

Interview with Greening Life Community members Khyana Gehris, Paul Gehris, John Brubaker, Lous Brubaker, Helen Michener, and Bob Michener

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

June 24, 1996

Q: This is Monday, June 24th, and let me go around the room and make sure I know everybody's names. [lists names]. I'd love to start by hearing some history about Greening Life. What led up to its formation?

KHYANA: Well, we were part of a group of people who started a school, it's called Londonderry School. I'm sure whoever you talk to will tell you from a different version, but in the process of knowing some of those folks, we were close neighbors with another couple. Paul's a clergyman, and we were living in a parsonage, and he was changing jobs, and we were going to be out of the house. So we wanted to look for a place to live, and these close friends said, "Let's look together, and let's look for a farm that we could share. And then somehow, word got out, and other people who were looking at community came out of the woodwork. It just grew. And we spent about 3 years talking about community and reading books, and trying to decide what kind of a community we wanted to be, and visiting some. Our family went to the Bruderhof [?] for awhile, five days .

Q: Which one did you go to?

KHYANA: We went to Farmington, New Meadow Run. We decided that wasn't quite what we were looking for. Although there were some things that I really liked about them. And then we found a piece of land, and decided that we'd better act and stop talking. We started looking, and we found this land, and half of the group chose not to come here with us, but went down to [unintelligible], because they seemed to like that area more. At that time, there were five couples.

MAN 1: Was it the Beuster's [?]?

KHYANA: Beusters went south.

MAN 1: But who else? You said half of the group.

KHYANA: There was a couple other families with the Beusters. So five families bought the farm together.

PAUL: I think it's important to say we were already incorporated before we bought the farm, as Greening Life.

Q: And how did you incorporate?

PAUL: We were incorporated as a nonprofit organization. It's a very simple . . .

Q: You incorporated when? Early '70's?

PAUL: My recollection is we incorporated in early '71, and bought the farm in '72.

Q: So when you incorporated in '71, you chose the name Greening Life?

PAUL: In fact, we were under real pressure about trying to figure it out, and finally came to consensus about that, because we needed something on the corporation papers.

WOMAN 2: So that was the spirit that moved you?

PAUL: Well, people pick names for their kids like that sometimes. It seemed like a good choice.

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Q: I think at dinner, you said it was influenced by that book by Charles Wright [?], The Greening of America?

PAUL: Yeah, which we had all read.

Q: Were there any buildings on the land when you bought it?

PAUL: When we came to the farm, the farmhouse was there, and the barn was there, and what we called the Corn Barn, which has since fallen down and is in the process of being replaced.

Q: So did all 5 families move into the farmhouse?

PAUL: No. We made a -- different families have lived in the farmhouse at different times. The first place that was built was the geodesic dome. Which interestingly, is going to be razed to the ground next year, and replaced by another building. And then people came and either were living in their own home in the city while they built their house, or in the case of the Brubakers, they lived for quite a while in the farmhouse while they built their house.

Q: How many acres do you have?

PAUL: 134.8.

WOMAN 3: Excuse me, Deborah, I want to interrupt a second. This is Candy Wilderman . Candy has been interested in exploring community, and Jeff invited her to join us tonight, thinking that it might be an opportunity for her to hear us talk about community. So I want to check with people to see if you're okay with that. Is that okay with your Deborah?

Q: That's fine with me.

PAUL: Come in Candy. We thought you were a process server.

KHYANA: That's Paul's sense of humor. He's really not expecting her.

Q: I guess I'm curious if you had any sort of common ideology of philosophy that sort of fueled you all to seek community and to come together.

KHYANA: Sharing resources, living easily off the land, self-sufficiency. Raising our children in free space. Giving our children exposure to extended family.

MAN 1: Dissatisfaction with organized religion.

KHYANA: Dissatisfaction with school district, and I guess organized religion.

UNKNOWN: I think universal opposition to Vietnam. Nobody came here who thought that was a good idea.

KHYANA: I think mostly it was a desire to eat well, live well, and share resources.

UNKNOWN: Expose the kids to lots of adults who were different from their parents.

Q: Were you living in Harrisburg before, or somewhere nearby?

KHYANA: Gloner [?] Park, East side of Harrisburg.

PAUL: Everyone lived near Harrisburg. Because [unintelligible] . . .

WOMAN: They were fairly urban areas, though, not city, suburban, nice bedroom type community places.

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Q: Now one of the reasons you threw out was dissatisfaction with school districts. When you moved here did you plan to home school your kids, or start a school?

KHYANA: No, part of the reason we chose this particular area is the public school system here had an open-space, nonbraided elementary school, in New Glowview [?]. So our kids came from Londonderry to that school, and unfortunately, after they left it, they quit doing it that way. But it was a nice transition for them, and there were a group of teachers that were really committed to it, and our children had a good experience. The whole thing was open-space, and writing your own lesson plans, a real supportive community. But in general, people wanted grades, other people who lived here, didn't all want that kind of thing.

Q: Now, when we were talking at dinner, we talked a bit about incorporation and how you did it. Originally, the way you did it, people didn't own their own houses? Or they did? Can you describe some about how the incorporation is set up and how that might have changed?

PAUL: Somebody else can talk about how that's changed, because they've gone through that. Originally, the deal was to become a member of Greening Life, you bought a share of the corporation, and that gave you all the privileges, including building a dwelling here. That was basically approved by everybody else in terms of where it was placed, and to some degree, what it looked like. The rule of thumb was no mansions, and no hovels. And in between that, some of our -- so if you look around, I guess you won't be able to, there are different kinds of dwellings here, but they do fall between hovel and mansion. Not that we don't have nice houses. There are mansions, but -- and part of that was deep concern about, if people leave, we didn't want to be responsible as getting first right of refusal, to something we couldn't afford. So we wanted some reasonable value in those houses.

KHYANA: We also had a concern about the whole living simply thing. We had an intention of building a community building, so originally, the houses were planned to be small dwellings, and we would build this big shared space.

Q: But you never built the community building? Do you still have dreams to do that?

KHYANA: We sort of put that to rest, recently, for now.

