all, right?

Q: Right.

A: By any means. Probably in Kansas, you say you came from Kansas?

Q: Actually, I grew up in Southern California.

A: Well, in Southern California there was no chance either, so, you understand. But for us it was like all the time you thought about that. I remember coming up out of the subway one time, it was Armed Forces Day in New York, and there were these huge planes flying over and people were marching in the

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street, it was quite a world. Crazy, you know? Really, basically insane. Really. Because once you could see, you could see that all of that was some very deep confusion on the part of the people involved, whether they were Russians or Americans. The idea to contemplate that people could sit and contemplate blowing up the world, destroying millions of people, is a fundamental sickness, a very very deep sickness. And these sick people are in charge. They are in control completely, and they still are, that's the fact of the matter, nothing has ... here we are and I don't feel You know, [unintelligible], when we don't know the truth about it, but really, they're so in control. So what can you say? It's terrible. I mean, they're a little bit less in control, maybe, I don't know. Or at least, people are not contemplating it the way they were then, but they were really bloody-minded. And it was all the time in all the newspapers and if you lived ... I lived in a household of people who thought and read and newspapers and took time to talk and think and many of my parents' friends were, and so talking to people and listening as a kid to people like that is a very grim view of the world. Because they had all survived the Second World War, and everybody who had gone to the Second World War came back changed, altered. This is ... as I was saying, I grew up in this very rural setting where in the midst of the war there was no gasoline for vehicles, it was like horse-drawn, things came to a [unintelligible], it was really rural. Nobody locked their doors, very open and free and trusting society, really. At the lake that we lived by you could drink the water out of the lake. There were no boats, there were not speedboats, there were rowboats, fish dive and stuff like that, but big deal. It was a twenty-one mile long lake fed by springs and it was pretty fresh. [unintelligible] When people came back from the war, they had ... because the war itself was part of the madness, they had seen things that they will never tell people here that they've seen because in the course of war you see things that are unmentionable. And they were sick by those things. Like the Indians, the Navajo, when somebody comes back from a fight or something like that, they bless them. They do something for them to change the way they are. To wake them up from where they've been. Because sometimes that happens. But that would've happened in the hand to hand stuff. This was like -- you don't know what happens when a shell falls out of the sky on a bunch of people. It's not like hand to hand combat. This is just like body parts everywhere. And people came back, and they had not been prepared for that, as young people of America, to see what they saw. I had a very good Indian friend and he was in the marines in the South Pacific and man, he would get drunk the way often Indians get drunk and then he'd talk to me when he got drunk and he'd tell me these stories over and over and over again. In other words, that malaise, it was some kind of malaise, a sickness that came back with these people. They had been deeply scarred, our parents' generation, my parents' generation, by this war. They knew in some way, I'm sure that the war had been the only way out of the economic situation that they faced in the '30s, when everybody was hit. My father lost everything in the 1930's. He went from being a very rich man to being a very poor man in nine months, and not from stocks, this is something that had been in the family for generations, for business. We were bought out because everything is all big business. It's like the government and big business, it was a deal. And the deal was, big business pays taxes. Family businesses, before the Depression about seventy to seventy-two percent were family owned, and after the Depression was over, and the Second World War, all that was finished, that particular set piece, they were down to seventeen percent. In other words, it's shifted into some mega ... big companies dealing with big government taxes, and people were ... it's the same thing, they were chewed up in another way here as well. So all of this stuff

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is kind of ... if you say, what led to the founding of such a place, this was how to get, in other words, rural. Rural is very important in many respects because here, even on this farm, the sounds are different. It's a different world, when you live constantly in the world of the machines and everything you are a servant of the machines. You just become a servant of them. People say that technology is neutral, but it's really not. It has also its agendas and priorities. I could see that you had to reach to a place or to work these things in a place where the actual created things that we had been given for us to live with could be once again seen and felt and experienced by people who may have been living in very brutal environments. And because of the brutal environments they lived in, they were inevitably brutalized by them. So there was no hope for them, there was no hope for people in a certain sense, except for very very rare people, who there always are, but basically there is very little hope for people if twenty-four hours a day they live inside that. It's very difficult because all your references ... it's like living inside your own mind. All your references are artificial. You never see what it is that where we are really. You see what it is that we've created to take the place of what is. Buildings are all out of scale, even ten story buildings, I mean, really, a massive feat, and this and the whole thing of that thing. Everything you see around you -- if you see a tree it's only because somebody put it there. I mean, it didn't grow there, in a real urban environment, except maybe some back lots where the stuff cracks through or something like that. And the whole country being paved over for these roads and for the cars and for the parking lots. You would see areas in the country would just simply disappear. You lived in Southern California, that's where they did it in spades, and it's a boom, the orange groves are gone. There are no more orange groves. Boom! That's gone. And you drive there in six weeks, months later you drive past and there's a thousand houses there. Where did they come from? And the people move into them in the illusion that they're moving into some place where And there's not a tree, there's not a stick, and they create that so that that suburban environment is a created environment again. It's not even, it's just the urban environment, it's like the nature is totally controlled. As a painter myself, I was drawn very deeply into the world of nature. As a child growing up, I was drawn very deeply into it, because looking into its depths, there's a voice that speaks out of it, but you have to be very quiet to hear it. So all of that kind of stuff is where I was coming from, and that's what led me to want to do this thing. Not to make a commune per se, because that's how they identified it and that's how they dismissed it. That was simply a convenient rubric, a convenient appellation which they could pin to it, "commune." Because they didn't want to know, by that, the larger society found that whole thing as always very threatening because they're saying, "No, no, no, hey, guys, the prime value of life is to buy and sell," or to get more, or to get better, or to get bigger, or to get more beautiful, whatever it is. Whatever the thing that is non-content which causes people to constantly seek to make more money, to buy more things, to have a bigger car, to have a better house. You know, I mean, like, wow, what's the end of it? That's the underlying belief in it. And then when you say, no, no, no, no, that's ... from whichever way you're saying it, that becomes threatening. And that was also part of that civil war, those values between the two different parts of the society, in which they felt that these people who are saying these things, that So all people who said anything like that were called in "communes." Because there were many communal responses indeed to the things that we were facing at that point, many. So when you study about getting the information about all these "communes" or communities, which is probably a better term, you will find that if you talk about The Farm, Steve Gaskin, different

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reasons led to that than led to Lama, let's say. If you talk with Michael, what's-his-name, his name just slid out of my mind, about essaline [??] and [unintelligible] what went on there and that whole thing, you get another thing. If you talk to [unintelligible] Baker about the Zen Center, you get another thing. If you talk to Wavy Gravy about the Hog Farm, you'll get another thing. All these people you talk to ... you understand? Everybody did something because we could no longer do what we were doing. It was impossible. It was impossible to live within it. It was impossible to live within that society. To exist in it at that point, you had to get out of it. And people got out of it for all kinds of different reasons. All I was trying to tell you is in answer to your first question was for that reason, that I thought to put my energy together with these two other people, to start Lama. And they may describe it, and they will describe it differently, slightly, because they're different people, so they see it from different aspects. That's what I can tell you.

Q: Why were you drawn to the Southwest?

