

Interview with Deborah Sladen

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

July 16, 1996

**Q:** This is Tuesday, July 16th, and an interview with Deborah Sladen [?]. And I'd love to know a little bit about your background and how you ended up at Twin Oaks.

**A:** That's a good questions. I graduated from high school in 1970. Right away started, went directly from that to living in a communal household. Several of my friends were already doing that, at that time.

**Q:** Where were you living?

**A:** San Antonio, Texas. And then pretty quickly after that, Austin, Texas.

**Q:** So you started out by living in a communal household in San Antonio, and then you moved to Austin?

**A:** Right after high school. And then a lot of my friends went to college in Austin, it was the cooler place to be. So I lived in three or four communal households in 1970, and in '71. I was also real interested in communities already, looking through literature, and reading a lot of utopian literature. It sounded like a good argument to me, the whole alternative lifestyle, alternate way to live. In living in group houses in cities, I wasn't satisfied, because I wanted it to be a bigger deal, I wanted it to be more alternative, I wanted it to be more a different lifestyle than just living together in hippie households. I wanted it to affect more like the way I lived and the way people interacted, and the way they raised their children -- I wanted it to be a bigger deal. So, I started looking for a communities then. Even though I was enjoying the communal living experience of households, they were mostly not really that intentional, not really committed to anything, just places for people to live that were better than living alone. And a lot of the problems of community came up in those situations, but I wanted a bigger dream. I wanted it to be a bigger part of my life than just a place to live. Just about then, Cat's first book had just come out, and I ran into an excerpt of her book in Psychology Today, and I said, "Oh, that's just too cool. That sounds like a good idea." I got the book, I read the book, and wrote to Twin Oaks, and said, "I want to come visit, I want to join, it sounds like you're doing what I want to do." And Twin Oaks wrote back and said, "We have a waiting list about a year or more long, and besides, Cat Kinkade's not here anymore, Cat Kinkade's gone up to Massachusetts to start a new community." And I said, "Well, that even sounds cooler! So, forget the waiting list at Twin Oaks, I'm going to go find Cat Kinkade, and I'm going to help her with the new community." Which is what happened. It happened because she was in the midst of trying to start East Wind. And it started out in Massachusetts because somebody had said, "I've got a farm I'm willing to turn into a commune." It turned out to not be true, and that didn't work. In fact, the next attempt didn't work either. But I caught up with early East Wind group I guess in '72. I think that's right. We worked on Herman Pat's [?] dairy farm for awhile. Cat and I and a couple of Twin Oakers who'd gone up to help get started, and then some new people too, that we started at East Wind. We ended up not staying in Massachusetts, we ended up leaving Herman's farm and going into the city and spending the winter making enough money to buy land to start East Wind. It was a very, it was actually an awful winter in Boston. Except for the fact that we had this wonderful treat -- we had months and months and months of nothing to do than dream and scheme and plan a community. We weren't making very much money, and we were trying to save it all, so we didn't have much money for recreation and stuff like that. It was also just miserably cold. We just really couldn't go outside anyway, so we just spend all winter working as hard as we could, and saving as much money as we could, and doing as much of the planning for a new community as we could, without having the land or being there.

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**Q:** Did you all live together in a rented house?

**A:** Yeah. We lived in a slum in South Boston. The only saving grace was immediately before us, a bunch of Moonies had lived in it, so they had painted it all and cleaned it up. That was a nice thing. We were horribly crowded. Privacy was just completely out of the question. There was 16 of us all told, living in not even 8 bedrooms. There was women's and men's dorm rooms, ore or less, up in the attic. All the single women slept together, in a room up in the third floor, and all the guys, single men, slept in a dorm in the attic. Even couples didn't necessarily have private rooms. There was one room with two couples in it, and one room with a couple and a single person who didn't mind sharing a room with them. It was very crowded. And we all had fairly crummy jobs. Some people had decent jobs. But mostly it was like get any job you can to make it through the winter, and save any money you can to have money for the land. So even though there were 16 of us and we did this for 9 months or something, we still didn't have a whole lot of money. Twin Oaks really didn't have much money then, either, so they couldn't really be of any financial help. But we did all that, and even though it was -- now I had never left Texas in my life, so this Texas girl takes a bus to Boston, Massachusetts, and it was the first real winter I'd ever had. So I was personally very miserable. But on top of that, I was getting to know people, and we were just very idealistic and very determined, and that's when my relationship with Cat really kicked in big time, because she and I had a job at the same office. I was working for her in the accounting office. We got to be really good friends. Also, she was really the moving force behind doing things we could do, like writing the bylaws, and planning all the social and political aspects of East Wind. Talking about Twin Oaks and how it was and how we wanted to be the same, and how we wanted to be different. That's pretty much how we sustained ourselves, and entertained ourselves over the winter, was we could talk about -- we were living together already, and that was good, but we were living together in fairly miserable conditions, and that was bad. Planning East Wind got us through that winter. And then in the spring, in fact [unintelligible] and April first, in the spring -- well, I should go back a bit. Sometime during the winter we bought the land moved in. We had people that had come to visit, or people that said "Yes, I want to join," and were hoping to get their stuff or something in. One of them was from Missouri, and he stopped with this piece of land. We had realtors from all over the country. We were trying to find the biggest, cheapest piece of property we could, someplace fairly warm. And some place fairly cheap to live. And we didn't care about how isolated it was, because we were going to be isolated, we were going to create this totally alternative culture, and the less we had to deal with the outside world, the better. Which was a very naïve thought, and certainly people have regretted that since. Because it seems clear now, that you can't live devoid of the outside world, and you can't set up an alternative culture that doesn't interact with the greater community at large. But certainly at the time we thought it would be helpful, or at least, it wouldn't be harmful, to be in the middle of nowhere. And that's where we were, in the middle of nowhere. So in April we bought the land and we moved to East Wind, and started building community in earnest, physically, as opposed to just mentally building it.

