

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

Q: So, Stan, what is your last name?

A: Hildebrand: H-I-L-D-E-B-R-A-N-D

Q: Great, thank you. Okay. When did you come to Sandhill?

A: Uh, I came to visit in, uh, June '79, and I've been living here since April of 1980.

Q: Okay. Um, did you live in community before that?

A: Um, yes. A partner and I started a community in Guatemala, and we were there from 1976 to '79 -- or we tried to start a community. I don't know if it ever was a community or not, I guess, at some times it felt like a community and some times it didn't. And then uh, from uh, let's see, uh, September to March, September into '79 to March of '80 I lived at Twin Oaks.

Q: So tell me a little bit about the community in Guatemala?

A: Um, well, uh, there's two of us who wen-, you know, we, well, we met as graduate students at Michigan State University and we were, you know, into leftist politics and then we decided that we needed to live the revolution, you know. We were all, everybody was, you know of course we all talking about the revolution, and when it was coming and where it was coming and how it coming, So-,

Q: What were you studying?

A: I was in African history. [unintelligible] African history.

Q: And what time period was that?

A: Uh, this was, uh, well I was there from '70 to '76.

Q: Um-hmm. Did you finish your Ph.D.?

A: No. I did my exams and then I was doing research and then uh, I got involved with this group. We were, you know, we were a Marxist study group, and uh, some of us out of that group just decided that what we ... needed to do was live the revolution rather than, plot it, I guess. [laughs]

Q: Did, when you were, um, in , was it East Lansing? Were you living in a co-op house or shared house or anything.

A: No... shared house, yeah, I mean it was several of us living, yeah.

Q: So this group, um, or two of you went down to Guatemala?

A: Right. Me-, first there was group and then we started looking for land in, in Mexico, and while we were looking for land in Mexico the group fell apart and there was, but then there was two of us, uh, still wanted to do it. And so we, you know, we looked through Mother Earth News and stuff like that and. . And first of all we looked through Mother Earth News, we came across Twin Oaks and East Wind and then, and uh, their ads said that were Walden II inspired, and so, so we read Walden II, and said, "Well that's very nice, but, uh, surely we can do better than that." [both laugh] You know, it was too much structure for us. Too much, yeah. And so uh, we naively, you know, did not visit Twin Oaks or East Wind or any, any other groups and we started looking in Mother Earth News and, you know, and all the land

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

that we saw advertised in groups, you know, in the United States was just so expensive. And uh, and then we started coming all this, you know coming across ads in Costa Rica that were really cheap land and so we said, "Well, why not?"

Q: When you were in Mexico, did you visit Los Recons or did you know about them?

A: No, no we didn't know about them. No. No. We were just very naive and we just, we were gonna, do it, you know. Nobody could do it as well as we could. You know?

Q: So you went to Costa Rica:

A: Well, actually, no. We had. . .through Mother Earth News we met, we, we got in touch with someone who had land in Costa Rica and it sounded like he was very much into what we were doing. And he was loading up, he was in California at the time, he was loading up his truck and going down. And so we agreed to meet him in Mexico and travel on down with him. So we did meet him in Mexico and started traveling down and then after a few days or a week whatever, we realized that we were on very different trips. Uh, it just felt like he was, he was in a very strict... strict, well what we thought was nonenjoying-life-type. You know it was like, he was very, he was very much a vegetarian and thought all these peasants who had, who kept animals were stupid. And, it just didn't feel right to us. So, we parted company in Guatemala and said, "Well, why not look around here rather than Costa Rica?" And so we just started looking for land there and, we found a piece of land, and we bought it. And then we ran ads in uh, Mother Earth News, and Country Women, uh, for people and we got lots and lots of responses, and um, we figured in those few years we wrote 500 letters, you know some of them were repeat. And then we had quite a few people come and, and live with us for um, anywhere from a, you know, couple days to uh, six months I guess is what longest people stayed. And then, after awhile it just seemed like it was gonna be hard -- you know we trying to, we were trying to get local people. We wanted to get local peop-, theoretically we wanted to get local people to join but also, but mostly we were getting foreigners visiting us. And --

Q: Expatriate Americans, pretty much?

