

Interview with Peter Berg
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
May 26, 1996

Q: This is Sunday the 26th, and an interview with Peter Burg. I don't know anything about your communal involvement, so I'd love to hear about some background that led up to that, and what you're involved in.

A: Principally, the Diggers, in San Francisco. I was an originator of the Diggers. There were three kinds of Digger communal situations. One was the actual Digger movement itself, which was a communalistic approach to providing food, housing, and culture to the hippie psychedelic movement of people that moved to or came to San Francisco in the '60's. Roughly from 1966 to 1971 or 1970 would be that period. That involved getting food and apartments. At one time there were 35 communal households in the Haight/Ashbury that were visited by Diggers with baskets of groceries on a weekly basis. And they were free communal apartments. Some of them were whole buildings, whole multiple apartment buildings. There was that type. Then there was actually living together with people in San Francisco various kind of shared rent or free dwellings. And then there was the infamous Black Bear communal ranch in the Sisque [?] Mountains.

Q: So the Black Bear was part of the Digger family?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Okay, because I interviewed someone from Black Bear yesterday.

A: Who was that?

Q: Peter Laughingwolf.

A: Oh yeah, right, he wasn't one of the originators of Black Bear, so he probably wasn't able to tell you that it was founded by a particular person who felt that that was the way that he could best express his participation with the Diggers, rather than being urban, to be in the country. His name was Richard Marley [?]. It was money from the Diggers and welfare checks that paid for the down payment and a lot of the other payments on that ranch over the period of time that it was occupied communally. I don't think it is anymore -- well, it may still be. Although it may be privately owned.

Q: I think he said it was a land trust. So how did you get the idea or the inclination to start the Diggers?

A: Actually, it was more complicated than most people think. The originators of the Diggers were all theater people, associated mostly with the San Francisco Mime Troupe. And the Digger do, the putting out street communications, formulating a credo, that says, "Everything is free, do your own thing," the work of going to the produce market, which was considerable, by the way, -- I ran a free store, which was a lot of work to get up every morning and open the doors and arrange the stuff inside the store that was filled with donated things they would find on the sidewalk in the morning outside the store, clothes.

Q: So the whole idea behind it was to get free things that you could give away to people that needed it?

A: Exactly. Not only were we feeding and clothing and housing the revolutionary population that was arriving in San Francisco -- at one time I would guess there were half a million people. There were three or four best selling songs saying, "Go to San Francisco, put flowers in your hair." So, there was a lot of impetus to [unintelligible] ... in addition to that, though, we were -- it was a political philosophy. "Everything is free, do your own thing." It was a utopian, anarchist vision of the future. So there were

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two reasons to do it -- we had an audience for it, and we believed it.

Q: Did it evolve gradually, or did you consciously just one day say, "I want to start something called the Diggers, and this is what we're going to do"?

A: As theater, it evolved gradually. It has to do with the theory of the fourth wall in theater. Do you know this?

Q: No, I don't.

A: Okay. A challenge in 20th century theater has been to overcome the separation between the stage and the audience. And this has been done in practical ways, such as stand-up comics tend to do this, by talking about reality on such an intimate level. They tend to separate the formal aspects of theater. By formal, I mean the language, the themes, etcetera. In the hands of stand-up comics, like Lenny Bruce, theater is a place to talk about really universal inhibited behavior, and how to overcome it. So in a way, that's overcoming the difference between the audience and the stage. But in more formal terms, the most influential theater [unintelligible] of the 20th century, who are [unintelligible] Artaud [?] in France, and [unintelligible] Brecht [?] from Germany, attempted to overcome the difference between the audience and the stage in the way that they presented plays. Artaud by saying that an actor shouldn't be a performer, but a heretic burning at the stake and signaling through the flames. That's not theater, that's more like witnessing a suicide. And Brecht, by writing plays that he said should be studied by both the performers and the audience, studied so that they could see the way human behavior operated, almost a scientific approach to it. So Three Penny Opera, which most of us know from the song "[unintelligible] the Night," is actually an elaborate way of talking about criminal behavior as being forced on people by society. And showing it in a sort of scientific way. Or at least, that's what Brecht hoped for. So the fourth wall -- you know, the three walls, there's one on the left, one on the right, and one behind you, the fourth wall is the audience. So how do you get the stage into the audience? And the Mime Troupe did that by having free shows in the park. And as a result of that, I created something called Guerilla Theater. That was my invention. That was a way of having theater without people knowing it was theater. We would show up and start doing a play, without announcing that it took place. So people would watch what was happening as though it was reality. That was the theoretical, political basis of the Diggers, was that we would create the conditions we described. We would start doing the kinds of things that we wanted society to do. Which was have free food, free places to live, and be much more creative. Our credo was, "Everything is free, do your own thing." Sort of a vision of the future. And that's what we proposed as, you could say, the politics of the psychedelic generation.

Q: You took your name from an old English group, then, right.

A: It's quite bright of you to know that. How do you happen to know that?

Q: I don't know. It's just one of those things I've heard about.

A: They were a lot like us. They were people that dug up the Commons -- they were called the Diggers because they dug up the Commons as a source of food. The commons is a big public park, but these were mostly farmers that were forced off their land during the Enclosure Movement. Which was like the psychedelic movement -- it was one of those things where suddenly a lot of people were coming to

