Interview with Glenna Green
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
March 24, 1997

**Q:** This is Monday, March 24th, and an interview with Glenna Green in McMinville [?], Oregon. I'm interested in hearing a little bit about your background and how you got interested in communal living?
**A:** Well, really, I sort of stumbled on it. Although, I was interested, but where I ended up was sort of accidental. I was hitch hiking through from California, where I grew up, with some friends, and met some people in Seattle, where we stayed for a little while in a communal sort of household near the university in Seattle. They were, some of them were coming down to Oregon to stay on a commune out near Willamida [?], and we decided to go with them. We spent the summer there, and I ended up at the commune across the valley later on, which was Ithilian, which is where I stayed. It was more, it was quite a different commune, more my style.

**Q:** And what was the name of the first one?
**A:** It was Green Parrot Goat Farm.

**Q:** What wasn't your style about that one?
**A:** It was composed of a biker community, and there was a lot of alcohol. Eventually, we were all arrested for the marijuana that was being grown on the hill. It was just a little socially wild for me.

**Q:** So you found out about Ithilian, and --?
**A:** Well, we had done some social interchange, and so I knew they were over there. Then I met someone that was staying at Ithilian, and that was how I ended up going over there. We didn't stay together, but that was how I ended up there.

**Q:** And where was it?
**A:** It's about 20 miles west of here, in the hills.

**Q:** I bet it's pretty.
**A:** It is.

**Q:** When was it that you ended up in Ithilian?
**A:** I came to Oregon in 1970, in the summer. I spent that first summer at Green Parrot. In the winter, I moved over to Ithilian.

**Q:** Can you tell me a bit about Ithilian, like its size, who was living there, things like that?
**A:** Well, the core group had originated in the Bay Area -- Berkeley. Most of the people had met through anti-war movement, and they had lived together in a house in Berkeley and decided to move to Oregon and came looking for the land. They bought about 70 acres up on the mountain. That was the core. So it was based on a war resistance.

**Q:** Do you know how they came up with the money to buy the 70 acres?
**A:** At that time, 70 acres was really pretty inexpensive here. I wish I'd had a little more money, I would've bought some myself. But, so it wasn't all that expensive. The land had been logged, and it was not prime farmland, so in the eyes of a lot of people, it didn't have much value left to it.

**Q:** Do you know how they worked out the deal? Was it in one person's name?
**A:** They incorporated as a church. And the church of Ithilian is still a legal entity in the state of Oregon, and owns the land.

**Q:** Were there any buildings on the land when they bought it?
**A:** When they bought it there were no buildings. They bought it from an older couple who were then our neighbors. It had been part of their farm. So they retained the buildings on their farm and sold these 70 acres.

**Q:** So did people live in tepees and things, or did they start building?
**A:** Well, the first summer they lived in tents, and built a big shop. Basically a pull [?] building. When it started to rain, a lot of people moved into that. They built a kitchen area that had a roof, and sort of two sides, but was open on two ends. It was a wood cookstove in there, and tables, and food preparation area. We cooked there the first winter.

**Q:** And you would actually sleep in the tents in the wintertime?
**A:** There were a few people who were still sleeping out. A couple of people, some people had started to build little cabins out in the woods, and they slept in those. But a lot of people slept upstairs in the shop.

**Q:** How many folks were there at this time?
**A:** I can't really remember exactly how many people were there the first winter I was there. Maybe around 30. The number of people staying there at any given time varied a lot. There were a lot of affiliates at large that came and went. But there were usually 30-50 people to feed at dinnertime.

**Q:** That's an undertaking! Were there children as well?
**A:** There were a few children. There were 5 children who were -- no, six -- six children who were pretty much there all the time. Which isn't very many for all those adults. And no more were born after the first year.
**Q:** So you must've got there fairly near the beginning.
**A:** Yeah, within a year.

