Interview with Allen Cohen
Interviewer: Tim Miller
March 25, 1996

Q: To just preserve the communal experience, we're just trying to, in all of its diversity, figure out what went on and we're looking partly for names and dates, kind of concrete information about where things were, that kind of thing, and then also just anecdotes, and stories, what was it like, who were the people, what did they do? Um, just kind of, pretty ecstatic moment in a lot of ways, what was it like? So, I don't know, could you give me a little bit of chronological information, maybe, I mean, you lived communally in the Haight, I presume, . . .
A: Uh, the groups in the Haight, I wouldn't really describe as communes like, uh, the commune in Mendocino was. They were more, um, uh, roommate situations, with some degree of sharing, or, or, and uh, [unintelligible] I wouldn't exactly call them communes, I would think that most, except those that were, perhaps, organized around, the, uh, a uh, teacher or a religion, and there were some, some of that. Uh, I wouldn't quite describe them as communes. Uh, they would range between uh, uh, uh, uh, what we'd called then uh, um, [pause] I can't think of the term we used, but they were real --

Q: Crash pads?
A: Crash pads. They ranged between crash pads on the one hand, the most informal, to an association of friends living together, uh, uh, on another. But, not quite communes. But we started to develop the idea of communal living by living together in that sort of association. And uh, yeah, I was, most of the time between '63, when I moved into Haight-Ashbury and uh, uh, '68 when I moved out to the commune, in uh, uh, involved in groups of people in intimate living arrangements. And uh, uh, and it, insofar as we did that, we did two things -- we learned skills of intimacy and uh, we got used to sharing and being concerned about each other, particularly with, uh, help of some of the psychedelic, psychoactive things that we were doing. [Laughs].

Q: Yeah. That's pretty good [unintelligible], I think.
A: So, uh, um, there was much interaction in that regard. But then, serious communal living only really started as, as far as I can tell, when, uh, we moved to rural communes.

Q: And that was '68 for you?
A: For me it was '68. In The Oracle [?] we wrote [?] about Drop City, which was [unintelligible], probably as early as '66.

Q: '65. '65. Yeah. It's just about the first one. Very close.
A: And I don't, I think ours was one of the earlier ones, here in California, starting in the summer of '68. And more developed afterwards. I think Aspen [?] went east in the early '70s.

Q: Right.
A: Um, so basically, what happened with us, was we were editing The Oracle [?] and uh, uh, the Oracle, like the Haight-Ashbury, was like a comet -- it appeared, it glowed, it had a big tail, and it fizzled away and disappeared into outer space. And, uh, the, the glory of excitement and uh, uh, international renown and media spotlight, uh, are traded into police riots and heavy drugs, and uh, uh, some confusion and dismay about the disillusionment of it all, and then into a direction of, uh, of doing some

of the things that we had felt was necessary to do, which was to live intimately with other people. Uh, on the land, in contact with nature, uh, using some of the techniques that we had learned through meditation, and uh, with a study of the values of the American Indian culture. Uh, the way it happened for me, was after Mill Brook broke up, Tim Leary's group in New York, a friend of his, who'd been living there, uh, wanted to start a commune here in California. And Leary started one down in Southern California, in Laguna, his was called the Brotherhood of Love, the fellow who started it up here was named Walter Schneider, and, uh, he went into partnership with a fellow named Duncan Ray [?] and bought a piece of property up in Albion [?]. A hundred and twenty-acre piece of land for fifty thousand dollars, it's worth fifty million, now.
Q: How many acres?
A: A hundred and twenty acres.

Q: [Inaudible]
A: Then they asked people that they like to come up and live there. Very random, very, uh, um, uh, spontaneous, and uh, [unintelligible] sharing the life at that time, and myself decided to go try it out. And uh, there was probably around fifteen to twenty people at the beginning. We were living very primitively. There was a big old farmhouse there that we were able to use as a central place, for the kitchen and the dining area, and we did a little fixing on it and made a living room, larger living room and porch. Uh, and uh, then we started over with [inaudible]. There were a few people who were there who knew right away that they didn't want to be there. And they left, and a core group started to develop, and it grew for awhile. For a year or two. To what would be about a five year run of a core groups. Um, so now, so what do we come with, to this life? Looking back on it, I've always felt we were very ill-equipped for what we were doing. Um, um, most of us had little or no skills, in terms of living on the land. Um, some things came easier than others. Those who did have the skills, in our group there was two people who had the skills of the sort needed to really live on the land, tended to get more power than the other people, because most of the things that had to be done had to go through them.