A: Because my wife was a teacher and I'm an artist and artists don't really work for nine to five type of life, so that meant that the summer months were always off, and she was also from California. But my studio was in New York, my gallery was in New York, and that's where everything was happening as far as I was concerned, and so that's where we were. Then with the summer off, we would go always to California, and not really liking to stay in motels, I hate motels, really. But now I've learned to ... I try never to stay, I try to stay in people's houses. I don't like them. They're weird places. Just strange. So anyway, we camped out all over. I have a lot of good memories of the Midwest because we used to take these old pokey roads through the Midwest and eat in these cafes, eat lunch in cafes and soda shops, or whatever they're called, all over. And we got to meet a lot of people. Really, they were pretty nice people, friendly people. Mind you, at this point there is no interstate going between California and New York. I mean, there's 66, and 66 in many places is a two-lane blacktop, that's it. So it's still another world. So we camped out a lot. One of the places that we liked to camp out a lot was New Mexico, Arizona, Southern Utah, parts of Nevada. These are great places because they're really empty. It's really pretty great places. Then this flips into another part of it is that a very old friend of mine, a person whose name I'm sure you know, Stuart Brandt [??], and he was in the army at that point. He was the second lieutenant at Governors Island in New York, in this photographic brigade or something like that. I had known him from California. So he used to come and stay at my studio to get out of the army, because he was just, that was it, he was in the army, but that was his way out, so we became very good friends for many many years. He had this friend whose name was Jack Leffler, who is now the curator at the Museum of New Mexico for ethno musical curator. He was a musician, but his thing was working as a lookout in the National Forest, fire lookout, he and his wife. And Stuart said, "Hey, you should go see these people," they're forty-fifty miles of dirt road to find these people, that kind of thing. Also, we used to like to look people like that up and stay with them because by that time they'd love to see some people for a week and then, "At last the people are gone, thank god," you know, like that, but it's great, it's a diversion when you're out there in the wilderness like that. It's great to see people and then there's a whole flurry [??]. So we went out and we saw them. We spent a lot of time talking. I pretty well thought that this was the best place to be, out there, because I could see that ... now New Mexico is like the middle of America was then, maybe. It's hard to explain. Now, you wouldn't even want to go to

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Santa Fe. I wouldn't. They invited me to come to Lama last autumn, I went just to visit for the first time in many many years, ten, twenty years, I don't know, and you really wouldn't want to visit there. Because it's been sold, right, this is what I told you in the beginning, right?

Q: Yes, uh-huh.

A: It's just sold, it's another thing that's been sold. But then, Santa Fe, inside Santa Fe there's maybe a couple of art galleries but the rest of it really was like hardware stores, the five and ten, cloth stores, shoe stores, it was a real town. It's not a town anymore. It's filled with things that -- places that nobody needs, and everything is sold in the mall out on the hallway like every place else. But the air ... anyway, there's still something. You can still kind of get "out of it" fairly quickly. But then you could really get out of it really easily. So by the time I thought that this was a good thing to do, I also have to mention a figure by the name of Mayor Baba [??]. I don't know if you ever heard of Mayor Baba. But I had heard of Mayor Baba in the '50s and had been corresponding with his secretary, Adi Arani [??] in the late '50s and early '60s, and had a long correspondence with him. When the psycho-pneumatic substances to which I referred earlier really began to be everywhere all the time and having understood the effects of them myself firsthand on many occasions, I began to write to him, "What's this? What am I seeing, what am I feeling, what am I experiencing?" about my experiences with various psycho-tropic substances. What is this about? I see this, I see that, well how does that relate to spiritual truth? Does it? Is it? And this went on for a number of years and then finally, and I'm never sure exactly how this happened, there was a young man from the United States, his name was Robert Dreyfuss [??], who was a student at Berkeley, and he was also in correspondence with Adi Arani and Punam [??]. And he decided that rather than just continuing as a letter-writing thing, he was going to go and ... I variously understood this in different ways, he was going to go to India and drop acid and go and see who this man was. Rather like [unintelligible] did with maharishi [??] in later times. So he did, or something like that, or he smoked gunja [??] or something like that, it's one of these two things. And nothing happened. He went back to his hotel room and when he got to his hotel room -- you know, in India, have you traveled to India at all?

Q: No, I haven't.

A: In India, very often because of space being what it is, generally there'd be two beds in a hotel room and you'll share it, simply because, I mean, why would a bed be empty?

Q: Right.

A: You know, everybody's got to sleep, right, so if you are a single person and you rent a room in a hotel, even in a hotel, unless it's a western hotel, but if you're traveling as a traveler, you share your room with somebody, or you may not, the person may not come by that night, but if somebody comes you know you may be asleep and you hear somebody barging into the room, putting their bags down and using the bathroom and that's just the way it is. So all you know really about that is the level of the hotel that you book into who you may or may not have as your roommate, basically, and that's how you do it. Or what class you travel on the train. So he came back to his room and he found this guy who was all dressed in white in his room and he's just sitting there, probably just sitting on his bed. And most people in India sit like this, everybody sits on the floor or [unintelligible]. People don't have furniture

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because that's just other stuff to have, buy, get. And it's more comfortable, at least for taller people it is, so -- it's comfortable for everybody, so he shows this guy and he thinks it like some great saint, an apparition or something like that, and he starts freaking out, kissing the guy's feet, and the guy is just some traveler. So this creates a big stink, obviously. Because he's been booked into this thing not by him booking himself but by the people at the Ashram [??] that booked him into it, then thinking that he's American, they probably booked him into like a middle-class or upper-middle-class Indian hotel. So who is he and what is this and then they go through his suitcase and so Baba says, "[unintelligible]," this is a ... and he doesn't speak, so all we know really is Adi Arani writes saying, this stuff has got to stop. Because as long as it was kind of in the realm of letters and so forth like that, it was describing experiences, basically it was this person's misunderstanding of what was going on, you could say, that led to that. But in the end of it, by the time all that was refined and everything like that, he's saying, look, this stuff, no matter what it does to you, is not going to cause you to realize the truth. That's what he's saying. He's saying, yeah this may be interesting, this may be that, but, you know, it leads to this other thing and it's not for sure, it's really dependent really on, really I suppose, maybe on, this is earlier days, who it is who takes it. And then finally saying, this stuff is not the stuff. This is not going to do it for you, so forget it. Now, that certainly, let's say, was not the view of somebody like Steve Gaskin. Nor, you understand what I mean? I mean, that probably is not a politic [??] thing to say, but I mean, they were still thinking that there was, certainly wasn't the merry pranksters [??]. They certainly thought that chemical ... I mean, I remember sitting and listening to Ken Kesey say, "There's no hope without dope."

