

Interview with George Hurd

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

May 31, 1996

Q: A little bit about your background and what got you interested in communal living.

A: What started it is in 1966, I was a student in San Francisco State, and another student and I took a two bedroom apartment in the Haight, moved in on Friday, and by Monday we had 18 people living with us! I found I liked it. I sort of came at it from a philosophical, or I guess psycho-spiritual structure. A lot of the people involved, in the Haight at that period of time, in the mid '60's and in the early communal spill out from the Haight, I think, identified with trying to establish, or at least develop alternative living arrangements that would allow for living on the fringes, if not totally outside of the traditional structures that were up then. And I lived in the city that way through, for about a year or so, and then moved to a country commune in Santa Cruz mountains, [unintelligible] Holiday [unintelligible] . . . condemned [unintelligible] . . . the number of people ranged from probably 30 in the wintertime, to anywhere up to 120 during the summertime. It was one of the early spin-offs out of the Haight. Sixteen Candles ... a fairly open community. My communal experience, my communal family was always struggling with conflict between an open communal group and a closed communal family, defining or limiting the extended family concept, or open it as broadly as possible. The psycho-spiritual element, or ... well there were a lot of things that happened with the '60's. We were all doing psychedelics, and the traditional barriers that we'd grown up with didn't seem appropriate any longer. Where we drew the line had a lot to do with um, physical space, economics, relationships that developed, conflicts that stem from differing approaches to communal living. I remember after dinner one night at Holiday, we were cleaning up the kitchen, and one guy was standing in the middle of the kitchen floor. We asked him to leave the kitchen so we could mop the kitchen floor, and he said, "If God wanted you to clean the kitchen floor, I wouldn't be standing here now." And I said, "Well, if God had wanted that, I wouldn't be standing here now telling you to get the hell out of the kitchen!" One of our biggest battles was do we allow pets in the main house? With all the heated debate of the Nazi invasion of Poland.

Q: I think that's pretty common. I've heard a lot about pet battles, and dirty dish battles.

A: I always espouse an open family, and so would often come in conflict with other family members who were more interested in a smaller communal group, [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Do you know when Holiday started?

A: Sixty-five.

Q: So it was an early sort of back-to-the-land group.

A: It may have been '66. I think it was either late '65 or early '66. Yeah, it was very early.

Q: Did somebody own the land?

A: No, it was rented. It was a condemned resort, it had been a river resort called Holiday Cabins. A small group of people set up the Aum foundation to -- there's the legal entity for the family.

Q: So it was like an

A: --we also talked about cleaning out backed up septic tanks.

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Q: The joys of communal living, right? Was the Aum foundation like an incorporated church for example?

A: It was a religious group. It really had little to do with what actually was happening at Holiday. It wasn't set up that way. The emphasis was on informal structure rather than formal structure, and there was almost no reference to the Aum foundation other than sort of as a spiritual umbrella for what was going on.

Q: Is Aum "O-M"?

A: It was spelled both ways, "O-M" and "A-U-M."

Q: And Aum is in the chanting "Aum?" Okay. And how did, was Holiday the name of the resort?

A: Yes. It was Holiday Cabins.

Q: So you just took that name?

A: Yeah. Just carried the name over. It seemed appropriate.

Q: Did people pool their money?

A: At Holiday there were cabin rents, so that people who were living in cabins did pay a small rent. Um, and food stipulations. So there were sort of fees involved. Those fees were met a lot by joint working groups. We'd go out in gangs to get vegetables, or take out jobs. But it wasn't pooled in the sense that everyone [unintelligible] . . . where they put all of their money in. There was a lot of -- one of the things about Holiday [unintelligible] at that time was it attempted to recognize someone else's [unintelligible] as valid as your own to make decisions about limited resources and quality of living. "This is mine, that's yours." People still had their things.

Q: Was there any sort of statement of purpose that was articulated or written down?

A: No. I think Holiday was really sort of a borderline. It was a semi-dropped out environment. Because it kept itself fairly open. It was a proselytizing farm, in that we were very interested in preaching the word about the New Age, [unintelligible] . . . people could live together in harmony even if they came from different backgrounds. To some extent [unintelligible] . . . specific values within a generalized values system. But no, there wasn't a charismatic leader, there wasn't a doctrine or institutionalization. And people adopted a lot of different teachings. Teachers with their spiritual paths and prophecies. [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Were there any group rituals?

A: Lots of chanting. Food fights. Couple orgies. They were like a, there was a family meeting, which was probably the most structured ritual at Holiday. But again the emphasis was much more on informal living together, give people the most personal freedom as possible, so that most of the rituals were spontaneous, whether it was dancing or chanting or whatever people were interested in doing. It was not formalized in any way.

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Q: How often did you have those family meetings.

A: I think every week. As needed, emergency meetings called now and then.

Q: Did you have any special way of decision making, like were you into consensus, or did you vote?

A: That's a good question. We strove for consensus, but we did vote. We spent a lot of time struggling with consensus. [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And what sort of things would you talk about at the meetings.

A: Should we have dogs in the main house? Uh, we struggled a lot with uh, who belonged and who didn't belong. Whether our -- we also struggled a lot with how public we wanted to be. Again, the concept [unintelligible] . . . but also the concept of are we there just to drop out quietly to do what we've chosen to do, or are we there to get the message out, to try to affect change. And that was another thing that we struggled with.

Q: Were meeting pretty endless?

