

Interview with Helen (Sister Naria) Jackson and R. B. Jackson

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

September 12, 1997

HJ = Helen Jackson, RJ = R. B. Jackson

Q: ... an interview with Helen Jackson. I'd love to know how you and your husband got involved with the fountain.

HJ: Actually, I met my present husband here in Alaska. I don't know how he got involved in it, because that didn't stick in my memory.

Q: How about you, then?

HJ: My grandmother was part of the WKFL in California in 1948. And in 1952, I was in a very mixed up marriage. Battered wife, two little kids. I was in California, and my mother was in Ventura County, in WKFL, so I went to the Fountain primarily for that reason, because she was there, and they helped women who were in abusive situations. They didn't ask any questions, and helped you mentally, physically, provided a roof over your head and food, babysitting, whole thing. Helped you get reestablished, and that was it.

Q: And once you got reestablished, though, you decided to continue? Can you tell me some about what life was like there, how you spent your days? What jobs you did?

HJ: In Alaska, WKFL, Fount of Alaska was registered as a nonprofit, humanitarian service organization. I believe it was also registered as a nonprofit corporation. I guess after I got my head together, -- my grandmother at that time was a registered nurse and was in the group and took care of seeing that people got proper -- in other words, we'd call it the health department, which we really weren't, but, and the thing is she was getting on in years, so I kind of stepped into that position along with her. We had a dispensary. We did minor first-aid and stuff, but we had a lot of situations. We had drug addicts, we had alcoholics, we had pregnant women that had no husbands, and in those days that was a real bummer. Nowadays, everybody expects it, they just go on welfare. Anyway. So, what we did was coordinate -- the people that came in, most of them, had never had any dental work done, per se, so there was coordinating them with doctors in the valley that would donate their services of dental work, young people, teeth filling, teeth pulling, dentures. Several ophthalmologists, optometrists, for eye exams and glasses, and we coordinated with the county of Ventura and the health department. That letter is from the mental health department. I was more associated with the health department for people -- there were some people that needed surgery, they had problems that had been neglected and never taken care of. So it was -- the biggest part of the job was coordinating all of these available resources, and seeing that the people, that the appointments were made, and seeing that they got to the place where they were supposed to be taken care of. So when they left, which they could do at any time, they left in much better mental and physical health than they ever had been before. Other than that, I supervised the laundry -- any of the things that had to do with public health: watching the kitchen and inspecting to be sure everything was clean. That was about the gist of what I did.

Q: Now did people all take their meals together?

HJ: We had one large dining room. Nobody ate separately. It was a large dining room. The kitchen was - it was organized in such a way that if you came in, you had two little kids, okay -- we had a nursery, we had 2, 3 people in charge of the nursery, and the dispensary was right off of the nursery, so it was very close to that particular area. But people -- depending on what their background was, or what they

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wanted to do -- some of the women had no particular training or anything, but they enjoyed doing laundry. So that's where they worked, they took care of washing the clothes, drying them, folding them, getting them back where they belonged, mending, that sort of thing, that was their thing. If they had children, there was the nursery right there where they could see the children at any time. But during the day, they were free. Day care center, nowadays what is called a day care center. In those days, this was all real strange, it was all new.

Q: Was the commune a good place to be raising your kids?

HJ: I would guess it was a much better environment than -- for most of the people there, it was a much improved environment compared to where they had been. Concept of private families would be the ideal situation, but most of these people, there were not too many married couples, there were people that were either married and divorced, or were single people. Men had a separate dormitory, women had a separate dormitory, there were very strict rules. There was no hanky-panky. If people decided to get married, they were only performed on one day of the year, which was March 29th.

Q: Why was there only one day of the year for marriage?

HJ: That was the day. Well, March 29th, 30th, 31th, and April 1st, those were considered the holy days, so those were the days where everything was culminated. The other thing that we did was on Saturday night -- and the public was welcome any time, you didn't have to make a special appointment because somebody might pop in and see something they weren't supposed to, people came in 24 hours a day, anytime. And then, Saturday nights, the area was known for being open house. Hindsight, in analyzing this, I can see that certain ones were picked out, and they were told what the theme was, and so it was an improvisation stage play. You just had about 30 minutes to get your characters together, your costumes or whatever you were going to do, and this play was put on. And now, what's comparable nowadays that I see is mental health, they have these group therapy sessions. That's current. But WKFL was doing it 40 years ago or more. But it wasn't pushed on anybody, but there were a lot of good results. A lot of people left. Some of the people who came thought that it was going to be a real soft touch. When they found out they had to put in a decent day's work, and they couldn't have their drugs and they couldn't have their alcohol, and it wasn't free, open-door, in and out with the women, they decided it wasn't what they wanted, and they soon left. Which was fine. But the thing is that you have to have a certain code of ethics, a certain bunch of rules, and that's it. They were simple. But they were -
- you were expected to follow the rules.

Q: And the rules were basically, no smoking, no drinking, no fooling around?