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. So if you look at it, really, though there were many, as we go, talking about before, there are many things called communes that were coming from different reasons and they had different understanding of what chemical or ethno-botanical or whatever you want to call those substances are. Ethno-botanical herbs, which people have been using for a couple of thousand, three thousand, four thousand years in all societies all over the world, to attain various degrees of spiritual understanding. That's what everybody says, called sacrament, whatever you want to call it. Whether you want to call it the host or peyote, in the end of the day, that's ... people take their sacrament to be different things. But people use something to get something spiritually, and it's known. It's a known thing. So there were different understandings, but this teacher is saying, and I'm very connected to this teacher, is saying to me, "No, no, forget that. That's not going to do it for you." So I'm going into this with these two other people, saying, "Look, this is a no-dope place," and they're saying, yeah, right, because the other guy, Jonathan was primarily interested in Buddhism or let's say, a more contemplative outlook. In time, he came to be a Buddhist, because that's what suited that particular form that he had, and my first wife, that was fine with her. She felt that that was, having investigated those things in some sort, felt also that there was a different possibility. So that was one of the things, perhaps, when you look at all these things called communes, that distinguished Lama at its beginning was that it was very clearly stated that ... and this with various degrees of puritanism that came and went over the years, extended finally to things like meat and coffee and tea, all those things. It became basically what the Hindus call very "Sapphic" [??] diet. Everything was very Sapphic. It meant that there were not extremes of [unintelligible] of hot and cold. You understand all of these things if, you know, in Religious Studies, I

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don't know if you've touched upon all these things, but I would assume that you have, so ... like that. Let's see, I think that takes care of that one. What was that ... that was all about what?

Q: Well, I had asked you about New Mexico and ...

A: Oh, New Mexico ...

Q: How you ended up there, I guess.

A: Anyway, right, so we'll get back to that, that fire lookout guy. That was on safe grounds. New Mexico, right, so in the sense, you could really ... when we went to look for ... and actually Stuart Brandt actually helped when we were looking for that land, driving around. [unintelligible] drive around the other day, we tried to find the place, for instance, where the predominant East/West jet traffic, because that's another problem. You could be in the middle of the most beautiful wilderness area in the world and there's these constant stream of silver bullets going over your head, right? So, big deal, there you are, you're still there. You can't get out, you can ... you understand what I mean by "out"? What I mean by out is to return to just the world kind of the way it was without the machine imprint on it. You can't really do that ever because you get there and maybe you get there in a car ... you have to get there on some level in a car or a plane or something, but you can leave that behind, you can go walking, walking is very different than riding in a car. Walking is a very different experience, completely different. You see different things. This is what we felt, you need to find this place, some kind of place where you can get out. For instance, you get out in this great place and it's beautiful all day long and then you're going to sleep at night and you notice the whole eastern horizon or western horizon is lit up by light because there's some city seventy miles away. Light pollution. I mean, there are a lot of ... but this place, we narrowed it down. This is the East/West one, that's the ... the jets are going this way, they're going that way most of the time. Every once in a while something will, but most of the time it's not a constant. Then we look into the flight path between Albuquerque and Denver. They fly over here, they don't fly over there, that's the thing, so we don't want to be over there because then ... it's a shuttle. It's not a shuttle like between Washington and New York, but it will be in time. It will be. That's just the way conurbation [??] goes. There'll be those silver bullets going by or it will be a hub city or some other silliness, so get off of that. And yes, Albuquerque is one hundred and twenty miles that way, but in Lama you can see a hundred and twenty miles that way. But the [unintelligible] come up like this and this comes up like that, so it blocks that light at night, so you don't see that thing, and Santa Fe didn't, at that time, although I don't know, I didn't see it that much last year, didn't make any. Los Alamos doesn't make anything to speak of. The next things up there don't make any ... trying to narrow that down by going there and then staying there, sleeping there. Because sometimes you're there and there's a highway fifteen miles away and the truckers and hit their jakebrakes [??] all night long so you get [MAKES A LOUD NOISE] like this.

Q: Right.

A: So, oh, you made this big deal to get to some place and you find out ... so you got to look carefully to find a place that's quiet, hard to find.

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Q: But you found it.

A: We found one of the places, yeah, definitely. So that's it. That's where we did it and that's where we put it.

Q: When you got the land, was there anything on it or ...

A: No.

Q: You had to build everything from scratch.

A: Yeah. Well, there was an old foundation. This land was a very amazing piece of land because it was surrounded on four sides by National Forests. So that meant that, you never know what's going to happen in a National Forest, of course, like now it's burned down. You know about that.

Q: Yeah, sure do.

A: Yeah. So ... I just got an e-mail from my daughter. My daughter lives there now. She's working there. She's been working there for the last year. So that's how I know what's going on. Anyway ... I'm lost, I'm sorry.

Q: Oh, you talking about it being surrounded by a National Forest.

A: Yeah, so it's surrounded by the National Forest, you had this kind of buffer between whatever ... I mean, they'd come in to log off aspens every now and then or log off some spruce or stuff like that, but the forest itself was not of value enough to come and do a clear cut, for instance. It wasn't a mono-culture forest. It was still, oh, we'll see what happens now, because now it will be replanted. So this is what will be the next thing, but at that point it was not a mono-culture forest. I understand, actually that the permaculture people in working with the government have gotten a grant to reforest there. So that may come out not to be monoculture.

Q: Good.

A: That's at least in some kind of negotiation stages that look favorable. Are you familiar with the permaculture people?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Yeah. So, that'll be with a good spring on it. You can't look for better than that. I don't think you can find better than that.

Q: So then, you had to build all the infrastructure yourselves.

A: Yeah, exactly, and not only did we build it ourselves, but we took everything that we took out of the land.

Q: Oh, wow.

A: So all the adobes were made there.

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Q: Yeah.

A: And there was a guy by the name of Abe who ran the saw mill down the hill, at the bottom of the hill, so we used to log out our own trees and then he'd haul them down to the saw mill, which was just a simple saw mill, and saw everything up for us and then send it back up the mountain. So basically, everything there was build right out of it. When I went back this year and saw these things and cement trucks it was like, god, what are you guys doing here? Scale, scale. I don't know if you know, there's a book I read a lot, The Timeless Way of Building, do you know it?

Q: No.

A: Christopher Alexander. A very important book about ... you know, about scale and about ... towards ourselves and I think at times we [unintelligible], we made the bricks with horse and plow. We didn't make it with a tractor. And other communities were doing it. New Buffalo was doing the same thing, Steve Gaskin, I think, was doing the same thing on The Farm in certain ways, again, you see there's these shared things and each of these communities came about it in different ways, but I think that was another thing that people felt, that they had gotten very far from what the means were by which you lived in something. How do you live in something? How did the house you're living in get made and what did that do to the general overall problem? Have you added to the problem by ordering [??] this house or by inhabiting this house? That's part of the equation. And how did it get made? If the two-by-fours in your house are the result of clear cutting in the Cascades, then you're not a big help. No matter what you talk about ecology or anything else like that, there's a deficiency. You got to figure out how to make it out of where you are, if you can. That was very much the idea.

Q: Did you design your buildings for energy efficiency?

A: In those days we didn't know enough to do that. We did it slightly, later we did it more. We thought we were, with adobe and things like that, but that's a fallacy. I later worked on a much larger community in New Mexico called Dar Islam [??] I can show you some pictures of which used adobe in another different way. But no, we were just thinking of surviving. We built the a-frames in the woods, the people lived in the winter and everything froze every night. I spent many a winter living through that, but it was great. It was fine, a very healthy way of living.

Q: Did people come right away or was it just the three of you?

A: Right away.

Q: So a lot of people.

