

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: An intentional religious community in Elkhart, Indiana. Are you ready to begin?

A: I guess we are.

Q: Alright. What commune, or communes plural, did you live?

A: Just the one, and that was Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, Indiana.

Q: Okay, and you called it the Fellowship of Hope. Was it known by any other name besides that?

A: Not that I know of. Maybe you'll find somebody else that knows.

Q: Yeah, I didn't know it by any..., yeah. And it's in Elkhart, Indiana? And what dates... When did you first start relating to it?

A: I started when I started going to Seminary which was in '71. Uh, The fall of '71. I went two times and I started really going more seriously in the winter and spring. Then I went to Chicago for six months-

Q: On a *scoop*, right?

A: Yes, well it was *umps* at that time.

Q: *Umps* at that time, okay.

A: And, um, during that time though, I came back. I had already talked to them about joining before I left for Chicago, and my work in Chicago just convinced me more that a commune was the way to go. And, so I, um, visited back during the six months and when I came back in January of '73, I moved right into their housing. And after (something) later, joined. (Tape out)... '74.

Q: Okay.

A: It seems like a very short time, but it was extremely intense times, so, I don't know, I feel like I packed a decade into it.

Q: Uh huh. Is Dorothy's phrase, "Every whisper is a shout", that if I ever do a dissertation on this, I'll have to ask her permission to title the dissertation that because that's...

A: (Something), (laughing)...

Q: I actually had said that to, um, Gordon and Jeanie, that you had said that, and their eyes just lit up with recognition, and said, "That captures it.". Okay, we're gonna get back to something that you said in a question later, which was: when I was in Chicago, the kind of work I was doing convinced me more that I needed to live in a commune. We'll get back to that in a minute, um, because I think that's very important. The Fellowship of Hope, their purpose or ideology as a group was what, would you say?

A: Yeah, um, you know I, it's... to project back into that time, into the Mennonite, quote, "radicals" of the time. I think the community was to the Mennonite world, as other communes were to, sort of mainstream, America.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: And part of the sort of ideology at the seminary while I was there, was sort of the recovery of the anti-Baptist vision, and, um, going back to the original church and the passage from Acts, is it Acts II?... about people held everything in common. And it all seemed so simple, so how come the church wasn't doing it? And, you know, we were sort of, I felt like I was, and the other people in the community, kind of hungry for an authentic life, some kind of an integrity, so I think that sort of the ideology, it grew directly out of, um, Mennonite, um, a thread, of Mennonite ideology.

Q: Um hmm. Um hmm. Did you have, um ... Was Fellowship of Hope in any way led by... like Reba Place proceeded Fellowship of Hope, right?

A: Yes, in years, yes.

Q: Was there any kind of... Were you padding yourselves after Reba Place? Or any other communities that you knew about? Or did you see this as kind of an original in itself?

A: Well this is a question that probably is not for me to answer as much, because it was already, Fellowship of Hope was already in existence when I came.

Q: Um hmm.

A: I mean, I think they started somewhere in the sixties, and I was there '71, '72. So, um, they may, I think, my guess is that they visited Reba Place, they were inspired by Reba Place, uh, they took a lot of their early cues from Reba Place, things like the common purse, and that kind of thing. When I got there, it was still very, in some ways very loose. Loose, in leadership... there wasn't clear, defined leadership. It was, ah, well, we didn't call it democratic. What did we call it? Oh, by consensus. You know, we made decisions by consensus. And, um, at that same time when I came there was a big jump in population and there were more people coming, so they needed probably more structures. And, that... I was there at a very crucial time of the shift from consensus decision making to leadership, acknowledged leadership and authority. The whole idea of submission to authority. Um, which before had been like submit one to another, which was a biblical understanding, but it got shifted to a, what I would call a political, or a power, arrangement. And that definitely came from Reba Place, that was very *political*... I remember the night that Keith Harter came back from a weekend at Reba Place in which he had sort of a (something) experience, and he knew he had to submit himself to the elders of Reba Place. Yes. And he came back saying that's what we needed to do as a group here because they have, like, deeper wisdom and discernment, and you know, I remember us kind of listening to him, and he seemed authentic. We wanted to believe him, but it was such... it was strange words, or I felt very much it was strange words.

Q: Um hmm. Especially since they hadn't founded you. In a direct sense.

A: No. Although... No, I don't think so. Now you need probably to talk to an earlier member of...

Q: It'd be interesting to get a Reba Place analysis. Whether they felt like Fellowship was sort of one of their daughter communities.

A: Yeah, yeah. Well certainly not in the same way as Plow Creek came out of Reba Place. That... I really don't think that Fellowship did that. It was seminary students living in Elkhart. But, I'm not sure of how

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

tight the early connection was. But clearly during the time that I was there, there was a very swift and strong move which we really were under Reba Place and we became part of the community of communities that, um, I mean there were a lot of other ones, but the kind of four that were accountable to each other, um, Plow Creek, and... New Creation. New Creation, (something) Place, and Fellowship of Hope. And it was during that time then that, you know, we got the elders, and we got the...

Q: But you became one of those elders, right?

A: Yeah, I did actually. Uh, that was also before the time of wondering whether women really should be in that position. Uh, so there was just so much... I lived in that, those two years were just a real, real big change.

Q: '71 to '73?

A: Well, no... The shift started like '72 to '74...

Q: Okay.

A: ... that, that ... 'cause I joined a loose knit ... it was a common purse, but it was loose knit decision making, consensus, um, you know we lived wherever. We were living in the same neighborhood, but we were kind of just scattered around in houses.

Q: Not communally owned houses at the time?

A: You know, Marilyn, I am really sorry about not knowing about the ownership. I ... I don't know. I thought while we were there maybe that it started with individual ownership, when they first started moving into the neighborhood. While I was there, I think I was thinking that we owned these things together. It seemed like we were making decisions based on that everything was in common.

Q: But you weren't paying rent to an outside landlord?

A: No, no, no, no. No. Well, we ... Yes. There were some people living in John Hargary's (?) house on one of the streets, but they weren't ... They were like, they were neighbors. Intentional ...

Q: Intentional neighbor, yeah.

A: Wasn't that the term?

Q: I think so, I think so.

A: Okay, so yes, I think the people who were actually members lived in houses that were either owned by themselves or owned by the Fellowship, but I'm not real clear who owned. I also know we had this fleet of cars that sort of seemed to be at our disposal. But I really think it was people who joined brought in cars and their name may still have been on the ownership title for the government, but, ah...

Q: Anybody could use them?

A: We apportioned, they were apportioned according to need. So I have the sense that it was all in common, but actual names on titles may have not been. Again, you'll have to check that out with somebody else.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Yeah, I will. That's something that I'll... Uh, you said that it was founded sometime in the sixties.

A: Yeah.

Q: That it had been going some time before you joined in '71. Do you know the names of the founders?

A: Well, you know, I'm thinking it was Keith and Judy Harter and Keith Kingsley and Gretchen Kingsley.

Q: Who later were at New Creation, right? The Kingsleys?

A: Oh, were they?

Q: Oh, no. That's (something). Um, you had said the founders, Keith Harter...

A: Yeah, I think Keith and Judy and, uh, Keith Kingsley and Gretchen...

Q: And they were seminary students at the time?

A: They were seminary students at the time. And maybe there were some others, but I don't remember. Maybe Frank Zolhar (?) was there at the beginning, but I'm not sure.

Q: Oh, I remember that.

A: Yeah, and um ... there was probably somebody else.

Q: So it started out fairly small.

A: Fairly small, and it was very uniform in age, and ethnicity, and ...

Q: Did you ever have any minority members?

A: Uh, not that I remember. Maybe after I was there. There wasn't just, uh, there wasn't minorities. There was very, very, very few people who were not of kind of Germanic, Dutch, European, Mennonite ethnic background.

Q: In their thirties? Twenties and thirties.

A: Yes. It was really between twenties ... I think probably between like early twenties and late thirties. I mean, there was a twenty age, twenty year age spread that was...

Q: That would be large, yeah.

A: Yeah. I mean, I think later maybe it changed some, but that was particularly true of the Fellowship of Hope because it started with this group.

Q: Um hmm. Rather elite group that went to seminary.

A: Yeah, so um, you know, there was a lot of similarity. And a lot of it then was, I think based on a relative kind of comfort level of similarity, and ... Even like similarity in personality and things. I might be wrong, but ...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: They were friends. From seminary.

A: They were friends from seminary. But, you know, friends can really be different in temperament, but, maybe with the exception -this is in retrospect- with the exception of Keith Harter, I feel like most everyone else, kind of had a more, um, retiring personality. And, um, sort of more placid and quiet, and um, obliging, and ... So I think it was hard for a loud mouth to be there and be happy. Hard for, um, you know someone really colorful or ... 'Cause I did see some people come and go, and I think part of the going wasn't necessarily, uh, that it was communal or anything like that, but it was more based on the chemistry of the group.

Q: Or there wasn't a place for some people's individual quirks or something?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Did Keith, the two Keiths become leaders then when they went to a more leadership style?

A: Okay. Who were they? It was definitely Keith and Keith. And I'm thinking maybe David Jansen. Uh, not the David Jansen who was in Newton, but a different...

Q: This was David Sydney Jansen.

A: Yes, that's right. I'm thinking it was him. And I think also Judy Carter. I'm trying to get this straight. I think it was Judy and not Gretchen. I think it was Judy.

Q: Judy and Keith Harter, Keith Kingsley, and David Jansen.

A: David Jansen, I'm thinking.

Q: Those ... Were they leaders already when you came?

A: No. See we didn't really have leaders.

Q: That happened after you came.

A: Yes. It was, you know there were people ... What I remember when I came was that it was task oriented. You know, so someone would take this responsibility for this time, and this. And sometimes it rotated, and sometimes somebody was really good at certain things and would continue doing that, like, I mean, there was a committee for the worship, and there was, you know, for taking care of the cars, and for this and for that. It was, you know, they were task-based.

Q: Did you have a members meeting, altogether, like once a month?

A: Oh yeah! Once a month?! Once a month?! Oh, we had meetings all the time! Uh...

SOME VOICE: I only ask that to get her to say it that way! (Laughing from all.)

