

Interview with Laurie Hesed

Interviewer: Shirley Andrews

n.d.

**Q:** Heartland Farm, outside Great Bend. We're going to start talking about 1974. When Laurie started living in an intentional community. Tell me about that, we didn't talk about that at all on the phone, those early days.

**A:** I graduated from college in 1974 from California State University at Sacramento. I had worked with Young life for three years while I was in college. Friends had suggested that I go to either, I had about six people whom I considered to be kind of role models for me, or something. Three of them had suggested I go to Koinonia in Georgia and three of them had suggested I go to Juarez Spring to work with Young Life there. There was a house called Dale house, they took in runaway teenagers, kids who were in trouble. I decided to go to Dale house in Colorado. I stayed a couple of weeks there. I was sitting on the curb one day, on a sunny day, this was - it all took place within a couple of weeks after I graduated from college. A woman came along who I hadn't seen before and introduced herself and asked what I was doing, I explained. She said, "Well, I used to work at Dale house for several years and I know the place pretty well and while you're thinking about what you would like to do for the rest of your life, would you like to come out and work at our farm?" So I said, "Sure, why not." So I went out to Buena Vista with her, it was about a couple hours away from Colorado Springs in the mountains. She and oh, I guess at different times, two or three other people lived on a place called Good Earth Farm. I ended up spending somewhere around three months with them. They had an organic farm, they did organic gardening. They were loaned the farm by Young Life. They had all been former Young Life workers who had decided they wanted to live in an intentional community and wanted to be farming or gardening. They had the use of this small farm. While I was there, we kept one teenager who was having problems at home, she ended up staying with us for maybe six weeks or two months. I stayed there until my mother started having health problems. I was able to get a ride back to California and stayed with my folks for a couple of months while I was saving money in order to go to Koinonia. The whole time I was at the Good Earth Farm people kept saying, "You know, you really ought to go to Koinonia," and I'd say, "Yeah, yeah, I really ought to," but I didn't. Somehow I didn't think that it ought to be my direction. A former boyfriend of mine had lived there so I knew a lot of the people through him. I felt like that was kind of his territory. I decided to check out other options, but then everybody kept saying, "Go to Koinonia, it's really just right in your direction." Then I finally went there in January of '75.

**Q:** Koinonia is a Mennonite?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Ecumenical, what would you say?

**A:** It was started by a Baptist minister and his wife in 1942. There was another couple that was involved too. Clarence Jordan, Clarence and Florence Jordan were kind of the founders of Koinonia, Clarence had his doctorate in both agriculture and theology. He felt that to live out the gospel, it meant being...since he was from rural Georgia, south Georgia, it meant becoming involved with local black people. That was very, very...

**Q:** Radical in those days.

**A:** Yes. So they started an intentional community near Americus, Georgia, kind of right in between Americus and Plains. It continued beyond his death, I think he died in '69. Florence then stayed on, it

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continues to function now. It has changed dramatically, but at the time that I was there, I think there were maybe eighty people who lived there and I was there for six months. That was where I met Larry. He had been there for about six or seven months before I came.

**Q:** Koinonia's, tell me some more about its mission. Its mission was...

**A:** Well, it changed a lot throughout the years. There were entire books written about Koinonia. Cotton Patch Evidence is the one that's kind of the history of Koinonia. Koinonia Remembered is a book that was put together just a few years ago. They asked former volunteers to write something about what they remember of the History of Koinonia. I wrote a little section of it. Then they had people writing from the '40's, the '50's, the '60's, the '70's the '80's and the '90's to show how it had changed. Nullard Fuller, who was the founder, is the founder of Habitat for Humanity, came through Koinonia and worked with Koinonia before he started Habitat. Many of the ideas that he used in forming Habitat came out of Koinonia. When we were there, there was a mail order business where they sold pecans, they had a pecan shelling plant. There was a candy business, there was...they sold all of that mail order. They had books that they were publishing. The main thrust of the work went into building housing for low income people. A lot of the poor, black people in that area became homeowners through Koinonia. Where they would pay, over a long period of time, no interest loans but they would pay only for the materials the labor was all donated. But also, Koinonia would raise money to be able to hire local people to work. It was an attempt to get people out of some of the squalor that was in that area and to also then, hopefully involve them in an intentional community or just show that...be a demonstration plot for the kingdom-is what Clarence would say, that black people and white people could live side by side and be content with each other. There were a lot of problems in the '60's, as you might imagine, that mostly came from the white leaders in that area. Church leaders, who felt that what they were doing was wrong. Koinonia was riddled with bullets more than once where people drove by and just shot up the volleyball field. Koinonia volunteers were beat up many times, well many times that's probably not so, several times. Clarence was always being called on the carpet for interpreting scripture in a way that somehow included all races.

