

Interview with Francie Levy

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

January 8, 1996

**Q:** This is Monday, January 8th, in an interview with Francie Levy. So, Francie, could you tell me a little bit about what led to you becoming a part of Synanon.

**A:** I think a lot of it had to do with the time, in the '60's, when I was in college, I was very involved in um, political action. I was involved in the Civil Rights Movement and actually went to Mississippi for Freedom Summer, which, some people may know what that is, and registered voters, and did some things down there. And I was also very active in the Peace Movement, which was a major focus, kind of a progressive people. And, I was at UC Berkeley, and there was a small group of people in Berkeley who were playing something called the Synanon Game. And I met someone, and they told me about this wild place where, people were living together, and they were getting people cured from drug addiction, but they also had kind of a vision about maybe changing the world and changing the way people lived, and changing family structure, so that people lived more in a tribal kind of organization, instead of just in little boxes in cities, not knowing the other people who lived in the boxes on their block. And I was very fascinated by this. So someone took me down to Synanon in 1966. And, um, there was a small group that lived in San Francisco, near the Embarcadero, at a place called the Sea Wall. And I think the first time I walked in there, um, I was just captured by um, a tremendous feeling of joy and cooperation and the openness of people who would come and sit with me and tell me a little bit about who they were and how they'd really changed their lives: they had problems before, and living together and working together, um, to change their lives was really a healing and optimistic process for them. And I just, I loved the people, and I said, "Wow, this a group that I'm interested in." And there were other people who were getting involved who were not drug addicts or alcoholics, although that was the history with which Synanon began, was helping people with addiction problems. There were a lot of other people who just thought about living together, having your life committed to a vision of something a little bit larger than yourself, and I found it very appealing. And so I kept coming back and getting more and more involved, and didn't actually move into Synanon until January of 1970, but was very involved from the first contact in '66, up until I was actually able to move in 1970.

**Q:** Did you start playing the game right away.

**A:** Yes. That was the way that people who didn't actually live in Synanon, who hadn't come to Synanon particularly for help with a specific addiction problem, could be involved. They could play something called the Game as a game club member. And what that meant is you were a person who liked the idea of Synanon, and you went down one night a week or two nights a week, and you -- generally people did some volunteer work for Synanon, and you know, helped in some way, and then got to play the game. And the games, for people like me, who didn't live in Synanon, were a mixture of other people like me, who were coming down, who were interested in this process called the Game, and then some of the Synanon residents, usually not brand new residents, not somebody who'd just come in out of jail, but somebody who'd been around a little bit, and wasn't going to like, totally be crazy, and attack the "squares." We were called squares, meaning that, you know, we didn't have an addiction problem. Now some people really were squares, had never smoked pot, done anything, other people had various experiences. But the thing was called the Square Game Club. And we were supposed to be squares as opposed to character disorders, it was kind of a funny label. And not always really descriptive of the true situation, but anyway, so yeah. I started playing the game, this is at the end of 1966, and um, it was such a wild thing, to sit in a room with a group of people from many different backgrounds, and have people

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just talk honestly about their feelings, about a given situation. Sometimes husbands and wives would be in the room, or people who were friends, and they would talk about a specific encounter or a problem or something, and everybody was so open and undefensive about whatever they felt, that anything went, you could say anything. You could laugh, you could cry, you could swear, you could scream. The only rules were that you couldn't commit any act of physical violence, and you couldn't threaten anybody. You couldn't say, "If you say another word to me I'm going to strangle you!" But those were really the only rules. So people said all kinds of wild things. And my favorite story about the game, because, in the early days of Synanon, there was an absolute contract that what occurred in the game never went outside the room. So, you could feel safe in talking about anything, knowing that when everybody got up in the end, and left and kind of shook hands and laughed and went and had coffee together, that nobody was going to bring up something you said, that it was kind of sacred to that moment in time and space, sacred to that room. And there was a man that was playing the game with us who had cheated on his wife. And she didn't know, but he came into the game and began to talk about the fact that, you know, he'd been doing these things, and he really wanted to save his marriage, but he wasn't sure what he should do. People encouraged him in the game to tell her. Be honest, tell her, you can work it out, whatever. But she wasn't in the game, and it took him awhile to kind of get up his courage. So for several weeks, he played the game, they were not in the same games, and he would talk about this thing, and he'd say, "Well, I really, I gotta tell her, and I have to fix this," but it took awhile, it was a scary thing. And in all those weeks, I think it took maybe three months before he actually finally sat down and told his wife, no one ever said a word. She never knew. And yet week after week, there were different people that were rooms with him, who heard him talk about this thing that was going on in his life, and no one ever said anything, because they really believed in the sanctity of the game, number one; and number two, that it was his issue, and that he was the one who needed to tell her, and there was no reason to go out and have anybody gossip about it. And she never heard. She was playing the game too, but she was in different circles, and I guess a few times maybe, they were in games together before he really was ready to tell her, and no one in the room -- if there were people in the room who knew, no one ever brought it up, no one ever said anything. They kind of game him the dignity of fixing this mess himself. Which he did, and they stayed married. They worked through whatever the problems and the fallout and all that. But, that was kind of what the game was, it was like a sacred thing, you could say anything, you could talk about your secret innermost thoughts, you could talk about, um, a problem with another person, and once you left the room, it wasn't going to go anywhere. So I guess that's kind of what therapy is like, I guess. If you go to a doctor or a professional, you know they're not going to go talking about whatever you say somewhere else. But these weren't professionals. These were just ordinary people, kind of talking, sharing, laughing, crying, whatever together.

**Q:** Was the game originally designed as part of a drug treatment program?

**A:** Yes. Synanon was formed in 1958 by Chuck Dieterick [?], and I believe you're going to interview Chuck's son? Right, okay. Chuck was an alcoholic who was trying to stop drinking. He got involved in AA. He lived down in Ocean Park, which is right near Santa Monica. And there was kind of a spin-off of his AA gathering, of a bunch of guys who liked to stay up late at night and talk. And they began kind of meeting regularly, and talking to each other and talking very honestly, not in a defensive way, but just

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talking honestly about the things in their lives that I guess led them to these problems. And Chuck got the idea that this could be a tool to help people stay clean from alcohol, which was the group that he was involved with. And they rented a little store front on Ocean Beach, and that's where they would meet. They'd sit on folding chairs and talk. And somehow the word spread, so that some people who had problems with drug addictions, some people who were using heroin, said, "Oh, there's this group of guys, you know? And they meet and they sit around and talk and, they're not drinking, because they're talking." And then some drug addicts started coming. And from there it really blossomed into a whole community. But it was originally invented as kind of a therapeutic tool. And it was right about the same time that group therapy was beginning to happen, and tea groups, and the timing of all this, they way, in several different places, with several different kinds of people, the same sort of circular interaction was occurring. But in this case, it really saved lives. Because a lot of these were people who had um, not just addictive problems, but problems with the law, and at that time there was not a place for a person who was addicted to drugs to go. The only choice was Lexington, which was a federal prison-hospital situation. There weren't any of the self-help groups. This was really at the beginning of what we now think of as the self-help movement. So the game was an incredible gift to help people really turn their lives around. And it turned out to be a great communication tool for people who maybe didn't have major problems, just the normal problems of everyday life, but, the thing that it did as the years passed in Synanon, was enable us to live together, to have a tool to live in community, and when things came up -- because people always have issues with other people, life isn't perfect. You don't get along with everybody, and things happen, you work together, you live together, there are conflicts. The game functioned as a way for us to talk to each other in an honest fashion and work toward resolution of things that could be conflicts or problems.

**Q:** When did the group living part of Synanon start?

**A:** Well, as I said, it started in 1958, and the first squares didn't really talk about moving into Synanon until about '68, I guess. So people in Santa Monica moved in. The people who had come to Synanon for help lived together --

**Q:** From the very beginning?

**A:** From the very beginning. This group on the beach decided they were going to try and rent this storefront, and try and live together. And then after about a year there they were able to move to a bigger place, also in Santa Monica, called the Armory. It was an old National Guard Armory. So they lived together in some kind of communal fashion, but it was toward the end of the '60's, like '68, when other people started coming around, and said, "I want to live this way too. This is a great way to live. It's much more natural, it's kind of the tribal fashion." And in Santa Monica, a group of people, doctors, lawyers, business people, all kinds of people -- young students -- decided to move into Synanon. And by that time Synanon had bought the Del Mar club, which was a health club right on the beach. It had a lot of rooms and much more space. And so, a lot of squares began moving in, and the whole communal thing really blossomed. At the same time, in Oakland, there was a group in Oakland that lived in something called the Athens Club, which was also an old athletic club, interestingly enough. And a whole gang of us -- and that's where I moved into Synanon -- who had gotten involved at Berkeley, decided that we also wanted to live together. And so we bought an apartment building not too far from where this club building was,

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so that some families could move in. And this, the school -- there had been a Synanon school that started in Santa Monica, but there had been nothing up in Oakland. Anybody who had children before this time just moved south, so that their kids could live in the communal school situation in Santa Monica. But with all these squares moving in in the Bay Area, they decided to start a school in Oakland as well. So that kind of happened at the same time, at the end of the '60's. This was like '69.

