

Interview with Wendy Erickson

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 26, 1996

Q: This is Monday, February 26th, and this is an interview with Wendy Erickson in Austin, Texas. All right, so you were going to school at Michigan State?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: In East Lansing? And you lived in a co-op there?

A: I lived in ... yeah, I just lived in one co-op there. Actually, you know, I lived in two co-ops there, but only one while I was going to school. The first one I lived in was called Bauer House and probably the most interesting thing about that one is that it was a house the SHC had just acquired and it had previously been an independent co-op. It was all men and SHC bought it and was working on salvaging it and moved in about fifty percent women, and that was a very interesting challenge for a number of the men who had lived there for a period ... the men who stayed, a number of them who had lived there for a period of time. It was very interesting.

Q: I'll bet. What time period was this?

A: This was, let's see ... early '70s.

Q: Early '70s.

A: Yeah, late '60s, early '70s.

Q: So this is probably about the time that a lot of dormitories were becoming coed and... ?

A: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Q: Okay. So how did you like living in Bauer House?

A: Actually, it was delightful. It was very interesting. Even the political squabbles were, you know, interesting.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And it worked out pretty well. Like I said, the men who stayed, though they resisted a lot, they obviously liked living in the cooperative environment and they were the ones who seemed to be willing to put the most effort into the household.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Even if it wasn't necessarily the way in which some of the other people would have put energy into the household, you know, it was obvious it was important to them.

Q: Yeah.

A: Otherwise, they would have left, you know. And so it was nice. And I met some very nice people.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: That particular house was a little unusual that was an old apartment house and so there were little suites of rooms with like a bedroom, a living room and a bath.

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Q: Oh, that must have been nice.

A: Ripped out all the kitchens.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, and there was a kitchen down in the mess, a common kitchen down in the basement where we all ate, so you know, and different house mates, you know, kind of worked it out. Sometimes they used the bedroom as the bedroom and the living room as a living room and sometimes they had, you know, the living room became another bedroom and the other bedroom was used as a second bedroom and people worked it out different ways how they wanted to use the space. It was, you know, it was a really good experience for me.

Q: Yeah. Did you all share on the work of running the place?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: The cooking, the cleaning, all that?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you have any sort of organized work sharing system, like you had to earn a certain number of work credits or anything like that?

A: In all honesty, I can't remember. The distinctive thing I remember is that if you're going to be gone for the weekend, is that all the chores were assigned for the week, and if you were going to be gone for the weekend, you had to sign out for the weekend, otherwise you got assigned -- there was a weekend sort of labor czar, and you got assigned a job. And you know, it was sort of arbitrary what job you got assigned.

Q: Right.

A: It didn't necessarily turn out to be one of your preference or one that you were competent at.

Q: So there was a labor czar who made those decisions?

A: Who made those decisions.

Q: That's great. I like that name.

A: And in terms of the weekly assignment of tasks, people got ... there was a labor czar who sort of assigned tasks, but people got to say, "Well, this is my first choice, this is my second choice, this is my third choice," and people pretty much got what they wanted.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: Yeah.

Q: I don't know much about the student housing co-ops in East Lansing. Are there very many of them? Is it a big system?

A: It's a fairly big system. It's larger than when I was there. It's in a lot of ways modelled on ICC, partly

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because one of the people who was sort of their main director, Jim Jones, who was there when I was there, went through college in the ICC system and so that was his model and so in a lot of ways, it was modelled after the ICC system. And it's ... I really don't know much about it at this point in time, but my impression is that it's still fairly strong.

Q: Yeah. Was it considered at all like a hip place to live? I don't know if that's the right word to use, but when you were in school?

A: Um, Michigan State is a huge university.

Q: Is it?

A: So, I mean, everybody had their sort of place to be. I mean, there were fraternities and sororities. It was also the less expensive university...

Q: Right.

A: ... state university to go to, so there were a lot of people there who didn't have as much money and therefore, didn't go to live in Ann Arbor and go to Ann Arbor and so it had much more of a middle class atmosphere, and a lot of people liked the co-ops primarily for economic reasons. You know, it's like, "Okay, I have to do these chores and yeah, these people are okay, but you know, I'm living here because it's cheap." You know, and they were perfectly nice to the other people around, you know, perfectly civil, but they went to school, they went to work, they did their chores and that was it.

Q: Yeah.

A: And then there were other people who, you know, were involved in the co-ops because they really believed in the whole idea of co-ops and cooperative housing. But I would say a fairly large proportion of people were there because it was an inexpensive way to live and an inexpensive way to live halfway decently.

Q: Right.

A: And you know, it's hard to say whether or not it was a hip place to live because that's sort of defined by the larger culture...

Q: Sure.

A: ... and the culture was so large that it was like...

Q: You couldn't define it? So it wasn't like, you'd say to a person, "I live at the co-ops," and they would know what sort of a person you were? Do you know what I mean? You couldn't be typed, really, by living in a co-op?

