

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

Q: In what commune did you live? What was the name, location, the dates active, purpose or ideology of the group?

A: Wow, that's a complicated question because number one the Amanas have not been a communal society since 1932, and I was born in 1970, so that would be my grandparents who were born in that era. This is the Amana Society. We were a communal organization from 1855 to 1932, when they dissolved the communal society. They broke the assets into a for-profit corporation called the Amana Societies Incorporated, that's who I work for, then the church and cemeteries were split off into separate entities- those two entities still exist today whereas they were one under the communal system they have branched out now and a lot of people are obviously still members of both.

Q: Okay. So it hasn't been a communal society since 1932?

A: It hasn't been a communal religious society. But our church is still active. It was active in Germany from 1714 to 1843 when the people started migrating they came as an entire group. It took five or six years to get all the people here. But before that they weren't living communally. They just had people scattered out in villages or arranged in different congregations throughout Central Germany, Southern Germany, and the Northern part of Switzerland. So essentially they lived not communally there, came to this country and agreed to live communally, and agreed to dissolve in 1932. From then on they lived basically like they were in Germany beforehand, however you can... by capitalist means, or otherwise. Um, was there anything else that I did not answer?

Q: What was the purpose or ideology of the group?

A: The purpose of the group, well, as a religious group they just simply wanted to be able to practice their faith as they felt fit. And then the purpose of the communal society was to be able to essentially get everybody over here, keep them sort of together, and they could govern them a little bit better. I mean they became very systematic once they came to this country. The church elders ran the spiritual and the temporal side of everything, so a lot of the elders were in charge of the business of the woolen mills, they were in charge of the farms and the stores and all of that so they had to make sure, they had a general store in each one of the villages, but the church elders basically ran the business side of things as well as the sort of the ministers within the church. So you had to answer to them with questions in your life. Where am I going to live? Who am I going to marry? Or they would have to ask permission to get married. "Oh we're in love and we want to get married", you'd have to go to the elders to ask.

Q: Not your parents?

A: Well, yeah I mean it was okay to say, "Well we're in love and we want to get married" but you had to ask them to officially get married. Then there was always a waiting period in the writing that we see now it was anywhere from about a half a year to about two and half years. They always say about a year of separation, a "cooling off" period. So because they practice celibacy, which was a part of their religion too for a number of generations, they didn't want people to rush into it.

Q: Yeah, I see how that makes sense. How did you come to get involved in communal living?

A: Um, that was way after. I mean I was born in 1970...

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

Q: Yeah, that's true... so how did your family become involved in communal living?

A: They just well, I really don't know. I mean only part of my family was indigenous here during the communal period- my Dad's side moved here when he was a little boy. If you look at the genealogy of people here, some people were there right at the beginning of time and you can trace those names back. Others started in the church in the 1750's, the church was founded in 1714 but there were not very many families involved. As you come closer in time, I mean somebody has to link up and get married and their heritage may go back to the very beginning, some people won't. One side of my family didn't come until the early 1880s, so they were living in the province of Saxon, I know a lot of people came later on. Whether or not they were affiliated with the Church of Transpiration, which is what it was technically called at that time is not, whether or not they were familiar with that at all- really people don't know.

Q: How did the people relate to each other? What was the food like? How were the chores and housework handled? Do you know any of those general questions even though you weren't alive when it was a communal living situation?