HJ: You could smoke, but not pot -- you know, tobacco, it was alright. But it was rather limited basis, because the funds were limited. You just didn't have an unlimited supply. But they were -- any kind of community service, we went. When there were earthquakes, there was a crew that -- we had our own supplies, we had our own vehicles. Earthquake, we would call up the Red Cross or whoever was in charge and say, "We have X number of people that can come and volunteer and help." We'd set up shelters, we'd take care of babies. I remember two or three days in one of the floods, Sierra Madre flood, I was making baby formula by the gallon. Or forest fires. Fellows went on forest fires, and I think,

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it was either '52 or '54, I and one of the other sisters were the first females that ever went back into the Angeles National Forests. We helped set up a kitchen that would feed the fire fighters. So we served, we organized that, ordered the supplies, got everything rolling, and got the meals put out. I think we were serving anywhere from 35 to 4,000 guys. The scary part was -- but I guess we were too young to be scared -- most of the fire fighters were convicts from Folsom -- rapist, murderers, they would take them out on fire crews, put them out on the hills. And the way we got to set up the fire camp was you got flown in by helicopter way into Angeles National Forest, there aren't a lot of roads in there. Flown in by helicopter, and the last two miles we had to walk and packed a lot of the supplies on our back, and after that we got the camp established, they would air drop food, whatever supplies we needed. Once in a while they would come in with a donkey, a string of donkeys with food on their backs. But it was inaccessible, that's for sure, and we were also the first aid station, for spider bites and poison oak and all kinds of stuff out there. Hindsight, you think about it, it was kind of scary. But those men, we were like angels. They would just be sitting there with their eyes wide open, just thinking that here were these nice young -- they didn't have any bad thoughts I'm sure, because they were wanting to get good food, and we had good food. We didn't just serve up chili beans, we baked biscuits, we had salad, actually a salad bar, which was unheard of, especially in a drop kitchen. I don't think they do that now either, but we did. Katrice [?] and I were the first women that had ever been on the forestry service fire line.

Q: So you guys did a lot of service work, then.

HJ: Yeah. That was the objective as well as working on the premises, and doing repairs and whatnot. There were those that were on the fire line, fighting, locally, they did the fire fighting. And then we went out wherever we were needed. Fires, Bakersfield earthquake, it was either '52, '53, '54, right in those three years somewhere, really serious earthquake. But we set up whatever the Red Cross -- Red Cross usually was there first, but they only had a handful of people. Because we were more experienced doing things, the climate, and we were used to the country, just went in, they just told us what to do, and we took over from there. They'd just go back to their office and do the paperwork.

Q: So what did your neighbors think of you? Did you have a good reputation because of all the service work you did?

HJ: Right across the street from the establishment in California was the fire department. The fellows that were in the fire department, we were back and forth. Far as I know -- I never really was concerned about what anybody thought.

Q: I just know that some communes have had a hard time, because people think of them as strange or cultish, or something like that, and I was wondering if you guys ever had a hard time?

HJ: I don't know. I think mental attitude has a lot to do with it. I guess if people did -- there weren't any efforts to do away with it that I was aware of. We were written up by the paper. At Christmas time -- we had a choir -- at Christmastime they would go down into the hinterlands of Los Angeles and sing. We'd go to hospitals and put out entertainment to the tuberculosis -- was it Olive View? I can't remember, it's been a long time. But we were involved in the community, rather than being separated and aloof, setting ourselves apart from the community.

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Q: Now brother Isaiah showed me this rope that he wore. Did you wear one of those as well? Did women wear them?

HJ: Yes. And they were color-coded. In other words, depends on what your expertise or lack of expertise, whatever, was, that was the color of your robe. The leader and his wife wore yellow. People that had training, like if you were a telephone company person, if you had some trade, you wore the gray. Isaiah's was gray, my husband's was gray. Blue was for the medical profession, if you were a doctor, a chiropractor, nurse, whatever, your robe was blue. Many of the married women who became pregnant, and there weren't very many situations like that, the women that came in that were single women or single mothers or mothers that had two or three children, came in pregnant, of course, they didn't wear the robe, so when they were pregnant, they weren't a member of the group at that time, so they didn't have a robe -- your robe was all pink, and the yoke was your normal color. So when I was pregnant with my -- when was I pregnant? It was pink, and the yoke was blue. And if you were, normally had a gray robe, then the yoke was gray.

Q: So since you worked in health, you had a blue robe typically, and then when you were pregnant, you had a pink one?

HJ: Any of the pregnant women had pink, and the yoke was the color of their normal robe. So if you saw a pink robe, that was pregnant woman. Be careful. And if you had no formal training of any kind, then you wore a green robe. And the women's were a little fancier than the men's. The men's were very straight and plain. The women's had maybe puff sleeves, and the yoke was edged with lace. And usually if you wore green, the bottom part was green, and the yoke was a lighter color green. Then I think a little later on, the style changed, and then the robes were just -- I have my grandmother's still packed away, but all of these boxes, they're all labelled, whenever I get to it. It was too traumatic to even move -- this house feels like we're still staying in a motel. Because that house is a landmark back there, the old house.

Q: And you went barefoot?

HJ: Yes.

Q: Even when you were here in Alaska, did you go barefoot too?

HJ: Yeah.

Q: In the wintertime?

HJ: We were eccentric, but we weren't idiots, when the men ran the beach, because there was no road from Homer [?] to the head of the bay, that was just 35 miles, and they had to travel on the beach, they wore bunny boots or regular arctic wear. They weren't -- but if you were here in town, and say a couple of guys wanted to go to the movies, they wore the robes and went barefoot. And nobody froze their feet. I think one of the most uncomfortable things was if it was really cold, and you were in somewhere where it was warm, and then went outside, your feet -- it's like if you've ever taken ice cubes out of the refrigerator and your hands are a little bit damp, and you stick to it. But that's what happened to your

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feet. The gravel would stick to the bottom of your feet. So you scuffed a little bit to break it loose. I remember that. That was impressive. Pain impresses itself onto your mind.

Q: I'm curious about the finances of the community. How did it bring in money to pay for people's living expenses?

HJ: People that came in and joined the group, whatever they had, that was donated to the group, whether it was real estate that they sold, or savings, or whatever, all of their -- and the thing is, you had a choice, you didn't have to, you just weren't a member.

Q: Did you get an allowance?