MAN 1: The houses were built on common community land, so that although, by general agreement, the people who built the house owned it, you didn't really have any legal proof that you did. I guess. I don't know.

PAUL: But you paid the taxes on it.

MAN 1: You couldn't get a mortgage, because the land underneath was in no way dedicated for that house, by lease, or . . . and we resisted doing deeds, because we wanted to keep common land, not break it up.

Q: Is this county zoned?

MAN 1: Minimal, when we started, if at all, but it's been increasingly so now.

PAUL: Subdivision [unintelligible] . . .

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Q: Okay, does each have to have 5 acre parcels for houses or anything like that?

PAUL: We escaped that, because we were just putting a few [unintelligible] on the total of 135 acres. But now, interestingly, you're in Carol township here, but if you walk 30 yards from here, you're in Spring township, right through our garage. In fact, --

Q: Oh, so you span both townships then.

PAUL: Right. And two congressional districts. But more importantly, Carol township is the most populated of all the townships, because it's right next to Tumberland County. So it became the first real bedroom [?] community for people working in Carlyle [?] and Harrisburg. And it's like, Carol township got tighter -- is that a fair assessment, Bob? Carol township got a lot tighter a lot quicker than the rest of the townships?

BOB: Because of the influx. I won't say a lot quicker, but there's several of them were affected the same way. Carol township is close to Newport, where the major highways go. Those townships were affected equally, I think, like Carol township was.

PAUL: But there are now sufficient restrictions.

WOMAN: You talk about when you were incorporating and forming the community, you tried to talk to the township about some kind of subdivision, and they couldn't even get anybody to talk to them. It was like, "What do you want?" So then,

PAUL: ... for almost a year and a half, and we finally just quit.

Q: You just went ahead and started building?

KHYANA: There were some rumors, though, because I remember somebody asking us one time if we were planning to start a school here. So the neighbors were really curious.

HELEN: Well, when we lived in New Bloomfield [?], when we came out here to the 4-H thing, and we were talking to people about coming out here, and they said, "That must be that hippie commune out there in Shermansdale." So the word was out around, because we actually lived in Perry County, Bob and I did, before the community was ever formed.

KHYANA: A part of how that got established was we bought the farm before we could get here. And we rented the farmhouse to some hippies. It would be fun to hear, they would tell us stories about their experiences with some of the local neighbors. And there used to be a little general store out where [unintelligible] now is, and they'd go hang out in the store, and get to know neighbors. They were bearded, long-haired hippies.

HELEN: And you're in redneck country.

BOB: They were also all quite intellectual hippies.

HELEN: Yeah a couple of them had gone to the community college.

Q: So I take it then, you wouldn't have considered yourselves hippies at the time?

HELEN: No.

WOMAN: I mean, we wore bell bottoms and things like that.

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Q: It sounds like some of your values might have been similar, though.

WOMAN: We were probably closet hippies.

MAN: Well some of those people were living here in skin domes and Yerkes and tepees, so that word got around, kind of strange.

WOMAN: They loosened us up a bit too.

Q: Now how did you set up economic arrangements? I assume you didn't pool your money?

WOMAN: We talked about it.

MAN: Briefly.

WOMAN: We talked about pooling our money, and all living in the same building. And we decided that wasn't for us at that time.

Q: And so was there some sort of tax that each household was assessed, community tax?

HELEN: Well there's a [unintelligible] ... a fee we all pay into the community on a monthly basis. It's been anywhere from \$150 a month to currently \$85 a month. It would be very similar to a condominium fee.

Q: So it's to pay the mortgage, and then also to keep up roads?

HELEN: The only difference is that we also do all the work, plus pay all the money.

WOMAN: People also buy a share when they join.

KHYANA: So when members join, they pay a \$5,000 share for each members. And you would pay it up front, or pay it over time with interest.

WOMAN: And it's non-transferable.

KHYANA: And then a monthly fee.

Q: And is it "one member, one vote?" Is that the way it works? Or is it consensus decision making?

KHYANA: Yeah.

Q: But does every person in the household have the right -- would children, for example, contribute to meetings.

KHYANA: Yes.

MAN1: Oh yeah.

WOMAN: They get sick of them after awhile.

MAN 1: Within the meeting, and the premeeting --

MAN: They don't buy a share, though.

MAN 1: Like, "I don't want to come to the meeting, but I really want everybody to know this."

WOMAN: Yeah, so often when our kids, the kids that were here, if they had an issue, they'd come for early-on, and share their issue .

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Q: Tell me some about meetings, how often do you have them? Or has that changed over the years.

MAN 1: Well, we have a monthly meeting for business. And then as needed. Probably an average of meeting in a full group twice a month. There were times when we met every week. And we'd gather for work days or other times, occasionally have small business sessions, or call a session if we needed. But generally, we meet in the full group 2 times a month. Would you say that's accurate? Or 3 times a month? Not counting the work days.

WOMAN: Right now we meet once a month for what we call "issues."

MAN 1: And we have joint meals and things. Somewhat sporadically, as the spirit moves, in connection with a work day, or Saturday evenings.

Q: Do you have regularly scheduled work days, or are those as needed as well?

MAN 1: Twice a month is our pace now. It used to be every weekend, until we freed ourselves of that.

Q: And how are the chores and work divided? Do you have committees or heads of different areas?

WOMAN: We're very organized now, or at least we're attempting to be.

WOMAN: I think we are, on paper, sometimes.

WOMAN: Compared to the way it used to be --

MAN 1: We have a facilitator and an organizer that, people check in and mention what they think needs to be done. There are some group and some facilitator, prioritizing activity, arrangements for necessary tools, if there are certain kinds of jobs. So there is a move toward organization that has developed over the years.

