

Interview with Thomas and Karen Heikkala

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

Q: This is Saturday, February 24th. I'm in Austin, Texas, and this is an interview with Karen Heikkala and the last name is spelled H-E-I-K-K-A-L-A-S. And Karen used to live at the farm community in Tennessee. [Pause] So, um, can you tell me led up to you becoming part of the farm? Do you guys have different stories about that, or did you meet at the farm?

KH: Not, no.

Q: No.

KH: We met at Wednesday night meetings, which was an offshoot of Monday night class and Sunday morning services, and uh, so that was, when, about 1969?

TH: Near 1970, somewhere in there.

KH: Yeah, so we, were both...

Q: And you were both living in the Bay... in the Bay area at the time?

KH: Uh huh. You, Thomas was raised in that area, born and raised in that area [Pause] and I'm a native Californian. I was born in, uh, Stockton, which is about two hours away, and lived in the Valley, and then, uh, went up to San Francisco in the '60s.

Q: And were you guys going to school there, or working, or just hanging out?

KH: We [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

KH: Yeah, sort of...

TH: Working some and hanging out some.

Q: Right, uh huh.

TH: I was, I grew up around the San Francisco Bay area and I had just returned from the military at the beginning of 1969.

Q: Had you gone to Vietnam.

TH: Yes. I was there for almost a year. And, when I came back, I found uh, Stephen Gaskin and the group that was meeting within a month after I returned. But my roots were, even while I was in Vietnam, I was tending to be more like a hippie, that was my, it was just that people, you know, well, you're in the army, and you're in the military, you have certain things that you see that are really neat that you'd like to imitate, or emulate, whatever the word is. That was one of the ones that was important to me, and so when I got back, it seemed natural to fall into this group.

Q: Were you living in a collective household?

TH: Of a sort. There was about three or four guys living together in a little basement apartment and we weren't really spiritual seekers, we were just old friends that were just living together. And, I guess I, you know, I, didn't meet till six, eight, ten months later that I was in... I don't remember what the date was.

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KH: Yeah, I think actually started going to class in 1968, my sister had, somehow, she had gotten connected and told me about it. I had at that time been living back with my parents in Stockton, and just started going up there to go to the class, and I felt so drawn to it that I eventually moved up there.

Q: And, and what was class like?

KH: Oh, it was wonderful. I have sort of a, a funny story. I was, um, at a period, I'd been through the Haight-Ashbury, you know, being barefoot and running around on the streets and that whole scene, and it had started getting kind of rough, started out kind of, you know, real peace and love and light, and then it started getting kind of rough, with no direction, and so I just started kind of, hitch-hiking around the country and eventually found myself back at my parents. And at that point I was like, throwing up everything I ate. It's weird, I mean, not everything, but a good portion of everything. And I'd go to the doctors, and I went to the psychiatrist, and you know, my parents were sending me here and there and nobody had any idea. And then the first time I went to class and I saw all those people, and I saw Stephen, I just immediately stopped. And I attribute it to, just being fed up, just being sick of every... of the culture, basically, and everything that I was being fed, I was just kind of sick of it. And then I, I saw that, and it was like, oh, there's, you know, this other frontier, you know, there's so much more possibilities... it just felt like a lot of love, to me, among the people. That there was just a real openness and a real caring.

Q: So, when Stephen said "Let's go back to the land" you guys joined the caravan?

KH: Yeah, well actually, it wasn't "Let's go back to the land," although that was, I know something that I had thought about for a long time, so we probably did talk about that, but the caravan was "Let's go explore, let's go talk to the country."

Q: Oh, OK.

KH: See, he had, maybe he told you when you talked to him, but he was, he went to a convention of a sort, that was held at a church where he started holding Monday night classes, at the Glive [?] Methodist Foundation Church, in San Francisco, that's where I started going to class. And there was a few hundred people live... uh, going there and it was consistent, every week. So, he, when they had a convention of ministers come to town, they asked him to be one of their speakers. Because they were all concerned about all the young people, uh, giving up their homes, uh, direction, life-style thing, and going off to San Francisco and New York and Atlanta and other places where there were large hippie enclaves, and growing their hair and trying to look more natural and not following suit with the way the American culture was going, you know? And also, I remember that it was after Kent State and the violence in the country, that that, there was a big need for people to go, to speak to that, especially, we were, you know, we were counterculture, we were hippies, and different from across the Bay, which was like, you know [angry sounds].

TH: [Simultaneously] [Unintelligible], Berkeley.

KH: We were more peace-and-love and that kind of thing.

TH: And the Vietnam war was raging, you know.

KH: Yeah, so that's why there was a big division. I didn't even really understand that...

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TH: The civil rights movement was raging. All that stuff was going on at the same time. We were sort of obscure, really, as far as the, who was making the most noise. We would get hippies, would, in the peace-and-love thing, we'd get some press... you know, John Lennon was outspoken and a few others, but as far as the political rage, it was always the Black Panthers and the rage in Berkeley and Kent State and things like that.

KH: Well, we were apolitical. That, you know, um, I'm sure you've probably heard one of Stephen's teachings was "What you put your attention into, you get more of." That was one of those basic teachings and we felt that if we put our attention into all that violence that that would just bring more of it and our direction was peace.

TH: So, he was invited, after those ministers went back to their homes to come speak to them and their congregations. So, he arranged, he was invited by so many of them, that they, he arranged an itinerary of meetings and that was what we all left to do, was to follow him and be part of the meetings that he would have.

KH: And then the idea of just, after that bonding experience, staying together just seemed like the natural thing to do.

Q: What was the caravan like?

KH: [Laughs]

TH: [Laughs] [Pause]

TH: You know...

KH: It was rigorous.

Q: Yeah, I bet it was. Yeah.

TH: We left in October.

KH: [Simultaneously] It was really rigorous.

TH: And went north.

Q: So, you were cold.

KH: [Laughs]

TH: [Unintelligible] at first. And then, actually, we didn't actually get too much of a severe winter problem, although it did get pretty chilly a few times.

KH: I remember, well, we got snowed in. Remember? In... where was that? Nevada? Now where was it? When all those people brought us eggs and milk and white bread?

TH: No, that was Nebraska.

KH: Oh, Nebraska.

TH: That was [unintelligible]

KH: Yeah, and that's when we were so –

TH: Lincoln, Nebraska.

KH: You know, we didn't eat any eggs or white bread, or...

Q: Oh no, and they brought you eggs?

KH: sugar they brought us, all that stuff. Because we were like really, snowed in, they felt sorry for us.

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Q: Yeah. And there was nothing you could eat?

KH: Well, we ate it. Anyway.

TH: We had some food, too. But they thought we were need, in need, so that they came out and –

KH: Yeah, we didn't actually really need it.

TH: [Simultaneously] gave us all this stuff and we ate it right up. [Laughter] Yeah, we figured, something that's given with love is not...

KH: It was exciting, too, of course, it was very exciting. Going into all these different places and meeting all those different people and seeing all those different scenes and just being a community together, realizing that we were a community and seeing that we were a community.

TH: We were a community on wheels.

KH: Births and deaths, and marriages, you know. Every, everything that would happen in a community would happen.

TH: Trouble with the police, a little bit, sometimes, things like that.

KH: But mostly our, yeah, our relations with the police were very, very good. You probably heard about that, some.

Q: Well, not really, too much. Would they try and, like, keep you out of places, or something?

TH: Actually, they expedited us, mostly. They helped us to move down the road, because we became fifty vehicles after a while.

Q: Wow.

KH: Yeah, we left, we left with fifty vehicles, didn't we? From San Francisco?