**Q:** How did Chuck fund things? Through donations? People pooled their money?

**A:** Yes, it was definitely through donations. He had a very strong point of view, that he didn't want to take government money, because he thought there would be strings attached, and people would tell him how to do what he was doing, the self-help thing would then be taken over by the professionals and the experts, and no longer would it be a true self-help movement. So he very early on made this decision that he wasn't going to take any government grants, and he established a whole department of people -- this was their job, they were trained to do this -- they were called "hustlers." And they would go out to businesses, and talk about the work that was going on at Synanon, and ask for whatever the business might donate. Now in the early days, it was stale, day-old food from restaurants, and it was survival stuff. But over a 15 year period, it evolved from food to just keep people going, to construction materials in order to build the communities in Tamales [?] Bay, which came later. People would go to the Midwest and hustle cattle. And then they would hustle butchering services that would butcher and cut up the cattle into the pieces of meat, and freezer service that would keep it, so that we would actually have this great meat that had been donated, and clothing, and I mean, everything that people need in order to live. So it became a very sophisticated business of getting these donations. We had a tax exempt certificate in those days so that businesses could write it off. So, yeah, it worked very, very well. Then the other thing that happened was that a business was started, selling advertising specialties, which is, the business that I'm in now, is kind of a spin-off from the community, because we bought the company from the community. What happened was, someone donated a pencil machine that stamped - you could put the dye in to make a company name, and then you put the pencil in it, and it would stamp the company name, and it could be sold, like as an advertising gift. So, from the donation of that machine, and a few guys going out and trying to sell these imprinted pencils to businesses, grew this huge advertising specialty business.

**Q:** That's what Ad Gap [?] is?

**A:** Ad Gap is a spin-off from that original business, and Synanon, over the course of 15, 20 years, trained all kinds of people to sell advertising specialties. And now, Ad Gap is a business that came out of Synanon, but there were also sales people all over the country who started their own businesses, selling imprinted items. People who learned this trade in Synanon, folks who maybe didn't even have a high school education, who are earning huge incomes, because they learned this sales business.

**Q:** That's great. So the community has really had an influence beyond just its boundaries.

**A:** Oh definitely.

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**Q:** Yeah, in a lot of people's lives.

**A:** Definitely! And I think we told you, when we saw you at the communal studies, I mean, there was a law school later on, that put about 20 people through a three year law education, and these people all passed the bar, and they're practicing lawyers. So many businesses came out of -- there's a business in San Diego called Good Source, which is a, they're food brokers. That business came out of Synanon, because in the beginning, you know, when we were hustling things just to stay alive to have enough to eat, then um, we began getting more things than we needed. So we started looking for other people that we could share the donations with. And that was called, in the old days, anti-hustling. So we hustled to get stuff to eat, and then we anti-hustled to give it away to other people. So like, we helped the Black Panthers breakfast program in the '70's, and you know, lots of other people. So that business grew now into being this huge food broker business in San Diego called Good Source, and a lot of people who lived in Synanon are salespeople for this business, and earning great salaries, and working all over the country doing this food broker thing, which they learned in Synanon.

**Q:** So you moved in in 1970.

**A:** I moved in January of 1970.

**Q:** And that was in Oakland?

**A:** I moved in in Oakland, yeah.

**Q:** And um, that was originally in the, what did you call it?

**A:** It was called the Athens Club, it was an athletic club in downtown Oakland, which no longer exists. The building was old and it got imploded at some point.

**Q:** And then you said you bought an apartment building, the group --?

**A:** We bought an apartment so that a lot of families could move in, and um ... it was kind of near Highland Hospital in Oakland, I can't even remember the street now.

**Q:** And how long did you all stay there?

**A:** Well, people lived in Oakland for about another five years, I think, before we left there. I, personally, only stayed there for about 9 or 10 months, and then my husband and I were transferred to Santa Monica, because he went to work in one of the businesses down there. That's when I went to work in the school, in Santa Monica, and began a 15 year career of being involved in the Synanon school.

**Q:** So you were in the Santa Monica area then for 15 years?

**A:** No. The school, um ... existed in Santa Monica, but there was also one up north in Tamales Bay, in Marin County. So I lived in Santa Monica for a couple years, maybe two and a half or three years, and then I got transferred up to Tamales Bay, which is Marin County, and I taught the school up there for oh, seven or eight years I guess, maybe nine years. And then we sold that property in Tamales Bay, and then I moved to Badger, which is in the hills up here, 45 minutes from where we are now. Beautiful country. If you look east to the mountains in the morning, that's where we were, up toward those mountains, it was really beautiful. And we kind of closed down a lot of different facilities, and people converged on

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Badger, so that's where I lived for the whole last part, you know, the last um, let's see, I'm trying to remember when I moved to Badger. I guess I lived there for nine or ten years. As Synanon kind of ended, that's where we were. Which is how a lot of us ended up in Visalia [?], because it was close to Badger, and some of us were involved in these businesses, and it seemed like a natural move.

**Q:** Now, did you pool your incomes? Were you fully communal?

**A:** We were fully communal, but mostly people ended up working for Synanon. When I first moved in, I still had a job outside of Synanon, and so did my husband, and we just turned in our income. We kept a small amount of spending money, and just turned in all the money, and got everything provided by the community. But as Synanon grew, there was work for everybody within the community. We didn't need to work outside. So nobody was paid what you would consider a normal salary. People were paid what we called "WAM", it stood for "walk around money." And really, it's like an allowance. If you think about a teenager, and giving a kid just enough money to buy Cokes and go to the movies, and buy a few frivolous things, that's kind of what that money was for. Because housing, food, clothing, the schooling of our children, a vehicle when you needed it -- there was a place you could go, you signed up if you needed a car because you had to go do something. There was a fleet of cars that was owned by the community, so nobody had an individual car. So there wasn't really much of anything to spend money on, other than, you know, if you decided that you wanted to go out for a special meal somewhere, eat out, observe a special occasion, or you wanted to go to the movies in town somewhere.

**Q:** So how much WAM did you get?

**A:** It was \$50 a month. And uh, it was plenty of money in those days.

**Q:** And you had your daughter living with you as well?

**A:** I have a son who's 23, and Zoie's 20 -- but when you say "living with us," not really, because the school was communal which -- you were in our session weren't you, when Ellen and I talked? Okay, so the kids went into the school around age 6 months, as they began to be weaned from being breast fed, and they were raised together. So, yes, living with us in the same place, but not in the same house in the traditional nuclear family concept.

**Q:** Do you think it was like a kibbutz?

**A:** I think it's a lot like a kibbutz, because the school was designed based on principles from the kibbutz, definitely. I mean a lot of the people in the early days who worked on kind of developing the Synanon school read all those books about kibbutz, and talked to people who'd lived on kibbutz. So I think there were a lot of parallels in the way the school was designed. And originally Chuck thought of the school as a way to have people kind of recovering from addiction, not be the only person involved in trying to raise their children, because he thought they might not do the greatest job. So the original concept of the school was almost as a protection for the kids, not to be raised by crazy people, who were trying to get their lives together. But a lot of the people like me, who were attracted later on to the notion of Synanon, loved this idea of communal child-rearing, and thought it was an enriching experience for children. So it's interesting, it kind of evolved from one way of looking at it into a broader approach to child-rearing, but I think, yes, very much like the kibbutz. Some of the really good parts of the communal

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child-rearing in China. Because as I taught the school, we read books about things being done elsewhere in the world, and I know there were a lot of abuses in China, but some of the communal schools on the communal farms in China looked like they did great things with the kids. And so we would read things like that and get ideas for things to do. We all read Children of the Kibbutz, and Bruno Bettelheim's [?] book, Children of the Dream. And you know, we'd see something in there and say, "Oh, God, we've got to do this!" And you know, so, yeah, I think there were a lot of things that were the same. And when I heard the presentation on Walden II, a lot of what they took in their school was straight out of the kibbutz also, and I felt tremendous parallels with what they did with the kids.

**Q:** Did you guys read Walden II?

**A:** I did, and a lot of people did. There were always reading groups in Synanon, like a group would get together and say, "Oh, we have to all read this book, because it applies to what we're doing." And so a group would read, and people would write papers. And then sometimes they'd present papers to larger groups of people in the community. A lot of people read Walden II, definitely.

**Q:** What were the accommodations like for the adults? Did you have, like each person have a private room, or did you have an apartment?