**Q:** Now was that '74?

**A:** That was '7- . . . gee, I wish I knew this. That might have been April of '74. I should know this. You can certainly find out -- when was East Wind's anniversary? There's a difference between when we started - I mean, land day was the day that we moved to Missouri. We were calling ourselves and being East Wind way back as far as Herman Pat's farm.

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**Q:** So you had already chosen the name at that point?

**A:** Yes we had.

**Q:** How did the name get chosen?

**A:** I bet if you ask 5 different people who were there at the time, how we decided on that name, two of them would say, "I don't have any idea," and the other three of us would probably give you different stories. Cat would know this, maybe, but my recollection is that a bunch of us were into Eastern philosophy at the time. And we wanted -- one of the ways we wanted to be alternative was getting rid of Western values and stuff like that. So somebody was reading something, and I think there was some quote about how, "An east wind blowing through the west and cleaning stuff up," or something. So it had to do with being open to Eastern philosophy. Not that any of us were all that religious, but we certainly were all that philosophical. I believe that's how it came about.

**Q:** Were any of you into B.F Skinner or Walden Two?

**A:** No. Well, I shouldn't say that, that's not true that none of us were. We weren't in the way that early Twin Oakers were. We weren't in the way that that's where our idea of community came from. I would say probably only have of us had even read Walden Two. Certainly less than have of us knew anything about behavioral psychology. I did, I'd been studying it in college. Will Bailey [?], who joined in Boston, was in fact a behavioral psychologist, that's what he'd been studying in college, much more seriously than I had, and for longer. Cat was still sort of a behaviorist, but Cat had become much less rigid and much more practical in some ways. But most of the early East Wind folk were young hippies that didn't even think of such things as behavioral psychology. They thought about peace and love and maybe Buddhism. But behavioral psychology wasn't something we talked about a lot or thought about a lot. Most people ended up reading Walden Two backwards from having read Cat's book first. They'd read Cat's book, and then say, "Oh, let's read the original then." And there were certainly groups of us who sat around and thought about it and criticized it, and analyzed Walden Two. But he and it was not a major motivating factor at all, certainly not outright. Particular people, maybe. But I would say most of the early East Wind group didn't have a clue. We certainly didn't do much intentionally with behavioral psychology in mind.

**Q:** Did you do any sort of behavior experiments?

**A:** I think in -- yes, I think we did, in that Cat had learned a lot from being at Twin Oaks already, and several of us were interested enough in the how's and why's of changing people's behavior. I mean we were certainly intent upon changing people's behavior. This is, you know, we're talking issues that were on our mind were gender imbalances, sexual morals, and stuff like that. So we did a lot, I think. Certainly, a lot of us were thinking about stuff like how to have different kinds of relationships, like how to get over jealousy, for instance. Or how to work without having bosses. So there were ways we were trying to think about how to change people's reality. And how to affect their behavior. How to get people to deal with the idea that this was not yours or mine, but it was ours, and we needed to treat things differently than we were used to. So there was a lot of stuff like that, trying to get people to learn things, trying to get people to teach things, trying to get people to get along in ways that they hadn't grown up with. So I think a lot of us did a lot of different things, but there weren't a whole lot of agreed

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upon, upfront, "We're going to experiment with this." Will Bailey, who was an early member, and who really was a serious behaviorist, he would certainly try that. He probably, of all of us, more deliberately than anyone, actually sat and planned experiments. And I can recall doing that some. I guess the planners, or those of us who were actually involved in the early government, did it more than the general membership did. Because we were the ones having to deal with the problems. And so we'd sit and think up things to do. We'd say, "This is a problem, this is something we feel like we need. How to we get people to do it? How do we get people to cooperate? How do we get people to change their ways and behave like this?" So we did a certain amount of that. But I think a lot of us just believed that if you talked to people and they understood what we wanted and why we wanted it, that they'd just do it. The funny thing about that, it was kind of true, in a very small group. That was easier to do in a group of 14 or 16, than it was by the time we were 30, which happened fairly quickly. East Wind grew very quickly, because we were accepting anybody at all that even vaguely seemed like they wanted to do it. And there were a lot of hippies out there travelling around, with nothing better to do than join a commune. A lot of them didn't stay, because we were a lot more serious than they expected us to be. Like, we made people work! Stuff like that. But then a certain number of people certainly did stay and were impressed that we had it together and weren't just another hippie crash pad.

**Q:** What was the land like when you arrived? Were there any dwellings?

**A:** Yeah. We got really lucky with that. Our specifications for land with all the real estate agents and people that were sitting out looking was, we really wanted privacy, like we wanted to be at the end of a road, or we wanted to have no neighbors, and we wanted a place to swim, and we wanted -- there had to be at least X number of acres. I don't remember how many. There had to already be a well, because we didn't have money for a well, and all of this stuff. And the land in Missouri fit all of that description, and had a farmhouse on it! It had a telephone, it was a party line, unfortunately, which was kind of a pain. When we first got there, it was a party line with three other farmhouses on the road, all on the same phone, and boy was this bad for a bunch of hippies in one of the poorest counties in the land in the early 1970's. But it had a farmhouse. The kitchen was way too small, but it was a kitchen. And the bathroom, it didn't really have a bathroom. It had a bathroom, but it didn't have a septic tank nearly big enough for 15 or 16 of us. So we built outhouses right away. It had a telephone, and it had electricity, and it had water. And it worked quite well for us. It became the kitchen and the dining room, and the living room. We still didn't have any place to live. We spent the first [tape interrupted] . . .

**Q:** So you were saying the farmhouse was the kitchen and the dining room. Then where did you all sleep? Were there rooms in the farmhouse to sleep in?