TH: No, I think about thirty. Thirty or –

KH: Oh, OK.

Q: And then you picked up some more along the way?

KH: Oh yeah. Every, almost every place we would, you know, big town, we would stop, somebody would hear the message and jump, get themselves a vehicle, and...

Q: That's great.

KH: We were buses to begin with, you know, and then, by the time we were finished, it was anything and everything.

TH: Vans, trucks, pickups...

KH: But the, um, what happened was, [Pause] what, the word went out, or something, you know, I mean the police were like, what is this? And the word went out that we were into psychedelics. And so, they, uh, they stopped us very, very soon in Northern California, and um, I think they found a few things on some people, but we were like, tell the truth, no matter what, you always tell the truth. So, they'd said, they'd come in our buses, say "Do you have anything?" "Oh, yes!" You know, we'd go in the back and we'd get, oh, and then there's this... and, we didn't really, we didn't have any hard drugs. We had psychedelics. And so, then, the word went out, oh, well, these are peaceful, honest people. And so, when they sent the word ahead of us, that we were coming, and then the police would be our escorts as soon as we got to town. And, you know get us [unintelligible]

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TH: They'd find us places to stay.

Q: Cool.

TH: Cause we needed big places to stay.

Q: Yeah, right.

TH: So, they would say, "Oh, they're coming. Maybe we can put them up here, put them up there."

Q: So, you didn't sleep in your buses?

KH: Oh yeah.

Q: You did?

TH: :They were like little mobile homes.

KH: But we needed parking areas.

Q: Oh, got it. OK.

TH: Hippified mobile homes. Wood stoves, and...

Q: Wood stoves. Yeah.

TH: Gas stoves, and beds, sometimes just a big empty floor, when there was, cause there were a few buses that just had a bunch of single folks in them and, eight or ten of them, and they'd just, might have a stove, or [unintelligible].

KH: We were married, so we didn't have that kind of [inaudible]. [Pause]

Q: So, did you, um, go to the farm when, I mean, were you at, at there at the beginning?

KH: Yeah, yeah. We did the caravan, we came back, and then we went back to Tennessee and started looking for land, and, yeah, we were there.

Q: And can you tell me some, what, what that was like? The beginning days of the farm?

KH: Oh, that was, [Laughs] real different.

TH: Yeah, we sort of had to pioneer it in a lot of ways.

KH: Yeah, we felt like pioneers. [Unintelligible] we were [inaudible].

TH: It was, no houses. Just barely enough road to get into the place.

KH: Lots of bugs.

TH: We had to dig holes for outhouses, and we took showers in the rain sometimes, because it was a, sort of a, semi-subtropical climate in Tennessee. It is. Exactly that. So, in the summertime, we got [Pause] we got there in April, May, sometime like that, and the rain started up. You can just about count on a rain, a shower, clearing out in the rains [?]

KH: Yeah, for washing our hair, and stuff.

TH: And we'd cap the spring and pipe the water up to a homemade shower.

KH: And we had meetings, real regularly.

TH: [Unintelligible] meetings. Meetings were always the most important thing.

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KH: Yeah. Coming together, and, and...

Q: And what were the meetings like? Were they business meetings, or?

KH: I think they were kind of a combination, although we did try to separate a spiritual meeting from a business meeting, but a lot of times it was a combination of both, because that was, that was the, the ground, you know, the framework, was built from the spirit up, and that's what we felt, that it would all work out if we had our spiritual laws together. We started having lots of babies, and it was just kind of, figuring it out, that [Laughs]... figuring it out as we went along.

Q: And did you have children at the farm?

KH: Yes. All three of mine were born on the farm.

Q: Um, with midwives? Home births?

KH: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And what was that like? How did that go?

KH: Oh, it was wonderful. I mean, I, I'm a nurse now, and I, I have not really worked in the hospital much, but I went through, through my orientation I had to do some labor and delivery stuff, and I just thought, oh my God, I'm just so grateful, you know, that I could do it this other way.

Q: Yeah.

KH: And I didn't have any relativity before, I'm not from a large family, or anything.

Q: So, the hospital kind of birth turned you off, or?

KH: Oh, yeah, definitely. I mean, it's just so cold and sterile and unnatural when it's so much a natural process, really. And we, you know, we, I'd work up unto the day the baby was due, I mean, not due, but coming. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah, right.

KH: The um, our second birth, we'd actually, were living in a satellite farm in Mobile. We, we actually ended up doing a fair amount of that... traveling to different community farms, that's how we ended up here in Austin, actually. Um, and so we came back three weeks early for him, and then he was born that day.

Q: Oh, wow. That's funny.

KH: So, yeah, it was, it was wonderful having that birth on the farm.

Q: Did you work as a midwife...? No, you didn't on the farm.

KH: No. No, and I'm not a midwife now.

Q: So, what, what kind of work did you do?

KH: On the farm?

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Q: Mm-hmm.

KH: Oh, nothing skilled. I did some typing, I think I started out doing that, doing some typing, transcribing, some of the tapes for the books, cause you know the big book...

Q: Right, yeah.

KH: [Inaudible] Publishing company. That was the beginning. Working house, oh, cooking, working in the fields, working at canning and freezing.

Q: And how about –

KH: Babysitting.

Q: Oh, OK. How about you, Thomas?

TH: I was...

Q: Building houses and stuff like that? [Laughs]

TH: I did some of that. Did a bunch of work on what we had as a motor pool.

Q: Oh, right, I drove past that. Yeah.

KH: It's nothing now, compared to what it was.

TH: We had, you know, ten, twelve mechanics in there sometimes. And I, mostly, I was more of a coordinator, facilitator, rather than a mechanic, because I really, not a [?] mechanic. I just felt sort of drawn to there. And, uh, I worked there mostly. And I did, [unintelligible] I did house painting and I worked at our front gate as a, it's called the gateman, to greet everybody and everything that came through. And I had a, usually was in charge of a little crew, cause there was always a crew of people up there, there was so much business. We had ten, fifteen thousand visitors a year after a while, after a year or two. The first few years it wasn't that many, but it got to be that many as the '70s progressed to the mid-'70s.

KH: I was just thinking you might want to mention to her how being a coordinator at the motor pool was, we had all these vehicles, but nobody owned any vehicles.

Q: Right.

KH: So, he had to coordinate who was going to take what vehicle.

Q: Whoa.

KH: [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

KH: This was the communal vehicles.

TH: Yeah, sometimes it got down to only a few. One or two, even, sometimes. And then, we had to be, we were really socialistic at [unintelligible] and assets, and I did this figure out who was going to do a doctor run, or who was going to do a... run for something or other.

Q: So, you had to kind of, prioritize the importance of people's requests?

TH: Yeah, and then load up the car with everybody that needed to do something.

KH: [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

TH: You know, decide who went, who went, and figure out the priorities, keep a sense of humor in the process.

Q: Boy, that'd be tough. Cause, would, would people get mad at you? Cause they would want to go, and they'd get denied and stuff?

TH: I'm sure, but I don't recollect very much anger.

Q: Oh, that's good. [Laughs] That'd be a tough position.

TH: Yeah. People used to tell me I had a pretty good sense of humor about it, and they'd, I would kid them a lot, so, I don't know. It was kind of a fun job in some ways.

KH: Saturday morning was always a real drag, though, the telephone ringing constantly. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, asking if they could have a car, or?

KH: Yeah, I tried to get it figured out.