A: If they had any consciousness of the co-ops, yes, because they were sort of a little rundown, not very expensive, and some of the people were very politically active. But that wasn't like totally true, so.

Q: What were the politics like in the co-ops?

A: Primarily liberal, leftist and a lot of support for the anti-war movement at that time.

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Q: Yeah.

A: But again, there were people who lived there just because it was inexpensive and had either no expressed politics or oppositely expressed politics, but they just kind of went, "Uhhhh."

Q: Right. Yeah.

A: "I'm living here because it's cheap and these people are nice and that's it." You know? "Nobody's mean to me."

Q: What kind of food did you eat? Was it just run-of-the-mill?

A: It varied a lot. The student housing co-ops ... when we first moved into Bauer House, they ate primarily meat and potatoes. They had hamburgers a lot, they had goulash a lot, they had meat-loaf a lot, and when the women moved in, it was like, "Let's make something a little more interesting than this!" And so were still part of the diet. The second co-op I lived in was definitely more interested in eating healthy food and eating a more balanced diet -- lots of fruits and vegetables. We weren't necessarily vegetarian, but a lot more attention was paid to what we ate and we were part of the food co-op.

Q: Was that also in East Lansing?

A: Yeah. And that was a little private house that was started by myself and five friends, three or four of whom had lived at Bauer House.

Q: Okay.

A: And you know, we were out of school and we were kind of tired of dealing with the school, the university mentality and in that group, most of the people were pretty political.

Q: Yeah. Did it have a name?

A: Rivendell.

Q: Rivendale?

A: Rivendell.

Q: Rivendell. Okay.

A: And that was only five people.

Q: How long were you there?

A: There? I was there a couple of years.

Q: And why did you decide to live that way?

A: Um, it was ... well, actually I decided to live that way when I left school for the first time and went to Washington, D.C. and lived in a commune and worked on a publication and it was interesting.

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Q: That wasn't Quicksilver or Washington Free Press or something?

A: No. No. It was, God ... Community ... what was it? It was called The Source.

Q: The Source?

A: And we were doing a series of catalogs on access to alternative housing, food, health. And the particular catalog I was working on was housing.

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And that was like so intensely political that there sort of wasn't space for people to be persons?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: And when I came back to school, it just seemed like a natural way to live.

Q: Can you tell me some about the group in D.C.? Like how you lived? Was it a big group house where people lived together?

A: It was a big group office where people lived together.

Q: Oh. Wow.

A: Yeah. It was pretty strange. Basically, people worked most of the days of the ... most of the hours of the day, you know, fell into bed for like five or six hours at night ...

Q: Wow.

A: And it was not my thing. You know, it's like, "Okay, I'd be happy to make a political contribution, but part of my political contribution needs to be being a sane human being."

Q: Yeah. Getting your sleep. Yeah. Was there a consciousness around wanting to live communally among that group?

A: Yeah, yeah. There was. There was a very strong consciousness about that and about making decisions by consensus rather than by voting on them and but at the same time there were still a number of people who ... just a couple of people who put a lot of political and emotional pressure on people so that things would be the way they perceived them as politically correct.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, in terms of what type belt to buy and how to do the laundry and things like that.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: You know, it was like, "I'm sorry, I can't quite get into politically correct laundry."

Q: Right. Did you all pool your money?

A: We did. Yeah. Basically all the money that we brought in ...

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Q: From selling the newspaper?

A: From both ... largely from grants and contributions, we used and we did communal laundry, we had communal clothing. People just sort of came with what they had in their suitcase and that kind of went into the communal pile and you know, you got up in the morning and you picked out something that was clean in the communal pile that fit and you put it on and proceeded about your day. You know, but it was a good experience. It was an interesting thing to do and it was really interesting living in D.C., you know.

Q: Were there a lot of communal living groups in D.C. at that point?

A: Yeah. Most of them were not very public because for instance, we were not living in a place where we were supposed to be living. We were living in an office.

Q: Oh. You were living in an office. How many people were there?

A: There were six to eight. It varied.

Q: That's a lot for an office.

A: Yeah. Well, I mean it was the third and fourth floor of you know, a row of office houses in the embassy district, so it wasn't ...

Q: Yeah, it wasn't like one room, or something.

A: It wasn't like one or two rooms, but it was still, you know, one large room and a few other assorted rooms.

Q: And what was the purpose of the group? It was to put out this newspaper?

A: To put out a catalog of ... you know, it was designed to provide access to information and so we were putting out this catalog that provided information and ideas about how to create low cost, communal, you know, housing. You know, how to access money to build or create things like that and different organizations were doing different kinds of things like that.

Q: And it was called The Source?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: How long did it last? Do you know?

A: I'm not really sure how long it actually lasted. There was ... I think there were two others after I left, and I'm not really sure how much longer, because they're sort of...