HJ: Didn't need any. Everything was taken care of -- your clothing, your food. There wasn't any, there was no need for any . . . like I said, there was a fleet of vehicles, and we had men -- just happened it was all men at that time -- their responsibility was the carpool, they saw that the cars were serviced, were gassed up, were oiled, were maintained and so forth. We established a system of requisition --so that there was a paper trail even in a commune -- like if I had several people that had to go to Ventura for, like some kids who had to be vaccinated, go to the health department in Ventura, then I would have to put in a requisition for a vehicle. It just happened that I was a driver, but if you weren't a driver, and you were requisitioning a vehicle for certain appointments that were made through your department, you'd either requisition just the vehicle or you'd requisition a vehicle and a driver.

Q: Were there any regular routines or rituals that you would do together as a group? Like did you pray together?

HJ: Yeah, there were. I think, approximately 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening, after the evening meal, it was like it was a group meeting of concentration, prayer. And there was like one person was, say, focal point of that meeting or group meeting, and everyone was expected to attend, unless there was some particular reason, if someone was involved with the children. A lot of times the children were there.

Q: And would Krishna Venta [?] give lectures frequently?

HJ: Sunday, and it wasn't because -- because we had people from all backgrounds. We had Jewish people, we had Japanese people, we had . . . what else was there? Seventh Day Adventists -- but it just happened Sunday was the most commonly accepted, and people were more accessible on Sunday. And it was open to the public -- he usually lectured on Sunday at a certain time. And there were certain times where he and a number of the group would go to various places to lecture, the philosophy, or answer questions. But those were trips that were taken at various points in time. And then whoever was left, in California, one of the brothers, if Krishna wasn't there, than one of the brothers would -- just like the pastor gets relieved on Sunday if he's not there, well somebody else. But, we weren't a church, it was a philosophy, it was a way of life, it was a way of thinking. Various people had various concepts of who Krishna was, but it was in your own head.

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Q: What was Krishna Venta like?

HJ: Very intelligent man. Of course, I wasn't indoctrinated in the Bible, and a lot of people have been so indoctrinated all of their lives, that in their mind, there was all these titles and expectations. I'm not that type.

Q: Was he charismatic?

HJ: Very much so.

Q: People would come from all over to hear him talk?

HJ: Yes.

Q: Was there a leadership structure in the commune?

HJ: Yeah, there was what they would call headquarters, that was the building for Krishna and his wife, and the main office was over there. One of the first things he stressed when he was teaching or lecturing or even impromptu meetings in group, that he was trying to develop leaders. He didn't want followers. And he said that more than once, for sure. But of course, there's always -- I would say the largest percentage of the people who were there, were people who were very much indoctrinated with church philosophy -- and so that's how their mind and their mental process worked, aside from the fact that many of them had lots and lots of problems, but there was that particular indoctrination in their minds. So they interpreted a lot of things that they saw, lot of things that they heard, according to that particular kind of dogma. But Krishna was mainly interested in people -- the word "think" was printed this big and this high just about everywhere you would look. He was trying to get people to use their own brain. To think. To become a leader. Which, being a leader is not an easy task. That is for sure. But the proof of the pudding -- and I believe has been the same problem in a lot of other communal type groups, the Mormons, etcetera -- that when the leader that established the organization died, passed on, was killed, whatever, it wasn't very long before the groups would start to disintegrate, and that was the same thing that happened with the fountain. Because there were a number of them that were in this directly beneath him that were in executive positions that had received more intense training than just the ordinary person who really wasn't interested in being, leading the group, same old thing. Same old story, year after year, throughout history -- personality problems, competition. And it gradually just disintegrated. And some of the ones that were supposed to be the leaders were some of the first ones that flew the coop.

Q: Isaiah said that a couple of followers, or members --

HJ: --Ex-members.

Q: --were the ones that killed him?

HJ: Yes.

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Q: Oh, they were ex-members at the time?

HJ: They had come to Alaska about 1956, and most of them -- well, they were men, except for Mother Rubin [?] -- then they were on the fire line, there was a lot of forest fires, so the whole bunch were out on the fireline. I'm not sure, but I think at that time, the two of them were kind of close, buddy-buddy, and I don't know if one influenced the other one or not, I have no way of knowing, but after they had their big check from the fire fighting, then they left and went back to California.

Q: Was that a pretty big shock, that that transpired?

HJ: Well yes, because terrorists -- that's basically the category it falls into -- nowadays it's on the news every day, somebody gets blown up or whatever, but in those days, 1958, that was rather an extreme situation. It was front page all over the place. And the thing is, the number of sticks of dynamite were so many, and the explosion was so intense that anybody that was near the center of the explosion, they picked pieces like thumbs and fingers and toes out of trees. It wasn't just an explosion and a big boom and a fire or anything -- these people were literally blown to atoms. Because each one of those people had the most potent dynamite they could get, and each one of them had 20 sticks taped around their middle.

Q: So they died too then.

HJ: Oh yeah. They blew up with everybody else. I think, as far as Fountain people, I think there were a total of 9, and among them was about a six month old baby, one of the immediate leaders and his wife, and it was his baby. Their three sons were here in Alaska at that time. There were a couple of people that were hurt. They were in the same building, but they were far enough away that they could get out, they weren't trapped, and they weren't close enough so that they were blown up. But there were a number of small children, a 3 month old and a six month old, and then there was a child that was about 10 at the time, and she survived. She was badly scarred and burned, but she survived. And the strange thing is, after the explosion, there was the one woman that had been hurt in the explosion, who was colored, her name was Erma, and there was a brother who was probably in his early 30's, that had 2 sons. The two sons and the young man and the colored lady were with Jim Jones, and died in Guyana [?]. They went from there -- certain period of time. Erma was colored, but Jones appealed to the colored people in the Los Angeles area. In fact, I saved letters that Erma wrote to me, and when she discovered Jim Jones, and she sent me an article, one of the pamphlets they passed out. So I have all that neatly filed away. But she and David and his two sons all went with that mess in Guyana.