WOMAN: Some of it as the group has gotten larger, it seemed more cumbersome to try and generate the whole process of what we do from the whole group. And that kind of spurred some of the committees to be organized, so that we can -- like we have a natural resources committee, and we have a buildings and equipment committee, and we have a relationship committee. And so -- and a finance committee, and then we have a committee that oversees all that, which is like the organizational development committee. And so the thought is to try and have the -- in other words, I'm not on the natural resources committee, because that's not one of my bigger interests. So that I can be on the committee that interests me more, so hopefully the energy that's there, people really kind of want to -- and they'll generate the ideas and bring it to the group, and then the group can buy into it rather than -- and we try and generate the work lists things from that, giving the people who are really interested in the one thing, the ability to prioritize and stuff and see what's really important. But anybody can go to any of the committees, like I can go to the natural resource committee and have a voice and everything, I don't have to be a member. Some of us like structure more than others.

MAN: Delegation of some tasks have become important, is something we've learned, rather than everybody being involved and everything.

Q: So like in the winter time, for example, would somebody be in charge of plowing, perhaps?

WOMAN: First person who gets home in time to do it, who knows how to.

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Q: So then if it snows, you stay at work a little longer?

WOMAN: Actually, there are a few people who I think really like to do it.

MAN: Last couple of years that's changed. We're not fighting each other to get to the tractor quite as fast. This past winter and two winters ago, it was heavy snows, we've had a couple feet of snow, stuff like that, to plow, and it kept coming, it just doesn't go away. And then later, we've had steady snow all winter. It gets to be a real chore.

MAN: I recorded 100 inches of snow here this past winter, which is more than double the average. It's a tremendous task to keep ahead of it.

WOMAN: It's interesting about dividing the work. I know there are communities where you put in so many work hours, and you rotate jobs and all that kind of thing. And it seems like what's worked best for us is to show up for a work day, and have a list, and then people sort of come out on what they want to do, and we prioritize the list. It seems like we still do that sort of the way we did it from the beginning. And work days are not only to get the job done, but also a way -- we seem to relate around work.

WOMAN: Yes, that's true, work or tasks, or it seems when we're grappling with issues, if it's centered around some situation, we tend to be able to deal with it. When I say "better," I don't mean that we fix it, but I mean, we don't get our hands around nebulous things real well, it seems like. So projects -- and as far as relationships and things like that. If we just have something that's all about relationships, it's just kind of out there. Whereas if we sit and do some work or something, the relationship building and the things that happen there seem to be easier. More comes from it.

WOMAN: And the dream of shared resources is a pure nightmare sometimes. When you go to use the riding mower and it doesn't work, or you go to use a tool, and it isn't where it belongs. So we had to continue to recommit ourselves to whether or not -- we have more individual lawn mowers now than we ever had.

Q: Have you moved more in that direction?

WOMAN: In several ways, I would say. We used to garden almost totally together. Plant everything together. Argue over who does it which way, and how, all that kind of thing, work every detail of it out together. And now we grow our tomatoes and corn together. And some people don't do that.

MAN 1: We do fruit together.

WOMAN: So we sort of garden near each other now. Although several households have liked to have their gardens closer.

MAN 1: The other thing about community work, why I think it's important, in that a lot of community work is done outside of work day by individuals sometimes because of they can't make work day, or because they see it needs to be done. But it doesn't all happen on the designated work day, by any means. And that goes for treasurer, organizers, committee people, and physical tasks, maintenance things.

WOMAN: I think that we pay a price for the changes, in some ways. And then in other ways, [unintelligible] . . . because there was a lot more pressure for everybody to produce and everybody to be there, and all that kind of thing. Now that pressure isn't so much, but there sometimes is less knowing of each other, [unintelligible] . . . little nitty gritty thing to find that place where we all agree.

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Q: Now a lot of communities I visited have problems with work sharing, in that not everybody contributes their fair share of work. Is that an issue you've had to face here? Is that something that would come up at your issues meetings?

WOMAN: Not so much now, --

MAN: I don't think that's a big deal now. It used to be. I will never forget the Saturday morning we were working our butts off, and one of the -- this was long ago -- and one of the original members took the day off to go down to meeting in Maryland about community. And I think everybody was really pissed. Because we were doing it, and he was away talking about it somewhere.

WOMAN: And one time I took the kids on a hike, and was criticized for not being here "working." So there were more, I think sometimes maybe it depends on personalities. I think sometimes, this is purely my perspective, some people give more because they have more energy and drive and desire, or whatever. And then if they don't have it worked out as to how much they want to give, then that pressure toward the rest of us would come.

MAN: Would you say it's fair to say that those criticisms were not group censured criticisms, it was more individual vibrations.

WOMAN: A few individuals who felt like they gave more than other people did, and then it got very unpleasant. And then also, there were some [unintelligible] . . . money equality. When we first started, there were some folks here who weren't able to pay equal maintenance, and so they would work it out, because they lived here, and they didn't go off to work, they would stay and do some more work here. And even though that was agreed upon, that didn't always rest well.

HELEN: I think there's definitely pressure. We lived in New Bloomfield, and we were looking at community here, it was '77, '78. And we ended up moving, leaving the area, and not coming then. And then 3 years later, we were coming back to the area, so we kind of regenerated that again. But things have changed very much in this community in those three years. And part of it, I think, some of the stimulus was the children getting older. And they were then, somewhat -- they were in school, they were interested in activities, and so that was pulling some of the parents away and some things. Maybe part of it wasn't just an evolution of some of the people who had originally been here weren't, and some things like that. Because I know when we were first thinking of coming, Bob was going to make a job change, because the job he had, we felt, was really pulling him away from the family, and we wanted to have more family life. It felt like, if we had come here then, that would've been the same kind of thing. We were looking at being able to have more time for the four of us, and it wouldn't have felt that way then, coming here. It was like the community came first, then your family came second, almost. But it didn't seem that way when we came back, it seemed like there was just enough of a shift that, you know, if you wanted to do something as a family, or if you had something that you needed to do that you weren't going to be, there wasn't going to be that tension.

Q: Did that feel better to you?

HELEN: It felt better to us. I don't know that it felt better to the people who were here, that that change occurred. I don't think we would've come if that change hadn't -- because I think we were still pretty much committed to trying to have that family life, our nuclear family the way it was. So, -- but it's interesting, when you were talking about that, we're grappling, kind of, now, with how decisions get

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made. We know they're made by consensus and stuff like that. But we'd have some situations over the last 6 months or a year, where it seems like fragmented groups have kind of made some decisions here, there, and around, and part of it may be with that pendulum having swung from having to work out every nitty gritty detail, that we're getting a little further away, and that doesn't feel right either. That's kind of not what we're about. You might as well live in the development if you're going to be like that.