**A:** Both, actually, depending on the different facilities. Like when we were in the cities like Santa Monica and Oakland, some people actually lived in these buildings that were former athletic clubs, so they were more like, a bedroom and a bathroom. And then the meals were all taken communally, and there were recreation things that were communal, there were tennis courts, and swimming pools, yeah it was great. So, in some of those cases they were only small rooms, but there was an interesting concept in Synanon called, "Living Lifestyle," and what that meant was that women deserved their own space as much as men did, and so it was encouraged to have two bedrooms, which a lot of people from outside would look at us and think we were really crazy, maybe it meant we didn't have sex or something, which was not the case at all. It just meant you could have your own room: you could decorate it the way you wanted, that could be a place that you retired to and had some quiet and some privacy. And in some cases it was a place where you slept, because sometimes you get a better night sleep not actually falling asleep with somebody. You can join each other for intimate time and then move apart to actually go to sleep. So, in the clubs, if people lived in those big buildings, they may have just had two different bedrooms, each with its own bathroom, and then everything else was communal space. But in some places they were apartment buildings, and it looked more like a traditional place. There'd be a living room and a bedroom, and little kitchens. But most of the dining was done in a communal dining structure, and the recreation people hung out in larger rooms, where groups of people could sit and chat of an evening, or read a book, or watch a video together. And we actually had movie theaters, and real, honest-to-God 35 mm movies. It was great fun. And lots of sports things, tennis courts, racquetball courts, um, you know, all that kind of stuff -- horseback riding when the place was in the country, and so forth. But it wouldn't be a house like this, because you wouldn't need all these rooms and all this space. It would be a smaller place, because a lot of the actual living was done in a communal setting.

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**Q:** Did the squares and the recovering addicts do stuff together? Or was there a feeling of the groups being separate?

**A:** Well, Synanon was kind of a, um, a three-year program in terms of people coming in for help. So, somebody like me, let's say, who'd been living in the community for a long time, teaching in the school, I wouldn't have a great deal of time spent with someone who'd just came in, a brand new person. But somebody who'd spent a year or so, or two, and had kind of gotten their life together, there wasn't a great structural difference. There was a power structure, and certain people had more prestige and nicer living accommodations, and, you know, somebody who was helping to run the community had more, "goodies", let's say, than someone who'd only been in the community for a year or two. I mean, there were certain differences which the sociometry is just like that, you know, in the greater society. Doctors make more money than bus drivers, in general, and live in bigger houses, and have more toys. So there were certain differences based on community time, and responsibility for the community. But, um, most people would, I mean you would eat in a common dining room. It was not uncommon to sit down for a lunch, for example, and be sitting with people who were fairly new. Dinners tended to be more segregated because people tried to social things at the dinner hour, and so groups of friends would try and eat together, and, you know, have an evening where they did something. So, there might not be as much interaction. But there wasn't like a total segregation where you would never see a brand new person. Somebody would come in, generally, and take a couple of days if they were really addicted, to kick a habit, and then kind of go through a process for a month or two. But after that, if they'd made it through the first couple of months, they were a full member of the community in terms of walking into a dining room and being able to sit at any table, and no one would say, "You can't sit here! You're too new," or, you know. There were sometimes set-up events that somebody brand new wouldn't be invited to, but, I think there was a lot of interchange.

**Q:** Were people -- was your identity pretty well-established? Like, would everybody know that you were a square, for example?

**A:** Not necessarily. No, that's interesting. I mean, people knew who an old-timer was, someone who'd lived in the community for a long time. But once you'd been around for a long time, it really didn't matter how you'd come. So there were people -- well, like you're going to interview Leon tomorrow. He originally came in because he had a drug problem. But he stayed for a long time and was an important person in the community, and I don't think there was much of a difference as to whether somebody came in as a square, or they came in for help -- if they'd been there a long time and helped to run the place and keep it going, the original reason for coming didn't matter that much. I think it only mattered when people were newer. You know, when I first moved in, it was very important that people knew I didn't come here -- we used to say "for a ham sandwich." It was like a joke. You came in destitute, looking for help. "I came in begging for a ham sandwich." No, I didn't come that way, and actually, you know I gave some money, and turned in my car, and whatever. So, in the very beginning, it was kind of important to know who was a square and who wasn't. But as the community went on for longer, a lot of that blurred. With the exception of new people coming in, just for health.

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**Q:** Did the addicts have to pay for their treatment?

**A:** No, not really. There were certain periods of time, I think, where we tried to ask families. If their child was coming, to help and give some money, make a donation. But, from my recollection, nobody was ever really turned away. People came in with nothing, like 15 cents in their pocket. They'd say, "I need help, I need to fix my life." And they were not turned away, if it was felt they were really serious, and wanted to do something. They were allowed to come in.

**Q:** How did it feel to give up your stuff? Like give up your car? Was that ever scary at all to you?

**A:** Yeah, it was really scary in the beginning, I mean, because there was this trust that, okay, this is all going to work. And, you know, as it turns out, the fact that the community ended, and I was in my middle forties, middle to late forties, and I didn't have all the stuff that people my age had. I'd never bought a house before, because my husband and I moved into Synanon right at the point we were thinking about doing that, and I didn't have money socked away in investments and all of that. So it turns out to be scary even now. The fact that most people who are my age have worked for X number of years, and have certain things kind of socked away -- they have a certain amount of equity in their home, they have retirement --

**Q:** They've been making social security payments and things.

**A:** Yeah, a lot of things. So I kind of got a late start. So it was scary then to do it, and it's scary now thinking, "Okay, I did that, and so what have I given up?" But when I really, truly think about what I've done with my life, I don't have any regrets. I had a great life, I've met a lot of people I never would've met otherwise. I have some incredible friendships, because they are people that I lived with in a very intimate way for 20 years, which most people don't have that opportunity. Most people maybe have one or two or three really good friends who really know them. I mean, I have dozens. And when I say, "I know them and they know me," I mean, that's in the good and the bad sense. Okay, they know all my character flaws, and all my little foibles and my things that probably drive people crazy, and they like me anyway. And then they know the good things about me, and, you know, because we've really shared our lives. There's a bunch of people that I raised my children with. We all had kids kid of at the same time, and we went through all these experiences together. A whole gang of us who worked in the school together daily, raising the children of the community - there's just incredible bonds.

**Q:** Didn't you say you even breast-fed each other's children?

**A:** Yes, in the hatchery. Yeah, we did. We did. And it was great. It seems kind of weird -- you tell somebody that who doesn't have some kind of background on your community, and they think, "Oh my God, what a strange, weird person." But it didn't seem strange. I mean, we worked out a schedule, and if a baby got hungry and the mom was off, you know, you fed it, and it just seemed like a natural thing to do to me. And I know that's what happens in much simpler societies, you know, in Africa, or India, where they're not so sophisticated and complicated like we are. They just kind of do what comes naturally.

**Q:** How was the domestic work divided?

**A:** You mean like chores?

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**Q:** Like, cooking, cleaning, things like that.

**A:** Well there was food service department. People who -- that was their job. That's how they "earned their keep," so to speak. They worked in the kitchen, they prepared the food, they did the dishes, they did all that, and that was their job.

**Q:** So you wouldn't necessarily take a rotation through cooking, you just had a particular job, and that's what you did.

**A:** In general, people were placed in jobs according to abilities and interests. Sometimes you could get in trouble, though. You could do something wrong, and end up, like, "busting suds," as we used to say. You'd have to go wash dishes or something to make up for having done something, whatever. Broken some rule, or been politically incorrect at the time. Like any community, we had rules and, I'm trying to think. I used to get in trouble on occasion for speeding. Having somebody ride with me and saying, "She drives too fast!" and then I'd have to go to something called traffic counsel, and I'd have to wash cars as a punishment. So, but in general, there were people who were really good cooks and worked in food service, and um, my job was taking care of kids, so that other people didn't have to. And there was a housekeeping department that did the vacuuming and the cleaning of the community spaces, which were the big spaces, big huge living rooms and dining rooms and places, required a lot of upkeep of course. We were all responsible for keeping our own personal space clean, but since the personal space was rather small, for the most part, it wasn't a big deal. You kind of had to clean your room once a week, and vacuum and dust. But there wasn't a whole lot of space.

**Q:** Was work divided along gender lines? I mean would you see the women cooking and cleaning and taking --?

**A:** No actually, food service was a male dominated organization, interestingly enough. I mean, there were some women, but generally the cooks were men. The newer people would get, kind of what you might consider more menial jobs, like washing dishes, mopping floors, these are the newcomers who are taught to work. And so, some of the things that were kind of boring, and in the normal society wouldn't be very well paying, would go to newer people. So they'd be behind the vacuum cleaners or doing those kind of chores. But being a cook, had a certain amount of prestige. Um, and then, you know, teaching in the school, working in some of the businesses, people, you know, learned certain skills and stayed in those fields. I mean, we had people who did bookkeeping and people who did ordering of supplies. And, you know, those kind of jobs, which I guess are kind of mid-level, in-the-marketplace sorts of jobs. And then there were doctors, there were nurses. There were, I'm trying to think of all the normal things that go on in society.