Q: You mean they had farming skills?
A: Farming, building, mechanical skills. And, at the same time the women's movement was developing, and the women and the people that didn't have good skill needed that, needed to sort of equalize the interaction somehow. So it was at that time, I'd say, starting in the '70s, first two years [unintelligible] pulling certain things together, that certain frictions started to develop in terms of what everyone was doing, and the power, and how things developed, and talking to people in other communes, I've found that there's similar, that similar things were going on. There was a male-female split, there was a inability for the males to cooperate in the way the females were learning how to do, the women were learning how to do. And, uh, as a result, very few of the communes [unintelligible] developed an economic base. In the meantime, what we were doing, is we were working in spiritual areas, like peyote, meditation, uh, [pause] uh, reading [or breathing?] skills, like using the Indian method of circle readings, one person talking at a time, using the [unintelligible], uh, things we picked up from the American Indian culture, which were very useful. And, uh, at the same time, little rivalries would break out. There would be sexual rivalries, there would be, um, uh, rivalries in terms of who was going to do what, what kind of

building enterprise was going on, and, these envies and jealousies in regard to those. I would say that on the one hand, we had, it developed into a kind of schizophrenic life, where we were real happy to be where we were, real happy to be with each other, but it seemed impossible to make any progress together. Economic progress, uh, and even spiritual progress. Um, and they [phone is ringing] [unintelligible] stopped, a lot of things, a lot of developments sort of stopped, around the third or fourth year. Uh, so, um, to lose [?] these two areas, everything, and area where everything was peachy and wonderful and spiritual and getting high, and in tune with nature, and this other area of whenever crunch came to crunch, there were these tremendous internal turmoils. Um, things would happen of whether we should build a greenhouse or not, who was going to build it. Oh, one time, oh, the mechanic went on a trip and, uh, spent, I don't know, four or six hundred dollars on bringing back a bus that nobody really wanted. So he, he got [laughs] he got in trouble for bringing back the bus. And then there was the problems of some people wanted to hunt deer, and other people didn't want any guns on the land. And uh, um, uh, there was all this, uh, all this happening. Um, we did develop the Albion School, we developed our own school. First, for the kids just on the land, and then we opened up for other kids nearby, and then it became the first alternative community school, right up to high school. It was a great school for the Albion area. And so that was a significant thing, and it started, it started, it was mostly run by the women, because the women were able to cooperate more than the men. Now some of the men played a little role in the school, they helped build a new schoolhouse and, along with other people in the community. But basically it was run by, and organized by, and fought for with the school board and so on by the women. Um, [pause] what else? Um, [pause] the life of living on a commune is one in which you take your life, your whole life, back to yourself. You don't realize how much of our lives we give away. The garbage man comes, the sewers are taken care of, the plumbing's taken care of, the house is built, we pay the mortgage, but it's build. But all of a sudden, you're sitting on a piece of land in the middle of a forest, and it's your own responsibility to build a life, to build a civilization, to build a culture. We didn't have any electricity, we didn't have any telephones, and we were ten miles up a dirt road, and ten miles from Mendocino, ten miles away.

Q: So the house that was already there didn't have electricity?
A: No. Um, uh, no electricity, no telephone. And it was only long after I left that the first telephone was . . . um, so we had this responsibility, and in order to do so, even amongst a small group of people, there has to be a system of organization, a system of, uh economic support, all kinds of subsystems, like what's happening with the garbage, the sewage, the, uh, the uh, automobiles, the uh, the water, the food, the gardens, the animals, in our case we had goats and sheep, um, and so, uh, the way we were organized was a, a, anarchic. That is, we did not kowtow to authority of our own or anyone else's. Uh, we were a non-religious, in terms of formal religion, so there was no religious leaders, and uh, we had to develop these systems as gently as we could, um, it, without using the techniques that are usually used -- the authority of religion and the authority of politics and, and, and the authority of money, the power of money. [Coughs]. Um, [pause] in the meantime, we were having babies and love affairs, peyote rituals, um, [pause], um, most of the money that was coming in at that time was from welfare, though there was some occasional working for money. Uh, after a while, I started to work at the Renaissance Fair [?] and bring back some money. Um, a few other people would do odd jobs and come back with the