KHYANA: Another thing that contributes to where we are now is -- it feels like just a couple years ago, but folks [?] have been here five years. But in the last five years, we've doubled in size. We diminished from the original 5 families, and then the Brubakers came very soon after we got started, and then added more. But we stayed for a long time with how many families.

WOMAN: Well, we lost a good many.

KHYANA: Right, we lost quite a few. And then in the last 5 years, 3 more -- we almost doubled. We were 4 families, and three more came.

Q: So you have 7 families?

KHYANA: Yeah.

Q: So are there 7 dwellings then?

KHYANA: Yeah. But it's like when that many people come that close together, it's hard to get them incorporated, and the life changes. I think that's where we are now, is some of us who kind of came along in values, and then some new people who came -- I don't know how to say it. We discovered soon after we got here with the original group, that the dream wasn't the same dream, even though we thought it was. So we had to work a lot of that out. But then we got into some kind of equilibrium, and then the new families came, and how to incorporate them, and us to change, and because of the new life, but also not to lose some of the strength of what we had to offer. Some other people may want to speak about that. I now feel as new people come, we need to let them know who we are, somehow, instead of, I think we tried to be free and open to anybody and everybody, and we were going to have space for all kinds of diversity. And then we didn't have anything new they could grab onto somehow.

Q: Do you have anything written down, any sort of mission statement or vision statement?

KHYANA: Yeah, we do, values papers. We can dig those up. Part of the membership process is that when someone wants to become a member, they write a letter stating why, and then there's a meeting where we explore the values statement from our standpoint, and from theirs. But it's really interesting how that gets to be real vague. The value statements are good, but yet, in the sense that they allow diversity, but they're also in a way their own worst enemy, because there's not -- anybody could read them and say, "I agree with that, and I feel good about that," So I think that's kind of what you were saying that there's not really something that gives them the true idea --

HELEN: --And I don't mean we don't have anything, we have good things, but I'm not sure we were as clear. And how do you be clear about some of what holds us together?

MAN: We also have the principle that people should visit us, and interact with us for some time before there's a decision even made to request membership, so that plus there's a responsibility from both sides to check out if there's a fit there. And the value statement is maybe something to reflect against.

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It's not a hard and fast prescription, but it lays out certain things. And if someone said, "I don't hold that value," why no one ever has really gotten interested in it that doesn't, so.

Q: Can the land accommodate more people, I mean, could you take in more members, or are you at your maximum?

WOMAN: We have two more dwellings.

MAN: We have approximately 10 household sites, probably. And on the farm, we have a [unintelligible] . . . in the development on the front sloping rim, keeping the other land basically undeveloped.

Q: Well that's nice. Do you have walking trails on the land?

MAN: Some people wanted to build way back in a nook somewhere, and yeah, we do develop some, just developed a new one in coordination with the forest stewardship program that we have our farm cooperating in.

WOMAN: People have moved in all around us now.

MAN: On other properties.

WOMAN: It used to be we could walk the farm and not see a light at night, or run into anybody.

MAN: Or hear a dog.

WOMAN: But now people, lots have sold off around us.

Q: Has the group tried to build for energy efficiency at all?

WOMAN: Passive solar. The house that Jeff and Peg live in, that was intended to be passive solar. It didn't get all the way worked out.

MAN: We used passive solar principles, and we heat completely with fire wood, with the assistance of passive solar. Quite efficiently. And we use 4 and a half to 5 cords of wood in the winter to heat 2,000 square feet.

Q: Do you all have septic systems? So you haven't used outhouses or anything?

WOMAN: We have one.

MAN: We built it prior to zoning. It's pre-existing use.

MAN: We can't build another one. I don't even know if we could put another hole in there.

MAN: we actually built it for use during outings, gatherings, celebrations, you know, at the outdoor playground. I don't think anyone has ever resorted to using it from their house. Not that I'm aware of.

WOMAN: When we were building [unintelligible] . . .

Q: And I take it you all have electricity? Do you all heat with wood? Do you use propane for cooking or water heating?

?: You've got Jeff and Peggy's propane.

WOMAN: And Joseph and [unintelligible], they use propane.

MAN 1: Most of us use electric.

MAN: Some of us have oil fired hot water and/or house heat. It gets really cold.

WOMAN: I still have a dream of having a windmill.

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MAN 1: We have a community water system. Where we draw water from one well, pump it to a reservoir, and another one that flows by gravity to most of the dwellings.

HELEN: The township zoning thing has, when you said you couldn't build an outhouse, we lived in Jeff and Peg's house when we first came here, we just built a new house two and a half years ago. And it wouldn't even - the ground wouldn't [unintelligible] . . . for a traditional septic system, we had to do a sand mount. So the other two sites that -- in other words, if we'd been able to get that zoning together back in the '70's, we would've had a little more flexibility with how things could've been. But we were really, the number of lots -- didn't you originally talk about 12 families? But we would've had, if we went over ten lots, we would've had to go to the big paved roads and the gullies, and it would've been just too expensive, and it would've changed the landscape and everything. So it did kind of dictate some decisions toward that point. Like what we could do, what we couldn't do.

Q: Would you say, is there a shared spirituality at all here? Or a common religion perhaps? No?

PAUL: Well, I would be quick to say no, because if there was a common one, I would leave it. I think that our spiritual life is really to our values, and people work that out in unique ways. So the closest to worship that we ever do together, you participated in tonight.

Q: The prayer before dinner?

PAUL: Right. Which is non-denominational. But there are some other celebrations, like Easter morning up on the hill, and summer solstice. I want to backup very briefly to -- we have been very clear, and it was very clear to me, having visited Bruderhof, that I have a great deal of admiration and appreciation for the Bruderhof, but could never be there, because when you go to the Bruderhof, you buy their bag. And it's not up for discussion or change. And one of the values of this community is that everybody who comes will bring their strength and their ideas, and that should help to flavor the community. So that our values, which may be kind of vague, are one thing, but there's no party line. Having said that, though, I think politically, there is . . . that probably grows out of our values.