TH: Then I coordinated also the visitors, cause we, we had visitors constantly that would stay for two or three days, for nothing. They would be with us and then they would usually work in the fields, or if they had something that seemed adapted doing, then they might do that, that was another thing. And we developed visitor quarters, which at that time were mainly [?] just tents with a wooden floor. We, we got a whole, over the years, we had gotten into buying these army squad tents, which were sixteen foot by thirty-two-foot-long, those dark green canvas tents, you know? And we would build a wooden floor and set it up on the floor, and sometimes make little walls within them. Sometimes fold the flaps out and make walls from the flaps being folded out. We lived in one when our first son was born. It's a house with three other couples. And we used them for all sorts of things. We had a few of them that we called visitors' tents, and we put the visitors, some of the visitors up in them, and I had to coordinate the people that would be the in-charge person in the tent. Of, of the community. So, I had to recruit. Always recruiting people to do that, and that was a difficult chore sometimes. I was a recruiter a lot, wasn't I?

KH: I guess so.

TH: And then I recruited people to work.

KH: Farmhands.

TH: Farmhands. We got a little business going in town where we would offer our labor as just, unskilled labor, since so many of us were unskilled, and I would recruit people to go out and do these little jobs. And all the money went back into the community. So, nobody got anything in their pocket. Although a lot of times we did give them some money to get a... something to drink with. [Pause]

Q: So, um, was your living situation pretty crowded then, if you lived in a tent with like, three other couples? Was that...?

KH: Not nec -

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TH: Sometimes.

Q: [Laughs]

KH: I mean, it...

Q: It sounds crowded.

KH: As the farm evolved, it actually got much more crowded.

TH: The children were very little then.

KH: Yeah, cause we didn't have a lot of kids at that point, that didn't really seem very crowded, I think.

You know, we, um, well, we were sort of on the outskirts, not the outskirts but we were...

TH: Off the land.

KH: Well, we were off the land. We didn't realize it at the time, but we, I mean, as far as the tent went, we were, like, one of those extensions or something, and then we had our bedroom. And, uh, yeah, we had our first baby. And nobody else had a bunch of little kids running around. As the farm evolved and there were more kids, you know, like 25, 30, 40 people, we missed that period. We were at a satellite farm. We came back and, I think, we had about 22 people or something at Albert's house. We came back and moved into Albert's house and there were that many people. Everybody was going "Oh, yeah, this isn't too bad." [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs] And that seemed pretty crowded to you?

KH: Um...

TH: Wasn't too bad.

KH: Well, there were ten kids, you know. Ten little kids and there were people living in vehicles right outside the house, but then the house was their kitchen and their shower, you know, and they would go out and sleep in their vehicles.

Q: Wow. So, did you guys get sent out to satellite farms to help establish them?

TH: Once.

KH: Well, not to establish... to help. That was, I think that was the beginning of our going out to satellite farms. We had gone for a visit to California... a memory thinking about the situation the early parts of the farm. We didn't have a road. The road from the main, or the book publishing company off to where the other places are, so like we got a driveway car to go out and visit our folks, we had to slog through the mud. There was always, like, lots of mud. [Laughs] And when we returned, well, on that trip, Thomas got a little job and made some money and sent money back to the farm. So, when we got back and came through the gate, people said "Oh, we heard you're going to Mobile!" And we said "Oh, yeah? Well we didn't hear that." [Laughs] And it turned out because they had, cause we had sent money back, "Oh, well, those, those guys would be good folks to go to Mobile," where there already was an established community that was doing remodeling and then sending money back to the farm. So, that was our first part of the first time we went out. And then from there, I think we, oh and then we came back and had the second boy who was, came right away.

TH: Went back.

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KH: We kind of enjoyed, actually, we kind of enjoyed that smaller scene. Cause in Mobile, we had like one block with, think about three or four houses.

TH: Three or four, yeah.

KH: Three or four houses on that one block. And we were a community. We were a tight community. Within each house, there was probably two or three couples and their kids. But it was a little bit easier, and, in my mind it was a little bit easier to grasp the scope of what was going on in that little community, versus the farm and all the people, and, you know, kind of felt like I have a little bit more, um, I had more position to really manifest and do something. At, at that point we started doing some Plenty stuff, too, because we were, our little community there was one of the first responders to the earthquake in Guatemala.

Q: Oh, wow.

KH: Cause we were so close. And one of the fellows was a ham radio operator, and so he was getting news that the rest of the country wasn't getting.

Q: Yeah. So, did you guys go down to Guatemala?

KH: No, we didn't. Our second boy ended up being kind of sickly. And, uh, it just didn't seem that that was right. But we, I did a lot of fund-raising. You know, calling people, getting donations, and that kind of thing. And uh, I really, I liked that role of being able to get out there and interact with the rest of the community and do something, you know, there was a lot more resources to do something with, than on the farm. We were pretty isolated.

Q: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

KH: So, um, and when Plenty first started in 1974, we were, uh, oh I was the first secretary and Thomas did something... I can't remember exactly what his particular title was, but we were involved there in the beginning, but didn't really have much of a chance to do anything.

TH: [Inaudible]

KH: What was it, what were you when Plenty first started? I know I was, like, the first secretary.

TH: Oh, I was sort of like the, the temporary director.

KH: The temporary director?

TH: The first, the first coordinator, director.

KH: Really? I didn't know that.

TH: But it didn't last very long. Till they, till it got to be a little more organized.

KH: And... oh shoot, I missed that letter... uh, what was the question that you asked? I, I've forgotten.

Q: I guess I; we were talking about satellite farms and what you were doing on satellite farms, and that led into talking about Plenty.

KH: Yeah. And then we went to go visit in California, again, our folks, and, um, went to the California farm, and everybody said, "Oh, stay, why don't you guys stay here?" [Laughs] So we said OK. We had, we weren't planning on that, you know, we'd just taken some bags to go out there and all the rest of our stuff was back in Mobile, but we didn't really have much stuff... didn't seem like I even remember we missed it.

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TH: We were pretty austere as far as what we called possessions.

KH: Well, yeah. Everybody... everything was communal, you know. You go and the kitchen was already set up, fine. So, we stayed on the California farm for, was it three years? No, no, wasn't that long. Couple years, probably.

Q: What part of California was that?

KH: Let's see. We landed in –

TH: San Rafael.

KH: San Rafael.

TH: Which is just north of San Francisco, you know? Marin county.

KH: And, and, they already had established a soy dairy, a restaurant, and a store.

TH: Grocery store.

Q: Wow.

KH: A grocery store. And we lived up above it. Not just us, but several of us.

TH: And it was a, it was a big old building. Real big building. I think was paid twenty-five hundred dollars a month for rent. It was a big building. And we had a big downstairs with a large grocery store area... I mean, not real large... what could I compare it to? It was probably fifty, sixty feet wide, and, and the grocery store might have been a hundred feet deep. And then behind it, behind the grocery store area was a soy dairy that had been constructed out of some of the storage area. So, there was food, and, and stock storage, and then the dairy with all of its equipment, to make tofu and soymilk and tempeh. And, uh, the second floor had a lot of office space, and, and, a great big hall that was used for, uh, dances and meetings. It was already part of the building. It was hardwood floors –

KH: It was a great place.

TH: With a little sta... little, tiny stage. It was probably a hundred feet long, it was... cause it went from front to back, too, like the downstairs. Or from front to almost back. Real wide, and we could hold our meetings in there, and we'd sometimes we'd get speakers to come and, or the Sufis would rent it out to have their meetings. And then we had a lot of little rooms where people lived.

KH: And what, what happened to that place? Did we go west, or something?

TH: Well, we just decided it was too much, and the, the landlord that owned it was not very much fun to deal with.