money. Um, after a while the school was bringing in a little money, though most of it went back to the school, just a small amount to the commune. Um, [pause] so, uh, the question, the question that, uh, that, uh, that comes up is that, um, there's a lot, there's a lot of questions here. One is how, what did you succeed, and what, and how did you fail? And, um, [pause] and another is how did we evolve? Um, I think in terms of evolving, I think one area that was very important and very subtle has to do with, uh, human intimacy. When I came back to the city in 1975, after seven years there, and uh, I found that the alienation that I had been used to, after all, I'm urban-born, urban-bred, Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn College, uh, San Francisco, I had never been in the country until I went to that commune. Um, [pause] I felt an immense alienation. And I was always usually a warm person, but I felt when I came back, you know, the period between the '60 and '75, when I came back, I suddenly felt that I was very alienated and [unintelligible] couldn't understand what they were doing. You'd walk into a bar, and there's all these guys with mustaches they were very popular in the '70s, and everyone had the same mustache, I thought that it was aliens from another planet who had funny lips. [Laughs]. So, but the, --

Q: I suppose on a primitive commune, everyone had beards, right?
A: Yeah, we just had beards, yeah. But there was this gap, because the reason of this gap, is it wasn't any different from what I had left, really, but the quality of intimacy that we had with each other, the quality of knowing each other through thick and thin and round and round was so much more intimate than ordinary daily routines, even with friends. "Oh, I'll see you for dinner," isn't like having dinner, making dinner together, doing the dishes, sitting down, dealing with the kids, setting the fire, sitting in front of the fire, reading stories to the kids, everything happening all at once, you know? And this, this totality of experience, you'd think rural life was lonely or something -- no, it was just the opposite. It was the most intimate life I'd ever led. Uh, you lose your sense of self, really, and which leads me, another thing, you really start becoming part of the group. No matter how dysfunctional the group is. [Inaudible]

Q: Yeah, OK, it's going. I couldn't see it.
A: No matter how dysfunctional, or crazy, weird. [Inaudible] dysfunctional.

Q: Yeah. [Laughs].
A: Crazy, weird.

Q: [Laughs].
A: Things were, you were still part of this organism. And that's exactly where the problem, particularly on the male side, uh, was. Uh, [pause] it was like, um, we went so far into this sense of unity or organism, we tried, we liked to use all kinds of tribal consciousness. Um, we went just so far and there was a sense of drawing back. You didn't want to lose the identity, your identity, to some entity that you are so conditioned to be an individual against the world. The personal, creative, spontaneous, self-motivated, self-fulfilling, self-ego world, and you didn't want to lost that. So there came a point where people had to define themselves against each other. And it also was at very irrational points. Because the points at which it was easy to become organic, an organic whole, was easy. It was the very points

where it was the most touchy, sexual jealousy, certain senses of power and identity over areas, uh, like the mechanics, who would usually do the building, or who's really the boss of this little, tiny area. Or, I don't know, a thousand little things that come up in each individual's consciousness. Oh yes, one of the big problems, and I'm sure you've heard many people speak of this, is are we closed or are we open? Should we let more people in or shouldn't we? And if somebody slips in, are they really in? [Laughs]. How are we going to determine if they're really in? Are they really part of the family? You know, and there's always someone who wants "No, no, no, no, no." And, uh, so we had, there was a sense of fear, almost, of, uh, of, uh, going all the way into, the only way, the only real way to live on the land and without authority, living on the land without external authority was to become tribal, and yet we couldn't become tribal, no matter how many peyote sessions we had, no matter how many sweat lodges we had, we had, a, you know, the long nights with the rattle and the drum, that sense of tribalism just eluded us. And what was left were these areas of irritability. And these areas of jealousy, and these areas of power tripping. Um, [inaudible], but, um, uh, I think that it was these things that were at the basis of the failure of the commune movement, plus one other thing, which is the economic problem, and, uh, we never developed a way, and that was also based in inability, lack of ability of the males to develop an economic thing together. Whereas the women developed this school, but it wasn't economically really viable, it just was keeping up with the school. And the males just didn't get it together. The only ones I ever heard of that were able to somehow function, aside from religious communes, on an economic level, was Garcon's [?] group, but they were so big that they folded on that level, also, eventually, because uh, people just got tired of living their whole lives being on a list of when their kids were going to get sneakers. So there was this breaking point, that, you know, I don't know when it was, mid 80's perhaps, where a whole groups of hundreds of them left.