Q: Well, you mentioned this a little bit earlier when you were talking about the hippies that lived in the farm house before you came, but I'm curious what your relations have been like with your neighbors in the surrounding community.

WOMAN: I think they're pretty good. A couple years ago, we decided that we didn't want any hunting, by outside people. So some of us went around and visited the neighbors to let them know this was going to be our policy. They were very welcoming, and then others go locally to get their hair cut, and Luc [?] visits people when they're sick. So we've sort of made an effort over time to get to know our neighbors. We don't necessarily socialize with any of them, although we have invited them to different things we've had here.

WOMAN: We have picnics together.

MAN: I think there is a mutual respect, though. An acceptance, and it's not grudging. Like, I don't believe they see us as -- I'm sure they don't see us as extreme outsiders anymore, like new people, we're different.

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WOMAN: Sometimes you can ask, and people don't know who we are, because of new people moving in outside of this community. And I think a lot more new people have moved into Perry County. I think also all the children went through the public school system and were accepted, and did well. And so they kind of were an outreach for us.

Q: Were kids ever teased about where they lived?

WOMAN: What did they used to call them?

MAN: Oh, on the school bus? But I'm not sure that's not just --

MAN: I don't think that was a problem. I think our kids held their own pretty well.

WOMAN: I think they also chose who they talked to much about it, and who they didn't. I've gotten that impression from them, it wasn't like they ran around telling everybody, "Hey, guess where we live?"

WOMAN: I had an interesting experience too. We go caroling every Christmas, we have for years. And we used to go distances to people we knew needed special attention, or they were special friends of people. In recent years, we've started going to our immediate neighbors, got tired of going out so far. And we've had people cry when we come, be really touched by our coming [tape ends] . . . I think we'd [unintelligible]. . .

MAN: When the neighbor relations, there are a number of neighbors that are happy to lend us tools and things. Some of them are well-equipped with every mechanical tool that you could imagine, that we tend not to get.

WOMAN: When we put this new trailer in, the neighbor down on the corner showed up. Walked through the woods to find us, and said, "I wanted to know what was going on back here, what was all this noise?" And of course leaned on his stick and watched us work and visited awhile, and walked back off again.

MAN: Is that Bill Sheets [?]?

WOMAN: Yeah. He was there for a good half hour. That was his way of kind of checking it out, making sure it was okay. He didn't lift a hand, but he joined in the conversation.

Q: Now I take it households are pretty autonomous when it comes to things like meal preparation and stuff like that? Was there ever a time when households shared meals?

WOMAN: We've made some attempts at it. We talked a lot in the early stages about how we could eat each night at a different house.

MAN: [unintelligible] and prices.

WOMAN: And we did used to do more canning and freezing and that kind of stuff.

Q: Do you have regularly scheduled potlucks? Or do they just kind of happen?

MAN: Somebody calls us to do a project on community, and we have a potluck.

WOMAN: It used to be every Saturday night. And then lately it's evolved to coffee at midday, which is a big lunch, instead of Saturday night. Tend to get tired. And we have some young folks who like to go out on dates on Saturday night.

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MAN: I think that's a good point, that there is kind of an older group and a younger group in the community right now. At one point, we were all, all the folks in this room's kids grew up here and left here, and --

MAN: They're all in their --

MAN: --middle to early thirties. And nobody mentioned -- we used to have game night almost every month on a Friday night when the kids were growing up. And we had a lot of fun things when the kids were growing up.

MAN: Baseball games, softball games.

MAN: Skits, and just, yeah.

Q: Was this a good place to raise your kids?

MAN: I think even the kids think so.

Q: And what were the pro's?

MAN: No mall to go to, when you got home from school on the bus, that was it.

WOMAN: They wouldn't think that.

MAN: Well, now they might agree with it. They may not have liked it then, but I loved it.

WOMAN: The pro's are raising any animal you want. Pro's are positive, right? Probably a lot more freedom -- when we were building our houses, the kids roamed this place, and we found out later, tried driving a car, all kinds of things. But, a lot more freedom. The votes, we've been here 5 years now, Aaron's 13 -- those kids could stay alone at night, and then mom and dad could go out knowing that we were close by, and they could reach us if they needed us.

MAN: A designated person, they pre-arranged, so you could call if you wanted.

WOMAN: I think, also, for our kids, if they were pissed at us about something, they had Aunt Pat, or they'd be over at Luc's. Luc taught cross stitch, and Lynn is still an avid cross stitch person. So that some of our gifts got shared with the kids. We made home-made candles, --

WOMAN: Patricia taught them assertiveness. They were young then, junior high.

WOMAN: All those skills, yeah.

WOMAN: The skills, [unintelligible], they always helped with [unintelligible] . . . they would go home on work day . . .

MAN: They've been involved in a variety of summer projects, and they were often the only on their group that knew how to use a chain saw. That turned up for Hunts and Eric, with Hunts in Tennessee, and with Eric in school, tools and things like that, they got a good start.

WOMAN: And theater, we had some very dramatic performances that they would put together. They didn't tell us what our roles were.

MAN: I got to wear a tu-tu.

WOMAN: He was the sugar plum fairy. Who were you that night?

MAN: I think I was a spectator.

WOMAN: They did that up at Jeff and Peg's, it was our house then.

MAN: That was a riot.

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WOMAN: That was the funniest thing, that was just hysterical. And the kids did that totally on their own. They got it together, and stuff.

WOMAN: And I think their relationship with animals was prime for a lot of them. The life process, the sexual process, and the whole business was first hand learning. Erica didn't like the -- my daughter had goats, and she really hated the part that the boys got killed. She didn't want -- our son had beef animals, and he just seemed to accept that. But Erica chose goats so that she wouldn't have to deal with that, she would milk them and she would get to keep them. But then the boy goats came along. They weren't a big market draw.

Q: Now, have people pretty much had outside jobs? Or have you ever had a community business?