A: They were long. I don't know if anything ever got resolved. Temporary resolutions. Wonderful parties. They tended to be open. Whatever rock groups we got to play, we dug a pit trench for forty chickens, had a band play. Crop that just came in from Northern California, were rolling joints with newspapers.

Q: Did you eat together?

A: Yeah, well there was a common meal. There was a common kitchen and common meals. People weren't required to do that. Some people would go out, but there was a communal meal.

Q: What was the food like. You mentioned you had chicken, so I take it you weren't vegetarian.

A: No, we were not vegetarians. Actually my communal experience has always been pretty eclectic. Um, in terms of vegetarians, non-vegetarians, fructarians, occasionally ran into a breatharian, they never stayed for long. The nature of religious and spiritual -- people practiced all different kinds of spiritual disciplines. Some people very much interested in the occult, some not. The food was, we did buy bulk essentially, 100 lb sacks of grains. Grind our own flour, make our own bread. Grow our own vegetables. Dumpster, which at that time provided a lot of food for the family. But the meals were [unintelligible] ... because there were vegetarian dishes and non-vegetarian dishes. I suppose more often than not the food was vegetarian by necessity, not by philosophical or spiritual decision.

Q: And so were people into gardening?

A: Some were. Chores were pretty much voluntary. People would sign up for working the garden, and people form crews together to do various things.

Q: How did work sharing go? Did people do a good job in contributing to the work, or were --

A: Some did and some didn't.

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Q: Was that an issue?

A: Yeah, on occasion. I think one of the edges that we might have had is that people who -- there was sort of an undercurrent of a belief that what is what is should be. So that sort of took the edge off of "I'm doing more than another person's doing." Because we sort of knew at some level that you can't really evaluate the value or create a hierarchical structure of what someone is or is not contributing. And that would become a topic of conversation in to deal with discrepancies in how people evaluated [unintelligible] . . . some people worked very, very hard, put in a lot of time and effort to the communal part of the [unintelligible] . . . other people, a couple musicians, for example, pretty much spent all of their time doing their own thing, but their own thing was valued by the communal family. Artists and craftspeople spent most of their time doing their own things and not communal or family things. And then there were other people who just freeloaded!

Q: Now you mentioned that there wasn't a charismatic leader. But did some people take leadership roles?

A: Yes. I was the official non-leader of the communal family.

Q: And so what did that mean, being the official non-leader?

A: Uh, it had a lot to do with the economics of the operation. Where there were family obligations. It had a lot to do with being a mediator, facilitator, and working through personal problems with different people in the family. Had a lot to do with motivating people to get out and do the stuff that needs to get done. Other people played roles with that, because they were not defined. It was not my defined responsibility. It's not like we had a chosen or elected leader who had this responsibility. People acquired and were given responsibilities as there was a need to have someone there.

Q: What sort of relationship did you have with local officials?

A: Um, in every communal experience I've had, at Holiday there were emergency meetings, the townsfolk trying to run us out of town. There was a stream running down the back of the property, and the family members would bathe nude in the stream, and there would be sheriff's deputies in the bushes across the stream with binoculars and cameras. We were not allowed access, kicked out one of the grocery stores in the town. There was a fair amount of hostility. On the other hand there were a lot of people who came by to support this different way of being. That was true in Pennsylvania. A member of our family in Holiday inherited a farm in Pennsylvania, six acres. So a bunch of us moved to Pennsylvania. When we first got there, the response from the community was incredibly positive. Farmers came out and plowed for us, farmers wives brought us baked goods and canned goods. But the small town people, including the health officials sort of saw this as [unintelligible] . . . put an end to this way of life. So we had a lot of problems in the community. They were actually all arrested in Pennsylvania for encouraging idleness.

Q: Now at Holiday, did you have utilities, like did you have electricity and all that.

A: Yes.

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Q: Did you have flush toilets? Or outhouses?

A: We had flush toilets. Septic tanks that backed up on a very regular basis. In Pennsylvania, we had -- it was an old farm that hadn't been used in a hundred years or so. We bathed in the stream, we cooked in campfires for the most part. There was a main house that we were in the process of rehabilitating, and there was a wood stove there. No utilities, we used kerosene lamps and candles. Outhouses.

Q: Was this place in Pennsylvania where you went to after Holiday?

A: Yes.

Q: And what was it called? Or did it have a name?

A: It didn't have a name.

Q: Were these people from Holiday that went to Pennsylvania?

A: Starting, yeah, and then a lot of people grew into the family on that property during the time we were there.

Q: Why did you end up leaving Holiday? Did the whole thing kind of crash?

A: Uh, no. I mean, Holiday was um, a rented property. It was fairly well-known, there was a lot of traffic through Holiday. And then Bill inherited this property in Pennsylvania. A group of us wanted to do it -- there was no rent to pay, there was an opportunity to really build a solid community there, which wasn't really the case at Holiday. With Holiday the family [unintelligible] . . . scattered everywhere, considered themselves part of the Holiday family. There was, the property itself, the buildings, the septic tanks and so on were pretty seriously -- irreparable. The property eventually got raised. It's a port [?] now. So for a lot of reasons, Pennsylvania was really attractive. Unfortunately, it was the most conservative part of Pennsylvania, the northwestern corner of the state.

Q: I'm going to this place, they're going to have a pie festival in Northeast Pennsylvania.