**A:** Well, that's just hilarious. No. There were not. We needed -- I think actually, I mean, it did have a bedroom, but we needed it for something else. An office, we had no office. So dining room, office, living room, kitchen, that was it for the farmhouse. It was really little, but it was pretty good shape. We got there in April. So we had enough money to put a down payment on the land, and a few thousand dollars extra to build a building there. Now, mind you, we didn't know how to do that, but this is where Twin Oaks really came through for us. Twin Oaks, at the time, had a construction business. This is before hammocks -- not before hammocks were being made at all, but before the big Pier I order. and Twin Oaks wasn't making a lot of money either, and one of the ways they were making money was a

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construction business. And so a bit later in the summer, two of three of the Twin Oaks construction workers came out and helped us build the first building at East Wind, which was basically a 10 room dormitory. Small rooms, completely simple, no plumbing. Just the quickest, cheapest 10 room dorm we could possibly put up. But that summer, we got real creative. There was a little, there was like an old chicken coop, and an old smoke house, and there was a couple of little hold outbuilding shacks that people moved into. And we didn't have any money at all. We were very worried about making it through the summer. We even know we would all have to go back to work in the winter, because there wasn't any way we would make enough money the first summer, and we needed all the labor we could to get a building up. And so we gave everybody some amount of money, I want to say like \$20, to buy whatever materials they wanted to, to build themselves whatever they wanted to build. Sleep out in the woods in. It was hilarious. It became clever. It became clear to everybody that the cleverest person was the one who went and bought the biggest sheet of plastic they could for \$20 and use whatever scrap wood was laying around, to build whatever. And we had some very interesting structures, actually. Cat, herself, who had brought with her from Twin Oaks, a very nice bed, a real wooden bed with headboard and footboard and a very nice matching dresser, and she had, she brought all her bedroom furniture with her from Twin Oaks. One of my fondest memories is walking out to the woods, and here's Cat's bedroom, out in the woods. Somebody had built it for her, I think, four poles in the ground, and put a plastic roof on the top, and it had roll up and roll down sides. So Cat had a charming rug and everything on the ground. Cat had a very charming bedroom out in the woods. A couple of the boys, Billy and somebody, built a rather clever quonset[?] hut type of affair that was really quite large. It would sleep four or six people. Didn't even leak to bad. It was a very nice design too. Some visitor came along, not too long after that, who actually knew how to build geodesic domes, and built a dome out of leftover stretch of wood and \$20 worth of plastic. Which was stunningly beautiful. Now, it did leak a bit, but hey, it was not bad. It was around for years. I remember, I never lived in it, I remember making love in it, it was quite a nice place for that. Later on -- even years later, it was used for a greenhouse. There were several other structures like that. Robby built a sawed roof hut in the woods. He just put a roof and boards around some existing trees, and made a cabin in the woods. One way or the other, we all managed to sleep someplace for the summer. And by wintertime, we had Sunnyside if not quite finished, then at least liveable. By winter, we had twice as many people, too, so our dream of finally getting single private rooms was totally out of the question. We doubled up and even tripled up in the winter in Sunnyside. There already wasn't enough rooms for everybody that came from Boston, and there certainly wasn't enough for everybody that joined the first summer. So, we spent the winter doubling up. The rooms that would later become single-person rooms had two or even three people in them that first winter, because it was the only living space we had.

**Q:** How did that feel? Was it frustrating, or exhilarating?

**A:** I think that probably varied from individual to individual. I, personally, was in a real free-love, everybody should love everybody, we should all get along, and nudity, and privacy and stuff like that was nowhere near my consciousness. I had 2 or 3 lovers, and I slept with whichever one of them had the most convenient place to sleep. I just didn't care. There was a bunch of us like that. It certainly wasn't just me. We built lofts into half the rooms at Sunnyside. I had a more or less steady lover for most of that time. He and I had a bed up in the loft. But very often, we'd say, "Oh, you guys can sleep

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downstairs," and one or two other people would sleep on a mattress down at the bottom of the room, while we were sleeping in the loft. We didn't care. I think a lot of us didn't care. Because it was all very exciting, and we knew it was going to get better. We were eating and breathing community. Nobody hung out in their rooms, because we were all too busy either getting to know each other, or working, or playing hard. We certainly did a lot of hard play. This was still a time for sex, drugs, and rock and roll for lots of us, there was a lot of that mentality around. So people didn't tend to need privacy and quiet and stuff like that, as certainly a lot of people did later, do now. Like, certainly I do now.

**Q:** What was daily life like at East Wind? What sort of work were you involved in mostly? Was it construction, or --?

**A:** I did a lot of construction work. Early-on, I did a lot of managerial work. Most people didn't know or care what that meant. Most people thought of managers as bad people you're trying to get rid of. But of course, it doesn't quite work like that. Somebody had to do it. So, I did a fair amount of managerial work. I'm an absolute total non-cook, and always have been, but I was a kitchen manager, and I was a kitchen manager because we very carefully budgeted out and said, "If we could just spend just this much money for food this summer, then we won't have to go back to work until September," or, "We could actually afford to put the roof on Sunnyside." So we were working on a very tight budget, and not many people understood or knew or cared about things like that, but I did, and I didn't want to go back to work that soon. So I was a kitchen manager almost solely for the purpose of being sure that every single penny was spent as well as it could be spent. Because this was a situation where if somebody cooked a really bad meal, it was a problem for us. We just could not afford to throw away or waste anything. We were rationing the goodies, and so I was doing a lot of that kind of thing.

**Q:** Were you vegetarians?

**A:** No. Some of us were. We were never, as a group, vegetarians. In fact, early-on, there was what we used to call "food fights," I guess people still call them "food fights," that were philosophical battles between the omnivores and the vegetarians. They still go on, they go on here and now, and they go on at every community I've lived in or heard of since then. But certainly, we weren't all vegetarians. Of course, it was almost a moot point early-on, because we couldn't afford meat. And so it was a constant problem with meat-eaters always grumbling about not having enough meat. But then the vegetarians grumbled about not having anything but soybeans either, so. We basically did not please anybody with food, the first summer or the first winter or the second summer either.