A: (something) had meetings all the time. Now there were probably, we had a membership... I think there were membership meetings every week.

Q: That was the whole membership?

A: Yeah, but the membership wasn't that big when I first came.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: How many do you think?

A: Oh, members, maybe, I don't know, fifteen?

Q: Adults?

A: Yes, and then there were kids, of course. And then there was all these intentional neighbors. Um, well, we didn't have a name for them at first, but then as we got more organized...

Q: Who came to your worship services?

A: They came to the worship services, and, yeah, but you could just come to the worship services, you could come, I mean anybody could come to the worship service. And we did. I mean, that's how I started going.

Q: Intentional neighbors came over for a meal or something...

A: Intentional neighbors lived, moved into the community, moved into the neighborhood. They were actually intentionally-

Q: Like Sylvia?

A: Yeah, they were intentionally in the neighborhood. Or ... And they, uh, let's see, we had a...We had worship and then we had Sunday meal together. And then, you know, we'd go play volleyball because that's the age we were (laughing).

Q: We could still do that.

A: We could still do that! And, then we had a um, I don't know ... We had a common meal during the week. And I think that after the common meal, we had a membership meeting. And then I'm thinking that we had some other meeting in which intentional neighbors did come to. That talked about certain things, but not the-

Q: Secret?

A: -innermost things that ... I can't even ... I'm trying to think what would be, make the difference between one or the other. I don't know which ones were the secrets. Um, and then we'd have, then we'd have these committee meetings of whatever group you were in. And then we had little, two people, who were members, who would meet, um, on a regular basis, with intentional neighbors, with an intentional neighbor. So it was sort of like a two on one. And, I know I was in, I was in on a lot of those meetings. I wasn't so much in on the internal organization of the community of the you know, how the cars, or the house, or the...or the childcare, or the all those things. I was mostly, most of the things I went to was with the intentional neighbors because people I invited to come -being the little missionary I am!- so I would naturally then be involved in their... So, there was... And then there would be... As we were moving from consensus decision-making to acknowledged leaders to leaders with quite a bit of authority, um, we also moved into households. And that was a direct thing from Reba Place because they were doing that. So we'd have, we'd structure these households. And they would have a mission. And the mission was always around someone who needed help. You know, so it was very internal, I mean it was, it was to support somebody, or somebody-

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: And these households, somebody would get together and choose which group of people would live best here, and which...

A: Yeah, yeah. And I think... I'm thinking it was... I mean, it was still a lot of consultation going back and forth, but I think it was the leadership group that... that did that. And you know, this whole tightening up, really it wasn't just Reba Place. Reba Place was getting it from Church of the Redeemer in Houston, and that...they...that was a charismatic group. And I'm not sure it always has to be this way, but with that charismatic group there was a hierarchy and there was sort of levels, and, it was very, um, sort of strict is I guess the, uh, and it just got tighter and tighter and if you expressed, uh, now maybe it was very mature, you know, post-middle aged people. There was (something) circumstances in their, um, wisdom, they gained it through life's (laughing) blows would soften that a bit, but for us, who were in our twenties and thirties, getting that kind of an ideology, um, it got real tight, so if you raised questions, it wasn't just raising questions anymore there was like maybe, there was a sense of not being spiritually fit, or being spiritually in tune or something like that.

Q: Sort of like the fundamentalists... If you... you can't doubt and have questions, you just have to take it by faith because if you doubt, that means you're not quite as good?

A: Yeah, yeah. It was a much more sophisticated way of doing it, but it, it kind of, it came to that which meant there wasn't as much elbow room.

Q: Um, why was it named Hope?

A: I don't know, but I do remember I worked at church community services during the time when there was the oil crisis, you know in '73 and '74? And, um, that really affected the R.V. industry in Elkhart, so I had like a million people coming to the office asking for food, asking for money for rent or whatever, and just, you know, terrible circumstances they were facing. And I remember one woman looking up at the bulletin board, and I had something on it, some notes from the Fellowship of Hope and she goes, "Ah, a fellowship of hope. That's what I need!" And I (something) I looked at this woman, she was, you know, maybe a forty-five year old black woman, very little education, had, you know, worked her tail off in dead end jobs, and I thought, would this be a fellowship of hope for this woman?

Q: Um hmm. Interesting, very interesting.

A: Yeah, and I think that was one of the contradictions I always felt because I was more involved in the larger town of Elkhart. Sort of the social issues, and form of the new office system of township trustee and organizing on that level, and the reason I joined the community was that I wanted to have a coherency to my life, and I wanted a grid in which to live it, and I thought it was going to strengthen me to help me live out in the world and to face the things that were there, and as it was tightening, there was less attention paid to that. I mean, most of us still worked outside jobs since... since then after I left, you know, they had like a carpentry crew and other things where they worked together and that was, that was the... the, um, hope of a lot of people that's where it should go (something), but at the time I was there, we were still working at jobs, and most of us were in social work kind of jobs. Um, where was I going with that?

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: (something)

A: So then I thought, Oh! We should have a household of, like, deaconesses, and our... the purpose of our household would be to, um, do work in the neighborhood, and that would be our focus, and it would be partly a way of gaining new members, but it would also be a way of, um, you know, making a difference in where we lived on the street. And that was not accepted. I think that again they were taking a lot of kids from Reba Place, and at Reba Place at the time they were going deeper and deeper, not into just -you know- individual (something), but deeper into the hearts of each person, and you know, primal scream therapy and stuff, which I think, you know, from the perspective of middle age, I realize there's a point at which you have to get to your core. I think though that to force feed somebody at twenty, in their twenties to do that, when it's more a kind of... the mellowness of the years in your, your, um, you're more ready in mid-life and see more reason to do it, um, kind of are at the point where you have to develop another part of yourself, but I don't think in your twenties or thirties you quite do that, so, in retrospect, I feel that that moving in that direction, while in and of itself, wasn't a terrible thing, was out of joint with where we were in our lives.

Q: Um hmm. The um, membership at Reba Place was older than the membership at Hope?

A: Somewhat.

Q: At least the people with power? At Reba Place?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Um, why did so many people flock to communal living at this time?

A: Well, you know, it was that time all across the country and, uh, so it ... I think anytime you set something up and you try it, you try something, you try an alternative, you, uh, you know have the guts to try to stand up and do something that's different, people are attracted to it. And, a lot of people came, that I knew were never gonna join, but it sort of titillated their fancy. I mean, it was, a... it gave them ideas, or it gave them hope, or it gave them inspiration that you don't have to just kinda drag through the same old thing all the time. Um, so, that's why when I think of all the visitors that came, I think that was a... they were looking for something beyond what they had seen in the church somewhere.

Q: Um hmm. And at particularly at Hope, um, you'd said earlier when you joined, right after that, there was the, um, real, um (**A:** Bursting?) in population. How big did that get to be?

A: Oh yeah, okay, well, I'm not real clear. I think probably it was, uh, I don't know, thirty or forty members. (Something) you think from fifteen to that, it's like double.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So, it is... it doesn't seem really big, but it... it did feel...

Q: So did you keep buying houses in the neighborhood?

A: Yes! And I was, I was, um, I was active in that. I mean, I don't know why. I 've never really been in real estate, but I have a nose for houses. And, also because I was helping people find housing, the poor, find

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

housing. I knew practically every landlord in Elkhart, and, um, I was up and down the street all the time because... because of my work, so I talked to everybody, and I knew what houses were coming up for sale.

Q: And then, at that point then when you were getting new members, then the common purse bought the houses? Or took- assumed the loan?

A: I don't know that. I don't know that.

Q: You found the houses, but you don't know how they paid for them? (Laughing.)

A: No, I was just the- (Laughing.) When I think about my role there, it was really the kind of the bridge person finding out what else was going on in the community.

Q: And then somebody else took care of it after...

A: Yeah. Right. I never was on the internal maintenance as much. Even though I was in the leadership group for awhile, ah, that part somehow passed me right by.

Q: Me too.

A: Yeah, I think it was more of a function of who I was, rather than that it was on purpose that it passed me by.

Q: Now, this is where we get to the question of something that we put on hold at first, and that's you said when you were with UMPS in Chicago, the urban ministries program in seminary, what... what was that called?

A: I don't know. Urban Ministry Probo (?) for Seminary.

Q: Something in that experience convinced you that communes were the way to go. And my next question is: How did you get involved in communal living? You already knew about Hope from seminary before you went to Chicago, but what happened in Chicago then?

A: This is so interesting because I am still in touch with the pastor who argue-, tried to argue me out of it in Chicago. I actually agree with him now, but I didn't at the time. And here it was like this: I was working with a welfare rights group, and I was working for, um, um, a political candidate, there was an alternative reform alderman in (something) council where the vote was always forty-three to seven. Forty-three in control and then (something) was in control of them. And, um, I worked in a, in a youth program and, and, you know, saw some really blatant, blatant discrimination against young black kids. And I looked at all these problems and I was trying to think, you know, how, how, how is this gonna get resolved? And it was also the middle of the Vietnam war, and so there was, um, you know, lots of demonstrations and lots of...

Q: So this was 1970? '71?

A: '70, um, well it was '72. Let me think, the summer of '72 and the fall of '72. So I went through the (something) McGovern election in Chicago (something). Um, I felt that there needed to be a more comprehensive alternative because it felt like you were always patching, patching, patching things.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Everything looked in disarray, everything looked in chaos. It didn't look like the world was ever gonna end. It didn't look like the people who were on welfare, who were, um, joining on the rights group, would like all these little, tiny victories that didn't really make that big of a difference in their life, and so I had this idea, sort of like you were telling about those workers who wanted to start a commune in Washington and then build it to the next and the next and the next step, that's what was in my mind. This was going to be like a... you know, we were gonna do it here, and then it was going to multiply itself, because surely everybody would see that it was a better way to live. Um, you didn't have to compete against each other, you'd cooperate instead, um, you didn't have to always... you could speak up in your job because you wouldn't be so afraid of losing it, you'd have something to fall back on, and therefore, you could have strong people speaking the truth wherever they were. That whole thing. And I remember the pastor kind of telling me that, um, my Church of Christ pastor, he was very active against the war, and very, um, the parish was really doing a lot of things in the community, and he was saying, you know, you can't withdraw yourself from the larger world, you...the whole point of being a Christian is to interact and engage, and, you know, this is all of creation not just, you're not just one little new creation here, but everything on this earth is part of God's concern and this is kind of an Amish solution to, uh, you know, to withdraw like this. And, you know, I felt really sorry for him because I felt like he really didn't see the way (laughing).