Q: Two other people or two other issues?

A: Two other issues.

Q: Two other issues.

A: I think it sort of dwindled out.

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Q: And about when were you there?

A: I was there, gosh, probably '71, '72, someplace around there.

Q: And what did you like about it? What was the best part of that time?

A: It was very interesting living in a different place because I'd always lived in Lansing, in East Lansing. So that was, for me, really interesting, and it was interesting dealing with different kinds of people than all my high school and college friends that I had spent time with. It was exciting to be doing something that I felt could make some actual change or contribution to make to changing. And I think that's something that's a holdover for many of the people from that era. In many ways, it's a handicap we had to get over, you know, the fact that at that time it was exciting, it was adventurous, we felt like we were doing something important and then we suddenly wake up and find we had to go get jobs and you know...

Q: Yeah.

A: And feed ourselves and we weren't happy sleeping on somebody's couch. It just wasn't quite as satisfying constantly sleeping on somebody's couch and it was like, "Hmm. I've got to get a real job and get a real income." And "Ugh, I'm getting sick. I gotta pay to go to a doctor."

Q: Yeah.

A: Or, "I want to have kids and if they get sick and I have to pay for them to go to doctors. This isn't quite as exciting as, you know, as it was back then." But in reality, you have to make your own excitement. You know, you have to make your life what you want out of it, not have it created by the atmosphere around you.

Q: Would you have described that group as being counter-culture?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: Seriously counter-culture. The second house I lived in in East Lansing was some students, mostly students elder than average or students who were working and going to school and when I came back, I continued to work on a different catalog and it was to market goods produced by various cooperative manufacturing groups.

Q: What was the name of that?

A: It was Community Market Cooperative Catalog.

Q: I think maybe I've seen a copy of that.

A: And that's what I did for a couple of years until the last issue came out.

Q: And that was put out there in East Lansing?

A: Right.

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Q: And did you work like with a collective of people on that?

A: No.

Q: You did it all by yourself?

A: I did it primarily all by myself.

Q: Whoa. Did you think up this idea or... ?

A: Actually no. It was an idea that had been sort of brewing and they'd tried to do it and they did this sort of little issue of it and then got a lot of sort of peripheral support from Student Housing Cooperative in East Lansing and because they sort of shared office space. You know, this is the desk for ... and some other group that was there at the time and I can't even remember what they were. Some student group. But I did pretty much all of the work on it. The other person who was involved in it was Jim Jones. He was the director of the Student Housing Corporation at the time.

Q: That's how I've seen a copy of it. I'm a friend of Jim's, because I go up to the Nalscow Institute all the time and he's shown me a lot of things like that. Yeah. So then did you move down to Austin after that?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then did you live cooperatively here?

A: Yeah. I came down here ... I travelled, oh travelled for about nine months around and actually visited a whole lot of co-ops and communes.

Q: What groups did you visit? Do you remember any of them?

A: I remember some of them. One was a group that was doing some type of publication which I don't even remember now out on the west coast in Eugene and then there was a commune in northern California that also had a house in Palo Alto and I stayed with them for awhile and those are the places I remember the most in that respect. And then I went back to East Lansing for a rather short period and Jim Jones and I were a couple at the time and he got a job down here working for the ICC here and so we decided, "Well, you know, maybe we'd like to move to Eugene, Oregon." I said, "I really liked Eugene." So we went out to Eugene and it was the rainy season and we both went, "Uh-uh. I will mold and shoot myself very quickly if I have to stay in this for very long." And we came down here and of course, it was absolutely gorgeous. It was spring, it was beautiful, you know. And there was lots of co-op activity here. So we decided, "Well, this is an okay place." And he had the job at ICC as director, but he couldn't come down till fall, so for the summer, I did the job and in the fall, he came down and took his job.

Q: Wow.

A: And what I did I do? I found a job in a fabric store. So.

Q: And then did you guys live cooperatively?

A: Yeah. Uh-huh.

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Q: You did?

A: I lived in one of the ICC houses here, Seneca, which was a very delightful experience and it was a women's co-op, it was primarily graduate students and it was very friendly. There were lots of nice people to meet, lots of nice people to talk to and even though they were mostly students and I was not, it was, you know, they were old enough so that they were like serious about this and so that was very pleasant. And there's actually a woman who's an author, Sara Bird, who's written, her first book was called Alamo House and was written about that house.

Q: Wow.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Wow, that's neat. I'll have to check that out.

A: Yeah, you really should and it's hysterical and some of the characters are from the time when I lived there and some of them are from other periods, cause she lived there when I lived there and she lived there later. She left and then came back later after I had left. So that's actually a really interesting kind of, you know, different sort of view of the whole thing. And it's also a really good read.

Q: Oh good.

A: And it's out in paperback.