Q: So the murder happened up here in Alaska?

HJ: No, it was in California. WKFL -- the Fountain of the World, in Box Canyon, is where the bombing took place.

Q: And was it then that people moved up to Alaska, or had they already gone?

HJ: No, this was all established up here in '57. The explosion took place in December of '58.

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Q: Brother Isaiah wasn't really clear on this -- why did the group come up to Alaska?

HJ: To establish -- I really shouldn't be quoted. The thing is, like I say, I've got this paperwork. But it was just an expansion. The WKFL Fountain of the World was here, and there were to be many of these founts -- that's why this was called WKFL, Fount of Alaska. At one point, there had even been some inquiry -- it's interesting the way it turned out. When we first came up was in '56. I came in '57, my present husband came in '58. But there were a group of the Russians that were in South America or something that were interested, wanted to have more information on it. And the strange thing is, here we have in Homer, we have all of these Russians that originally came from these offshoots from the South American and the Oregon group. Some of them were born in China. But they're religious refugees, so to speak. But Homer is like, my God, we've got 3 and 4 villages out this way, and 2 and 3 Russian villages out toward anchor point.

Q: I didn't know that. So Homer's been a sight for religious refugees?

HJ: Well, the Russians. And if you go uptown and just kind of wander around in the stores, you'll see the women in their fancy -- they still keep their dresses, and they still have their little --

Q: --I saw someone like that today, and I was very curious what they were!

HJ: Those are the Russians from the Russian village. The women all wear costume, and the men all have beautiful embroidered shirts. Those are special -- they don't wear those to work in. Most of them are fishermen. But way out East, I can't pronounce them, I think there's at least three Russian villages out there, and the strange thing is one of them is very close to where the commune is established out there. We had a US weather station out there. Most of the time, I took care of the records, but I have the annual booklet that was printed by the United States Weather Bureau, and in it gave all of the yearly, for Alaska, all of the high and low temperatures and rainfall and stuff. And then in the back, there's several maps. And so Venta, which is what the establishment at the head of the bay was called, is on a US map - - it's on the US weather map.

Q: So Venta is at the end of the road?

HJ: It's 35 miles past the end of the road. You still can't get there by road.

Q: How do people get there then?

HJ: They went by tractor, pull tractor with trailers over the thing.

Q: Wow.

HJ: I'll show you some.

Q: Commune scrapbooks?

HJ: Yes. These are colored slides that one of these days I have to get printed. It's awfully expensive, the museum wants this stuff, and I figure, well if the museum wants to pay for it, maybe that'll be the way to go. I haven't been in here for awhile. I've got paperwork in here that I didn't think was here. This is just a cover letter to Diane. Okay, did you want copies of these? We can do it. These are the basic

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requirements when you came into the Fountain, this plus the Ten Commandments, literally. Even the churches today don't follow the Ten Commandments.

Q: I'd love a copy of this, this is fascinating.

HJ: Okay, not here's more. Krishna made this list, there are 31. What these are called golden gems. So if today is the -- when you get up in the morning, today is the 12th. So you look for 12, they have a real fancy word for this, it's a positive thought, that if you keep your mind focused on that thing all day, then you get a better understanding. These are the golden gems, one for each day of the month. Of course, each month, starting the 1st, number one is number one, whatever month you're in.

Q: Right. So today's says, "Idle words lead to gossip. Take no part in this foolishness." So you would try and think about that during the day?

HJ: That would be like the first thing you thought of in the morning. Maybe you wouldn't think about it at another time during the day, but it was a positive thought to start the day out with. Now this is a letter to me from the United States Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, and this is the annual summary, 1958. And you can peek through here, because Venta is on there. I've highlighted some of it in there.

Q: And Venta was --?

HJ: At the head of the bay, it was referred to as Venta. Community's Village, whatever.

Q: Now, the head of the bay is east of here?

HJ: Yes. Stay on East End Road and drive out as far as you can drive, and you've still got a long ways to go when the road ends.

Q: To where your settlement was?

HJ: Yes.

Q: Are there still buildings out there?

HJ: There's a map in here. I don't know. A lot of things were left out there years ago, and it was gradually absorbed by the neighbors, so to speak. I have the brochures here, so we do have something. What I did was I photocopied this stuff to have a basis for, what Diane looked at when she was doing her book.

Q: Now I think Isaiah told me that one of the Russian groups lives communally, is that true?

HJ: I have no idea.

Q: He said you might know.

HJ: They might. I have no idea. At first they were very -- well see, actually, after some of them got here, the religious faction that's here in the Homer area came as one denomination, I don't know what to call it, because it's still the Russian orthodox, and they still do the same holidays. But the one thing after

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they were here for awhile, that has split, so now they have two different groups, and that's what split off these different villages. I've got stuff on that packed away. In fact, I gave some to the museum.

Q: And what do they call the one that's out where you guys used to be?

HJ: Where we were out there was called Venta. Jim was out there 2 years ago, in fact, I think I've got the pictures in here, that shows what's left of our -- see, we built our own schoolhouse, and we had a state school teacher there. We had enough children from our group and at the head of the bay, and from the neighbors, because there were a lot of them that lived way out there on homesteads, that they had to teach their kids at school, so it was wonderful for them to have their kids be able to go to public school. But in order to have the state supply a teacher and books, you had to build a school house and quarters for the teacher. And it just happened -- Black people in Alaska in the '50's were rather unusual, and it happened that our teacher came from Kazan [?], which is down by Juno. She must've been almost 6 foot tall, and she was blacker than coal! She was the sweetest person in the whole wide world, but that was our public school teacher. And she was great. And she arrived on -- I don't know how she got out there to a certain point -- anyway, she arrived on horseback, because one of the guys, the homesteaders, was closer to the end of the road, and took the responsibility of meeting her somewhere and getting her up the trail on horseback with all of her luggage and stuff. Did you read that? Did you want a copy of that letter?