**Q:** So when you needed to go to the doctor, you'd go to someone within your community?

**A:** Unless you needed a specialist. Because the doctors who lived in Synanon were um, internal medicine and family practice doctors. And then, if you had something, you know, seriously wrong, they would send you out to a specialist. In the early days, we had a lot of donated medical care. Later on, as we became more prosperous, I mean, we didn't necessarily try and find donated stuff. We would just send somebody to the doctor and pay for it. But, you know, for regular -- we had a health services facility at each of the places where I lived in. And if you got a cold or something, you just made an

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appointment, you went to see the doctor, and they'd give you some antibiotics. They had a pharmacist who lived on Synanon who could, you know, fill the drugs, and so for something like that, that was considered normal. And then, like when I was pregnant, I was sent out to a gynecologist in Santa Monica, you know, oh, that I saw, and I'm trying to think, people who had specific problems were followed by specialists, but. We had about six doctors who lived at Synanon, and a dentist. And uh, a pharmacist, and some nurses, and physical therapists, so, you know all that was done internally. It worked out fine.

**Q:** What were gender relations like? Would you say there was equality between the sexes?

**A:** Well, yes and no. There was a great deal of talk, especially during the '70's, when the whole feminist movement started, a great deal of talk about equity. But the thing I found, the day to day realities, to be really honest, which I think is true almost everywhere -- women do a lot more than men. Because all the women were expected to have jobs, but they were also expected to keep the place where the woman and her husband lived -- you know, that was kind of the woman's responsibility, to keep it clean and keep it pretty, and all of that. And, the social events of the community were generally put on by the women. So if there was a big party, if it was Martin Luther King Day, and we were going to do something, or if it were Valentines Day and we were going to throw a dance, or whatever, most of the work, and this is a generalization, because certainly there were men who performed a lot of social duties, but for the most part, women always ended up having more chores than men. And I see that, now, living in community here, I mean, you go to church -- it's generally the women who handle a lot of the stuff that goes on -- in the school, in the PTA, it's the women who are doing all this extra stuff. And all of them work. It's not like people -- there aren't too many housewives anymore, unless they're married to a really wealthy man. Most women have jobs and they raise the kids, and they do -- so there was a lot of that at Synanon too. I guess that's just the way it's going to be maybe for another 50 years, until we really get enlightened, and men do an equal amount.

**Q:** Can you describe some what your daily life was like? Like, when you got up, when you ate your meals together, things like that?

**A:** Um, the years I worked in the school, which was the longest part of my time in Synanon, um, I got up pretty early, because we used to -- I was a teacher, but I was also involved in the kid's lives, so I had to wake up kids. So I would be up pretty early, you know, like rising at five or five thirty, and then going over to the school facilities so that I could wake up kids and get them ready to go to breakfast. I never had to cook for them, because there was food service people who actually served the meals. But my day, -- oh and actually, I should tell you about this thing we had, called the cubic day, which I think Ellen talked about in her presentation. A lot of the time in Synanon, people had jobs that they shared with another person, so you'd be working for seven days, and then you'd have the next seven days off. We called it the cubic day, because it formed a cube. It was originally 14 days on and 14 days off, which almost made a whole month, but there variations on the cube -- there was a seven-seven, and a ten-ten, in addition to the fourteen-fourteen. But a lot of my years at the school I was on what was called "the cube." So, when I worked, I worked a 12 to 14 hour day, which was very long. But, I might work for 7 days, and then have the next 7 days totally free, with the exception of, the day before I got ready to go back to work, we had meetings, so that the two people who shared the same job could meet and

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exchange information, and talk about things that had been going on. So, let's see, I guess I lived in Synanon almost 20 years, and I'd say at least 10 of those years I was on the cube. Which was wonderful. Because the leisure time was terrific. I mean, I did reading and study, and a lot of different project, and fun things, time to pursue hobbies. So that was really nice. But my normal working day, I mean, I would be up pretty early, and go wake up kids, get them ready for breakfast, and then I'd be in my classroom, and I would teach. And then at the end of the day, like most teachers, I'd be grading papers and be available for kids who wanted to ask questions. But then usually, I would be around, like for the dinner meal for kids, and sit and eat dinner with the children, until they were kind of ready for bed, and then, I would go home. So it was a long day, but you know, lots of fun. I mean, I really enjoyed it. And then in the evening, you know, sometimes I'd have a game to play, or a study group to go to or something.

**Q:** Were there regular games? Daily games or nightly games or something?

**A:** There were games that went on at all times. I mean, I think games were scheduled a couple of times a week in general, but then people had special games -- they had to fight with their husband and they said, "I've got to get some people and take care of this!" And so you'd get invited, if it was a friend of yours, or you needed one, there'd be special games, like, "I'm having a game tonight, I need to talk to my husband," and so, there'd be special things. There'd be department games, where people who worked together would play the game together, and a lot of work issues would be resolved in these settings. You know, you could yell at your boss, and you wouldn't get fired! You could say the absolute, outrageous thing, like, whatever, "I hate working for you! [unintelligible]" but you knew, always at the end of the game that you were safe, you hadn't risked losing your job because you said a feeling that you had. So there would be work games, there would be special games that people might have. We played games with the kids. I mean, the years I worked in the school, we taught the children, how to use the game as a tool among themselves. And then those of us who taught the school got the great privilege of sitting in games and having kids yell at us. Oh yeah, it was interesting, it was very interesting.

**Q:** Well now, if you had a fight with your husband, for example, if you wanted to call a game, would you do it without him or with him?

**A:** Oh either way, it just depends. You can say, "Look, we really need to have a game, let's get a few of our friends," and you know, "we'll have a game." And you know, we did that. Or sometimes, you just, you got a bunch of people and said, "I'm really uptight, I really need some help, would you come?" And then you went home and said to your husband, "Some folks are coming over, we're going to have a game." I mean, it could be either way.

**Q:** Okay. How were decisions made?

**A:** Well, now Synanon fits into, when I look at communities and all the different structures, Synanon was kind of an authoritarian community, I have to admit that in hindsight. I don't know if I always felt that at the time. But there was a pretty rigid structure in terms of, who had decision and power-making ability outside of the game. In the game, everybody was equal, until the very end, when it kind of got, blurred, which is a whole other story which I can tell you. But through most of my time in Synanon, the game was the great levelling factor where, literally, the guy who mopped the floor could go in and talk to the chairman of the board and could say anything, and it would be fine. Um, but outside the game

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there was a fairly rigid structure of people in authority. There was a board of directors. It was run like a corporation. There were people who represented, not necessarily the business, but the life point of view, but they had power and authority. And these people met on a regular basis -- they made decisions about what we were going to do, and how we were going to do it. And certainly, um, if a decision was made, I mean you always had the option of not going along with it, but you pretty much had to decided that you weren't going to live in the community anymore -- on big things. For example, in 1970, the entire community quit smoking. And we said, "We're going to be a no smoking community, we're all quitting." And that particular decision was made because the founder's wife, Betty, was diagnosed with lung cancer. The doctor said, "You have to stop smoking," and ... he said, "Okay, we're all stopping smoking." And we went from like one day -- and I remember when it was because I was a person who smoked -- it was in April of 1970, and on a given day, it was announced, "That's it, we're not going to smoke anymore." And people went nuts. A lot of people just left. They said, "I can't do this. I'm getting the heck out of here!" Other people just went bonkers. We had a huge donation from Ghiradeli [?], of chocolate. So there were giant bowls, everywhere, of all this chocolate, and people were eating like this, because they were so uptight, because they couldn't smoke, 'cause smoking's like an oral thing and a pleasure thing, and, oh, it was so crazy! But when a major decision like that was made, I mean, you always had the option of leaving, I mean it wasn't prison, you weren't locked in. But, you couldn't say, "Well, I'm going to stay here, and I'm going to smoke." That was not an option. You either had to say, "Okay, I'm going to quit smoking," or, "Okay, I'm going to leave." So, um, there were certain things that happened. So we became a no smoking community at a certain point. [phone rings]

**Q:** So we were talking some about decision-making, and you were giving the smoking example.

**A:** Oh, right. So, there was a structure to our lives, and the people who had vested power would make decisions. And, you know, there were lots of small decisions, obviously, but certain big ones. The no smoking was a big thing. At a certain point we also gave up sugar, and I'm trying to remember when that was. I can't remember the times now, I remember where I was when it happened, because I was on a field trip with a bunch of kids in San Francisco, and the decision was made, um, that we would just stop eating sugar. And that was like a major thing, especially because I worked in the school, and the kids, like, you know -- no ice cream, no candy --

**Q:** What was the rationale?

**A:** Somebody had diabetes. Somebody important, I can't remember. So that's kind of how it happened, and then it evolved into a whole health thing, and, um, we really got into exercise, and not eating sugar, and being really super-healthy. And, but it became like a crazy thing, because it was this rigid thing, and then people would go to all these, um, extremes. Like people would buy dates, and boil them down, and get this crystalline thing, and bake with them. So that was observing the letter of the law, and it was much less healthy than if you'd just gone and bought some stupid thing that had sugar in it! So we did that for a number of years, it was very hard on the kids. And most of them cheated. You know, if they could get out somewhere, you know they went and bought Mars bars or something. Right Zoie?