A: Um they related to each other, actually, once they came over they had to get used to each other because there were enclaves of inspirationists, which is what they called themselves up until the change in 1932, they essentially had people who were living in the Province of Hessen in Germany. That was sort of the main state. Frankfurt if you fly into Germany is not too far from there, about 45 minutes from there, where the hub of the church was. And as you go out, you go west, and go into the northern part of Switzerland, and you also go into the extreme eastern part right on the border of the Rhine River where Germany and France are divided, there were a lot of families who came from there. And like I said there were a lot of families that came from the Province of Saxon all throughout the history of the church and they were migrating from Saxon into Hessen at one point and I guess once they got to America it must have been difficult because they all spoke different German dialects, they all had a little bit different customs and stuff, but the overarching thing was their religious beliefs. And so as they got together their German dialect leveled out to the German we still speak today, or that a number of us do. And you also have, you know, just this different food customs of people eating- what kind of dumpling do they eat. Do they eat a potato dumpling? Do they eat a bread dumpling? Do they eat these different things. And so that all had to be leveled out because when you went to the communal kitchens then, so once they all got together, they built up neighborhoods in each village because for instance in the village of Amana here they had 16 communal kitchens. In the village where I was born and raised, where my family has lived the entire time they've been here, and I live in the home where my family has been for 100 years, that was a communal kitchen. My great grandmother was the last kitchen boss in that particular kitchen. So they built up neighborhoods around these communal kitchens. They would assign about 10 families to eat in these kitchens so you'd have anywhere from 30 to 45 people that would eat in the kitchen house. So say somebody your age, you said you're 22, right?

Q: Yeah

A: You would be at the upper age of one of the quote on quote "kitchen girls", I don't want to demonetize you but I mean you would have been one of the younger ladies who would've started out at the age of 14 when they graduated from 8th grade you would've gone to a kitchen, you would've taken

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

a week of cooking, a week of serving the food, and a week of doing the dishes and stuff. The girls then would rotate and so once they got to be your age, maybe a little bit older, they may or may not have gotten married, um and if you did get married you'd be off when your kids were home so you'd go to the communal kitchen and get your food or eat there, you had a choice later on, um, but I guess overall is that within the kitchen, the ladies who worked together, there were about eight to ten ladies who worked total. Some of them were young, your age and younger, and a lot of them would be our parents' age- 50, 60, 70 years old, as long as they could work. Some of them worked in the garden that was part of that kitchen complex and they would work together, they would prepare the vegetables and stuff, and you got to be family that way. And you also got to be family because those ten families, and the ladies that were working there, were most likely from that 'mini neighborhood' about a 4 or 5 or 6 house little block would all eat together.

Q: That's really cool

A: And so that really established that. You always had people of a certain name living in a certain area and they always even though they maybe weren't related, maybe they were second cousins, but they seemed really especially close because I grew up in sort of the shadow of the communal society but when I was a kid my great grandmother, the kitchen boss and I, would go around town and visit all of the people who were her age. Again I was born in 1970 so I'm going to be forty here in June. She was born in 1889 and we were going to visit people who were older than she was- this is when I was a kid, I was five or six years old, that only spoke German, only talked about what it was like years ago, they'd sit around and say "Wasn't it nice years ago?" "Yeah things were so simple...". Well their lives were very simple compared to mine.

Q: Yes, yes compared to ours.

A: I mean I'm running around, I've got soccer practice, concert practice, this thing going on, and work and whatever. But anyway they were very, very close. And a lot of that feeling, in my opinion, we've lost in the last ten or twenty years. But part of it is because our grandparents are dying and they were the ones that knew that feeling, and they continued to stick with their cousins and stick with their friends. We all grew up that way too. There's even a thing in Amana where you call your parents and grandparents cousins, or even close, very close friends you call them aunt and uncle in German. And people still do that, I mean I found out I'm not related to half the people I thought because I would call the uncle but they were not related like I thought they were. But that's how close people were.

Q: You are family. So is that the same way it is now with the kitchens?