A: And, and a few, some Europeans. And so um, it just seemed like it was, it was -- we were getting discouraged, and so Sandy, eh, Sandy went to a, to uh Community's conference at Twin Oaks, in the fall of '75, and went, "Wow! We wrote all these groups off before we even visited them, and it was a big mistake, these people are really exactly what we're into." And uh, so she was, you know, she got very excited about -- she went to visit a whole bunch of communities: Twin Oaks, and North Mountain, and East Wind, and the Rocks, and uh, uh anyways so she got very excited about all these communities. So she came back and uh, then we pretty much decided to leave. But it took, took me a long time to say goodbye to the land, so it took, you know, like four or five months, and so we didn't leave until the spring of, of '79. What did I say? She was, she went to Community's Conference spring of seven-, fall of '78. Yeah, fall of '78. 'cause we were there from '76 to '79, and we left in the spring '79.

Q: And then what did you do when you came back up here?

A: Well I had written--you know we were getting Community's magazine. So, and so we were in, so I had written and scheduled visits at Sandhill, and Twin Oaks, and then we were just going to wing it and see

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

where else we wanted to go. But Sandy and I were having a lot of problems in our relationship, and so we kind of split up and met up and split up and met up and so anyway. I came up here first, and I really liked the place, but at that time there was only Ann and Laird here, and there was another person here but she was leaving, and it was very--there was a lot of tension around her leaving. And then there was suppos-, supposedly another person coming and I went, "This is, this is the lifestyle I had envisioned," but, you know, I had been a part of a couple trying to do a community and it was, and, and I didn't want to be that third person that, you know, to make it, that changes it from a couple to a community. And, uh, and so even though I liked it very much I just, said, "Well I need to go to Twin Oaks," and then I went to Twin Oaks and I really, I just loved it. And it was like, you know, I had uh, well the way I look at it now it was like a pendulum swing for me. I'd been off in the woods so, so long, and I'd been not around people, you know, the, the people energy, the juice. And then there's all those people there that were, I just fell in love with it. And so I, but then I was on a waiting list at Twin Oaks, so while I was on a waiting list I came back here... for a month or so. And, uh, and Ann and I started up a relationship and, but then I went on to Twin Oaks anyway. But then, then it didn't work out for me at Twin Oaks. Uh, I got involved in a, I was, became a member of the farm crew right away and there was a big controversy over the farm program and, and so, at first I had seen all the love and, gushyness , and then, when I got back as a member I saw people fighting over resources, scarce resources, and then I saw all the conflict and tension and how... the nonlovely side of Twin Oak people. And so I got pretty discouraged by that and realized that, that I really was looking for more of a family-type atmosphere and that Twin Oaks probably could never be that for me. And there was actually a whole bunch of us at the, at Twin Oaks, we called the Perkin's group and we all decided that we would leave. And, uh,

Q: What did the "Perkins group" mean?

A: We met--the first meeting we ever had as a group was at the Perkin's cabin, which was a cabin that Twin Oaks people often retreated to; it's like only five miles away from Twin Oaks, and was out in the woods. And uh, we went there just to talk, and then we became a group. And uh, then we decided we were going to leave as a group but we didn't. We didn't. And so, so I was, were impatient and left, and we straggled and left individually, and uh, most of those people eventually did leave. Well, probably all of them eventually, but it just took, anyway. We didn't leave as a group. So I came here, and uh, and I've just been here ever since.

Q: Um, well describe to me, so, so let's see, you came here in '79 or in '80?

A: Eighty. Back to live, yeah.

Q: So you've been here for 15 years then?

A: Umm-hmm.

Q: Um, describe to me what your life is like here. What you do. What's your daily life like?

A: Um, well, I'm the uh, uh, I guess we call it the farm, farm manager, farm coor-, you know I manage the fiel-, all the field work, and our crops that, that get planted in the field as opposed to the garden. And um, and so I'm also beekeeper, I'm the main beekeeper, and so I'm very much involved with our, you know, two main industries is sorghum and honey. And uh, right now I'm the mustard maker, I mean

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

I took that over from Jules. But so, my daily life, okay, uh, well in the summer time I, I work a lot out in the fields, and um, you know everything from making hay to cultivating sorghum to harvesting soybeans from harvesting mustard or planting it and um, uh, yeah, making hay, making compost, um-,

Q: So how does a graduate student in African studies learn all these farm skills? Have you just learned them by trial and error? How did you...?

