

Interview with Linda Fuller  
Interviewer: Deborah Altus  
February 6, 1996

**Q:** ... has been?

**A:** OK. Well, my husband and I first went there in December of 1965. We had been living in Muckary [?] Alabama and my husband had been in business, I had been in school, and we had just made a major decision to totally, to change our lives; give everything away and find, you know, some type of service-oriented work, Christian kind of work. We didn't know what we were going to do. But the first thing that we did was to load our two children, our two young children up in the car and head to Florida, just to spend some time ... thinking and praying and really getting acquainted as a family because we'd lived and living a pretty fast-paced life, and uh, Millard was totally consumed with business and making money, and we just needed a break and so, uh, it was on our way back from Florida that we remembered some good friends of ours who had lived in Birmingham, Alabama. He had pastored a church and made the fatal mistake of preaching a sermon on integration, and this was back in the early '60s, and he was thrown out of his church and they had moved to this Christian community, we knew it was somewhere in Georgia, we couldn't exactly remember where. When we stopped in Albany, Georgia, which is 40 miles to the south of here, we thought maybe we would find it listed in the phone book down there, but since we didn't, we called the operator, and she was able to direct us to Koinonia, here in Americus [?] and we came and visited our friends, Carol and Al Henry at Koinonia and really, had just planned to stay a couple of hours. And, uh, when it came near lunchtime, they insisted that we stay for lunch, and that's, that's the time, that's the first time that we met Clarence Jurden [?], who of course founded Koinonia and uh, we were just, just absolutely fascinated with the man. There was a news reporter there from the Columbus, Georgia newspaper asking him questions and we were just fascinated with the kind of answers that he was giving. He was giving, telling about the history of Koinonia and uh, so we felt like we should stay longer, and uh, since it was their busy time of year to be shipping out the pecans and pecan products, they were shorthanded anyway, and so we just decided to settle in there, for a while, and stayed a whole month. Talking to Clarence and Margaret and her husband Will and Florence Jurden [?] uh, and helping out in any way we could. Millard signed on to help milk cows with Clarence Jurden, actually or just one cow.

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** [Laughs] They milked cows together. Millard grew up knowing how to do that and so there was um, a very special time for us and as I said, we left at the end of that month, but came back a couple of years later, to uh, start what we called Partnership Housing, Partnership Farming, Partnership Industries. And uh, starting a new um, type work at Koinonia, whereas mostly they had been centered on communal living and had some, had some outreach program, but we wanted to institute some, some real uh, significant type of outreach programs that would help the many sharecropper families that were in the area that had no way of, uh, improving their conditions, their housing conditions, their economic conditions. Partnership Housing, we took some of the property at Koinonia. Actually, Millard surveyed off enough land for uh, twenty-five houses and a playground and uh, we started building houses and appealing to the mailing list at Koinonia. Clarence wrote, uh, this very appealing letter to, uh, have people contribute to what we called the fund for humanity, using this as the money source to buy building materials, build houses, to be sold, no profit, no interest, and long-term to pay. We felt that home-ownership was very important and uh, course, most of these families had never even dreamed about owning a home. They had no way of going to the bank to get financial assistance and uh, then the

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Partnership Industries that we also started, uh, building up the pecan business and fruitcake bakery, um, we published a pecan cookbook, and this gave more opportunities to employ more of the local people, that, uh, were either unemployed or underemployed. We started a child-development center in the uh, in the same area where we had the houses and the playground developed, and uh, we started a sewing factory to give more people employment, we um, had uh, Partnership Farming where men and women would join together and farm the land at Koinonia and uh, that way they could get more share of the profit than they had been getting previously, living on the land of local farmers. So, uh, we were there for about five years, doing all these neat things, um, primarily we wanted to be able to free up Clarence to do more speaking and do his cotton-patch translations, so uh, he being you know, very skilled at farming, he did go out some and supervise some of the farming operation, but he mostly stayed in his, what we called the writing shack and prepared um, speeches and did his Bible translations. [Pause] Oh yeah, we had what we called Discipleship schools, where groups of people would come from time to time, and Clarence would do Bible study and uh, we would teach our understanding, or his understanding, of what radical Christian discipleship was all about [pause] and then it was a big change for me because I had never lived in Christian community before, and we had our own individual place to live, but there was a lot of interaction between the other people that lived there. We had a lot of visitors to start coming. Sometimes I felt like I was just over-saturated with people, and uh, sometimes I would just go off and walk in the woods by myself, when I could get away from my children, somebody could keep our children. We'd, we didn't have much time, you know, for ourselves. 'Specially those of us that were also parents living at community. [Pause]