Q: But you didn't at that point feel like this was withdrawal, did you? 'Cause you said earlier you felt like it was a focal point that would empower you to do just exactly-

A: Exactly. Exactly. But I did, I did see, you know, that is has to... it can't be for everybody. It has to be for the people who really want it, and the people who are ready to do it, and so there is a sense in which it is elite or something because it's not... You can't expect that everybody wants to do this right away. Um, so there is like another level or, or something. So that is like a with- it's not exactly a withdrawal- but it is like a (something), like the priesthood or something.

Q: Um hmm. Like going into a monastery for Catholics, and most people aren't going to do it, but a lot of people do see it as something better.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Or something higher, let's say. On a higher plane.

A: Yeah. That's right. Something... That's right. That's right. And, this pastor was trying to argue that there is like nothing higher, it's, it's, it's... You have to look at it completely differently. I did not get was he was saying. I remember I lived on the top of a flower shop, and I remember sitting in the flower shop one day with this pastor, who was visiting the people who (something) the flower shop, and having this conversation and, um, thinking, you know, he really is making a contribution here, but really doesn't see it! (Laughing.) That's really what I was thinking!

Q: Um hmm. Um hmm.

A: Yeah, and you know, I did not... The thing is that I didn't understand much about group dynamics at all. And I didn't understand-

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Mmmm! Good point.

A: -didn't understand much about myself, either. 'Course, like, what? Twenty one years old?

Q: Yeah, none of us did.

A: But, I think maybe I was... I had bigger blind spots in certain areas than maybe other people did. I mean, or maybe their's were in other areas. But mine was in the area of, um, recognizing, um, like what would make a healthy person. Like, for example, boundaries, you know, and knowing who you are, and standing fast with what, what you are, being able to say, 'This is good. I'm good the way I am.'

Q: Hence our conversation earlier.

A: Yeah. Exactly. I mean, it's like a very big learning for me. I mean, I'm what? I'm forty-six years old, and I'm still, still on that learning piece. But I am at least thinking that there's another way to it. When I joined, I just... I mean, I don't feel like I have boundaries. It was like, whatever the group wants is good. And I really want to cooperate with them. And, you know, when people objected to this or that that would make them uncomfortable, I did not understand that. I really thought that they were just being childish or picky or something like that. And I couldn't recognize that that may have been a more adult thing to do. To insist on their... what they needed. Because at least they knew what they needed. I had no idea. I just, you know... I was like... I just wanted to cooperate. So that, that also meant that I did not recognize when other people were being violated. I, I don't mean-

Q: In the group?

A: Yeah, I don't mean...

Q: You could recognize it on a social-

A: Yeah. Yeah. Oh of course I did! That was-

Q: (Laughing.) That was your story.

A: That was right. On the big picture, in terms of class, and all that stuff, I was, like, right there, right away, but in terms of myself, I didn't... I wasn't, and therefore, I wasn't with other people that I was, that I was living with, and so when it came to, you know, discerning about people who were gonna, gonna come into the community, or about people who were there, I , I missed a whole piece because I thought they were just behaving badly, you know. And I realize that that's a legacy of the Mennonite church. I mean, it's part of my...

Q: People shouldn't be concerned about their own concerns.

A: They should not be concerned... That you're selfish if you're concerned about your own concerns. And it felt... That's also a way to keep everybody in line, and keep everybody uniform. And I didn't, I really didn't see that 'cause I didn't think of myself as being in line, I thought of myself as being very ununiformed. But, in fact, when it came to living daily life in the communal situation, that's exactly what I was. I mean it was a direct link. I mean we really were the children of a Mennonite heritage.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Um hmm. Very interesting.

A: I mean, that's my take on it, right? I mean, I'm being very psychological. There's many other, there's many other lenses to look through.

Q: (Laughing.) Oh, that's why you talk to a lot of people, but it's really, I can already see after two interviews, or one and a half -whatever-, some, you know, just sort of linking and it's like, oh my mind is just racing with things! But anyway, um, did you have some predisposition to community? For instance did your parents, um, have communal or cooperative interests? Or did you have a boyfriend or a respected female colleague, or anything that you can remember that may have set you to thinking about...

A: Oh, okay. Well, you know, in a very general sense, of course, Mennonites are more communal than their neighbors around them, and so without even recognizing, - we sure wouldn't have used that word - , once I started moving into other circles, I realized that we weren't individualistic like other people, and that had both a positive quality, like I fit right in (something) society which is also much more communal, but I also realized that that's part of we're talking about before of not developing the internal self. And so if you don't have a bunch of people with developed internal selves, you're communal project becomes, um, ah, not enforced, but it becomes like sheep, kind of, you know. And to let people, to let people, um, become a scapegoat when they just would be indifferent to some thing. They carry things that nobody else wants to. So yeah, I think I had that in my background, but in terms of sort of everyday things, I mean, our family wasn't - I don't think - very social to others. We didn't have any visitors, we didn't, uh, there wasn't anything like that at all. I do remember when I was in university, there was a Mennonite man in, or a student in the young peoples, that talked one time about- see we never had any of this Anabaptist mission stuff (something)- and I remember him talking about that the most important thing is the church, and that church is like all these people together. And that was like a totally new thing for me because I kept... in consciousness, because I was thinking only that there was like you and God, (something). So that stayed with me, and when I, you know, read the seminary catalog about that we don't look to Athens for a style of learning, we look to Jerusalem which is not competitive, but I don't think they use the word communal, but it was like we work together to learn together. It was like an... it sparked something immediately in me that was, that I really, I was just tempted. And I don't know where that came from... So then the commune was just the next logical step, if you're going to learn together, why don't you put your money where your mouth is. Literally.

Q: What kind of books or other literature that you read influenced you as you began to live in community?

A: I don't really know.

Q: You didn't read Jackson's Living in the World?

A: No. No, I didn't. In fact, I think maybe I still haven't.

Q: Okay. I haven't.

A: Oh. Okay. No, I didn't read any of that.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: What books were you reading at the time? Or were you just not reading because of all the other things you were doing? It sounded like you had like twenty-five irons in the fire if I remember right!

A: Yeah, yeah, I did!

Q: But you were going to seminary, so you were also doing-

A: Well, I dropped out of seminary for a j-term to read all the women's' books that were out at that time. And there wasn't...like starting with Betty Fiala(?) in '64, '65. So from there until '72, I think whatever books were written. I think I....

Q: Free to Be?- No, um-

A: I think I read them all.

Q: Nancy Harvesty's(?) All Were Meant to Be.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: 'Cause she even spoke at the...

A: Yeah. Yeah. So I did that for a, for a period. You know what? I know that I read books on community, but I, I honestly, I can't, I'm totally blank on that. I don't think it was books that got me there.

Q: You can remember your feminist books, but not your communal books?

A: No. Sorry.

Q: That's alright.

A: But I did read, I mean I read Gandhi, and I read, um, Martin Luther King, and stuff about (something). That's what I remember.

Q: Do you remember any kind, the courses that you took in seminary? Any books coming from that that were particularly meaningful?

A: No. But, you know what?

Q: Jim... Jim Wallace's book came out when I was there. A (something) Biblical People.

A: No. No.

Q: That wasn't it?

A: (something).

Q: And Robert McCathy Brown's(?) works. And, um, Swamly(?).

A: Yes, um, I remember those names. I don't remember that I was, that my heart burned within me, reading them. I think it was more the, the people. Talking to the people and, um...

Q: Okay. Well...

A: Sorry.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: That's fine. Okay, you lived in a neighborhood in close proximity... You lived there before there were households and after there were households...

A: Yeah. I moved into a house that was owned by Nelson and Christmas Carol Kauffman (?). And we were just renting there, but our house was right next to the meeting house, which was another house that we used the basement to meet in, and across the alley from the Harter household. And, um, I moved about four or five times in those two years because we kept re-doing the household.

Q: Shifting combinations?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, what then -if you can kind of think of a composite life- was daily life like?

A: Okay. Well, let me, let me start then with the household because we had, um, in that first household, (something), there was about eight people, and most of us got up for breakfast together. Early, because some people had to go to work early, so six-thirty we'd eat and have some kind of morning devotions (something). And, um, almost everybody went off to work. Um, maybe there was, ah, a woman left in the house.

Q: Were there children in your households?

A: There were no children in our household. I think our house was the only one with no children. We had a couple, a husband and a wife, and all the rest of us were single at the time. And probably we were all in our twenties. Maybe there was a couple of people... No, we were all in our twenties. We were kind of a young household. Um, we ate supper together every night. And then, we usually would rush off to this meeting or that meeting. Once a week we had prayers, um, it was for anybody who wanted to... Like a vespers service. (Something) came to that, but I usually, um... And the evenings really were meetings.

Q: Almost every night?

A: For me they were. Some people were smarter than me. They would just say no to things, but... I just... I lived for the intensity. I loved the intensity. I mean, you were dealing intensely with people all the time, and it was like I was on a constant high. It was not a wearying thing for me at all. Um, I just a... I was so glad. You know, I had no sisters growing up. I was so glad to be in this house with all these women, and, uh, you know you could just come out of your room and find someone to talk to right away. I mean, I was in heaven!

Q: That's interesting because Gordon Hauser said when he first joined he said he'd found nirvana. It's really interesting that you would both... I was waiting for you to see what metaphor you would use because they're so similar that he felt that way, too. That once he'd joined community and, finally there, I mean, he... he experienced nirvana. And then you said 'I thought I was in heaven'. Interesting.

A: Yeah. Yeah, I know. It was a wonderful thing for me. When you're in your twenties you're going back and forth between independence and trying to develop intimacy. And so this was a.... You know I didn't have a good, I don't feel like I had like a really good growing up learning about real sharing, and so this was, you know, finally a chance to do that and have socializing, so yeah, I loved it. That's why they complained about me being (something). (Laughing).