Q: Yeah, '82 or '83, the, like three-quarters of them left. There's still a couple hundred there, but . . .
A: And Steve's [inaudible] a really good friend of mine, and uh, uh, but I think he went, it was just too much to do, to keep that big of a group together. But certainly he did a lot toward solving those economic problems, more so than any other group I'd ever heard of, except some religious groups.

Q: Yeah, of course, they considered themselves a religious group.
A: Yeah, but they weren't religious in the sense of giving it all over to the guru --

Q: Well, maybe -- it was a heavy guru trip over there.
A: You think so?

Q: Yeah. That's, that's what they all say now.
A: Uh huh.

Q: I don't know if they would have said that at the time.
A: Right. I don't, well, I hadn't spoken to anyone about it recently, but uh, this sense --

Q: You know Elizabeth Gipps [?] right? Ask her.
A: Yeah. Was she there?

Q: Yeah. She went on the caravan, she went and settled there, but she didn't like it and she only stayed less than a year. But she was there.
A: Well, I think at the beginning, there was probably more of a guru trip because Steve was so looked up to as the leader. But my understanding was he withdrew more and more from that, and instituted various structures, which then, decision-making in themselves. That's the way I understand it.

Q: Yeah, but he was still the ultimate power.
A: Uh huh.

Q: Until, until the breakup in the '80s. Now he's just a regular guy.
A: Uh huh.

Q: He's not a guru at all, anymore.
A: Uh huh.

Q: Which is kind of interesting in itself -- how often does that happen? -- you just resign from being guru. This thing about other people coming -- you were theoretically closed, a fixed group, not letting other people join, more or less?
A: Uh, uh, we developed at various times various rules about what it would take for somebody to become a member of the family. And uh, uh, they, they, they kept varying, and of course, they were agreed upon, but they kept varying anyway. And uh, um, they would go from a person would stay a week, and then we had to have a meeting, and somebody had to recommend them to stay for another month, and if they wanted to become a member then they would have to announce that they wanted to become a member and then, uh, there's be a sixmonth waiting period, --

Q: [Laughs].
A: -- and then, I don't remember all the variations, you know. And always there would be somebody who would close, several people who were closed, and several who were open and wanted to embrace everyone. And usually, what would occur would be somebody would be so persistent that they would just stay. [Laughs].

Q: And that would define it? [Laughs].
A: That would define it. And that didn't happen very often. Because very few people wanted to get, and it would become quite a battle after a while, after they stayed long enough, and so very few people wanted to go through that. Um, so there was [unintelligible] so eventually what happened was I left in '75 before it got too bad. It had certainly come to a halt, in terms of growth, spiritual, economic, psychological, it just came to a halt, you know.

Saw the writing on the wall and left. I saw there was nothing else I could do there and uh, there was a, a future [?].
So, but most of the people stayed, and it went down to seven people who stayed for many years, and they fought with each other, and they fought, and they finally had a formal divorce, they had to get divorced.

Q: [Laughs].
A: Seven people --

Q: These are people who went way beyond what you did.
A: Right, yeah. And eventually they all left the land, and they're fighting over the land, about who owns it and you know, and uh, trying to get it back into communal -- eventually what happened, just last year was the kids came back to the land and started to live on it. [Phone is ringing].

Q: Really? The kids came back. That's pretty interesting.
A: They're [unintelligible] --

Q: You were talking about the kids beginning to come back, which I'm pretty intrigued by --
A: Yeah.