**Q:** What was it like, um, giving up all of your things, all your material possessions to have a community of goods?

**A:** Well, we had done that a couple years before we moved there, and when we came we, uh, we came with just a minimum amount of furniture. We had two beds and uh, the place where we lived was rather small, so it didn't need much furniture, and uh, in fact, let's see, as I recall, the kitchen that we had didn't have a stove, it only had like a hot plate, and there was no hot running water in the kitchen --

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** We had to boil it or bring it from the bathroom. We did have hot running water in the bathroom.

**Q:** Did you live on the farm itself? Or, uh ... yeah.

**A:** The house that we lived in was the structure that was built, the first structure that was built uh, when the community was started. There was, that was where the original community dining room was, downstairs, and then the Jurdens had lived upstairs. And uh, where the community dining room is now, the Jurdens lived over that building and they were when we were there. And um, unfortunately, they tore that house down, that we had lived in. The last year we were there, a duplex house was built, that's the concrete block house to the side of the kitchen, and uh, so we had a little nicer place the last year there, and had a baby born, our fourth child was born, while we were at Koinonia. And, uh, we decided that we would have a home delivery, one of the women that worked out in the candy kitchen, was also a midwife, and uh, she's the one that came and helped me birth the baby.

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**Q:** How'd that go?

**A:** It went really well.

**Q:** Oh, good.

**A:** Yeah. I almost wish I'd had them all that way.

**Q:** Wow. [Laughs]

**A:** [Laughs] All the others were born in a hospital, you know. That was during the time that the hospital here locally would not allow the father in the delivery room and we, I felt that that would probably be our last baby, and I wanted my husband to see at least one of these babies come, and so that's one reason why.

**Q:** Was that your last?

**A:** It was. [Unintelligible]

**Q:** And the woman in the candy kitchen was a midwife, is that what you said?

**A:** Yes, actually, there were two women that worked in the fruitcake bakery and in the kitchen that were midwives. Registered midwives. [Pause] Oh let's see. One of the things that we always looked forward to was the noon meals; to begin with, when there were fewer people there, we took turns by the week preparing the noon meal, and then after so many people started coming, Lew Drill's [?] wife, maybe was our, our cook. She was a wonderful woman, very wonderful, and uh, that was always something to look forward to, getting together, you know, if any visitors were there, you know, everybody was welcome to share in the noon meal, and we'd have like, uh, prayer and announcements, and then the other meals we had in our individual homes. I guess it's like we do now.

**Q:** Uh huh. Was it a good place to be, to be raising kids?

**A:** Oh, definitely. Yeah, our kids just loved it. You know, there were other children there for them to play with, and of course the woods all around. Our son, we have a son, whose the oldest, and three daughters, and our son would go out in the woods and build forts, and there was good places to ride bikes [Pause] and of course they were exposed to all kinds of interesting people that either lived there or came to visit.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** [Pause] And it was a real opportunity to learn a lot of new things too, because, um, I learned how to bake bread and make yogurt and um, since I knew how to sew, I helped some people learn how to sew. [Pause]

**Q:** And was, um, Millard really involved in getting the building program going? Was that kind of how he spent his time?

**A:** Yes, he was officially the director and so he was directing the house-building program, and he was involved in every aspect, actually. And uh, since he had uh, a legal and business background, he uh, he did a lot to build up the community as a whole, especially the business, pecan business.

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** That was one of the main ways we had to support the community. And then the donations that came into the fund for humanity we used all that for the hospital programs, the other type ministries that we had there.