**Zoie:** What?

**A:** I was talking about giving up sugar, I said it was hard on all the kids, and I said they all cheated, right?

**Zoie:** I didn't.

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**A:** You never bought a candy bar when you were in town, not ever?!

**Zoie:** I bought a licorice once. I didn't know that sucrose, is that what it was --?

**A:** Oh, you didn't know that sucrose was sugar?

**Zoie:** And you took it away from me.

**Q:** Somebody took it away from you?

**Zoie:** Well it was sugar.

**Q:** Was it hard not to have sugar?

**Zoie:** No, I don't really remember having sugar, except when we were allowed to have sugar, Francie had to throw away ten dollars worth of candy.

**A:** Oh yeah, we would have these pagan days, and then you could eat anything you wanted, and people would go absolutely crazy. How old were you when we gave up sugar? You were really little, weren't you?

**Zoie:** I was young. I don't really remember.

**A:** So you don't remember ice cream. Her dad took her to town, in Petaluma, because we were living --

**Zoie:** I was only about three years old.

**A:** --and he bought her an ice cream cone, because he didn't want her to grow up never having had an ice cream. And then he came home, and he told everybody he did it, and people were furious at him and yelling at him, and threatening stuff, and, it was really funny. But I mean, these certain bizarre things, like, you know, okay, for 10 years or something, we didn't eat sugar. Maybe eight years.

**Q:** Were there other ways that you would eat, like did you eat meat or not, or --?

**A:** I don't, and didn't, but no -- there was always meat. There were people with dietary preferences. But no, the community had no other particular dietary rules -- the sugar thing became a rule, but -- but no, people ate meat, and um, we had a very proactive exercise thing, people had to be in good shape and exercise, and we tried to get people to lose weight. We had something called the fat-a-thon, where we used to have group weigh-ins, and we were all trying to be healthy, and the right weight, and -- that was pretty funny too. I mean I guess we did a lot of goofy things, as I think about it. But for the most part, they were things that made sense because they were healthy.

**Q:** Now was Chuck a strong leader?

**A:** Definitely. Definitely. He was an autocratic kind of leader, who had certain ideas, certain ways he wanted things to go, and for a long time they were all good things and it was fine. Toward the end, -- Chuck is a manic-depressive, which I guess we didn't all know in the beginning, and he had been an alcoholic, so there were certain character disorder issues on top of the manic-depressive thing. And, after his wife died, and he very soon thereafter took another wife, totally sublimating all of his grief, but it was still all working under the surface, and he really kind of went off the deep end, at a certain point, which I think helped bring about the demise of Synanon. It wasn't all him going off the deep-end, because there were economic issues. The people who were selling ad specialties and going out in the world, and making these great sales, and all of the income was coming to the community, a lot of these people realized that if they got any of the benefit of what they were doing, they would be very wealthy.

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They were talking to other people who did what they did, you know, and they said, "Oh God, you'd be making \$100,000 a year!" "A hundred thousand dollars a year! I'm making \$50 a month!" So, the whole greed issue entered. And that's a big factor, I'm sure it's true in all communities, that you give over everything toward the communal good, but sometimes, people just want their own comfort and their own -- and that's not bad. It's a hard thing to figure out -- how can you have community and satisfy people's personal desires. So, uh, Chuck's kind of raging, manic thing, helped bring about the end, I think. Money becoming an issue. And then, we tried to pay certain people. So some of the salespeople got big bonuses, and some of the other people in power on the board got money, and then other people got no money, and so there were tremendous feelings about this. Money is always an issue of conflict between people, I think, just living in the real world, kind of noticing some people have things, some people don't. Um, I'm trying to think of what all the issues are. Oh, and then there were legal issues, because there was an IRS suit, and we were kind of fighting legal battles, which also drained the community of resources and time, and energy, just trying to fight these various fights. So I think all of those things were factors, which . . . which led to the demise. But you've probably talked to a lot of people who've lived in all kinds of communal settings, and there's always different things that make things fall apart.

**Q:** Yeah. Sure. Now one of the things I read about in those transcripts that I read that I didn't really understand, was something called rape weekend? Can you tell me what that was?

**A:** Yes. Oh God, it's a nightmare. Um, right toward the end, Chuck was in the very middle of a manic episode -- it was a crazy thing. I'm trying to think of when it was. I've lived in Visalia for six years, so it's probably about eight years ago. And um, he got this bug in his bonnet that people should talk about -- oh wait a minute, I know what it was. There was a time when women were not supposed to be out, like away from the community, after dark, by themselves. So for example, we lived up here. If you came to town to run errands or go to the doctor or go to the movies or whatever, if you were a woman, you were supposed to be home before dark. There was this tremendous worry that people were in some kind of jeopardy or something. And somebody talked about the fact that they were in town by themselves, and there was no man with them, and whatever, and Chuck started in on this tirade about how women were in tremendous jeopardy, because they could be raped. And he became fixated on this idea. And, he, they called everybody in the whole community together over the -- there was a P.A. system, so that you could hear it wherever you were on the property -- "Come to the shed, we're having a game, it's important to come talk." So everybody converged, and he had this thing that, "The only thing we should talk about is rape." And if you'd ever been attacked, or you'd had some kind of experience, or you'd come close, or whatever. And it became obvious after awhile that he was a little bit weird and out of it. But, nobody really did anything in the beginning, and people stayed for hours, talking about times they'd been afraid, or they'd been alone, or they thought somebody might attack them. And then some people who had actually had past experiences of sexual assault talked about that. We stayed up all night. It was -- which we did actually from time to time regularly, I don't know if you could tell in any of the transcripts. We would have long games sometimes, and stay up for 24 hours. I mean, we were really tough and great, and we thought nothing of it. And, you know, I've done it so many times, the idea of staying up around the clock means nothing to me. And maybe it was like sleep deprivation made people weird, but usually we had terrific experiences, and people felt closer. Like if

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you were in a game, and you played the game for 24 hours, you stayed up all night, and you got through the worst part of the night, which was always somewhere between 2 and 4 in the morning, when everybody got really weird and tired and crazy. And if you pushed through that and you got to the morning, I mean you'd have this great experience, and you'd feel a kindred spirit with everybody, our common humanity. The barriers of our external selves sort of get washed away after you've been up for 24 hours. And so, and it was always a lovely thing. But, anyway, this particular weekend was just crazy. People were talking about being raped, and he was kind of nuts and off the screen, and finally his doctor showed up and gave him some lithium -- unknown to him, because he wouldn't have taken it -- and finally he decided to go to bed, but it was kind of a crazy weekend. And I think probably Lauren Benjamin's story, she mentioned that. I'm trying remember where you would have read that.

**Q:** Oh, I think Helen did, or maybe this woman named Cody, I'm not sure. It was in a couple of the transcripts that I read.

**A:** But that's what it was. I mean, he just got fixated on this idea about women getting raped. And part of the thing about, I think is, his bipolar disorder, when he was in the manic stage, he was very fixated on sexual things. So the rape thing, it wasn't just that he was so altruistic and worried about the women of the community being in danger -- he was, I mean there was a whole sexual component of this, of wanting to hear about things that might have happened to people or -- it was a crazy weekend!