Q: I'd love a copy of that!

HJ: Okay, we'll make a stack over there. And this is a story that was in the We Alaskans, which is the newspaper publication. This is just a story that Charles Wolfworth did. Everybody that writes a story about the Fountain, even your thing, will be according to their own concept. So this is just somebody's concept of the facts.

Q: This must've been fairly recently, 1992.

HJ: And I have some other ones.

Q: I think I might even have a copy of this. A woman named Denise sent us some information, and I think it was this story.

HJ: You want to see bare feet? December of '57, this is out of the airport.

Q: Wow, bare feet in the snow.

HJ: That's Krishna's wife and myself. The thing is, if my machine won't copy these things -- this is a lot of copying to do.

Q: And then who's that on the bottom?

HJ: That's me.

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Q: Did you guys also wear scarves, or were you just doing that for . . . ?

HJ: No. There's pictures in here, I'll show you. The smallest brochure is this one, and this is the large brochure. The smallest brochure was written about 1952, the other brochure was revised and written about 1957 -- this is my note, you can read it, I don't have to read it to you. This is all information, and I'm glad that I had this, give you some basics without having to dig into those boxes.

Q: Yeah, I'm very glad.

HJ: And the actual real estate that was owned by WKFL in the city of Homer there, in fact, right across the street from the fire department, Isaiah took care of the paperwork -- that was donated to the city of Homer for a park. Did you see the park and the sign?

Q: I haven't, I'd love to go see it. I'm not sure where it is, exactly.

HJ: When you left Isaiah's place, and you came out, where you came out the street from Isaiah's place there, it's the Homer volunteer fire department. And when you're facing the fire department, it's on a corner, and it's a big one, there's a great big rock and there's a sign on it, and the whole thing. I think I probably have some pictures of it.

Q: Oh, these brochures are wonderful.

HJ: There's pictures out of the head of the bay that were taking in 19 -- Jim gave me these -- this is 1996. He took these in '95, and there aren't too much left. And this is a story about the park. These are out of Homer newspaper articles, plans for the WKFL park. This was some of those plans. But it's like I said, I have got jillions of paper yet to put . . .

Q: When did you guys leave the head of the bay?

HJ: Well, R. B. went back and forth, because he travelled the beach a lot, hauling supplies back and forth. There were some of them that stayed in town, because that was the headquarters here. I was mainly out there because when we were first out there, before we got the public school teacher, I did the correspondence course for, I don't know, did I have 6 kids? I had first grade, couple of second graders, couple of high school 9th graders. But I taught them until we got a public school teacher. But it was the Calvert [?] course, you know, the typical home . . .

Q: You guys were really remote then.

HJ: Oh yeah.

Q: It was not an easy in and out from there.

HJ: No, at one point we had two ham radio operators, but they didn't say, so there was no communication. I was sledding with the kids one year, it was really really slippery. I broke my collarbone, and so I had to take care of it myself. That is painful. It healed, but it healed crooked, because it never was set

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HJ = Helen Jackson, RJ = R. B. Jackson

Q: Because there was no way for you to get into Homer?

HJ: I could have ridden in on the tractor, but it was in February, and that would've just absolutely killed me. It was better to stay -- I just put a pillow under my arm, and strapped it down. We had triangular bandages and stuff, and they helped strap me down to immobilize the damn joint, you know. I did that the first part of February, then I came in town in March, because one of the sisters in town was having a baby. We saw that all the pregnant women saw the doctor regularly, but there was no hospital here. I delivered Isaiah's baby girl, and about 2 or 3 other ones, it was home delivery.

Q: Wow. You guys were brave.

HJ: It was in town, they saw the doctor, but it was home delivery. In fact, R B helped me on a couple of them. This is a bridge, this is in California, and the little lady is my grandmother, and one of these is one of her sisters, and that was her other sister. That was a real old one. Maybe we can go through this paperwork here, and then you can look here, because I have a picture taken and I has Isaiah in here, 1955, in Chicago. He was with Master when they were on a lecture tour.

Q: That's what he said, that he was his driver.

HJ: And so, that's Isaiah, right where my thumb is, 1955 in a bar in Chicago.

Q: Did all the men wear beards and long hair?

HJ: Yes. Let your hair grow, and go barefoot until the end of time.

Q: So the women grew their hair out as well?

HJ: Yes. I was in the fount for nine years, and so, I had a pony tail down to here. When we left and went out, I saved it all -- I've got my pony tail, I've got R B's ponytail. But anyway, we can look at these too. This is Long Beach, California, they were on a lecture tour, and music. And these are all self-explanatory. The big black and white's are in here.

Q: "The Robed Prophets." They would play music and give some of their philosophy?

HJ: Yes.

Q: So the women wore scarves?

HJ: Yes. [tape ends] . Here's a picture of 1957-58 Homer High School basketball team. So right in the center is Krishna and his daughter, and a couple of their boys that were going to high school. They don't look like there are any anxiety on their faces.

Q: What were you saying about animosity?