A: I grew up on a farm. Okay, see I grew up a Mennonite, in Canada. And a, so I grew up in a Mennonite farm, so yeah, all of this stuff came very easily to me so when I first came to Sandhill, um, you know at that time Laird, Laird was doing a lot, mostly the farm work, but he was, he was, he was fine giving it up. He was, you know, and then he went into construction of Karma, the building. So I just, I just slid into it, just as soon as I got here basically, I became the farm, the main farmer. And uh, so, the machinery, I mean, this is much, more, more small scale than what I was used to. And, um, of course we, you know, growing up, we were farming agri-biz style, you know, chemicals and stuff and so, but, when I was in Guatemala, you know, I, I took on, I mean then I just really became convinced of the whole organic thing and just becoming in touch with, with pagan, paganism, you know, spirituality, and, and uh the land being a spirit and nature spirits and, and you know read Magic of Finhorn [?] and got very blow away by Finhorn and, and all the, you know spirits and magic and, and all that stuff. So that's what I really wanted to practice and, you know, I just came here and it was ready, you know, heh, this is like an open field, you know ready to do it. And uh, they were just looking, you know, for somebody to-, and we were, we all doing it, but everybody had, you know, other people had so many other things to do... Well by that time it was Ann, Laird, and there was another person, but during that very first summer I was here there was, like, ten of us most of the time and they were all people from East Wind and Twin Oaks. Some of them were from the group I was with at Twin Oaks, and some and then there's ex-East Winders who had left and... So it was a large group that first summer. And we were just, uh, trying to figure out, you know, what we were, what we were about. And uh, so my daily life... The winter time, I, I skate and ski a lot. I, I love s-, you know I've never, I never cross-country skied before I came here so, and, but ice-skating of course I was, I did back home.

Q: Do you have a pond?

A: Yeah. We have several ponds. In fact now I have-, now-, in the first years we didn't but now we have hockey sticks they get up, up from Canada. [laughs] So we play hockey and, [laughs] Kiwi [?], Kiwi and Laird and I, and then there-, and then we have some neighbors come around and play and we just fool around.

Q: Do you think your, your Mennonite background, at all, um, prepared you for living in community? Was, was the Mennonite community you lived in a tight community?

A: Well, yes and no. Um, huh, it was-, it was a very consolidated community, I mean, what, wh-, when the Mennonites moved, moved to Canada it was, it was in the 1870's -- it bought up a whole tract of land, everything. So where I-, we lived was just only Mennonites. So I went to a public school where it was all Mennonites. You know, and, but we lived right on the edge, we, we'd called it a reservation, a Mennonite reservation, 'cause that's what they called it when they bought it. And, um, of course there was an Indian reservation, but we were the Mennonite-, we had, we had the East River and the West

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

River reservations.

Q: What part of Canada is that?

A: Uh, this is Manitoba. And it's like, we were just uh, uh, our farm was four miles from North Dakota, eleven miles from Minnesota. So.

Q: Hutterite country too, huh?

A: Yeah, umm-hmm. Right. A lot of Hutterites up there too. And, so, we were, we were right on the edge of the Mennonite community, so we knew, you know, we were, we were that I know were Mennonites and we had, you know I didn't learn, I didn't know any English when I went to school. We had our own dialect. But then, just right next to us were the French-Canadians. And there was, there was a lot of rivalry, I mean, between us. And, and we just, there's no visiting. So anyways. But the Mennonites, okay -- we were, it's such a mixed bag, because the extended family was very important. Both my mother and my father's side, you know, there's extended families, and they-, everybody lived around us, so we always had family gatherings. We had probably five, six family gathering during the year, and you know, just, and all the grandchildren would come out and play together. And yet, there would be all kinds of tensions and, and weird stuff between people in the, in the general Mennonite community. I mean there was like... I mean one of the, one of the-, one of our jokes, and later on when I went to, when I went to a Mennonite Bible college, was that, you know, we didn't, you know, Mennonites are pacif-, uh, pacif-, uh, pacifists. [laughs] Pacifists. And, we don't go to war because we're so busy fighting each other. I mean, there's so many religious groups in churches! We're just fighting each other so constantly, we don't have time to be fighting anybody else! I mean, it's awful!