Q: Okay. I'll definitely check that out. Yeah. Did you know that Marge Piercy wrote a book that's based on her experiences at one of the co-ops in ICC-Ann Arbor?

A: Oh. Oh. I've read a lot of her stuff, so I may have read it.

Q: No, she lived at Austerwild House in Ann Arbor. It's one of the ICC houses. I don't know if it will be similar to this one or not. But I'll have to check this one out.

A: Well this one's very poignant and very funny.

Q: Uh-huh? Oh great! Good.

A: And the sense of humor is a lot like Sara's when she was there. She was a very enjoyable person to be around. And after ... then we started La Florie and we started La Florie primarily again to get away from the whole student ghetto idea. And we moved to house that's actually not too far away from here on the opposite side of the freeway on Woodland in what turned into a student ghetto.

Q: Oh no.

A: Well, after they let the university shuttle buses run out here to those big apartments over there. We took a duplex that was in a buffer zone between the single family housing and these big apartment complexes and turned it into a seven bedroom cooperative. And that lasted about three years and ...

Q: That was for non-students?

A: Well, there were some students who lived there, but because of the time, it was a pretty long ride to the university by the shuttle bus, a lot of students didn't want to live there.

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Q: Yeah.

A: And a number of us, most of the people who lived there were not students. So, it's focus was not student and the interesting thing is that it was part of ICC, which is basically a student organization, so we were sort of like the undercover ... officially we were supposed to be a student co-op, but ...

Q: So ICC actually bought the place?

A: ICC actually bought the house.

Q: Got it. Okay.

A: Which was sort of a political leap of faith on their part that maybe this thing would work, cause there is another non-student co-op in Austin called Sunflower Co-op and it's in South Austin, too. It's just west of Congress, between Mopac and Congress and they were doing okay. There are actually a number of other co-ops in Austin, non-student type co-ops. And we started that one. And that was again, it a very pleasant experience. My parents would ask me, you know, "Isn't this a little weird living with all these strange people?" Strangers, you know. Not like living with your family, not like living with people you know, you've grown up with. Because it's a cooperative, whoever applies, if they seem like they'll work out, you know, you say yes. You know, you'd talk to them and interview them and find out, you know, whether they're ax murderers or they just seem off the wall, but you know, you're only moderately judgmental. And I said, "Well, you know, it's not really any different than living in a great big family, where you know, as you're growing up, at varying points of time, the siblings all hate each other and then they love each other."

Q: Right.

A: I mean, the conflicts are different, but there's just as many of them.

Q: Did you guys do much together? Like did you eat together or anything?

A: Yeah. All the co-ops I've lived in, we've always eaten together. Even if that was the only thing we did together because we just felt like that was the important thing because to live in a household with people you had zero contact with just was like, "Okay, this is not a cooperative house. You can't have, you know... if you're going to do that, you may as well live in a boarding house."

Q: Yeah. So what ended up happening to La Florie House?

A: Uh, La Florie just ended about a year ago.

Q: Oh it did? Wow.

A: It changed locations several times.

Q: Did you change locations with it?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did? Oh, okay. Where did it go after it was on... ?

A: And I lived in La Florie for twenty years.

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Q: Oh wow. Wow.

A: Yeah.

Q: Up until just a year ago?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh gosh.

A: And we moved from ... it got to the point where we were having difficulty finding people and especially people that ICC approved of as having any connection to the university.

Q: Right.

A: And the conflicts between the student mentality and what we wanted were just like ... you know, we'd go to ICC Board meetings and there'd be just like ...

Q: No connection?

A: No connection. Nothing. And so, ICC decided they wanted to sell the house, and we decided that's fine, we understand this experiment didn't work for you guys, but we want to keep our household together, so we're going to take the name and we're going to move someplace else. So, Jim Jones bought, who was part of that co-op, bought a house over near the university.

Q: Which you were trying to get away from.

A: Which we were trying to get away from and we moved into that house. And actually he was not part of the co-op. He took the little apartment in the back of the house and he lived in the little apartment in the back and so we lived in that house for probably five years and I don't think these numbers are all going to add up, but that's okay.

Q: Oh that's okay. How many people lived in that house?

A: That was five. Actually, I think the first La Florie was seven, this one was five and again, some of the people were students, most of the people were students and working folk. Pretty active in the co-ops. Robert, my husband, worked at College Houses, worked at ICC, worked at Quitesville Food Co-op ...

Q: Wow. Yeah.

A: All through that period. And I was president of the credit union that we started here. But we got just tired of living in the university neighborhood.

Q: Sure.

A: And so the second time we moved, Robert and I bought a house in a west Austin neighborhood, a fairly fancy west Austin neighborhood, big two story house with seven bedrooms. Actually they'd only had six bedrooms at the time, but we turned the den into a bedroom also and we lived there for like twelve years.

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Q: Again with a group of people?