**Q:** And then, um, did your family go off to Africa? Is that what I heard?

**A:** Yes, we did.

**Q:** Uh huh. And why did you do that?

**A:** Well, like I say, we were at Koinonia almost five years, and during that time, you know, we were able to accomplish a lot. We built about, I guess about, twenty or twenty-five houses were completed during that time. And um, we just, we felt like um, all the programs were you know, underway, and it wasn't a really big challenge anymore, and uh, it was, it had been Clarence Jurden's dream to build houses in a lot of different places, so we thought, well, it's, you know, time to go try this idea somewhere else. My husband and I had visited five countries in Africa, right after we left business in 1960, I guess it was the summer of '66. And um, one place we visited had a block and sand [?] that the, uh, church in Zaire had a block and sand operation, and uh, I remember when, when we visited there, their dump truck was real old, and not any good anymore, and we came home and raised money for a dump truck, and um, we just always kind of remembered that block and sand operation and we thought, you know, that that would be a good basis for our housing project, because -- oh, the need for housing was just, was just critical in that area, as in so many areas of Africa and uh, so we got in touch with that church that we had visited and they, you know, invited us to come and do that work. We had to spend three months in Paris learning French.

**Q:** Oh, wow. [Laughs]

**A:** So we went, yeah, and so we were just going to go for two years, and uh, by the end of two years, we were just getting started good, because it takes a long time for things to get repaired and it just takes longer to do things in a third-world country, and by the end of two years we were just getting started really good, and so we extended another year, stayed a total of three years, and then moved back to Koinonia, for a year, before we moved into town here. We really thought of Koinonia being the base of doing this type of work worldwide ...

**Q:** Uh huh.

**A:** But the people that were living at Koinonia at that time didn't share our vision. Most of them just wanted to continue building houses just in this county and we'd already [pause] strongly felt called to [pause] make it happen in a lot of different places. So we had a friendly parting, bought, we bought a house here in town, and Millard was going to practice law to support our family and then start what we named Habitat for Humanity on the side, helping it get started in, you know, other places.

**Q:** And that was the late 60's at this time?

**A:** No, this was, uh, like the mid-'70s.

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**Q:** Oh, this was the mid-'70s.

**A:** 1976, actually.

**Q:** So, by the time you moved back from Africa, had Clarence Jurden already died?

**A:** Oh, he died before we even --

**Q:** Before you left.

**A:** Finished the first house.

**Q:** Oh, OK. I see.

**A:** He died, let's see. We moved to Koinonia in the summer of '68.

**Q:** Oh, '68, OK. For some reason I was thinking it was '63.

**A:** Summer of '68, and he died in October of '69, just a little over a year [inaudible] we'd been there.

**Q:** OK. Um, one of the persons I talked to, I think it was Julie Kunups [?] said that, that I should be sure to ask you about a story about when Clarence Jurden died, and something about how the coroner wouldn't come out to get the body, or, and Millard had to take him into town and, maybe you can tell me about that, I don't know. [Laughs]

**A:** Uh huh. Well, I guess you've already picked up on the fact that Koinonia was a very unpopular place because of their stand on racial issues, you know, they had, did such radical things as having blacks and whites living together, which was, you know, totally against the culture in the south. And uh, also they took a strong stand for peace, they had a lot of conscientious objectors to come there and live during the, I guess it was World War II? And um, so they were just unpopular and people didn't understand this idea of communal living, sharing, lot of people called them communists, you know. OK, so, Clarence Jurden was not, uh, very well-thought of, as well as Koinonia was not very, not thought well, not well-thought of in the area, so when he died suddenly of a heart attack, um, my husband called the coroner to come and pronounce him dead, and he, he refused to come. Not to Koinonia. He said "You know, you'll have to get an ambulance and bring him into town." And, uh, so we, we didn't want to spend a whole lot of money hauling a dead body around, so we, just put him in the back of a station wagon that we had, covered him with a sheet, and uh, Millard drove him into town, to the hospital. A funny thing happened. There was a farmer that we knew, his name was Plessy [?] Nelson, he had gotten into some pretty bad financial trouble, and so we had, we had gotten the church, we knew of a church in New York City that helped him out, and you know, we had this real friendly relationship with him and, for some reason he was in the parking lot when Millard drove into the hospital, and uh, so when Plessy Nelson saw Millard he said "How you doin'" you know, just friendly conversation, "How you doin'? How's Mr. Clarence?"