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Hey somewhere else to go, yea!

A: Yeah, really! Somebody else's soul to search.

Q: Um, How did you make sure dishes got done? Who did laundry? Who grocery shopped?

A: We divided it out. I don't even remember how we did it.

Q: Like in a house meeting?

A: Yeah, like a household... Yeah, that's right- we had house meetings. And pretty much people just volunteered for certain things. We had the woman of the house, who was the wife, I mean there was, you know, just one couple, and she only worked part time, and so she, um, she planned menus, I think. And she did the shopping. And then we just fit into... You know, we signed up to do certain meals, and I think she also put together a schedule for... I'm not a very good detailed person and schedule person, so it was kind of nice that she... It was her, you know, she liked to it, and I think she also needed order, and so she provided it. And I'm not sure, maybe (something)...

Q: I was gonna ask, was this kind of routine for each household, or did each household...?

A: I think each household did their own thing, 'cause we were just starting in with households. We didn't really know, uh, what they were gonna, what they would be like.

Q: And, um, I don't know what else about daily living... Were the tasks in the community... What about gender? Did you notice anything about there being a correlation between certain tasks and certain genders?

A: Yeah, I think so. Um, and you know, it was sort of presented as -in the early time at least, because there wasn't supposedly a gender bias in the early times, or not a spoken, conscious one- 'cause, of course we worked hard at all times, so ... So, it was always then 'Well, this person is good at this, so therefore, they'll do it', and you know, having grown up the way we were, there was, tended to be guys who were good at maintaining the cars, so they would do that. And it tended to be women who knew about food and that kind of stuff, and so they tended to do those parts. Ah, guys would help, maybe, or women might help with some, but they weren't in charge of the... So I think it came down on kind of a, what you might think of as a traditional, although we didn't think that way. We thought we were, you know, trying to -that's what I thought- I thought we were trying to... (laughing). I hope we were trying to do that! And then with the, um, worship and stuff, um, Jamie Harter and Gretchen, too, I think were involved in that part.

Q: Had they also been students at the seminary?

A: Now this I don't know that. I'm not sure. I think Judy maybe, but I'm not quite sure about Gretchen. They had small children. I'm guessing that they were the ones, the women were the ones (something). Um, then later on, you know, with this charismatic thing came also gender-bias with males, and, um, this idea that maybe we women weren't suited to leadership (something). You know, I don't care if John Miller was still at Reba Place or if he'd left already, but he, his influence I think was still there. When he, I remember this paper I read by him, and then discussed with him about that men need to be in charge because they have to be, have to be internally developed so that they can support the woman, and if

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

she's in charge, it just undoes the man and he can't be then the father he needs to be to raise good kids. And, you know, it seemed like such a, it was based on a Freudian analysis (something), but it seemed so insulting in a way to men, that they were so weak that they had to have this prop up there. I mean, I think that's kind of how, how people think, but they would never say it that blatantly, but he did. So it was, like, right out there to see.

Q: He also had a big article I can remember, '75 in the Canadian Reporter about insisting that God was called Father for a specific theological reason. So this would've...

A: Yeah, it played right into the same thing. And his theological reasons were very based on Freudian analysis. And the interesting thing, though, is as a human being, and as a person who interacts with his wife and other colleagues when I was with him one semester at (something) Gable teaching, um, he was probably one of the most open and egalitarian people. I mean, that I can say.

Q: Yeah, I know. That often happens.

A: And then you have the people who are, you know, spouting the good lines who actually in their daily actions are..

Q: Um hmm. Yeah. We know one of those guys, don't we? (Laughing). Okay, you talked earlier about the community having central religious ideology. How was that practiced? Like church. You could start with church, and then maybe.

A: Okay, well the ideology was everybody held, was asked too, about believers held everything in common, so that these, that really was the thing that defined the Fellowship differently from everyplace else was this common purse. Um, so it was practiced...

Q: By that.

A: By bringing your paycheck in every week, and...

Q: Okay. Let me ask this question, too. You say 'bringing your paycheck in'. When you entered the community, was everything you owned: land, um, car, house, clothes, well some personal items maybe not, but any kind of savings account- Was that all put into a common purse?

A: Well this is what I don't know. I mean for me, I was young. I didn't have any savings. I didn't have much of anything. I did get some money once from my family, and I put it right in. I don't know if other people did that or not. I'm not sure. And I, like I said I know the cars were at the disposal of everybody. I don't know like if the person left. There were so many people leaving. It was such a terrible process for me. I hated it. I hated it.

Q: While you were still a member you remember people leaving?

A: Yes. Yes. There were lots of people coming, but there were also people leaving as it tightened up, and, ah, I know that they were given money to get started in something else. Or they were like, they were... One guy was a carpenter, they made sure he had all the tools he needed. Some of the stuff he couldn't use that was other people's, but he put stuff in. So, um, I'm not real clear how everybody did it.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: So you don't know whether if like a person came in with a house, and a car, and a bank account whether they got kind of commensurate when they left. They might not get the same car back, but they get a car. They might not get the same house back, but they get a house.

A: Well, I'm kind of thinking that that's how it was done. I mean, I know people were given stuff when they left. And maybe it was commensurate with the stuff they came in with, but I'm not real sure about that. See, I didn't come in with anything, and I didn't leave with anything. I mean, I didn't bring a car, I didn't bring a bank account, I didn't bring a house. And I left with none of that.

Q: When you left, you moved into the CCS home.

A: Yes I did. Which was, you know, a block away from where I had lived. And it was across the street from a Fellowship house. All my neighbors were (something) people.

Q: Were there any rituals or ceremonies that you... Like did you do weddings or baptisms?

A: Well, ah, there were people that got married to each other in the community. And it was mixed. I mean, they had some stuff, you know, pastors maybe from their hometown or something, but they also had, you know, Keith Harter, Keith Kingsley...

Q: Were the Keiths' ordained?

A: No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody was ordained. You know, we didn't see that as... I mean, ordination was just one more thing that separated the...

Q: Well, when did you become a Mennonite church? Or did you?

A: Um...

Q: You know, like New Creation now is a Mennonite church?

A: Yeah, I know that's right.

Q: And Reba Place is a Mennonite church.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: But is there even a Fellowship of Hope church? Or do they all now go to Southside?

A: See, you'd have to ask somebody who... I mean, I certainly was before, but I don't know that now. Um, I'm thinking, I'm trying to remember, but I think that we were then talking about joining a.... I mean, we considered ourselves Mennonite. I think we talked about joining different conferences. There was a lot of discussion about how much time that would take, and what would be the purpose of it, and the purpose of it was to witness to the other churches who (laughing)...

Q: Hadn't seen the light?

A: Hadn't seen the light yet, and like that. But I myself wasn't involved in that too much, so...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: So, was weddings... were they married on community property, or were they like down in the chapel or the Sermon on the Mount? Or their home churches or...?

A: Well, there was, um, I remember there was one out at a camp. And I don't remember any in churches exactly, but various, kind of in nature... Yes, I think there was maybe one in a (something) chapel. It just depended on the person and...

Q: Were you still in community when you and Gene got married?

A: NO.

Q: No. Okay. 'Cause yours was at that Sermon on the Mount chapel, I remember that.

A: Okay, yeah. Yeah, no. I don't think, I mean if I'd have stayed in the Fellowship, I don't think I'd have married Gene, so that could not have happened.

Q: Maybe some of those questions are for off the test! (Laughing.)

A: Probably, yeah!

Q: Did they baptize though? Or do any other kind of ritual or ceremony, other than like your worship service in the morning?

A: Oh, I'm thinking that we had a baptism. But a lot of people were baptized before they came to the...

Q: So you just took in church membership?

A: We took in church members, but I think there were some young people. I think they were baptized. But that would have been a special thing. And again, after I left (something).

Q: When did it dissolve?

A: Oh, I have no idea.

Q: You left in '74.

A: Oh, it went on for quite awhile.

Q: Did it?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: I'll have to find that out. (Something).

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: How did the people- This is a nebulous question, kinda- you can take it many ways- How did they relate to each other?

A: In the community?

Q: Yeah. Did you call each other brother and sister...?

A: Oh, no.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: I don't know exactly what this means, but, um, did you spend most of your time, did you socialize with just people in the community? Did you socialize at all? Did you take them home with you to your biological homes on holidays? Did you have holidays within the community? I think maybe some of these...

A: Oh, okay. Alright. Well, I remember one Christmas, we- our household- drove to Kansas, 'cause several people came from Kansas. But once we got there, some of them went to their biological homes, so I didn't go with them there, and some of them went to stay with New Creation people. So that was mixed, kind of. Um, some people didn't spend- some people didn't go to their biological homes very much because they weren't very accepted, and others had to go every special holiday.

Q: And there was room made for that.

A: Yeah. It was.. Well, there was room made for it. There was some, um, I think there was some question about, you know, it was more under the surface as I remember questioning about why some person would have to keep doing this all the time, like were they tied there in some way?

Q: And was this not their new family?

A: Yeah, like you know, who were my brothers and sisters, (something).

Q: Um hmm.

A: Um, and I, I certainly was of that mind. I mean, I just, well 'cause my family lived in New (something) and, I mean, this was more fun than my family, so I really didn't make much connection back home, and I really didn't understand people that had to, and I also didn't understand people internalizing so much of their families' judgement upon the community.

Q: Was there a lot of that?

A: Yeah, there was... I mean people had conflict with their families about that.

Q: I think there's something that comes up on that a little later.

A: But in terms of, like, socializing, yes, I... I mean we had meetings all the time, and that was my social life and even when we were bringing in new people, but I would be another commune member there, so I socialized with them basically. And I was so exhausted after all that that I didn't... You know, I never went out to movies or all that sort of stuff, and I knew other people were doing that-

Q: In the community or?

A: No, I mean people in my, well maybe they were or, no, people my age, no. No, there wasn't that much in the community 'cause we really were... We were intensely engaged with one another.

Q: Were you ever given an allowance that you could spend on personal items like clothes and toothpaste?