**Q:** I don't have to imagine the '60's because I lived through them as a young adult and I remember well George Wallace standing on the steps of Old Miss and all of those things.

**A:** Where did you grow up?

**Q:** In Salina. So I was removed, but in fact it certainly was a landmark time for all of us who were cognizant of the world around us at that time. It was an incredible place, Georgia, between Americus and Plains to realize the humanity and the totalness of humankind and not be segregated. Boy, what a radical vision that was. It must have taken some courage and commitment on your own part and all of you who volunteered, to know that it was fraught with danger.

**A:** Well, by the time I got there it wasn't. Things had really...

**Q:** It was in the '70's you say?

**A:** Yes, things had really calmed down significantly. I remember how shocked I was to go into Americus and see, I stopped at a gas station with somebody and went in to get water, and to see two drinking

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fountains. One said colored only and one said whites only. The colored only was barely a faucet. The whites only was refrigerated water and such. Just to be shocked by that sort of thing. Basically we didn't experience any hostility or anything. The civil rights portion of life at Koinonia was not a major issue when I was there. There were black people who were working on the work crews, you know, and in the candy kitchen. Koinonia tried for years to experience worship together with whites and blacks. What they discovered basically, was that people had their own culture and it was very difficult to move beyond that. Same with eating meals together, we didn't seem to eat the same kind of foods. I visited several times, a black church with one of the partners. It was a black Baptist church. I think it was near Americas, it was a rural church. It was a totally different experience. There were no hymn books, everybody knew the songs, but they were all done so differently than anything I'd ever heard. It was an emotional experience. It was a treat, I visited there several times. But there were so many differences. You had a lot of northern volunteer workers coming down there and you had a lot of urban white volunteers and a lot of southern blacks. There was friendship and there were good relationships, but there wasn't the kind of bondedness and intentionality to community, to worship, to even meals, that I think Clarence and Florence had always thought there would be.

**Q:** Is that one of the things that has been impacted by time if you were to go today?

**A:** It's really changed, it's no longer, as I understand it, an intentional community. We visited there about, let's see, I was pregnant with Kyle, so somewhere around eleven or twelve years ago. It was still very much like it had been, in fact, it was interesting that, how stories were told, you know there are legends within any, I guess, community that's been around for a long time. This guy who I had never met before, he was a young man, came up to me after lunch and said, "Are you the real Larry and Laurie?" and I said, "Well, I guess so" he said, "Well did Larry really confront you out in the cabbage patch when you were reading that day and ask you all these questions and say that the relationship was not going to go any further until he knew exactly where you stood on civil disobedience and drugs and abortion..." He had all these lists of things and I said, "Well yes, but how could you have possibly known?" He said, "Oh, it's one of the stories we tell around here." It cracked me up. There were several other things like that. There were people there that I knew of because of stories I'd heard many years before. They were just kind of myths or legends that surrounded the place. It was still an intentional community when we visited. It has, in the last many years, it has gone through some major changes and is being restructured so that it is no longer an intentional community, it is more of a business or more of a....people who work there are now paid wages. There were always people who were being paid wages, but they were not a part of the community. Well now the community part of it, the intentional community part of it has disintegrated. Or specifically, the people have chosen to allow that part to die. It's time to move on to something else. So I haven't, I just heard that there have been major changes and I don't know what that means living there. How that's different. We continue to get their newsletter, but you know it's always hard to tell what's happening at a place even though you get a newsletter.

**Q:** So you moved from Georgia when?

**A:** We left in June of '75. We felt that the community was too large for us. When I was in Sacramento working with Young Life, I used to be involved in kind of a study group with the Young Life leaders. We were thoroughly convinced that community was the way to go. We were reading all the books that we