A: No, well because the kitchens were dissolved- I though can go back because I'm actually going through Barbara who you'll be interviewing later, her son Peter has a PhD from Iowa State in History and he's sort of the heavyweight- you come in and he already knows everything, he's absolutely brilliant but anyway he got a catalog or wrote up a big list of everybody who he knows, who he could find records of who ran these kitchen houses and it's really, really interesting to see, sometimes they go from mother to daughter, to daughter, to daughter, to daughter, sometimes they go mother to daughter-in-law, to another daughter-in-law, to a sister I mean a lot of them stay in the family, but some of them are completely different. The ladies who ran the kitchen house where I lived, only two of the five were

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

related at all. It went from a mother and daughter, then they got out of it and my great grandmother took over, the two ladies that were first were not related in any way, shape or form but anyway since it's dissolved though I can still go and kind of look and see how people are still friends because like I said there's a kitchen house that were typically on the corners of the streets and these people and these people were always friends and they're all dead and gone now but I think about that in my mind and I think wow these people were so close, well it's because they ate in the kitchens together years ago. I mean there are no more communal kitchens, that was all dissolved in 1932. June 1st of 1932 was the date that they stopped living communally but I believe the date was April 11th when they actually stopped serving food in the kitchens and they started this transition into getting them to living capitalist versus their communal ways.

Q: Was that a, I'm assuming, was that a tough transition for them?

A: It was a tough transition, most everybody wanted to do it but to get used to it they had to deal then with legal things, insurance, things they'd never dealt with before and actually that's almost a quote from the movie downstairs, um but there were so many things that people here didn't have to worry about. That's why they were master gardeners, or these great cooks. They didn't have anything more than an eighth grade education but they knew so many things- they knew how to graph trees and they knew all these techniques in farming and they could've patented over 100 different inventions but basically the way the patenting goes right is you take a piece of a equipment and you improve it then you can patent it yourself but through the Amana Woolen mills, the Woolen mills tradition was something that's been around since 1838 is when they formed the Woolen mills in Germany so they were masters in what they did but they could clear a lot of that stuff out of the way and say I have my spiritual life that is very important to me, they used to go to church 11 times a week and that would be every night, which is seven times, and then they would go Sunday two more times I believe so that brings us up to nine, and then I think that they went Wednesday another time and Saturday another time or else maybe they went two times on Wednesday but anyway they went 11 times a week and right now it's just a coincidence that you're here during Easter week and this is the last remnants of how we used to do this together because Sunday we have Palm Sunday services, then we read in John I think we start off in either John 12 or 13 but we read a chapter every night until we get to the crucifixion on Good Friday and then from there then we don't go to church Saturday and then Sunday morning we go to church and that's just how it used to be years ago and a lot of the older people, 60 and older, especially somebody like my mother would say "Oh it's so beautiful, oh I just love going to church. It's just like when I was a kid." But we're not used to going to church at night, we have a Wednesday evening prayer service normally throughout the week but we just started that up five or six years ago but it reminds so many of the people that were raised in the 50s or 60s of what their parents did, sort of harkening back to the days when life was a lot slower, when they really did put their emphasis on church and then their daily lives, they were wonderful. There were hundreds of recipes that have been cataloged, and we have all these cookbooks and so many people know so many things about culinary stuff, now it's not French or Italian cooking of course, but it's good, hearty food where there using all these techniques and a lot of it was sort of speed cooking because they ate five meals a day, two coffee breaks, then they did their church stuff so I think they tried to do stuff as simply as they could but when you look back it was still lots of hard work for them. But everything in their lives, they tried to do

everything with as good as quality as they could, and use the things that they have and a lot of them were master gardeners and they just had a lot of talent here.

Q: Okay, so in terms of faith now, how often do you go to church and all of that now (besides this week because this week's different)?