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town. So to feed themselves, they dug up the Commons, declaring it to be a public space. And if you think about it, there are a lot of commonalities between that and what I've just described. In doing that kind of theater in the park [unintelligible] ... Mime Troupe, I got inspired. I was an actor, director, and performer. I got inspired to think of other things that we could do as well. [tape interrupted] ... were conceived as a kind of a theater. And this theater would ultimately overcome this fourth wall problem by actually getting into the street, and do things that we thought were exemplary kinds of behavior. Which I called "life acting." The best Diggers, I thought, were the ones that acted out the proposition, "Everything is free, do your own thing," the best. My [unintelligible] was to open a free store, because a free store was such a theater. People would walk in and say, "What do things cost?" And you'd say, "Well, they're free." And they'd say, "Who's the manager?" And you'd say, "You are." Or they'd say, "What can I take?" And you'd say, "Everything. Empty the place. Pull a truck up and just --" It was very theatrical. I even had interviewers from major magazines interviewing each other as the owner of the free store. Who can own a free store? So it was really to push the limit of it, what is this idea that a store could be free? Where does this stuff come from? How is it free? Is anything really free? Does anything really cost? It was a theater to talk about that, almost like a free speech movement. And the best Diggers were, for example, a free banker that used to put \$50 bills in his hat band, and if you knew that he was the free banker, you saw the money in his hat band, and you needed money, you could ask him for it. And if he thought you deserved it, he'd give it to you. We used to supply him with money that was donated to us. So we'd just say, "Here's the money that was given to us today, go give it away." And he loved the role. He once drove a motorcycle down Haight St. throwing quarters in the air. And there was - - all of this was conceived of as art. Even the free food that we served in the park, to thousands of people, by the way, was served behind a frame, because John Cage, the musician, had said, "If you put a frame around anything, it's art. So we put an enormous 12 foot orange frame around it so that people going to work could see this as a painting. And we had enormous events in the park, and on the street, that were attended by 5 to 15, 20 thousand people, some of them really orchestrated, really thought out. Like having huge, carnival-sized animals come down Haight St. with a casket, with huge gold and silver pieces in it, singing, "Get out my life, why don't you babe," to Chopin's "Death March." Elaborate, thought out things. We started riots in the streets. At that time, you could say the Diggers made a commune out of Haight/Ashbury. That's probably the biggest communal event, because there were literally thousands of people who didn't have money, didn't have rent, didn't have changes of clothes, didn't have food. And they ate in the park, they slept in our Digger free pads, and got clothes at the free store. That lasted until through a combination of the success of the anti-war movement, which made it possible for people to stop dropping out -- a lot of these people were college aged kids who were going to be drafted. In fact, the principal group of women in the Diggers was the whole graduating class of Antioch college. The whole women's group were from Antioch. Must've been half a dozen to a dozen women, just dropped out en masse and joined the Diggers, among whom that were more notable were Motorcycle Nina, and Sienna. Taken names. At any rate, because of the success of the anti-war movement, because of the oppression of the police, they changed Haight St. to be one-way traffic, with mercury vapor lights, and squad cars coming through constantly, forced us to take our whole Digger thing and go onto City Hall steps, where we had a three month long, from the spring equinox to the summer solstice, we did a three month occupation of City Hall steps, where we talked Digger philosophy, and fed the workers. Took showers in the fountain, introduced nudity to noon hour among

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the workers, read poems about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Anyway, when that was over, we felt exhausted by the whole effort. The tide had turned, or as I said to somebody, we were upstaged by society. Society had done something to move our audience and our stage away from us. And a lot of us then went to Black Bear, which during this Digger period in San Francisco from 1966, say, had, Black Bear had been pioneered by people who had been with the Diggers, and then went up there to have a free communal ranch. And it was free in the sense that it didn't cost you to go there, it was not owned, and the land payments were made mostly by welfare checks. That group grew to be as many as 70+ people, on I'm guessing 40 acres, most of it not capable of being farmed or lived on, forest. I imagine only 4 or 5, maybe 5 acres, were able to support cabins, and having gardens. So 70 people put into a relatively small area, all living in small cabins. There was a main house. And we underwent all of the benefits and discomforts and unfortunate developments that happen to people who try to start everything all over. We were trying to start society all over. And of all the communal groups that you have studied or will study, this is probably the most radical in terms of the backgrounds of the people. They were from the Diggers, the Weather [?] Underground people were through there, the Black Panthers were through there. Up Against the Wall Mother Fuckers, the anarchist, police-provoking group from New York City were there. Hell's Angels were there. We really had an enormous amount of people. There were guns. And we thought of ourselves as being at war with society. I suppose you're picking this up to a large extent? It's hard to imagine now, because you come visit me, and I'm cutting a bush that's part of my native plant garden. They're native plants, I can show people what native plants are, as part of what I do now, which is direct Planet Drum [?] Foundation, which is an ecologically oriented organization. And probably my desire to go in that direction occurred at Black Bear Ranch. I probably got inspired to do this through various things that happened there, or that I was involved with there. I would like to give somebody credit, but I can't. I have a lot of negative associations with people there because of my own personal disappointments, that things didn't work out there. I left because I was so disappointed in the possibility of the people there ever making links with either local people, other communes, Native Americans, whatever. They seemed to be so self-absorbed. Self-absorbed in their own political viewpoints, self-absorbed in their personal backgrounds, self-absorbed in their own psychological dynamics. I mean, for a group of 70 people, a dozen of whom at least were children, I don't know a similar number -- let's see, that would be 55 adults that winter. I don't know a similar number of sexual preference changes occurring in a population. I'm guessing now, at least a dozen to 15 of those 55 adults became lesbians or gays there, at that ranch. And an overwhelming number of them came from backgrounds that included psychiatrists, doctors, teachers. And for most of them, I don't think they renounced their decisions. They felt that they had always been gay, and being alone in the woods was the opportunity to do it, without any social pressures, no closet to be in, they came out. So women started wearing men's clothes, and men started wearing dresses, quite amazing. I would call it an outbreak, except it didn't go back, for the people who were gone. It was only about a third of the adult population, but that's a tremendous number. For 30% of a group, who you had no idea before had any different sexual preferences than heterosexual, to gradually announce or start behaving in ways that were homosexual and lesbian was astonishing. But that wasn't what disappointed me. What disappointed me was the inability, for example, to make coalitionary relationships with a nearby Indian tribe, which I tried very hard to do, but I found myself alone in it. To make relationships with other communes, because people there simply didn't care what went on in other communes. It was more like

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something to talk about, but not something to feel aligned with. They were alone, there was an overwhelming feeling that that ranch was alone, and that you were alone at that ranch. And that disappointed me. The good things were that we overcame adversity in powerful ways. For a bunch of mostly city people, and a very high percentage of Los Angelinos among them too, by the way, people who I considered to be particularly ill equipped at living off the land, or living away from a mall. For example, we planted tomatoes, onions, and -- no, we planted tomatoes and peppers, both bell peppers and hot peppers. And in that high mountain altitude, I'm guessing, I don't remember exactly, but I think the altitude was around 5,000 feet, winter comes early, and frost bites, winter stays a long time. The snow was 9 feet deep at the deepest point. [unintelligible] ... being novices at gardening -- I hadn't planted the gardening, I arrived after it was planted -- but frost came and just wiped it out. And that was going to be our fresh vegetable supply -- well, canned, we were going to can it. So without any prior experience, this is something I did, I said, "You know, we could make salsa. But we have to work really fast. So let's harvest everything that's out there, and just cut away the black parts. But we have to do this today. You cannot let this stuff sit 24 hours." So about a dozen people went out and harvested all the peppers, all the tomatoes, brought it in -- most of the tomatoes were green. That day we cut away all the black parts and began chopping it all up. And they added garlic and onions. I invented this recipe - - garlic and onions and vinegar. I decided it needed vinegar, because it was going to sit for the winter. And we made jars and jars -- because we had canning jars -- jars and jars of this frost bitten salsa, pickled. I think we called it pickled salsa or something like that -- salt, vinegar, things that you normally don't think of in fresh salsa, you think of as in pickles, but then the material was the sort of thing that's in salsa, peppers, onions, tomatoes, garlic, chilies. We made hundreds of jars of it, and that actually got us through the winter. We were eating brown rice and this pickled salsa two, three times a week, that would be on the menu. Or for some people it was a constant vegetable throughout the whole winter.