**Q:** Were you guys modeling yourself after Twin Oaks? Like your labor system and your government system?

**A:** Yes, consciously and unconsciously we were. Because it's what we knew. Not so much out of a dedication to, "We want to be just like Twin Oaks." Most early East Winders had not been to Twin Oaks and didn't know much about Twin Oaks. Cat did, of course, and some of us made it a point to study it, because we were looking for solutions to problems, and Twin Oaks was in fact the only viable model that we had. So in that sense, we were. But it wasn't because, "Oh, we want to be just like Twin Oaks," it was, "Oh my God, how do we do this?" And somebody says, "Well, Twin Oaks does it like this." We go, "Okay, let's try that." And it worked. There were ways in which we knew we didn't want to be like

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Twin Oaks. There was the negative model effect too. Twin Oaks had a more restrictive membership policy. They interviewed people more seriously, and they rejected people they didn't think would fit in and so on, and we were determined not to do that. We were going to take anybody that wasn't just totally crazy or violent or something. Twin Oaks was stricter about things like noise and privacy and smoking and . . . nudity, I think, and stuff like that. And I think a lot of us said, "We want some place freer, with less rules, and more personal freedom. I think that was partly, there again, it might have been an age difference in that we were very young, we were just starting, and the average membership at early East Wind couldn't have been over 20, I don't think. Cat was the major exception, for years, quite some time. I don't know what the average age here at Twin Oaks was either, but I think it was probably a little bit higher, but I don't think it was a whole lot higher. But we had a higher percentage of young, starry-eyed hippies than Twin Oaks did, because for one thing, we accepted them more readily. And for the second, they would be more attracted to early East Wind than they were to Twin Oaks, which was already fairly well-established. And people would come to Twin Oaks and visit and not like Twin Oaks, and come to East Wind and visit and like it. Or vice-versa, depending on what they were looking for. So there's ways like that, where we were attempting to -- that Twin Oaks was a model, either positively or negatively, because it's the only thing we really knew.

**Q:** Now the government system at East Wind evolved pretty differently, didn't it, than Twin Oaks?

**A:** It did finally. It didn't start that way. It started identical. We just outright imported the planner-manager system directly. As far back as early Boston, we were already doing that. As far back as Herman's farm, in Massachusetts, the planner-manager system was already in place. Yeah, that was a straight import. But it didn't stay that way at East Wind. East Wind later on became not as satisfied with that system, and tried a few different things. I think East Wind's always been, tended to be more experimental. And that might be because we didn't start out with this fundamental and homogenous an ideology as Twin Oaks did. I think from early-on, that vision of how to be wasn't as strong and clear. So it allowed for more flexibility. The down side of that is, if you don't know where you're going, you're not likely to get there. And East Wind isn't as mature, I don't think, isn't as financially stable, isn't as whatever as Twin Oaks is now. And that's partly, I think, because of the differences early-on.

**Q:** Did you start doing hammocks at East Wind right away, or start the nutbutter business? How did it happen there?

**A:** Luckily for us, God, it was very lucky for us, the first summer none of us worked outside at all. We built Sunnyside and got moved in and started to garden and so on. I don't mean none of us work -- probably some people did work. I think what we said was if you came to join, you could stay on the farm for a month, and then you had to go into Springfield, Missouri -- a miserable little town, you can probably imagine what the employment opportunities looked like in Springfield, MO. Nonetheless, that was the closest place, and that's what we did. We rented a house in town and sent people in to work. You had to go in and work 2 months, and then you could come back to the farm, and then you wouldn't have to go back in until it was your turn again. We just kept the house full, and we were bringing in money doing any kind of work people could get. Most of which was just awful. Miserable work. So we did that for the whole first fall and winter. And didn't know what we were going to do for a living. We were just making it by. I think -- I could be wrong on the exact timing -- but I think it was the next

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summer, early the next summer, that Twin Oaks got the big Pier I order. They might have gotten it the summer before that, but it was that next summer that Twin Oaks came to us and said, "We need to make more hammocks than we can possibly make, and you guys want to go into the hammocks business?" And we said, "Absolutely. When can we start?" Because this is the way to keep us on the farm, this is the way to get us off of outside work. This is the way to quit having to send a third of the population off to the city to be miserable for two months at a time. So the Pier I hammock order really financially, if not saved East Wind, then really, really relieved the burden of outside work, way sooner than we would've been able to otherwise. We are eternally grateful. So we were all very happy about that. The downside of that was, now we have to start a hammocks business with no money, and no skills. We didn't know anything. Hammock making at early East Wind was a fairly miserable occupation, because -- I laugh about all this now, it was not funny when you were freezing your fingers and toes off in a vaguely warm, old army tent all winter. What we did right away was we went and bought these huge old army surplus tents. And we set them up as hammock shops and started working. They were hot as hell in the summer, and they were cold in the winter. And there was the bugs, and there was no amenities whatsoever. It was just a fairly lousy workspace. But it beat going in town and being a waitress or serving coffee or working for some jerk of a corporation or any other stupid jobs people had, being dishwashers, all sorts of other miserable jobs. So we started making hammocks. We had very little money. Trying to set up a stretcher shop was just laughable. I remember Milan [?] and I going through junk piles going, "Oh, that used to be an old washing machine. That will make a nice saw stand. We'll just a portable saw and turn it upside down inside the washing machine and make a table saw." It's like, oh that's just real safe. Real efficient, very safe, very good. We didn't care about efficiency or safety. We cared about how many hammocks we could get shipped as quickly as possible. Stuff like ventilation systems and all that was not there. Of course, it didn't matter, because they leaked so bad anyway, the fumes couldn't possibly have stayed in very long. Anyway, we just didn't care, we didn't even think about it, and if we did think about it, we didn't care, because we had no money to start a business, and we started it any way we could, and started making hammocks, and have been making them ever since. Because it's a wonderful business for a community, the little bits and pieces of variety, and being able to do it together, all kinds of stuff like that, just makes it a good business. We had trouble getting people to make hammocks. We had problems getting people to do things they consider traditional kinds of work. I do remember, we did some incentive program early-on, to try to get people to work. We'd have goodies in the workshop -- that kind of behavior modification did in fact occur in that situation, as it does now. Both here and at East Wind, and at Acorn, for that matter.