WOMAN: We had a business at the community. But we haven't had a community business.

MAN: They've always been minor or subsidiary kinds of things. Is that fair to say? Except for a few people who lived here.

WOMAN: I still have a dream that we would have something that we would have something that Greening would offer that would pay the bills and -- but we haven't come up with it yet. We may be getting closer as far as some organic, something, organic farms are really big right now. Joseph and Sandra have a flower business that's farm grown. You used to have your yoga business. But not a total Greening -- that's right, we also sold Christmas trees.

MAN: Each family has usually had outside, major outside income. Except a few who chose to live in voluntary poverty in the early days.

WOMAN: Some of us lived in involuntary poverty.

MAN: Right, but that was different.

Q: Was that to keep income below taxable levels, you wouldn't support the war or something?

WOMAN: Some of that, when we first started. That's where Mark and Jody were coming from.

MAN: Yeah, and Steve, but Steve also wanted just to be at subsistence level.

WOMAN: And we didn't pay our phone [?] tax, and that kind of thing.

MAN: It was a war protest. A mini-protest.

WOMAN: That was the easiest one to refuse.

MAN: And nobody went to jail.

Q: Nobody hassled you about it?

MAN: I don't think we ever even heard about it. It may mean that we are less significant than we thought.

MAN: At some point you might want to mention you got the burial ground established here.

MAN: Well, I just searched the state law, and learned that there are no regulations. Well, there is one, you have to be 18 inches below the surface, below the grave. But we can designate a place and bury with a death certificate. They do need a death certificate.

Q: So do you have a cemetery here?

MAN: No, although we could.

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Q: Nobody's died yet?

WOMAN: We have a few animals.

Q: You haven't set aside a plot or anything?

MAN: No, but we could.

MAN: We have the information in our minutes.

WOMAN: We might not want this on tape. We are starting to talk about supporting each other in the death process.

Q: A lot of communities are starting to talk about retirement planning issues such as, "What's going to happen when maybe we're not quite as mobile?"

WOMAN: When you were talking about an older group and a younger group, in some -- like, Jeff is not a whole lot younger than the rest of us, but I think it's as much as where they are -- they're a new relationship, as opposed to older relationships. I think that --

WOMAN: --and new to us, the relationship.

WOMAN: Yeah, the dating group.

MAN: Well, when I was his age, I had the energy he does, and I don't anymore. There is definitely a difference there that I think is real.

WOMAN: And more outside interest, too. Of course, we had a lot more outside interests and dropped some of those as we got there. So I think it takes awhile for people who live here to stop running to where they used to be. We used to do that, we used to go shop in the same place, on the east shore all the time.

WOMAN: I've always found that you tend to gravitate toward people that are in the same kind of life cycle that you are. Like, if -- when our children were little, our friends had other children that same age. They weren't necessarily our age, but we kind of all gravitated toward each other, because we were in that same life cycle. I think those of us that are the older ones are in more of a similar life cycle, planning our retirement, things like that, as opposed to some of the younger ones, just developing their relationships.

Q: Have you ever bought food together, like in a food buying club?

WOMAN: Yeah, a lot of us were members of a co-op.

Q: Like a retail co-op, or just a food buying club?

WOMAN: Food buying club. And then, before that, we'd go together to some places. We went to Miller's a lot, remember that? Buy big cheeses.

Q: But you don't do that anymore?

MAN: Occasionally, but not nearly as much.

WOMAN: We don't need that much food without the children.

WOMAN: And now there are more healthy food available in smaller quantities than there were back then.

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Q: Would you say people tend to eat in a particular way? Like, are there a lot of vegetarians? Interested in fresh foods, organic foods?

MAN: A few more than there used to be.

WOMAN: I'd say that a lot of us are moving toward that, and then some of us are adamant, and then one of us is loud mouth about it.

Q: About being a vegetarian?

WOMAN: Right. And I say that lovingly.

WOMAN: Believes in capital punishment, but is a vegetarian.

WOMAN: And Austin, next door, is 11 now, and he chose to be a vegetarian. And he came to us -- did he come? He wouldn't even eat our eggs, because there's a rooster in the pen. So he wanted to do some negotiating to have the rooster out. That was quite an interesting discussion.

MAN: I think Joseph finally got him to understand that.

WOMAN: Well, he was going to go talk to him, try to convince him why fertilize [unintelligible] . . .

MAN: It turned out that he hardly ever ate eggs anyway.

Q: Are there any rules surrounding behavior or conduct? For example, maybe smoking or alcohol use, or drugs use, anything like that?

MAN: We really don't have any rules around that, I'd say. I think there are common understandings, not impinging on other people through behavior.

WOMAN: I think there was a good bit of marijuana smoking going on when we first started.

MAN: All present excluded, probably.

MAN: Well, never inhaled.

WOMAN: It was quiet.

MAN: Yeah, and Amy, in our house, declared this a nonsmoking house, early-on.

WOMAN: Even my poor dad has to smoke on the porch in the pouring rain. I guess there probably would be some subtle pressure [unintelligible] . . .

WOMAN: I think the only rule about smoking is the worry about fire. Like when we have activities around the barn, we have plenty of signs, and nobody is to smoke. That's just -- we don't care whether they're outside or not, it's just so -- that might be a rule. I think, certainly some of us have stronger feelings about drugs and alcohol than others, but I think at this point -- I don't think it's ever been a huge issue here.

WOMAN: Well at the gatherings, in the beginning, we never had any -- well, we had wine with the meal, I guess. But we didn't have beer available, or that kind of thing.

WOMAN: We used to have yearly gatherings. Did we talk about that?

Q: No, I don't think you did. Like a founders' day or something like that?

MAN: No, our annual celebration.

WOMAN: We offered workshops, invited people to come.

MAN: Sometimes had a couple hundred of people come.

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Q: Wow. What sort of workshops did you offer?

MAN: You name it. One year, I think we had 25 or 30 workshops.

WOMAN: Farming.

MAN: Volunteers to lead them.

WOMAN: Massage. Therapeutic touch.

MAN: Color therapy, you know, all the new age stuff.