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could find on intentional community, on organic farming, it felt like all of that tied into our lives as Christians. Living at Koinonia, there were about eighty people there and in order to be a part of the decision making group, that was the partners and long term persons, long term volunteers meeting, you only had to make a commitment for six months. I had come making a commitment for three months, I think originally. I became aware that there was a place where decisions were being made and issues were being dealt with that I was not involved in. So I said, "What do I have to do to get in on this meeting?" They said, "Well, you've got to commit yourself to be here for at least six months." I said I would so that I could be a part of those meetings. I was glad I did, but it also showed me that when you have a group of eighty individuals and sixty of them are in on the decision making, you end up going with the lowest common denominator. Everybody wants their views heard. Sometimes the views are extremely divergent, there are some similarities in values, which is why they ended up there, but the range in experience and the direction that people thought the farm ought to be going was vast. Larry and I both felt that it was too large, it was unwieldy, too large a group to really be able to experience intentional community in a sane way. We decided to, well he had been planning to start an intentional community in Southern California with some friends who had formerly been volunteers at Koinonia. When he and I decided to get married, then we decided to move out to Southern California and be with them. Then we were married in August of '75. It turned out there was only one other couple who decided to go ahead and start this community, so there were just two of us couples. We were living in Altadena, CA. We all worked part time and we took in two teenagers who had run away from home in Texas and got out there and didn't know what to do with their lives and got them into school. We stayed there for a year and then I wanted, I had really been wanting to teach art to deaf children. I had applied for two years in a row to get a scholarship to get my masters in teaching the deaf. Each time I was chosen as an alternate. The option came up for Larry and me to start a Mennonite voluntary service unit in Pasadena, the last few months that we were there. Then they offered me a teaching position in Colorado Springs at the school for the deaf. So, we went out there in August of '76. We said, "Well, is there anyone in Colorado Springs who is involved in radical Christianity?" The guy who was the regional director, Carey Porter, of Mennonite volunteer service said, "Yes, but don't worry about finding them, they'll find you." We were there for about two weeks or so and we met this former Catholic priest and his wife, they had started a soup kitchen in town. Larry started working at the soup kitchen right away, I taught at the deaf school for two years. We were in Mennonite volunteer service for that first year with let's see, I guess there were about eight other volunteers who lived in the same house with us. Then we moved in with Steve and Mary Lynn, this couple, and we were part of the same community then for twelve years until we came here.

**Q:** What does it mean for you to say radical Christianity? What did you mean when you asked that question?

**A:** I think that radical Christianity means people who, it's a theology that tries to incorporate Jesus' teachings into one's lifestyle. Rather than Christianity being a theology that one perhaps adheres to in one's mind and on Sundays. But it doesn't changes one's value system at all. I think to us at that time, radical Christianity meant, is there anybody out there who would call themselves Christian and are living in intentional community, are working with the poor, are involved in peace education. People who are taking Christianity further than the mainline churches have taken it for many years.

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**Q:** How do you feel about that now? I'm assuming nothing has changed, there are still Sunday morning Christians and those who know what it means to live in a transformed way from day to day throughout the days and the nights. I would assume that you would say that nothing's changed.

**A:** You mean for my commitment and such? Or how I describe it or what do you mean?

**Q:** Well, I think that was just kind of a general philosophical question and we can dispense with it if you'd like. So you came to Heartland Farm...

**A:** Well, I'm glad to answer you if I understand what you're asking. Are you wanting to know if I have changed or if my understanding of radical Christianity has changed?

**Q:** Yes, is your concept of radical Christianity kind of the same because the need for that understanding is still in place?

**A:** Yes, I would say it's basically still the same. I think that, I feel a real commitment to be involved in a local church because I feel that we need to keep being accountable and holding others accountable who believe in the same God. I feel, right now, we're members of Brookdome Mennonite church and I feel a lot of freedom to say what I think and to question things. I feel a lot of support even though there are very few people who would across the board agree with a lot of my, how you take your beliefs and turn them into your own personal reality. People, there are those who would question a lot of stuff, but I feel a lot of support to go ahead and talk about it and pursue that. It's still very important to me to live in an intentional community. I think that, you know, of that group, that when we studied intentional community when I was in college, of that group of people, I'm the only one who went off and did those things and stayed with it. There were people who dabbled for a few years, but now they're all back in the same lifestyles that their parents had. I'm always kind of surprised because I think - gee, it fit me so well, I'm surprised that intentional community doesn't fit more people. To me, it's very important to be with a group of people who have a similar value system. Another definition of radical Christianity, I suppose, we have often lived with people of different denominations, often lived with Catholics. I have found that people who are on the fringe of any denomination, usually sound a lot alike. There's a lot of commonality among people who probably most of their denomination is looking at them askance anyway. So, there's no problem living ecumenically for me, when you have a common value system. It kind of overrides all of that. The little idiosyncrasies of particular dogma or theology are interesting to discuss with each other, but not a hindrance to a shared prayer life or a shared community life at all.

**Q:** So this community at Heartland Farm: You have four Dominicans in this house, No?

**A:** Three Dominicans and a Sr. of St. Joseph.

**Q:** Okay, there's another family here that's here temporarily, is that what Terry told me?

**A:** Well, they came as volunteers for at least a year. If it feels like a good fit, they will extend and become core members.

