

Interview with Carolyn Adams Garcia

Interviewer: Tim Miller

July 15, 1996

Q: It is what, July 15th, I think. We're talking to Carolyn Adams Garcia. I guess, the thing that we're trying to do, overall, is we're simply trying to document the 60's communal thing. As you know, there's been lots and lots of stuff on the 60's written, some of it good, some of it not so good, and it's focused on music and politics, and various things, but the communes, I think have had very little attention. And to me, they in some ways, represent a real high point. Partly because they're so total. Unlike politics, you can go to a demonstration and go about your life in a way, but the communes, it's kind of a 24 hour a day deal, so I'm interested in kind of preserving that record. And in the course of that, and why I'm especially interested in talking to you, I'm really intrigued with the whole question of where it came from. Why suddenly did this huge communal energy erupt and send people off to the country side to live that way. And, I think the answer is probably complicated and in many parts, but, it seems to me that part of it was some communal, part of it's just kind of, in a sense, a steady historical train that there were other things that kind of led into it. The one that I'm curious to know, how you could maybe help me answer that question is the whole Mary Pranksters, cause I mean, would you call that communal, for openers?

A: Well, in part. In that there was sort of a community that sprang up around Ken Cusie. A lot of what happened around in the Pranksters, was very much at Ken's direction, and he had the masters in drama from Stanford, so you know, or from the University of Oregon, and he'd gone on to the writing program at Stanford and had gotten this lovely degree. So, he knew what he was about as far as dramatic presentation. I would say that he was a master of publicity, and understood that you really can't get anything, you can do writing by yourself, but you can't do anything else by yourself that requires folks to help you. So, I think that the artist in him saw the possibilities of a troupe, of having a troupe, or a group. And, he began to recruit people, and got a bus, and wouldn't it be fun if...and it progressed, I think innocently, toward a mass travel concept, where people were wanting to be part of this gang or troupe, and getting on the bus, and becoming part of that outfit. There was various degrees of commitment to that, some people were willing to commit weekends, but not their job, you know, they wouldn't quit their job. Other folks wanted to live there full time, and work on it full time. But, it wasn't a commune, per say, in other words Ken was really the final authority, and it really wasn't a shared financial institution either, we weren't seeking, we weren't really seeking new converts, and we weren't really seeking to tap into their bank accounts either. It was pretty much, whatever we had got used up, in the quest for fun, and trips, and experience. So I sort of missed the major commune aspect.

Q: Was it residential? Did people actually lived at Mohanda?

A: Yes they did.

Q: To me that's an important part.

A: At one time there was 20-25 people living there, and it really became untenable at that point as the systems began to break down, like the plumbing, and the cooking, and the, just too many people there all the time, that was a strain and a stress on what was kind of a small place. There was a lot of land around it. It had wonderful tree stumps to go nest up in. But, it wasn't necessarily something that we were going to build together, like Llama foundation. And, it didn't have a purpose other than to house the troupe really, and Ken's family who lived there and owned the place. It was his home, and I think he tried desperately several times to get everybody to move out and go live somewhere else, but still be

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sort of attached to the events, and attached to the bus, and attached to the Mary Pranksters as a traveling troupe, and I think that that attachment has remained and it's fallen apart and come back together so many times in so many different patterns of people. People go away and come back, and still retain some sort of a Pranksterhood. A lot of it was, we had a lot of fun, we didn't have an overriding goal of creating community, that wasn't the goal, so it misses the commune aspect there. But, we experienced a lot of the same living problems that other people have going in their limited budget housing problems, and we were just one step from being college kids combining the grocery budget and going out and buying spaghetti together, it was just a very natural segway, from sort of a California backyard patio barbecue mentality, into a sort of a psychedelic journey to a writer's, I guess it was a writer's conference out in the East Coast.

Q: And the World's Fair.

A: Yeah, the bus trip. Now, I missed that first bus trip, I came along right after they got home, and sort of when it was supposed to be over, but it wasn't going to be over because people didn't want to let go of it. It was like a family for me.

Q: So you then what, met up with people in about '64, then?