Q: Did it taste okay?

A: Oh, it was delicious. It was one of those strokes, like a really happy accident. But we got it down -- it might have been my idea, but it would not have been executed unless there were a dozen people willing to do -- these were very arduous things, to go out there and pick this whole damn thing, do it fast, and volunteer to go into the kitchen. There were teams of six people working on a different vegetable, peeling and chopping garlic, chopping onions. Huge amounts of stuff started appearing, and we were mixing it in huge containers. That was a great team effort, and it worked out well, and it tasted well, and it lasted through the winter. It was a triumph. And there were people that became very good at natural medicine. With 9 feet of snow around you, you're not going to get out. None of us knew how hard the winter was. In fact most of the houses had to be rebuild during the winter. Most of the firewood was cut in the snow. Everything was done the hardest possible way. So you spent all day surviving. And it may sound a little death march-ish when I say it that way, but actually, there was a lot of cooperation, and there was free time, and you could leave. You could leave and come back and not have too many things go wrong. You could trust your place to people. And people did look after each other. On the other hand, they did not look after each other. In one of our political moves inspired by one of the members of the commune who had been reading too much about the Red Guards in China, there was a group of people that marched through the land, went to every house, announcing that they were a revolutionary committee who wanted to start practicing a more advanced form of communalism, and there was too

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much of isolation in cabins, and too much of caring about yourself, so bring your most needed things and your children, and come down to the main building, and we will all live together in the main building for the rest of the winter. Sounds a little Jim Jones-ish when I say it that way, but it was done with a little more cheer than that. So I resisted it for about a week, I couldn't see the point of doing that, and I didn't see it producing anything. It seemed to me to be more of this self-indulgence that seemed to be a chronic in this particular group. Might be worse than another group, come to think of it. Isolate the 75 human beings, men, women, and children, in the mountains, tell them that there are no rules, and expect paradise, is a bit much. So another group, a trailer park full of people, might do much worse. If you just transported them up to Black Bear Ranch for the winter, they might eat each other, I don't know. But I resisted this, and when I finally did come down to the main house, I saw that people were trying to make the best of -- like sleeping beside each other in a circle in the main living room, with the children all in a separate room by themselves. By the way, the children crying in the morning, and no adults wanting to go in and be responsible for all those children, was a major factor in my deciding to quit this place. And the woman I was with -- and I don't think I'm supposed to say I was with a woman, that would violate the communal spirit of the situation -- was the person that found herself most often taking care of all these children. Which I admired her for. So I began to feel that the inability of people to get over it, like, you know the expression, "Get over it," -- I feel resentful, I should've gotten something, I didn't get it. Okay, you feel resentful, fine, now get over it. The inability of people to get over it. Pity squabbles and now Jean's wearing a dress, now Margarete's wearing a tuxedo, everyone's off on their own trip, and they're all forgetting to do the dishes, and they're leaving the babies crying -- that got to be a bit much. So that's my personal mixed feelings about it.

Q: How long did you stay at Black Bear?

A: I think it was over a period of a year and a half. I left once to go edit some videotape that I had made of other communal groups, the Dukavores [?] in Canada. I was really very serious about communalism as a utopian -- you know, the back to the land movement I saw as being social.

Q: So did you study some of the 19th century utopian experiments and stuff like that?

A: Well, sure, yeah. There was a book written by one of the authors of Two Year Before the Mast. Is that the right author? No, no, that's Dana [?] who wrote about the mutiny on the bounty. Nurdoph and Hall?

Q: Yeah, Charles Nurdoph did the communal tour.

A: Nurdoph wrote a book, yeah. And the woman I was with, by the way, her family were in one of those -- her grandfather's father was in one of those communes. Alliance, in New Jersey, Russian-Jewish chicken farmers. Irreligious Jews, by the way, completely socialist. They were too socialist to be religions. Is that your background, are you a Russian-Jewish chicken farmer?

Q: No, I'm not Jewish, but I'm not religious.

A: Other good things that happened there is some of the people developed interests, for example, interests in alternative medicine, because we had to treat ourselves. One of them became a Native-American plant-use herbalist of some note. At least one of them became an acupuncturist of some note. Early acupuncturist. Early study in China type acupuncturists. Several of them became stalwarts in the

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women's movement, in one capacity or another. Meaning some were lesbian feminists, some were feminists. Some of them became woods workers of note. In terms of belonging to tree planting collective groups, and becoming silviculture [?] adeps. And some of them became farmers. And some became gay rights advocates. There weren't many that went the particular route I went, which was to develop -- I think I have a more analytic mind than most, or some people. So I tend to think in terms of ideas, like leading ideas. And it seemed to me while living there that people should be more in tune with the place where they live, and that would mean discovering what the place was. And for most Americans, this is not a fact, that they know where they are in natural terms. So I sought a kind of information that the land-based communal groups would have. I made video between communal groups. I called it Video Home Skin Pony Express. They were like letters from one group to another, all from North America. The Dukavores in Canada, the Red Rockers in Colorado, Twitchel [?] Hill in Freedom, Maine. Eureka Springs, Arkansas. I'm naming places where I stopped, made a video of people, and went on to other places. Ward, Colorado. Libre.

Q: Do you still have it?

A: I gave it all to Video Inn, the group that's in Canada, Vancouver. It's a play on the word "in," you know, like, "plug in." I made a sort of a summary of all of the tapes, called Post Guards [?], from Home Skin Pony Express, and put it all together and gave it to them for their archive.

Q: So we might actually be able to get a copy of this, or view it?

A: I've got some old quarter-inch video tape in a drawer in there, it's loaded with it. But I don't want to touch that, because it's liable to crumble. At any rate, that ended me up in Maine. From Maine, I visited some people in Nova Scotia, and then went to the 1972 Environment Conference in Stockholm. Found that there were thousands of people in the streets there, who I called the "planetariat." Do you get that word? It's derived from proletariat. What's your background?

Q: I'm not sure what you mean?

A: Do you have a political background?

Q: Definitely left, I suppose. I've spent a lot of time in school, probably more than I should've.

A: You seem to know a little bit about this background that I'm describing.

Q: Well, I'm really interested in communal studies, it's something I've read pretty widely.