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**Q:** What does that mean to become a core member? If I were to come out and say, "My husband and I want to try this out" what would, I mean just as volunteers, what would that mean in terms of the jobs we might do, the input we might have, the financial arrangements?

**A:** We've set up a volunteer program and I'm the volunteer coordinator. We ask that people, after an initial visit, come for two to three months as volunteers. A lot of times people come here thinking they understand what we're about and then they find out "oh, that wasn't at all what I thought." We had a man who sent us a post card one time and he said, "Oh, I'm just so excited about you guys! You're really doing things the way they ought to be done, I want to come join you." We said, "Well, wait a minute here, that's not quite how we do things, why don't you come for a visit?" He was within a few hours of here so he could come for a weekend, and we'll just show you around and talk. Well, he came with his suitcases packed and he was ready to move in. We just said, "Well, you know, we could have him come as a volunteer." After about three weeks with us he said, "I don't know that I belong here, because you guys just aren't spiritual enough." We said, "You're absolutely right. We're not spiritual enough. We wish we were more spiritual than we are." He eventually stayed for about three months and then left and joined an ashram in California. Hopefully, they're more spiritual there. We, after discussion about it, when people know what they're getting into and we feel like the person would fit in well, then we have them come for two to three months and we have a whole program where I'm meeting with them weekly, other members are meeting with them on a regular basis to give input on about fifteen different issues that are very important to us, like non-violence and consensus decision making and alternative energy, there's a whole list of things. Then we give input, we have discussion so that at the end of that time, we don't expect people to necessarily embrace these things, but at least they understand what we believe and why we do the things that we do. They'll be exposed to some ideas that they probably aren't going to get many other places. Then if they choose to stay on and become members, that's a possibility and we discuss that with them or they may go off to another situation and during that time, they've been involved in usually gardening, but there's also construction, there's some office work and there's some craft work, lots of different things like that. Once someone decides to become a member and we've all agreed to that and feel that that is going to work for all of us, we, well first with the volunteers, we offer people a living stipend depending on their need. There are people who come through who ask for tooth paste and postage stamps and room and board. There are others who are really, have a greater need financially, if we feel we can afford it, we just ask people to be honest with us and tell us what they feel they need to live on while they're here with us. If we can afford it, we can do that, but it varies depending on need. When someone joins the community, we core members have kind of a common kitty or a financial base. We put all of the money that we earn together and then we assess how much we feel each household needs, each household requests a certain amount on a monthly or yearly basis and takes from that what they need. It's a little bit different in this community than in other intentional communities. When you have sisters who are part of an order, they already have hospitalization and they have retirement fund. We pay into the mother house an allotment that the mother house has come up with, the Dominicans, have come up with, and in one case the Sisters of St. Joseph have come up with. But they feel they need to keep people hooked into that and covered by those criteria or those needs that they've set up. They offer, we as a community offer medical insurance to core members. Larry and I have never had insurance. We've always chosen not to have insurance. The amount that they would normally set aside for us that would go to insurance, they just give to us

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and we put into our medical fund. We have always lived, having lived in community for 21 years or so I guess, we have always been in situations where when a financial medical problem has occurred, the community kind of pulls together and deals with it. We had planned on having a home birth with our first child and at the last minute had to go to the hospital for a last minute caesarean. It ended up costing several thousand dollars more than we had imagined. Several people outside of the community offered to pay that and we all talked about it, and said, "No, that's one of the reason we are community to each other. Let's just figure out how much we can pay per month for each of the bills and see if we need to take on more jobs, or what needs to happen. For us that was a good demonstration of how community can take care of itself in a healthy way. It meant that it took us about two years to get it all paid off, but we were paying on a regular basis and our doctors were fine with it. That's what it means from a financial perspective, if there is a pooling of resources, but it's also recognized that this is, it may not be the last place any of us live. Any inheritance money or if there's other like our car is in our name. We've lived in communities where the community owned the car and paid the insurance. The way we've worked it out here is that each of us own our own cars, but we share them as needed. Any inheritance money or if there's something else that people are more comfortable keeping separate, that's okay. We have acknowledged that we don't have to own everything together. What it means from a practical perspective, I suppose, is that we share all of the decision making by consensus, the core embers. We have a weekly meeting that's for all people who are involved in the farm, so that's volunteers, core members, everybody. We all get together on Monday afternoon to talk about the work that needs to be done that week, to share anything that's coming up or anything. Then we meet weekly as a core group to discuss any decision making or issues or whatever needs to be dealt with. That, to me, that's where the heart of the community is. There is a deeper accountability, there's a deeper involvement with each other. We're trying to search out what our, both what our individual missions and directions are and then where we as a group are going together.