KH: So, we moved across the Bay to a totally opposite scene... Richmond... do you know anything...? It's Oakland, Richmond, and it's like real poor and...

TH: Mostly black.

KH: Mostly black. And we got a, another great big building with a couple of houses connected to it.

TH: Lots of living space.

KH: I think we lived out there for three years, yeah.

TH: And then we built a brand-new soy dairy in the industrial district of San Francisco.

Q: Wow.

KH: And about that time was when we decided we had enough, and we went back to the farm.

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Q: [Laughs]

KH: That's when we moved in with Albert. And that was '79.

Q: So, were you there during the changeover?

KH: Nope.

TH: Nope.

KH: We missed the changeover...

Q: You missed, you, were you at a satellite farm, or you'd left by then?

TH: Sorta.

KH: Yeah, we were at a satellite farm. We stayed from '79 to '81. And our second boy, and our middle boy was just sick all the time. I mean, he was sick in California, but then back on the farm, I mean, things had gotten pretty poor on the farm. There were a whole bunch more people, and, uh, there was hardly any fruits or vegetables, as I remember. Um, you know, very crowded living conditions, much more so than when we left. And, uh, the weather there, and then, plus all the people and not getting enough fruits and vegetables, he was just, he just didn't do very well at all. So, we heard that there was a farm in San Diego. You know, dry weather. [Laughs] So we went there in '81. And, yeah, I think that was kind of like getting to, you know, we were feeling like things were, certainly not as they were when we started. You know, it just seemed like it had gotten kind of out of hand. You know, it wasn't as, it certainly wasn't as tight and cohesive and, you know, one-minded as we had been.

TH: Lots of businesses were developing, kids were getting bigger, they were getting a little bit weird, you know, cause they're, you know how teenagers will get.

Q: Sure.

TH: And... it was more and more problems. The population grew to a thousand, thirteen hundred, somewhere around there.

KH: It...

TH: Cause we were only two or three hundred when we ca... arrived.

KH: And when we, you know, we chose to take a vow of poverty when we got there, and we said we felt like pioneers, and it was like "Oh, this is great!" you know. But it got old. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah, yeah.

TH: And there really wasn't support for anything as socialistic as we were.

KH: What do you mean?

TH: Well, as cultural support...

Q: Right, yeah.

TH: We had support from our friends and neighbors that appreciated us individually, and everything. But as far as having any larger government or commercial or cultural support for anything as socialistic as we were, it just wasn't, didn't even exist. So, we had, everything we wanted to do we had to figure it ourselves.

KH: That's right.

Interview with Thomas and Karen Heikkala

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

Q: Yeah.

TH: I don't think they'd get a lot of support from people that would help us to figure out how to plant stuff, uh...

KH: Oh, yeah, it was...

TH: And grow stuff, and guys would learn how to do carpentry and do [unintelligible] mechanics, people learned the skills of printing and all the skills of creating books that go along with that... photography, and videotape, midwifery skills; we grew and the food-processing and creation of the soy diet, and so a lot of stuff got involved.

KH: Midwifery and birth control... just amazing, the amount of stuff.

Q: And vege [?] meeting... I mean, there were like cookbooks and a book on like, diet and nutrition or something?

KH: Oh yeah, yeah. And we had to, you know, figure that all out. I think –

TH: Natural birth control.

KH: Everybody was vegetarian when we left, but you know, we'd come to that on our own, but didn't really have much background or knowledge about, well, how do you really be a vegetarian...

Q: How do you do it.

KH: And stay healthy.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

KH: It was like "Well, you eat brown rice. Just brown rice. That's it." [Laughs]

Q: No, that doesn't work... especially for a pregnant woman, right?

KH: Yeah, right.

Q: Yeah, wow. Well, you know, it's been amazing to me to learn about all the farm has done, especially when you look at a lot of communal groups who, like, maybe they went and tried to farm, and didn't know how to farm, and everything sort of blew up, you know, and it crashed and burned in a year or two. But the farm, it's like, maybe people didn't know how to farm, but they learned how, and, you know, they, people taught themselves the skills they needed to know it seemed to work, and...

TH: Oh, the neighbors helped us.

Q: Uh huh?

KH: It was nice.

TH: Oh, the neighbors really helped a lot. I think it was a lot because our attitude was one of kindness and openness and, you know, we, we would find out that some people didn't like us, and we wouldn't bother them. But we found that there was a lot of them that did like us... because our spirit tended to be similar to the independent spirit of Tennesseans. They had, it was a, was a Bible Belt area. You might even call it belt-buckle Bible Belt area.

Q: [Laughs].

KH: [Laughs].

TH: But they were, they didn't care who you were, as long as you didn't hurt anybody. They didn't, they had a real open attitude about uh, strangers and outsiders, and different kinds of people, except for racial problems. They had some real problems with that. But as far as weird, white honkies, you know, we were all right. And we were nice to them.

KH: Although they were very, very suspicious of us in the beginning.

TH: Some of them were.

KH: And they didn't really want us.

TH: Some of them actually protected us. You know, they, cause they, there was a few of them that really liked us, they were dangerous also, these people. And so, nobody would mess with us because they knew that we were protected...

KH: [Laughs].

TH: By somebody who was dangerous. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs] That's really funny. Oh, wow.

KH: And also, I think the fact that we were so together, and, you know, communal and, and there were those that went out and made the money and stuff, it made room for those people that were visionaries to do that, to have their visions, and have the time. You know, it's not like in this society, where everybody is struggling, you know, to make the buck.

TH: [Unintelligible].

KH: There's not much time left to do anything unless you happen to be fortunate enough to have a lot of money so that you do have time. You know what I'm saying? It freed up people to do that.

Q: Be creative, and...

KH: Yeah, yeah.

Q: That makes sense.

TH: There was a bunch of people that didn't really have much of a creative idea, as far as making some new things, but they just wanted to be there and support it.

KH: Right. There were a lot of workers. Who just wanted to be there and [unintelligible]?

We had a lot of worker bees, you know, worker ants, and a lot of, bunch of creative ants, too. So, they tended to stay on the farm and develop their things.

Q: So, did you guys end up going to San Diego to the farm there?

KH: Yes, we did. And um, think we stayed there for –

TH: The boy did really well there, too.

KH: He did, he did really well there. Probably better there than he'd done here in Austin. But we happened to hit it at, we still really didn't have any skills, and I had, we had our last child, we have three, she was like, we left when she was a year old, so she was pretty young. And, uh, we happened to hit San Diego when they were having a, what do you call it? Repression, depression?

TH: Recession.

Interview with Thomas and Karen Heikkala

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

KH: Recession.

Q: What part of San Diego was the farm in?

KH: Well, it moved.

TH: When we got there, they had a big house right on the beach.

KH: Mission Beach, right? Isn't that what it was called?

TH: Mission Beach. They had a, like an old converted four-plex, or eight-plex, I think it was an eight-plex. Real old stucco building. And as soon as we got there, somebody had found a place in Humol [?]. You know where Humol is?

Q: That's east, isn't it? Like, east of San Diego State University and all? [Unintelligible].

TH: Yeah, as you go out east of town, it's a little bit south.

Q: Right. Yeah.

TH: It's, you climb up into the hills a little ways and it's sort of an upper middle-class suburb, suburb.

KH: Quite different than what the beach scene was like.

TH: But we had found a house for rent up there that was sort of in limbo. It was a, kind of, kind of a limbo place, as far as who owned it and what was going on. And we rented it for six months, eight months.

KH: Yeah. We had some people from the farm who were in wheelchairs. There was...