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** "Oh," Millard says, "Mr. Clarence ain't doing so good, Plessy." He said, he said, "Well, what's the matter?" and uh, Millard said, "Well, he's dead, I got him right here in the back of this station wagon." [Laughs] And so he comes over, and Millard lifts up the sheet and he said, "Yep, that's right, that's him."

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Oh me, but anyway. They kept him and they kept him and they just did not do an autopsy. And I finally got our kids to bed and came into town and sat with Millard in the waiting room of the hospital with Millard, and it was about eleven o'clock at night before they ever gave the body back to us, and uh, you know, just um, to show just how much they despised him they handed me a paper sack with his clothes in it, you know, and um, but Clarence never wanted to spend money on a funeral. He wanted to be buried, right, at Koinonia, and uh, there happened to be a casket company, uh, here in town, and we got one of the shipping crates from the casket company, and that's what we buried him in. I had to come into town the next day and get the burial certificate, 'cause we weren't going to have the body embalmed, and he had to be buried within twenty-four hours. The men out on the farm dug the grave. It's way back on the backside, edge of a pecan grove, where he's buried, Lawrence is buried, several people that have lived in Koinonia are buried. That's where my husband and I want to be buried.  
[Laughs]

**Q:** Really. Uh huh, yeah. What kind of a man was Clarence Jurden? Was he charismatic?

**A:** Oh, oh, extremely.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** Uh, the [unintelligible] um, he looked like a very simple man. He dressed very simply, usually in overalls or just jeans and a plaid shirt. He always wore, uh, these like [unintelligible] work boots unless he was going out on a speaking trip; then he would put on a suit. But when he was just around the farm, he dressed very simply and usually wore a straw hat and got himself around on a motor bike. He would leave his writing shack and go out to where farming was going on, or wherever he needed to go, on his motorbike, and here he was put-putting around the farm. And uh, he was just a phenomenal storyteller, and he had a lot of stories to tell, of all the experiences that they had in Koinonia. [Pause] Did they tell you about the records he made?

**Q:** No.

**A:** Like the Great Banquet. They're sort of modern, um, versions of parables in the Bible.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** Let's see, I got one. Judas the Rebel. But it's Clarence speaking, telling, you know, the, and he puts a lot of humor in. He's just one of these people you can just sit and listen to for hours. And uh, [pause] he uh, he really enjoyed sharing stories. He was a great public speaker too. And uh, he's, since he's uh, got his doctor's degree in Greek New Testament, and he always read directly from the Greek Bible.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** [Pause] He was uh, he was handy too, he's a very practical uh, type person too. He could work on a tractor, on a car, he knew how to fix things, and as I said, he knew a lot about farming. He had majored in agriculture, from the University of Georgia before he went to seminary. He was raised in a small little town, just northwest of here, in Taubetton [?]. His father was a, probably the most prominent man in town, he had a big store. And uh, he came from you know, a fairly well-to-do family, but uh, he was very keen on making the teachings of Jesus relevant and, and, living the way he felt [pause]

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** a Christian should, should live.

**Q:** What do you think about the recent changes at Koinonia and the, the dissolution of the common purse?

**A:** Well, uh, it's very different from when we lived there. It's been pretty much a leadership vacuum there for quite a while. And uh, I don't know what, how it's going to turn out. It looks like they're taking care of getting rid of their debt, that really concerned me for awhile. They had such a large debt. That was from, you know, some really poor leadership, um, poor business decisions. So it looks like maybe they'll pull through that. But they're going to have to have some, uh, stronger leadership, I think, before they're going to actually be able to be a strong community again.

**Q:** Yeah, a lot of the people I've talked to seem kind of disheartened about the state of the community, and they keep telling me that it's no longer an intentional [?] community. Yeah. [Pause] What, what has been the best part of your association with Koinonia, with?