A: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember what it was, it wasn't big, but it was fine for me. I'm really not, it's not that important to me. And I can... You know, if I have a lot, I'll be happy, but if it's a little, I can live with that. So I don't really... I know that was a problem for some people (something)...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: What was the food like?

A: Oh, well, um...

Q: Were you vegetarian?

A: No. No. Um... We ate a lot of beans and all that kind of stuff, but there was meat around. Like, people, some people came from farms. They would get like steaks (something)... And we got stuff in bulk, I remember.

Q: There was a food co-op. Do you remember that food co-op in Elkhart?

A: Uh, I don't remember. I just remember that we had to... People would... Somebody would go out and buy stuff in big bulk, and we would be repackaging things smaller, um...

Q: Was each household responsible, had a food budget for that?

A: Um, yes, that's right. Yeah. I mean even though we handed our checks into a central place, there was then... I mean each household got according to the number of members, (something)...

Q: But you don't remember, well, not going hungry, but do you remember, like, having to stretch that? Or boring, tasteless meals near the end?

A: No, no.

Q: They were all pretty good, huh?

A: I thought they were, yeah. It was quite wholesome food, you know, old people- a lot of the women, especially- who were into baking bread and baking (something), so yeah, it was kind of... I thought it was wholesome food. I didn't mind.

Did they have a policy on alcohol? That's not here, I was just curious. Yeah! I don't know! I really don't remember.

Q: Like you don't ever remember pouring wine at your meals or anything?

A: No. I don't remember that. But I don't remember that we couldn't.

Q: Did anybody smoke? These aren't questions that he asked, I'm just really curious because I remember-

A: I think probably some people went out and smoked somewhere else probably.

Q: There wasn't nearly the anti-smoking back then and it was sometimes a radical thing to do at the time.

A: Yeah. I don't remember it either way. My guess is that some people did. Well, I did actually! (Laughing.) I didn't smoke very much.

Q: Well, I remember another one in our closer circle of friends, too -Orlando- I remember he...

A: Yeah, but he was never as bashful.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: No, but I always associated him with you, and I mean, you know the kind of (end of side A)... Ernie Penner(?), and Orlando, and me...

A: Oh yes. No we didn't do that. (Coughing.)

Q: Talking about smoking has now caused you to cough, Dorothy.

A: (Something), you know, on Main and Hickory, was this little one, you know, three booths, café.

Q: Did Dale Suterman(?) hang out there? 'Cause he certainly smoked.

A: Yeah he did. He did hang out there. And he would come- there was sort of like the changing of the guard. It was white til a certain time, and then it was black after a certain time, and, ah, yeah. He did actually. Not all the time, but it was one of his places.

Q: But would you go there even when you were at the Fellowship? Was that a place to get away?

A: I guess it was. I didn't go that often, but every once in awhile, yes.

Q: You talked earlier how the chores in the house were handled: basically signing up, so we can kind of go on... And the economic arrangements, you talked about bringing your paycheck in and putting it in a common pot, and each household sort of having its allotment and having their personal... Besides people who were working for pay who brought their paychecks in, what other kinds of income did the community have? You talked later about a work crew...

A: Yeah, see when I was there it was only this paycheck. This question about did we try for economic self-sufficiency- were we growing all our own stuff? or that kind of thing- no. We didn't. We were really dependant on social service agencies. Most of us had jobs, you know, in the youth service bureau, welfare department, and church community services, and family agencies. That was our... And then we had a couple of nurses who were kind of in that area, so we were just getting paychecks, and there was dreaming about, you know, putting together, like working together kind of, like carpentry was one, but there would've been other things...

Q: But there really wasn't any cottage industry?

A: Not at that time. There might have been later, but not when I was there.

Q: Um, could people still go to seminary? Would the community pick up the tab for seminary, or were the two Keiths, who had gone to seminary originally, were they now not going to seminary?

A: No, um, I don't... That's a good question because a lot of us had come from seminary, but I think when you joined the community, ah, I don't remember anybody being sent to seminary. I mean, I dropped out of seminary to join the community. Nobody told me to, but seminary just didn't seem that helpful or relevant compared to now that we were actually going to live the seminary message.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: At seminary, when I went in '73, there was, I could sense a certain rift, an unspoken rift between Fellowship of Hope and the seminary. A certain challenge of each other. An unspoken debate that was going back and forth.

A: Yes. Yes. Yeah. I think there, because I think that... I'm trying to remember, but I think that when they, the Fellowship, first got started that, um, they, it was very critical of the seminary because we learned all this stuff from you, and now you're not doing it, and we have to do it ourselves, and the older people, who should be leading us, aren't (something). I think that attitude was pretty much there when I was there, and I had that attitude. I was very happy with some of the stuff I was learning at seminary, but then it was like, okay now what are we going to do about it? So, I think that's true.

Q: I picked it up from John Howard when he, ah, I don't know, related this story one time, I think, about Walter Hostetler and Michael Friedman. I don't know if there was a certain kind of rub between those two, but he was talking about his change of name, and having told his parents he changed his name, and John Howard told us in detail- I think this was even in a class- told us in detail that his mother said, 'I named you Walter because I liked the name Walter'. Which I think was a story to get us to kind of look at Michael Friedman and think ugh! A little of Hate the Character anyway. I remember sensing from that kind of one interchanging class that John Yoder was a little bit defensive about the people at Hope that thought, that used his theology and then turned it back against him.

A: I think that's right, and I know that I made some efforts to convert him, to come and join us at Fellowship. (Laughing.) Well, you know, I was like an honest missionary, I'll tell ya! I really was. I just, you know, I believed and wanted everyone else to get on board, too, and surely he would because we were using his stuff. And, he- it was actually interesting- he raised questions of me that I didn't understand at the time, but I do now about, just about group dynamics and how much we were alike and the same age and same everything else. And, you know, not having space for peoples' callings and stuff like that. And I was very influenced though by the Bruderhoff(?) stuff, which was, you know, you could just be hoeing carrots your whole life, and still you could develop a marvelous internal life and why would you be dissatisfied with that when the most important thing is to love, and you could love hoeing carrots as much as you can, you know, studying theology or whatever, so yeah. I mean, I think he had some real valid criticisms of the Fellowship of Hope, not of the communal idea, but of how it was manifesting it there, but I could see why he wouldn't want to go there. And I think none of us were in any shape to be smart enough to really challenge him on any kind of basis that would mean anything. So yeah, there was a...

Q: Good. That's interesting to check that out after so many years this sense that I had. Who made the spending decisions? The central committee? (Laughing.)

A: Like what kind of spending decisions?

Q: Ah, well, like how much money did you give each person, if a person like spends how much... Um, here's a house, we're gonna buy it. You know...

A: Well, there was committees, but it all went through- you're right- it did go through, by the time we were on the Reba Place model, it all went through the leadership group. But, I'll tell you one thing I felt the first time that I went to a leadership group meeting, because I felt like we weren't hashing things out

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

anymore in the large membership meeting. And so I was actually very excited to be on the leadership team because I thought here's where it probably gets hashed out so not that many people have to spend that much time in meetings. Because people were getting weary of meetings. I mean, you could just do that much by consensus with a large group, and so, but my experience in the leadership team meetings was that there wasn't really (something).

Q: And who was on the leadership team? Was it the Keith, Keith, Judy...

A: Well... Yeah. Dave and myself.

Q: Were you elected to that out of your household, or do you remember how you were chosen for that?

A: I don't know if I was chosen(?). You know, it was a, we called these all discernment processes, and I think it was the discernment of the whole group, but I don't know if the name was brought by the leadership committee for discernment by everybody, or if somebody just said 'Dorothy', and then everybody said 'Yeah, I think so.' I actually don't remember that, but I'm trying to remember... I think that that came before we formed the households in which I was then sort of like the household leader, or whatever.

Q: Because you were on the...

A: I think so. I think it was that way, as opposed to the other way, because they wanted to make sure there was somebody in each house.

Q: So, when you got to the leadership committee, even there...

A: I didn't feel like we were hashing things out. I think a lot, a lot, a lot of initiative came from Keith Harter. And, like I said, he was the only with a very strong extroverted personality. And most everybody else was introverted, or, ah...

Q: Sort of willing to let him play that role?

A: Yeah. I mean, I think he took a lot of things on his shoulders just because there was a vacuum or something, and, ah... You know, I mean we all go through our things. And we go through them over and over again until we learn that we don't have to do that anymore. And I think it was just one of those times where it just seemed like, 'Man, I have to do this all,' and ...

Q: And he did.

A: And he did. You know, he did a lot of, I mean he really...

Q: And because of that he had a lot of power then?

A: Yeah. And he also had, like, a lot of people criticizing him, too, which is, you know, it's kind of wearing as a leader, but that's what happened, but it was, it was just a function of the ???

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: So as far as you know, how was your propop..., ahm, ??? ???, they probably went through the con regular, made a bit on it, made a loan, where they making payment on these houses, or did you have enough money to pay the houses out right, or... should I ask somebody else that question? (Laughs)

A: You have to ask somebody else, of that stuff I just don't...

Q: Ok, you talked about the formal governing structure being the leadership group, when that... I mean it was very loosely formed, was the leadership kind of the first structure that came out of the loosely formed, that was then...?

A: Well, the loosely formed, well the consensus decision making...

Q: Consensus, yeah.

A: ... was, ah, had task groups.

Q: Ok.

A: And, you know, obviously the people who had been there the longest and had most invested there, also had a stronger, ahm they were stronger, and then like I'm saying personality also played part. So even though it seems like it was, you know consensus decision making, there always is leadership in that. But the designated leadership when everybody acknowledged it, ah, and give it a form and boundary and like that, ah, that, there were still task groups, but then this was above the task groups.

Q: So this is kind of..., came in as an additional thing over the structure that had already existed?

A: Yeah, sometimes the structure changed a little bit, but there were still always committees to do stuff, different people, different tasks.

Q: Did it work though?

A: What does work well mean?

Q: Hmm, I'll have to ask somebody else about that. (Laughs) ??? it didn't work.

A: Well, it worked in that, you know, our cars were maintained and somehow we didn't have big fights about who could use the car or anything, those things were...

Q: So basically it went pretty smoothly.