HJ: Like you were asking, what did our neighbors think of us? You can see there, they didn't think anything about having them all take their picture right in the group. Otherwise they'd probably -- if there was any bad feelings, they certainly wouldn't have been sitting there, having their picture taken. The original of it is in here, so it's much clearer to look at. If you want to just run through this. What I did was

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that I grabbed and made copies of stuff for Diane when she wanted some background information, so this is a quicky that I threw together for her.

Q: So is this when you guys were clearing the land in Alaska?

HJ: This is on the beach from Homer to the head of the bay, what it looked like.

Q: You were building a road in to Venta.

RJ: No.

HJ: The beach was the highway, we didn't build anything. Right on the beach, we just drove on the beach at low tide. And if you got stuck, you got swamped, so you had to get off the beach if the tide was coming in.

Q: Why did you guys settle so far out there?

HJ: Three of the men filed for homestead land, and they filed for adjacent, so that the three pieces were adjacent, so that made up the -- they proved up on the homestead, then that became the WKFL property. But the three individuals filed on the homesteads and proved up on it, and that's how we got the land. That's the Northward Hoe [?], scenes from the Northward Hoe.

Q: And that was one of the plays you guys put on.

HJ: Yeah.

Q: And you actually did it in Anchorage?

HJ: It was in Anchorage, yeah, the Fur Rendezvous.

Q: What's that?

HJ: Fur Rendezvous, it's in the spring, when the trappers bring in their furs and sell them. It's kind of hard to explain if you don't know.

RJ: It's like a big street fair.

HJ: Dog sleds races, booths. Isn't it kind of patterned after years and years ago, in Canada, they had the --

RJ: [unintelligible] ... end of the season they'd come out of the mountain and sell their furs [unintelligible] ... and that's why they call it Fur Rendezvous.

HJ: And it's every year, the second weekend in February or March.

RJ: February.

HJ: But this is still going on. 1958 isn't when it started, and it's been going on for a lot of years.

RJ: [unintelligible]

Q: Now, did you guys in the Fountain have any special holidays? You mentioned at the end of March you had something.

HJ: March 29th through the first of April. The first of April was when there was a big banquet. And I'm not sure if it explains in that brochure there or not.

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Q: But those were kind of like your holy days or something?

HJ: Yeah.

Q: What was the best part for you about living communally?

HJ: I never thought about it. I was busy. We just enjoyed what we did, it just wasn't -- but the thing is, after the explosion, and we could see that this one was leaving, and that one was leaving, we decided, "Well, look's like we'd better get a job and get off on our own. No sense waiting any longer." Because we could see the handwriting on the wall, that it wasn't going to last much longer.

Q: So you moved into town at that point?

HJ: Yeah. We were pretty much in town. We left about October of '61, is when we left. I worked for the newspaper, we had an attorney in town, so I also worked as a legal secretary.

Q: What was the hardest part or the worst part of living communally?

HJ: I don't know. If I figured there was anything hard I probably wouldn't have stayed. Do you remember anything especially?

RJ: Some of the personalities made it hard, [unintelligible] ... it's like, you're in high school, and you have to associate with sixth and seventh graders. That kind of mentality. [unintelligible] not up here, with you, but you have to put up with it, and that's the way it was in there. That was the hardest part, but [unintelligible] ... to accept the fact that everybody was not in the same way.

HJ: Just because you're in high school, that somebody else is only 5th grader, you don't hold it against them that they're 5th grader, but it made thing more difficult because you had to explain in more detail, or they required more supervision, because they were 5th graders.

Q: Yeah. So just different personalities having to get along with everybody could be kind of challenging at times.

HJ: Especially if you had to supervise them. Because they would challenge your authority. But the thing is, some of those people, if you maintained and you understood them and tried to work with them and stuff, if they had animosity, they turned on themselves, because it wasn't causing any problems with anybody else. In other words, if you're trying to cause trouble, and nobody will let you cause trouble, because you don't let them upset you, then they leave. They dirty their own nest and they can't stand it, they've got to get out.

Q: Now when you guys lived way out there, did you continue to do everything communally, eat together, pool all your money and everything?

HJ: We didn't have any money.

Q: How did you survive then?

HJ: Our supplies came -- they hunted moose, we had fish. We had a huge garden. Dump trucks full of potatoes, we had huge crops.

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Q: And Isaiah would send you some supplies?

HJ: He would send supplies that couldn't be done locally, like if there was cloth, for the ones who did the sewing, or equipment, machinery.

RJ: They sent most of the stuff that we could not --

HJ: --And there was money in town, at headquarters, it was like the office. There was money there, and they bought things locally, but the thing is Mother Ruth was in charge of that, and she took care of all that. But as individuals, they didn't have pocket money per se. Because if you needed cigarettes, then you got cigarettes. If you needed food, you had food. So you didn't have any need for money.

Q: Did Krishna Venta ever come up here?

HJ: Yeah. In fact he had come up and stayed here, and would travel back to California, and that's what happened in '58, he had gone back to California. He and Paul went back.

Q: So when he was gone, did you have, was there an elder who was kind of in charge?

HJ: Mother Ruth.

Q: That's his wife?

HJ: Yes.

Q: And she lived here in Alaska?

HJ: Yes.

Q: Okay. Was there someone who would give sermons or teachings or anything?

HJ: We had lectures on Sunday morning, I don't remember?

RJ: [Unintelligible] ... sermon [unintelligible] ... Krishna wasn't there. And it wasn't like a church sermon. [unintelligible] ... scream and holler. They mentioned the Bible and then discussed it.

Q: Oh, okay, so it was sort of a lecture-discussion format in a way.

RJ: Yeah.

Q: And would Mother Ruth lead those?

HJ: Sometimes.

RJ: It all depends on whether she was in [unintelligible] or in town.

HJ: Yeah, because mainly she was in town.