**A:** When I lived there?

**Q:** Yeah, I guess so.

**A:** Well, um, [pause] we lived there during the time when there were a lot of changes going on in our country. I grew up in pretty much a sheltered-type environment. Um, middle-class America, you know, and so living at Koinonia exposed me to a lot of new things, a lot of new ideas, and uh, a lot of different kind of people that I had never had an opportunity to get to know before. A lot of young people, hippies, that came and lived there at that time. And uh, I don't know, it was just really exciting to uh, be around such interesting people, although I did sort of get, uh, weary of it at times. But on the other hand it was real exciting and our worship services on Sunday afternoon were full of music, a lot of young people played guitars, banjo, lot of singing, clapping, I came from such a conservative kind of background, you know. [Laughs] That was fun. Try some new ways of worship, and new songs, and it's like, you know, it says in the Bible, you have to put new wine in new wineskins, you know, it was, it was new wine. It was a real different type of life. [Pause] I enjoyed being out in the rural area, I had pretty much grown up in a, in a, not a big city, but a city, medium-sized city. And I enjoyed going barefooted, feeling the grass under my feet, walking in the woods, being around gardens, picking strawberries in the spring ...

**Q:** Yeah. And you said you came back from Africa in like, the late '70s, is that what it was?

**A:** It was, we actually came back in the summer of '76.

**Q:** '76. And then you lived at Koinonia for a year and then moved into Americus?

**A:** Right.

**Q:** And that's kind of when Habitat for Humanity started then, was about '77?

**A:** Um, actually we, we formed it right away in the spring of 1976. We had sort of a little office out at Koinonia.

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**Q:** Wow. So you're about to celebrate your twentieth anniversary, then.

**A:** That's right.

**Q:** That's incredible, to see how it's grown.

**A:** Like timber.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** 1996.

**Q:** What has that experience been like, to go from a small building to this incredible international organization?

**A:** Ahhh ... it makes me dizzy sometimes.

**Q:** Does it?

**A:** Yeah, well, of course, we started out very slowly. It was just my husband and me, and then one volunteer came, and another volunteer came, [pause] we, uh, didn't start building houses right away, here in town. Koinonia was still building houses during that time. But we were helping groups get started in San Antonio, Texas ... uh, Morgan Scott county in Tennessee, Appalachia area, Tennessee, down in southern Florida, where a lot of migrant workers were living in Alachua [?] Um, Millard was going out speaking some, because we had to, we were still raising money to continue building houses in Zaire, in the place where we lived and then in another location that was getting started ... about ninety miles away from where we lived. And so the idea was already beginning to spread in Zaire, and we, we were raising the money to continue the house-building in Zaire. Um, so our being able to work on it part-time, since Millard was practicing law to support our family, and we finally had to find someone to be like an administrative director, full-time administrative director. And uh, we started buying up old houses for volunteers to, to uh, renovate, volunteer housing. And it was just, just very slow-moving kind of thing there for a while. I'd say for the first eight or nine years. And um, we did a few things to really try to make Habitat for Humanity known, like in 1983 we did uh, a seven-hundred mile walk from here to Indianapolis. My husband and I led it, there were about, there were four people that walked all the way; my husband, myself, and two others. Walked the whole distance. Then there were a number of other people that walked part of the distance. And of course, you know, it brought out the media and we, we would talk to people in every community that we walked through about the problem of poverty-housing and trying to promote the idea wherever we went along the way. That was so successful, we did a thousand-mile walk from here to Kansas City ...

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** For our tenth anniversary celebration. Then three years later in 1986, there were about forty people that walked the whole distance, including my husband and I, on that walk.

**Q:** So, are you going to do another walk for your twentieth anniversary? [Laughs]

**A:** Actually, we, we are. We're going to do, like a sentimental walk, from here to Atlanta.

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**Q:** All right.

**A:** Our celebration will be in Atlanta. And, uh, we're doing just 140 miles. But then there, there are bikers, there, oh, there's a couple that's starting the tenth in just a few days, in Olympia, Washington, and walking clear across the country from Olympia, Washington to Atlanta --

**Q:** Oh, that's great.

**A:** For our anniversary. And there are bikers, there's several groups of bikers from Canada, they're joining up with some more bikers in Louisville, Kentucky, and I think in North Carolina, yep, there are lot of people that are coming doing walks and bike-a-thons, to come into our anniversary. It'll be Labor Day weekend.