A: Yeah. And the house finally collapsed largely because the people just didn't have the energy to keep the household together. Robert and I felt more and more like we were keeping house for a group of people.

Q: People weren't doing their fair share of the work?

A: Well, they would sometimes do their fair share of the work, but it was like raising children and ...

Q: You had to nag them or something?

A: They had to be nagged ...

Q: Oh yuck!

A: They had to be nagged and we just got tired of doing the nagging. And it takes a lot of organizational structure ...

Q: Sure.

A: ... to make it work and everybody has to sort of participate in that organizational structure. And gradually we kept getting people who were much more interested in their careers, their jobs, you know, their boyfriends, their girlfriends, whatever, than the household. And because the household for a -- well, for the last probably five or six years of its existence didn't have any cohesive things that we all did together. Like for awhile, most of the people in the household were folk dancers and musicians, which is something that Robert and I are still involved in, and so there was that sort of cohesion. Um, but without the very strong political pull and any other kind of cohesion, we just, you know, attracted nice people, but you know, they'd finish their graduate work or get a post-doc in England and they'd just take off. They'd get married, and they left. For two years we went through this "getting married and leaving phase," and it was sort of like, we started interviewing people, "Are you dating anybody?" "No." "Okay, good. That's one positive thing." 'Cause we had three or four couples, you know, come through, get married, and leave. At one point the house consisted of three couples and one person. And we were like, "This is not groovy." I mean --

Q: 'Cause the couples were more into themselves than they were into the house, kind of?

A: Well, that to a certain degree, but also, when you have that, you have a real dangerous situation in that if one person leaves, they're both going to leave. More than likely. I mean even if they leave separately, they're probably both going to leave that situation because they don't want to continue living where the pain happened. You know? So.

Q: Do you contra [country?] dance?

A: A little.

Q: Is there much of a contra dance group in Austin?

A: Oh, yeah, lots of it. It's something you want to do while you're here for fun.

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Q: Well I was hoping I might be able to, but I have a calendar of contra dance events, and it didn't look like any would coincide with the days I was here. I'm leaving Wednesday morning.

A: Yeah, there's Wednesday night contra dancing.

Q: Darn. Oh well. Were you involved at all in the start-up of Wheatsville? Or do you know anything about that history?

A: I know a little bit, and it's kind of sketchy, because I wasn't actively involved. Robert was pretty actively involved. Wheatsville was this little -- well, Wheatsville didn't have that name, but the, I've forgotten what, I think it was called the West Austin Food Co-op. And it was over in Central West Austin in an area called Clarksville, and I think was actually even initially called The Clarksville Food Co-op. And, ... then they ... went through all of the usual agonies that all food co-ops go through, and kind of got a little more upscale, and changed their name I think to the West Austin Food Co-op. And then they moved over, decided maybe if they moved over by the university, you know, they'd have a bigger base. And so they got this building nearer to the university, and that seemed to help some. And that's when they changed the name to Wheatsville, because that was the name of the little neighborhood back a long time ago, where they were currently, you know, existing.

Q: Do you know who was involved in like starting it? Was it student co-ops, or more townspeople?

A: More townsfolk. As I said, Austin has a really, very strong cooperative, because there's ... there have been co-ops here, you know, student housing type co-ops here since the '30's and '40's. And there have been the women's on-campus co-ops for years. So a lot of people who left those institutions but stayed in town, um, have very, you know, good feelings about those institutions. And they did a lot to just start things, like the food co-ops, and the other non-student type housing co-ops, and day care co-ops, and things like that. So, then they moved into this really huge -- for a food co-op -- building, over on Guadalupe, and that's where they've been ever since. And ... we were always members of Wheatsville, we're still sort of members of Wheatsville, and um, ... but I can't say that we shop there much anymore, because it's just not convenient to the way we travel to get groceries and stuff. And ... I'm trying to think of ... who you could talk to about that.

Q: Oh that's okay, I was just curious more than anything, because it's kind of to the side of what we're studying. Although, you know, it's funny, a lot of places I've gone, a lot of communal groups and cooperative groups have been the ones that have started the food co-ops, so I was just curious.

A: I have a feeling that in a lot of ways it's not quite as peripheral as it might seem. I think it's fairly integral. It's a lot of the same people, and ... it's one of the things that people want to start.

Q: Yeah, it seems that way. Does Lauflorien [?] mean something?

A: It's the woods -- it's from the Tolkien trilogy, the same as Rivendell, and it's the woods where the good elves lived.

Q: So were you guys big Tolkien fans?

A: In all honesty, no. Lauflorien was everybody's second choice when we were picking a name.

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Q: What was your first choice?

A: Gosh it's been so long I don't remember.

Q: I wonder why you settled on your second choice?

A: Well everybody had a different first choice.

Q: Oh, it was your second choice.