WOMAN: What ever was in vogue that year.

MAN: And a bunch of the old country stuff, folk type skills.

WOMAN: Always had a square dance, singing.

MAN: Hay rides and games.

Q: Now was this open to the public, or did you invite friends?

MAN: Anybody.

WOMAN: Well we sent out flyers, and they sort of shared it. We didn't put anything in the paper or anything like that. And we didn't check anybody at the door. If people wanted to crash it, they could've I guess.

MAN: We had a donation box, so it always cost us money.

WOMAN: There were always discussions about that too.

Q: But you don't do this anymore?

WOMAN: No, we stopped it.

MAN: We did it 6 or 7 years at least, and then energy started to wane.

WOMAN: We had a few divorces, and people were leaving, and it was a lot for the few of us who were left, and depressed. That's my interpretation. And we started doing things a little differently for a change. Then, Jeff and Peg have a harvest party in the fall, and that sort of filled the space for awhile.

WOMAN: Last year we planned a peace bowl [?], and we invited people to that.

WOMAN: That was similar to a gathering, I think.

MAN: A little one-day celebration, yeah. We did a few evening square dances without the whole day workshop thing too, just kind of, without workshops.

WOMAN: Bob's 50th birthday party.

MAN: We have a tradition here, when the kids turn 16, we do a special birthday party for them, and they have become very elaborate at times. And then some other birthdays too. We did Paul's when he got his degree.

WOMAN: Some 50th birthdays. [unintelligible] . . .

Q: Has there been artistic expression? I know some of the things you just described certainly would fit in that category.

MAN: Well, the thing we did in December, of all of the houses.

MAN: Craft open house.

WOMAN: We had an open house with crafts, some were things that we made ourselves, and others were artists we invited to come. Loose weaves, paints. Woodworking.

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MAN: Joseph grows flowers and does a lot of nice things with flowers.

WOMAN: Mark grows sweet potatoes.

Q: Make bluebird houses?

WOMAN: Yes, we have a lot of bluebirds.

MAN: We're about to spread out to bats and owls and a few other things.

WOMAN: I keep trying to see where working with children get's into arts. I think it's an expression of my art.

MAN: There are a lot of gardeners here, outdoor recreation, biking.

Q: Can you bike on your land? Mountain biking?

MAN: I've done that.

WOMAN: We don't have any motorized vehicles.

MAN: We discourage snowmobilers, and welcome the cross country skiers and hikers.

WOMAN: Every so often, we someone careening through the land, but we try not to have that happen.

Q: When I asked earlier about rules, I forgot to ask, what are attitudes toward sexual relationships or sexuality? Like, for example, if a gay couple wanted to move here, is that something that's accepted?

MAN: Assuming everything else was okay, I don't think that would be a consideration.

WOMAN: I think my sister recently changed her sexual orientation, I guess is the best way to say that. And I think she and her partner, one of the first places they came to visit was to our house here, and they were extremely comfortable walking in the community hand in hand, and coming to meetings and things. To me, that says, everybody accepted them, and I think they sensed that, so there wasn't any awkwardness. We haven't had any gay or lesbian couples come and bang on our door yet, though.

WOMAN: I wanted to come back to the question on spirituality. I don't know what I wanted to say, I just wanted to come back to it. There have been times when a number of us have meditated together, or have studied a book together. And we used to have times when the whole community would do [unintelligible] . . . what we called quiet time or silence, on a regular basis. And I think that may be a source of disappointments on the parts of some people in the community now. People are sort of meeting their own needs. I know, I still would love it if there was something more. And it's still shared in some respects, by a few people now and then, but there isn't anything formal. Except quiet before meals. Although, we have started going back to some silence before we start our meetings. What would be considered more centering time.

Q: Like in a Quaker-like fashion?

WOMAN: Yes.

Q: What would you say are the best parts of living together in the community?

MAN: For me, the people who are here who tend to be sensitive and supportive. And if you need something, and ask, you would almost always get a herculean effort to meet it. And I think, for me at least, the quiet of -- the sense of being alone, but not alone. I'm sure for my own psyche, it's probably

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prevented me from burning out in my job, so that when I leave my job, -- this is a whole different way to be. And I can be here. I also enjoy helping to keep the place going. I didn't say it earlier, but I think we have been overly infected with Calvinism, and it still shows, even though most of us resisted it, and probably resented. But it's still around.

WOMAN: I'd say, for me, it's to be joined with a group of people who have a commitment to try to make contact. I mean, to -- it's a learning community in a lot of ways. To work with our differences, to challenge each other, to support each other. And we don't always make it for individuals' needs, but we keep trying. And so -- when we do make it, it's pretty nice. I feel like we've connected in the right way.

Q: Other good points?

WOMAN: Well, sometimes I feel like we have something to offer other people. It seems like an awful lot of people want to come and ask us about it. So that, in some ways, we've always been a place where people would come and look us over and ask some questions, and share what they learned elsewhere, so there's kind of that bridge kind of thing.

Q: Are you in the Directory of Intentional Communities? You are, okay.

MAN: We can't find our copy right now, but we're in it.

Q: Have you gotten many inquiries through your listing?

MAN: Quite a few.

Q: Has that been a hassle?

MAN: Yes. Well, I think sometimes it's also been an enrichment. It's a mixed bag.

Q: Is your phone number actually listed?

WOMAN: It used to be.

MAN: Yeah, that was one of the problems.

Q: Have you ever had any sharing going on with any other intentional communities? Or, like in the beginning, did you try and model yourself after a community?

MAN: Well we drew from Tangy [?] when we were incorporating and working with bylaws and things, and some of the structuring, we got information with them and had talks with them.

WOMAN: What's the group Christopher and Stephanie were a part of?

MAN: In Philadelphia, the Life Center, we've had them out to lead workshops, problem solving and that.

WOMAN: One time we had a gathering with communities. That didn't work out too well. But we still --

MAN: --The Bruderhof people came.

WOMAN: They were the only ones who came, I think.

MAN: We invited others, and they gave a workshop there.

WOMAN: And what about the Willoughby's?