A: I think so, yeah, I mean I don't remember that it was... But you know, when we tightened up, we just had these people leaving, and often anonymously and look I'm resolved and I'm finished, and I felt, ah, I felt really bad about it, and I also felt helpless and I didn't understand how to make this, ah, with dignity. And I just, I couldn't, I couldn't grasp how that was gonna happen.

Q: When did this tightening up that you are referring, when did that start? '73 maybe? After you remember after the leadership ...

A: Yeah, after I was a member, and the leadership stuff came out of that first tightening of...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: (At the same time) Ok, so it was a level.

A: ...he submitting himself to the elders of Reba Place. And then Reba Place elders got involved, you know, in our, you know, our stuff, they'd come and give us ??? meeting with, ah, I mean at first they don't really keep it, and then that was the leadership, you know, group, and they would, they'd come and counsel certain people and they, you know, it was really hands on.

Q: They would actually come down from Chicago?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So you met with them then as a part of the leadership group people? So you were sort of aware of this tightening up, I mean you could see it ...

A: Yeah (!) I was and yet, I mean it was one thing that didn't quite feel right, but I was so into cooperating, ???, and being part of the group and stuff that I didn't, I ahm, I don't know, I just went along with it in my thought process, but I know that in my instinct I , there was, it piled up to be such a contradiction that I couldn't stand it anymore, and part of my fault was that my instinct and my head weren't together, and that is something I had to work on for many years, so as a young person in the early twenties that's what happened to me.

Q: So the tightening up was evidenced by maybe more rules, or more regulations, or what...? You said that the first tightening up came out of Keith Harter coming back and getting all excited about submitting ourselves to Reba Place. Well, submitting ourselves then meant structuring yourselves...?

A: Yeah, more structure and more steady leadership.

Q: More of a hierarchy?

A: More of a hierarchy, although they would not have said that, but I think that was true. The kind of charismatic thing, you know, the charismatic thing, the, sort of, the attitude on women changed, I think. Yeah, kind of expectation of what it meant to be a member and what you have to do as an intentional neighbor to become a member, and...

Q: And this was '72, '73 maybe?

A: '73, '74.

Q: '73, '74. Is this when people started leaving?

A: Yeah, see, lots of people were coming, but then some people were leaving.

Q: Some kind of ??? people or short-term people, or...?

A: No, there weren't really ??? people, what you think, they were, you know, like Julie Harter's brother and his wife left and that was really ...

Q: Who was that?

A: Gordon Creeb (?) and ...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Oh yeah...

A: ...and Carol Farmer (?). And that was probably the first one that was quite ecumenist, you know, I lived with her, and because she got married she moved in the same household and she and I read the same stuff about women and, ah, you know I had a ??? and kinds of teachings making and yet I felt like some of that stuff was real.., I don't know, I bet it probably sounds selfish or something, I don't know now if I heard the same conversation again where I would be.

Q: That would be interesting.

A: And I remember joking it will??? kind of humping the other room thing in that Fellowship and my not seeing that she had pointed that out, that wasn't the issue. But I think as I learned to more and more and not just about the????? how the internal, internalized messages and fears and stuff, I think that was very much the issue at that mo..., at that time in my state of consciousness that was the issue for me.

Q: I remember saying to somebody, ah, Jake Pauls or somebody at New Creation, ah, I feel like women in New Creation have, you know, the access to leadership I like to see, and here he'll be saying "oh yeah, the men in our churches can do a better job of it!" and it was sort of case closed, because of that point. At that point, but now I fell like the communities have gone backwards in quotes and the church has actually moved a little forward on that. Ah, were you on the first or last to leave of that group?

A: I don't know.

Q: How many had left kind of before you? What do you think?

A: Ah, I don't know. About five or six, you see it was such a small group, that was such a small...

Q: Yeah, I that's what I was gonna see ???

A: And there were people also who didn't join and who came so close to joining, they'd been with us for a long time and then they just didn't do it. I remember this one woman she wasn't ???, she had like two kids, and supposedly had some problems and, but I remember that somebody from Reba Place coming and we were working, I and another person, ???, and this total mess were you could just tell that she is being very seductive, and this is part of the power and a contemporary kind of clothes she is wearing. And you have to dress more modestly. I remember being very stunned, and I don't know if I maybe wasn't the totally observing person or didn't see seduction where male would see it, but I just, I just took it as this woman is, she is expressing herself differently then we are, but I don't see it as a problem of emotional problems, seduction and neediness. Ahm, yeah.

Q: That's interesting. Were there qualifications for membership? Did you have to sort of prove yourself and were people turned down for membership, do you recall?

A: I think, ah yeah, wasn't turned down, because you pointed out earlier the ??? you could turn down. Because once you come and probably attend meetings and stuff, and then you would stay if you's like to be in touch with ???, and then so would start meeting with a group, and you'd talk about the issues that you had with the community and the question you have about being part of the community, and you'd tell your story and kind of the people in your group??? would tell their story, and so... A lot of it was

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

done in that small way, and so, ah, I don't know if there were people you'd say you can't join, but there were people who once they talked over stuff they realized before even joining this is probably not for me for this reason or that reason. So that's kind of how...

Q: So there was some way of a screening.

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah, you didn't just here and sign up, that's for sure. And they usually, you know, there wasn't like it has to be you or it has to be..., but there was sort of recommended times to take it slow and make sure that you ??? what you're doing here. And I always thought that was good, I liked, I liked that. But I think maybe ?? everybody else does, but, yeah. Because it probably saved some people from grieve, you know.

Q: Did the group garden or farm?

A: Yeah, but I don't remember if the garden was with the group. I mean the garden was ??? with the house and I think there was a place where some people worked together and gardened. At that time in my life I was ???

Q: And did the group seek self-sufficiency in that?

A: No, no, that is what I'm saying that the division was not, division was extremely narrow as I see it now, and just like most landlords there isn't really an understanding of how the world works, the larger world, or how economics works, so a sociological political point of view, and so, I mean there was a sort of innocence that, I mean it's becoming in children I don't think you can kind of grade it in adults, and I think that is how we were. I see that in myself I mean it takes a long time to ??? standard and take responsibility really, and let go of pure innocence, but it's because innocence is such a, it's equated with purity I think, and you certainly wanna be pure in a chosen community, and that's why you, you even in a Mennonite Church but also then with the, you're trying to make this external purity so that you'll stay with the, at the expense of what else, what underneath needs to be experienced. And you don't know that at 22 or 23.

Q: That is a really interesting inside, because all this semester I've been struggling with what makes it work and what doesn't make it work, and that, I think your analysis there, I think you're really on to something.

A: You know, I think the thing I can't, I admire actually that we were so ???, you know that was something to admire, people ?? or die, and what I don't know is that if you have to have such a idol or mentally in order to be, or could you be, could you be that enthusiastical, that willing to, to, to ahm engage fully while caring all these other doubts about it at the same time., which is really the kind of mark of an adult, but then it's like adults never takes risks, right? So, I don't know.

Q: Yeah, you got some thing here.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Did you seek energy self-sufficiency, like did you have generators and wood stoves and so, so that you could avoid KPNL, or whatever it is?

A: There was an attempt in different ways, but I never thought of it as a whole, I mean there was people in the community that ??? and solar energy and that kind of thing, but it wasn't at the point of really being developed to be materially making a difference.

Q: Did the community have an open-door membership?

A: What's that?

Q: Well, we talked about that in the home last night, and I think it means you can just come and be a member and just leave, and you know and not be a member, I don't think...

A: Well, nobody would shoot you.

Q: Yeah, yeah, but when you, I think about open-door is meaning you can go in and be a member for while and then leave and then come back in, and...

A: Ok. See I think that we, ahm, it was in the process of evolving and at that time the statement stuck, or at least I came to thinking that I would be a member forever and I think that everybody else was thinking that a lot of people were thinking that way that if this is the right way to live why would you come in and out, that would make you sense, you know, and then when you develop as a person and as a group, you go and you're being wild or something. So I think when I first joined my ides was this isn't. I never thought of open-door as a kind of negative thing. I think it has been lost members and we didn't process that well and it was just a grieving thing and ti probably got clear as a sort of reality therapy that there maybe has to be another way of thinking about so it doesn't take, it's total so deeply. But I don't think I don't know if that got ever fully developed while I was there. And my leaving was very quiet, very much ??? everyone else's, too. I remember sitting in smaller meetings crying and sitting in the big group saying good-bye and crying and everybody else crying, and yet it was, you know, it seem we just couldn't figure out why is that happening, why did that happen. (Laughs slightly) **Q:** It's like two people who love each other getting a divorce. **A:** Yeah, yeah.

Q: Ok, you talked about the kind of living arrangements. There were..., and were there any nuclear family household or did all people with children also live with other people?

A: It was a, well, ah, at the beginning of course it was the kind of the ??? stuff, but when we started into the households I think almost everything became household, maybe there were one or two that weren't.

Q: And that was seen as done on purpose? I mean people should live with more in their...

A: Yeah... I think so, because that was part of the ministry then.

Q: Like that ministry in the community?

A: No, ministry in the households.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: In the households...

A: Like this woman I was telling you who came with kids...

Q: Ohhhh, Ok.

A: ...and she had no means of support and she is a single mother since she like all this parenting...

Q: Ok, Ok.

A: And she moved into a household and other members of the household helped parent for example. It was that kind of thing.

Q: Oh I understand. Ok, where the household would take on a task, that kind of...

A: Yeah.

Q: Other than that one woman was weaned to dress seductively by the members from Reba Place, were there any other rules or agreements about dress or other manners or style?

A: You know I don't remember it being spoken, but unspoken stuff is very powerful and it has been very powerful in the Mennonite world, and I think we just took it right out of the Mennonite world, and I mean we were, we dressed I think conservatively. Ahm, but nobody said anything, I mean we didn't wear like black and white colors, but I remember there was a time when we had longer dresses, they came down to our ankles sometimes, and I remember one person one time has a very lovely long legs, and she had a very short skirt and she went to a wedding or something like that, and I don't know if anybody ever talked to her, but I felt that there was, that was not appropriate I felt that that was being felt as not alright.