A: Oh no, right away. Because people wanted, people were really looking to find a place because our idea was that if you make this place and you do that that there are ... we knew people, it was a big network of people all over America who ... I'm not talking about big like today, but don't forget, then none of these places ... now you can find a retreat center, [unintelligible] has a big ashram [??] twenty miles from here. The world is different. We changed the world, in that sense. We did change the world. You can find places now all over to enter into a different relationship with reality, with something like that, anyway. So the first summer there were maybe twelve or fifteen people. It was pretty small scale.

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Twelve or fifteen adults. But in that first summer we really made a lot of adobes. We made thousands of adobes and we started building the dome area there. The idea which I had understood was that you need to build first the communal building, and then that is something that everybody can share. And you have to build that large enough to fit what you imagine to be the maximum number of people that such a site could support at any one time as visitors, which is about a main building and with an outflow could do about three hundred people, that's what I had always figured. If it was somebody coming to listen, because the idea was to be able to bring teachers to America, traditional teachers to America where they could sit for two or three weeks. As it was, at that point, there were teachers coming to America from different traditions. I would always go and try and hear them, but the thing is you'd go and the ambiance would be an auditorium and you'd be ... or it would be somebody's house and they were sponsoring the person and people would be all up the stairs and all out there and there and you couldn't really hear and it was not set up to do that. [unintelligible] that the people hosted people like that, but basically the environment wasn't set up to deal with it in a correct way. Either it was a very hostile environment, I find auditoriums and things like that to be relatively hostile environments. And panel discussion type of things and "our speaker of the evening" and [unintelligible] so-and-so will now share a few thoughts with you. You know. There was the Vedanta [??] Center in L.A. There were a few places, the Baba Center in Myrtle Beach, the [unintelligible]. There were a few places, but mind you we were all like twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and it seems like it always skips a generation or something like that, so these were all like old ladies with blue-washed hair and people who had grown up on Blavatsky and you know, I mean, "Huh?" I mean, another, like more than the difference between you and myself, it's like myself and an undergraduate or just somebody who's working on their dissertation, like that. And they didn't know where we were coming from, but we met each other, it was interesting. But anyway, my feeling was that the thing would be to bring these people to where they could have a place, natural environment where they could sit and talk about their thing and you could be with them. So that was the idea of what we were preparing. So those twelve or fifteen people who worked that summer were working with that in mind, that we were preparing a place that would be a center where people of different religions or spiritual understandings or even philosophies could come and talk and be and you could be with them, and you could learn what they were really thinking about and at the same time you would be living outside, because the idea in the summer there would be tents and things like that. You would be living outside eating very healthy food, there would be no drugs, and the water is coming from a spring. Very pure environment. Very very pure environment. The air is quite refreshing up there and at the same time I had understood this idea in my correspondence with Adi Arani and many other ... I was also corresponding with [unintelligible] Bindo and people like that in India at that time. And they stressed to me and another man in the south of Indiana [??] they stressed to me the idea of working and they said, Barakhat Ali [??] who had a bindery for binding Korans in Pakistan, they stressed the idea of working. So what then I saw was that you could build all of these things with the labor of these people who ... there would be a simple tradeoff. They would trade a chance to sit with these people for their labor and whatever it cost to feed them. Just that, no more than that. So that there was no more going out than coming in. And if the labor was going about in the same kind of a way as these people seemed to indicate that it could be and as we know for instance from other Oneida [??] and Shaker communities in this country that they also have a similar

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look and how work could be carried out. Then you could not only be involved in a contemplative state but in an active state, a state of active contemplation if you like, in building things which are to everybody's value, it increases the value of the common wealth because everybody can share in it. If you build a kitchen that will feed a hundred or two hundred people as well as yourself, then you can feed two hundred people very easily without much more difference than feeding just your staff in the wintertime because if you put an eight burner stove in, in the wintertime you only have to cook on one or two burners because you're down to your core community but in the summer and you have a big grill like in the restaurant and a window that looks out because you can feed people easily. So you can convince people that if they want to come to these things that if other people would like to come to, then we should all work together to build a kitchen and a dining room whereby we could feed ourselves and feed other people who might come in who might also like to have this experience. And we could build it all out of the stuff that was just right out in the woods or in the ground and so that kind of keeps you focused on the physical plane, but in a spiritual way, you can see that. So that was kind of the idea of the program, and that's what in the beginning that's what people were working towards.

Q: Mm-hmm. So was Lama sort of like, I don't know if this is the right word, but like a retreat center in a way where people would come and stay for awhile and ...

A: Well, it wasn't a retreat center, a retreat center ... yes, it was in that sense, but a retreat center in that sense is a place where people are coming usually out of a kind of either burnt-out situation or high-powered situation or just tedious boredom situation. All of those things prevail to drive people nuts. And then they go there and they kind of exist there on their own terms more or less in a kind of regimen that the community sets up for it. Whereas Lama was different in that respect because of this work project, this continual work project that went on all the time. So all these people were co-opted into something that they couldn't control, except, say to their physical build and abilities. Obviously we didn't put a certain type of person on going to get logs out of the forest because they couldn't do it.

Q: Yeah.

A: Though people would want to, and you could include one idiot like that in a group and they would learn in time then they wouldn't be an idiot, because everybody could do it, really, even the lightest person can help in that thing because there's certain moments when the log is swinging free and so forth that a child could push it. But it's dangerous work and it requires great concentration, so in the beginning the group has to watch out for that new person, so you don't want to add somebody who you think is a little too spacy to deal with that kind of stuff. So in a sense these people were coming, yes, for two or three weeks or for one week or for the summer or whatever because mainly it was a summer program. Because when the winter came at Lama, very few people could ever ... I mean we're talking about many weeks of sixteen below weather, routinely. Five, six feet of snow, seven miles of road with snow on it, sometimes you'd have to walk it because the cars didn't run and that's the end of it. And living in basically unheated cabins in the woods during the night because you can't keep a fire going all night. In those days we didn't have nice stoves like this one, we had one Ashley [??] that could do that, but we didn't have much money either so we couldn't afford high tech stuff. Very few people could stick it through the winter like that. So that cut the population very quickly right around October and opened

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it in the spring, but that was great because that summer thing brought in enough people and enough money and enough things from outside and in the winter our idea was we would take these people, like you're doing here in the summertime and then produce them as their talks. Then we would use that as one of the means of exchanging with a larger community or something that we could sell at a very low cost, but enough again that would mean that nothing would go out that wouldn't come in. Because that was the idea. The idea wasn't to make something, but to always keep it level. In other words, a really conservative society in a sense. A conservative idea of what communal functions were. In other words, if you spend, you have to receive. But you don't have to make, you just have to keep level. If you need something more, then what do you need more? And if you have twelve people then you have to talk about what this thing is you need more. We need this? Well, what do you say, you say we need ... so every decision was made in that thing by consensus. And that consensus included all the people who were there in the summertime. Except for long term things like should we have gas or we shouldn't have gas, that would have to be the people who lived there on a long term basis. But all the decisions on we do this, we do that. So this was not a retreat center in that way because it focused people on activities which were useful activities, and for many people, the first time they ever worked in their life, physically. Working in the garden, working building, we had different kinds of work that was going on. Every day there was at least six hours of hard physical work every day. So that offset the meditation and the food which is purely vegetarian and all whole food. A lot of it we would glean, we would just go places in trucks and glean people's orchards after other people had picked them. And a lot of canning and so forth that went on. A lot of preserving. And a big garden, Lama had a very very big garden in those days. We put up a lot a lot of food. A lot of food. So that was a really very healthy way to live, and a lot of work got done and it was really a very very good time. That's all I can say. I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Q: Was there some sort of a system for distributing work, some sort of work sharing system?