A: This was northwestern, halfway between Lake Erie and Pittsburgh. And at the time we went, we were California hippies that folks in that part of the world had heard about or read about or seen on the news, but never had any direct experience with. On a sunny afternoons on the weekends I would sit cross legged on a table under a tree on the front lawn and sort of talk to the 150 people from the surrounding areas, lectures on the New Age. All that sort of stuff. We drew a fair amount of attention. And then they threw us all in jail, and then we got us out of jail, and they'd drop charges if we'd left the state.

Q: What were the charges?

A: Encouraging idleness.

Q: That's right, you said that.

A: It's true.

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Q: That blows me away. Now, when did you leave Holiday?

A: Spring of '68.

Q: So you had been there a couple years at that point. And how much longer did Holiday last?

A: I don't really know. It sort of trickled on for another year or two.

Q: So it was about --

A: --but the core if it, it affectedly ended when we moved, because the core family moved. It wasn't just a few people, most of the family moved.

Q: Now why did you choose Pennsylvania?

A: The land was there. Bill inherited the farm. For sure we would not have chosen Pennsylvania if we had a number of choices. But the land was there, so we hitchhiked, and hopped trains, and drove buses and motorcycles, and one way or another got ourselves across the country.

Q: And then that was really rustic living there.

A: Yes it was. Very back-to-the-earth, kind of. And again, we had the same conflicts about open and closed communes, to the extent that we actually had a schism where one part of the property, it was closed, and another part of the property was open.

Q: Would you get a lot of people who were traveling through that would crash there?

A: Yeah. And that was a problem for some people. And that was true at Holiday too.

Q: At either place, did you have explicit membership policies?

A: Yeah. We never, it wasn't open in the sense that whoever's here is here and belongs here. There was a discussion about new members and pros and cons and so on and so forth, and sort of a vote to accept people into the family, to assign them a place to be, a cabin at Holiday or, uh, a patch of ground. Some people were staying in the main house in the old farmhouse in Pennsylvania, most people were camping out in tents or made tents. Bathe in the nice cold stream.

Q: And how long were you there?

A: Pennsylvania did not last very long. We were uh, only lived three, some five months, before we were all arrested. Then there was some trickling down [unintelligible] . . .

Q: So you didn't over winter there?

A: No. I stayed, but not at Holiday.

Q: Are you talking about Pennsylvania?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Yeah, 'cause I imagine the winters would have been pretty tough without the utilities you were used to.

A: Wood stoves. Lot of wood on the property.

Q: So where did you go after that?

A: I ended up in New Mexico, Santa Fé.

Q: Did you join a group there?

A: Started a group there. I got a [unintelligible] ... in New Mexico. I had studied for the Catholic priesthood before Holiday, and ended up in a monastery in New Mexico. I was ordained, and then started a free church center in [unintelligible] . . . which was a communal family. [unintelligible] ... part of Holiday family came to Santa Fé to help do this free church center.

Q: Now what were you ordained as?

A: Orthodox Catholic priest. Very unorthodox Orthodox Catholic priest.

Q: So was this a fairly open or accepting, order? Is that the right word? That ordained you?

A: Orthodoxy, well, in my particular case, yes. It happened at a time when the Church was very socially conscious, and very committed in that respect. The bishop who ordained me had been an unordained street priest prior to his being ordained and consecrated a bishop. So he had an understanding of who I was and how I would do, what I was chosen to do. But even in that regard it was not part of traditional Church structure. I had a special youth ministry, non-geographical, so that I was pretty much on my own to do things as I saw fit, and my bishop was very tolerant of that. Um, one of the first things we did is I got together with a Roman Catholic nun from Pecos, an order of nuns from Pecos, and de-sexed the literature, took out all male references to God the Father. At Christmas I came to California to friends in San Bernardino for midnight mass, at which we blessed the paraphernalia and [unintelligible] ... all the good stuff.

Q: Now I assume you took vows of poverty and chastity and all those things?

A: Actually not. Orthodoxy is different from the Roman Church. There is a tradition in Orthodoxy where a married man can become a priest, but a priest cannot become a married man. So celibacy wasn't required, although in my case I was under [unintelligible] ... because I had a special ministry and I had a very progressive bishop, I didn't have to deal with a lot of institutionalized steps of the Catholic Church. Even at that, five years later, I sort of withdrew, and said, even with the leniency on structure I had, I can't consider myself a spokesperson for the Church.

Q: Now, in Santa Fé, you started a church there?

A: It was a free church center. We leased an old nursing home at the end of the Santa Fé trail. That was the summer of 1970, which was a really bad summer in New Mexico. Santa Fé, New Mexico was the place to go. A lot of people were coming through. There was a lot of hostility between the local Hispanic population -- Chicanos, at that time -- they had been Chicanos in Northern Mexico. There were bombings and beatings and lootings and rapes, and we were sort of an oasis, a center for people who

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were forced out of Northern New Mexico. We also had a Chicano center as part of it. We were feeding probably 100, 150 people a night, and sleeping forty or fifty. We had, a real good core communal family, a couple of mechanics. Vehicles were being serviced while we were there. Every communal group I've ever been involved with has had a spiritual component, so we had a meditation room, which was used for the broadest possible range of spiritual experiences, dancing and yoga, [unintelligible] and more traditional Christian ritual. Chanting.

Q: Now did you lead services on Sunday?

A: Well yeah. Not just on Sundays. I did a very organic [unintelligible] . . . incorporated a lot of different philosophical things.

Q: Did you wear priest garb?