A: Right, typically we do a Wednesday evening prayer service, and that's about a fifteen-minute service and we read one chapter maybe sometimes two, depending on what's chosen. If the chapter is really small, we'll do two. It's usually at least 20 to 40 versus, maybe 60 sometimes, those of us that are church elders sit down and say okay we're going to go through the Gospels now so we'll do Matthew then we'll do Mark and Luke and John and then they say okay this is a really long chapter we'll divide it into two or it's a really short chapter so we'll do two of them together, or whatever then we do a hymn, we sing the first part of it, then we do the Bible reading, then we do the second part of the hymn and have a benediction, and that's it so it's usually about fifteen minutes. We go Sunday mornings, we have Sunday school at the church here in Amana, and then we also have German church or the early service where the hymns and the Bible readings are done in German and that's still from many years ago because so many people still want German. We have our hymnbook that's been used since I think 1716 so I mean they've had I think 11 editions or something like that but we have over 1100 hymns to choose from in German. Then we have the 10 o'clock or English church service and we have a book for that and but we've only got, I think we've got less than 280 hymns that we've either translated them ourselves or found other people our there in the world that translate hymns that we really like. And so we've only got about a quarter of the hymns that, you know, we could use.

Q: So do you speak German?

A: Yes

Q: Okay. My Grandpa and my uncle both speak German.

A: Well you're from the Quad Cities, there has to be someone in the family.

Q: Do a lot of people still speak German?

A: Fewer and fewer everyday. There are people who have what I would consider- because I have a masters degree in German- I studied German dialectology, um and I know for a fact that even when I was in graduate school ten years ago and I got done in 2002, so it's been eight years, we have so many few speakers now. There are people who have German ability where they can understand or they can speak a little bit or read a little bit, but it's never been trained. I mean they stopped going to, I mean when you interview Barbara she's a few years older than my mother and they would've had German as a second language in school but all the kids could speak German at that time. Barbara went to college and her folks eventually past away and you know her folks really want to speak good German. The German language ability, the kids at one time could speak German, Peter and I are two of the youngest people who can speak German. I mean I went to school for German so I should be able to speak German well but on the other hand I grew up with my great grandmother of mine who couldn't speak English and there were still people who were alive in the 80s who couldn't speak a word of English.

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

Q: So it wasn't just your schooling, I mean you learned it from being around it?

A: Right because all of the corrections and finding out that all of the words I'm using are 100 years old or 200 years old and nobody uses them anymore.

Q: What is life like now in the Amanas? Are there still a lot of remnants of the way it was when it was communal or is just like living in any city anywhere else? What makes it different now from everywhere else?

A: Yeah, you could make a line of thought and agree with both of those. But I'll tell you that I think it's somewhere in the middle. There is something special to me about living in Amana. It has nothing to do with growing up here; it has nothing to do with my family living in my home or all of my relatives being buried in the cemetery or whatever. It has to do with the quaintness, the landscape, the architecture of the old homes; it's something I've always liked. I have a lot of friends who grew up here and they could care less.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah, and I don't mean that in a bad way. You know what I live in Chicago, I'm a Chicago boy, or I live in California or whatever. But for me it's the remnants that I still see are still a lot of the old family ties and the old relationships. Yes a lot of families in a lot of areas of close, um but here it goes through the food because there are still people who will eat together as larger family groups. They'll eat potato dumplings and boiled beef and creamed spinach and chicken and all of this certain stuff that everybody eats everywhere else but for it's like "Ohhh it's special, Oma's going to make creamed chicken and dumplings tonight, oh boy." And everybody gets together on Sunday and eats and stuff and it's supposed to be a bit reminiscent of the way things were at one time. But I would say too because we do live in an extremely small area, I mean every time I leave the Amanas, I just got back from a trade show and the city where I was had 150,000 which is comparable to Cedar Rapids and I go to Cedar Rapids once or twice a week but as I left I was talking to some people and told them I need to find my hotel and I said it's supposed to be in a few minutes of the show center, where is it? And they said well you just go here and here and here and here, and don't worry it's a small town so if you get lost you can just stop and ask somebody. I said I saw the sign and it said 150,000 and the place where I come from there's only 1400.

Q: It is only 1400?