**Q:** Give me an example of an issue that you might want to bring to just the core group I suspect that a larger group might want to discuss maybe the addition of a hermitage or a piece of equipment or some sort of developmental issue. But what might the group...

**A:** No, that would be a core group decision.

**Q:** Would it?

**A:** Yes any expenditures or development would be a core group decision. A decision whether or not to neuter the dogs was something that came up a couple years ago. That's something that people who are living here and are committed to living here over a long period of time, at least with some, it's open ended, those are the ones who then discuss, is this something that should happen? People will bring up issues. For instance, in that case I said, "I really feel we need to have our dogs neutered to be, from my perspective, to be responsible so we don't have our dogs running off in other directions and we are not adding to the mass population of unwanted pets, that seems like a responsible action on my part." Then there was someone else in the community who felt completely the opposite. We then worked at consensus to see, everybody else was somewhere in the middle, we kept working at it and couldn't come to a consensus on it. So I backed down, I said, "it seems very important to me, but it's not so important as to override your feelings about it. You feel very strongly about it, so I will pull out and we'll

just let the discussion sit and simmer for a while and see if there's any clarity later on. Well within probably a month of that, the other person who had brought one of the dogs, the dog ran away and didn't come back. Then there was the discussion of, would he have run away had he been neutered? At that point, they decided, that person said, "Okay, maybe this should have been done earlier. I am ready now to have the dog that's left be neutered." So that's just one example of how consensus decision making, I mean, we've had people who live in communities elsewhere and they'll come here and they'll say, "You guys use consensus on everything, doesn't that get a little old?" In a way, we do use consensus in a lot of ways, in a lot of areas in our lives, but we also pretty well know what's going on all over the place. There are decisions that Larry is making in getting that basement renovated and building things. There are some decisions that he's making, like what nails would work best in this situation. But when it comes to, say what kind of insulation or sound proofing there needs to be between apartments, he will come to the group and he will say, "Is there anyone who is interested in being involved in that decision?" Then those who are interested in that will go over and look at the situation and study it and see what they think or he'll say, "Well, we're ready to paint the cupboards, is there anyone who has a feeling about how the cupboards should be painted?" There is a lot of involvement. When somebody calls about wanting to buy organic hay, pretty much everybody knows what's going on. We've all talked about it. "Yes, there's some available and you can talk to this person. They're the ones who are, would be your contact." But we all pretty well know what's happening in all the different areas of our life.

**Q:** Does it require patience to wait for consensus sometimes?

**A:** Well, certainly. But it's a whole lot more satisfying than majority rules. We use that with our children too, there are some situations where we would say, "Dad and I are the ones who are making this decision. This is something that is a parental decision." But for the most part, we ask for their input on everything. You know, "How do you guys feel about this, what do you think? We're talking about vacation." Joe, our oldest, says, "I've had to miss baseball, some part of baseball season or the tournament every single summer. I would just as soon not go on vacation and not have to miss it." So then we have everybody's info, "How do you feel about that?" Could we go later on in the year, "Well, we'll miss the family reunion." Everybody has some say in it, but then when you arrive at a conclusion, it's something that everybody can live with. If you can't live with it, then it's not consensus and you need to go back into it. To me, it's a very satisfying way. It takes into consideration the youngest and the weakest and it somehow says, "There's value in what you think. You add something to the mix that wouldn't be there without you." That's a lot more, I think, compassionate than just whoever raises their hand and the aye's have it. I think that takes more patience than trying to work through an issue.

**Q:** Certainly if you're one of the nayer's, it does. Negative voters. So, outside jobs that are income producing by salary, do any of you here hold outside jobs?

**A:** All of us do.

**Q:** All of you do, what do you do particularly? Do you still work with deaf children?

**A:** No, I do still work with art, though. I do experiential art, I work at Cedar Branch Family Services in Great Bend. There are three therapists who I work with. They refer clients to me, who they feel may be blocked in some area or would somehow benefit from an art experience. It's helping people, it's using



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art to maybe help people express some emotion or some trauma or something that has happened to them or that they're in the midst of that they cannot articulate themselves. I also do dream analysis in conjunction with that. Sometimes the things that come out of our fingertips, the things that come out of our dreams are, it's like our body knows what's happening with us, knows what's going on. Sometimes our mind doesn't connect with that. Art and dreams sometimes can be used to help people understand better what's going on with them and what they can do to provide their own healing.