A: Yeah, there were certain things were put on automatic which were dishwashing, garbage, and outhouse cleaning and those jobs that have to be done in every community that in other communities just fall through that are the least prepared very often. But that was just shared out on a wheel so that you knew that you had this duty and that was that duty and you had it this day and you didn't have it that, then you could plan for it. Sometimes people would sign there to take a week of something or people would between themselves would trade, and that was cool. I don't want to ... but that's, but this is what you got. If you could trade that off with somebody who would rather do that, like composting or dishwashing, as long as it got done. Because the wheel was arbitrary, it just fell as it fell. And some people do like to do other things more than other people like to do other things. But basically, all of those jobs were like that. Then in the other jobs we would meet, we would meditate every morning and have breakfast and so forth like that. Then about an hour of free time, then we'd all meet back together and there would be ongoing work because things were being built, whether they were shelters or they were water lines or they were adding to fields or going out to pick from other orchards or fields or going into town to take all the laundry or whatever it is, that's what it was. So then it was all shared out in the morning like that.

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Q: Mm-hmm. So could you tell me what a day was like? You said you meditated first thing?

A: Oh yes, every day. So say by then it was about quarter of 6:00 in the morning, 5:30 in the summertime, we would meet to meditate and chant. And we'd do that say from 5:30 'till 6:30, yeah, it was about an hour. The winter was the same except the time, because dark and light is different. So then we would do that and then we would go back to wherever it was that we were sleeping, so forth and do, you know, get kind of together and then we'd have breakfast. That half hour allowed people to make the breakfast during that time, the people that were on breakfast detail. So then the breakfast would be made, we'd all have breakfast and then there'd be another half hour, forty-five minutes so it was about ... a recapitulation of nine-to-five, basically because everybody understood that. By nine o'clock everybody was working. So about 8:30 we'd get together and say, okay that's the day and that's what's gonna happen and then we'd go for it. And one day a week was silence day so we'd do all that in silence, which further complicated the thing, but we did it. It was all very interesting. Then we'd break for lunch and rest and then we'd go at it again all afternoon. Then we'd stop and we'd have late afternoon chanting, which was always a very nice time. Then that allowed for dinner to be made. We'd have dinner, and after that there was a group discussion every night which was very intense, that went on for an hour and a half or two, followed by a half hour of meditation, or an hour and a half by half hour of meditation. And that was like no holds barred group interaction, which was very hairy in many respects and very mind blowing in other respects and very beautiful. Many many things happened, as you can imagine. This is the dynamics of the group. And as I say, everybody is free to say whatever they have to say, and that's very illuminating. Then when there's a teacher there, you don't have that, the teacher talks for that time and then you have the meditation. And in the afternoon, instead of the afternoon chanting the teacher talks in the afternoon. And in the morning it's the particular morning exercise that that teacher observes themselves, whoever they may be, man or woman. If they sit, you sit with them, if they do mass, you do a mass, or whatever they do, you do.

Q: What sort of teachers would you have go through Lama?

A: Oh, gosh, there were Jewish teachers and Sufi teachers and Buddhist teachers and Hindu teachers. Lama has a whole list of them, they'd give 'em to you. Many many different, I mean, we could get into it. There were certain teachers who were more than others and more important to Lama than others in many respects. But anyway, that was the day. We can get to that possibly later on. But that is, that's how the days went, and they all went like that.

Q: Yeah. Did Lama consider itself interfaith or did it have a particular faith that it followed?

A: No, it didn't. At that point New Age hadn't become a faith. Now there's something called "New Age." They call it "New Age," it means something in people's minds. But in those days, nobody knew what it was, so it wasn't anything. And interfaith, not even interfaith. It was open to whoever we could find who we felt that was involved in the traditional ... mainly we were interested in that kind of traditional path which a lot of the time American Indian teachers came there too. It was never all Eastern teachers in that sense. So it was a very mixed ... ecologists came from time to time, there were many different ... Gaiasts, or whatever you want to call them, all of these different things came there and all of them left

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their mark on it, in a certain sense, but what it was was the staff that was running that as a service. And that was fine until the staff began to think of itself as a priesthood, in a certain sense.

Q: Oh.

A: Which is another story that we can get into later on perhaps. Which is ... that becomes another story. And you can see what I mean.

Q: How many people were in the core group that lived there year round?

A: Never more than twelve, fifteen, sixteen, eighteen, because that's all you ... you couldn't deal with more than that. There weren't that many permanent structures to stay in, and not that many people could take it, they really ...

Q: Because of the winter being harsh?

A: It was not that it was harsh, it was ... like, the same rhythm was going all winter long, and people, they couldn't deal with it. They just couldn't, they went bananas. Because there's nothing. There's no television, there's no radio. There's nothing, there's just these people you live with day in and day out and you work with day in and day out.

Q: Did the core group, were they communal, like, did you pool your income in the core group?

A: Yeah, nobody had, I mean, there were sometimes people who had private incomes, or trust-fund babies here and there that came through, but basically ... and then people would give donations and that all went into a common account. Everybody there got their food, got their shelter, and got their basic clothing. And they got, if they really stuck it out a couple of years, they had always the promise of a bus ticket or a plane ticket back to wherever it was they came from, it was called the bail-out fund. Because sometimes people just, they'd had it. They'd done two and a half, three years and that was it, they announced, I'm going back to the city, or I'm going back to Marin [??] county, or I'm going back to Woodstock, or I'm going back to wherever it was that they came from, I'm going back to Southern Ohio, [unintelligible]. I'm going back to Southern Ohio or wherever it is, [unintelligible], that's enough. So that they didn't know how to get out because they didn't have money. So there was the bail-out fund. And people were always encouraged to keep some money because, you know, they might, I mean, because we had seen by then to keep whatever their own money was, to keep it, because we didn't want it because they were going to need it at some point if they had to bail out. And they did from time to time. But all money basically was in that pool. So if you could live with your food, shelter and clothing, if that was enough for you, you were cool, basically, if that was enough. If you needed more than that, and sometimes after the books began to sell, there was actually money. We could give it. And say, well, what's the problem? That would become a source of many days discussion, that so and so needs whatever they need because of such and such and is that, really should we pay that or we shouldn't pay that. Should that be paid for them or not? And then that would be discussed and then people would come to say, well, okay, or no. Or one person would say no, I don't think so, and that would be it. We might come back to it again three or four months later, but because of the consensus, you hadn't convinced that one person, so And sometimes that was a political tool, even. Sure. Many things

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happen to people when they live very closely together over long periods of time. It's like a big family, lots of dynamics, believe me.

Q: Was Lama incorporated?

A: Yes.

Q: So there was a corporation that owned the land, not an individual person?

A: Not an individual person. Dar Islam Foundation owns the land.

Q: Dar Islam Foundation?