A: I ran into these guys in '64, I was living at Palo Alto, and my brother was doing graduate work at Stanford and that's how I got there from upstate New York, he rescued me from upstate New York. I went out to California, got a job at Stanford, and had an apartment, and a motorcycle, and met the Prankster Klan, late Fall, I guess it was, from mid to late Fall, and just fell in love with them. They were exactly the sort of interesting, push the limit, pioneering spirits, mental activists that I'd always been looking for at the ripe old age of 18. This was the type of people that I felt very drawn to, and after awhile I lost my job, and my parents stopped paying for my apartment, and I wound up moving in with them and living...

Q: At Mohanda.

A: Yeah, and living under a blanket, under a little tent that I'd made for myself down by the creek. And, there was various living arrangements out there. Six boards nailed together with a tarp over the top, and that was a bedroom, you could make something that way. There was a tree house, and some old out buildings that were converted into sleep areas, and then there was the vehicle. Vehicles as living area, as well as on the bus itself. We had, we had quite a wonderful time, then that segwayed into the Assotists, which were Ken's idea, they also seemed to be the idea of people around, it was an idea this time had come that a weekly blow out of some sort was probably the American tradition, and this was a different tradition that we were trying to start.

Q: His acid knowledge was back several years before that, so it's not like he'd suddenly came into a new...

A: Yeah, he'd been the golden boy of Stanford, and had participated in the VA hospital experimental studies, and he'd also been working in the VA hospital here, and working in the mental health wing, as a night person, as an orderly, or whatever he was, so that, he had access both to the experimental phase that they were experimenting on the folks in the VA hospital, plus they were running these experimental

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studies on intelligent high scoring students, with various intellectual credentials at the same time, paying them to take drugs and check their blood pressure, getting them to answer simple questions, so that was, I think, a lot of people from the Palo Alto scene got their start right there, in psychedelics, and it just made a tremendous interest in them, the interest only seemed to grow if you could get together and talk to other people about it. In other words, there's an individual quest, and then there's a community quest for higher learning, and that seemed to be very much of a shared event, and sort of the purpose of the acid test was to bring people into that shared event consciousness, and also to break that rigid stereotyping of audience entertainer, where the audience all sits in their seats with their hands folded until the end of the show, and then they all clap and then they leave. That was out the window, this was to be a fully participatory clientele, not an audience.

Q: And by all accounts, it worked amazingly well.

A: Yeah, and so we had a lot of cute little tricks that we did with people. It was hard work, I cannot take LSD to this day without looking for a place to plug in the projector, or I start looking around for what can I do? When does the work start? You know, what is the, I need to go sell a ticket, I need to go put on my costume, and figure out where we're going to plug all this equipment in, and that is an automatic response now, so it makes me on a different pathway from other people. When I take psychedelics, it's a little disturbing sometimes.

Q: Well, I remember some of the first stuff I read about psychedelics, and at that time, I was out in the midwest and watching it from a distance, but I remember being struck by that whole scene, the whole wide open glorious thing, versus the Timothy Leary, very quiet introspective mysticism, become one with the universe. Two very different approaches.

A: And I think that is a clear distinction, and it's one that caused us a lot of trouble, actually. Milbrook was introspective, but it also seemed really down, to us. They weren't celebrating anything, and we didn't connect that way. I think the one time the bus went to Milbrook, they were all just coming off of a big long weekend party, the bus rolled in at 10:30, and nobody was, everybody was asleep, so I think that there was a perception of that schism that was actually bigger than the actuality, I think the Milbrook people actually adored the stuff we were doing, so it was worth the error, it had a powerful theatrical element, it was colorful, fashion-breaking. Do you remember we were in the rip of hideous fashion industry that was trying to make people as ugly possible, and dress them with square clothes with blinds painted, there was just the most bizarre time, as far as what America was heading toward, and cars had enormous fins, you know, fins three feet tall, this was good, you know hoods, that stretch out, you could seat twelve on the hood of a car, it was ridiculous what we were going into in this country. We felt like we could strike a blow for change, that we didn't all have to march in this direction, and that you know that we needed to undercut a lot of those assumptions about life, and you know, I look around at something like the Country Fair Dome and go, "Wow! What's going to happen? How's it going to be in another twenty years?" Cause we've been participating in this for over thirty years, and it's a long time to be doing something, and we can see, you know, you can see what's happening, but it's not all good, and I think there's just as much adolescent agony out there as there was when I was 17, 16 and 17.