Q: That's kind of sad! [laughing]

A: It is! [laughing] It is. It really is. I mean there was... but they had, you know, there's all kind of minute divisions. And my next door neighbors, for example, moved to Bolivia in the '60s because they, they, uh, because some people put electricity in their church. And so there's this church split-off, and then they-... Well, the main factor was, which it always is, that, when, anytime the group is there for a very long period of time, they can see that the young people, they're going to lose their young people. The young people are going to go to town, to get radios, etcetera. And, then, they're going to lose them. And so, then they move the small group, you know, 12 families or whatever, move to this, valley in Bolivia, where they would be only, they'd have to depend on each other, and they'd be a tight-knit little community again. And so, they've done, you know, th-, you know, I mean -- the Mennonites aren't unique in this of course. Just like any religious community, you know, it's, it's a very common thing, where they go off and they spawn off and spawn off and, and tha-, and very often it's the poorer people --they always say it's religious reasons, but really when you look, it's economically too. They don't have the money to buy the land. And uh, so it's very often the poor people that move and, it's exactly the people that moved from Canada from Russia, and they moved to, they moved to Kansas in... in it was all in the same migration, 1870s. So, but, so we-, there was a lot of community feeling there, and there was a lot of divisions too, you know. So I don't know about community, I mean, some things feel real natural to me, and like, my mother, for example, she's come and she can just, she can identify both with the rural aspect and the living in group, living in a community, and , and, you know, being there for each

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

other, she can just... empathizes at a, you know, a real feeling level. And my father just, you know... "For this you went to school? All these years?" You know, I mean like he went, you know he never went past 8th grade, 9th grade, you know. And uh, so I guess he always thought I was going to do something... exotic. You know? [laughs]

Q: Well how did you get from a Mennonite Bible college to studying African history at, at Michigan State?

A: Well, uh, I guess I was i-, I was in Bible college for two years. By the second year I was getting, I mean it was very exciting for me... intellectually. But there must have been some element of boredom, of, you know, like, this is a loss, and I just needed-, I wanted... bigger adventure, something. And so I went on a j-, Council of Mennonite colleges, had what they called a junior year abroad program. And I went to, uh, Nigeria, and did my junior year in Nigeria. And uh, that just blew my mind wide open. It was like, all these peop-, you know, anyways -- realizing that there were people from a very different culture, you know, who were not Christian, and yet, I couldn't condemn them to hell. You know? [both laugh] That kind of stuff. And, and I just, oh I just loved the culture. And it was something that I just really, I made really really good friends there. And uh, so then, when I came back it was just -- and I studied a lot of African courses while I was there. Um, but I did my masters in European history and taught for a year in college, down in Georgia and I realized, yes, I wanted to teach! And then, so then I went for my Ph. D and I always knew I wanted to do African history. And uh, but at first I was a little afraid to because I didn't want to specialize so narrowly unless I realized that I really wanted to teach, but then I decided I did but then, while I was in that, in that program, you know, it just seemed like -- I realized that, if I was in academ-, in academia I would always be, you know, people would always be moving, -- I would be moving, or else the students would be moving. And there were be this constant flux of people. And what I really -- then all of a sudden I learned that I yearned for community. And I didn't, I didn't conceptualize it as community, but I yearned for human relationships that would last-, that would last. And it was the first place -- Michigan, four years -- was the first place I've been any, anyplace for longer than two years since leaving, you know, leaving my parents' house, and so all of a sudden I realized, oh , I'd built some real friendships. And then I was leaving it, and then, and that this was going to be my life if I stayed in, in that kind of life. And I realized that that 's not what I wanted to do, and uh, thi-, so there's this whole idea of community and living.

Q: Is that when you became a Marxist?

A: Yeah. But it was, yeah. Umm-hmm.

Q: Then did you kind of, um, I don't know, "dump" isn't the right word, but sort of dump your Christian, your Anabaptist background?

A: Well, that had, I did that earlier. I did that, uh, when I, I was in uh, I guess I when I first, when I came back from, from Africa, I was, I went back to uh, I graduated from Newton and ... uh, Bethel College in Newton, Kansas?

Q: Yeah, I know where that is, sure.

A: Yeah, that's where I went for my senior year, so, and, that, that was real culture shock. I mean, it's

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

just culture shock for me being back... in America. I mean, Canada, America, you know the culture's basically the same. But, after having been in Africa, it was just like, it, it was real culture shock. And I just, I floundered, and I floundered, and I just couldn't really ... figure out what I was doing. But in that meantime, I pretty much lost my, my Christianity. And then next year in uh, I did my masters in Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, and then I just basically, you know, became an existentialist and, you know, and just realized that Christianity was, you know, all shallow, it, or at least what I had been, what my Christianity had been. And uh, so I left that then, and so. And then Marxism came really more, oh, the middle of my Ph.-, you know, graduate student in Michigan, and it was mo-, really part of a, oh, it was a s-, Southern Africa liberation support group, you know? But it was just, you know, one of many, umpteen groups in the left, it's kind of like the Mennonite churches : all these division on the left you know? [laughs] Everybody have, we all had our own little cause, right? But we, you know, we talked to each other enough, and, and you know, the analysis was that revolution was, basically Marxian I guess. [unintelligible] revolution.