**Q:** So it started about '69 maybe, or '70?
**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** How did the finances work out? Were you expected to pool your income?
**A:** A few people had jobs outside, and put most of their money into the group funds. It depended on who it was that was working, [unintelligible] . . . what percentage they kicked in . It wasn't, there wasn't a hard and fast rule about it.

**Q:** So when you came, you didn't have to necessarily contribute everything?
**A:** No, and it was a good thing, because when I came, I had nothing. So, except a few skills.

**Q:** I take it you worked on the land then, you would cook and help build, things like that?
**A:** Garden. Animal husbandry. I worked a little. I didn't have very highly marketable skills. I didn't work out very much. Other people who had more marketable skills worked outside.

**Q:** So did you try and raise a lot of your own food, then?
**A:** We tried. We grew a big garden, and we had some animals.

**Q:** And would you eat all your meals together?
**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What sorts of things would you eat?
**A:** Well, lot of brown rice and potatoes. Peanut butter.

**Q:** Were you vegetarians?
**A:** No. I grew up on a farm, and I -- it's all the same to me to kill a chicken as to pull up a carrot. There were some vegetarians, and we ate a lot of vegetarian meals, because that much meat is hard to come by. You don't want to spend a lot of money. People would give us road killed deer, and lame sheep, and we weren't proud.

**Q:** And you did have a little bit of chickens and livestock?
**A:** Yeah. We kept chickens, and we had some goats, and later we had a cow. Raised some pigs, those kinds of things.

**Q:** So eventually, were there a bunch of little cabins scattered out around the land?
**A:** Yeah, people gradually built cabins all over.

**Q:** And then was there a common house, or was that just --?
**A:** And then a dome was built, that was the community house. No one slept there. It was the kitchen and the bathroom, and the livingroom and the library. That was a two-story, 35 or 40 foot dome.

**Q:** Did you have a well? Is that how you got your water?
**A:** We had a spring.

**Q:** Heated with wood?
**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did you have an outhouse?
**A:** Until the dome was finished, which was quite a while. Then we had a latrine.

**Q:** But once the dome was finished, you had actual indoor --?
**A:** We had actual indoor plumbing, but we still cooked on a wood stove.

**Q:** You actually cooked on a wood stove too?
**A:** Actually, I like it. I miss it. When we moved away, I continued to cook on a wood cookstove for 10 more years.

**Q:** So you didn't have propane or anything like that?
**A:** No. There was an electric stove, but I don't remember ever using it myself.

**Q:** What did you guys do for hot water for bathing or something?
**A:** We had a tank hooked up to the cookstove. Later, an electric hot water heater also went into service. But later.

**Q:** So you had electricity?
**A:** Yeah, we did.

**Q:** And you just had one bathroom that everybody would use for bathing?
**A:** Yes. With no walls. Guests sometimes had a problem with that. The latrine was totally open as well.

**Q:** Was that pretty cold in the wintertime?
**A:** It was pretty cold in the winter.

**Q:** Is this kind of in the mountains? I don't really know what this area is like.
**A:** It's somewhere -- I don't really know how high it is there, it's maybe 750 to 1,000 feet.

**Q:** So it would get pretty chilly then.
**A:** Yeah, it's a different climate there, actually. It's far enough west that it has some coast weather, fog would come in at night. And it's colder there than it is here. This is the banana belt. When you've lived out there. Tomatoes get ripe in the summer here.

**Q:** So was it a challenge to grow things out there then?
**A:** It could be. Because the season was short. And nights are cool in the summer, so things that need a warm season don't always get that.

**Q:** Now you mentioned before that the group was kind of founded on the anti-war movement. Did that sort of ideology continue?
**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Did you become politically involved here?
**A:** No, not a lot. To some degree. Some people more than others. One of the founding members is still the editor of the state anti-war newsletter, in Salem, and is still very active politically.