A: That got me thinking that everybody on the planet was sort of a new definition, human species on the planet is different than member of a nation-state in the world, and that the U.N., United Nations, was inappropriate for this new planetary view. So I developed the idea of a bioregion.

Q: Wow. You developed the bioregional movement?

A: I put the pieces of it together, and then with the aid of ecologists and community organizers, defined it, and started the bioregional movement, which now has about 250 groups in North America.

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Q: Wow.

A: Why are you smiling?

Q: Well, that's just wonderful.

A: Well, that probably derived from being exposed to the elements of ecology at Black Bear Ranch. And as I said before, it would be wonderful if I could give somebody credit for that, but I can't. It was almost in spite of the ranch. It's the fact that we had to do so many things on our own. You actually had to look at food, water, waste, child birth. I helped a woman have a child who then, we had to repair a truck to get it through the snow to get emergency help at a hospital -- just all the things involved. It was, we thought, "She's going to have a baby. Read a book, have a baby." It was more like really traumatic labor that went on and on. It was horribly complicated. She couldn't be moved unless it was on a mattress, and we had to rig all this. But I mean, we did it. We -- well some of us did it. Some of us looked at it, and went, "Me? Eek!" But we got her out of there, and got her to a hospital, and it all worked out well. It was sort of marvelous. But when you see that kind of raw involvement with everything that's around you, -- we didn't know enough to -- I don't know if you remember much about Lenny Bruce, but one of his basic lines is "All law begins with this premise: Don't shit where you eat." Well, you know, he meant it metaphorically. In other words, don't be bad to the people you're around. But literally, we shitted where we ate. We didn't know it, but because the land was like this -- extremely vertical, and the outhouses were close to where our cabins were, and our cabins were close to the creek, that in heavy rain, all of that -- you know, the outhouses would fill with water.

Q: So did you get hepatitis?

A: Salmonella, hepatitis, every variety, shigella [?]. We had everything you could get. Not everybody got it, that was astounding. Their blood should be tested. People were doing desperate things, it was like the plague. People were eating garlic, on a garlic-only diet to get rid of things. So consequently we had to make a map of the ranch and put a dot for each place there was an outhouse. And then you could see that all this was going into the creek. And that's where our water supply was. So we had to redesign the communal shitter, and then we redesigned each other's shitters, and then we began only composting our waste. We did a lot of things that are advocated now for living densely. But we did it by necessity, it was just like the pickled salsa. It was -- we did things that were in [changes his tape in his recorder] ... anyway, we were acting out all of the phenomenal that were appropriate to the problem, how do human beings relate to the ecological direct environment. Not woozy, suburban environmentalism. You dig? It was down on it. And the other people around us, our closest neighbors were a Native American tribe that fished for salmon out of the river, and whose local hero was a guy who could stand on a slippery wet rock, with a net with a pole ten feet long, catch a 40 lb salmon on it, do a flip with his arm so that it would make a sock on the bottom of the net, throw it over his head, and then flip it again so the sock would undo, and throw the fish up on the bank behind him, in such a way that it would stay there flopping, until he could get up to it. Just 40 lbs. at the end of a ten foot pole --

Q: --On a slippery rock.

A: You ought to try that some time. Here's your problem -- hold 40 lbs. at a length of 10 feet from your body. You will go over, it is very difficult. This guy was built like a refrigerator. One of those huge, stocky,

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[unintelligible] Indians, they're built like that, they have trouble going through a door, their bodies are built like a door. Anyway, that was our neighbors. And we did that with them. I caught eels by myself in a trap, and smoked them myself. And I brought them back to the camp, 60 smoked eels, and brought them back to Black Bear, and said, "I found some meat for the winter," and they said, "We found a Japanese, he just walked in, and he said if you brought in eels, he would make sushi." So the first sushi I ever had was on a mountain cabin with Indian smoked eels, and brown rice, that a Japanese guy made that just walked in. Those are the beautiful things. Or also, there were behavioral things, like sometimes we would get ex-cons, or Black Panthers, or Weather people, people who were involved with violence as a practical consideration. Not violence as an occasional, passionate, but violence on a daily basis. And their demeanor was really high strung and paranoid -- "You said what?!" It's like ready to take on the world. And watch them after a week. We knew, have a guy come in who's got a knife and a gun, looks like he's ready to take on the world, and just give him a week there, and then check him out. And that person would be mellow, and unarmed, and starting to think about something like a severe storm as something to be impressed by instead of how tough somebody was. That was nice to see. What I got out of that was the idea of a bioregion, and consequently, a lot of people have contributed to that idea. And a lot of the land based groups 20 something years ago, those people are all 20 something years older now, they have children, some of them have grandchildren. And a lot of them do ... but it's just me. Is there a Mister-somebody?

Q: Yeah.

A: I've never been married. What's next?

Q: Gosh, I'm trying to figure out if I should pursue Black Bear or go back to the Diggers. I'm interested to hear some more about the Diggers, and how it was all organized. Or maybe it wasn't organized?

A: There was a core of people. Mostly these dropped out theater people. People had left the Mime Troupe. Probably at the highest point, a dozen people left the Mime Troupe to become the Diggers. It was started by two actors from the Diggers, and I was the third. Then we were joined by others, eventually Peter Coyote, the movie actor.

Q: He's on my list of people I'm supposed to contact.

A: At any rate, and then these girls from Antioch college joined in. Actresses from the Mime Troupe were there, Judy Goldhalf [?], Jane Lapener [?], actors and dancers.

Q: Oh, that's David Simpson's wife? I interviewed David Simpson a while back.

A: Yeah, she's his wife.

Q: Were people actually considered "members" of the Diggers, or was it never that formal?

A: No, we said that if you're a Digger, you'll say so, you'll just say you were.

Q: So someone could show up and say, "I'm a Digger," and just start pitching in to help with the work.

A: Yeah. Or not helping with the work, just walking around and saying they were a Digger. There were some real characters out there, named things like Tobacco. A guy that rode motorcycles, can't

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remember his name now, but just had single names that were strange, who called themselves Diggers, and even were interviewed as Diggers, but I never saw them doing anything. I'm not resentful, I mean, the credo was, "Everything is free, do your own thing." So if doing your own thing was nothing, that was your "no thing." You had a free nothing, that would fit, that would go. In the spirit of the times, you know.

Q: But in order to accomplish all that you were doing, which was pretty intensive, you had to work pretty hard!