Q: Would you describe yourself as pagan now?

A: Yeah. I do.

Q: Do you guys have any pagan rituals?

A: Well, we don't do, you know, uh... No. I don't know. I mean at various times when people here, some people come, they, they, they, it becomes, we do more of a traditional, you know, what we call a ritual. But, the ritual, you know, we do, you know, the holding hands at night before dinner, and a lot times we'll sing a song. Um, that's, that's about the most ritual-, I mean we do, you know, steady ritual that we've done. And that's really not really... it's no more pagan than it is Christian, really, you know I mean. [laughs] Um, but the feeling behind it, I think very often is, and when we sing songs they're more, they're pagan songs. And it's like, well we do, lot of us, the, the idea is that we, when we take a moment of quiet to, and, and you know, instead of being thankful to God, we're thankful to the Mother, or you know, it's the same idea. But it's, it's earth centered, and we try to, and, and also a lot of times appreciating each other. Uh, you know, [unintelligible] good energy, and trying to build good energy. And so it's, you know, which is not particularly pagan, it could be just Buddhist or Christian, or anything else. Um, so pagan, for me, it's, my, I guess my paganism is, is more in, in my, just my orientation to my life and how I view, how I view our farm, and, and life, you know, on the earth, or my, my, uh, my connection to the land. That all, it feels pagan to me, and that's, it's something that we don't, you know I've... more like five, eight years ago, let's say when I was, I think, first, when I first called myself pagan or became, you know, read a lot of books on that, I really yearned for, to create ritual. I mean, I shou-, thought I should have some kind rituals to do these kinds of things. And uh, somehow I never could come up with them. And now, for me a lot of that niche is filled by, by biodynamics. So I do biodynamic farming, and do all the preparations. And there's a lot of spirituality in that. And whereas Steiner talks about Christian -- and he still talks about God and Jesus and all that -- and I don't, I don't read that part of Steiner, you know. Really, for me, I feel the, the energy, and the, energy forces and stuff, but the, the symbols of doing, of taking, you know, the manure into the cow horn and burying it in the ground, and then digging it up and doing the crystals and all that stuff -- that, those symbols fit for me, somehow. I mean, I, they could be any, and I realize they could be any symbols, you know. And I always think that

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

the ideal would be if I did my own. I should have my own, or we should have our own together, somehow. But, it's so hard to create your own culture, I mean, you just totally start all over, you know, it's like, and, and we haven't done it. And it hasn't happened, and so, so in the meantime, biodynamics fills that, that niche for me I think.

Q: Have you had any giant vegetables like they have at Fendhorn?

A: No. [laughs]

Q: No. Have you tried? [laughs]

A: No. We always had neighbors who had, who had cocked us by growing the big pumpkins, biggest pump-, you know. And I think for awhile maybe Anna did some of those, earlier, before I-, but no, we haven't uh, we haven't ... I mean I suppose we have had some, some giant things but uh, nothing that comes to mind right now. You know. Or, uh, it feels, it feels to us that, that the land is being more productive, and, than it used to be. And, but you know, I'm sure we could uh see the same results if we used a lot of chemical fertilizers. [laughs] But we don't, and so uh, so the feeling we get from it is, you know, and yet, it's, it's not, it's not, it's not the glowing thing, you know people are not flocking to our farms saying, "Oh my God, how are you doing this?" you know, that's not happening either. [laughing] So, so it's, it's... there's a lot of humbleness or humility that we have to deal with in terms of, not being, you know, totally in touch with the spirits, they're not just really blessing us [laughs], so much that it's obvious to all of our neighbors, you know. So.

Q: Well now you've um, been involved in intentional communities now for about 20 years I guess? Close to that, huh? How do you feel about that?