**Q:** What were sexual relationships like within Synanon ?

**A:** It was a community that definitely stressed monogamy. And, um, not necessarily marriage for life, but serial monogamy. So that in other words, um, like in terms of our young people, -- we were pretty open about, like young kids, having sex, and that was okay as long as you were protected, and that you weren't going to be in danger of having children at age 17 or something, but that it was a definite pairing up of people, and, you were faithful to one person for as long as that relationship lasted. And um, I think it was very hard for people who weren't hooked up. Um, single people, I think, had a hard time at Synanon . I mean, there were a lot of single people who weren't married, but I think socially, the community really pushed people to be married. And um, probably because it's more stable and less threatening in terms of everybody living together in some kind of intimate way. If people are paired up, there's just less threat, probably. So the people who weren't married, I think really had a tough time. It wasn't easy. Because social events, really surrounded people being coupled. Marriage was encouraged, and um, staying married for a long time was encouraged. For traditional in that way. But with the kids, it was interesting, um, we had something we used to call "small 'm' marriage," which meant, like if a 16 year old, if two 16 years olds were going together and really liked each other, we would allow them to have sex, but we wanted them to get legally married, so that nobody would come in and try to shut Synanon down, because we were always under scrutiny of various agencies. So we tried to be very, very careful. So a lot of, like our young people, ended up being married at 16 or 17, and they weren't told, "This is forever," or anything. This is, "You need to do this so you can have a nice time, and enjoy each other, and we won't get the community in trouble." So, like I have several young friends who are, well I say young, but they're 30 now, they're kids that I taught in the school, and they've been married three times. At age 30. But the first two were what I did as a kid, you know, just like going out with somebody and having sex with them, you know, because that's what --. So, they say, "Oh yeah, I've been married

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three times," and I say, "Not really. Okay, yes, we made you do it, but, really, you've only had one marriage." So it's kind of a bizarre thing that we did, in order not to have some agency come in and, you know, say we were encouraging lascivious practices, or whatever they would've said. So we made these kids get married. And then when these relationship ended a year or two later, which is what happens with young kids, for the most part, then they'd have to get divorced. So it was kind of a funny thing. It is a very funny thing. And I just think we were just, we were afraid and leery about, you know, agencies looking at us, and that we could lose everything if people came in and said, "Oh, they let their 16 year olds have sex." But for the most part, people were very open and, I mean, as a teacher in the school, I had lots of talks with young girls. I mean, I would have like a tea, and have 12 fourteen-year-olds over to my house, and we'd talk about it, about sex, and I would tell them how great it was, and that they should enjoy it. And that was very typical. I think we were a very free community, but we were always a little bit worried about what the outer society might think about us. So we tried to be careful.

**Q:** Was homosexuality accepted?

**A:** Only for a brief time. There was a period in Santa Monica where actually, a couple of lesbian couples moved in. And, two gay men, but that was a very, very small period of time. For the most part, we wanted people to be straight, and we weren't very tolerant. So, new people who came into Synanon, like for help, if they were gay, for the most part they stayed long enough to kind of get themselves together, and then left, because it was not encouraged. A lot of people had very, uh, kind of judgmental, old-fashioned points of view about that.

**Q:** Were there lots of rules?

**A:** Yes, a lot of unwritten rules.

**Q:** Were there things written down as well?

**A:** Well, the only written rules were the thing about like no physical violence, no threat of physical violence in the game, --

**Q:** Were there rules about drugs and alcohol, I assume?

**A:** Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Well, drugs, the whole time, alcohol, up until, um, I think the last seven or eight years, alcohol was allowed, in kind of a controlled way. We had parties and alcohol was served -- this is toward the end, though. For the early years, for the first 20 years, no drugs, no alcohol, no physical violence, no threat of violence -- those are probably the only "rules" written, until then, later, no sugar. That's pretty crazy. When I say that now, I feel so silly saying it, but. And no smoking. The rest of the things were more kind of code of conduct. And it's interesting, because I lived in Synanon for 20 years, and I think I can count on one hand, the times that marital infidelity occurred. Which is really pretty wild. It was so rare, because of this, marriage being encouraged, and monogamy, and faithfulness, and -- it was so rare, and it was such a big deal when somebody did that.

**Q:** Do you think the game helped, bring couples together, keep them together?

**A:** I do. No I do, because you could really go in and hash it out, in a way that's pretty hard if you don't have that kind of a protected setting. And so people who can just help you look at it objectively. And

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people can have a raging fight at Synanon, scream, yell, stamp, swear, call each other dreadful names, but this whole protected thing about, okay, alright, now we're out of the room, we're going to leave the room, and everything we said is in that room, and it's gone now. And if you could really believe that in your heart, you could go in and have an outrageous fight with somebody you loved dearly, and then when you left, it was like the fight, -- well not like it didn't happen, because you were better, because it did happen. So it's a hard thing to talk about, but um, -- I'm trying to think of like games I had with husbands, where we just said cruel and outrageous things, but I never felt hurt leaving the game, I felt safe and protected, and like life was going to get better. Which, that's very hard to do if you don't have that protection. 'Cause you always have to hold back, you can't, you can't risk yourself and you can't risk hurting somebody that you care about, so, yeah I think games helped make relationships work. I really do.

**Q:** Did you guys have home birth? I don't remember you talking about that.

**A:** There were some people who did. Um, there were a couple of women in Oakland who um, these were second and third children, not first children, and yeah, they had their babies at home.

**Q:** But you didn't. You went to the hospital?

**A:** Right . Most people, on a first baby, yeah, went to the hospital.

**Q:** So that wasn't a major part of the community, of having home births.

**A:** No, not really.

**Q:** Did you have people die when you were there?

**A:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had a lovely ceremony called A Celebration of Life, where the whole community would gather. We didn't do, like people were generally cremated, we didn't view bodies or do any of that, but we would have a big party. And everybody would gather, and we would tell great stories about the person. And we always recorded it, so that the tapes could be given to husbands, wives, kids. Yeah, 'cause the community spanned from very young children to very old people. So, yes, people definitely died.

**Q:** Did the deaths and then the celebration --

**A:** And Sandi's husband died in Synanon. The man she's married to now is her second husband. And her husband died and we had a giant Celebration of Life for him, because he was a very beloved person. He was a famous musician before Synanon, a jazz musician. And he was very loved in our community.

**Q:** Did these Celebrations of Life, do you think they brought the community closer together, having to go through deaths?

**A:** Yes. And we would have the kids there, so that they kind of understood that, you know, that loss is a normal part of life. Yeah, I do think so.

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**Q:** Was the community ethnically mixed?

**A:** Yes, with the exception of Asians. We never had many Asians in Synanon. Over the 20 something years that I was involved, I remember a Japanese young woman, and a Chinese man, and that's it in terms of Asians. But there were a lot of African-Americans. There were a lot of Hispanic people, both from, Mexican people, Mexican-Americans -- I don't know what the P.C. word is, I'm probably saying this all wrong -- and a lot of people from Puerto Rico, who's native language was Spanish. As a matter of fact, we used to have Spanish games, because there were enough people that, you know, they'd be more comfortable playing the game in Spanish. And for a short while we actually had a facility in Puerto Rico, and intake facility. Because a lot of people had drug problems in Puerto Rico, who then came to the U.S. for help. So, and large African-American contingent. So it was mixed in that way, but the one thing -- and Native-Americans too. Not a whole lot, though. So I would say primarily we had a lot of White people, Hispanic people.

**Q:** Does the name "Synanon" mean something ?

**A:** That's so funny you should ask that. In the early days, when they were down on the beach in Ocean Park, and it was just kind of the recovering addicts, they used to have something in the afternoons they called "seminars," where they would, somebody would read from a book and then they would talk about it, or they did, um, something they called "fishbowl seminars" -- they just took a bowl, and people would throw quotes in it. Somebody would write a quote, they'd take the piece of paper and fold it up and throw them in the fish bowl, and then somebody would reach in and pick up something and open it up and have to talk on whatever the topic was. So, they called these things "seminars," and somebody, a new addict, came for help, was talking to somebody else, and rushing, and said, "I have go to the sss--," and it came out "synanon." And that's how the name happened. It was a mispronunciation of "seminar." And it stuck. So in the early days, the game was called a "small 's' synanon." Because the name of the organization became "the capital 'S' Synanon", and then the game, the thing that we've been talking about, was called "synanon," and then later on, it evolved into being called a game, to take it out of the reality thing. As I told you, it's like a special thing, it occurs, once it happens it's over, you don't take it out of the room. So the idea of game, being like a tennis match or something, and that, when you leave the tennis match, it's not your life. You go on back to your life. Whatever happened on the court was the tennis match. So that's how the name, "game" happened from the synanon thing.

**Q:** Were there rules in the game? Like let's say, um, you know, you're my boss, and I come in and I just let you have it, in a game session. Were there rules about not leaving the game until everybody felt okay? Because I can see how that can be devastating.

**A:** Well, people tried to -- it was called "picking up a person" -- that if somebody really got bashed in the game, that you always tried to pick them up. And you tried to make the game go long enough so that everybody felt okay. But sometimes, things would end, and somebody would still be upset, and the thing was always, that you were supposed to go outside the game, and sit down, have a cup of coffee, a snack or something, and make sure that everybody was okay. And it, specifically, if you had an interchange with a person that was very strong, and let's say you yelled at each other about something, you always had to go out of the game, and go sit with that person, and just make nice. That if you had a squabble or a fight, or you stamped, and pounded your fist, at somebody in the game, that that was the

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person that you definitely had to say, "Let's go get a cup of coffee," and that you could laugh and talk. So that there was always that physicalization of the fact that, "Okay, that was in the game, but now we're out of the game, and we're going to live our lives, and we're going to be friends, and we're going to be nice to each other." So, it wasn't a rule -- that was an unwritten, kind of code about the way we were.