A: Yeah it was probably my second or third choice, and I don't remember what my first choice was. But other people had other first choices, and there's - - you know. And in the way of cooperatives, you know, we achieved consensus on the name, and it was pretty much everybody's second or third choice.

Q: So was it disappointing to you and Robert to, to see the cooperative kind of die out?

A: It was very disappointing to me to see the cooperative die out. Um, ... I would've much preferred if we could have, if we had said, "Well, we've decided that we want to try living, you know, by ourselves with just the two of us." A very strange experience, because we've been together for like 20 years, and we had never lived alone, just the two of us. And um, ... I would've much preferred if people had said, "Oh my goodness! Well we need to keep this going!" But it was, to me it was very telling that the energy was just not there, and that without us to keep it going, it wasn't going to keep going. And we made a lot of suggestions as to, "Well, you can contact ICC, or you could contact these people, you could, you know, try to make arrangements like this," other people to help support them and point it in the right direction, but they just didn't, you know, it was like nobody was willing to take the initiative to hold it together. And that was, primarily, that was the reason we were leaving.

Q: Yeah, so is it just the two of you now?

A: No. Um, when we first moved, a house mate of ours moved with us, because his other rent, you know he didn't have any other place to live, and he was real nice to live with. Um, ... and he did his share of the laundry and all that kind of you know, stuff, and picked up the house, and was very -- so he moved with us, and then finally when we moved into this location, -- no I, well. 'Cause we lived in our rent house for about nine months while we were looking for a house to buy, after we had sold the other one. And he was gone, his rent house that he was going to move back into, came empty, so he moved back there. And another friend of ours came back from the Carolinas, and was kind of hanging at loose ends and didn't quite know what was going on, so we said, "Well you can stay here for awhile." So he stayed with us, and then you know, went back to Carolina, and came back, and he's now staying with us again. So, you know.

Q: You guys aren't destined to live by yourself, probably.

A: Right. The thing is, is living by ourselves is not the important thing for us.

Q: It was just getting out of that situation.

A: It was just getting out of that situation. And if things had been different I probably would have been perfectly happy to go on staying in that location, you know, in that situation, like I can't foresee that I would have any great need to have changed that.

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Q: So would you like to live cooperatively again in the future?

A: Potentially.

Q: So you're not soured on the idea of cooperative living?

A: No.

Q: You just think that that particular group just wasn't gelling right?

A: Well I think, I think that the thing is that particular group went on for a number of years. And ... I think that, the situation for the people of that age group was just not right.

Q: So have you come to any conclusions about cooperative living based on your experiences? Like maybe there's certain age groups it doesn't work well for, or --?

A: Well, I think that there's a whole kind of social support system for that, and when ... when we were in college and growing a little older, there was a lot of support for that, but as we became older, most of our friends were single, married, kids, um, and they wanted single-family dwellings. And the people we were running in who didn't were people who were in a transition period, just between living by themselves, you know, my own house, my kids, or were about to get married. And they didn't really have any definite commitment. I mean, I remember saying to one woman something about repairing something in the house, and she was, just, you know, complaining about how, having to take care of this physical edifice was such a pain, and I said, "Well, think about that -- don't ever plan on owning your own home," and she says, "I don't ever plan to own my own home!" And it was like, "Okay, well, it's clear for you! But boy is that different for my priorities." I like old houses where I have to constantly keep fixing things.

Q: How did work-sharing break down in terms of gender lines? Did women tend to do a lot more traditional women's work and the men do repairing, or, no?

A: Um, the men tended to do ... more of the physical repairing of the house, largely because they had the skills. Um, but, ... most of the men were willing to teach the skills, and a number of the women had the skills. So, um, and it varied, again, with the mix of people who were there. Um, it got so toward the end it primarily fell to Robert to do most of that, a) because he knew how to do it, but more because he was the only person who would think to do it. And it was "our" house.

Q: Would you have regular meetings or any sort of formal work-sharing system?

A: Yeah. We had, -- yeah. All of that was very structured, in pretty much exactly the same way the student co-ops is. About the only differences we didn't have regularly scheduled meetings. We'd have meetings, you know, about every ... maybe a couple times every three months. And at one of those meetings, the work schedule would be re-arranged, because somebody's work schedule would change or somebody's class schedule had changed, or somebody was doing something different after work. And, but pretty much, the chores were divided up, and they had sort of weights, you know. Cooking dinner had a lot more weight than sweeping the walks. But, if everything didn't balance out absolutely perfectly, people didn't get all uptight as long as they were doing, they weren't stuck doing things they didn't like doing. And chores were assigned, people were expected to do them, people got nagged by

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numerous people if they didn't do them. Um, and as we got sort of richer, you know, people would come flying home from work, going, "I had to work late! Here's the pizza!" and they'd just go out and buy pizza. And what we would do in situations like that is we sort of had a set amount that was in the budget for how much we usually spend on a dinner, and that much they'd get reimbursed, and the rest of it just had to come out of their pocket. But at one point we had a medical doctor, a lawyer, and numerous other professions -- an accountant, a computer software person, um, ...