TH: Yeah, we had a five-acre place and a big house and a big garage so there was room for us all.

Q: Were those older people, or just –

KH: No, younger.

Q: Someone who had a disability.

KH: Yeah, yeah. Broken necks.

Q: Mm, yeah.

KH: We had; didn't we have Bob and...? We had Bob Glass and we had Thomas Nash. And Mary.

TH: Thomas. But he left right away, Thomas. Left real soon after we had gotten the house.

KH: Yeah, there was always, you know... "Oh you're coming? OK, well, they're going." [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs].

KH: It would just sort of happen that way, you know.

TH: And we're going.

KH: And then I think the farm started going through its changes, right? We were hearing reports of, that was happening.

TH: And then the Humol [?] house, picked, it started getting back into the grips of normal, whatever you'd call it.

KH: What do you mean?

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Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

TH: Well, the, cause the guy that, that rented it to us, didn't own it, but he had somehow had a handle on it, so he rented it to us, and then he didn't, he left, and then the people that did own it, or something, wanted it back, and so we weren't able to stay there anymore. It was kind of a weird real estate...

KH: And we couldn't get, we couldn't get much work because of the recession, and I, I didn't have any skills to do anything and Thomas had just... he looked for jobs and looked for jobs, and he had a really difficult time. So, and then this going-on with the farm, it must have been about four or five families living there at one time. But it just, we just, kind of like decided, well, probably something happened with the house and all that, well, we're going to split up. So, we went with one other family back into San Diego and got another house. Rental house.

TH: On 44th, 45th?

KH: Something like that. I don't know. But we still had a difficult time getting work. And so, we decided... and they were kind of like, supporting us, really –

TH: But we, I got work in [unintelligible].

KH: When we decided, well, we're going to have to go someplace else, this isn't working. And we got connected with people in Austin, who had a farm scene here, and they said, "Oh, yeah" you know, Texas is booming... early '80s. There's lots of work here, oh, it's a really neat scene here and, sure you guys can come. We don't really have a place for you, but, yeah, come on. And uh, so at that time, then we started making money. And Thomas started getting jobs, so we felt like, well this is, this is the right thing. Because it's working. And, uh, we took Thomas Nash's bus, right? Yeah, that's what we did. Thomas Nash who was in the wheelchair, somehow or other, we ended up with his bus.

TH: Yeah, he couldn't take his bus with him when he left, so he left it there, brought it back to him, because he went back to Tennessee.

KH: He went back to Tennessee. Yeah, so he said oh, you can take our bus if you don't have a place to live. So, we just lived in the bus.

TH: Had to repair the bus, get it ready to go out to Austin. Eventually took it to Tennessee.

Q: Oh, wow.

KH: We haven't been here the whole time. We did go back to the farm again. [Laughs].

Q: Oh, you did? When did you go back to the farm?

KH: In '89.

Q: Oh.

KH: No, '88. '88.

Q: So, after the, after the changeover and all.

KH: Yeah, it was '88, the end of '88. Yeah, we went the day after –

TH: Halloween.

KH: Halloween. Yeah. '88. [Laughs]. Yeah. And, uh, well we, and then where did we go then? Is that when we moved in with...? Oh, we bought a house.

TH: Yeah.

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Interviewer: Deborah Altus

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TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

KH: Oh yeah, some of our real dear friends that we lived with here in Austin, we actually –

TH: That's really...

KH: There were some folks from, who were coming from the farm, she was, her back was in real bad shaped and he, you know, he came up here and said "Well, I'm going to bring her up here cause she really needs, you know, she needs to get out of the farm and get into an easier-demanding scene. We said, "Oh, well we'll get a place with you." Cause I was feeling pretty good. So, we ended up sharing a house with them here in Austin. And we stayed communal, you know, we just had one checkbook and all of that.

TH: Stayed with them for three years.

KH: Stayed with them for three years, then they moved back to the farm to have their baby.

Q: Oh, yeah.

KH: And so, they told us, "Oh, well, we found a house for you. You guys come on!" So...

Q: So, you came out.

KH: So, we bought this house and we moved back there.

Q: So, at that time, then, everything was private? So, you actually had to buy a house on the farm if you wanted to live there?

KH: Yeah, right. Yeah.

TH: The changeover happened for us, actually, officially, when we lived here. Because there was a whole farm, communal scene here, too, although we had...

Q: Was that in Blanco, or outside of here?

TH: No...

KH: No, but those were some of the people: Nan and Eugene...

TH: One of the members of the community gave ten acres of land to the community, so that, the original vision was to make money in town and build a scene out there. We ended up having two or three, four houses around town, where usually there was two families that shared a place. And uh, seemed like, this vision thing wasn't going to work out, so we dissolved the farm community as an Austin scene. And we continued to live with that couple that we were talking about.

Q: And share everything with them.

TH: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, mmm hmm.

KH: Excuse me. OK.

TH: That was really the changeover for us, was that happening here.

Q: So, what was it like when you went back to the farm, then, in '88?

TH: Well, we weren't really as prepared, probably, as we should have been.

Q: [Laughs]

TH: We didn't, didn't realize the depths of the problems that were so involved, that created the changeover. I mean, we saw here that some of the reason was because people didn't really like each other that much.

Q: [Laughs]

TH: Some of them. More or less, you know. But enough of it that it was a problem. But if you're going to do a visionary thing, you've got to have a lot of respect for each other. It just didn't exist, entirely, in a way that was satisfactory for everybody.

KH: What are you talking about, after the changeover?

TH: Well, I, she said what was it like when we moved back here?

KH: Oh.

TH: And I said, well, it was somewhat of a problem, because we didn't realize the depths of the problems that were involved with the changeover.

KH: Yeah, yeah, it just created a big [unintelligible]. And then our son got sick, sick again too.

Q: Oh no.

KH: Yeah, it seemed like he got, he was better, enough, you know, enough better that we could go back, but he's...

Q: Was it something to do with the climate? Or like what he was eating?

KH: The climate. Yeah, yeah, no. Because at that time we could buy, you know, whatever we wanted to eat. We were self-sufficient. But...

Q: Have you remained vegans, or?

KH: Um, more or less. I mean, definitely vegetarian.

TH: We were into dairy.

KH: Yeah, I don't hardly, I mean, I got into it, but I don't really, you know [inaudible] eat it.

TH: Yeah, but he, you know, we started getting powdered milk, and we started getting cheese.

KH: Yeah, we did. But we don't do that nearly as much as we used to, I mean, there was a period when we were into it, but...

TH: While we were it, we got into using that stuff more. It was mostly the kids that wanted to use it.

Q: [Laughs] Uh huh, right.

TH: We didn't really like it that much. We'd been vegans for so long that we didn't really care that much for dairy's and foods.

KH: And I had just gotten back into making soymilk again. Because it's so expensive to buy.

Q: Oh, it is expensive.

KH: Yeah, it's terrible... can't do it. The soymilk is soy seed you just want to go "Wow, you can make all this food, and it's so cheap."

Q: Right.

KH: So, that was, that was really the final, final thing for us to, to leave and come back.

Q: Because your son was sick.

KH: Because he was sick, yeah.

TH: Plus, we had to drive so far to go to work every day.

KH: Yeah, right. That was, I was driving like, fifty, sixty miles one way.

Q: Were you working in Nashville or something?

KH: Uh, Franklin, just outside of Nashville.

Q: Oh, man. That'd be horrible, yeah.