**Q:** Did certain personalities do better an Synanon than others?

**A:** High verbal people! Did better. I mean, the kind of quiet, thoughtful types might have had more trouble in a game, than kind of the loud-mouth, um, fassle[?] with words people. And I'm not saying they did better in terms of success, but their life was probably easier. Like quiet people had a harder time in games. And sometimes a game would get going and everybody's talking and yelling and laughing at once, and somebody'd be sitting over there who's one of the kind of quiet people, and unless there was someone in the room who was really aware, and tried to draw in the quiet person, sometimes they could just be passed by. Now maybe they liked it that way, maybe they were fine with that, but I always felt like it was a little harder for them.

**Q:** Were there ever criticism sessions, like, "Okay, tonight it's Francie's night to be dressed down," or whatever?

**A:** Well, um, I'm trying to think of games where -- sometimes games were called for specific reasons, because there's a problem in the work place or something, and then, yes, it might be somebody's turn. Like if you made kind of a major mistake in terms of your job, or whatever, you know, and games could be called because of something like that. Yeah, and then you knew it was your turn, you just had to get through it and survive.

**Q:** Is that how you would deal with something like a work sharing problem, where someone would be blowing off their work, would you call a game, and confront them?

**A:** Very often, yes. I mean, some things had to just be taken care of right on the spot. I mean, if it were a serious problem, but for the most part people tried to have a game and work things out that way. So yeah, that happened a lot.

**Q:** Now when you joined the community, that was right at the height of the whole hippie thing. Were hippies coming to Synanon?

**A:** Yes, there were some. Absolutely.

**Q:** Did they fit in okay?

**A:** Some did, and some didn't. I mean, there were certain things about Synanon, I mean, Synanon was like a neat place -- it was always clean and orderly, and so sometimes people who were truly hippies, might not fair that well, because they didn't conform to the um, the expectations about how that would go. If they were really sort of slovenly and didn't give a shit, that could be a problem. But yes, there were a lot of people who were drawn to Synanon who were part of that hippie --

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**Q:** Did you ever see yourself as part of the counter-culture, or --?

**A:** I always did. I mean, me personally, but I can only speak for me. I mean, you're going to get a different point of view talking to other people. Yeah, I mean my whole thing was kind of being a rebel. You know, I was in the Civil Rights movement, I was in the Peace Movement, um, I was always looking to be somewhat different than what the major society was doing.

**Q:** What did your family think about you joining Synanon?

**A:** Oh, they thought I was crazy! They really thought I was crazy. You know, "Why would you give up a normal life and give up all your possessions, and give up, " you know, "go live in this nutty place." And of course when we did some things -- stopping smoking was okay, but we all shaved our heads, which I think we told you about, so having a bald -- I had a bald head for a number of years. That was pretty weird.

**Q:** For a number of years!

**A:** Oh yeah, it was a number of years. Six or seven years when I had no hair. Yeah.

**Q:** Now what was the purpose of that?

**A:** Well, originally, in Synanon, the bald head was a symbol of shame. If someone went out and used drugs, or had a still and was brewing alcohol in their dorm and getting drunk or something -- you know, they did something really terrible. And these were males -- their head would be shaved, so that everybody could see that something had happened. And then people would say to them, "Oh, what did you do." And then the person would have to run their story. And, with women, they didn't shave women's heads, they put a stocking cap on. They took a nylon stocking and put it tight over the head and tied a knot at the top, and then it was always a provocative thing, that somebody would look at the person, and say, "Oh, you must have done something, and ask them what it was." The person would have to say, "Yeah, I was using drugs," or whatever. And it was a way for them to kind of be humble and hopefully think about what they were doing and make a change. And the story about the bald head thing, was kind of a funny thing. We were in Tamales Bay, and we built this unbelievable building, it was called the Mother Kitchen. It was this giant building, that was going to, um, cook all the food -- we had three properties in Tamales, there were 1,000 people living up there, so this kitchen was going to cook all the food for all three properties, and the catering trucks were going to go to the other two places. And it was a gorgeous, gorgeous facility, with state of the art ovens, and steamers, and whatever, I mean it was a beautiful building. And somebody made a mistake, and in one part of the building, there was a beam that was way too low. A normal height person, like 5'8" or 9" couldn't go through it without ducking. So, they realized it was wrong, and um, they cut a hole in the beam so that you could actually walk through it. And the founder walked into this gorgeous new building that we'd spent all this money building, and he saw this beam, and he said, "I can't believe it. Whoever is responsible for that mistake should shave his head." And he stomped out. The next day, the entire construction crew -- architects, engineers, carpenters, plumbers, flooring guys, carpet guys -- everybody who had anything to do with the building, all showed up with bald heads. They just all shaved their heads. And then, what happened is that other men started saying, "Well I drove by the building, I must've seen that beam, I'm responsible too." So suddenly in about a three day period after this, all the men had bald heads. And then, a group

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of women said, "Well we're just as responsible, we should shave our head too." And then some men said, "Oh no, you can't do that, you'll be ugly if you shave your heads. That's terrible." Then the women said, "I don't care if you think I'm ugly, I'm going to do it anyway!" And it was like wildfire, over the next two days, the entire community had bald heads. And then what happened, I mean that was a great thing, it was a very liberating, wonderful moment when we all shaved our heads, it was really fun and we were laughing, it turned into a giant party. The thing that got kind of crazy is it then became codified, so for ever after, we had to keep our heads bald, which was really sort of ridiculous.

**Q:** Did Chuck shave his head too?

**A:** Yes. Oh yeah, everybody had bald heads. But it became sort of absurd because, after a certain number of months it kind of lost its meaning. And like Zoe and her peers, they were little kids, she was like five, and all these little kids with bald heads. You know, and we would take them on field trips to the city, and people would think the little girls were boys, because they had no hair. It was pretty strange. But we did do that for awhile.

**Q:** What was your relationship like with the outside community?

**A:** Well, for a long time it was really good because we entertained visitors, and we encouraged people to come down and visit us, and we had what we called Saturday Night Open Houses. And it was really wonderful. But as we got, toward the end, as we got kind of strange, and we were involved in all these law suits, we became a bit xenophobic. Which I think also led to the demise, and I forgot to say that. One of the things besides whatever was going on with Chuck and the law cases, and human greed, there was this thing about shutting off, and not having interchange with new people. Which I believe isn't a healthy thing. So for most of my years at Synanon, there was a wonderful interchange. People were always coming to visit, and we were going out and speaking on college campuses, and various places, and people were coming to visit and it was great. But the last five or six years, we hardly ever had visitors from outside the community, and that's not healthy.

**Q:** When you did things like shave your head, would people think that you were a cult, or something when they would see you?

**A:** Oh, absolutely! They thought we were totally weird and crazy, and maybe we were. Yes, of course.

**Q:** What would you say was the best part of your Synanon experience?

**A:** Well for me personally, the best part was the years of working in the school, and raising the community's children, and being involved with a whole group of people in designing and building the school. And kind of raising our kids in a unique way. Um, I had relationships with so many young people that I helped to raise, and I'm in touch with a lot of them to this day. It was a wonderful thing. And I think the testament to whatever we did do will lie with all these kids that were raised that way. And it's much too early now, I mean, Zoe's only 20, and there are young people who are 30 who went through the Synanon school, but I think they have to get to be 50, and really look back on their lives, and then, we'll see if it was as exciting as I think it was. But, you know, I would say 20 or 30 years from now, when a lot of these kids who were raised in this kind of extraordinary way, have a chance to write books and

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give interviews, and do whatever they do, that's where um, the proof of the pudding will be, so to speak.

**Q:** What was the worse part, or the hardest part for you?

**A:** Probably the hardest part was changing partners, which I haven't really talked to you about it, I think maybe you heard about it, but.