A: Yeah. Well mostly I'm just really um... mostly really really good. I mean there have been, there have been times, I haven't had a recent one so much, but, uh, throughout those times been times when I think, oh, I'm really, you know, I'm really not suited for this, really, when you come down to it, because, I have these feelings of, I have these, you know, uh, negativity about, you know, people come in who want to join, and I have these feelings of negativity, I'm always looking for faults, rather than their good side. And, and really, you know, I'm really not suited to this, you know? Why do I have all this negativity? And uh, and especially, say, at three years ago, uh, this was two years ago, when we got Mildred Gordon to come out for our first community thing? I mean, she, she helped, I mean I was just tremendously helped by that process, because, I-, and I realized how mu-, uh, really how much negativity I had built up. And, I had, that I had a-, you know, how much was in me. And, and how it was really fouling up my, um, the expression of who I was, and who I wanted to be and, and how I wanted to be, and um. . . a lot of it was, was symbolized or somewhat centered around my relationship with Laird. And, and at the same time, what was wonderful about her, about her visit is that, is that she made me realize the potential, how much, you know, that all those, all that negativity was just, you know, look on the other side of it, was just potential. And uh, and working through it, you know this really was not that, you know, not that very odd, I mean it's very, a very common thing that we all do. And that, and that all we need is, well, not all, what we need is , we need some basic tools to work through those things, and, and good will, and, and so that just, it's, it's really been a big boost for me and my community energy, and uh, was just that process, went through the process with her. And uh, and what we've been doing since

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

then. And uh, so ba-, let's see... and had been times, like there was, I think, you know, An-, Ann and I have, you know, we started back then, you know, we've since, when I first came to Sandhill, and we, you know, just, we never had a, a commitment ceremony, we've never made a commitment, you know, and people are always doing , you know, those, and we've never done that, and so, sometimes we think, "Well, what does that mean?" or, you know, "What's the-." But anyways, um, somewhere, in there, you know, probably about, after I was there five years, or so somewhere in there, there was time when I realized that, you know, that if, that if it came to it, I would, uh, if I had to choose, you know, that I would probably choose to live with her rather than to live in community, if I had to make that choice. And so that was a very, I mean a humbling relationship, a humbling realization the way that, you know that, oh, my, my commitment to community isn't all that, you know, I mean is not the first thing. But that, long term relationship is. But, and yet, it always felt like such a false thing, just to think of it that way, because, you know, of course I didn't have to choose. But then I realiz-, but if I did choose, that's, that's what it would be. And I kno-, you know, now, I haven't thought about it in those terms for a long time and I don't, you realize that I usually don't have to, and I don't really know where I would come down with it now, you know. But it was, a, you know, so I can't say, "Oh yes, community forever! For me!" you know, that's, uh,

Q: Do you see yourself growing old here then?

A: I do. But then I did, I saw myself growing old in Guatemala too! [laughs] I, I , I get attached... fairly easily, I think, to places. And then even when I was at Twin Oaks, I was just really in love with it for awhile. Just, I just, glowing, and I just really thought, uh, but,

Q: Have you [unintelligible] a plan for retirement? Like, do you set aside for money or anything like that? Or do you...

A: No. No. No, we haven't, and uh, I mean... for awhile we joked, that we had a bunch of walnut trees in the land, that that was our old-age retirement. But a lot of those have died. [laughs] Those walnuts died and we just, of course, there's still more coming on. But I think partly, I, I think partly th-, it's, maybe why we haven't, well, first of all we hav-, we don't, we just haven't' had the money. And we don't-, to do-, to get the money to do, to set aside, we would have to do outside jobs. We just, have not been able to do it. Um, but also, is that, the fact is that, that uh, I've, I've been getting money from my folks, uh, and Laird's been getting money from his family, and, and Ann's family, she knows she's going to get money, she not you know, and so, we know there's a lot of inheritance money coming along and so, I think that takes the edge off of, yeah. And the three of us have been, you know, the ones who've been here, uh, you know by far the longest. And so, I, I think it's, it's, it's coming up more as an issue now, I mean, gradually, with, with other people being here, and wondering, you know, "What is our long term future here?" right? And so, it-, it's, we've talked more about it I think the last year or so than we ever, or mayb-, yeah, more seriously, at least.

Q: As farm manager, you pretty much stay here, don't you? You don't do a lot of travelling? Is that true?

A: Well, I've uh, I've been travelling more, I mean, well actually I've always travelled I think. I mean but I used to travel in the winter a lot. But I've uh, I've done some in the summer now too, and I've-, I've been trying, you know, I've been trying to, uh, well, uh, so this last spring I became, uh, I did a training course

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

for, for inspect, to become an organic inspector, and so I did that. And so I've done a couple of inspections this year. And, you know, I've just playing around with how much I want to do that, you know, in years to come, because that is done of course in the summer months when , you know, the farm load is the heaviest. And so part of my idea was that I would, you know, that I'm, I mean partly I just want to be part of a larger movement, and, so that fulfills, that. And then that -

Q: What sort of movement do you want to be a part of? The old [unintelligible] ...or is it other things?