Q: This is kind of a simplistic question, but we always ask people anyway: do you consider the Fountain a success or a failure?

HJ: Well I think it was a great success. It certainly was a forerunner of the modern health system. We did that before they even got their butts out of their chairs. Mental health.

RJ: Mental health and alcoholic counselling.

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HJ: Mainly the coordination of all of these health services in one way. Before that time, there was no coordination.

RJ: Men, women, the whole thing. They didn't have any of that before.

HJ: Well the churches, it was alright if you were a member, but otherwise. And there were a lot of these battered women with kids that couldn't get welfare.

Q: So you provided mental health services, you helped battered women, you helped people with alcoholism . . .

HJ: We didn't do the mental health counseling, but we coordinated the services.

Q: So you were like social workers, in a way.

HJ: In another sense, though, like that Saturday night thing, everybody was participating, and even if you weren't bouncing off a rubber wall, it still was good to get rid of frustrations, because sometimes you'd be given a part to play in the play that was just different. It was good therapy for just normal people.

Q: Do you miss the commune?

HJ: I don't know. We just moved on, I guess.

RJ: I wouldn't say "missing." There's something there, but it's not a "miss." We're not lonely for it, we don't want to go back to that. We went ahead.

HJ: It was a stage in our development.

Q: Are there things that you learned during your communal life that you've brought forward to your life today? Either practical skills, or more sort of spiritual ideas.

HJ: Myself, I know that because Krishna gave me such and such a responsibility, because at the point when I came into the Fountain, I had no self-esteem, because I had been battered for so many years, I couldn't even tell you my name if you asked me in a hurry. But he knew what my capabilities were, and what my training was, and so he gave me these responsibilities, and so I did it, because he asked me to. By doing it, it didn't take too long, and I was a real person again, instead of just a blob, because actually, I was just a blob, just absolutely wiped out.

Q: Did he give you the name "Naria"?

HJ: Yes.

Q: Does that mean something?

HJ: I think it's in the Bible, it means, light? If I remember right.

Q: Did he give most people new names?

HJ: Some he did, and some he didn't, because the name change was something that was suppose to, oh, everything has a vibration or something -- of course, that's a New Age sort of thing now. Especially people, their name, like Isaiah, his name was Claude, and Claude was "I, Claudius," and so the name

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Isaiah, for him -- I'm using that as an example because I can see it more tangibly than my own -- by being called "Isaiah" every time someone called his name, that called forth something in him that would help him overcome his past, and some of the insecurities and problems that he had in the past.

Q: Do you know of any other communes that were in this area?

RJ: The only real communes now in this area are the Russian villagers.

HJ: They're becoming more open, they were a pretty closed community before, but now they're pretty open.

RJ: It's not a commune, they have their own homes and do their own things. But they're tightly knit.

Q: Kind of like the Amish or something?

RJ: Yeah.

HJ: And they're each individual families. It's not like communal where everything is shared.

RJ: It's not like we had. We had men's and women's dormitory.

Q: Did you live out here in Alaska too?

RJ: Yes.

Q: Even for the married people?

HJ: There weren't too many married couples.

RJ: Well, she and I were married up here. In 1960. [unintelligible] were married up there.

HJ: But they were married pretty close to when the whole thing fell apart.

RJ: And then [unintelligible] . . . and Paul --

HJ: --They were married in California.

RJ: Yeah, they were married in California, but they were here for awhile.

HJ: And then he got killed, and she went back to California with her sister.

Q: So could married couples stay together?

HJ: Yeah, when we were -- in town, there's a garage in front of a little old beat-up house, which is where headquarters used to be -- our very plush accommodations were in a garage, unheated.

RJ: Unheated, and no insulation in the walls or nothing.

Q: Wow. How did you guys get your drinking water out there?

HJ: Had a creek. Had a pump. And we had a great big tiers [?], half a tiers, it's a great big wooden keg, about so high.

Q: And then, did you have kerosene lamps, or what did you do for light?

HJ: You strung the lines, we had a 25 kilowatt generator, so go down and fire up the generator, and go ahead and have electricity. We did that to get electricity to the school.

RJ: [unintelligible] . . . small generator.

HJ: But it was mostly kerosene for awhile.

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Q: And then, did you cook on a wood cook stove?

HJ: I didn't cook. There's pictures of all that in here.

RJ: [unintelligible] . . . some did the sewing, [unintelligible] . . . each one had their own department they worked in.

Q: So it's not like you rotated the chores. There was a group of women that did the cooking, a group that did the sewing. Okay. How many people lived out there?

RJ: At one time we must've had 30 people.

HJ: Or more. Just before -- between '56, '57, and '58, the different groups that came up, there was a bunch.

RJ: Well there was 13 of them come up [unintelligible].

HJ: And then down in California there was more.

RJ: There was, at one time, maybe 100, 150.

Q: That was in California?

HJ: Yeah.

RJ: They were here, and some of them go, some of them come back. Moving around.

Q: Was there much artistic expression in the Fountain?

HJ: We had, Sister Ethel was an accomplished organist. She was the woman who played the Hammon organ for the silent movies in Chicago.

Q: No way!

HJ: She composed music. A lot of the songs that the choir sang and a lot of the songs that were sung in these plays were original songs that she composed and taught.

Q: You guys had a choir?

HJ: Yes. She also, was it Merle? But Ethel was, either her father or something was a real famous bandmaster, way back. I can't remember what the name was. Anyway, it's organized, but it's packed away, it's not in here. But she was in her 60's when she was up here.

RJ: Paul was an artist.

HJ: I have this charcoal sketch that he made of the face on the bar room floor, which looks as good or better than the original. And paintings. Of course, who they got to do for this Northward Hoe, who was a famous artist in Anchorage, Richard, he didn't belong to the group, but he was -- he was just starting out, and now he is a very famous Alaskan artist. He did all the backdrops and the scenery and stuff for the Northward Hoe play.