**Q:** When did the nutbutter business start?

**A:** Many, many, many years later. I don't -- I was gone by that point. I was only there for the first two and a half years of East Wind.

**Q:** And then did you come here?

**A:** No. Then I left community. I went and did other kinds of communal type things, but --

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**Q:** --Why did you end up leaving East Wind?

**A:** Well, after all the pioneering was done, after the government was all set up, and the accounting was all set up, and the business was started, and all that kind of thing, then, I was a 23 year old hippie who really wasn't ready to settle down and live the good life in the country. I was -- as much as I was attracted to the idea of community, and how much I was attracted in fact to the reality of building community, the "Okay, now let's milk the cows and raise the babies and raise the garden and build the 4th new building," wasn't attractive. I wanted to go off into something else. So I left. I went to go do something more exciting, because in fact I wasn't ready to be a rural farmer, and live happily ever after in the countryside. I had no intention of having children, and the day-to-day routine maintenance of the community just didn't excite me nearly as much as the making and the forming and the deciding and the building and the pioneering. So I left.

**Q:** Did you do other communal ventures before you came to Twin Oaks?

**A:** Yeah, I did. [tape ends] . . .

**Q:** Well, we can get back to that.

**A:** After I went to -- well, I went back to college, because I had nothing better to do at the time. I subsequently went back to college and studied things like behaviorism and socialism and other stuff like that, after I'd already started East Wind, and because I had started East Wind. When I went back to college I made it a point to study stuff that I wish I had known then. It was a little late by then, but it was still an interesting thing because of my own personal experience.

**Q:** But it might not have meant anything to you if you'd studied it first.

**A:** Oh yeah. It wouldn't have. It wouldn't have even dawned on me to study it at first. Socialist economics? What's that? Behavioral psychology -- what's that? It wouldn't have, and so just as a little aside, I went back and studied some stuff like that, after that. And then I left and went to the Caribbean for years. But then, most of the time I spent between East Wind and coming to Twin Oaks I spent in California, and I spent it doing whole bunches of community development work. Housing co-ops, worker collectives --

**Q:** --Where in California?

**A:** Bay Area. Bunch of different sorts of housing collectives and co-ops, land trusts, bunch of different things that I was involved in over the years there. And so lived in a lot of different social, quasicommunal -- never full-time intentional income-sharing communities, but a bunch of different kinds of housing situations. Both rural and urban.

**Q:** Anything that would have a name that I might recognize?

**A:** I don't know. Walnut House Co-op, you might recognize. It was one of the first of the urban housing co-ops in Berkeley. Private ones, as opposed to government subsidized, low-income stuff. This man, Jack Caswand [?], was really into such a thing, and his idea was, if you can afford to rent an apartment, then you can afford to buy an apartment. Two years and millions of hours later, we made that be true. But, we were the first one, so there again, that was a pioneering thing, and I enjoyed that work. I did

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several consultations for worker collectives that were trying to become worker-owned business, and didn't have much in the way of clues about co-management and peer management, and partnership agreements and so on. A lot of which is stuff that I did learn at early East Wind. Not to mention things like construction, which -- a woman my age, my size, in the early '70's, would not have been able to get a job learning construction work. And I learned it there, and it's been useful to me the rest of my life. A lot of the skills I learned at early East Wind served me well for a long time. And were of use to other people. Because I'd run into problems and solve problems, and had visions and real alternatives in my head, that other people didn't have, because I'd done it. And I think once you've lived in community for any length of time, it changes the way you think about how to live together. And so, I'm in California, there's a bunch of people saying, "Yeah, it sounds like a great idea to live together, but how does it work? What do you about this? And how is that going to happen?" and on and on and on. And they'd all be saying, "Well we don't know what we need. We'll work it out somehow," and I'm like, "This works, and this doesn't work. I tried this before, and --" and so it was very wonderful to -- a lot of the work I did with communal groups in California, I was valuable to them, because I had the real practical experience. So I really thing it was worthwhile in that sense. And after that, and so then after -- well, I finally was getting sick of living in the city, and the Bay Area in particular, and was thinking about coming to community again, either East Wind or Twin Oaks. But right about that time was when Cat decided to start Acorn, and so the reason why I'm actually out here now, and not still in CA is because I got a call from Cat saying, "I think we need to start another community, are you going to come help?"

**Q:** Now when was this?

**A:** This was just a couple of years ago. Acorn's 3rd anniversary was May 1st of this year.

**Q:** So you were out of community for quite a while, then.

**A:** Almost 20 years. Out of community as we know it.

**Q:** Out of these big intentional communities.

**A:** Almost 20 years.

**Q:** So you moved back here in '94?

**A:** Ninety-three. Well, May 1st -- this year was our third anniversary, so '93. Directly to Acorn, and started that one.

**Q:** Now, are you still part of Acorn?

**A:** No. I was only there the first year. I didn't really want -- as attractive as the pioneering and so on was when I was twenty-something, it's not nearly as attractive when I'm forty-something. That 20 years made a lot of difference. I'm at Twin Oaks now and not at East Wind, and not at Acorn, because the size, the variety, the flexibility, the stability is more attractive to me as a 44 year old as it was as a 22 year old. I could imagine -- I could live at East Wind now, but Twin Oaks is more attractive to me, because it's a way that I call more mature. The variety of work, the variety of play, the variety of people, the luxury, the standard of living is higher. So Twin Oaks is -- so I'm finally ready to settle down and live that life that I tried to create in Missouri and didn't want then. Well, now I want it. And here it is. Makes me

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really happy that it's still here. But I didn't want it then. I didn't want it at Acorn either. There, again, I was willing to help enough to get it started, but I don't want to live at Acorn for 20 years.