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**Q:** Did you guys have any rituals or any holidays, things that you celebrated, or things that you did regularly together as a group?
**A:** Yeah. We had a weekly meeting, business meeting, where we worked, supposedly kept talking until everyone agreed. And then we also had -- I don't know what you would call it -- they weren't exactly rituals, but we would do things that we planned together. We had a two-day party every summer, where we invite everyone, all the extended family, to come and celebrate. And we had, for quite a while, a weekly gathering. I can't even remember at the moment what we called it. But different people would volunteer to lead this, and we would just do something together, whatever the person chose to do, whether it was readings, or playing silly games, or a discussion about something, it was just something we did together that wasn't a business meeting. Because sometimes they could be stressful. Eventually, for awhile, we didn't call them business meetings, we called them a "potato", to try to take the stress out of it.

**Q:** Did you have to do anything just sort of in form to qualify as being a church?
**A:** You have to file the legal papers.

**Q:** But you didn't have to say that you were holding services or anything?
**A:** Well, you have to file a statement of some sort, I can't remember what they call it. I have a copy of those papers somewhere. A mission statement sort of thing. But it's pretty loose. Nobody reads it and says, "Well, this isn't a church!" They don't do that.

**Q:** Did people have to pay rent to stay there?
**A:** No. If someone had shown up and had just really been blatantly living off of us and not chipping in in any way, then they would've been asked to leave. People usually became uncomfortable if they weren't participating anyway, and didn't stay long.

**Q:** Was there any sort of official membership process?
**A:** Well, if someone wanted to stay after a visit, then we would discuss it in a meeting. And decide whether they could stay or not.

**Q:** And you'd have to agree on it?
**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Consensus?
**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did you usually do that?
**A:** Usually did that. I can't remember ever saying no.

**Q:** Did you have any sort of work sharing system?
**A:** The kitchen duties were fairly rigid rotation. Everybody wanted to get fed. And so when your rotation came up, you needed to be there and do it, or find someone to substitute for you. That usually wasn't a problem.

**Q:** That was the only thing that was organized?
**A:** That was the only thing that was really rigidly organized. And even that was sort of flexible. The people who had jobs outside didn't do kitchen duty.

**Q:** Did that work pretty well?
**A:** Most of the time, yeah.

**Q:** Was there any sort of leadership structure, formal or informal?
**A:** In any group, there's someone who's more outgoing or forceful than another. People are natural leaders and natural followers. But not officially.

**Q:** Did you guys have any cottage industries?
**A:** A little. There were a few people who did little crafty things. They weren't big money makers.

**Q:** Was there ever any plan to try and have something be the group's industry to make money?
**A:** We discussed it.

**Q:** But that's about as far as it went?
**A:** That's about as far as it went.

**Q:** How did you deal with the kids? Did you home school them?
**A:** We did that. Some of the parents operated a home school with some other people in the area. People who weren't living at the commune. I think it was just for a year. They rented an old school building, one of the country schools, and held classes there. I think it operated for just a year. I didn't have children, so it's kind of hard for me to -- and then they went to public school.

**Q:** Did the group have any philosophy on childrearing, how it should be handled?
**A:** Oh, we always fought about the children.

**Q:** Did you? Were the kids supposed to be considered everybody's kids, or was it pretty clear --?
**A:** They were clearly the responsibility of their parents. But we all were pretty close to the kids. They had their parents who were the final authority, but they could go to anybody, and did.

**Q:** Did families live together in cabins?
**A:** Pretty much. After the main dome was built, then a little miniature was built next to it. Children lived in there, all together, after that.

**Q:** And would they have an adult that stayed in with them?
**A:** No. At that point, by the time they were living there, probably the oldest one was 10 at least. And she was pretty responsible.

**Q:** Did you guys get lots of visitors?
**A:** Yes. Lots.

**Q:** Were you sort of on the hippie trail?
**A:** Yes. There were a lot of nomads out there who would stop in for varying lengths of stay.

**Q:** And was that okay, or was that stressful?
**A:** Most of those people were welcome guests. They participated when they were there. Only occasionally would people, sometimes people would just show up that no one knew. They heard we were there, and just thought it would be a fun place to come and stay for awhile. Usually it either worked out well, or they left. I can't remember a time when people who didn't really fit in stayed for very long.