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Q: Oh, they're with the Life Center.

MAN: Well they're now in Medford, New Jersey, starting a community there.

Q: Yeah, they have a land trust there in New Jersey.

WOMAN: We had that too, but it changed.

Q: Yours was originally a land trust?

WOMAN: In agreement among the members, but we never got it written down.

MAN: We've always been told it is that, in effect.

Q: Now with your new process now, you're a condominium, that's what your structure is? Well, what are the drawbacks to living in community?

MAN: The down sides that I am aware of would be more in the nature of a disappointment than a disaster, so it's not really a big deal. And I think a lot of it depends on personality types. I'm a great believer in caring well for things, putting them where they belong, having them there when you need them. And I haven't modeled that well enough for community. So I'm still looking for the damn shovel that belonged . . . until that's found, I have to carry my shovel. That's kind of it for me.

WOMAN: It takes you 6 hours to find something that's supposed to be somewhere.

JOHN: Most people are learning to cut asparagus off below the ground now.

WOMAN: Next things to get them to take the stems off the tomatoes, right John? It's really hard work. And I might venture to say that some point in time, most of us have -- well, there are times where I wish I only had myself to think about. Sometimes it feels like every little thing has to be worked out with everybody.

MAN: I've described it to people, they ask, "What is it like to be in community?" as being married, but a lot more.

Q: I've heard a number of people say that.

MAN: You said that on the tape we have of you guys being on TV talking about community.

Q: By the way, I'll make you a copy of the tape. One of our questions is, would you describe Greening Life as a success or a failure?

WOMAN: It's a success, I think, as long as it has lasted. We haven't given up even though it's a totally different community from when we got started.

WOMAN: I think both of our kids would say it was a success. They both got college papers out of it.

WOMAN: One of the children said she wanted to study community and do it right. That was her opinion.

MAN: Well, they are smart kids, they could certainly learn from some of our mistakes, I'm sure.

WOMAN: I think that the fact that it's still ongoing, it's hard to say, "Is it a success or a failure?" I think there are times when we felt like we were failing, and there's other times where we've felt on top of the world. I don't think that's any different than life in general. You have some things that turn out really great and are real reinforcing, and you draw strength from that, and there are other times when you

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think, this is [unintelligible] to do. And hopefully you learn from those. So I guess we're both. But the fact that we've survived, and we're continuing to try and survive, is a success.

WOMAN: The place where I'd say that we failed is when I think of a few people who've been hurt. And haven't recovered.

Q: Have those people left?

WOMAN: Some.

Q: As a final wrap-up question, it's unusual for a community to have lasted as long as yours has. Certainly, a lot of communities from the same era crashed and burned rather quickly. So what do you think is the glue that's kept your community going this long?

MAN: I think the decision to live in separate dwellings. The decision to not have a total community pot of money. The decision to be open within the scope of our values, to everybody, to bring themselves and their strengths. Being very clear with people who are interested in community that it was not a free ride, that it takes money and energy.

WOMAN: A few of us are like bulldogs, when they get old, they don't let go.

WOMAN: I would have to think because the children were part of the reason for it being, that that was the sustaining thing, and that it worked really well for the children, that that helped too. Even if funds were tough or things, you still felt that it was the best situation for the children.

MAN: In many ways, this community never really has been tested, also. We, to my knowledge have had nobody up till now with a debilitating illness leading to death. We've been decimated by divorce, and all that goes with that. We've also been blessed with kids who were gifted in many ways, physically and emotionally and mentally. No single family has been in serious financial jeopardy, to really press some of our values, and those who espouse them. And all of those areas, they would, I think, would really make community become quite alert to figure out how to move with that. And that has yet to happen to us.

WOMAN: I think that commitment to the land is really strong. And a lot of us have an investment in this particular piece of land, and have the desire to eat healthy food and to grow things. [unintelligible].

WOMAN: I thought about something else about spirituality. When Paul talked about divorce, we did lose a couple members to a spiritual group. I think that had a big impact on our life -- two divorces came, not necessarily because of that, but as a result of it. And it might have something to do with where we are now.

Q: There was kind of a loss of community energy after that?

WOMAN: I think pain.

Q: I forgot to ask, I was curious if you ever had home births at this community?

WOMAN: No. The kids were all born before we came.

MAN: A lot of farm births.

MAN: Some tenants had some children born here, but they weren't home births. We haven't had any home births, and we haven't had any deaths.

WOMAN: If we were doing it over again, we would.

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Q: I think that's all I have. Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

MAN: I think the values have held Greening together. I think the value statement that we have, and energy put into that, and some of the structural part of Greening has helped. I think we've done a good job in looking into what would make a community strong, and what would make the values -- what would make it continue in the future after some of us have gone. I just think they've done a good job in putting some of those things together.

WOMAN: I'd also like to say that I'd sorry that some of the other folks who live here aren't here, because I think you miss another flavor. One of the benefits of living in community, especially when we had a house we could rent, is the number of different kinds of people who pass through here. I wish that in a way, we had a space where people could come and live with us a while and go on. And when that has happened, I think we've been really enriched by it.

MAN: Sometimes more than others.

WOMAN: Well, sometimes it's been a pain, but yeah. And there's a zip, I think that some folks have brought, that tickles me when I think about them.

MAN: Is that youthful energy, that zip?

WOMAN: Some of it is. A lot of us I think initially are introverts by nature, and some of the newer folks are more extroverted. So I don't know. It's just a different flavor. It's still settling for some of us.

MAN: It's the new folk that misplaced the shovel.

MAN: How do you know that?

MAN: I just know that.

Q: For the record, I should get demographic background. Has the community been pretty much White, middle class, well educated? How would you describe yourselves.

MAN: I would say that's close. We've all been very fortunate in many ways, in terms of genetics and background and parenting.

WOMAN: But we've come from very different backgrounds, I think.

Q: In terms of maybe religious backgrounds?

WOMAN: Economical, "broken homes," dysfunctional family types, things like that. I think we all seem to have functional families, but that's not -- and did you say spiritual? Religious upbringing. I'm really aware that you brought us a gift in having us do this, and I appreciate that.