A: We were an ensemble at the Mime Troupe. We got \$5 a show. You can imagine how dedicated you had to be. And the politics there were very left. We were anti-war, we had a minstrel show called "Civil Rights in a Cracker Barrel." We were arrested all the time for our shows, and for not having permits to play in the park. My first play for the Mime Troupe never was performed, because the police arrested the director of the theater group, for performing without a permit. It was an exciting time, because there was a lot of new cultural influences. Bill Graham was the business manager for the Mime Troupe. The reason he left the Mime Troupe was that he saw how many people came to a benefit that featured the Mothers of Invention, and the Thugs, and Blue Cheer, and these other groups, did a benefit for the Mime Troupe, out of appreciation for them, when we were arrested. Well, he saw 5,000 people around the block, and his eyes rolled. He got Saul Herok-itis [?]. Saul Herok was the biggest impresario of New York at the time, that's what Graham always wanted to be, was the second greatest. And last time I was in New York, I saw a street's been named for him, so I guess he got it. Those were very exciting times, and those people were very ensemble oriented. So they became the core group who did all this work. Judy Goldhalf and Nina Blossomhime [?], and Sienna Rafia [?] were the people that went down to the farmer's market nearly every day, and got yesterday's old vegetables.

Q: And they'd give them to you free?

A: Yeah, well, these girls would charm them. The Italian guys at the --

Q: Did the core group live together?

A: Not together in the same building, but together like out of each other's pockets. Like, "I don't have any money," "Oh, here's some money." Or, "I don't have a place to stay right now," "Stay with us." But intimately supportive. Not like, "I'll see you next week," but "Right now, I'll quit what I'm doing, I'll help you." So nobody ever -- if you got arrested, you were out the next day. People would raise your bail.

Q: Now, how did you get these free apartments?

A: Usually under a ruse. Like the same way we got the free store. I told the owner of the space that I was going to rent this space to make a boutique. And they said, "What kind?" And I said, "A fashion boutique. It's going to have men's fashionable clothes." And then we were in it, and we just changed it into the free store. We kept paying the rent. So the owner hated it, but there was no way to legally get us out. The free store was called Trip Without a Ticket.

Q: Now how did you get the money together to pay the rent?

A: On the free store, by -- we created a poster. The poster at the bottom said, "One percent free." It was

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based on a patch the Hell's Angel's wore that said "One percent." Someone had written a magazine article, and their comment, this was in the middle '50's, right at the time of The Wild One, you know, the movie, Marlon Brando is a motorcycle outlaw that comes to town. I listed it as one of my favorite films, not long ago, someone asked me, "Give me a list of your 10 favorite films," and that was one of them. So, someone reacting to this wild motorcycle image said, "Oh, don't pay any attention to these people, they're only 1% of the people that ride motorcycles. The others are all decent human beings, good Americans." Well, the Hell's Angels, who saw themselves as the 1%, had a patch that said 1%. So I took that, 1%, and put "free" after it. I put "free" with anything, at the time, and took a photograph of two Chinese tong [?] men. Tong were Chinese outlaws who were hired to guard Chinese establishments during the gold rush. Very tough guys. There's a picture taken of two of them leaning against the wall in San Francisco, smoking cigarettes, looking very tough. So I put them on the poster and put 1% free under it, and put in Chinese, the ideogram for molting, or revolution, out of the I'Ching. These posters were five feet high, three feet wide, on newsprint. Spay-painted. And we put them all over the Haight/Ashbury. They were very cryptic, very evocative. You can imagine in the last half of the 20th century, you're looking at Chinese tong men -- a lot of people didn't know these associations, just the look of it was "Whoa." And it said, "One percent free." Well I gave them to all the store owners on Haight St., and said, "Put this up." They knew who I was, they knew who we all were. Some of them said, "Why do I have to put this up?" I said, "You don't have to, it's a free poster. It's beautiful, it's free, put it up." But some of them, and this is really true, some of them interpreted it as extortion, that we wanted one percent of their income, the hip merchants, the ones selling ash pipes and voodoo dolls, and god's eyes. And some of them actually started making contributions to the Diggers, based on that understanding, although nobody had said that. One of them was a woman who started Cost + after this. She was on Haight St., she had a big bead store. That's the beginning of Cost + by the way -- do you know what Cost + is?

Q: I don't think so.

A: It's an import chain.

Q: Is it like Pier 1 imports sort of?

A: Sort of. The idea is they directly buy an import, low-cost, third world goods, and sell them, their cost, plus a certain margin, that makes their price lower than everybody else. She started that. But it began as a bead store on Haight St. And when she saw this 1% free, she said, "I'm paying the rent on the free store, from now on. Just every month, come in, you may have to remind me, but I love what you're doing, I'm paying the rent." So she paid the rent. And the houses, people paid the rent through welfare checks, through money they got from their parents, some of the women -- well one of them in particular was a stripper. This was sexual freedom time, so that was what she did, Julie. Some people worked and threw money in. And sometimes we only had these apartments for awhile. Somebody had paid rent for 3 months, they were going to leave, they threw in 3 more months of rent, and then left. Paid the 3 months in advance, because they had the money, and then said, "The apartment's yours for three months." So we just had it for that length of time. If that three months was in the summer, that place would be jammed. And the health department was involved with that, they accused us of violating all kinds of health codes. But we saw that as police harassment, we saw that as like drug and behavior

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harassment. I could tell you a lot about the Diggers. You asked how the communal households worked. Let me tell you what could happen to you at one day in a communal household. You were one of 8 people in a space this big, 4 or 5 rooms. Like 2 to a room, with a couple of rooms as common rooms. You've been there for 2 weeks. That makes you one of the older people there. One of the more tenured. If you've been there for 2 months, you ran the place. Somebody just came in the door yesterday, and somebody else went out. You're relationships to these people are based on sex, drugs, and rock and roll. You're listening to music, smoking pot, eating together, and fucking each other. You could very easily be in everybody else's bed in a situation. And for bisexuals, that was absolutely the case, they would be in everybody else's bed. You would get food once a week in a cardboard box. Provided by the Diggers. It would have fresh produce from the produce market, some staples that could keep for awhile, onions, oranges. It would have government surplus food -- cheese, evaporated milk -- these were all things we could get easily. And there would be sheets of paper in it as well with news, from the Communication Company, which was a street sheet service that we ran, that Gestetner [?] -- it was a very advanced mimeograph machine. You could do color on it. We did beautiful color Gestetner at work. And we did this in addition to 5,000. We were given paper by a leading paper company, the president of it was a proto-hippie, and he loved what we were doing, so he just gave us reams and reams of paper that they couldn't sell. So we would put out editions of 500 to 5,000 sheets, depending on what the event was. And worked very hard to make them beautiful, they are beautiful, they're three or four colors. Typical of the Digger thing is that it was cultural, it was a theater piece. So the -- for example, tie-dyed shirts, they came from the free store. A woman named Jody Robins, who taught fabric technique at San Francisco State college, we asked her what to do with this problem, that we were getting so many white shirts, because people were dropping out of being 9 to 5. So we were getting a tremendous number of white shirts. Like white business shirts. So she said, "Well, we can either batik [?] them, or tie-dye them." So it turns out that batik requires a level of involvement that's greater than most people have who are amateurs, because it's based on melted wax. Melted wax is kind of difficult to work with. But tie-dye meant that you could smoke a joint, sit in a corner, mindlessly tie knots in a white shirt, dip it in various pots of dye, clip the strings, and you would have this thing that was unique, free, it was the Digger garb. That's where it came from. It spread from the free store, to everybody buying them, and finally some people becoming really good at making them.