A: Sometimes. My last collar [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Was there sort of a traditional robe? I don't know what Orthodox things look like.

A: Yeah, it's similar to the Catholic, the chalices, and the white tie with the more ornate thing in there. I sometimes wore a collar, depending on what I was doing.

Q: And then were you kind of supported by the Church?

A: No. That was one condition. Having a special ministry meant having a lot of freedom, but also not having to generate the necessary support for the program.

Q: So the same Holiday family was still kind of together in Santa Fé?

A: Some members were. Holiday became a very, very large extended family. A lot of people that lived there had come through and been a part of it, and felt connected. And then depending on what was going on where, different people would gravitate to those places. Elizabeth's communal family, for example, sort of overlapped with Holiday.

Q: Now I don't know about Elizabeth's.

A: Oh, you didn't talk to Elizabeth?

Q: Oh, Elizabeth Gips?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, no I didn't get to. Tim interviewed her.

A: So their communal family and mine sort of overlapped.

Q: Was she part of the farm?

A: Yeah. But that was something else. There were a lot of links. She became a strong follower of Gaskin, part of the Gaskin experience. She was also a part of the communal family in [unintelligible] . . . and part of her family from others had been part of the San Bernardino branch of the family. Some of them came to Santa Fé, stayed in Santa Fé for awhile.

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Q: Did this free church center have a name?

A: The Center, El Centro. We had a great logo, the center part was overlapping with a dozen different spiritual symbols. The [unintelligible] sun symbol, the cross . . . the yin yang [unintelligible] . . . so I was arrested there for creating a public nuisance.

Q: Is that because you'd go out and kind of preach on the streets?

A: No. It's because we were a block from the state government, the capitol, and there was a lot of traffic, [unintelligible] what they were doing in those vans. And there was a lot of us leaning toward [unintelligible] . We had our share of conflict [unintelligible] . . . I was the only one who was arrested in Santa Fé. [unintelligible] . . . don't want to pressure those poor [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Where El Centro was?

A: Yeah. [unintelligible] . . . it's now a shopping mall.

Q: What a shame! So how long did El Centro last?

A: The Center lasted about a year.

Q: And what were the dates, approximately?

A: I think through 1970, '69 through '70.

Q: When you were there, did you visit some of the hip communes?

A: Yes. Llama convention. There was a schoolgirl [unintelligible] . . . there were three or four of them [communes] in New Mexico. One of them was [unintelligible] . . . still exists.

Q: I know I heard about that on NPR.

A: [unintelligible] . . . possibilities in Santa Fé [unintelligible] . . .

Q: They were Gurgief [?] focused?

A: Yeah. [unintelligible] . . . and they were in Santa Fé at the time, and so just on the other side of town. There were two or three other communal groups in Northern New Mexico [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Was it New Buffalo?

A: New Buffalo was one, yeah. Drop City.

Q: Yes, that was more Colorado.

A: I was at Drop City. And um, yeah we pretty much went to all those. And there was some interaction, but not a lot. We would go to the Llama foundation simply to ask them [unintelligible] . . . and Drop City and New Buffalo just to meet and talk [unintelligible] . . . not a lot of interaction.

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Q: What did you think of these places? What were they like?

A: Well obviously I liked my place better. Llama Foundation was wonderful, it was probably my favorite one. The [unintelligible] ... was a very, very mellow place. [unintelligible] ... and it was a very, very spiritual aura of [unintelligible] ... whereas things at The Center were pretty chaotic.

Q: Chaotic in that there was a lot people coming and going?

A: A lot of people, there was a lot of congregations, there was a lot of [unintelligible] events there, people coming through, people and family getting their act together. The Center also [unintelligible] my communal experience is not centered around some sort of common belief system or spiritual discipline or charismatic leader. Even if I were considered the [unintelligible] the community, it's not accidental [unintelligible] ... the emphasis on my communal experience [unintelligible] ... responsibility in doing what you need to do to get [unintelligible] ... with the external structures in place. Tremendous amount of freedom, which creates a tremendous amount of friction. And some people got very caught up in their specific process. And they would try to impose it on others, or because of their chosen path, or creative clash with other practices . . .

Q: But you did feel like you had some sort of a mission, right, that you wanted to get out to the people?

A: As a family? Some members did, some didn't. Some people in the family just wanted to drop out and live quietly. Others, -- those who came to The Center, obviously, had conviction, felt like they had a mission. But even at that, there were real conflicts in the group that was there, about how open or closed, what we would tolerate, what we wouldn't tolerate. And I went over on the side of tolerance. I would be willing to deal with violence for example, or violent people, and try to work through that. Whereas other members had children, and when there were threats, it was very hard for them. Had some huge blowouts about how open, how accepting we were going to be.

Q: Sure. Were there a lot of children in the Holiday family?

A: Um, not a lot. There were children, there were a couple of tots. Actually some married couples and some had, maybe.

Q: Ever to the point where you did your own schooling?

A: No.

Q: No. So kids would go out to public schools?

A: Public schools or no school.

Q: Did you do any sort of communal child care, where people would take shifts?

A: No. Not in a formal way. People would, for example, there were a group of parents who set up their own process for that, where one parent would take care of everyone's children at Monday night, and then someone else would, and so on so forth. But that was never, that was something that was done by the parents of the children and not as a family thing.

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Q: So what happened after El Centro kind of --?