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Q: Really?

A: Absolutely. And that there's this period that people go through in their lives where they're reaching out for something, it's this opening of all the doors, and it's a dangerous time for kids right now. And so, my heart goes out to all the parents out there, most of the kids will survive the transition to adulthood, most of them survive, I have three kids, they've all survived, they're all over 21 now, I'm just so thankful.

Q: well, it's inherently hard.

A: You have to stay in communication, when I grew up there was the generation gap, oh, and it was severe, it was bad, plus we had the Viet Nam war, that, everybody my age that was born in 1946 was marched off to Viet Nam, it seemed like, all the guys certainly were, they didn't stick with their deferments and their college education, and off they went, and it was a horrendous tragedy, and so I feel like, then in the bay area, there was this coming together of the anti-Viet Nam War Movement, the peace and freedom people, the Hell's Angels, some Pranksters, and then some musicians, and it just made for an absolutely glorious scene, and it was full of every kind of character, and old people would come who had been communists in the thirties, you know. And they would come and say "Yes, Yes, Freedom!!" So we got a lot of support from people who had sort of been hiding for a long time during the conforming years, and that was very reassuring and there was other people in the psychology industry who were also working very hard to bring psychedelics into their practice, and they were powerful supporters of the early Pranksters, they were very supportive and very interested and always wanted to be invited to the parties, and you know, sort of study us, as it were.

Q: Well, some of those early psychedelic researchers were real crusaders for it, they thought they were really onto something.

A: They were.

Q: And they were.

A: This is a wonderful tool, it's a shame that it's been so misunderstood by everyone, the information is somehow so hidden, about how to use this stuff, because I feel that kids are being denied any access to the information, I think that the internet is going to be the ultimate resource here.

Q: Yeah, yeah, it's completely changing communication for the better.

A: So, I'm very excited at the potential for the future, and at the same time, I would let the people under thirty learn stuff, they have so much more energy, hip hop was an important musical phenomenon, and rap music was important, they were all youth expression, so that's where you gotta look for your big sweeping changes, is to what your kids, your kids will go to that place where the pain is the greatest and make some kind of a turnaround, and you know, America's hell-bent on destruction again, it's so much like the 60's, it's ridiculous. I'm waiting to see what is going to happen next, really, and we are in our 50's, and that's painful, God I hate being 50, it's really a drag.

Q: Yeah, I'm 51 now.

A: Yeah, I'm only 50, but it's like how did that happen? I don't feel a day older than I do when I was 20.

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Q: Yeah, I know, we're the youth generation.

A: I feel a little older, but, yeah.

Q: Did you, Cusie, later, as I understand it, the standard histories and all say that he came up here and some of the Mary Prankster crowd came with him, essentially.

A: Eugene was his hometown. So, many of the Mary Pranksters also from Eugene and Springfield so that was no stretch, because their folks are here, and so...

Q: But, the communal scene was essentially continued as Farm, right?

A: Yes, it did very much so, and my brother was a part of that, but I was not, I had gone over to the Grateful Dead scene at that point, so I can't really speak to that one. It continued on for several years, up to sixty people, and it was really communal at that time.

Q: Really? They all did live out on the Farm?

A: Yes, as many as sixty people at once, and many buses.

Q: Where'd they live?

A: In their buses, in their vehicles, in the barn, the barn is huge, or it seemed huge.

Q: And that went on for several years?

A: Yeah, like five years, until like 1972.

Q: And finally, Ken got tired of the whole thing and told them to leave?

A: Yeah, started asking people to leave, and I wasn't there for that part, I know that my brother jumped ship and started another commune down in Creswell, called Church of the Creator.

Q: Creswell?

A: Creswell, Oregon.

Q: Church of the Creator, I've never heard of that.