A: I mean, excuse me, Lama Foundation.

Q: Lama Foundation.

A: I get them mixed up.

Q: Okay, that's okay.

A: Sorry.

Q: Yeah. How did the Lama Foundation get its name?

A: The name of the mountain is Lama.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: It means "mud."

Q: Hmm.

A: In Spanish. [unintelligible] People always thought it had to do with llamas and Tibet and [unintelligible], it doesn't. It has to do with [unintelligible]. "la-ma." And then other people said "la ma" is "the mother" and the mountain is the mother, that became fashionable in later years, to think of "la ma," and this is the great female teacher, the mother, the mountain who was teaching everybody. Actually it means in Spanish, it simply means "mud." There's a particular kind of mud on that mountain that is like goo. I never found any place else, makes travel impossible like about six to nine weeks out of the year. You can't get up and down it, except by a big strong four-wheeler, you just can't do it, it's too muddy.

Q: Was Lama incorporated as a church?

A: No. Non-profit educational foundation. 501-c3 in the IRS codes.

Q: I was just wondering because some groups have incorporated as like a monastery because of the way they do their taxes it makes it easier.

A: Well, an educational foundation is like a monastery. It doesn't have any really different things.

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Q: I realize that Lama was very isolated, but did you have neighbors and what did they think of you, what you were doing?

A: Yeah, there were neighbors. Abe [unintelligible] the gypsy [??] saw mill thought we were great. Fred, the guy who was the game warden and the soil man [??], Pete Merchant, he thought we were great because we took care of the woods. The local hardware stores thought we were great because we bought nails and screws from them. It comes down to that. Yeah, always people are suspicious, but they know what the mountain is like and if they see that you can go on the mountains through winter, they know what it's like. And that's it.

Q: So you were never hassled by the sheriff or anything like that?

A: Oh, no. I mean, we had the FBI come and all of that [??] because there were lots of fugitives in the '60s. I was very badly beaten in Taos by Chicanos. But they were just doing their thing, some new group, Anglo weirdos, you know, who knows what, so they beat myself and two other people with 2 x 4s right into the ground. After a while, especially when people from other communes like Dogtown and New Buffalo used to carry guns, you know? So after awhile, everybody said, well, you don't know who they might be. Don't forget "Black Hat" Charlie Manson at the Hog Farm with his black bus. You can see why. And [unintelligible]. Everybody knew Black Hat Charlie. He hadn't done what he did, but not everybody drives a black bus, wears a black hat, but Charlie did. And there were people like that around, so after awhile local people said, "Well, you know ... " Because they're very, people out in the West, out in that part of the world are pretty respectful of people who might be hiding the same inside their coats as you're hiding inside of your coat. So that kinda cooled out. But there was a time when we were fair game, basically. That's how it went.

Q: Were there a lot of communes in the area?

A: Yeah, there were. There was New Buffalo, there was Lorean [??], there was ...

Q: What'd you say, "Dog City" or something like that?

A: Yeah, no, Dogtown.

Q: Dogtown, okay.

A: Dogtown was a very strange place. Dogpatch, excuse me, Dogpatch. Dogpatch were the real hard core dropouts from New Buffalo or someplace like that. There was some land up one of the rivers that was ... they were like really out there. That's about as far out as you can get. They lived up this river. They called the place where they lived "Dogpatch." And they were really, they were quite something. They were quite something. Really, it was anarchy, total anarchists. It was an anarchist community, that's what it was. I mean, they would've never said that. They would've said, don't call us anything. We're nothing. We're Dogpatch. You want to say anything, we live in Dogpatch. But they were basically diggers and anarchists and really far going people.

Q: Did you have any relationships with these other communes?

A: Yeah, everybody kind of knew everybody. You'd see them in the town at the laundromat.

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Q: What was the nearby town?

A: Taos.

Q: Taos was the closest town?

A: Well, Cuesta [??] was the closest, but Cuesta was a mining town, they mined molybdenum, one of the world's biggest molybdenum mines. If you kept very very still in the middle of the winter and it was about six below you could hear them crushing the mountain. It was miles and miles and miles away. You never heard it, but sometimes you'd just hear this [crunching noise] because to get molybdenum, molybdenum is a hardener for steel, and you get it out ... it's like you get a hundred pounds out of ten tons, max. So in order to do it, they'd just cart it out the mountain, and then they'd crush it. They'd just put it through this crusher. You could hear it like some kind of weird ... I always call it the beast because you could hear it way ... it would be a certain kind of morning, the wind would have to come from a certain direction, you could hear it ... you could feel it, you could feel it because the mountains are all interconnected. Just grinding the mountain away. Anyway, Taos was where the Piggly-Wiggly was and that stuff was. I remember a seven or eight week period one time, or more, sometimes four or five months I would never go anywhere, I'd just stay there, I never went anywhere. So I didn't ... other people could tell you more about that, but I didn't really go many places. I just lived on the mountain, myself. That's what I wanted to do, I really was not interested in Taos, I wasn't interested in Albuquerque. I wasn't interested in anything really, very much. I spent a lot of time running the trails and the ridge lines, that's what I liked. When I didn't have to work, that's what I'd do. Did you ever read a book called Deep Ecology?

Q: That sounds really familiar.

A: Yes, it's familiar, it's a buzzword, but the book is not a buzzword, it's a book and it's real. And he says that the real commitment, basically, he says a lot of things, but the real commitment to the ecological movement can only come through a spiritual experience which happens in nature. People get involved in Sierra Club, even in Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and whatever, but there remains a level that they're outside of the experience because they're trying to do something for the Earth or for the planet, they don't know really, though, what they're doing. They're trying to do something good, they're good people, not to say that they're not, but there's a definitive spiritual experience that happens to people which completely changes the relationships to what ecology is and so forth. It's a sense of abiding oneness. The entire thing is a single entity of some sort. We don't really know what it is, nobody knows what it is, people say they know what it is, but as the Tao says, "The Tao that can be named is not the Tao that is." So if you try and put a name on it, it retreats. But there is an experience of this unity which completely alters one's relationship to living and to the land and to everything else. That's basically what ... that was my involvement. That's where I got off or got on with, went through, or ... that's what I'm involved in, is that. So that was my spirituality, basically, so I was happy as a clam.

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Q: Was there a lot of artistic expression going on at Lama?

A: Yeah. One of the things we did was make prayer flags. As an artist I had come to learn a lot of techniques and things. Silkscreening was always a good business for us, always brought money in consistently. And the business is still going, they're still making them.

Q: Were there a number of cottage industries like that?

A: Yeah, there were. There was a pottery [unintelligible], people put up stuff, sort of like going to a craft fair, you can imagine. People had all kinds of ... another guy did postcards, everybody had things that they did because they had to make that little extra money that they needed for different things, the people who are staff. Basically if your food shelter and clothing is cared for in a very minimal way, nobody lived very high. You needed to make some spare change of one kind or another, just for -- toothpaste, your own [unintelligible] toothpaste. And these things become very important to you, "my toothpaste." I used Tom's this, that's not ... you guys buy the communal toothpaste, because if you buy communal toothpaste you buy huge tubes, and I wanted to have my own, so you got to pay for that. You can't convince people that you have a need to have your own toothpaste. And people would from time to time try to convince people that they had a need for particular things. "No, no, that's your thing. You figure it out." Or sometimes two or three people would get together and work out things they could do. A lot of ladies did a lot of knitting hats and things and mittens and things. It's amazing what you can make. The wintertime is a long time on the mountain. A long time sitting around the stove. Nothing else to do. Can't go out and get wood anymore, got all the wood in. Nothing to do all day long. Can't build. How many people can sit and transcribe? Not too many. So like that.