A: Well, I mean, that's part of it, yeah. I mean of course the communities movement is, is, that's, you know, I mean and I like to go, I, I generally go to Twin Oaks every two years or so. And, so, to keep a-, you know, 'cause I lived there so I still have a lot of those connections there. Not a lot of the people I go to visit are, live outside of Twin Oaks but live in that area still. And uh, so it's the communities movement, of course, that's, that's one. And then my family, my biological family, and Ann's family. And, but there, ye-, they're farming, you know it's seems like there's, I have a-, I have a connection there that, I feel like uh, I've learned a lot from, and it's been very important in my life, and it's a place where I think I can fi-, I can fit into, somehow. And, you know, that, and, community, you know, also, that, that's, that those, th-, try to link those two. And, and my teacher is, uh, the people who ran the cour-, the course, they, they, they're from a, from a farming community in, in LeSota [?]. With Sequoia Valley.

Q: Is that an intentional community?

A: It's a la-, it's, well, yeah. it's-, but they're not, they're not income sharing. There's like, there's like 20 or, between, usually between 20 and 25 people living there, but there's individual households, and they all live on the same land.

Q: So almost like a co-housing community or something, or land trust, or something like that?

A: Yeah, something like that. Right. And so, you know, so we, I share that with them, and they, you know, they're both full-time, you know, the-, they're a couple and they're both, the-, they now are full-time inspectors, or that's what they do to make a living, besides, you know. And so, it's like, yeah, you know, agriculture and communities... is, is, that's, those are the two things that are very...very important to me. Or they just fit together. So that's how I, I mean, I see myself doing that in the future, and uh, you know both here and ... but also, you know, seeing ourselves as part of a larger-, And I get, you know, just, visiting other farms you get so inspired too, and, and it's like networking, that 's what it feels like, you know. Just like, "Oh, do you know so-and-so? Well they've had these kind of problems..." and you know, you've got those, and it's-, some of those are community issues and some of them are, are, agriculture issues, and, it's like, all th-, you know the farms that I went to see, they were very interested in community and they've but they've, you know, they've either been a community or they're part of a community or they're, you know, alternative folks, and they're just -- anytime, if you're organic, you know, I mean, you've got, you're weird and you find yourself, you find the other weird people around. And you, you see, you know, the alternative folks, and so, it's a community, and so, it's like we're all, we're all part of the same, same building that, the same network, and, and uh, you know it's just different people clustered in different areas. And this is just, you know, the area that, that's min-, that I feel most comfortable in, and, and , can , can contribute.

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

Q: Sandhill's lasted for a long time. What do you see as its success? Its keys to success?

A: Well, this is, [laughs] uh... it's kind of embarrassing, because, you know, uh, one of our, one of our... goals or visions is that we were a self-sufficient community or, -- but I think one of the-, that we've outside money coming in from our families, as, as, that's what, that's what it feels like to me, you know? If we would have had to, to do outside jobs, it would've felt a whole lot more fragile, and it would've been a different community I suppose. And I'm not sure if we would've continued here. So, to me I think that's, it's a, it's a pretty critical... factor in, in hav-, in coming to terms with it, like, whe-, when, before I came here, and even when I first got here I guess, uh, the community did not accept money from people who gave it, or, just on loan or something. We didn't want to because we didn't want to feel it was somehow dirty money because, you know, how did they make that money? I mean, they probably -- somebody got exploited, right? [laughs} If somebody has extra money they got it because somebody exploited somebody else, you know? It was that whole, tha-, you know, political philosophy that we were, that we absorbed, and so, and so coming to terms with that and, and learning to, to see the positive sides of how we can use money that, that we don't earn ourselves, it was a big step for a lot of us to work through. And uh, and we did it, and I think we did it and it, you know, it took fits and starts, and, but so that's one thing. And um, ... what else? Oh let's see, uh, Laird and Ann are both born in the year of the ox, the Chinese ox. [laughs] Faithful and steady and they'll just keep plowing forever, and they can just go, you know. Maybe that's another, uh, you know, I'm in the year of dog, I'm the faithful one, you know? Just faithful. So. [laughs] Uh. I don't know. I really don't know. You know, it's like, because, we-, you know, we've seen other groups that looked very similar... uh, you know, whether it's Dandelion, or, you know, Oakwood, which is fo-, forty miles away from here, you know? And, you know, that at various times had a lot more people there than we did. And uh,

Q: Now what's Oakwood? I'm not familiar with that?