A: It's still going, sort of, the land is still in that name, and now there's some land dispute about the folks that are there want to take it over.

Q: Creswell, Oregon?

A: Yeah, it's just down the road a ways.

Q: Your brother you say?

A: Yeah, my brother Gordon Adams.

Q: Is he still down there?

A: No, he's in Seattle. It was a very minor of a little land commune.

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Q: Boy, Oregon was sure loaded with them.

A: His number, if you want it, he's in Seattle, is 206-633-5447. And there were all these [unintelligible] crews, many of them who had their own farms and communes, and stuff.

Q: Yeah, it's a never ending story.

A: It's amazing, to me, when I started looking at your list, today I started going to your list and reading it to people, and they were going, their eyes were going back in their heads, they were going no, you're kidding, I don't remember, I don't know. Oh yeah, I remember that.

Q: But even this is only like 1/10th of the reality or something like that. I mean really, I mean this one isn't on here, Church of the Creator, I'd never heard of that.

A: About fifteen people, they bought land together, they tried. But, you know, they had some problems.

Q: Sure, we'll call him, that would be great.

A: But you know, you're documenting something that was really a phenomenon, to me.

Q: Yeah, it was. Now, did you live communally elsewhere?

A: No, not really, I went straight over to the dead scene.

Q: And The Dead, I guess, I mean there was kind of...

A: That was business commune.

Q: I mean, it was kind of like a family of sorts.

A: Oh, very much so, Danny Rifkin, Danny Rifkin had the house, he had, he was like landlord, Danny's Father taught communist and socialist thought and theory at UCLA. So, Danny, like was not only Mr. Pinch Penny, he was Jewish, he was an Eastern European Jew, with incredible values about what you could and couldn't do. I mean, Danny has been sort of our social conscience, for many, many years. And then, Rock Skoley was sort of the managerial partner who is a very extremely well educated, educated in Switzerland, speaks several languages, and from the school for diplomats, he was sort of the business manager, and [unintelligible], was just sort of spilling over with interesting people, and it developed into something, it also developed a lot of problems at the same time, the minute it got any publicity, things got really difficult, because people who never would have been there for any other reason, went there just because something was going on, and it was a great scene.

Q: Yeah, it makes it hard to keep any rationality to it, probably though, when people start showing up in huge numbers.

A: It was really just kids that were down and outers, and you know, street kids basically. Kids that had just run away from home. Fresh from wherever, you know, and just big eyed and looking all around them and going "Wow!" And that summer that I moved into Ashbury was really like that, I guess we were there for about three years, but the house was run, pretty much everybody paid into the kitty...

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Q: It was The Dead living together?

A: Yeah, oh yeah. We had a big house at 710 Ashbury is a big beautiful Victorian house, that was kind of really beat up inside, but still had the stained glass and great staircase and cool windows, and nice stuff, and that was like four story house with an attic, so it was way rooms, and great big rooms too. The entire band lived in there, plus two or three of the equipment guys, and their friends and then people would live in chair, you know, so and so had a chair in a closet, or an attic, or you know, there was many different ways to give people a place to sleep. They had one van, and Jerry's best friend from high school. So, it was friends and they had been playing together for quite awhile already, and it was really basically the Beatles that gave them the courage to really go ahead and try to go electric and get funny haircuts, cause they had been folk musicians before that. So, there was a lot of talent there, so they were able to carry the music part of it easily, that was not a problem, but developing sort of the technique of putting on a staged event, staging a musical event, and having all the equipment together, and people to carry it, and sort of the psychological structure that creates this thing, that took quite a while to pull together. And it takes a lot of hands to make stuff like that work. So, we all lived together, and I would collect the money for food, food was my department. Fifteen bucks a week, everybody had to kick in, it didn't matter if it was just you, it had to be, it was per person, I don't care if it was you and your girlfriend and you never eat, you have to pay the fifteen bucks, because there's toilet paper, there's electricity, so I was the collector, and cook, and there was, luckily, we didn't have any cars, but it was easy to shop on Hate Street it was, everything was right there in those days, and it was a lot of fun, we had a hilarious time, it was like a made up family, it was great. You know, I just remembered how warm and comforting, and nurturing, and pleasant the times were that we had there. It was like waking up in a big happy family, everyday. It was really, really nice.