A: Yeah, according to our water bill. We're not incorporated so we don't really have many means of determining how many people live in the Amanas but the estimate is 1400 people. But back to your question, I still feel really homey when I walk around town like when my wife and I walk our dog at night and I look at the homes and I still remember the people who used to live there and how quiet it's supposed to be. We do have a lot of new families who are moving into the Amanas and it's about us getting to know them and it's sort of an opening of ourselves to them and us saying hey, now that you live in the Amanas you don't have to speak German or you don't have to attend our church but at least be friendly, be neighborly because like I said the people years ago, they were so close and there's no way to fake that. You could say they bore each other's burdens years ago, if there was a tragedy people responded. If you live in the city nowadays you might have an aunt and uncle who live across town and

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

they might come see you but are your neighbors all around you going to come and see you? That's what we do and it's not just all small town America either. There's something to me that's more than that because I have friends who live in a lot of the small towns in the area and some of them get close with their family ties, but to me there's something different and I can't describe it. On the other hand though when visitors come to Amanas, they look for German stuff and they say well that Wiener schnitzel didn't taste like the one I had in Germany. Well, we need to say that we're German-Americans because we've been here since the 1840s for heaven's sake and I guess some people come here and are a little disappointed, and a lot of people think what we do here is great. But on the other hand we need to change and develop and continue to move forward with things and we have a lot of younger people moving to the community and they want to have a little bit community better park or a better soccer league and all this other stuff and nobody played sports here until about the '20s when the church elders allowed them to play baseball and that's because it was sort of the passing fancy that they had resisted for a long time. But I guess back to the original question, in a lot of ways we are just like a regular town but in a lot of ways we aren't. If something happens, people will call the Amana Society that I work for and say "Hey I have a cat in the tree, I don't know how to get it out." Well, most towns you call the Fire Department or you get it out yourself. Well our service company which is owned by the Amana Society will send one of their guys out with a ladder and they'll go out and get it. They always talk about mother society after the great change and after they became capitalistic. They wanted to know who was going to take care of them if a bridge broke or if this happened or if that happened, they didn't know what to do. So the Amana Society continued to step in and pay for things, do things and all of that and we're starting now to finally train the local people who have been here for generations away from the mindset that "You know what the Amana Society has to do everything." We are a for profit company but we're not the state, we're not the county that sometimes pays for things and does civic-minded stuff because we've always been expected to do that. So I guess some people still think the old Amana Society is still around, the communal thing. So I guess if you want to look at our church and our religion they have always demanded humility, personal humility, where we say the believer is supposed to put God first, others second, then selves third. And we're not supposed to show wealth, we're not supposed to show arrogance, we're not supposed to say "Hey I'm a better ball player than you do" or "I've got more money than you do" or whatever. And nowadays through our possessions and things like that people can say "Wow they bought a \$40,000 pick up? What'd you need that for?" It's one of those things where all of the sudden we are starting to get to the ways of the rest of the world, whereas 100 years ago it was bad if someone read the newspaper. It was like "Oh you shouldn't be reading the newspaper too much, just let the world go by and we'll just do our thing." So things have gone completely the other way where we jump on the first trend with some things, and other things you go oh! You can't follow a strict pattern with that either.

Q: I understand the whole- it's like a big family kind of thing. I went to a small school called Assumption in Davenport, Iowa. I had around 100 people in my graduating class which compared to the rest of the schools was small. We always talk about how small our class was. Now I go to Kansas with people who are from Kansas City and Dallas and they say, "I can't believe you went to school with 90 some people!" And I'm like, no but I've known those people since I was in preschool. I went to grade school with them, I went to high school with them. I knew the seniors in our high school, and I knew the freshman in our

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

high school. Whereas my friends who went to public high schools would see people graduating on stage and they had no idea who they were. So even though my situation is completely on a different scale, I like the closeness and family like feeling, it's indescribable and I think it's so cool that your community is like this and that you can probably walk down the street and know a lot of people.

A: Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad. So that's the bad thing. Comparing to the school you went to if you had 100 kids in your class, you had twice as many, almost twice as many, as we had in the entire high school here when I was a senior. We had 57 kids in our high school.

Q: How big is it now?