A: That was it for me. After uh, after the Center closed, well that's pretty much it as far as my communal living's concerned. I came back to California, to Santa Cruz, I got involved in moon festivals. Set up a center for healing studies in Santa Cruz, which was not a residential program, it was just . . . provided a broad range of alternative healing experiences, but it wasn't communal. I was in a relationship actually. [unintelligible] . . . I got into a relationship which I had never before done in my life. [unintelligible] . . . I think about it. There are two parts of me. There's one part of me that very much enjoys communal living, and there's another part of me that is very proud of that. So even in my communal days, it was always sort of [unintelligible] . . . my own space [unintelligible] . . . I've gotten, in the last five or six year, I've gotten very used to living alone. But I'm up with the idea. I don't have any push to do that. My missionary zeal has tempered a bit.

Q: Now I realize that what you were doing was certainly a political statement, but were you more overtly politically involved, like would you ever stage demonstrations or anything like that?

A: Yeah, I've participated in a lot of demonstrations.

Q: What sorts of political things? Were these anti-war things?

A: Anti-Vietnam War, Women's Movement, multiple political campaigns, environmental issues.

Q: Did the family ever do something?

A: No, not as a family. Political action was not part of our family [unintelligible]. Except by definition.

Q: Right. Well what you were doing I guess was very political.

A: I mean we ended up, at Holiday for example, [unintelligible] . . . council, and a guy had to do a presentation to the City Council, so there were speeches and things like that. Same thing is true in Pennsylvania and in New Mexico, but it was not family thing to be overtly involved with political process.

Q: And was there a reason for that?

A: It was that part of the drop out mentality, not wanting to be part of, or at least minimize the amount of interaction with the real world. That world out there.

Q: So you were in the Haight first, right? So when you went to Holiday, was there sort of this deliberate sense of wanting to get back to the land and wanting to leave the city?

A: Yeah there was a consciousness, we actually went on a tour down the coast and visited a number of different, what were called country communes. In the city, the, I mean it's just a very different kind of thing. Although there were a group of us living together, a fairly large group in a small space, it wasn't, it was almost like a marriage of convenience rather than it was a conscious decision for this lifestyle. For most of it I was a student. My reason for leaving the city was a decision, I sort of came at it from a philosophical position. Instead of sitting around and talking about it, I decided "Well, I'm going to do it!" So I was looking for a place to do it. Making a commitment to that lifestyle, which wasn't really the place for us [unintelligible] . . . there was too much other stuff going on. There was a fair amount of interaction [unintelligible] . . . diffuse. It was nowhere near the same kind of experience we had when

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we were in a smaller group, people were in more isolated surroundings, more consciously working together to develop those relationship, and to manifest that concept.

Q: When you went looking for a place up and down the coast, do you remember any of the groups you visited?

A: I don't remember any of the names. Um, there was one in Sand City. Which is this side of Monterey. It was right next to the shooting range for the army base in Monterey, Fort Ord. And then there were a couple in Los Angeles, one in Santa Barbara. . .

Q: Oh, Sunburst? Was that the one?

A: We did stop at Sunburst, yeah. I really liked Holiday because of it's [unintelligible] . . . I was a strong [unintelligible] for the environment, I've always been.

Q: So you guys were pretty closed?

A: Yeah. [tape ends]

Q: Oh, I was asking about the places you visited on the coast, and you liked that how [unintelligible] was so open.

A: And I liked the [unintelligible] pines [?] too.

Q: Yeah, they're beautiful. Was, where is Holiday in relation to the city?

A: [unintelligible]

Q: So is that kind of up?

A: Just north of Santa Cruz [unintelligible] . . . and also I like the Northern California weather better than Southern California, San Francisco, and San Rafael.

Q: When you were at San Francisco State, did you ever go to Stephen Gaskin's class?

A: I went to a few of the Monday night classes. I never [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Why not? Why didn't it appeal to you?

A: I'm an anti-leader. I think that um, uh, . . . the whole -- let me start again. I think it's old church -- a lot of what happened with the hippie movement and New Age movement, was really old church and not new church. I was looking for different ways of doing things, rather than new ways of doing things. Uh, it was affinity for traditional mysticism, traditional occultism, Eastern philosophy, stuff like that, that I [unintelligible], but there was still this identification for or expression of the need for some sort of external discipline, whether it took the form of a philosophy or a teacher, um, . . . which I didn't support. I was very . . . I guess, oh, I still am actually. Again, even though I did [unintelligible] a Catholic priest, [unintelligible], and I'd even preach, Catholicism, I think people need to um, find for themselves who they are, what they are. Be Christ, not be a Christian, be Buddha, not be Buddhist. Um, and I will acknowledge that this whole range of "external" experiences have helped people do that. And more

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often than not people accept it. A lot of people were [unintelligible] . . . people [unintelligible] and stuff. [unintelligible] . . . throwing away their [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Oh yeah, I don't think I knew that. Well that's pretty wild.

A: It's a whole bunch of stuff like that, that people get caught up in. You know, the specifics of the process. Buddhist teachings there's [unintelligible]. . . it's only going to interfere with their own spiritual growth. So I have that attitude toward teachers. I think everyone teaches everyone else, that we learn from the other [unintelligible] . . . I think no one has a corner on that kind of things. And when it gets to the point where there's any kind of indication that this is the right way to do something, I get suspicious.

Q: So did you discourage people from not following you in your leadership role?

A: Oh yeah, absolutely.

Q: Was that hard sometimes? I mean, did people sort of start to follow you around?