**Q:** That's unusual.
**A:** I don't remember it being a big problem.

**Q:** You had mentioned the first place you had stayed, Green Parrot Farm. Were there other communes in the area?
**A:** Yeah, there were. Probably some we didn't know about. But there was one that we had quite a bit of contact with, that was 10 or 15 miles northeast of here, called Altus.

**Q:** Really? How did they spell it?
**A:** It was called A-L-T-A, if I remember right. We socialized.

**Q:** So that was somewhere close to McMinville then?
**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** So was this part of Oregon, were there a lot of little communes scattered around this area?
**A:** I don't know if there were a lot. There were probably communities that we never knew about. But I think it was a popular place to come, because a lot of people were moving up here, and the land was pretty inexpensive. I grew up in California, and Oregon was where people wanted to go.

**Q:** What part of California did you grow up in?
**A:** I grew up in Northern California, in the North Valley. It was -- usually when I say "Northern California," people say, "Oh, San Francisco," but we were well north of there. Rural Northern California.

**Q:** Where there were probably a lot of communes?
**A:** I'm sure there were after I left. At the time, I wasn't aware of any rural communes. I was aware of some sort of communities living in a shared house, for instance, around the college town that we were near.

**Q:** Were you near Arcada?
**A:** No, Chico State. There were a few people there. Although there were people who went to Arcada who lived at Ithilian for awhile.

**Q:** Did you guys tend to attract college educated people?
**A:** The core people were university people, so there was a pretty high level of education at this place. We had engineers and a doctor of nuclear physics. Those kinds of things.

**Q:** What were your relations like with your neighbors in the surrounding community? I know you were probably pretty rural.
**A:** It was sometimes odd. The people at Green Parrot had been sort of confrontational. They seemed to enjoy roaring into town with their long hair and their motorcycles and scaring the locals. Which was one of the things which I couldn't really relate to. The people at Ithilian were trying really hard to be accepted. So it was quite a different attitude. And some people were curious, and made an effort to get to know us and were friendly. Other people remained hostile for awhile. But eventually, people got to know us.

**Q:** Did you ever have problems with the sheriff? Did they even stop in to see what was going on?
**A:** I can't remember ever feeling harassed. But we were very careful. There were a few drugs around, but very little. And we were very cautious, and didn't flaunt it. Most of us just sort of drifted out of that, after –

**Q:** You said you went through a bust. Was it being worried about that?
**A:** Well, yeah, we didn't want to have to go through that. But it wasn't being busted that made me not smoke dope. I just got tired of it. I had too much to do.

**Q:** What were attitudes like toward sex at the commune?
**A:** There was a lot of partner swapping. And when I first arrived, I had been through some of that myself. But by the time I moved to Ithilian, I had observed from my own life and from watching around me that it really didn't work very well. It was fine in theory, but it became obvious to me that people can't really handle that. No matter how hard they try to pretend that they can, it creates more trouble than it's worth.

**Q:** So did that sort of die down after awhile too?
**A:** No. It created a lot of tension, I think.

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**Q:** What were gender relations like? Like, in terms of worksharing, did the women do all the sort of traditional domestic work? How did that all get split up?
**A:** Well, unfortunately, people come into these situations knowing what they've been raised to know. So in general, the guys knew how to fix cars, and do carpentry and plumbing, and the women know how to cook and clean and take care of children. So there was a lot of division of labor along those lines. But the women assisted with construction as well. Pitched in -- we tried. To varying degrees -- everyone had different levels of ability.

**Q:** What sort of things were people reading, and what sort of music were people listening to?
**A:** We had a huge record collection. With of course, lots of rock and roll, but a lot of classical music, and jazz, and a tremendous variety of music, which was just glorious. I just loved it. We would occasionally have dance parties. The best dance parties -- just the best dance parties. So a really wide range of tastes in music. We also did a lot of reading, and when a really good book would come, then there were fights. It would be who could get up for breakfast and get a hold of the book first. They would just pass through, everyone would read it.