A: Um, we combined with Clear Creek.

Q: I just drove by that

A: Yeah, so it's Tiffin and Oxford together with part of North Liberty and so I have a daughter who's a senior, I have a daughter who's a freshman and I have a first grader, he goes to the elementary here. Our kids went to elementary here, so each of the communities has its own elementary, then they went to middle school until last year here in our building and now they go, if you drove by it, the older building, the older high school is now the middle school. The newer building is the high school. The high school has 525 kids in it. So that still was about what you were talking about. My daughter has about 130 people in her class and she doesn't know everybody and so for me having grown up so small, my wife's grade had nine people in it freshman year and they combined with Clear Creek the following year and they had about forty people in their class and she couldn't handle it. Forty people just seemed like so many. But I'll tell you this, when we were kids we used to 'scoop the loop' here in Amana, that's what it's called here in Amana. We'd drive around all night, it wasn't very fun but my daughter and her friends go into Iowa City and they do things we don't necessarily approve of but we can't stop them, we've got to let them do it every once in a while. But anyway, she um... what was I going to tell you?

Q: You were talking about the size of the classes.

A: Oh yeah, well when she would say, "I want to go see this person or that person" we would say, "We don't know their parents" so we don't know who they are. Whereas years ago if we were out too late our parents were calling each other saying "Where's Jon? He isn't home yet." And those parents who were calling each other hung out together and did the same things, and their parents hung out together and did the same things. I mean it's amazing. One of my very best friends in school, his dad and my dad worked together at a company, and then my mom and his mom were in the same grade together, and then he and I were in the same grade, and then our grandparents all worked together. Our grandfathers worked together, and our grandmothers worked at the Amana furniture shop, they finished the furniture.

Q: It seriously is like one big family.

A: Yeah, yeah. And a mutual friend who used to work for me, she and I were talking one time and a lady who I went to school with her son works in our corporate office and she came and gave me something from when we won a baseball game thirty to nothing and the other coach came out and cried and apologized for not putting a good team on the field and he said "that's enough", we were still in the

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

middle of the inning and he just came out and called the game. Well all the names she read in there, she looked at that and said, "Wow, thirty to nothing." Then she started reading about six people's names plus mine in there, you know I was two for two and I got taken out of the game, another guy was two for three and he got taken out of the game, and another guy was one for two and was walked once, and scored a run you know and it was all of the descriptions of what our stats were. And she read this and she said, "No wonder you're so messed up! You grew up with the same people, you still talk to these people!" I said, "I know I can't help it!" I don't consider us best of friends but these were all the guys who were on my high school baseball team. And they're still all here. One guy called me the other day and he wanted a key to get into a building for something, another guy- his son and my son are in Sunday school class together, and the other one his mom is the one who gave me the article, you know. And I guess to me this is the only reality I have in this life is that we're a small town and we all know a lot about each other, I mean I know things Lanny did when he was little and he graduated the year I was born. I mean we just know things about each other; we just grow up with that. So part of the way you're sort of pigeon holed, in a number of ways, which is a bad thing, but in another way you can say "Wow", you know. I conducted a funeral once for a lady and she was a teacher of mine. And afterwards she called me and said, "I just wanted you to know you did a nice service and you know Oma (it was her mother-in-law) would have been happy." And so a tradition in Amana is that those of us who serve as church elders don't get paid, and that's fine with me and we just serve. After a funeral occasionally somebody will give us a card and it might have a little money in it, 50 bucks or whatever, and we would usually turn that into the church. But this lady wanted to give me, she knew I liked old books, and we had a printing press, we still have a print shop here in town so I mean we've been binding and printing books for 300 years and this lady when she called she said, "I want you to come over and I want you to pick out some books from Oma's collection". So I went over and she opened up these two huge bookcases and she told me to pick out anything I wanted because they'd all disappear from the place. Well as I picked them out and I was very thankful to have those, but I guess this is the funny thing too is that when I called her she said, "Well, gosh Jon, I can't believe I mean your words are so nice... considering what you were like when you were young." (Laughed) I had her in class as a teacher and I wasn't a very good boy for her. And I was friends with her son, her son and I (he was a grade older than me) we played baseball and basketball together, he was one of the guys listed in this article. And so I'm almost appreciative that I can say, "Yeah I know that I was a bad boy and I'm sorry." I mean I apologize to my fourth grade teacher every time I see him; he taught both of my parents and me and then retired the year before my daughter would have had him.