A: No, I wasn't preaching a discipline, or a lifestyle or anything that's structured. Just the [unintelligible] . . . so in that sense, they might have followed in my telling them to not follow!

Q: So would you say you were more almost a business leader in a way?

A: No, no. In a lot of ways I was a spiritual leader, I suppose. But um, in a way, that, I would never want to put myself in the place where someone identified as a follower of me.

Q: Devotee, or whatever they call them.

A: And I didn't feel like I had any special insight, so I never taught anything specifically that way. I would share information, feelings, and concepts, and beliefs that I had, but never in the sense that, uh, you know, as a teacher.

Q: Did the Holiday family have anything written down? No? So there weren't like written agreements or written rules or anything like that? Or even written descriptions?

A: No, I don't think there were any job descriptions. I don't think there were any hierarchical titles, um, no. There was a rental agreement between Holiday and Harperville [?] . As far as agreements among the members of the family, no, that was all very informal.

Q: Were there any sort of unwritten rules?

A: Um, well, yeah, there were unwritten rules that were either tacit or expressed openly, verbally, I mean, the uh, um, not to do physical violence to one another. Uh, tolerance of other people's trips.

Q: So could somebody --

A: Discrete dealing. [laughs] Actually, no dealing in terms of dealing to outsiders. No dealing. We didn't have drug dealers. We had drug dealers living with us, but not dealing drugs on the property. That was not [unintelligible] . . .

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Q: Because you felt that was too risky?

A: Yeah. [unintelligible]

Q: Did folks grow pot around there?

A: Not on the property. There was pot growing [unintelligible], we had connections with a lot of people who were growing [unintelligible] . . . because we're so open [unintelligible], all our trips are very [unintelligible] . . . very public [unintelligible] all the time [unintelligible]. But we had an agreement not to [unintelligible] a written agreement, but [unintelligible] . . . didn't grow [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Would people get kicked out, for example, for physical violence or something?

A: Yeah [unintelligible] . . . we'd ask people to leave for verbal violence too. If it got out of hand. But physical violence -- verbal violence is at least more subtle [unintelligible] . . . physical violence is [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Were you in the [unintelligible] . . . like the Santa Cruz papers and stuff a lot.

A: Yes.

Q: You don't happen to have any of those, do you?

A: No.

Q: Oh, okay. Because we're trying to collect things from the era.

A: [unintelligible] . . . there's a lot of stuff from Pennsylvania, I did TV shows.

Q: Oh did you?

A: Yeah. We were the feature article in the Plainview [?] . . . we were actually kind of set up by the Plainview, the company that [unintelligible] . . . when we moved to, shortly after we got to Pennsylvania, uh, this guy came who was [unintelligible] a beautiful pedigreed goat. And he, [unintelligible] . . . he's working at a children's center, in a central part of Pennsylvania. And this was [unintelligible] . . . beautiful [unintelligible] . . . the animals, and [unintelligible] get into this sort of things. He was [unintelligible] . . . and one day, it was probably I think on a Wednesday, um, one of the guys found a marijuana plant in our garden [unintelligible] . . . that Friday morning, at about 4:30 in the morning, um, dozens of police, sheriffs, big yellow school buses, [unintelligible] . . . they all converged on the farm. The rest of us all, hauled us off to jail on this big yellow school bus.

Q: Out of one pot plant in your yard?

A: Well, they went to that point in the garden looking for drugs. We didn't have any drugs on the property, so they ended up busting for encouraging idleness, which is a 125 rural statute in Crawford County that probably had never been enforced. [unintelligible] . . . we get hauled off to jail [unintelligible] for the first time for three months. [unintelligible] . . . I was the spiritual leader of my community, so I got to visit people in their cells, and talk to them, and pass messages back and forth and stuff. So a lot of weirdness went on [unintelligible] . . . but we were set up to that, so a lot of water [unintelligible] . . . Pittsburgh newspapers, and uh, I was invited to talk to church groups and other

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community groups, and environmental groups, [unintelligible] counselors, [unintelligible] . . . it was a big news item for --

Q: If we wanted to look up old newspapers, about when would this have been?

A: This would've been the summer of . . . '68? Summer of '68. The time we had been in Pennsylvania. Holiday, most of the present Holiday, uh, would've been fall, well let's see, would've been probably pretty much throughout '67. Which was what, something [unintelligible]

Q: Santa Cruz [unintelligible] , um-hmm.

A: There was a period of time, I think it was probably the fall of '67, uh, when there were, that's when [unintelligible] we were refused access to a grocery store in Felton [?], and there were emergency meetings being called, and there was a big deal with the school community, and we had to defend ourselves, that kind of stuff. It was probably some of the peak of press in Santa Cruz papers in the fall of '67. Long time ago!

Q: And you said your Pennsylvania group didn't have a particular name?

A: No.

Q: But did you still sort of consider yourself the Holiday family?

A: Um, well we did when we got there, but there was a lot of changes, we had a lot of new people who came in. We were in Parmesburg [?], um, Pennsylvania, and it was just like the Farm. But not to confuse it with the Farm, we didn't specifically call it that. In Pennsylvania we were Farm, but . . . or the Hippie Farm, if you will. But it never had a formal name.

Q: Were you, were there a lot of books that were popular during that time that were influential to you and the Holiday family?