Q: They, they all took off, [unintelligible].
A: They, uh, they were, jobs or, uh, um, in some cases they were in college and dropped out and three or four of them and some of their friends have come back to live on the land with their friends. The adults, the adults had all moved off the land, and it was vacant. People were living, you know, the seven or so people who were around were living in the area, that had given up living together. And uh, uh, and were having meetings to figure out how to get the land out of two people's names, who'd been holding it, uh, but that's another long story. Uh, the two people who originally bought it sold it to two other people, who'd been holding it, even though it was supposed to be communalized, but nobody ever did it. We never established the structure, the structure to do it. Finally, everyone said, "Look, the family's broken up, but the land is held by two people," [inaudible] and that's not right, and so they've been reluctant to give it up, and everybody's been trying to get them to give it up and make it, uh, um, conserve the timber on it and pass it on to the children and uh, I feel whatever other visions [?] and so it's been a battle to do that. It's another of the, it's a manifestation of exactly what I was talking about, which is that place where "Oh, I'm communal, I'm a family, I'm wonderful, I'm in nature, I'm beautiful -- but I'm going to hold onto this piece of deed." [Laughs]

Q: Uh huh. [Laughs].
A: That's my half of the deed. So, uh, uh, that's the story of Taylor [?] Mountain Ranch, I think it's been repeated in many of the other communes that started.

Q: Yeah, really. Very typical stories. Um . . . so really, '68 to no real ending date, in a sense.
A: Well, uh, um, uh '68 I would, I wouldn't know when people stopped living there, but it was recently, it was like three years ago or two years ago when everyone left. But the disintegration had been going on since, probably the early '80s. Probably ended somewhere in the early '90s.

Q: Did it stay without electricity and that kind of thing, still pretty primitive.
A: Yeah, just telephones came.

Q: So it's still that way now, and the kids are living in some fairly primitive life.
A: They pulled in a generator, at one point, during the school years, when the school, the school closed down, too. They pulled in a generator to run the school, electricity and computers and school [?] and um, uh, but just generally . . .

Q: What were the relations like with the neighbors, the straight neighbors? Were they outraged that this was going on?
A: No, our neighbors were very distant from us, except one person up the road who was very nice. Um, I don't recall any [pause] problems with the neighbors.

Q: So no one tried to shut you down on zoning, or things like that?
A: No, no. Just the county, every once in awhile.

Q: Yeah? They didn't like it?
A: Uh, well, you know -- it went through cycles, you remember the Brown administration, and it came in, they were in favor of communes, they had a, let's see, what was the name of -- Slim Dandelion? Slim Dandelion? -- He [?] had written books on ultimate housing, and stuff like that, head of the some department that had to do with permits and building and such and, and they passed some kind of regulation about allowing communal groups to live on land, new rezoning laws and [unintelligible], I don't remember the details, [inaudible] found out some useful [?] . . . and then after that, I left, you know, I left in '75. So it was, it took, then there was some problems with the housing that they [unintelligible] after Deukmaijan [?] became president [governor?] it changed the zoning things and they were, I thought you know -- this is Tim. [A dog has entered the room]. Uh, San Francisco. Um, so uh, yeah, so then they came and looked at our housing again and said [unintelligible]'s got to go, and they negotiated with them and made it so that no more uh, individual houses would be bought in the woods, and there'd only be a certain amount of houses on the land and so on and so forth. In other words [unintelligible].

Q: Well, that's better than some people did. You know, Lee Gottlieb's [?] place, is totally bulldozed. They built over it.
A: Um [pause] . . .

Q: I guess if you're remote enough, the neighbor issue kind of drops away.
A: Yeah, yeah. Well, also like, we were, you know, we didn't have hundreds of people coming in and . . . small group, I don't think we ever went over twenty. We had parties now and then, but I don't think we went over twenty at one time.

Q: [Pause] I'm curious about you, and maybe other people that you'd know their backgrounds. One of the things I'm trying to figure out is this whole matter of, of where the communal energy of the late sixties came from, and what I've found is that in a bunch of cases, there was some logical predisposition. Like Lee Gottlieb was a communist, you know, dedicated to the eradication of competition and Ramon Sender [?] had been, uh, he'd lived communally before, back in the Fifties. Uh, and I, I just wonder if there's anything like that in your background, anything that –
A: No.