Q: Ohhh that would have been cool.

A: But I guess the funny thing about this lady is that her name was Marilyn and her last name was Jack and to this day if I see teachers that I had, I mean I'm going to be forty, and I see them I still call them Mr. and Mrs. because there's that respect. And I don't know if that's common for the people to do but we have a lot of the teachers that I went to school with who still live in the community and when I see them I say, you know, "Hi Mrs. Jack" and she says, "Jon, I'm not going to have you call me that. Number one, you're in your thirties. Number two, I'm retired. And number three, you can just call me Marilyn!" And I say, "Okay Mrs. Jack... I mean Marilyn!"

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

Q: (Laughed) Yes!

A: Anyway, she was giving me permission to grow up. And she gave me the compliment and that meant more to me, that was the one compliment that I've gotten because she knows I was rowdy in her class, she knows from her son what I used to do wrong and she can "Wow, you know you've really come a long way with your behavior." So like I said, we sort of live together, we cry together, we laugh together, and I someday I think we'll all die together.

Q: That's really cool. Do you need to go? I know you said you had to pick your son up.

A: Oh, about 3:00. I've got a few more minutes.

Q: Oh, okay great! Is there anything else you'd just like to tell me? I just want to get different voices about what life is like in the Amana Colonies. We could choose whichever commune we wanted and I was just interested in the Amanas because I've driven by this so many times, I've heard about the Amana Colonies so many times, but never actually knew what it was about. I've really never thought about it

A: Let me say this, you went to Assumption, right? And that's Catholic, correct?

Q: Yes

A: To compare a commune, it would be essentially like someone living the mastic life. And that's what they were supposed to do here. They were supposed to live a holy, unattached life, devoted purely and simply to God. And they were supposed to go to church eleven times a week, and to me if you look at somebody who is very acquainted with Catholicism, has been to a monastery, sees the monks, because I guess I know it exists in America but when I think about living monastically I always think of living Europe 500 years ago and going into Italy or Germany or France or whatever and seeing the monks and the nuns living in their different areas but they're building these beautiful gardens and they're doing all this stuff and they're producing wine and doing all of these things and they really pushed the envelope with a lot of stuff at that time- science and whatever and I always sort of equate that to what it was like here. And I think it would be an interesting study for you with your background, a compare and contrast or whatever, but I guess I would just think that the way that we are now... like I said we live sort of in the remnants and you could just consider all these houses, if you wanted to see a visual, imagine these houses bombed and half a house standing or whatever and we sort of live within that now whereas I don't want it to sound like it's you know, if you look at an ancient castle and part of it's been fallen in, that's sort of what we live in now, and to sort of figure out in somebody's mentality through their spiritual life, through their practical life, what do they do that's still a part of what was done years ago. I try to cook the way that they used to... not all of the time because sometimes I have to do speed stuff because I have this soccer thing going on or whatever but if I have time on a Saturday or a Sunday, or I take a week off of work, I'm always trying to cook something that my kids will eat, something that I ate all the time when I was a kid, we still plant certain things in the gardens that they used to have years ago. There are about eight or ten things different things that really don't exist many other places besides here that we have. There are these ground cherries I think they call them, and some other things that really aren't- besides in heirloom gardens somewhere you don't see them anywhere but a lot of people here still actively grow those. So they the stuff that you're supposed to and to me that's sort of