A: Stranger in a Strange Land, [laughs], um, actually, there were a lot spiritual books, Eastern religions and philosophies, and a lot of cookbooks [?] that were a major [unintelligible] part of the process. Um, Mary Geoff [?] was a big piece of it. Hessin [?]. That's really it. We used to go and watch Mr Roger's Neighborhood.

Q: Get stoned or something and turn on the TV?

A: Exactly. You have somebody, I don't remember who the character is, I think it was the [unintelligible] , "You can be ANYBODY you want to be!" The postman is a speed freak, running around, with all this stuff. [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Were people going out getting jobs. I mean, where was money coming from?

A: Yeah, people were going out, there was no money generated on the property, so people were going out, getting odd jobs. We had one woman who did porno movies for example. She's hop up to New York whenever we needed money. But we'd do a lot of different things with odd jobs.

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Q: Was there a lot of artistic expression?

A: Um-hmm. [unintelligible] . . . musicians, obviously there was a lot of music. Um, most of the [unintelligible] were [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And, you know, most of the groups I've visited and people I've talked to said that there was a tremendous amount of art going on.

A: Oh, people made their own clothes, um, . . . I'm thinking, we didn't do things like pottery, we didn't have kilns, for example. But there was a lot of visual art being done. God's eyes, [unintelligible] . . . ojo de Dios. And that was [unintelligible] . . . New Mexico. God's eyes everywhere! I remember when I first learned how to make a God's eye, and all the different ways of doing that. Uh, music was really - if there were a specific [sic], music was one of the biggest ones.

Q: Did you have a band?

A: We had musicians, [unintelligible] . . . we didn't have a band that went out and did band things. We got together and made music.

Q: Was there experimentation going on with sexuality as well, as drugs and other things.

A: Yeah, we had a few orgies, and nontraditional partnerships. At that time [unintelligible] . . . heterosexual [unintelligible]

Q: Would homosexuality have been tolerated, or encouraged?

A: Not really encouraged -- I'm gay, and I wasn't very out in those days. Um, . . . philosophically or on an intellectual level, it was okay. But, most of the gay men I knew during those days were still pretty closeted, even in that kind of thing. That was like just, it was pre-Stonewall. After '69, the '70's, that started to change. But the late '60's and the early '70's, it was not . . . as okay. But as far as other non-- we did have people who were legally married, but we had a lot of different kinds of experimentation going on in one-to-one relationships, and three-way relationships, and then certainly casual relationships, and casual sex. A lot of the tantra spiritual intervention toward sexuality was part of that. There was a lot of group sensual experience, a lot of touching and coupling, not actually becoming sexual in terms of intercourse, but certainly very, very sensual and very, very [unintelligible] . [unintelligible] hugging [unintelligible] physical thing.

Q: Was there any lesbianism?

A: Um, not overt. There were women who slept with women on occasion, but almost [unintelligible] . . . almost as it is in the straight world, [unintelligible] lesbian relationships were found as such.

Q: Did you do any experimentation with sex roles in terms of trying to break down traditional sex-role boundaries and things?

A: Not just sex roles, but just breaking down traditional roles, institutional roles. Male roles, female -- that sort of, uh, the concept of freedom to be who you are and to express yourself and to experiment with who you are was an important part of it, so that uh, you know, men cooked, women gardened, women fixed cars, whatever. As a matter of fact, I think one of the groups in Pennsylvania, the Theater

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of All Possibilities, required women in the family who owned a car to be able to maintain it themselves. So they had to learn how to change tires, and how to do lube the job and how to tune up a car and stuff. We were very informal. We didn't have a formalized program. There was no dogma or doctrine. People did, and allowed people to do, what they needed to do. [unintelligible] . . . but it's not like there was any kind of pre-defined structure [unintelligible] . . . So some people experimented with [unintelligible] , some people did drugs, some people were vegetarians, some people weren't . Some people ran around naked, some people didn't.

Q: Despite that diversity, did you have any [unintelligible] about the diversity in the group?

A: A little, a lot. Minority representation was very minimal. Probably Hispanic, mainly [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And was that more around Santa Fé, or is that all along?

A: [unintelligible] .

Q: Okay. Just to make sure I have this straight, I'm curious about the sizes of the different groups. I know you said that Holiday kind of ranged depending on if it was summer or winter.

A: Yeah, at Holiday there were 16 cabins, so it was sort of a core of between 20 and 30 people in the core family. But in the summertime a lot of people would come and stay. Up to 100. And because Holiday had high turnover, part of it was people would come in for awhile and then be gone, and then be back and so and so forth, so that um, a lot of people who considered themselves part of the Holiday family, even if [unintelligible] . . . but the core family was probably between [unintelligible] . . . In Pennsylvania, it was about 36 [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And were you all living in one farmhouse?

A: Oh no. In Pennsylvania, I think there were maybe a half dozen people living in the house, [unintelligible] . . . all over the property. Two people actually [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And after the bust, did everybody split?

A: A few people stayed on for a few months, but before winter set in, we were off the land. And in Santa Fé, the core family was about 20 people. And that was all [unintelligible] . . . essentially the same people.

Q: What was the best part of communal living for you?

A: Well, one of the important things about communal living was the support, freedom, acknowledgment, to be who they are. And a lot of support for working through whatever you bring with you [unintelligible] . They have us a lot of support for nursing growth and understanding and self-fulfillment. Um, [unintelligible] . . . the breadth of -- with my communal experience, the breadth of philosophical or spiritual, lack of dharma [?], the resistance to dark force [unintelligible] . . . was a very important [unintelligible] . And it really was an extended family. You really felt like people would be there for you if you needed them. We were able to take care of each other.