Q: Did anyone in the group have . . .
A: No, we were a real mixed group. Um, uh there was a doctor's son, the fellow who bought the ranch was a Navy uh, intelligence, Navy intelligence and uh, flown, had flown jets over Vietnam before he dropped out to live at Mill Brook. Another one of the owners was an engineer, um, uh, there's one woman from a Boston family [unintelligible], um, I come from a working-class family, uh . . . I think one fellow, his father was a janitor most of his life, at some company [?]. Um, another fellow was from, uh, also from Brooklyn, his father was a businessman of some sort, small businessman.

Q: Doesn't sound like any single [unintelligible].
A: No, no, there's no uh, there's no political background, people tended to sort of be -- it came out of the, the, the uh, um, insights coming from [unintelligible] you know, from the '60s, including the sense of an alienated, materialistic culture, uh, the going back to nature, you know, and, uh, those were the primary, uh, very idealistic motivations [?].

Q: You mentioned sexual rivalries, which implies that things were not monogamous, how wide open was it, was it a big issue?
A: Oh, we, we had no theology on that. It just was that people discovered they liked somebody else, and they didn't like who they were living with and [laughs] and nice-looking [?] couple, they either would split up and somebody else was, the man would be in the middle of, someone else on the land or off the land. Um, um, so it was just a matter of, uh, uh, this, when, whenever you go into a new environment, different people start discovering what it is that they really think of each other in this new environment. So you go to an extreme like that, urban, uh, environment to self-sufficiency, self-sustaining on the land, living intimately together and that changes stuff, so [inaudible] I think that's a pretty natural thing. I don't think it had, well, it had something to do [unintelligible] it had something to do with the tenor of the times, that it was OK, you know, if you didn't like someone to find someone else, whereas in the previous generation, that wasn't a viable option. [End of Side A]

Q: [Beginning of Side B] -- Was it all completely pooled -- did everyone have to throw in everything they had? Was that the common pool?
A: Um, yeah. Well, that was one of the intentions, and uh, but, that was another part of the holding on mechanism, the egotism that couldn't quite give it all up. So, uh, though the rule was we would give it all in, uh, it was, uh, obeyed mostly when people didn't have very much. [Laughs]. And then when somebody got something, they tended not to want to do that. So, uh, that was, uh, that was real [pause] some of the true, truer moments that [laughs] of what we did there [?]. Um, [pause] so there, there's this matter of how much, uh, we are conditioned, no matter what our, uh, uh, ideals might be, how much we're conditioned to be individuals, to survive individually, and it isn't a nefarious thing, it wasn't done, these things weren't done meanly, they were done by this unconscious, uh, rush to hold on to something, you know? And, and the last thing that's being held onto there is two people holding onto the deed to the land. And, which, uh, then becomes, because of, it became so extreme and that was the last thing to hold onto, after they didn't want the land itself. They don't want to live on the land itself. [Laughs].

Q: They, they want the money, is that it?
A: They want the deed. Because they won't admit they want the money. But they're not giving up the deed. [Laughs].

Q: But what motivation, if they're not living there, would there be, but money?
A: That's right. [Laughs]. But they wouldn't say that. Oh, no, no, no. They want it to be just right [?]. You just have to have the right instrument to uh, to uh, to share this property. [Laughs].

You can find that -- you can put it in a trust or, different things to do.
Yeah, so we'll be spending a lot of time trying to figure that out -- something like five years.

Q: [Unintelligible]. There wasn't any formal government, I gather, right?
A: Uh, well, decision making, again was done on the Indian style, it was consensus, one person speaking at a time, a vote taken, and if one person disagreed, it wouldn't pass, and a, a methodology that I grew to hate, actually, it was like, 'cause we had some people on various issues who would not give, give it up. And, uh, so it held [inaudible]. Some political groups have been able to function with consensus decision-making. Um, but, uh, uh, when you're dealing with your whole lives and they're, living your whole lives with your children, um, even consensus decision-making means that you can have people who will not give it up when it's obvious that it should be given up. So, uh, it became a real obstacle to progress.

Q: Yeah, I completely agree with you. I was in the anti-nuclear power movement, pretty actively in the '70s and '80s, and every group I was in, they wanted to operate by consensus, and I felt like they spent all their time trying to achieve consensus and not fighting nuclear power. I really felt frustrated by it.
A: And that was just one narrow part of their lives. Their whole lives depended on it . . .