**Q:** I don't know much about dream analysis other than Carl Jung did a lot of it. Is Carl Jung a mentor for your experience and background in how to do that?

**A:** Yes. I've studied Jungian psychology for about twenty years or more. That is specifically Jungian dream analysis that I use. I guess I think that, as I have read Jung, I think he stumbled on some amazing truths. I personally feel that God has given us a psyche that works to keep us in balance and dreams – break in tape– That it's easy to not be able to hear God's voice. Dreams are one avenue that, where we're most vulnerable and we don't have all the defenses up, so there will be wonderful little gems that come through in dreams, that if we...I think that they are benefitting us, regardless of whether we pay attention to them or not. If we pay attention to them, start recording them and start analyzing them, I think you would just get more benefit out of it. But it is still to your advantage to be dreaming. Everybody dreams. People often think there isn't an order to it. I think there's a lot of order and a lot of sense to dreams. Anyway, I do that anywhere from two to three or four days a week, mornings a week, generally.

**Q:** Do you do that as a part of Heartland Farm? Do you offer retreats or some sort of meditational workshop that deals with dreams and dream interpretation?

**A:** Yes, we do have retreatants who come out here. You saw the hermitage and there are little cabins, I don't know how much of a tour you took.

**Q:** Enough to know that two of those are hermitages and the other one is a reflexology, massage lady.

**A:** Yes she does, Mary Ellen does both reflexology and massage.

**Q:** In the middle one?

**A:** Right. We have hopes of eventually building a larger holistic health care building where both Imelda and Mary Ellen would have space to do massage and reflexology and all the different varieties that they do.

**Q:** So you do organic farming, are you vegetarian all of you?

**A:** No. We, our son, the middle one who is a gymnast, is the only one who is a vegetarian. Everybody else probably strives in that direction, but we're not...

**Q:** Rigid about it?

**A:** Yes. We don't buy meat very often, but we're not offended by either. I suppose we would probably all say it's a place we move towards, we're just not there yet.

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**Q:** Is there any kind of, these are all surely questions, you notice that none of these are on the list.

**A:** Oh that's a lot more interesting. I looked at those questions and I thought, "Well, I don't know if I want to deal with all of this."

**Q:** Well, I think those are made for a wide variety of experiences and they don't all apply. How about healing, certainly the massage, certainly the way to meditate or the places for prayer and meditation, as in healing spiritually. I guess the massage is physiologic, what else do you do out here that lends itself to physical fullness and spiritual wholeness as well?

**A:** Well the intention when Heartland Farm was set up was that it would be a center of healing for the land and for the people. So we do feel that we have a responsibility to the land, to not put chemicals in it, to learn what it's own rhythms are, to work with it and not try to master it. Maybe more of that consensus together with the earth and not to be just using it to...

**Q:** Do you know about the Land Institute by Wes Jackson? In *Becoming Native to this Place* I think is his latest book, I was thinking of that as you were speaking because it seems to be his message as well.

**A:** Yes, Wes, I think Wes is less interested in intentional communities.

**Q:** Oh, that's a given for Wes, I've spoken to him about that.

**A:** We would see that as being, well, important to us as a part of that. We also want to be kind of a demonstration plot so that other farmers who are around us and are still farming by traditional means can look at us and say, "Oh, you know, they used ladybugs on their alfalfa last year to get rid of the weevils, it cost them less than it cost me to hire that plane to put chemicals on it, their yield was close to mine. Maybe I should look into ladybugs." A lot of times it's difficult for someone who is trying to support a family on a farm, by themselves, to explore alternative energy or alternative, it seems odd that organic would be alternative, but to try to experiment or explore those areas. From a financial perspective, they're frightened.

**Q:** It's risky.

**A:** That's right. So we figure, if we can do that here, and work out the bugs, then maybe it will be easier for somebody else to say, "Oh..."

**Q:** It's not so much of a risk because it worked.

**A:** So, I think the connection with the land is very important. Everyone does their own healing in their own way. There are those for whom being in a place like this, having access to space and quiet and others who are willing to help, to talk or to help direct a retreat or to massage them or whatever the situation is. There are those for whom I think that's really helpful and can be very healing. But the people for whom this is too much isolation usually don't come. Healing happens in many different ways with different people at different times. How's that?

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**Q:** I think that's absolutely right on. You have a telephone, is it the only telephone in the community that's here.

**A:** No, each of the households has a phone. There's only one answering machine, and that's in the office. We all have separate lines, there are four separate lines.