Q: Did people not wear make-up and jewelry ? Out of a life style more than...

A: Yeah, I think so it was just, you know, may be somebody did, I don't remember, but it was yeah ???

Q: And did you buy a lot of clothes at second-hand stores?

A: Yeah, or traded among each other or something, I don't remember ??? gotten new things ???

Q: Did your neighbors like you?

A: Well, (laughs) yeah, I think, although it varied, I think it varied. There was two black woman living with their boy, I think, from across the street where I lived. And they sometimes complained to me that the ??? was helping each other in bringing all the food from the garden to somebody else, but we didn't share with them.

Q: Meaning that...?

A: Like somebody in the fellowship would have a garden, and somebody wouldn't, and so they would, you know...

Q: It went in the fellowship.

A: ...yeah, they'd bring it to the fellowship house and...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Ok, but not to the neighborhood.?

A: Yeah, now that wasn't always true, because there were certain members in the fellowship who related to their neighbors and later after I left I know that ... Kinsley (?) really, really was involved in all the neighborhood stuff. So it was mixed, but I think that it's, it's the same phenomena that I've seen among young Mennonites when we went to Chicago, that you kind of, you club together and you, and you know you are sharing potluck with each other and you're doing this and that. And here you are in this ... city that you aren't connected in with your neighbors, and I think that's a little bit how it ???

Q: In the city, but not of the city. (Laughs)

A: Yeah.

Q: That's very Mennonite.

A: Yes, it is. Yes, and even if you have a different stated goal and besides these things are so deeply ingrained that you, ah, you just go with your, how, you know, that just seems like the natural thing to do.

Q: But did your neighbors think that you were some kind of a Hippy community, initially? Or is ... going on, or...

A: They may have thought that early on, but I don't, I think that was pretty much dispelled right away. Except it wasn't drugs that I know of, maybe somebody saving something, but it must have been pretty sad. And I don't know I just think we seemed so very straight I really don't remember that that would have been...

Q: Did you have any houses ... sanitation...

A: Not that I remember of.

Q: Ok, and you spoke some of having a relationship with Reba Place, which at least in your opinion was the beginning of the tightening.

A: Yes, right, we would have these community of community meeting, sometimes just the leadership came together, sometimes all of us would get together...

Q: And that was the four that you mentioned: Cloud Creek, ...

A: Yeah, that was, it was bigger at one time there were all kinds of other groups that they had. I remember when we went one time to a meeting, and it was a big meeting and we were about to have communion and one of the leaders from Elders Room (?) got up and did this full kind of communion preparation service, totally in male pronouns and I mean it was just ... atrocious in my opinion. I think that probably got, probably what they always did at the fellowship they were more careful, because there were a few more women in there. And I remember just like jumping out of my seat in amidst of this large meeting and some, you know I thought that I can't take communion like this, because I don't feel like I've been included and this is the... And I think to his credit, he stopped, he apologized, he said I want you to be part of this, I want everyone to be part of this, and you know, and then he delivered a prayer of forgiveness and then we went on with communion. But on the way home back to Alcard (?) I

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

felt like I was being scolded probably a bit for speaking out and inappropriately in the midst of a solemn communion service. Ah, so there was like a mixture.

Q: Would have also been also ... in New Creation and that's...

A: Yes.

Q: And were those usually held in Chicago?

A: All I remember is the one that was in Chicago.

Q: In Chicago were this event had taken place over the communion.

A: Yeah, yeah. We also had relationships with the Bruderhof (?), and that was the time when the Bruderhof not with the Hailraides (?). The Bruderhof was with the Hailraides, then they left I think during the Civil Rights time, because they were involved in that and then later on they joined again, but we kind of were connected to them at a point where...

Q: How did that happen?

A: The Bruderhof?

Q: The connection.

A: I think it was through this communion of communities thing, and there were a lot of different religious communities all over at different, ahm, and some how we made a link with them, and we visited them as a group, I mean the whole household went ...

Q: To New York?

A: Ahm, I think it was the one in Pennsylvania.

Q: Pennsylvania?

A: And then they came and visited us, so we did have those connections.

Q: Any other main groups you can remember besides the Bruderhof?

A: No, they maybe somebody else, but I don't...

Q: Ahm, the question here is what were the people like or who were the unforgettable characters? Is there anybody that kind of stands out in your mind as unforgettable character? (laughs) Besides yourself of course.

A: (Laughs too) I mean, nobody actually does. I mean I think when you are in a community, you just think how different each person is, because you are just trying to talk about something, you just speak about it differently, but I think it just stood outside the community ???, but then each saying everybody is really very much alike, ahm so... I don't know, nobody stands out for me, and it is interesting to me also that I really didn't continue any friendships. So I think that my connection to everybody there was based on our common commitment to community, and they would not have been the personalities I would have sought out just for having friends, which is I mean I don't know...

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: That is interesting.

A: I don't know what that means, but that what I thought when I left and ???

Q: In giving up a concept, but not necessarily a bonding relationships.

A: Yeah, although it was sad to say good-bye.

Q: Who raised the children?

A: It was sort of in the family, but in the household there were just more adults to be listened and some people were more involved in other people's, with other people's children.

Q: Did the children visit public schools?

A: I think so.

Q: Were there any artists in the community? Like painters, writers, sculptures, film, other arts, music..., that stood out?

A: No, I think there were people who were interested in each of those things and ahm they may have done a little bit of something, but in terms of how I understand an artist no ... myself to right now, but not like that.

Q: Would you've been able to do that?

A: That's what I'm thinking that you, see it was really a hierarchy of values and the most valuable was social work I think...

Q: That's interesting, yeah.

A: ...that you were working with ... people, and we had like carpenters and they did beautiful work, they really did beautiful work, and it wasn't very disrespected, but I did feel like there was a kind of, those professions that served people, like nurses and such workers, those were sort of like this is the ... of time that ... And that was something that I, you know and that's not just, because it comes out of the Mennonites tradition, that I had to struggle with myself, because I think to write fiction you need a lot of time and space and ... round and...

Q: Is that what you're doing?

A: Yeah. And it's just to get it over that you are being selfish or that you're wasting time or that you know what is your life for and all sorts of things, to come into a new understanding of what ahm what creation really means. And I don't think, I certainly didn't have any of that time, and I don't think anyone else did. Maybe somebody else did, but they didn't do that.

Q: So there really wasn't a space for encouraging that area.

A: I don't think so.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Other than perhaps as if related to worship services.

A: Yes. Exactly, yeah, yeah. It was sort of like, you know I'm not making ... the flowers and the garden were beautiful and ahm...

Q: So nobody psychedelic drugs that you???

A: I have no idea, but I would be really surprised. I think people were save.

Q: Ok, so you weren't like the farm right, after your Sunday service you'd ...

A: (Laughs)

Q: ???, what are those ... mushrooms?

A: No.

Q: Ok.

A: No peyote.

Q: No peyote?

A: Not that I know. I'm thinking of people that ... but I was...

Q: It wasn't a sanctioned part. It wasn't a communal part.

A: No.

Q: What about sex? Did you have to say anything with all these single people living together? Did you set up, what about if people became sexually attracted to each other?

A: Yeah.

Q: Or were there rules, where there ... Was it again the Mennonite way of just kind of unwritten ...?

A: I think it was unwritten as I remember and even maybe unspoken, I'm trying to remember. And then I think when people felt, and there were marriages within the fellowship, when people were attracted to each other I think they kind of, you know, started in to with each other, but they seem to talk to the leadership group about it, got a like a, you know they got a small group together to talk about that relationship. You know we all lived in a household there's not that much you can get away with, it is kind of obvious what you are doing. So, but I do remember when I went to Kansas, for the first, and I stayed with Gene...

Q: And he was with New Creation.

A: Well he was only attending New Creation, he wasn't a member. And he was on a farm, he lived on a farm before he went to the house, and I stayed there with him and then we snowed in, and that's kind of you know the romance type, but I do remember somebody as New Creation saying that that wasn't appropriate and the next time I came to visit I have to stay in a New Creation house. I could not live on the farm.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Because you're seeing a non community person anyway with Thomas S. (?) wasn't it, or not?

A: Well yeah, but he was already attending, and I think maybe, I can't remember, but I think maybe he joined. But the time I went to see him the next time, he had joined, it wasn't a matter of that he wasn't a member of that time, he was a kind of ... member, but he was a member. So it wasn't that of ... people of New Creation. The problem for them was that we shouldn't be on the same house together alone at night.

Q: Were you engaged at that point? Or were you just seeing each other?

A: No, we weren't, because we only got engaged after...

Q: ...after you got married? (Laughs)

A: (Laughs) No, I think we got engaged after I left ... But we were sort of already, you know, we were having these..., I don't know, maybe we didn't have engagement stuff actually, we had these sort of intentions and so we were living with a groups and certainly met with the group.

Q: Didn't you hash this out...that you and Gene should get married? ... with the group?

A: I knew that we would gonna get married, I didn't you know, he-- I think he even tried to propose to me ... settled.

Q: (Laughs)

A: I mean I just knew so--and then he was like--

Q: (Laughing) WHOA! So when did this happen?

A: Yeah, when did this happen! So I was ... I don't know instinct. Yeah, so it wasn't like "Should we get married or not" It was just kind of keep seeing each other because it was uh, um...by that time Gene was having problems with New Creation ... these elders came in to talk to him, he didn't appreciate that. I remember him telling me "Oh this thing, they're just running everything like in a-like the Amish." And I didn't know what he was talking about.

Q: Uh-huh. But he knew what he was talking about.

A: He knew what he was talking about, I didn't. I didn't know what he...I mean, instinctively I knew that I was ... and I knew it was right and everything, but my whole upper part, my whole superego was--my sympathy was with the elders at Reba Place. I mean, I thought "Yes, Gene you're being a troublemaker and ... understand why." I mean really and truly.

Q: Because he was a member of the community you were ... so what was the big deal.

A: Yeah. But you know he didn't--he, he was suspect in a lot of things that were happening, he said there were power dynamics that were not healthy and I don't even know what he was talking about.

Q: Hmm.

A: I really didn't.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: So you got married after you left.