**Q:** Oh, that's exciting. Is that going to be at the same time as the Olympics?

**A:** [Laughs] [unintelligible] It's going to be, uh, it's going to be two or three weeks --

**Q:** After? That's good. [Laughs]

**A:** [Laughs] Atlanta probably still won't have recovered.

**Q:** Oh, really. Has um, the association with Jimmy Carter been, a, a good thing for like name recognition.

**A:** Oh, I'm glad you mentioned that, because that was what I was leading into. How we started off so slow, and uh, in 1984 he and [unintelligible] Carter and Rosalyn got involved. I think we had something like around fifty affiliates at that time. And now, that was, like fifty affiliates worldwide. Now we have over 1800.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** So, you know, he, like no other, he and Rosalyn, have given Habitat for Humanity name-recognition. You know, because it was really unique for a former president of the United States to put on work clothes and go in the slums or wherever and build houses for a week every year.

**Q:** Yeah. They must be really wonderful people.

**A:** They really are.

**Q:** Yeah. Do you know them?

**A:** Fairly well. Yeah. [Pause] You know, he teaches Sunday school when he's in town.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** At Marymount [?] Baptist in [unintelligible]. So uh, we belong to that church and he's our Sunday school teacher. We see him from time to time. But then every year, for a whole week, we're with he and Rosalyn. Leading a big work camp. Last year we were in Watts, in Los Angeles, to um, build twenty-one houses in five days.

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**Q:** Wow.

**A:** And this, this next year, right before the celebration, actually, we're going to be in Hungary. We're going to be building houses in Hungary. [unintelligible]

**Q:** Wow. That's incredible. Yeah. Well, how about one final question about Koinonia. Um, Koinonia's really unique in terms of an intentional community living, because it's lasted for so long, I mean, so many communities seem to be really short-lived. What do you think is the, the glue that keeps it together and has kept it going over some fifty years?

**A:** I think it's the, the strong religious base. [Pause] That's one thing we, sort of realized, or learned, when we were at Koinonia, how important that was, to have the Biblical base. 'Cause if you ... any group of people that live together are going to have problems, you know. And if you have, um, a common guide, um, um, you know, a, some, some, some spiritual guidance on how to deal with that problem, uh, problems can get resolved a lot easier. Because usually people that live in community, they're all types, you know, they can come from all kinds of different backgrounds, and if you don't have, you know, that common spiritual tie in common, [pause] it just makes it really difficult to resolve differences and problems.

**Q:** Yeah. Do you think it's helped that they've had strong leaders like, Clarence Jurden and maybe your husband? I don't know if he was a leadership figure there, or ...?

**A:** He was, when we were there.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah.

**A:** Oh, I definitely feel like that today.

**Q:** And maybe that's what they're lacking now.

**A:** It seems so. [Pause] There are a lot of good people that are there, but you know, they just, it means a lot that there is strong leadership. Not only maintain or, what's there, but build. Know how to push something forward, build, build it up.

**Q:** Yeah. Do you think that it'll keep going as an intentional community?

**A:** Oh, I don't know.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah. [Laughs]

**A:** It's quite [unintelligible]. God only knows.

**Q:** Yeah, that's right. [Laughs] Well, Markette [?] was optimistic, she said that she'd seen it go through so many cycles --

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** That she figured it was going to come back up again.

**A:** Well it was at a real low ebb, although the Jurdens were still there, they were thinking about moving away, when we moved there. Or right before we moved there, 'cause when we expressed an interest in

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coming there, Clarence knew that Millard, you know, had a lot of business and leadership ability and uh, that's when he got excited about staying. Trying some of these partnership ideas that I mentioned. Um, so it was just basically the Jurdens and the Whitcampers [?] that were there when we moved there in 1968, and then when we started uh, telling people what we were going to be doing, you know, building the houses, and doing more farming, and um, this pulled in a lot of people and over in about three years we went from less than ten to over a hundred.

**Q:** Whoa! Yeah.

**A:** See that community dining room, we had to expand it. I don't know if you could tell where we had added on. [Pause]

**Q:** Well, that must have been an exciting period, to see it, it grow and see the community be revitalized, and uh --

**A:** It certainly was.

**Q:** Well, thank you so much for your time --

**A:** You're welcome.

**Q:** You've been really generous to speak with me, I appreciate it.