**Q:** What was the motivation to start Acorn?

**A:** For the first time in 20 years -- Twin Oaks had a huge waiting list, well over a year, and that's what had happened early-on. The reason East Wind got built was because the waiting list here was so long, and Cat said, "Man, I hate to lose all these people. There's all these people that want to be in community, and they're not going to wait a year. They're going to blow it off by then. And the waiting list is just going to get longer and longer and longer." And she, like many people here, wanted to strike while the iron's hot, get people while they want to come. This is a movement, this isn't just a community! And so that's how East Wind got started. "Twin Oaks can't grow fast enough, so let's start another one, get all those people that Twin Oaks isn't accepting." And that never happened again. For the last 20 years. Until four years ago, whenever it was, when Twin Oak's waiting list got to be hugely long, year, year and a half, maybe 2 years wait. And bigger all the time. And so the same thing. So Cat said, "Hey, same situation. There's all these people that want community, and we're not giving it to them. Let's start another one." And she did.

**Q:** And how was that pioneering year that you helped out with?

**A:** For me, personally, it was harder than early East Wind, and that was because I wasn't 20 this time, I was 40. My standard of living and my expectations and my comfort level and my needs had gone up, for things like privacy, and decent food, and stuff like that. I wouldn't trade it for anything, I'm very proud of having done it, and I feel like I contributed a lot. It wasn't miserable, for one thing. We had money. Acorn started with a quarter of a million dollars from Twin Oaks, so it wasn't like we were eating soybeans. And it wasn't like we had to go into town to work either, we had the hammocks business right away. The first thing we did was set up a hammock shop. So, it wasn't nearly as difficult. The crowding was, because even though we had a month and we had -- Acorn's first building is not a \$10,000 dormitory. It's a \$100,000 huge, beautiful, modern building. But it wasn't there. So the first year was that same, "Where are we going to sleep this summer?" It wasn't as bad. Acorn had a much larger farm house. Although certainly there were people sleeping outside in tents and so on. I wasn't one of them. But sharing a room with another person, sharing the upstairs of a house with 8 or 10 other people, that was not well-insulated, I mean, the crowding and the noise and that kind of -- sharing a bathroom with 15 people was not nearly as okay with me as it was at early East Wind times. But, what I liked was still there. That pioneering, that starting it out, that thinking it out, that inspiring people to work and figure things out, that creating that vision of community, was there, and I really enjoyed it. And I think I always will. I'll probably do it again, if I get a chance. I remember when we were talking about starting Acorn, I was talking to Cat, and she said, "Don't you want to come do this?" And I'm like, "Oh, Cat, I'm not 20 years old anymore," and I was whining. And she said, "Deborah, you know what, I wasn't 20 years old when we started East Wind. I was 40. You were 20. Now, I'm 60, and we're going to go start this." I'm like, "Oh, shit. Okay, I guess that's a pissy excuse."

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**Q:** Now what was it like to come back to intentional community living after you'd been gone for almost 20 years. Did you slip right back into it?

**A:** Pretty much. I did in the sense that I knew so much more what it was like, what I was getting into, than I did originally. And I kept touch with Twin Oaks and Twin Oakers. I visited several times before I came and joined again. I pretty much could look at what was going on and have a pretty clear idea of what it was going to be like. There weren't any surprises. And I looked at it and said, "Okay, I can live here, like this, in this way, and this will work for me." There were things I was worried about, like I'd been living alone, in my own apartment for about 10 years, in a housing co-op, but in a housing co-op of apartments, and not just bedrooms. So I'd had my own bathroom, my own kitchen for 10 years. I mean, my friends lived all around me, and we socialized together, and I was basically living in a community, but not at this level. Not income-sharing, and not even sharing all the same space. So was I going to like giving up that kind of private space? I had concerns about stuff like that. but I knew what the trade-offs were too. What I hated about the city, and what I was just tired of. Not having enough community, in the environment I was living in, I wanted more community. So I came back to Twin Oaks because no matter how hard I tried with community gardens, with housing co-ops, with worker collectives, with various and sundry political and social groups, I wanted more community. I wanted it more in my daily life. I wanted my work and my play to be more together, and I wanted my friends and my lovers and my coworkers to be the same people. So that's why I came back. And that's what I've got here. And there were things I knew would be hard, and there still are. There's things at Twin Oaks I don't like. But it's as close as I can come. It's as close to my utopia as there is, as far as I can tell.

**Q:** Do things feel pretty similar to what you experienced at East Wind, or were there a lot of differences?

**A:** No. It really -- on an emotional level, it's very similar. Physically, it's different, the standard of living has changed and so on, it's a bigger group. But that -- sort of emotionally and spiritually, it feels the same as it did. That memory I have of living at East Wind and how it felt. I wasn't disappointed when I came back to community, I wasn't disappointed. That feeling I had about what it felt like to live in community and felt like to live with people in this way is still there, was still here when I got here. When I came back, that -- and that's what I missed -- was still there. And it still is. I did a lot of soul searching before I came back, thinking, "Do I just have a rosy picture of how it used to be?" I thought, "You'd better get yourself out there and visit again, and be sure that this idea you had of what Twin Oaks is like --" because I had been using Twin Oaks as a model to everybody I'd met, and every venture [?] I'd ever done. We'd be sitting having meetings about something, and I'm quoting how Twin Oaks is all the time, and holding up Twin Oaks as my model of how life can be if you want to go in that direction. And there were times when I'd say, "I wonder if I'm being realistic? Is Twin Oaks really like that?" But I came back, and I talked to people, and I visited, and I studied, and I whatever. I found out that, yes, realistically, most of what I would say to people and most of the stories I was telling to myself about what it was like in the community were in fact true. Still like that. Early East Wind was too. And Acorn is too. It's maybe not quite as intense here. It's easier. There's always mini-problems. But basically, it's the same kind of thing. I think that once you make that leap into, "I'm living with a bunch of people, completely in public with them all of the time," I think that's where the big division is. Regardless of

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how old or new the community is, if you're living with this kind of intention, then you get this kind of intensity, and that's what makes them all feel similar for me.