Q: Did you have kids who lived there year round?

A: Yeah.

Q: So did you have your own school?

A: We finally ... yeah, there was a school in town, a communal school in town that Lama finally took over. It's called danah hazli, which means "friends."

Q: How do you spell that?

A: That's Navajo. Danah hazli. It's in Indian, not Navajo, Taos word for meaning "friends." Friends school, it's like homeschooling, but communal homeschooling. And then finally we took that over. And finally the kids went to school. It was a good school, a really nice school. [unintelligible], daughter of mine just went to a school similar to it, radical kind of rural school just here in Nelson county, next county down. I mean by radical and rural I mean, people who are off the grid and out of the thing and making a living in the country by what they do, cottage industry, crafts, carpentry. I work in the spring and the summer and in the autumn on the farm and I take care of sheep and things like that. I edit books, I still do the same things, basically, things like that. Trying to stay in that environment as much as possible. I find it the best. Those school are good schools. People have all learned that you need to know reading, writing and arithmetic well. Because you got to cope with it out here. It's hard to live in the country. It's not so easy to live in the country. You got to be resourceful and you can't just think you'll

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have one thing that you'll make money for. You got to have about ten different things and you got to figure out how to keep them balanced. You need to know mathematics, you need to know all that stuff, so that they are insistent to teach them to the children. They're reasonable people, the country rural radical people who want to stay in the rural and not become citified people. They're good folk by and large.

Q: Did you practice communal child rearing at Lama?

A: Well, I wouldn't call it like that, just kids are another little tribe. They all hang out together and take care of each other and Again, those are all kinds of things that people bring in. You imagine, week after week in the middle of the winter and there's no T.V. and there's no radio and you sit by the fire in the evening and all the kids are there. Thirteen or fourteen or fifteen kids sometimes the kids outnumber you. You just have one room that's really heated, like the kitchen and the only room in the library. And the rest of the houses you heat them to go to bed and you heat them when you get up in the morning, but you don't heat them when you sleep. You're just burning wood ... why heat fifteen houses, burn fifteen times the amount of wood that you could ... just heat a communal place where people could hang out. So it was a pretty interesting time. Very intimate time.

Q: During the early years like '67, '68 when you got started, did you have a lot of hippies passing through that were traveling the country and looking for a place to stay?

A: Yeah, but when they heard there was no drugs and they heard there was work, the work and the no drugs really separated people out very quickly. There were people who were genuine because we were not interested just in providing place, we were at this spiritual ideal that we were trying to achieve or to reach or to understand or to open up ourselves to so many different ways of looking at what that exchange might be that when people would come like that, we'd say, sure you can stay and here's what the deal is. First of all, there's a big can out by the border, you can leave your drugs in that. You can find them when you leave, we won't take them, but you can't bring them in. This is our border and this is the way it is, that's how life is in this land. Not bad, not good, what you do is what you do. And outside the border is national forest. But if you make a fire and you don't ... we'll see the light of it and since we work with the ranger, we'll tell you whether it's the time of the year you can make a fire or not and right now it is or it isn't and ... you can do that and as we know them as campsites and you want to camp out, no problem, it's a national forest, not our problem. But if you want to come here and sit down and eat with us and sleep with us, then you leave that stuff outside. We get up at 5:30 and we meditate at 6:00 and then there's breakfast and then there's eight hours of work.

Q: Did people pretty much comply with that?

A: Oh, they did or they left. Yeah. They totally complied with it. Yeah. That's what it was. We were very hard nosed about it, it was just, get out. We were prepared to pick them up and carry them out. Many people tried to invade [??], in a certain sense. We never hurt anybody, we just said, look, this is our thing and this is what we are doing and there's other places around and if you want to go there, you're welcome, you want to camp in the woods, fine, but this is what's going on here. This is a purposeful place, we have our purpose. You have your purpose, we have no argument with you. You want to hang

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out, or whatever you want to do, that's your thing. And we're not saying that drugs are good or bad or anything else like that, it's just that what we're doing doesn't include them at this point. So that's the way it is. That's in '67, '68, '69, that period. When that was Seventies [??] that was very rampant. And a lot of people say, yeah, cool, that's sounds cool, I'll try that for a day and we'll say, no, we don't take people for a day, we take people only for a week.

Q: So that sort of separated people right then and there.

A: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, we give them a day, we say, okay, you want to stay a day, alright. And they say, yeah, cool, and we'll leave our drugs outside, cool, okay and we'll work okay, okay and like that, but at the end of the day, tomorrow morning you can have breakfast and you leave unless we think that you're worth it and you want to do it and in that case it's not for another day, it's for a week. At the end of a week, it's not for a week, it's for a month. At the end of the month, it's not for a month, it's for the season. At the end of the season, it's not for the season, it's for the year. And that's how we give ... that's how the staff fall. And there were many many different kinds of people who passed through, I'll tell you. We stayed and went through ... a lot of people. Combat veterans from Vietnam who could no longer live with themselves, we had this Marine who lived there and he was great. He was just a really good guy, but he was plagued by hell. A tobacco farmer from Georgia who had just walked out. And housewives who had walked out of their houses, they said, this is nuts, and left their husband, their kid, and just said, this is nuts. I've had it. So many different kinds of people. They just had had it. They couldn't deal with it anymore. Or people who had elaborately figured out a way to buy themselves three weeks of it. Or a week of it, or two weeks of it or whatever...

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: But had to do something else. They were not up for going to Atlantic City or Yosemite for the summer vacation. Either one. Or Disneyworld or Disneyland, they weren't going to do that. They were going to go to this place and they would often be bringing reluctantly along their spouse, be it male or female who said, what is this, man? But he's in love with his wife or she's in love with him or sometimes they were really in love with one another and they were going to do it. Often it was like that, the man kind of sheepishly looking like, jeez, I've got two weeks of this, wanting to figure out how he could get out. But the woman is saying, man, why is he into this, then? She's like, you know, with bouffant hair and this pink dress and her nails and things and just sitting there and there's these, you know, because if you have really only a couple of sets of clothing, they generally don't tend to be very shiny and you tend to get things that will last. So you kind of look pretty homespun. And there'd be this person who'd just pop out of their environment and they'd be sitting there eating breakfast with these people, and

Q: Did you have any rules about sexual relationships? Were you celibate, or ...