Q: Was the band making enough at that point to pay the bills?

A: Just, \$50 a week was what their paycheck was. And that didn't cover the rent, what Danny was doing, he was paying everybody \$50 a week and withholding the rent which would get paid, and that made sure the rent got paid. Nobody used the phone, there was no one to call, so our phone bill was pretty, within bounds, and we didn't have cars, and it was all really simple and easy. So, you know, and we were willing to walk miles to stuff. We'd just load up the kin, and the guitar case, and walk out to the ball fields from our house, it was like three or four miles, it was no big deal it would take you an hour, but you know, you'd get there. There was a feeling of real confidence about all of those really memorable months, but you know, it didn't last long, as soon as anybody had any money, they moved out, so that was, we didn't really have a commitment, we had not made the commitment to live together that way. But, the communal aspect lived on with our business dealings with each other, and everything we shared in very interesting ways, so the battles over ownership and copyright and stuff never happened, poisoned other musical groups, so, business decisions were made, almost a board room setting, which was a lot of shouting and posturing and laughing mainly, lots of laughter. The payroll, the paychecks got cut pretty similar to each other, whether you were driving a truck or whether you were a musician. So, those things were very much, very organized, the crew had a big voice in what happened, the crew actually wagged the dog a lot of the times, and would say no to certain concert venues, or no to certain schedules or certain people, they had distinct taste, and had various powerful voice of their own, especially as the years went on, and there was a real attempt I think by the

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musicians, to keep the crew in the picture as long as possible, as far as their employment. It wasn't so much employment as it was...what do you call it? If your not employed...their commitment....

Q: Their life.

A: It was, it was like their lifetime commitment, it was 24 hours a day. You had to be completely, totally committed to this thing, otherwise you would feel disloyal, this is one of the problems I think that we faced, was the loyalty, disloyalty issue. I know everybody felt it, whether they want to admit it or not. Because there was, you know, it was kind of the litmus test, and you know, there was folks in there that didn't last because they were more thinking about themselves. So there was a lot of what I would say personal growth sacrificed in favor of the group, and that's certainly one of the pitfalls of the group consciousness, as far as progress toward individual consciousness is concerned, because you suspend that information, because you are locked into the group process, you suspend your own personal development, I think. If you're truly locked in, there are very few vacations. Our very first family vacation we took in 1987.

Q: Is that right?

A: Seriously.

Q: Now The Dead, now they didn't play all the time?

A: Shit yeah.

Q: Didn't they take a year off once?

A: Once, they took a year off, but Jerry played three bands in that year. Everybody had all these projects that they were doing and they were in the studio and they didn't tour but they did a lot of other stuff. So, the commitment to music, never faltered for a second, and the commitment to performance as being the reason. That's why I love the vaudevillians out at the fair, because they share that commitment to performance and being on stage and entertaining, you know, I love all that, I went along with that gleefully for many years. I thought that we were truly creating something magical, and extra, extra special, and the music had so much power and so much energy that it carried all the other crap that could possibly happen to you. All the mistakes, saying the wrong thing to the guy next to you, all those little social things that can go wrong, and tear up a scene, it didn't happen to us, because the music held everything together. The music was so compelling, so powerful, so dramatic, the whole [unintelligible] thing, we cared about it so intensely that nothing could wedge us apart for a second. SO we would take acid together and be in a circle with our heads together, and if you left the circle and went to the bathroom, it was like "Where is everybody? I feel alone!!" Boom! You're right back in there, there was no going for a walk alone, it didn't happen. It's very odd, but that's the way that we were, and there's something about LSD, it takes away some of those filters and barriers, and you're able to kind of get lost in somebody else's processes, give yourself up to it.

Q: Now you're living with just your boyfriend now?

A: And various offspring, that come and go, between us we have five offspring, so yes, I'm living out on the Farm.

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Q: But it must seem downright isolated compared to...