**Q:** Now, when you left East Wind, was that about the same time that Cat left to come back here?

**A:** Oh, no. Cat was there several more years. I don't know exactly, but several more years.

**Q:** Because I was worried that maybe there was this exodus of all the founders at the same time or something.

**A:** No. There wasn't. Actually, when I left, there was clearly a real solid core of people. Milan had not been there long, and he was obviously going to be a leader, and serious, and Will Bailey had decided not to go back to school, that he was going to stay. That was a really good thing. Cat had no intention of leaving. She was certainly going to stay. I didn't at all feel like I was abandoning East Wind. It was fairly well-established and pretty together when I left. I think I wouldn't have left if it wasn't. Same with Acorn. I think I wouldn't have left Acorn if it hadn't felt to me like it was pretty together. It's kind of funny having that sort of emotional attachment to communities. It's like, these are my children. This is my baby. I still feel like, if something happened with Acorn and a bunch of people left, or they got in trouble and didn't look like they were going to work, I'd pack up and go back over there, and stay as long as I need to, to make it work. I have a vested interest in it. Not that I think that will happen, mind you. But I think I would. I think Cat would. I think Autumn [?] would, the few of us that were involved early on would do that, we'd just say, "Okay, let's try again."

**Q:** Now, before I asked you about daily life at East Wind, and we were going to get back to that.

**A:** What I remember the most about it, from my point of view, is it seemed like there was no distinction between work and play, in the sense that we were always talking about or engaged in community issues, pretty much no matter what we were doing. What we did for work was sit around and problem solve and trouble-shoot and plan, and argue. And what we did for play for the same thing! But I mean, we did work and play. I think that early-on, when there's so much to do, and what needs to be done is so much right there in your face, everybody tends to just work all the time as much as they can, doing whatever needs to be done. It's not like say, here at Twin Oaks now, where there's not a whole lot of people who really feel like, "Oh, I should work 60 hours this week, because we're so behind in this, or this is so not together, or we really need to get this done by this day," it's just not true. So there's not much motivation for that. But early East Wind, that was pretty much not the case. There was just so much to do. And there's so many things that we wanted right now, that it just seemed natural that you just kept working as long as you could, and all of the time. Because what else did you have to do anyway? You were building a home and a lifestyle. So it was like, you know, just so many projects going on, it's like somebody's fixing up the old farmhouse, and somebody's starting a bathhouse. And then we're starting the foundation for the residence, and we've got to get a garden started. And somebody's working on the chicken coop -- because we wanted everything. There was all these things that we knew we wanted. We didn't have to talk about it, we just knew we wanted them. Yes, we want cows, yes we want pigs, yes, we want chickens, yes we want a garden, yes we want a bathhouse, yes we want a new building, yes we want -- all of the above.

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**Q:** So you didn't spend a lot of time in meetings just talking about things? You were out there doing it?

**A:** We had had so many months with nothing better to do in Boston that winter, that a lot of that stuff had been done. Which isn't to say that we didn't sit around for hours at meetings talking about things. We surely did. But -- and new people were coming all the time. So we had to set meetings a lot anyway. And there were all kinds of issues we couldn't possibly have decided in Boston. But the basic kind of how are we going to be, and what do we need to do, were pretty clear. Yes, we certainly would have plenty of meetings, and there were plenty of things to talk about. And we did, we did that a lot. But then I think we also just did things a lot. It was like, a new member would come and say, "You guys haven't put any asparagus in yet! My God, if you don't put them in this summer, we're not going to have them for years." We're like, "Yeah, okay, okay, cool. Well, go ahead, put the asparagus in. Fine, that's what you want to do? Do it." So there was a lot of that kind of thing too. Some member comes along who had pigs and knew how to raise pigs, it's like, "Okay, fine, we were kind of thinking probably cows, but what the hell, pigs. I mean, there they are, we'll take them." And so there was just a lot of do whatever comes up that somebody joins that knows how to do, or really wants to do, "Oh, yeah, sure, go ahead." We didn't do that to the degree where we'd say, "Oh, well we were planning on doing this right now, but we'll stop and do what you want." It was more like new members would come and just pick up the ball, or do whatever needed doing that they saw needed doing the most. It was always a flurry of activity. Just constant.

**Q:** Did you guys at East Wind get together with any of the other communities around, like Garden of Joy Blues, or Dragon Wagon, or any of those places?

**A:** No. Almost not at all. Well, like Dragon Wagon, we knew about them. Almost not at all, because, I think for several reasons. One is, we couldn't afford anything like travel, or even vacation. And yeah, I mean I think, it wasn't an intentional "We don't care about and are not interested in what anybody else is doing." It was that everything's right in our face, and there was so much to do, and we were so busy and we were so engaged that taking a weekend off and coming up with the money to go drive to Dragon Wagon and visit just done, just wasn't on our priorities. We were too wrapped up in what we were doing, literally, that the time and the energy and the money just never got up to be a high enough priority. I bet more people from other communities came to visit us, than we ever did to visit them. Certainly a lot of Twin Oakers came to visit, but hardly any of us ever came to visit here. That was out of the question, spending that kind of money and taking all that time.

**Q:** Would they come on labor exchanges?

**A:** Yeah, I believe we had labor exchange from the very beginning. As I said, several carpenters came and helped us put Sunnyside up, or we would've been sleeping outside that winter. But other people came too, because they were curious, and because they wanted to help, and because it was really exciting. Twin Oaks was already 5 years old or something. Anybody who was attracted to the pioneering energy came out to visit, and were a lot of help. Brought skills and knowhow, when we just had no clues.

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**Q:** Did you have any rituals that you would do together as a group? Like would you get together and meditate or anything like that?

**A:** None. I mean, I suppose unless you count drugs of one sort or another. Like, the smokers' lounge, the smokers' room, which was an old wooden shack, was a big [unintelligible]. We made beer, and shared home rolled cigarettes. We couldn't afford to buy cigarettes. Allowances were 2 and 3 dollars a week, some ridiculously small amount of money. So there was things like that. We really didn't have much of any recreation. Pretty much sitting around smoking and drinking, and deciding who you were going to make love to that night was major recreational time. Like, no such thing as movies or, people didn't go into Springfield to go bar hopping or go to movies or anything. We just didn't have any money. We didn't have enough vehicles to do that. So what do we do for fun? Well, I think what we did for fun was have intense interpersonal communications and relationships, and listen to music, and make music. And dream and scheme about how we wanted life to be different. What did we do for fun? We sat and talked about how we wanted to design the next building. I remember staying up to wee hours in the morning going, "Well, next time let's do it like this? Wouldn't it be cool if we --?" I think a lot of us got off on stuff we needed to do, which now I would consider work, but I believe at the time I considered play. And I think I wasn't the only one. A lot of us did. We would have holidays. We would take whole days off together.