Q: So were you the first people doing tie-dye.

A: Yeah, that I knew. I knew one other person, a film maker, that used to use a hypodermic needle to inject inks into tied fabric. But nobody did it as a garb to wear until we did it. Of course, they do in India - - but until we did it, nobody in the United States did, and especially hippie tie-dyes are not Indian tie-dyes. They're wild and undisciplined. Somebody in India would say a fool had done it or a crazy person. We also did events and theaters. We actually used real theaters to do real events. One of them was called "The End of the War." This is typical Digger -- I designed this event -- but typical Digger philosophy at work here, is the way to end the war, is to say its over. Then it will become habitual, and people will end it. So what you do is end the war. You end the war, the war will end. Sympathetic magic, it's like create the condition you describe, it was like the whole Digger deal. So the event was called "The End of the War." The poster was Ho Chi Min [?] with his arms around Lyndon Johnson, all of them holding American and Vietnamese flags while they were hugging. At this event, we had, people came into the

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theater, the theater was free. We got the theater donated. We got a search light donated. And then everybody that performed there performed for nothing, including Steve Miller's band, Jama Peneer's [?] group did a nude dance performance there. We got cargo netting and put it on the walls, people were climbing the walls. There were people with bowls of oil that were putting them on people's bodies and necks. There was pot everywhere, and platters given to people, LSD. There was a table with bullets on it. The Up Against the Wall Mother Fuckers decided that if the war was over, that the anarchist revolution could begin in the United States, so they had a table with bullets on it. We were pretty eclectic. Anyway, that was an example of the kind of theater that was done inside theaters. Then, outside theaters, there were these events that I described. Some of them were to provoke riots. One of them, I wrote out a thing of how to have a game with an intersection. The way to have a game with an intersection was to walk the different parts of the intersection in different patterns. I had all the possible permutations of the patterns that you could walk an intersection in -- triangles, squares, and X's, whatever. And passed out 1,000 of these pieces of paper on the street. And the intersection described was Haight/Ashbury. So people began appearing at the street corners doing this game, and of course, traffic stopped. But there were dozens of people doing this, following each other, doing this game in the intersection. And when the traffic stopped and the police felt that they had to come and start traffic again, but then they had to get through the crowd of people that were around the intersection. It is a way to start a riot. It is a guaranteed riot-starter. If you have the willing participants to play "The Intersection Game."

Q: So why would you want to start a riot.

A: Practice. Insurrectionary activity. We considered the Haight/Ashbury to be ours, not the city's. Not even the residents'. We considered it to be the taken geography of the people involved in this activity. There were a lot of us, we could muster 5 to 10 thousand people easily. So, you know. And we considered the whole thing to be a life theater to expose people to the kinds of things that would be necessary to create a new society. It was an intense period.

Q: Now you said it started at around '66?

A: The Diggers did start in '66. I think the '60's began in '65, by the way.

Q: And what do you think marks their start?

A: The simultaneous occurrence of the Free Speech Movement -- say, '64. The Free Speech Movement, the riots in Black ghettos -- those were the two big domestic events that were pro-Civil Rights and anti-war. And then of course, when People's Park occurred. People's Park was actually the height of the '60's. I wouldn't think any earlier than '64. I would consider the busting of the Mime Troupe play that I wrote, that was an event that began the '60's. Michael McClure's [?] play, "The Beard," he wrote a play called "The Beard," where a man and a woman perform oral sex on each other. Very poetic play. The beard being both on your face and pubic hair. What was common between men and women was a beard of hair around the genitals. And that was busted. And that was a big uproar. He was a Beat poet, so you could say that was the transition from the Beat era to the hippie era. That was one of the signs. Would you put Kent State at the beginning of the '60's, or in the middle?

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Q: Probably in the middle.

A: Yeah, I would put it in the middle. So let's say '64, and then probably, if you want a day that it's no longer the hippie thing, but it's become something else, it would be Earth Day, 1972. That's either the last hippie event, or the first -- the Woodstock of the ecology thing. So the '60's go into the '70's, and only start in the middle of the '60's, for me. It already had been ten years long. You agree?

Q: Yeah. Our project, we're calling it the '60's communes project, but the time period we're looking at is kind of '65 to '75.

A: Good. Land based groups last through '75.

Q: Yeah, because they started a little later. And I guess, well that would sort of lead into my next question, and that's, I've heard from a number of people that bad drugs started coming into the Haight, and the scene really started to change, and that's why people started to --

A: --The bad drugs always were in the Haight. I never agree. People say heroin -- but heroin was there all the time.

Q: But did the scene start to change by the end of the '60's. Or maybe even '67, '68?

A: Yeah, but the reasons for it aren't necessarily internal. There are things like the anti-war movement, when it had no recourse, when you couldn't turn on the television without seeing burning bodies or monks committing suicide, or Vietnamese generals shooting people in the head, you wanted to get away from it. When you couldn't get Civil Rights, and the ghettos were burning, you wanted to get away from it. I don't blame people for wanting to do that. But the Diggers felt that people -- if people were feeling that, that they should do something constructive of their own. If Black people were burning ghettos -- in fact the first Digger thing was two people sitting on the roof, watching the Fillmore burning, two hippies saying to each other, "Why aren't we doing something? Look what Black people are doing. Why don't we do something?" So they formed the Diggers the next day. That's where it came from. Anyway, those things, those influences started to pass. I wouldn't say that Civil Rights came overnight, but enough things happened that people began to think there was a little bit of hope there. The war was ended. The economy got worse. It was no longer a surplus economy. How can you have all this free stuff without a surplus economy? It was a result of the Great Society, in a way. Welfare was very easy to get. People left cars outside the free store. With a pink slip under the windshield wiper. You can't imagine that today. There was a real surplus. And those things ended. And then internally, in San Francisco, the police began really getting heavy about the Haight/Ashbury, the way I described.

Q: Did the kind of people that started to flock there change too?