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Q: Pretty slow progress. You, you, you tried -- oh, go ahead.
A: I thought maybe I could read a couple of those poems to you. Now, uh, some of these are to children. Many of these were written on birthdays. Um, and so they, what I would do with them is try to bring out the essence of the person on their birthday, some have to do with incidents, and some with the land itself. Um, see, some with the breakup of love affairs, uh, some with just some nature [?] material, uh, let's see . . . this is Poem for Leslie: Leslie, I like to encourage you / As you so often have encouraged me. / You probably don't remember and don't even recognize / What a pool [or pull?] of gentleness and acceptance you are / How you held me up when I thought the world was crushing me / By breaking my sanity [?] apart / You poured love in my ears like healing medicine / Yesterday, when we saw Jim, the ghosted lover / Who awaits his long-ago Suzanne in the forest of winter rain and cold / His hair turned gray with memory and yearning / You invited him to come on the ranch / to sleep in warmth and dryness / But enamored of his dream and suffering, he couldn't accept / I love you, Leslie, for that offer / So natural, so tender.

Q: Hmm. That's nice.
A: There's a guy who's living in the forest, there's this woman who left him.

Q: Uh huh.
A: This was, uh, for Bill. [Unintelligible] birthday [?]. And Bill was the mechanic, he put together a junkyard, the size of which you wouldn't believe. Um . . .
There's a kind of scene, the first sight seen / And impression that floods the mind / Before we stamp our frail expectations [?] upon each other / When I see you in this intuitive sight / I see the grope [or rope?] of hope in your eyes. The hope that Prometheus and Jesus were tied to stone and wood for giving to mankind / The hope that comes from risking everything on loving and seeing love returned seven-fold. / Often I've called you a magician on machines / But I've seen magic surround you like the rainbow.
[Pause] Um, this is for [unintelligible] failing to find an aunt [?] in an ancient burial ground during a walk for the woods:
Walking in the forest, looking for Indian graves / Fire [unintelligible], imagining moss covered, moss covered totems / A hunt for forgotten forms to dream in, to wish, to live in / Some way to know again the action of being /
The mind, its force [or is forced?] / Both knower and known / To speak in a language the redwoods can answer /
This hunt for burial grounds / A place to lie down into, to sleep, to rise renewed / With ancient molecules streaming through my bloodstream / flowing into my cells / assassinating the old regime of habit, of chemical preservatives / and electronic particles of "I want, I want." / Rising up to meet [?] and call, call, call! / I want to give the signal that will touch the nerves / Attack the paleface intruder or the British are coming / A light in the frontal lobe / One if by print, two if by electronic image / Advanced theories [?] of the old faith, the oldest faith / Tan [?] light of the body, shining star, Polaris, home for renewal / Sweep them away, the invaders / Keep them from walking the bow [?] mindwalk, earthwalk. Peace [?]. And, uh, so, I, are you, are you doing a book or a [unintelligible] or what?

Interview with Allen Cohen
Interviewer: Tim Miller
March 25, 1996

Q: Yeah, I'm going to do a book, but that's kind of secondary. The real reason I'm doing this is just, just to make an archive, so the experience isn't forgotten. But out of that, then, once that's more or less done, I do expect to write a book. Part of it is, you know, there's been all this '60s literature, but it's been politics –
A: Yeah, right . . .