**Q:** Now, your children are educated in Great Bend?

**A:** No, we're in the Otis-Bison district, we're in Rush County. So they are bussed. In Otis-Bison, the little towns have consolidated their schools. There are two little towns that do kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade, then a third town does 3rd, 4th and 5th, another town does 6th, 7th and 8th and back to the third town for high school.

**Q:** So you may have children scattered throughout Rush County?

**A:** That's right. Our oldest son is in middle school and that's twenty miles away. Our two younger ones are at the same town where the high school is and that's thirteen miles away. We had discussed home schooling and I had thought about home schooling when I was still in high school, I thought it made a lot of sense. But, we feel very fortunate to be in this school district. It's very small, the classes are very small. What it gives our kids is social interaction, it allows our children to be exposed to people who don't treat them like we do. So, here they're surrounded by people who love them and think they're absolutely wonderful, well, they may come across a teacher who doesn't think they're hot stuff at all. We think that's really important to be able to learn to deal with that. Oh, you've got a tick, I don't have any problems killing ticks.

**Q:** Thank you. I'll check to see if I have others when I get home.

**A:** You're welcome. Sometimes, just walking down, ticks are just starting to come out now, but just walking down to the...

**Q:** Hermitage?

**A:** And just walking through the woods a little bit, you might find them.

**Q:** I'm not grossed out by them, I'm an old girl scout. I am grossed out by the diseases because I'm also a medical technologist.

**A:** We haven't had any kind of sickness from these ticks at all. Our dogs get ticks all the time. People here I don't think we've had more than five ticks get imbedded in people and they're imbedded to the point where you could still pull them out, so ticks are not a real problem.

**Q:** What are the problems?

**A:** What are the problems?

**Q:** Yes, do you have any personal problems sometimes, probably not so much in a group this size, you solve those by consensus probably when there are difficulties.

**A:** Sure there are interpersonal conflicts just like there are any place else. Dynamics are different depending on who's a part of the make up, the mix.

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**Q:** What would you do, for example, if Bill and I came out here and decided to run this place. How would you...

**A:** Decided to run this place?

**Q:** Yes, absolutely, it would not happen...

**A:** We'd say, "Here's the keys honey!" Good, somebody's ready to run it.

**Q:** I think my point is, if you had someone who came here even after a honey moon period of two or three months or six or whatever you've decided and turned out to be really a detriment. Perhaps aggressive or perhaps not buying into the non violence and finding some internal inside four walls type of violence, something that was not compatible with your mission statement, with your philosophies, how would you deal with that person or those people?

**A:** Well, I think that's something we'd be processing all along. Character has a way of rearing it's ugly head, I think fairly early on, I think there are clues that one can pick up. There was a man who spent several months with us who had some serious emotional problems but we knew that when he came on and we took him with that understanding. Well over a period of time he wanted to join the community, we looked at the issue very seriously with him, but basically the conclusion we arrived at was, "You have some issues that you need to be working on, and community is very demanding. So, we feel that for your health you would be better off in a situation where you are working on your issues, you're dealing with your own healing. This isn't it." So we have said at different times, "We don't think we have what you need." I suppose if someone were a core member and something happened that was a major problem like that, besides the processing we would all be doing together, I could foresee us calling in a facilitator to help with that. I don't know, I know of other communities where that kind of thing has come up and in rare instances they have asked a community member to leave if they're tried outside...

**Q:** Truly are not compatible and are a detriment.

**A:** And usually that person knows that. I mean they're picking that up that they're going in a different direction than everybody else is. You know, that's just something we haven't had to deal with, but I imagine we'd deal with it just like anything else.

**Q:** Where are you going to be when you're old, Laurie?

**A:** Gee, I'm going to be in a state of ecstasy.

**Q:** I think my question is, how will you manage?

**A:** As I went with the sisters this morning to worship there was a balcony of those who are infirmed, I thought, you know that's the best way there is. They have been living in this bosom of communal sisterhood and they still are accepted as real. The rest of society, I think, has neither the means, the inclination or the interest perhaps to care for those who are very old. I think the older I get the more of an issue that becomes. Well, before Larry and I were married, people said to us, "Oh, yeah, you can live this way, but you're not married. Single people can just do whatever they want to do anyway." So we said, "Oh, okay" and then we were married. People said, "Oh, yeah, well you can live this way, but you don't have kids. You're a young couple, you can do anything you want to do. You don't have to be

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responsible.” That’s always how people see living in community as being irresponsible. It just amazes me. Then we had kids, and people said, “Oh yeah...” and there was nothing more to say. People have said to us, “Well, sure, but you’re not old and infirm.” Well, right, we’re not. We won’t know what that’s going to be like until we get there, but we don’t ever see in scripture where it says, “Set aside silos full of grain for yourselves and prepare for the end times with amassing of fortune that will care for you in your old age.” We feel like it’ll work out. We have known many people who have lived in community and died in community. We don’t know that we’ll be in community, but there’s probably a good chance. We are community people. I think that our culture tends to say at a certain age, people are no longer worthwhile or valuable to the group and we don’t buy that. We know people who are in their eighties who are still functioning at the level that they can function at. Hopefully we will be a part of a group at that time where our gifts are honored and our input is valued and I think it’ll take care of itself.