**Q:** Can you remember any books in particular that caught people's fancy?
**A:** Everyone read One Hundred Years of Solitude, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, and all those good novels that came out in those years. But classics would go around too. From time to time, someone would say, "Oh, this is really good. Have you read this?" And everyone would read it. And children would come up with really good books. We would all read World Doll [?]. There was a lot of reading in the evenings.

**Q:** I'm curious in terms of your involvement, what you thought the best part of living in the commune was?
**A:** I had led a sort of socially isolated life as a child. We lived on a farm, and I had my siblings, and we didn't -- in the summer I often didn't go anywhere at all. And so it was a real education to me to really get to know these people. I really enjoyed that. The sense of sharing, and there were opportunities that I really enjoyed. There were a lot of musically talented people. I can't play any instruments, but I loved singing with them, and I miss that a lot. That was a lot of fun. And there were a lot of things that felt really right to me about living communally. It's very inefficient for all these people to be living in their little houses, and it hardly takes any more time to cook for 50 than it does to cook for 5. Every little plot of land with its lawn mower, when one would do for the whole block if you'd just share, you know? These little things that are so inefficient about the way most of us live, that were so logical about communal living. But we weren't brought up to know how to live that way. That makes it hard to sustain.

**Q:** How about the flip side? What was the hardest part or the worst aspect?
**A:** I think the hardest part is probably learning to -- I think that what ultimately was the downfall of this commune was that it was too difficult for everyone to keep their egos in check when it was important. As well as -- what should I call it? Everyone had their own agenda, ultimately, and it was hard to focus on the group agenda. There were the people who were fighting for their little garden niche, and there were

the people who wanted to do this thing, and people who wanted to do that thing, and it was really hard to really reach a consensus about what our focus was. And so these people would go, "Oh, it would be really neat if we had a tractor." And then, "Our life would be so much easier if we had a big truck." This urge to accumulate stuff, I think, makes it hard to live simply. Which is what we would've had to do.

**Q:** So what did end up happening to Ithilian?
**A:** Well, the man that I was living with and I decided that we were going to leave. From my point of view, there were several reasons for that, the main ones being that my main interest there was the farm -- the garden, the animals, the kitchen, those were the things I was most interested in. But there was another couple there who were more -- they were just more forceful than I was, and it became their garden. And I got tired of working Maggie's farm, I don't know if you remember that line, and I wanted to feel like I could work in the garden without asking permission. It had reached that point, and it was just uncomfortable. That, and she had had an affair with one of the men that I had not been involved with. But for some reason when she -- I had felt like we were close until that point, and then we were not. And it was -- I never really understood why that was. But I'm -- but when we could no longer be close, then it wasn't fun anymore. I wasn't sure I could wait for it to be fun again. And I wanted to have children. I was 18 when I went there, and the older I got, the harder it was to think that I didn't want to have children. I wanted to have my own children, and I felt like I couldn't have them there, that there was -- it would be too much. There would be too many people who wouldn't want to have small children there. So we were ready to go, and had a date set, and a place we were going to move to. And then there was a Halloween party, great party, in the dome. Probably somebody left a cigarette ash smoldering in a sofa or something, and the dome burned down. Fortunately, there was no one sleeping there, and it didn't start until everyone left and went to bed. But that next winter was very hard for the people who stayed there.

**Q:** What year was that?
**A:** It must've been '74.

**Q:** So you stayed there about 4 years then?
**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** So did things kind of fall apart after that, or did they drag on for a while?
**A:** Oh, they dragged on for awhile, but people slowly left. Because the land is still owned by the church, the people who stayed are the people who have it now. It's still owned by the church, and they can't sell it without everyone approving.

**Q:** And who's "everyone." Are you still part of that?
**A:** Well, the people who would have to approve it are the people whose names are on the paper, filed with the state, as board members. And I'm not one of those. There's 5 or 7 people.