A: I think so. Yeah, I think so. There originally were people who were interested, but they became people that wore buttons on their shirt, a vest full of buttons. People like this, with a stupid grin, and they weren't interesting people. And also, you know, it was a big introductory period. It was a period when drugs were being introduced, LSD. Being introduced en masse. Owlsley [?] was producing it over in Berkeley. He was producing hundreds of thousands of tabs of acid. It was being given away free. We gave away thousands of tabs of acid at one event, called the Human Be-In. Once the introduction had been accomplished, what do you do then, just keep doing it? You don't keep introducing something, you

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introduce it, and then you do something else. And people began to feel that the show-ers up in the Haight/Ashbury were becoming less interesting in terms of their contributions. They were younger, they were starry-eyed, or they were zombie-eyed. They weren't that happy, giddy, explosive, sexual freedom oriented group that they had been in '64. And a lot of people started leaving for the country, for various reasons.

Q: Now when would this have been? Like '68, or '69?

A: Oh, '69, yeah. Black Bear people actually got up there in '67, I believe. But by '69 -- Morning Star Ranch probably started in '66. But other groups started forming like those two. And people stayed in Haight/Ashbury for a little while, the interesting people, and then go and do something. They would get their dope, they would get their free sex, they would listen to the San Francisco sound, and they would go to Oregon and start a farm. There were people who were trying to get away from American society. So what we were left with were the people that didn't have the imagination or capability to do that, or hadn't even gotten to that point in their life. A lot of people sitting in doorways, with blankets wrapped around them. That's what I remember. Getting roused by the cops constantly, cops making a constant presence of themselves. That's what I saw happen. And me, I was just exhausted.

Q: So is that why you went back to the land, just to kind of --

A: No, we gave fair warning, we told everybody we weren't going to do this after the summer solstice.

Q: What year was that?

A: Sixty-nine.

Q: And so is that when the Diggers ended ?

A: Absolutely. There were already -- we were having more attrition problems and legal problems than we were getting new energy. We started with a lot of new energy, no legal problems, and no attrition. We ended with a lot of legal problems, no energy, and a lot of attrition.

Q: What sort of legal problems?

A: Arrests. Heather Grovin [?] was set up by the police. Other people just got arrested, for drugs or health code violations, that kind of thing. I think pleasant as you are, we're at the end of this. What do you think?

Q: Sure. Are you still active in the bioregional movement?

A: More active than I'd like to be, frankly. Yeah, I just got back from an organizing and speaking trip in the Northeast. And something called The Conference on, the Teach-In on Globalization, in Washington D.C. Two weeks before that I was part of the watershed poetry event in Washington. Did you hear about that?

Q: No, I didn't.

A: I just go the poster for it, I'll show it to you. Can you wait here for a minute?

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Q: Sure.

A: [unintelligible] ... so I'm sitting there in the seat, waiting for it to go on, and the place begins to fill. And it filled to capacity, and then people were sitting in the aisles, and then all the aisles were filled. Five deep. And then the back of the room was completely filled. And people were out in the hallway to listen. What it was billed as was that they would read from their works. One of the things I was interested in was what did Windel [?] Barry [?] think was his most interesting thing, that he would read us in the Library of Congress. So it's sort of like, what do these writers, who, you say who some of your favorite writers are, I even know some of these people, but I was just interested in what would they pick? What would they think is their best material. And Terry Tempest Williams came out and said, this is in the middle of this event, it was four or five days long, this was like third night, and she said, "We've been talking, and we've decided that the people that have come to this, attended this event, has been listening to us a lot, and we haven't had a chance to hear what they say. So we all decided to turn the microphone over to the audience."

Q: What happened?

A: There were about three beats of stunned silence from people that had wanted to hear them, and then because the audience, as you could guess, was 50% unpublished poets, they ran to the microphone, created a line around the room, and read or talked or described their girlfriend's or lover's or children or the land they lived on, for up to 5 minutes each. And no one left. It had a teach-in-y feeling. It had a '60's kind of feeling. It comes from that. It comes from that ethos. Why else would you go to the Library of Congress as a professional writer, and not read your own work, unless you were involved with some values, context, that values context that I would trace as coming from the '60's. It reminded me of in France, during May '68, Jean Louis Barreau [?] was the hit of the [some name in French]. As a sign of solidarity with the students, in the May '68 uprising in Paris, the turned the theater over to the students to say whatever they wanted to say, suspended all the theatrical productions, just let them speak in the theater. Is it just me, or is there a lot of connection between theater and revolution? Do you see it? I'm saying, "Is it just me?" because I remember this event, and I thought, "Now that's really doing it right." I mean, what else are you going to do, try to find a play that's appropriate? That's kind of in-sy, you know. But to turn the theater over, the important theater, with the microphone, to the students, to say what they want to say, is really sensational. That's what this reminded me of. It was -- that's why I'm saying, you can trace it from the '60's. So for an hour and a half, these people did these things. Some of them were absolute schmucks. And some of them were really deep. [unintelligible] ... you could see where writing comes from, if that was the purpose. If they had said to [unintelligible], "Look, we're being billed as the stars of this thing. That's an embarrassing thing for nature writers to be doing. It's antithetical to ecology to have stars. So why don't we just see what the stuff of literature is, as provided by this group?" So some were embarrassing, and some weren't. And one was a middle-class woman in her late 40's, early 50's, dressed the way Scarsdale [?] women dress.

Q: That's pretty wealthy, right?

A: Yeah, upper-middle-class. Metal, imitation gold or real gold. She began talking about how she bought a piece of land in the country in Pennsylvania to start living a more idealistic, ecological life. And that it

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was her intention to allow the 40 acres that she and her husband had bought to become a wilderness. Or as much of a wilderness as 40 acres can become. In the course of that, she walked over the whole land, and she'd seen a lot of animals, and whatever -- she still looked like she had just come from the mall. She said she went to the next town, and on a day when she was particularly wondering whether or not this was what she was supposed to do with her life. You can see this, can you? Kind of a John Updike situation, a John Updike climax in a life. So she said in a somber mood, she went to the graveyard, and looking at the gravestones, there was her last name. Died in 17- something. And she went to the city records, and find out this was in fact a relative of hers. But that isn't why she bought the land there, she was from New York. It just happened. So she said now she's beginning to think that there were other forces moving. And that this wasn't her responsibility anymore, it wasn't her personality that she had to find, it was how to serve these other forces better. And I don't think the writers on the Dais [?] thought that much of her story, but I was impressed by it because of the mileage covered. It's like the distance gone, not the point arrived at. Because I know lots of people that say, "I want to serve the earth," and I believe them. This woman didn't know that that's what she wanted to do. And things began to conspire to tell her that. And she recognized that. So out of the mall, into the woods. Pretty impressive.