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Q: Are you still in touch with some of these folks?

A: Yes. A number of them. None of them are living communally right now.

Q: That's interesting. What was the hardest part or the worst part?

A: Uh, probably the worst part was dealing with the outside world. That made it hard for us to [unintelligible] . . . what we were trying to do. That was draining and caused a lot of problems [unintelligible] in terms of how we dealt with those external stresses.

Q: Do you think that external stresses were at all a bonding, causing a bonding or group solidarity?

A: Well yeah, there is the common enemy thing. A unifying factor. But it was also a disruptive factor in terms of [unintelligible] . . . I mean when we were in Pennsylvania, we [unintelligible] . . .

Q: People living at the commune?

A: We had [unintelligible] . . . a few women raped. It was fairly abominous [sic]. Talking about [unintelligible] . . . certainly a hot issue. So although there was a unifying, a unification, a sense of [unintelligible] . . . there was a lot of [unintelligible] . . . divisiveness [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Sure. Are there things that you learned during that time period that you feel influenced your life today [unintelligible] . . . ?

A: Yes. I've um . . . I wouldn't change my experience in community. I felt absolutely in place there at the time, I was in the right place at the right time [unintelligible] . . . I think it's contributed to me, certainly toward the environment. Like if I hadn't been -- I can't say that these things would not have happened had it not been for the communal experience, but I can certainly say that the communal experience enabled me to accelerate the process of growing and understanding in a certain fashion, and [unintelligible] . . . and rigidities, these things.

Q: Now I know you said you were living alone and that you like it. But do you think that you'd ever do it again? Or you'd ever consider doing it again?

A: I would consider it, yeah. If there was some reason for doing it. If there were a group of people that I had a special bond with, had decided that we would do this, they were planning it, I would consider it. But I'm not looking for it, I'm not out looking for people to make that sort of thing happen, or looking for a place to make it happen. Which wasn't the case before [unintelligible] . . . messianic about it, and going out and making this thing happen, you know I'm not doing that. I mean obviously it met an important need for me at the time to be doing that. [unintelligible] . . .

Q: This is sort of a simplistic question, but we're asking it anyway. Would you consider the holiday family a success or a failure?

A: A success.

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Q: And why do you say that?

A: Because I don't measure success in terms of longevity, continuity, but in terms of the, the be there then! It's just not a fair question, because I've considered the experiences of my life in every stage as a qualified success. So that may not be a fair answer.

Q: Well do you think it was for other people, and that --

A: I think people would respond differently to your questions. Some people would think that uh, that it failed, because it no longer exists. Continuity is a very important thing for a lot of people. Which is sort of [unintelligible] to the be here now concept that was in for part of that period. But people really wanted to see, really to be able to live that way, or to, in a lot of ways see those values transferred to the greater population, instead of seeing the [unintelligible] or the conservative thing, in that we kind of considered them a whole movement, not just their own particular experience. [unintelligible] . . . I think a lot of us would carry with us [unintelligible] . . . that time [unintelligible] . . . our lives [unintelligible] . . . and ultimately will help the [unintelligible] . . . considerably [unintelligible] by actions [unintelligible] . . . the dying gasps of the old church.

Q: Well, as a final question, if there was a group that wanted to live together communally, what advice would you give them?

A: Don't expect it to be easy! It takes a commitment to work it out. Same advice you give to two people who are trying to establish a relationship, only you're doing it in [unintelligible] . . . preporting to have some linkage, some thing that is sort of the basis for you getting together. I don't give advice. I certainly wish people well who are doing it. I think that people need to dance their dances. And a lot of, in terms of practical advice, [unintelligible] . . . what their reasons were for coming together, what they wanted to do as a group and as a family. I might offer some suggestions about how you make that happen, in terms of the general concept of [unintelligible] . . . there needs to be some reason for that. [unintelligible] . . . there really is a commitment to [unintelligible] . . . in some ways it's easier than a one-on-one relationship, because there's a lot of different things happening. But you develop a [unintelligible] . . . in the last two years I've been the director of Hayes Hospice here in the city, and relationships develop very deeply and very quickly when you're dealing with people who are dying. But even at that, we all come to it, we are bring our own stuff, and anyone, I don't care how right they might perceive themselves to be, if they get together to live in close proximity, any environment where they're going to be sharing physical space, and psychological and spiritual space as well, um, there has to be willingness to deal with all the stuff that's going on. And that can be a joy. It can also be an incredible hassle!

Q: So would you encourage people to learn about personal growth techniques and sort of group process?

A: It depends a lot on why they want to do this. If they want to do it for personal and collective growth, then absolutely. There's a lot of stuff out there, tools, to help make it work. Just in a one-to-one relationship, or two-to-one, or three-to-four or whatever, but yeah. It certainly is important. I think basically, -- and I don't think, I almost want to take back what I just said, because a lot of it has to do with a willingness to be there with someone else. And if you got that, then all the tools of the trade and

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so on so forth, which normally serve to get you to the point where you're willing to listen to another person, and to give them as much credit over the issue as yourself, you almost don't need those other things if you're approaching that. But there is, in a group process, I find there's a lot of value to ritualistic kinds of things, ceremonial kinds of things. Group experiences, and it doesn't matter what they are. The sharing of pieces of [unintelligible] . . . help to establish and keep those bonds.

Q: Great. Thank you.