A: It's ... it was not, it's --

Q: It doesn't exist anymore?

A: Not as a community. It was the same kind of thing where there was peop-, different households sharing the same land, you know. It was a very small -- but the-, and they-, they all made their living outside of the community, you know? But uh, now there's just one couple living there. And --

Q: What was the time period for Oakwood?

A: Uh, well let's see, Sandhill started '74, so they were probably like, '74 to '85...

Q: Okay. Wow, quite a while then.

A: Yeah, you know, I mean it's, various, yeah, various stages and various people, but, I would say yeah, till about '85, I mean. You know, so we had, we had a lot of... connections with them. And uh, so, I mean that's just another, you know, there's, you know there's so many of those, of Oakwoods, you know? Uh,

Q: Have there been in this area?

A: Well there was several others, uh, even before I came there was a group right on the Iowa border, just into Iowa. And uh,

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

Q: Do you remember its name?

A: No, uh, Laird and Ann, it was already gone by the time I came here. But Laird and Ann probably remember the name. They, they-, so there's a group there, um, right around here, I think that's it.

Q: Okay...

A: So, but, in just, you know, those groups didn't and uh, who knows why-, you know, I don't know why. Uh, but I think the fact that, that, you know, the fact that they had to work outside for income I mean that just puts a lot of tension. And there's not as much connection between people.

Q: Umm-hmm. Yeah. You know, before when you were listing off the names of some communities, you listed one that I heard of before? It's called the Rocks?

A: Oh, it's, it's, yeah, it's gone too. Uh, it was well it down there -- I think, I'm not sure maybe, it was Patch Adams. Okay, Patch Adams was part, he was part of a new group, they were called the Zanies. Back then it was, uh when I first came to Twin Oaks in uh, so it would've been '79, and, and the Rocks was actually where the community was centered. And some of the people lived in Washington D.C., and some of the people lived at, at the Rocks. And they had, you know, they had [tape ends]... the history of the Rocks... I went there for a giant, oh was it a rock concert in uh,... oh yeah, it was in the summer of '79. You know, a lot of Twin Oakers went there. But, yeah, who knows what, I mean

Q: And has that kind of moved into Gazoo Height [?]

A: I guess so, I mean some of the same people, yeah. Like, like Patch, and J.J., I don't know if J.J. was part of the Rocks. Probably not. Um, Wild Man was... was at the Rocks and then at the... so yeah. Some of those same people that were, yeah. Become Gazoo Heights I guess.

Q: We're particularly interested in chronicling the period between '65 and '75, and we're always looking for the names of people or of groups to visit. Do you have um, any ideas of people, like, if you were doing this project that you would definitely want to talk to or, places you would want to visit?

A: Sixty-five to '75? Uh, well, '75 is just when I was just, just starting, right. Just starting, uh...

Q: Well our time periods aren't that set in stone; I mean,

A: Well yeah, I'm just trying to think of early times when, uh,

Q: I suppose Patch Adams would be one, right?

A: Yeah, yeah that was interesting. That was an interesting, uh, ... place, the Rocks. Um, ... when I came here, when I can here to visi-, course that was, so that would've been '79, there was a group in Kentucky, or Tennessee that I really wanted to visit and I can't remember now what I did, but they were really... strident Marxist, uh, at least their rhetoric was.

Q: Do they still exist?

A: I, I don't think so. I never went there. I never got there. Um, and I'm not even sure they were, you know, by the time I got here, if they were still, functioning. So uh,

Interview with Stanley Hildebrand

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 8, 1995

Q: Well maybe, um, someone at the Farm, or Harvey would know about them, if they're down in Tennessee.

A: Or, I think they were actually in Kentucky. But uh, no, I can't think of any, uh, ...

Q: Would it be good and try and talk to a person or two that were involved in that, that, what's it called, Arrowwood? The place that was nearby here?

A: Uh, uh, uh... Oakwood.

Q: Oakwood. Oakwood.

A: Well, uh, I mean Kent and Mary-Jo were, they uh, an-, Ann knows a lot about their early history, uh Laird does too, um, you know they are fifteen miles from here, I don't know, uh... about their early days. They were, ... you know they were there, and they're, they're still there. They're the only ones that are still there.

Q: Okay. Alright. Well, I think that's about it.