A: No, nobody [??] was celibate. There were families and there were people who were celibate and there were people who were not celibate and that caused a lot of problems, in fact. Hard to say very much about that. I think that that was something that nobody could really still look at. I think at that point that whole thing was ... I mean, I know that there were groups who tried to explore that reality and with greater and lesser successes, I'm sure. But we didn't and a lot of problems arose because of it,

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in many ways, but what can you do. That's an area that is very unresolved for a lot of people, about how they ... see, even then there was not even AIDS. There was, but it had not at all reached anything like that and that was also the whole sexual revolution taking place at the same time in a certain sense. But it was just too loaded for anybody to really start to take that apart. As a result, many things happened unconsciously which could have happened consciously as we did other things, but I don't think anybody was prepared to do that. There was still too far buried to really get after that. But I think at The Farm and places like that, New Buffalo, well I don't know about New Buffalo, I don't know how people dealt with that. I've never seen reports on that. I don't know if anybody's ever done a real study about that. It would be interesting to know.

Q: Did you have like a behavior code or a list of rules that people were supposed to follow or were there things written down?

A: Not that I can remember per se. It was pretty much common sense, I think. It was not a heavy community in that sense, that was so heavily structured.

Q: But if somebody showed up, was there someone there who could explain things to them like no drugs?

A: Yeah, we had sort of principles, we had at least a rule of order, say, this is what happens. Which we would deal with that every year. Once a year we'd have a meeting and deal with the whole thing of whether we really want to keep getting up every morning, is that leading anywhere, where after awhile, for instance the discussion group in the evening was dropped because everybody felt that in the end it was counter productive. And it was kept as an hour long thing for people in the summer because people in the summer ... it didn't make sense for the staff to do that after a while. And sometimes people used it to pick on old things and it was just not worth it. Because everybody knew one another pretty well enough by then. It was just a way of verbal combat sometimes, which was not really conducive to more harmony, it created less harmony. But in the summertime we kept that because people come from different places and this is their first experience. A lot of them are just physiological experiences of being 500 feet. Short of breath or they wanted to ask questions about that. So we kind of kept the hour meeting in the summertime, but things changed and then there was like, should the rota [??] be every week or every day and that would change, it was flexible in that sense, but basically, for all the time that I was there and as I visited my daughter there last year and it was basically the same thing. That's what they were doing. Meditation never changes, meditation and eating and work and free time on the mountain and periodic trips to town. I used to go camp, I used to even go camping from there. I would just take off and go camping. I find even that, just living with people all the time, in the summer I would get out of the place a lot. Just felt invaded. My first wife was much more of a social person than I am. That's why they say you have to talk to different people involved because people have different needs. My need was not a social need, my need was for the place. But her need in that sense was much more for, in a certain sense, I don't like to talk for her, but a social sense of it. She liked the people and meeting the people and meeting other people who were involved in the spiritual work and so forth. And the emphasis on contemplation, meditation very much pleased the third person who was involved with it. So I had the place which was where I wanted to be, they had the social thing and my first wife was a

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very good organizer and she likes to do that kind of stuff and she's very good at it. And I'm not particularly interested in it but I'm interested in living in a certain place. I am interested in meditation, always have been interested in meditation, I continue to do it all my life, so that's fine. And I see the need for the social thing. It's not I don't see the need for it, I just am not heavily involved in it.

Q: Yeah. Did you or the other two founders play a leadership role in the community?

A: Sure, definitely.

Q: But I think you said before that you did make decisions by consensus.

A: Yeah, so like that. It's tempered.

Q: You say that now the routine is still the same, like when you went to visit your daughter, but you mentioned before that you felt the community kind of sold out?

A: Well no, I don't think sold out, it's just I prefaced everything from the very beginning by saying that what happens in America, and I don't know if it's a conscious or an unconscious process, but it is a process which happens, which is that everything becomes a commodity that can be bought or sold. It's very hard, just think of it. If you do have a T.V. and you do do that and many of the people who came there certainly did, they were products of that society. If you have these 21,000 commercials a year in your head and you multiply that by ten, twenty years, it's a zeitgeist way of looking at things. You can't even help it hardly. It's like a kind of brainwashing. Television viewing is passive. You sit there and the thing comes into your mind and after a while you're programmed. That's what I think. So that commercial thing is being programmed in all the people all the time who are watching television, that's why I don't have one. I wouldn't have it. Even the magazines, the stuff that come in the mail it's just like ... I barely ever get a letter. You get letters in the mail?

Q: Not many.

A: Not much. I get e-mail, but I don't get letters in the mail. I get this other stuff. It takes me half an hour a day just dealing with garbage. It's stuff I don't want. But just because I am, I get. Even if I'm just a box holder I get it.

Q: That's right.

A: See? So that's what happened. I think that there were people who saw that this is a product. Many things happened in my own life there and with Lama and so forth, which changed me. I left there in 1976 and last year was the first time I ever went back there, twenty years later.

Q: Wow.

A: Yeah. I mean, I never wanted to see the people who lived there again. I only really went there because my daughter was there. Just to see her.

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Q: So you felt kind of bitter or disillusioned?

A: No, not bitter or disillusioned, that's just the way ... I've been a member of different projects in different parts of the world, in Europe, in here and the Middle East, and yeah, I'd like a five year shot, seven year shot where you could do anything, if you're going to something. Then after that the bean counters or the salesmen or whatever, they take over, that's what happens. The creative thing is really gone by the end of the third year, fourth year max. Gone. It becomes routine, then people say that's the way it's always been and it becomes set in stone and you can't change it. And to change things, they say, well we always used to do this ... and you say, hey, I'm the one who started doing this in the first place, what do you mean "we" always used to do it? I did it, now you do it, now you think that it goes on forever? Ridiculous. But you can't tell people that because they think they discovered it for themselves. So then the best thing is to just leave graciously or leave, in any case, then just leave them because they're not going to listen. That's the way it is. It's kind of a law, one of those Murphy Law type things. It's just the law that bureaucracy always succeeds creativity. There are people who that's the way their minds work, it seems like. And they want to regulate and order and like that.

Q: Have you lived communally since then?

A: Oh, a number of different times, yeah.

Q: What groups have you been a part of?

A: Well, I was a part of the international work group community in Europe for three years and I worked with this other place in New Mexico for ten years, Dar Islam Foundation and landed in places in India and the Middle East more of a monastic nature, but communal. And I've taken part for a long time with the International World Peace Federation where we go for very intensive meetings with people of different faiths for no holds barred type thing for that, seven days and very like in the middle of Korea and the middle of where they sign the peace treaties in Europe and in very heavy places, very blood drenched places, Bosnia, Turkey, Morocco, Africa, Asia, I've been to all these places in these week long world faith meetings and they're really heavy. I mean, very very intense communal exchanges at a very basic level. So I kept on doing it in different ways. So now I'm living in this area, I've got a lot of family in this area. So I'm working with my family right now. Got lots of grandchildren and children in this area.

Q: Wow, yeah. Do you see yourself maybe living communally again in the future?

A: I plan very little anything, if that's what it is. No, I don't think so. I have just been in Alexandria, Egypt for five years, I just came back here. I lived in Mecca for a long time. I lived in Jerusalem for a long time. And those are very old sacred places and people are still living in very traditional ways in them. So in that sense, in the kind of community which has ceased to exist in America by and large since the 1940's, living in those environments. That's been very interesting.

Q: Well, should we end now since I know you have to get ready for this birthday party?

A: Yeah, I really got to do it. I got to do it.

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Q: Yeah, okay. Yeah. Well, I really appreciate your time.

A: I mean, no, you've come a long way ...