**Q:** I heard about it, but I don't really know what it involved.

**A:** I think I told you Chuck's wife, Betty, died of lung cancer. And he was pretty devastated and grief-stricken, and quite quickly he um, he did take another wife. And then he got this idea in his head that everybody should have this experience of letting go of a relationship and having another one. And it took about a month or two for it all to kind of occur, but, it somehow kaliedescope in my memory bank to that it was a very short period of time. And basically, everybody at that time who was married, ended marriages and got with a new person. And you either had to do that or leave, basically. There were maybe four or five couples who didn't, and managed to stay. But for the most part, people either said, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and do this," or, "I'm leaving." It was like the quitting smoking thing. And a lot of people left. Um, and it, for me, personally, was extremely painful, and um, . . . my husband at the time, my son's father, and I stayed up like three nights in a row, just talking, crying, laughing -- should we just leave? Should we -- Jerod was a couple years old at the time. Should we just get out of here and go and forget this? Or should we just trust that there's a reason this is happening, and it'll work out. And obviously, I mean, we went through the experience, and we ended our marriage, and we got with other people, and I mean it's fine. I'm here, I survived, I've had a great life, I've had a lot of experiences, but, the actual act of doing that was excruciatingly painful. And I'm still not sure why we didn't just say, "Let's get the hell out of here! Who needs to do this? This is nuts!" But we didn't. And um, it was a very interesting experience . Certainly something I would never again repeat in my life. It was just extraordinarily painful, and it took me about two or three years, really, to get over the hurt of doing that. But there was an exhilaration too, "Okay, I'm making this tremendous sacrifice, for the survival of our community," which is what I thought was at stake at the time. Which, now as I look at it, many, many years later, that, you know, it was a very misguided thing. And I don't know whether it makes any sense or not. There were a lot of people who were in unhappy marriages . So for them, it was probably great. But that wasn't my particular case.

**Q:** Were your new partners chosen for you, or did you get to chose?

**A:** People got together in all kinds of ways. Some people just, like maybe had always had a secret flirtation with somebody, so some of those people got together, and that's really neat. And other people had their friends chose for them, "I think you'd be really good with so and so." And sometimes the mate that you were leaving, said, " I really want you to be with --" So I mean all kinds of crazy things happened. It was really quite wild. And there were a lot of articles -- that's kind of what began a lot of the legal battles with Synanon, because the media paid attention to this bizarre thing that we did, and we really became labelled as cult, with doing this. And maybe we were a cult. I don't know what a cult is. I don't know what the word really means, and I don't know whether I was or not. Am I a cult survivor or not? Yes, maybe I am, but what difference does it make? So.

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**Q:** Can you talk a little bit about, um, what happened at the ending, in your particular circumstance?

**A:** Okay, um, well a lot of people date "rape weekend," which is the thing that you read about, as kind of a delineating event, in terms of the demise. Because after that, I think things went very quickly downhill. Um, a lot of it had to do with the founder and whatever was going on with him, and his manic-depressive thing. A lot of it had to do with people just deciding that they wanted more personal control over their lives. They wanted some of the goodies that come along with being able to earn a living at a certain level. A lot of the salespeople. The lawsuits that happened -- beginning after changing partners -- and there were these crazy things with the media, and some suits against television stations and Time magazine, and other stuff, and I don't even know all the details of that. The folks who worked in the law department, lawyers and legal assistants and so forth, are much more familiar with that. I wasn't really intimately involved with any of it. I just know it was a big mess. And we had a lot of legal cases going on. And a lot of people left shortly after "rape weekend," that was kind of a big exodus. And then a lot of other people, such as myself, kept hoping, sort of in a naive kind of way, that "Okay, maybe this will solve itself, and maybe we'll take some control, and it'll be okay. But I think there was about a two years period before I actually left. Maybe a year and a half. Where, it just kept becoming painfully obviously that this thing was going downhill, and it wasn't going to go anywhere, and we were shrinking, and people were not happy. And um, it was painful to me, because when I actually originally made the decision in 1969 that I was going to move into Synanon, I thought that was like the last major decision I was making about my life. So, realizing, okay, now I've got to think about all kinds of other things, and make a whole new plan about what I'm doing personally, that was very scary. Just as scary as the thing was in the beginning. You know, like, "Okay, we're going to turn in our cars and sell our stock, and turn it all in and move into Synanon," that was a scary move. At the other end of this thing, "Okay, now I'm 46," or whatever I was, 46 or 47, and, "I've got to go figure out how to live in the world." And I never thought I couldn't do it, but there were just a lot of ramifications. That it would be a big decision and kind of scary, and how do you start out? What do you do?

**Q:** Did you have anything, in terms of, did the community give you money or anything when you left?

**A:** Not really. I had, both my husband at the time, so it was Leon, and I both had gotten a few little bonuses where we'd socked away a little bit, in terms of, --but they were in IRA's, they weren't things we could touch. So, no, I mean, my mother gave me some money so I could put a down payment down on a house, and we had jobs, which that part was good. But um, you know, it was like, um, well funny experiences, coming down here and going to buy a refrigerator, which seems like a silly thing. We went into an appliance store, and we were looking at refrigerators, and I had no idea about size or what you needed or anything. And so the woman said to us, "Well, what size is the refrigerator you now have?" And we looked at each other and we started laughing. We had, because we lived in a couple of rooms, with a bathroom, we had one of those little tiny things that you could put soda cans in. So I said, "Well, it's about this big." She said, "No, but I mean your regular refrigerator?" And we said, "We've never bought one, I don't know." I mean, it was like coming from Mars. It was a silly thing like, what did I know about cubic feet, I didn't know, I never had to think about that.

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**Q:** And you hadn't cooked for years, had you?

**A:** Nope. Nope. No it was all new, like getting back in a kitchen. I had to buy, you know, pots and pans -- and so there I am, I'm 46 years old, I'm not 17, you know, like trying to start out, so yeah I had to buy pots and pans, I had to go buy all this stuff. We had to figure out how to cook. Now Leon had worked in food service for a number of years, so he knew how to cook, and had more recent experience with cooking. But, yeah, all this stuff.

**Q:** And was it hard for Zoe to go from the community school to a regular school?

**A:** I think it was hard in the beginning but also exciting. You know, you can ask her. She was interviewed in those papers that you read.

**Q:** I didn't see that one. I only got, I guess, a portion of it.

**A:** Okay, 'cause she's one of the -- they interviewed a couple of young people, and she's one of them. And so she's pretty comfortable about talking about her life. I mean, I think she liked a lot of things about living in community, and there were other things that probably she thought was crazy.

**Q:** Did you enjoy having more privacy after you left?

**A:** There's certain things I enjoyed and certain things I just found difficult. Not having everybody comment on every decision I ever made and what I wanted to do with my life was very nice. And you might describe that as privacy. Um, but I also missed the easy intimacy of living with a group of friends and knowing at any time I wanted to, I could walk out of my door, and there could be so many people around that I loved to spend time with. It's much more difficult now. You know, we all have our schedules, and things we're caught up in and things we're doing, and it's a lot harder to just hook up with people you care about. You have to really consciously plan it and think about it.

**Q:** Sure. Would you do it again?

**A:** You mean live in community?

**Q:** I'm sorry, not Synanon, but would you live communally again?

**A:** Yes. Yes, and I would like to figure out how to do it again. My only choice for doing it again would be I would probably like to retain a little more control, and not live in an authoritarian community. I'd be more interested in one of the more democratic kinds of [tape ends.] . . . yes, a few of us have. And we talk about, um, you know, some kind of like land trust thing, or a co-housing, which is kind of a common thing, yes.

**Q:** And do you think that might ever happen?

**A:** I think it's possible. Yeah, I do. I do.

**Q:** What would you say are things that you've brought forward from your life in Synanon to your life today?

**A:** Well, I really know how to make something happen in a group. So, for example, I serve on some charitable boards, and I can watch just the dynamics of people talking to each other and the decision-

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making process, and I can help facilitate it, because I just understand how people think and work, and I have certain skills from having lived in community for all those years. So that's one thing. I think I have, um, a highly honed social conscience, from having lived in community, so, I really care about where I am. Okay, right now I'm in Visalia, but I care about what happens here, so I'm a person who gets involved. And I think those are things I learned from living in community. And then, I have a strong interest in education, which I developed from the years of working in the Synanon school. I've been involved in our community in terms of education, even though, you know, Zoe's not in public school anymore, I'm still involved with issues relating to the public school system here, and I care a great deal about it. And I think that's just from all the years of teaching in the Synanon school and understanding . . . how important it is, you know, what we can offer young life. And if they don't have it, what can happen.

**Q:** Would you describe your involvement in Synanon as a success or a failure?

**A:** Well I have to believe that everything about my life is a success. Now at any given moment, I may not feel that, okay, I mean, obviously, I have pain and sorrow and trials and tribulations as any human being does, but um, I would have to say that everything that got me where I am was a good thing. It's made me, the person that I am. So I would say that it was a success. The community doesn't exist anymore, and that makes me sad, but um, there are hundreds of people all over our country who shared pieces of that experience with me, and I think we all have, you know, very rich, um, layers of experience, of shared goals and things that we did together, and we can weave a great tapestry. You know, when we get to talking to each other about what we did. And um, and I really believe in the long term that um, the way we raised a couple of generations of young people, could have a profound effect on life in our country. I believe that, and that's why I said, I really think we have to wait till some of these kids are 50 to see what they do, and how they talk about their experience, and how they can effect the next generations. But basically I would definitely say it was a success. I'm very proud of it, really.

**Q:** Well, on that upbeat note, I don't think I have anymore questions.