A: It does, it's driving me nuts, actually. I don't really care for the isolation, I really, really enjoy getting together with people who have, who we've shared some of this stuff with. But, I'm working on a book and that's, that requires, you must be alone, unfortunately, for that.

Q: An autobiography?

A: Yes.

Q: That'll be interesting.

A: Yeah, pick up where Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test left off.

Q: Oh really? Oh yeah, perfect. I wanted to ask, did you visit other communes? You mentioned what, Llama?

A: Yeah, well they wouldn't let us into Llama Foundation, so we were really hot to visit them, but they said no way, you people are way too noisy and besides, you're uncontrollable, and you're not spiritual enough. So, we didn't get to visit them, you know, we didn't do too much of that, we mostly hung out with other musicians in the folk singer music business, and the many photographers that wanted to photograph us, and artists and writers and so and so...that was more of a collectives than a commune, it wasn't until I got up here too, till I really started meeting people at Berkely and in Eugene that I began to realize that there was these dedicated communes starting that were very intense. That whole business about process, you know, this was all news to me. For us, who shouted most and had the best joke, so I thought a lot of other people were responsible for developing community process, but I think Country Fair is probably the most outstanding example of community process, because it's a temporary process, it's amazing. Right now, the Grateful Dead is having to move into virtual reality. Because it's not playing anymore, so it's going to have to be a virtual community.

Q: I guess, but now, what's the Further Festival, isn't that...

A: It's a tour that's made up of a couple of band members' bands and some other people and some other people, and its a good attempt, I think, to keep some of that feeling of larger community together, and then we have the REX Foundation as well.

Q: Now, what is that?

A: REX Foundation is the Grateful Dead's philanthropic arm that we started in about '82, or '81, and every year the band would do a series of concerts for their non profit, because they got asked to do benefits all the time, and finally Jerry got the smart idea, man let's just start our own non-profit, they keep wanting us to do benefits for this non-profit and that non-profit, and it's inconvenient, and a huge hassle, and things are never really well run, let's just put together our own non-profit, do some shows, and give them some money. After much argument, we finally did that, and then I got on the board in the late 80's as the only female which was kind of hard, because REX meetings were run a lot like Grateful Dead meetings, but it's still going, and we're trying very hard to keep it together, we've got wonderful people on the board, and we were up to a million and a half dollars a year in, actually '94, so that was a real good work that we were trying to do. And you know, help out all sorts of community

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work and science, and environmental, so all sorts of artistic projects, and musical composition, and a very wide variety of stuff that REX Foundation is doing.

Q: And that's going on?

A: That's ongoing but we're trying really hard to reformat and become a service organization for the Dead Heads instead of requiring, I don't know, it could either go to a service organization for Dead Heads, or it could go to being a celebrity foundation, I haven't really, we haven't really picked, I don't think the two things are the same way, we're coming to the place where we have to pick our exit. We're going to have to pick our direction here, so I'm not sure. I kind of lean toward being a service organization for Dead Heads, because it would start up a community building and an extension service for people's projects.

Q: Sure, it would be wonderful if that could happen.

A: It seems, maybe it's just two aspects of the same dog, I don't know. But we're groping now, because the income from the Grateful Dead concerts has ended, and we're not going to be able to replace that very easily, so, that's my problem right now.

Q: Well, it would make a difference.

A: It's taking me away from my project, here, all my creative energies, this is so much work, I'm locked into it, I can't help it, it's a way of life for us, there's no way for us to stopping thinking about all those people out there, that greater community, there's folks in jail that shouldn't be, political prisoners of drug laws my heart just goes out to all these people, I want so much to be able to be a vehicle to channel money toward organizations that help get that law changed, that's one of my big things, is try to help get those people out of jail.

Q: One of the great absurdities of our time, it's just hard to figure it...

A: But, we let that happen, it's our fault, I mean I'm fifty years old, by God, I'm a couple months older than Bill Clinton, you know, does that asshole call me and ask me if he should let people out of jail, I think he should let all those poeple out of jail, immediately. [unintelligible] So, anyway, do you want to go over to this other event, I'm done with this one now, I've given you.....