A: Yeah. And we were told not to see each other. And I tried for awhile but it was so hard.

Q: You actually did try?

A: Oh, I tried.

Q: Because you believed that leadership was coming from somewhere that was good for you.

A: Yes.

Q: That's how much you believe in community.

A: Yes. Yes ... (both talking at once)

Q: You had committed yourself to a system that said to do that and so you did that and that part I think is commendable.

A: I don't mean it was stupidity but I mean it was a lack of emotional and psychological self understanding. You know, everybody needs security, right. So my security was being part of the system, and it seemed like a system—I looked at different systems and this was the one that seemed like it was...but I think that's what it ultimately was, that you can't stand fast by yourself in yourself you may have to find something to...and that was what I did. I mean it was an adapting mechanism for someone who was insecure. I mean I think rigidity comes out of insecurity, right? You're not secure enough in yourself to go forward you kind of plant yourself and get things to support your position. That's sort of what I think was going on in my...so.

Q: What were the best and worst things you remember?

A: Let me tell you the best. I liked all the people around, I liked getting in on the intense conversation. I liked, kind of the sense that we were on a mission, you know, um that there was a purpose in life, life made sense. That, uh, you always try to do the right thingthat was the best. I think the worst thing was not understanding why people always had to be.....not even understanding why I had to be. I think I told you this...it's so intense when you live in a house and you see people so many hours of the day so it's not like if you have some disagreement of problem you can hold back, kind of recover yourself, and then get out there again to finish processing it. It's just right there, in your face all the time and I couldn't sustain that, so I just, kind of like the contradiction was so big I didn't understand it. But it was too overwhelming for me and I needed relief, and my relief was just to get out completely because there didn't seem to be a—

Q: A valve, pressure relief.

A: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And so that was for me the worst because I didn't understand really why I had to leave.

Q: But it was your doing.

A: Yeah, but I didn't understand why—

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: Why that was the only way you could solve the dilemma?

A: Yeah.

Q: Which is the next question, why did you decide— (both laughing) You're not sure why you decided to do something.....

A: I think it was the contradiction, but it came to very specifics of I wanted to be um, I wanted to have this household ... it was my last attempt. I went to the leadership group saying "Listen this would be a way...." and they just felt like there was enough other problems that what I was supposed to do was go into the household instead of being the head of a household, so to speak. I would go in with somebody else, I don't even know if it was Michael Walters or somebody else, but that was just, like, unacceptable. The other part, of course, was that Gene and my relationship was still.....

Q: When did you leave?

A: The end of '74.

Q: When did you get married?

A: April of '75.

Q: Yeah, O.K. That fits with my time frame too. I was trying to think—because I went to that wedding with Ernie... (Laughing)

A: Oh yeah, that's right.

Q: Let's see if there's anything else. Do you consider your commune and your participation in it a success or a failure, and are you glad you did it?

A: You know that was one of the questions I was talking to Gene about yesterday and I said I don't think I can really talk about success or failure or "glad you did it." I think there's learning experiences that we have in life. Things are very hard to learn sometimes and if you don't learn it in one way you'll get it the next time. It's just, you have to go through this pain to get there ... to be another way. And so, yeah, that was like an experience that was probably necessary and I don't, I mean if I was the same person and it was the same time in history—ha—I would do the same thing. Because I think, given the few options I had ... very narrow, Mennonite Bretheren community...it was already open to come to a new country, it was open to the seminary, I think in some ways at that point I saw the fellowship as an opening to new ideas. So, yeah, I probably would have done it.

Q: So, it was a success?

A: Yeah, I suppose so. If you asked me if I'd do it now I....

Q: At your age and your position—

A: Yeah, yeah I would say no ... community.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: (laughing) How has your life after community been affected by the experience?

A: Well, it was immediately very, very affected because I never really went to church after that. No, that's not true, I did go to church but I never joined a church, I never became part of a religious group, community, again.

Q: That's interesting because after being minister, I didn't either. I just needed to breathe and I'm still breathing.

A: Yeah, so that was a very big, big effect. The program had to do it that way because, personality wise I had to go right into the middle of the whole contradiction of, um a religious....that's connected with a ... (inaudible) I think that when I went to the Philippines, and of course the Communist party is very strong—it's underground— but it's very strong, it had its tentacles in every place and so it was hard to not be near it and I think that some of us ... fellowship helped me be a little more critical about some of the things they were doing. Because I had a great sympathy for their vision of a changed society and I had great sympathy that they were working with the poorest and dis-possessed of the country. But decision making and that kind of vanguard mentality ... um, I had seen where that ... and I immediately jumped on the bandwagon like some people did. And so then a lot of people were disillusioned at another point and then that wasn't quite the same experience for them.

Q: Yeah, yeah I can relate to that. As far as experiencing the sixties and seeing it reenacted with who I am now after wholeheartedly embracing it then and now it seems oh, um, naive, or not full enough, not analyzed enough—too simplistic.

A: Which is all the things that a lot of people said to us in the sixties.

Q: I know it.

A: (makes loud bellowing noise)

Q: We should erase this from the tape!

A: That hurts!

Q: Because we are now saying this!

A: Yes, couldn't be us!

Q: Oh, I still think we're better. (laughing) O.K. you already told me that you didn't save any documents from your communal living. Do you want to put on tape that you have no pictures and no artifacts and...letters—you didn't save letters addressed to you at Elkhart?

A: No, No. I have nothing. I have absolutely nothing. And yet, you know, it was probably the most formative experience in my life. It was probably one of the most intense experiences of my life. It was very, very important but I have no material evidence of it.

Q: Do you—are you in contact with any of the people that you—

A: No.

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: None of the people.

A: No, and I uh, also ... I lost contact. Well, you know, I got married and the next year I went to the Philippines and then—

Q: That might do it too.

A: Yeah.

Q: Have you been back to Elkhart?

A: I have been back to Elkhart. I have never been back to the ranch (?) that I can remember. No, that's not right. I did go one time that I remember, and we had a very rushed dinner together at one of the households and they were all rushing off to meetings they had to go to. I sat there thinking 'I am so thankful I don't have to rush off to a meeting.' Then I thought 'You know you're really missing a treat because these guys here ... there's a lot of sharing that could happen. I always thought those meetings were weird where everything was happening, right? And, I'm realizing, you know, we probably missed a lot of genuine sharing because it was so, uh, formalized. You know, like, NOW is the time to do ... three people in a room and then you kind of start things. As opposed to the flow of.....

Q: Do you think that flow, that coffee cup talk about things after a meal was more there for you at the beginning of the experience?

A: Yeah.

Q: Because you did mention you liked coming out of your room and having people to talk to, kind of spontaneous, more less structured.

A: Well, we still had spontaneous things within the household—like when we had time. But for people coming from the outside they pretty much had to schedule their time with us.

Q: I noticed, I had been talking to some people from Reba place on Monday and they had 1 to 3 hours.

A: Yeah.

Q: And I'm thinking 'I'm going to get there and just turn on the tape and go with it,' because—

A: That's how it works. And, um, at the time I thought that was good because we were being efficient with out time and stuff, but, um—I think probably if you're always present to yourself and present in the moment you can do ... I don't think at that time that was true of me so ...

Q: Really makes this ...

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Um, do you have any other anecdotes that you want to share? Do you want to expound on any of the questions? Like why you didn't become a Pilipino Communist? (Both laughing) Do you want to plug your books?

A: I don't think so. It's good actually, after how many years—(counting years)

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: You left in '74?

A: Yeah, 1974. 25 years. It is good to look back, because I'm realizing as I'm talking to you that so much of what I'm saying has to do with the internal psyche, almost. That's the explanation I'm giving now. And I think that 10 years ago or 15 years ago I really didn't know much ... I think it's kind of the time that you are at in your life ... You keep re-regretting your past experiences. So this is like timely because I'm working on this part and so-

Q: This is ...

A: Yeah.

Q: That's interesting because that's the problem and the joy, both, of oral interviewing is what stage of life that you get your informant—as you are known as—um, because I would have expected more of a political analysis of it, from you. Because I knew you back—that's where you were.

A: I think that um, even ten years ago you would have gotten that, maybe even five years ago. I'm sort of doing something else at this moment. Maybe five years from now you'll get it again. You know—

Q: Well we could do this on a five year basis. At the end of it all I could write 'The Life of—'

(Both laughing)

A: Well, I think that you do sort of, like I'm just in my prime of mid-life and that's when you do kind of re-do some internal things.

Q: Glad to hear that.

A: And then you, and then I think after that with that strengthened core you approach the externals, or the structural things again but with a different look ... I'm expecting more integration ...

Q: ... I expected you to say 'I left Fellowship of Hope because of the women leadership thing' and that didn't seem to be—

A: I think though that the rigidity and the hierarchy and stuff like that, it was anti-female. But I hadn't gone deep enough into what it means to be female. I had the stuff that was written at the time and it was an external quality—getting enough women in positions. But um, I didn't understand the other stuff, all the internalized processes. So sorry. Not political enough.

Q: Oh, no! No I'm not sorry about that, that's fine. See I'm saying "about" (about with a accent) after talking with you for two hours. You talked about other communes that you visited and knew about, um the (name indistinguishable) and then the other four, well the other three, in the kind of Mennonite family. Did you read books about any other kind of communes, did you—

A: You know, that did not stay with me, the things that stayed with me was reading like *The Other America*.

Q: Who wrote that?

A: Um—

Interview with Dorothy Friesen

Interviewer: Marilyn Klaus

March 22, 1996

Q: That wasn't John Swanley was it?

A: No, no no no. This was a secular critical book. Harrington! Michael Harrington.

Q: Oh yeah. O.K.

A: Yeah, it sort of launched the war on poverty. That's the kind of thing that really touched me, and the kind of thing I remember to this day ... I read my assignments but they just didn't stay with me.

Q: Well, um, Professor Miller, in his class, is particularly interested in—he can't believe that people did not go to the communal past and know a sense of history of community in this country that began—you know the first person who brought community to this country--we think because we only have brief little sketches-- was a Dutch Mennonite by the name of Peter Cornelius Plockley (?). He came in the 1600's with a group that wanted to live communally um, they bought, were settled in some of the Dutch lands.