**Q:** So are the people who live there still acting as a commune?
**A:** No. They have -- one person built a new home on the foundation of the dome, it's not a dome, it's just octagonal. Another couple built a house that's more house-like than the cabins were, and are still living there. There are people who come and go a little bit. There's one single man in particular who I think comes and goes there a bit. I go by there almost every day. I'm a rural mail carrier and I deliver mail, but I haven't been up there and visited with the people who were there for quite a while, a couple years.

**Q:** So what do you feel you've learned from the experience, or what have you taken away, that maybe you use in your life today?
**A:** I learned a lot. The people who were there were intellectually stimulating. I had a real crash course in human nature. And I learned a lot about myself. I think it was quite an education.

**Q:** Are there any practices from the commune that you still do today? Like yoga or some way of cooking? Anything like that?
**A:** Well, I did learn how to cook there. I sort of knew how to cook when I got there, but there's nothing like having 50 people who expect you to produce dinner, to teach you how to be creative. So, yeah, I think it taught me, certainly, to be a fairly fearless cook. And I learned a lot of other things that I suppose are useful, that I may not have learned under other circumstances, because I participated in some construction. We had vehicles that were an adventure whenever you went out in them, because they might not get you home, and you'd have to deal with it. So I learned a lot about cars. And I learned a lot about, I mean, I already knew how to grow vegetables, but I learned a lot more. But mostly it was an education in people.

**Q:** Would you ever do it again?
**A:** I still think it's a very reasonable way to live, that it's a much easier -- it's easier on the land and it's easier on the people if they can just learn to hold their desires in check. And that's the hard part, is that we're pretty used to getting what we want in this culture.

**Q:** Would you consider Ithilian a success or a failure?
**A:** Ultimately, it was a failure. Because we were unable to stay together, and I think that's mainly for the reasons that I said, because we couldn't hold our desires in check. [tape ends] . . . not only were well-educated, but they'd grown up fairly materially comfortable. They could rough it for awhile, but ultimately they wanted a little more comfort. I think that's hard to give up for people.

**Q:** Do you think because of your farm background, maybe you were somewhat more prepared or more suited for that? The rural lifestyle?
**A:** I think so. There was one other woman who had grown up on a farm, but it was more of a, it was a wealthier farm. I think growing up in material comfort makes it really hard to give those things up. And once the adventure was, the phase of adventure was past, people sort of wanted to get comfortable again.

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**Q:** Does "Ithilian" mean something?
**A:** It's from the trilogy, The Lord of the Rings. It's the land between the dark and -- it's the narrow land that they pass through on their way to the dark lands. It didn't really mean anything in particular, we just liked it.

**Q:** Were you there when it was picked?
**A:** No. But I was a fan of Tolkien.

**Q:** Were there any particularly colorful people, or interesting anecdotes that might be fun for you to share?
**A:** I'm sure there would be lots. I'm not sure what to tell. I expect that there would be people who lived there who would find me not to be the best person to be discussing Ithilian. Because I wasn't there the whole time, I wasn't there when they started and I left before they died. I haven't seen most of the people who lived there. There are a few people in the area still. But they're mostly scattered. A couple who had a big wedding there, recently renewed their vows last fall, and invited everyone to a big party, in the Bay Area. I was unable to go. But a lot of people did. I expect there were a lot of -- because I wasn't there, I don't know how many Ithilians at large showed up, but I expect there was quite a few. I'm sure they had a good time. A few years ago, maybe 5 years ago now, there was a meeting, a lot of people came, to talk about the land, and what should be done with it, if anything. It became, I think, mostly just an opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with each other. I wasn't able to be there most of the time, because they held it on a Saturday, and I work on Saturdays. So I got there after work. But a lot of people are still in touch. I think that -- I know I feel like people who were there all the time when I was there, they feel like siblings to me. Any one of them could come to me at any time, like a sibling, and I would respond to them. We got to know each other really well. And I think most of the people who were there most of that time would feel the same way. There was some value to that too, getting to know people who were different from each other, that well. It's hard to do that.

**Q:** Well, I think I've gone through all my questions. Thank you.