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

preserving and protecting and perpetuating your heritage and to me it's not just a heritage of what you're cooking and looking at in your house it's also partially too about the spirituality so when I see certain things I can say, "Oh yeah, that's right they did that" or "They used to eat that around Easter and yeah, that's important and we need to have that." Every year the Amana meat shops, speaking of Easter, we serve what we call Buck wash, which is just like bratwurst but it has eggs, and it's made out of veal instead of pork, and it's heavy on egg and it has chive in it and some other spices and it's a real mild, light sausage. They've been serving that here, prior to Easter, for over 150 years... so that's a tradition. So every year I have to get fat on it, I have to get my extra fat. So I go and I buy two or three or four pounds of it and then we have it. And I get home and I say, "Oh we're going to make buck wash tonight." So I go outside and grill it and we eat it. We have sour kraut with it, or red cabbage or something like that. And that's what we eat prior to Easter time. I think they're making their last batch of it today, today's Thursday, right?

Q: Yeah

A: So today they'll make about forty or fifty pounds of it and then they'll sell whatever fresh then they'll freeze it after a few days, and you know after maybe about three or four days or whatever and then it's done and you don't get it again until next year. And to me it's kind of neat that we have that in our town, and some people in their towns say, "I don't care about farming anymore, you know, I sell real estate" or whatever. But for us, you can still go off and do your thing but you can still have that substance or essence.

Q: Yeah, keep your tradition.

A: Yeah, and to me that's part of the enjoyment of life to know that that's coming, or this is coming. In the summertime there are certain vegetables that are done right at a certain time or we make things out of them or whatever. I guess overall it's just really interesting for me, I guess, to look at what they used to do years ago and try to at least to a little bit of it now. Because I have three kids I want to show them this stuff and say, "Come on you guys, you don't always have to go to Aeropostale, and you don't have to go to the mall". You know I went to the mall once three times in one day when I was a kid and my mother thought I was crazy but she also knew I was crazy and liked this kind of stuff too. Anyway, I'm always trying to get my kids out in the garden and try to get them to, ugh, I'm planting a little fruit orchard at home right now and hopefully it will take off this year. But anyway, I guess that's my overall thing... if you're looking at whatever research you'd like to do it's looking for our remnants here, you may have to interview twenty of us to be able to find things and you may think, "Gee I really don't think these guys know what they're talking about", because the name Amana, for the people who live here, it means so many things to so many people. It can mean nature, it can mean hunting because we have a lot of deer hunters and people like to hunt pheasants and stuff in the Amanas, and we own 26,000 acres and those of us who are shareholders, we're the only ones really who can trespass on the land here. And that's what it is, some people think Amana is our church only, and what they do in there life "Hey I don't have go this all the time, I don't want to eat this sausage stuff all the time." And some people think it is only about our farm here, or it is only about eating bratwurst. But I think it's a little bit of everything because Amana is a concept, to me it starts with our church and everything goes up from there and it gives us sort of this essence and beauty of life, I guess so....

Interview with Jon Childers

Interviewer: Ellie Stopulos

n.d.

Q: That was a great way of putting it, I think. I appreciate that. Well thank you so much for your time, you were great.

A: If you have any follow-ups, because I know babble a lot, because I go off here and jump here and then I go here, let me know if you need anything else.

Q: I might follow you downstairs to meet Barbara. So how old is Barbara?

A: She would be.... My mom was going to be 62 this months, I believe Barbara is 63. She would've been born in 1946; she would've been born the same year as my dad.

Q: Thank you so much!

A: Yeah email if you questions, you can email either address. Whichever one I respond to first.

Q: Okay, that works great.

A: Well if you have time you should check out the video

Q: Yes, if I have time I definitely will. I'm supposed to be going to church tonight.

A: One of my friends got married in a beautiful Catholic church in Iowa City.

Q: I'll have to check it out. I almost forgot it was Thursday and thought, I should be going to church. Thank you very much again; we'll be in touch!

A: Okay, bye!