Q: A lot of it's politics. Some drug literature and stuff, it's kind of like it's, to me, a major part of the '60s that's kind of been forgotten. I think it ought to not be. [?]
A: Now this is interesting, it's a little longer, but this was after I had left and I returned. [Phone is ringing]. And uh, [pause] this is called Return to Table Mountain.
Late spring rain soaked the ground / Delaying spring planting / The meadows stretch away with a wet sigh / And gray toasted [?] leave [?] / And gray coastal gloom surrounds my memories with a detachment that makes them open / Almost comforting / Elementals of my being my appear [?] into place / These are the meadows I created / Piles of rotting wood with Joel [?] and Calum [?] / There's the fence we stretched and circled two-acre garden / Silhouettes of planting, weeding, harvesting / Here's the round house I built / With its mandala skylight / Etched in my vision / Now, inside it again / I am loving [?] Luna [?] who lives in its dark forest of grace / In seven-and-a-half years so much love and so much pain / Yet I lie hear to listen [?] and to rest / In the forest I remember the trees I cut and the trees I planned to cut / And the orchard, the few trees I planted / Growing and bearing a hundred pounds of peaches / From the peach tree I nurse red [unintelligible] every year / Every tree, every cluster of seen [?] oak [?] and manzanita / Hides a memory / Last year I couldn't face the static / The voices and visions / Now in children's movements and voices as they grow / Children whose [unintelligible] I've watched / Some whose heads I caught as they tumbled into this world / And whose umbilical cords I severed / I hear the memory / I hear the harmony with nature / I'm going forth / In vital [?] penetration of sky and earth into the flesh / Mid-day [?] patterns that will continue into a mystic future / As the electronic world begins to seep into even this distant mountain / There is no escape from its invisible sirenic touch / But there is a place to stand / A way to struggle / As these mine [or minds?] and the dozens that have lived here and left / Are struggling / And change themselves to a cooperativeness without superstition and authority / And struggle with the devourers among the companies / county governments, school boards and real estate interests / To be able to nourish themselves / For a need for the land, the need the law of [?] the land for them / To be able to merge themselves, their need for the land / With the need of the land for them / Until they are their own government, their own school, and their own religion / And this land is protected by this generation / And the generation that is growing here / And these new blessings will go on longer than the old sins.
So that piece describes some of the heartache involved, some of the other pieces don't do that. Let's see, I'm looking for the, for the best parts -- this, this, [inaudible] more difficult thing. Let me see if I have another copy of that. I can't give you the childbirth book. I can give you, or send you, if I don't have it here.

Q: The childbirth book is published, I could probably track it down.
A: Totally out of print --

[Unintelligible] library [unintelligible]. I sort of doubt it, we didn't make it, we, we were very unsophisticated at the time. We didn't do marketing [inaudible]. We did print two editions and uh, sold about eight thousand copies, but uh, we, we were, and, uh . . .

Q: Is it copyrighted?
A: Yeah.

Q: Then two copies have to go to the library of Congress, right? That's the law.
A: I don't, I don't remember if we formally copyrighted it, I really don't remember. Maybe. Maybe we did. But I don't remember.

Q: Well, I'll see if I can track it down. I bet I can.
A: You wrote down the --

Q: I wrote, I wrote a note on it, yeah.
A: The Aquarius publishing company was us.

Q: Yeah.
A: We had one investor. So, I will send you the, uh, do you have a card?

Q: Yeah. Let me ask you -- one more thing I'm still trying to get straight. What was the food deal, did you try to be self-sufficient, were you growing a lot of your food?
A: No, we didn't go as far as to grow our beans and grains, we didn't have enough land for that. But vegetables, yes.

Q: And you probably lived on pretty little money, didn't you?
A: Oh, very little money, yeah. You know the uh, uh, Bell's [?] here in [inaudible]?

Q: Yeah, sure, yeah. I had dinner with Rose [inaudible]. Yeah.
A: Uh, you know Prahos [?]

Q: Yeah, sure -- Jim Prahos [?]
A: [Inaudible]

Q: Yeah, I will. Yeah.
A: I uh, spoke to him several times on the phone, in the interview, I'd get permission to use a piece of [unintelligible] on CD-ROM [unintelligible].

Q: Sure.
A: And I would, uh, the project I'm working on right now, is to put an article on the Web, to be called uh, probably San Francisco Aura [?] International, Solutions, Visions, and Quests. And, uh, I've been

putting together a team of programmers and marketing people to see if we can get this done. And um, I'd love to get something [unintelligible] into that, but we can't pay anything yet [inaudible] and getting people together on enthusiasm again. And then, if it works, we'll get sponsorship.

Q: Have you asked him about that?
A: No, I haven't.

Q: They do try to get money, William is not rich, and they try to get paid, but they're also decent people, you tell them you don't have money, and they're pretty cooperative.
A: Yeah, and I could advertise anything major [?] [inaudible]. I don't know if they've put up a Web site for [inaudible].

Q: I haven't seen it, but there is, I don't know. No, he's just pretty much living quietly in retirement.
A: How's his health?

Q: Oh, you know, for eighty-one or eighty-two, for that he's pretty good. Cranky old man, but he's –
A: His, his liver's [?] OK?

Q: [Laughs]. Well, he hasn't died . . . [End of tape]