Q: So it was a house full of professionals.

A: It was a house full of professionals. We had a licensed social worker. Those were the kind of work constraints that people had all the time.

Q: Well I'm sort of amazed you could keep any sort of dinner schedule going with those kind of professions.

A: Well it was one of the things, it was like, we had people who wanted to live there, and we'd look at their work schedule and say, "It looks like you'll never be here for dinner, I don't think this is the place for you. This is when we have most of our communication. This is kind of something we insist on. If you're not going to be here one or two nights a week, that's cool, but if you're not going to be here seven nights a week, that's just not going to work. We don't run a boarding house where you have your own ... " [tape ends] ... you know in many ways by student co-op standards, our standards were much higher. I mean, our house was pretty much clean, and ... the common areas were always picked up and almost always looked nice. People's rooms might be trashed, but you know, people pretty rarely trashed out the living room, except for a short period of time, then it all got shuttled away. But, ... there just got to be too much rubbing and bumping about, you know, ... like, "Who should change the lightbulbs in the hall?" and you know, ... "The toilet doesn't work, this toilet's not working again," just lots and lots of little things, where it seemed to be sort of like, "Well that's not my problem." The responsibility to the organization as a whole wasn't there. And I, you know, I have to say that Robert and I, who'd been in it the longest, probably had the greatest responsibility for, you know, teaching and training and coaching people to have that responsibility, but we just got tired of doing it over and over and over again.

Q: I can understand completely. I used to manage a student co-op house. So I can relate.

A: Yeah, and it's just like, "I just can't keep doing this." You have to have people move in who at least know when the toilet is not flushing properly that, you know, it's not somebody else's problem.

Q: Now you've been living cooperatively, basically, since about 1970 or so? That's a long time. What are some of the things that you've learned from that experience?

A: Learned to get along with a lot of people. I've also met a lot of really interesting people, and um, ... learned a lot about myself and a lot about how to assert myself, and how to... how a group needs to assert itself and go, "I'm sorry, we live here. This is just not acceptable behavior, it's not acceptable for you to hold us ... pull this emotional blackmail trip on us." Or, you know, "Come on, they're having a hard time, cut them some slack. Don't be so grumpy next week." Because I'm an only child, and I grew up without any brothers or sisters, so it was really valuable for me to learn to have that kind of give and take with other people. Because I was not especially spoiled, but I was very spoiled because I was an

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only child. So I didn't always get my way, but everything concerning me or the child aspect of that family was my way, because there was no other way to consider. It was, you know, --and I can be very rigid and very perfectionist and very demanding, and to kind of go, "Is this important? ... No, it's not important." It's important for me, you know, if I'm doing, you know, an art project or I'm doing something for me, then, "Is this important for my dealing with the world?"

Q: Are you an artist?

A: No. I was just thinking of that. For something I'm doing for myself, I can be as perfectionist as I want to be, but when I have expectations of others, then, you know, it's like I have to take into consideration that what I want might not be what they want.

Q: What have been some of the best aspects of this odyssey?

A: Well, the -- I think everybody, almost everybody who's lived at Lauflorien will say the best thing that happened was the food. Everybody who came in or left said, "Boy, am I going to miss these dinners!"

Q: Wow. So people would go all out in cooking nice meals?

A: Yeah, we had really nice meals.

Q: Did you eat in any special way? Like were you vegetarians, or --?

A: Yeah, the household was vegetarian. We ate fish, although not everyone in the house ate fish. Um, and, um, but people, you know, when you only had to cook once a week, and pretty much, only people who liked to cook, cook. So. And we had ... a financial base, so that we could buy good food, especially when you're buying it for a crowd of people that size. We ate really well.

Q: Do you miss meals?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: 'Cause now you have to cook every night, right?

A: Well and we have it -- that's something that Robert and I haven't resolved. It's sort of like, you know, I haven't had dinner yet, he hasn't had dinner yet, I got home, he won't be back for a couple of hours, it's like, well, there's can soup... and do I really feel like fixing something that will take another hour and a half? If I do that I won't get anything else -- you know, I'll come home, I'll fix dinner, and I'll go to bed! So that's something we still have to resolve. And sometimes we do better, and sometimes we do worse, but. So that's probably -- and missing having other people around just to kind of hang out with at times. ... Miss the fact that when there are projects to be done, all the responsibility is mine or ours. There aren't other people to share the responsibility. And we really have to go more out of our way to meet interesting people. We have a pretty wide circle of friends, with folk dancing we meet a lot of interesting people, but house mates not only were interesting in and of themselves, but they had friends who were interesting. So. And who would come to dinner and talk, sometimes for hours after dinner. So those are the things that I miss.