Q: Well, could I ask you one final question, because I know you need to go? I'm curious what you've learned in terms of lessons about people's ability to live together communal from your experience. Do you think communal living can work? Is this something people should be striving for? Is this something you want to do again?

A: I don't think I ever stopped. The Diggers were a big extended family. I'd say there were at least 300 people in the Digger family. That's everybody that everybody knew that was doing something related to what we were doing. And at Black Bear, those people were a family. That was a family. The fact that I find some things to be disagreeable about them is a thing that happens with all families. And since then, well, let me give you an example. I had a daughter, and when she was 12 or 13, that time when girls go bad, you know, girls do get awful for a period there. Boys do too, but it usually starts later and lasts longer. And girls are usually over it by the time they're 16. But 12 to 16, they are hell. Maybe you're laughing at me and not agreeing with me, but I'm telling you my appraisal of it. And by the way, in other primitive societies, this is well recognized, where you don't live with your teenage children, they're taken from you, through arrangements. Like in Africa, the wife's older brother is the person that takes the children. Teenagers can't live with their parents. Do you have any children?

Q: No.

A: Well, you were once, so maybe you remember that you couldn't stand your parents. At any rate, she was not only that way, but she did really badly in school in the city. So I went to some friends who live in the country. And -- up where Dave and Jana [?], it's Freeman and Nina, they're from the Diggers. He's a restoration ecology prophet now. A lot of us stayed in ecology. Anyway, there was a school being built there then, teaching bioregional ideas to high school students. But I couldn't afford to send her to this school, but I said, "Look, I will help establish the school, do some of the legal work about the arrangements for getting the land, and I'll teach for nothing, if my daughter can go to this school without being charged a fee." And then with Nina and Freeman, we offered to pay them a certain amount of money a month for her to board there. But what happened was she -- she had always known

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Freeman and Nina, I'm talking about my daughter, she had grown up in this extended family. So going to live with another set of "parents" for two years, with breaks, was nothing for her. In fact, it worked perfectly. They became the surrogate parents that teenagers should go and live with. And she thinks of them as her second set of parents now. She has a special relationship with them, their children, etcetera.

Q: So she went to that high school then?

A: Yeah. And all of the impulses that were badly rewarded in the city, like loyalty to friends, willingness to break the rules, were rewarded in the country. Because breaking the rules there meant inventing new ways of doing things, not tearing out the established ways of doing things. Very creative. She's a wonderful girl. Woman, she's 24 now.

Q: David told me some about that school. It just sounded wonderful.

A: I helped establish that school.

Q: Yeah, wow. He told me some about how they would design a play and take it on the road, and they'd go to Mexico, things like that.

A: Yeah, she did. She went to Mexico. Anyway, that's how those things survived. I think the best communal situations are where people have a larger degree of independence than they have of communally shared space. More independent than shared. That means goods, sex lives, culture, interests, etcetera. Where the things that are shared are the things that are essential and make practical sense to share. Like kitchens, not vehicles. Because people break vehicles, and then call it somebody else's fault. In kitchens, people don't wash the dishes, but you can overcome that. You can say, "Once a week, you have to wash all the dishes." But people don't take care of cars the same way, they don't take care of any tools the same way. But bathrooms, saunas, [tape ends] ... I'm glad we took some time, because I got to think of what I think is the most important thing. I don't think communes particularly work unless there's a cause orientation. There has to be a larger-than-individual idea of a goal to be accomplished, for which a large number of people required, larger than the self, larger than a family. You have to feel that there's something you're accomplishing together, and it can't just be living there together, it's got to effect the greater world. So I would say less rather than more communal social involvement, only the things that are practical, necessary, work, and can be seen to be viable. And the sense of impacting the greater world through your endeavor. It could be publishing books, it could be health-care. Or it could be an overt, political movement or activity, like belonging to the Green Party, or initiating urban sustainability in the town that you live in. Or all riding bicycles. Bicycles right now are having impact on society. Those are the two criteria I have. Another thing is something creative, something creative that you do together, music, dance, painting, making murals, something like that.

Q: You think that helps provide some glue?

A: No, I think it's a natural human endeavor that often is thwarted. But a group of supportive adults can make you feel that it's okay to do, to read your journal out loud, to show your drawings, to do a neighborhood pageant together. Celebration also comes out of there, solstice, equinox. What do you think?

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Q: That makes communal living work? Well I think what you said about having something larger than yourself, some sort of cause, is very essential.

A: Larger than the commune, too.

Q: Definitely. Although I've seen groups where it seems like their only reason for being together is to live together, and they don't have a greater cause, and they seem to --

A: --Then they must need it. They require it. It's hard to do if you simply require it. My feeling is that if people are simply living together because they need to live together, economically for example, that that means that anybody there that doesn't need to live with that group, is going to feel like they're holding the back, or whatever. But if you're all living together because you think you're accomplishing something you think you couldn't accomplish otherwise, then everybody's included. Not just the people who require it.

Q: So you still feel like you're a part of a big extended family, with the people were Diggers and Black Bear Ranchers and stuff like that. So you don't feel a need to actively seek out any sort of communal living arrangement?

A: No, but the -- you know the shared housing phenomenon? The shared housing, you know, people build a building together that they will be living in?

Q: Are you talking about cohousing?

A: Yeah, cohousing. Cohousing seems to me to be a good form for doing it. I could see retired people living in cohousing. And accomplishing all the things I was talking about. In fact, it'd probably be more effective, socially, if they did. Especially if they had a cause together. Like being Grey Panthers, or Elder Hostel, or whatever it was they wanted to do. Religious.

Q: And do you think it's a good form maybe because it allows more privacy than most shared arrangements?

A: Yeah. Also, I've been struck by people who do it, that they aren't drooling, psychologically deranged types. They seem to be sort of straight forward. I wouldn't say "straight" in the sense of hip and straight, but straight forward.

Q: They've got their act together.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, that's the way I've seen it too.

A: And I've seen some interesting designs, there's one in Denmark, where the people bought a relatively large piece of land, maybe a hundred acres or something, and put all the buildings in one corner to use things efficiently, and they're preserving the rest of the land. So come back in 20 years, that place is going to be surrounded by housing development, and there's going to be this wild space in the middle. That's damn good. There should be more of that.

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Q: I've had friends in this country that have tried to do that, and they've been prevented by zoning ordinances, that won't allow them to cluster the buildings together, they have to have one building per 5 acre plot or something, so it can be hard sometimes to make things work. Well, thank you for your time.