KH: Yeah. But I've, you know, I've never really had a full-time job, I usually just do agency work, you know, this and that. And um, it seemed to be all that I was getting. So, and, and I guess, yeah, no I think the farm is in a lot better place than when we left. After the changeover, it seemed like there were so many hard feelings. I mean, when we left, people said "Oh, well, here." I mean, the first time to go to San Diego... "Well here's a car, why don't you take this car, and you know, you can sell it out there and send the money back" and then people at the bakery gave us food and... except maybe hard feelings, you know, it was like a divorce.

Q: Yeah.

KH: Yeah. So, we didn't, fortunately, we didn't get to experience that, but we did experience, still the aftereffect of some of those feelings. And people would be talking about that "Oh, what happened? Did we miss something?" Oh, [unintelligible] changeovers, it's still like some real thing that was, you know, it just seemed like people were kind of stuck in. Some of those old places. And, um, you know, we, as I said, we weren't political at all... that was not our philosophy... but when we got to Austin, we got kind of political. We got much more political. And so, going back, we were going "It should be a sliding scale, as far as this, uh, financial arrangements" you know, because there's some people that after the changeover ended up with a car, a nice house, all this stuff. There's other people who ended up with nothing, you know, but are still there. Yet they pay the same thing. That didn't, didn't really feel right to us. So, we tried to, well, we did talk about some of those things and try to institute, but people were just not, you know, just, you know, kind of, didn't want to change, you know, it's too hard to change. But I think, now, I really do, I think that things are changing around, coming back... you know, it's that old pendulum swing... after the changeover, it was like everybody went back to what they had known before, almost. That safe, capitalistic way that they grew up. Now I think people are loosening back up again. And...

Q: Well, I know there's a big communal, um, group within the people who live at the farm, I guess, what...

KH and TH: [Unintelligible, speaking at once.]

KH: The second foundation, yeah, we were part of that when we were there. Yeah, it was the, it looked like, well, what's going on? Who's doing anything here? And it looked like the second foundation was

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what was happening to us, and so, we joined that. And it was, it was wonderful being part of that. Actually, when we left, we left with like fourteen hundred dollars that we had put into it, and after being here for a year or so, it was like "Oh, we found this other money that was part of your account" and they gave us another fourteen hundred dollars. I mean, so, financially...

Q: Yeah, it was OK.

KH: It was, it was wonderful. And then, um, socially, it was great, too, because you'd have people coming together, talking about real things and then developing economic businesses... like, that was when the mushroom...

Q: Yeah.

KH: You know, Steve, not Steve, Albert started talking about that, and that happened, and then the ecovillage, and, I'm sure a lot of that has been from the strength of the second foundation. People, you know, pooling their energies together again.

Q: Yeah.

TH: Another, other businesses on the farm that aren't even a part of it have benefitted some too, because they gathered together such a pool of money from our dues that we've paid into the second foundation that they were able to lend it.

KH: Yeah.

Q: Oh, wow.

KH: Which is really...

TH: Yeah, we'd lend it to the book company or to a few other businesses to help them do a certain thing that they wanted to do... so...

KH: Yeah, I think...

TH: In some ways people, some don't like the second foundation. You know, they just see the benefits of it, too.

KH: But then again, in the, in the beginning of the farm, or maybe not the beginning, but as the farm evolved, it got to be kind of "Well this is what Stephen says and so this is what happens." No, there's no discussion, no, there's no alternative viewpoints, or anything. And that just couldn't continue, you know. And now, it's everybody has their own opinion and it feels very free to express that and work it out, so that's really a lot better but because of some bottled-up stuff, I think, from all those years, that's when you've got all this "Well, I've thought for years that..."

Q: [Laughs].

KH: [Laughs].

Q: Right, yeah.

KH: So, I think it's, it's really healthier now. Lot healthier.

Interview with Thomas and Karen Heikkala

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

Q: So, when you came back to Austin, then, did you live privately, just by yourselves as a family?

KH: Well, actually, we couldn't. We really didn't have the money to, to just move. We just thought, well, we've got to move again, we've got to go. And um, a woman who had been a part of the farm for a long time was actually at my second son's birthing, as a midwife-helper, pretty much, she'd had a car accident, and was paraplegic, and she had a house here in Austin...

Q: That's not Joy, is it?

KH: Joy Newcombe.

Q: Oh, OK. Yeah.

KH: You know Joy?

Q: Well, she had, she's helped us get a lot of numbers and stuff. She's corresponded with the professor I work for.

KH: Oh, oh yeah. Well, her husband, she and her husband were splitting up, and her children were living in California with her, her first ex-husband, and so, we made an arrangement with her that we could move into her house, help her out, and um, pay utilities. That's all. And then, there was all her stuff, you know. So, we did that. And, but we rented our house out on the farm, because we didn't want to like totally give up.

Q: Uh huh.

KH: So, we found somebody else, brought somebody else into the community and rented our house out to her. So, we lived with Joy for two years. And um, and then we decided we were going to stay, so we sold our house and got our own place. So, this is the first place, this is the first place that we've ever owned... I mean, we don't own it... we're, the bank owns it.

Q: Right. [Laughs].

KH: [Laughs]. Um, but buying, other than the farm. It was kind of like we traded, traded in our farmhouse and the money that we had from that, we were able to get another house.

Q: Do you miss communal living, at all?

KH: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yeah. We made a commitment that we would stay, stay here for five years. Stay in this house for five years, get my last daughter through school, 'course, interestingly now, she's not in school anymore, she's home schooling now. We took her out of the... so that, that doesn't matter, anymore. But we still have, we really have two more years that we're going to stay here.

Q: Cause you agreed to do it for that length of time?

KH: We agreed, and my oldest boy, he's in college working on his degree, and, and then the other ones, see, we're all still here. All of us are still... and we're just like, OK, this is going to be a launching pad for them, you know... have some...

Q: Yeah, [unintelligible]

KH: Stability. Yeah, so that they can, they're not going to have to worry about getting a place and all that. So, that's what we're doing. But we're actually buying land outside the farm, that other whole project you might have heard about?

Q: Oh, Rosamate [?]

KH: No, not Rosamate. [?]

Q: Oh.

KH: What's that called? Highland Woods? Woodland Lakes?

Q: Oh, I don't know about that.

TH: Well, the original place that we lived in Tennessee, other than the campgrounds and stuff, was a piece of land that was six or seven hundred acres, almost seven hundred, I think. And it was right next door to where the farm is now. As you cut in that long road...?

Q: Yes?

TH: Uh,...

KH: And turn the corner.

TH: It's on the, and it kind of made a right turn, well, that whole plot of land after you pass the houses, that was kind of woodsy on the right there, back, six or seven hundred acres, is the first place we lived, we landed.

Q: Oh, OK.

TH: Cause when we were at the campgrounds at Nashville, we spent about a month looking around the whole Tennessee, Kentucky area for some land, to have a community. We'd have scout groups out, two or three buses, in different directions for a few weeks, looking for someplace we could buy some land before we found the farm. And one of our people went into a music store to get some guitar strings and the lady that owned the music store understood who we were, because we were sort of the news, you know, around Nashville, right then, in some ways, and she said, the lady there said "Oh, I have some land down there in Lewis county, you can go down and stay down there until you find something, you know, that you could buy. So, it, it was a port in storm, you know. We couldn't stay in the Army Corps of Engineers campgrounds for too much longer.

KH: Yeah, so, um, one of the things, I think, that kind of started bonding people, once again, on the farm was an environmental consciousness. After the changeover. And, um, the land that we got, you know, that the farm sits on now, one of the attractive things about it was that it was backed up against all this -

TH: Thousands and thousands...