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Q: What was the downside to cooperative living? What was the hard part?

A: The hard part was dealing -- it was always very hard dealing with people who ... didn't ... seem to get it. You know, get the whole group, respect for other people, respect for other people's space, respect for the whole idea of the cooperative, where you're trying to live together cooperatively, and who seem to be there kind of for a free ride, either financially, or -- and that happened a few times. But, um, -- or emotionally. Didn't seem to put anything in except negative energy. And uh, and you'd kind of try for awhile and then, and going through the traumas of figuring out, it was okay to tell this person that they needed to leave, because this was our home, and they weren't making it a pleasant place to be, and none of us should have to dread coming home.

Q: That's what you were talking about, about a group learning how to assert itself?

A: Right, um-hmm. There are a number of teenager's living next door, and interestingly enough, they're all relatively nice people, but, there is a serious culture gap there.

Q: So are you glad you've done it?

A: Oh, I'm very glad I did it. And I'm glad that, you know, that we're here now. Um, you know, I think my preference would have been to have had the perfect people to live with forever and ever, and had, of course had them not change and me not change, and you know? Our lives -- take the perfect month and just have it go on forever. But that's not reality.

Q: But you don't rule out doing it again.

A: Oh no.

Q: I've talked to a lot of people who lived communal for awhile, and then don't now, and have talked about it, um, maybe something they'd do later when they got a lot older, like in their retirement years or something. Is that something that appeals to you?

A: That's certainly a possibility. I know when my mother was getting very old, I started looking at places for her to live. And I visited a number of sort of retirement places. And, ... looking at those places, although they're run very differently, made me have a really major appreciation for the, um, I forgot the group that's in Michigan, and Ohio. The, um, sort of the retirement home cooperatives --

Q: Oh yeah! CSI. Cooperative Services.

A: Cooperative Services. And, think about, wishing there was something like that for her. Although, by the time she was ready to leave her house, she was sort of beyond where she could really take care of herself, and participating. Talking with Robert about that a lot, kind of going, "Well, is this something you find interesting?" And he feels, I mean, he seems to feel the same way, that, you know, it's like when this building and this place becomes too much for us to take care of, something like that would be definitely preferable, where there's other people around and you have some of your own space, but if you want to get out with other people, and there's also people encouraging you to get out, not just crawl into your room and feel sorry for yourself.

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Q: Is co-housing something that's taken on at all in Austin?

A: Um, it has. Um, there've been a number of groups that have tried different things, and ... they, again, it's not something I'm directly involved in, so I just know kind of heresy and rumor.

Q: Is that something that appeals to you?

A: It does and it doesn't, because from what I've heard, a lot of people who are interested in co-housing, um, it becomes a lot of major political battles over how high to mow your front lawn, whether or not we can put the garden plot here, and "The garden is important, and if you don't want to work on it then there's something wrong with you," and it's like, "No, no, no, you don't seem to get this." They've sort of, and little bickerings about, "Well what happens if I want to leave?" Because of the type of place Austin is, now, a lot of people come through here in very high-tech jobs, and the turnover's going to be really, there's going to be a lot of people who come through and leave in the five to seven years that people in this country move. And, "What happens when I want to sell my house in seven years?" How do you sell it? I think those are real issues that they're having a hard time dealing with.

Q: Do you think it really helps when a person makes a commitment to something? Because you talked about how some of your roommates were kind of transitory, I guess they came in and left. Um, do you think it would've worked better if someone had come in and just really made a commitment to staying there?

A: Yeah, I think so. But, ... I don't know . . . how -- again, our whole society doesn't support, a) people staying in the same physical location for a very long time, and that's -- so it's really hard to say, "I'm going to make this commitment to staying here for an indefinite period." When people think of an indefinite period now, they're thinking of five years. It's like, "Yeah, I can kind of see myself doing this for the next five years." That's like, forever! We look at, should we refinance this house because the rates have dropped even since we bought it a year ago. And it's like, "Well, okay, if it'll pay for itself in two to five years, it makes sense. If it won't pay for itself in ten years, it's not a good deal," because as much as we have absolutely no intentions of moving out of this place, anything can happen. You can't be sure. We may decide that Rob will take a teaching job in Tahiti, and we'll both pack up and go to Tahiti.

Q: That sounds kind of fun.

A: Yeah, that's the kind of thing that I go, "Well, you know, that sounds like fun.

Q: What do you do for work?

A: I manage a printing and copying shop.

Q: Oh, so you still kind of stayed in the same thing that you were doing in Washington D.C. and then in East Lansing?

A: Yeah. My degree was in "multidisciplinary social science education," at a time when probably every fifth person graduated in English or social science education. And if I'd wanted to go to, gosh I can't think of a town small enough, you know, to teach, I probably could have found a job, but, I didn't want to do that.

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Q: Well I think that's about all the questions I have.