Q: Now, you had kids at the commune, right?

HJ: When I came in from my first husband, I had two children. Later, I allowed him to take them for visitation. He kidnapped them and I never saw them again for, how many years? They were 4 and 18 months when he kidnapped them. I couldn't get any help from either of the counties' district attorney's

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office, so I just said, "Well, I'll leave it in the hands of God." So, they were 4 and 18 months; the next time I saw them was when they decided to look for me, which is what I figured they would do, because nobody told them the truth about anything, so they were taken in 1952. The next time I actually physically saw them was 1980. And then the next time I saw them was this summer, they were all here this summer.

Q: How awful. And then did the two of you have kids?

HJ: Yeah. We have two boys and a girl.

Q: And did you have them while you were at the commune?

RJ: No.

HJ: Just the first one. Armon [?] was born just before we left.

Q: I was just wondering if the commune was a good place to raise kids.

RJ: Yes. They were isolated from the drug scene and all this other garbage.

HJ: And like I said, we had the public school out there -- they got a much better education than -- well, now private schools give you a better education than public schools do too.

Q: Now did the group practice group child rearing? Or did the parents take primary responsibility for the kids?

RJ: Yes and no. If the parents were there, they maintained discipline. If they weren't, it was who was in charge.

HJ: Actually, everybody was responsible for -- if they saw the kids doing something they weren't supposed to, then they took care of it, or brought it to somebody's attention, but everybody wasn't in on the raising, per se.

RJ: Well, everybody [unintelligible] . . . or in the way of the equipment, or --

HJ: --Just happened to think, too, in California, in the kids actually had their own organization called Love, Think, and Understanding, and they elected their own leaders -- in other words, they were in training too. They were thinking, they were trained at an early age to learn their own brain. It wasn't something forced on them, it was just the way it was. They weren't treated like little idiots. They were treated like brains, that they had a brain, they had an intelligence, and they were capable of using it.

RJ: They were treated like people, instead of a kid, and they set up their own rules, their own punishment if somebody broke the rule, the whole thing. They had adult supervision, because nobody, either the adults or the kids [unintelligible]. So the adults supervised [unintelligible] . . .

Q: LTU -- that was Love, Think, and Understanding?

HJ: Or maybe it was Love, Truth and Understanding. I just remember LTU.

Q: That's wonderful. Well, based on your guys' experience living communally, what do you think are the key ingredients that make communal living work?

RJ: The key for me is everybody has to understand that each one has to do what they can do.

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Q: So everyone has to put their fair share of work in?

RJ: Put their fair share in. It's not one of these things, "I'll sit back and let you do the work, and I'll basically watch." Everybody has to work. Otherwise, it won't work. It will fall apart the first 6 months of it.

HJ: And there has to be a brotherly and sisterly love thing, not a physical thing, but a mutual respect for the other person as an individual. And it's very difficult. They don't last because it's too difficult, in most cases.

Q: Is that what happened with the Fountain, it was just too difficult for everyone to get along?

HJ: No, the strong leadership that held everybody -- the focal point was gone. And the people that were trained to be leaders, the next layer of leadership, couldn't do it.

RJ: They were not in that position and trained long enough.

HJ: That's true, because Paul got killed, and Jean [?] got killed. Those were the two oldest and longest under training to be leadership.

RJ: Those were the ones that held it together.

HJ: I think Jean could've handled it.

RJ: Those two worked together.

HJ: Samuel had too big an ego.

RJ: And they fought among themselves, not physical, but mental type.

Q: So do you think a commune needs a strong leader or strong leadership to work?

RJ: Yes, they do. Because everybody has to have someone, they have to look up to that one person. [unintelligible] . . .

HJ: And it can't be a situation where, "You do as I say, and I'll do what I want."

Q: Do you guys see any similarity between what you did and what the hippies did a little later?

HJ: Oh, we were the original hippies. Actually, it was WKFL group in San Francisco, was the first peaceful demonstration, like sit-down protests, that was another WKFL original. It happened in San Francisco.

Q: When did that happen?

HJ: I don't remember. In the '50's.

Q: What was the protest about?

HJ: I don't remember.

RJ: We didn't get as physical as the hippies in Chicago after the Democratic Convention.

HJ: The hippie movement, in a sense, they were dirty, they were druggies, they were whatever, whatever.

Q: And that was different than you, because you guys were more serious or something?

HJ: There was no drugs, no alcohol, none of it.

RJ: We had alcohol.

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HJ: Yeah, but the alcoholics, it wasn't that sort of thing. It was, mainly, during the holy days, there was communion. Some of those basic rituals -- I think some of those people needed that.

RJ: They had to have --

HJ: The biggest percentage of those people were completely immersed in that certain level of church dogma, so there was a certain amount of that in some of the Sunday services, because, in my mind -- I mean, maybe I'm wrong -- but in my mind, they needed that to give their whole thing continuity. It was just --

RJ: They had to be tied to their past. And that's what held them together.

HJ: And they were growing, but it was part of their basic foundation that they understood, the formality of it.

RJ: They couldn't understand, other than [unintelligible].

HJ: Philosophy is too abstract for a certain level of understanding. It would be just like talking about outer space to somebody. RB's mother never really did believe that anybody ever went to outer space. She died believing it was all a big hoax.

RJ: Nobody ever landed on the moon. People believe that today.

HJ: Well, you know how you see on TV, they can make anything on computers and TV. You don't exist, you never did exist, you never will exist.

Q: Well, this has been great. Can I make some copies of your pictures?