**Q:** Well, you had big solstice parties, didn't you?

**A:** Yes, I think we did. We certainly had big summer parties. I can remember giant, naked frisbee games in the rain, all over the field. We certainly had holidays. Probably solstice and equinox. Certainly rand [?] day, was a regular celebration. So we certainly did have parties. That was common, and always has been. Still is. But normal, everyday recreational activities, there just weren't many. We'd play a lot of games. I remember early East Wind, out in the big army tents that we were using as a dining room right then, we could easily any given night, we could sit three tables of bridge players. We played bridge like maniacs. East Wind still does. The last time I was out there visiting for anniversary, we had no trouble filling up three tables of bridge hands. We played a lot of cards. We played a lot of games.

**Q:** Would you say there was a common vision that united the pioneers at East Wind?

**A:** Yes, I would say so. I would say that that was true of the pioneers, and it became less true as people joined a community that was no longer really pioneered, that was more or less established. Then people's dreams became more varied. I would say yes, early on, there was. Early-on, everybody that was there, and everybody that was really engaged in building community all had very strong ideas and very strong feelings. Very strong visions. They didn't all necessarily have the same one, but what we had in common was not a particular vision, but what we had in common was a very strong vision. And so some of us had -- our visions were not necessarily all alike, although in some ways I think they were. But having, being a strong visionary I believe was part of what united all of us, even though we would argue endlessly what that vision was, still, we were all engaged in our visions, and a lot of them were shared.

**Q:** What were some of the elements that were held in common among the pioneers?

**A:** I think wanting to be really big was one of them. Wanting to grow fast and get big was one of them. I think wanting to be self-sufficient was another big one. We want to grow our own food, and we want

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to grow our own beef, and we want to have pigs and chickens and a garden, and so on. That was a big deal. We were all just determined it was going to be possible. We wanted to not have to go off and work or anything. We didn't want to have regular jobs and bosses and all that stuff. We were going to figure out some way that we could all live and work together on the farm. We were all pretty into "We're going to try not to make a bunch of rules, we're going to try to live together with as few rules as we could." Well, that was very idealistic. But I think at least early-on, a bunch of us were into people being free, and everything being okay unless it hurt somebody, and so on. I think we were all pretty clear on we wanted to not have family values, couples, and possessiveness, jealousy and possessiveness were not okay with anybody. I suspect that monogamous couples were always a bit embarrassed, and in fact, they often broke up soon after they got there. Some people had complaints about that, that the community broke them up, the way we were broke them up, and we're like, "Yeah, it did, yeah." Certainly there was a very strong sense of women's rights and women's issues. We weren't going to cook and sew and raise babies and have the boys build buildings. That wasn't going to happen. And the boys were behind that. Macho men were not happy, ever, even from the very beginning. There was a serious solidarity from the men and from the women behind that. We had some very fine men early-on, who were committed to feminist issues. That was a good thing. I think those were all things that we were all into that everybody was going to have an equal right to learn and do what work they wanted to. There's probably more things like that that don't come to mind right now.

**Q:** Well, as a final wrap-up question, what would you say is the glue, or what keeps both East Wind and Twin Oaks going? They've both lasted so much longer than many communities that came out of their era.

**A:** That's true. I've certainly pondered that question many, many times over the years, and I don't think I have a good answer. One of them, I think, one of the answers is that we did succeed in starting systems that really are sort of self-perpetuating, that don't depend on individual people. We've always tried to keep the power dynamics equal. There's always been a resistance to any particular people getting any power or getting any knowledge skills that allow them or motivate them to use them against other people. So I think the equality, the fact that some people are not more powerful than others, or if they are, not very easily, and not inherently -- there've certainly been times when particular people have dominated politics, social and economic policies in the community -- but when they left, there wasn't a big gap to fill, they didn't leave a big hole, where everybody that was still here went, "Oh my God, how can we do this without, whoever," because the system just came back into play and filled up those gaps. So I think one of the things is that the responsibility has always been spread out over a pretty big group, that the fact that we don't have real strong leadership, sometimes, is a disadvantage, but in the long run, it means particular people leaving wasn't devastating. Other people just stepped in. And the manager system spreads that responsibility out thin enough, that things just keep working, even if they don't work well for a little while here, they don't work well for a little while there, they do keep working. So I think one of them is just the system itself, that doesn't care who is doing the work, but that the work's getting done. And I think also that there haven't really been crises, like financial crises. Like Pier I's never just dropped us from one year to the next and left us with a \$100,000 cut in pay all of a sudden. So big crises that might've been disastrous didn't occur. I also think that Twin Oaks and even East Wind were not started by -- as much as there were plenty starry-eyed idealists, and even though the bulk of

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the population, at least those years that you're talking about, were a bunch of spaced-out hippies -- the foundation and the core groups of both communities were not people who were starry-eyed idealists, but were practical minded people that said, "We're going to make decisions based on practical things that will work. We're going to consider survival, we're going to make any compromise we need to, to make sure that, regardless of what we would like to do, regardless of what people want right this minute, regardless of our ideals about this or that, we're going to continue to make decisions that are totally practical, and totally geared towards what will work, what will keep us going, what will make us survive. Even at the cost of principles, if that's what's necessary." And so I think it's just a really strong and pragmatic, practical-minded people have always been attracted to Twin Oaks and East Wind, because they have been working, and they do work, and they can say, "Okay, I can do this, I can live with this, I can invest years of my life in this place, because it's going to go on." And those are those are the kinds of people that continue to make those kinds of decisions.