**Q:** That’s a good answer.

**A:** Why thank you.

**Q:** Absolutely. Because if you’re here, I suspect that you’ll all be, even if you’re at Heartland Farm, there will be those who will be able to value you and care for you.

**A:** There is a man who is, let’s see, how old is he, 78? He’s a retired Baptist minister, we see him wandering around the farm.

**Q:** I met him earlier, I bet.

**A:** Howard.

**Q:** Howard, yes.

**A:** He’s wonderful, he’s done so much work for us and he comes out whenever he’s got some time and he builds cabinets for us or he talks with Larry or they’re involved in some project here or there. There are so many people and there’s a lot of retired people in this area, a lot of retired people at our church, people who are willing to be involved with us in any way that they can, to be supportive, to have us involved in their lives. That’s another thing that I like about this community. There is a value to the different ages. Our kids are able to be with people who are our grandparent’s age, who are their great grandparent’s age, in some cases. Whereas, my family lives in Northern California, Larry’s family lives in Indiana. Both of our fathers are dead. There are people around, different ages who interact with each other and see value in each other. Larry grew up with three of his grandparents living in the house while he was growing up. He has always had a deep appreciation for elderly people. They have a lot to offer and there’s a reason that they’re there with you. They have something to say. There is a time that an older person has for a kid that a middle aged person does not have for a kid. That kind of interaction is a real gift. We feel real fortunate that our children have access to it, it’s not just everybody who is our age.

**Q:** It’s still small enough to have some real personal bonding.

**A:** Right.

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**Q:** Something about the interview I did last weekend, with a man who was in the Bruderhof of three hundred and fifty.

**A:** We have a good friend who grew up there. Is this one in Ripton, New York?

**Q:** No, it's in Arlington, Pennsylvania. But there is, there are six of them on the East Coast. Well, are there Mennonite communities that are specifically Mennonite, that's all? This one obviously is ecumenical.

**A:** Not specifically that I'm aware of. There are Mennonites who live in communities. The Mennonite mission board and Mennonite volunteer service is set up with a community idea so that if you go into either mission work with Mennonite Central Committee or with a Mennonite volunteer service unit, you're living in an intentional community. But it's very different because you're thrown together from different backgrounds, different experiences, may not have similar values. It's usually a very temporary situation. But it gives you that experience of living with others. But no, I don't know specifically, Mennonite community tends to be more in geographic areas where a lot of Mennonites congregate and go to Indiana and Newton and Hesston, oftentimes around where there's a Mennonite college. A Mennonite community kind of springs up there. But it's not, it's intentional to some degree, but it's not shared financial base or...although there are church groups, small groups who then end up having intentional community together. That certainly does happen in those areas. But I don't know of any specifically that just say, "We're a Mennonite community."

**Q:** I was thinking of Fellowship of Hope, Bruder place and some of those that actually Marilyn had worked on.

**A:** But those may have started from a Mennonite base, but are not, they would not say, "we are only Mennonite."

**Q:** No, that's true. So you have four sisters, three Dominican sisters and a sister of St. Joseph. Your family, does this family that's here for a while have the same, what kind of denominational background do they bring?

**A:** they are attending the Mennonite church with us and they have Mennonite connections in the last several years. Ted was the child of Baptist missionaries in Portugal, grew up in Portugal and in Minnesota. Nancy, I think her background was Lutheran, she grew up in Sterling. Then met Ted in Wisconsin and they lived together and were married in Minnesota and became involved in the Mennonite church there. That was an avenue that felt really comfortable for them and became involved with Mennonites when they lived in South Dakota as well, so it carried over easily here.

**Q:** This is a fascinating interview. I don't know what else to ask., I suppose I should look at my paper, except I think we've covered most things.

**A:** Well, that's good, because I've got to pee, (laughs) and you can write that down. Then I'm going to walk down and meet the kids down at the bus stop. You're welcome to walk down with me if you like. They'll be here in five minutes. So you can look through your notes, I'll run hit the bathroom. You can edit out that last part if you like.

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**Q:** Okay.