KH: Thousands of timber-companies owned land that nobody had done anything with for a long time, looked like "Oh, we'll just back into this natural setting." Well, the, the timber companies started getting kicked out of California and so started harvesting all their stuff and so people on the farm started really coming together and trying to prevent that, and one of the tactics has been buy land.

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Q: Buy land, yeah.

KH: Just buy land.

Q: Yeah.

KH: So that original piece, that six hundred, seven hundred acres was coming up for sale. The timber company wanted to buy it, but one, two or three of the women on the farm just amazingly, in a very short time,...

TH: Like one weekend.

KH: Got, called people all over the country, and got people to put in money and set up some type of corporation so that now...

Q: So, they could buy it.

KH: We are, we are buying that land.

Q: That's so great!

KH: It is.

TH: Two or three hundred thousand dollars, and they managed to pull it together on a weekend.

Q: God, that's incredible.

KH: It is. And most of the people just said...

Q: Only the farm could pull that off, I think. That's great.

KH: It was just, yeah, we were just mind-blown when we heard about it. Cause we had just left, and then we got these, you know, messages saying "Oh, you want to buy some land." Gee, didn't we just leave there, you know?

Q: So, you bought into this?

KH: Yeah, but it was like coming back for a 7-11... there was like six tracts like, which was like "Oh, boy." We just got into it.

Q: And this is Highland Acres, is that what it's called?

TH: They just gave it that name.

KH: Yeah.

TH: Highland Woods or something like that.

KH: I can't remember, cause it was really the Mark [?] farm, it was always the Mark farm, because those were the original owners that let us stay there. We just always called it the Mark farm. But now it's, we're, some people have bought their tracts, you know, their individual tracts, but nobody's living there or doing anything. Mostly it was just, "Yeah, let's save it from the timber companies" and well, who knows what'll happen. You know, maybe we'll give it to our kids, maybe they'll start something.

TH: They told us that, when they were in the office dealing with the realtor, the timber company people were in the next office waiting to see what would happen.

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Q: [Laughs] Oh man, that's such a great story. So, are you thinking you might move back there and build, build something? You don't know.

TH: I don't know.

KH: We're paying every month on it.

TH: It's just three, four acres.

KH: Yeah, I hope so, actually, to you know, probably not to live there all the time, but to have a little something there. And then, you know, we'd be part of the farm, but we wouldn't be part of all the other stuff that goes on.

Q: Right, sure.

KH: One of the things that, unless they change it, a current thing is that um, OK, you own your house, but you don't own the land. You know, it's a land trust. But if you leave, like, when we left, if you want to, like go travel around for a while, you have to pay half of your monthly dues. Just to keep services. I'm not exactly sure why. We had somebody renting... she paid, but we still had to pay, too. She paid for us, is how it worked out. But that kind of always irked me, because one of the things we thought about when we went back was, we'll get a land, we'll get a base, and then, cause we want to travel. And then we'll, I guess you can tell we've done a lot already. But, you know, we'd kind of like to go out of the United States and go other places, but have something to come back to, but it just didn't seem... cause we were always on a shoestring, you know.

Q: Would you want to do service-type work, like Plenty type work in Central America or something?

KH: Yeah, actually we have had an opportunity to do some of that since we've been out here. But it's, I just got back from Nicaragua about two and a half weeks ago, I guess.

Q: Wow, what were you doing there?

KH: I was working with a group here in Austin called Technica. Actually, they're in New York, too. And, uh, we were building some classrooms for the central Sandinista Trajabadores, the women's section, labor union section. And Thomas had done it two years previous. But I, you know, we couldn't both go, so...

Q: Was it a good experience?

KH: Oh yeah, it was wonderful to just, you know, that, I'd been in Guatemala for, um, ten days or something with, actually she's, she got, she married, she's a Guatemalan Indian, and she married one of the Plenty people.

Q: Maria?

KH: Maria.

Q: And Luis?

KH: And Louie.

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February 24, 1996

TH = Thomas, KH = Karen

Q: Louie? OK. Yeah.

KH: Yeah, yeah. And she's one of my good friends.

Q: OK, yeah. I got their number, too.

KH: And so, I went with her. She's just coming, she should be back, she should be back right now.

Q: Oh, OK.

KH: From Guatemala.

Q: Oh, OK. Cause I called, and I guess talked to their son, and he said she was still in Guatemala, so I just wrote them off for interviews, but maybe I can, maybe I can do one with them.

TH: If she's not too tired, or anything, you can probably reach her.

Q: OK, yeah, great.

TH: They, they, Louie said they'd be back at noon today. They took the bus all the way to Guatemala and back.

Q: Oh, wow. [Laughs]

TH: Usually she flies, but she decided to ride the bus.

Q: That's be a long trip.

KH: Cheaper. I'm curious who it is, who else you going to be interviewing?

Q: Um, let's see here. Um, Stephanie Blevins?

KH: Oh, yeah.

Q: Um, Nancy Butler...

KH: Uh huh.

Q: Um, and hopefully, Nan [?] Hannis, I guess that's her name?

KH: Oh, uh huh.

Q: But she's, she's pretty busy with that cafe, so I don't know if I'll be able to.

KH: Yeah, right.

Q: And then Brenda Smith.

KH: Yeah.

Q: And then I had down Maria and Louis. So, maybe them. [Laughs]. I don't know. Yeah. That's my list.

KH: Well, cool.

Q: So, just, um, some sort of final questions about, you know, what you think of communal living and, like, I don't know quite what to ask, but just um...

KH: Well, you put all your money into one pile... that...

TH: [Unintelligible] like the lifestyle?

Q: Yeah, stuff like, sort of economic. What do, what do you think about that and is that something that you want to go back to, I guess? [Pause]

TH: Sure, to a degree. Because I personally feel that the strict capitalistic philosophy is a disaster as much as the strict communist philosophy.

KH: Yeah.

TH: But that there has to be a blend between the two to create stability within the world. You know, they talk about how horrible communism is, but capitalism has been as much if not worse, a disaster for the planet as anything that ever has existed. And you know, a lot of these things that they call democracies are just, aren't. Just sort of capitalistic puppet regimes.

KH: Yeah, I think...

TH: You know, we have to have a way of living that's, that has its socialistic and its entrepreneurial spirit blended, otherwise this thing can never work. It's just going to be worse and worse and worse.

Q: And do you think the farm kind of captured those things? That kind of socialism but also the entrepreneurial spirit, as well?

TH: It's getting more into that direction, I think. I think, for a while it tried to unload as much of its socialism as it could through the changeover, cause it went out with everything else, you know. Many people left, as [inaudible].

Q: Yes.

TH: So, the warnings that were going out, like don't throw out the baby with the bathwater, you know? [Pause] So...

KH: Never were, yeah, now there's much more of a cooperative spirit...

TH: As people get to know each other...

KH: ...and economic arrangement, too, I think, and we're co-ops. Yeah, I like the co-op, model. You probably know more about that than I do, but...

TH: It's really, you can't be so cold as two systems, you know. Cause as people get to know each other, and get to appreciate each other, it becomes part of your life, rather than just a system. You know what I mean? You have... the systems are only people trying to work together, if we just have a competitive one, that doesn't breed friendship, really, it just breeds a lot of animosity. But if you're forced into a socialistic one, then you might be doing things with people you really can't stand.

Q: Yeah.

KH: [Unintelligible].

TH: Then you get to know people, and you realize that they need your help, and you need theirs, and this is an interdependent world, not a, one of dichotomies. Yeah, I think people need their own, to make

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their own choices, too. Like on the farm, when we were so communal, and there was not much money, it's like, well, you know, there's a little bit of toilet paper, here's a little bit of sugar this week, and...

Q: Oh yeah.

KH: I remember not having any, any shoes for about three weeks, just wearing house, you know, those real flimsy slippers, and you know it was, you just didn't feel like you had much, uh, voice in how things were going. How much control, and all.

Q: What did you like best about your life at the farm?

KH: I just, I think, um, having the extended family, yeah, definitely.

Q: Was it a good place to be bringing up your kids?

KH: Well, we didn't really bring up our kids there, because we had...

Q: Because you moved around so much?

KH: Because we moved around so much... but certainly, they are, feel very connected to the farm. Now Leona only lived there, well, her first year of life, and then the three and a half years that we went back. Um, I think in a lot of ways it was, and is, well, certainly, because you have all that freedom... all that land in which to explore, you don't have the fear of somebody coming in and kidnapping or rape, or shooting, you know, all those things that, like, I'd get real nervous if she's out, you know, at night, with the dog, or walking with a friend, or something, just because when nighttime comes, you know, then you're, we're conditioned that way, too, I'm sure, to be afraid. Um, also the kids just made tremendous bonds with each other, and they had, like they know each other, in a way, even my kids know kids from there that they didn't spend time with. Just because there's a tradition. You know, there's a belief system.

TH: Yeah, there's bonds that have then come apparent between the kids that are just incredible.

KH: Yeah, that never even saw each other.

TH: They were brothers and sisters in ways that we didn't realize. And they have that mutual thing about... and we feel, actually, we feel that with the adults that we were close to, too. There are ones that don't live there anymore are all trying to do some things that are important and worthwhile...

KH: Well, not everybody does, but...

TH: No.

KH: But a lot, yeah.

TH: We know of, of, there's a network, you know.

Q: Yeah. Like the Farm Net news and all.

TH: And on the computer there's a mail network that people write letters about what's important and what's going on. We know about a lot of different people.

KH: You know, Joy's not doing that any longer.

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Q: Well, yeah. I, I tried... I thought she was still living here, and I tried to call her and then someone told me she'd moved to California.

KH: Yeah, with her parents. So, they, they're helping her out. And she's given up the Farm Net news.

Q: Oh, she has? OK.

KH: And the woman who originally started it has now got it back again.

Q: Oh, wow. OK.

KH: She had branched off and just was doing something for the kids called Whirling Rainbow. Putting all-

Q: Yeah, yeah. I know that.

KH: Yeah, and so now she's combining the two.

Q: And does she live on, on the farm, or...

KH: No, she lives in California.

TH: She lives in Nevada City.

Q: Oh, OK.

KH: She lived in San Juan.

TH: Well, that's right next to...

KH: Is it right next to it? Yeah, so that's, that's exciting. Yeah. Um, that was definitely one of the reasons that we went back, too, was in '88, was cause it felt like the kids were getting kind of caught up into this outer scene here, and didn't, didn't remember their roots on the farm. And we wanted them to be able to experience that, remember that.

Q: So, when you went back to the farm, did they go to the farm school?

KH: Uh huh. Yeah. For a while. And then, they ended up going to Summertown and that was a reason why we felt like well, why don't we just take them back to Austin.

Q: Cause that school wasn't very good?

KH: Yeah, it's interesting though... that's what I thought, that it wasn't really that good of a school, a little hick school. But then my middle boy ended up dropping out of high school, and he has said, that, uh, actually he remembers Summertown as being really nice, that the teachers were really nice, and when he got back here, he had long hair and right away he was branded, and he couldn't get beyond that image, and I think that was very detrimental to him.

Q: That's too bad. I would have thought the teachers here would be more open-minded than that, somehow.

KH: Oh, well...

TH: I'm sure there are some...

KH: Oh, certainly there are some, you know, but there's 500,000...

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Q: Yeah, this is a huge town, isn't it?

KH: Yeah, it's gotten, just, really big. It's gotten a lot bigger than when we were first here.

Q: Do you have any feel for what the glue is that's kept the farm together for so long? I mean, I realize that it's different now than it was when it was fully communal, but it still exists, and it's just pretty incredible that it's lasted as long as it has. Any ideas on why?

KH: Well, I think it's probably the spiritual foundation that we started with. That was alw... that was definitely the most important thing, and that encompassed, not lofty ideas, but treating, treating the person next to you as your brother. With respect. Being honest, um, loving each other and helping each other. And so, so many people had that experience with each other that it's just so much stronger than you find in casual, or yeah, in...

TH: In a neighborhood like this.

KH: Oh yeah, we don't really...

TH: We know this guy. We say hi to these people. We wave to that lady. I'll talk to that guy a couple times, and we're...

Q: Yeah, it's different in the...

TH: Right. And everybody else, you know, is at best a wave.

KH: Yeah, like it's hard to, to really find friends at, anywhere near that level of intimacy, you know.

Q: Yeah. Ina Mae said to me, she thought maybe part of the clue was the home birthing, and that that kind of brought people together in sharing and sort of transitional life-moments and things?

KH: Oh, absolutely.

Q: Do you think so?

KH: Sure.

Q: And then I suppose you also, was there home death going on as well, I mean, did people die at the farm, and then you'd celebrate with funerals and things?

KH: Yeah, I think that's happened more recently. There's been some older people... not that were original farm members, but that came, because I remember hearing about this, how the death of this older man Joe, I don't know if you heard anything about it?

Q: No, I don't think so.

KH: Well, I, we knew him when we lived back on the farm. Um, and, you know, he came there to die. With, he and his wife, that's where they wanted to die. He heard about it on Phil Donahue.

Q: [Laughs]. That's great.

KH: And then the stories that we heard after being back here was, they were just really beautiful about how people would go over and sing with him and, you know, just share that time...

TH: Yeah, I think the first deaths were kind of sheltered experiences. It was, there was a few people that died in the early times, they were segregated to a group that they [unintelligible]. Sometimes the person was, the body was taken away back to their original homes, or...

KH: Yeah, now we have a little graveyard there.

TH: Yeah, so now there's a graveyard, and, depending on how well you were acquainted or what your interests are, you can go to the funerals and stuff.

KH: Oh, I think...

TH: And there was a lot of [Unintelligible... KH and TH are speaking at once].

KH:... Does, I think. Oh yeah, the marriages.

TH: There was a lot of marriages that happened.

Q: Yeah.

TH: It's a solemn experience. [Pause]. There was quite a few different types of experiences that welded us together. That made those, made that glue be real, you know?

KH: [Unintelligible]. Yeah.

Q: You know, I've talked to a number of people who lived communally when they were young and then no longer do now, and then, sort of talk about it nostalgically like it's something they might want to do when they get older. Um, do you think that communal living is, is something, that, um, is beneficial for an older person?

KH: Oh, absolutely, oh yeah.

TH: Oh yeah, the support that an older person gets...

KH: And needs.

TH:... It either doesn't exist or it's, if a, if an older person happens to be a very outgoing person, they might be able to create a network that supports them as they get very old. But if they don't, where do they go? Who takes care of them?

KH: Yeah, there's a lot of loneliness in this society. And the older people feel the brunt of that, I think. And the kids are gone, different states, yeah, I think it'd be wonderful. And there are, there are arrangements like that, you know, if you have money for older people now. And that, they seem to be, retirement communities, you know. But if you don't have money, it's pretty hard.

Q: Well I think Rosamonte [?] sounds like kind of a neat thing.

KH: Yeah, yeah, it sure does.

Q: Combining retirement and birthing and stuff.

KH: Yeah, yeah, it sure does.

Q: Well, great. I don't want to take up any more of your time.