Gordon: That's a yoga name from years ago. And, okay, our community name was Church of the Creative, taken from first hexagram in I'Ching. And founded in Fall of 1970, in, outside of Crestwell, Oregon, and I think it's called Lost Valley Rd., I'll try to get the address later. And, let's see, where am I?

Q: You just said it was on Lost Valley Rd. in Crestwell Oregon.
A: It's west about 7 miles and then south on a side road, which I think is called Lost Valley Rd, but I may be wrong. I've got some places mixed up. I've been there actually, in the last three years or so. It was started by a group of people who came together at a summer faire in Eugene, the summer of 1970, a bunch of hippies. And the core group was from an existing community called Hungry Hill, which was in a rented house in Crestwell. And they had found this land, and were looking for other recruits to help pay for it. And so I signed on. I had been living in another community down in Prescon, Cottage Groove, we called Blocks Farm at that time. And so, the people, I'll try to give you names here: Tom Mitchell, Gail Mitchell, Janet Strobel, Al Strobel, Dick Stewart, they all lived with or associated with Hungry Hill, and then added on was myself and Billy Bradford, a Black guy who was distinctive in this situation, he worked for the railroad; and maybe one other person that I might be forgetting. But Billy and his girlfriend, Velvet, who's last name I don't know. But anyway, so we ended up buying this 40 acres of land, which was sort of farmed out meadows and hills, and some timber but not much, but bordering on some beautiful timber land that has probably since been logged, and has a very nice creek running through it. We bought the land for $16,000 and started making payments on it. Then in addition, we rented the house next door, which belonged to a guy named Snively, and lived in that house for the next three years or so, two or three years, until I moved away in '72 in the fall. And a number of people of course came and added on and went away, many visitors and so on. The purpose of the community, it had a spiritual purpose, as best as we could understand "spiritual" at that point. We had been dabbling in various spiritual matters, and of course we were taking psychedelics. This was not a completely stoned out community, but definitely in step with the times, smoking pot and taking LSD, mesquine, and so on when available. So, we had spiritual wishes, at least. We would have sort of prayer circles and other kind of, solemn events. I often ended up being the focus person for those. There were a couple of children in the community -- Janet Strobel had a two year old at that point. When we moved into the house, I think that Gail Mitchell was pregnant. And she later became my lover and she and I took care of her kid, named Lily May. For some time, she and I lived in a tepee on the land itself, away from the house. And for the whole time, virtually the whole time I lived there, I did not live in the house, I lived out in the little out-building or slept out in the fields or something. We did do some development of the land, we built a driveway in, and a bridge across the creek, I think. At least a foot-bridge -- oh I know what we did. We built a heavy-duty rock driveway to go through a rather muddy, swampy area, to get to a parking area, and then we built a foot-bridge across the creek to go up into the land. And there was already a little cat road up in that direction. So several houses got built during the time I was there. Bill Bradford built one, and Dick Stewart, and Al Strobel -- those were the 3 main houses that were built fairly soon after we moved there. Up on the land, so that after awhile, we didn't need the rented house anymore, and we eventually were kicked out of there, or moved out of there voluntarily, I can't remember which. We had a garden, up sort of sporadically. I attempted to put in an irrigation system, a gravity-flow irrigation system with some plastic pipe. We had a barn on the property. I don't think it's

still standing. And . . . we built a little bath house. That might give you a picture. Maybe you can ask me some questions.

Q: Yeah, I'd love to ask you some questions. How did the group get its name?
A: It's from the first hexagram of I'Ching.

Q: Okay, yeah, you said that. And was it incorporated?
A: No, what did we do? The proper thing to do would have been to get a non-profit status as an organization, because we had the idea of avoiding taxes and all that kind of stuff. I can't really remember whether we went ahead and did that or not, maybe we did. I'm just not sure. I don't think it ever saved us anything.

Q: So was the property in one person's name? Since it wasn't incorporated?
A: There wasn't a … I don't remember how we did that either. Maybe in those days you could get a nonprofit together really fast, and we got it together and bought it in the organization's name. Now much later, probably . . . in the early '80's, some of the people who had lived there sued the people who were living there, saying that they had a partial interest in the land, and they should be paid off for what they had contributed, or the partial interest. And so they had a nasty little law suit. Al Strobel was involved, Dick Stewart. Dick Stewart was kind of on the good guys' side, the side that said, "Anybody can live here, and nobody has a financial interest in it." A guy named Toby, I can't remember what his real name is, his last name was Tobiason. And … anyway, it was a bunch of people. If anybody really wanted to search this down, they could go find that law suit, that would give them a lot of names and lawyers, and all that kind of thing to track things down. But finally what happened was that the people who lived at the church ended up having to pay -- they had to take out a loan essentially to pay these people off who had sued. To this day, it makes me mad that they won that suit, or at least got forced into a settlement. So the people who live there now, a guy who's last name is Zimmerman, lives in Al Strobel's old house, and he knows all about that. If you get a chance, he'd be the one to give you the later history of this place, and the fact that its operating today as a very cheap place to live and kind of a very cooperative, and probably only about 3 families, but a very nice rural spot, relatively undeveloped, so it's for people who don't mind a rough situation, have to carry water and mud and so on. I can't remember Mr. Zimmerman's first name right now, but I've talked to him, I've gone there several times in the last 10 years to talk to him. And things seem to be stable now, and they've got their legal situation straightened up, supposedly.

Q: Did you guys eat together?
A: Yeah. We generally had communal meals. Because when we were living in the rented house during the first year, probably, um, then there was only one kitchen, so we did eat together, and I don't remember how happy that was. I think probably we were trying to do quite a bit of communal eating, yeah.

Q: Did you follow any particular sort of diet, were you vegetarian?
A: I know that Billy and Velvet, for example, were strict vegetarians. I think Billy was for sure, he's a Seventh Day Adventist. But I think probably others ate meat when they wanted to. That was not the idealism we came around.

Q: How about financial arrangements? Were you guys income-sharing at all? Or did each person just put a certain amount of money in the pot?
A: Well, we were probably -- one thing we did in terms of the, the main thing we had to pay was the land payment, and then the rental on the house. So for the land payment, I should say, for the initial purchase of the land, people made contributions. So some of them were fairly large, $1,000, $500, and others were small. We got together maybe $2500 we needed for a down payment. And then, I don't remember how we made the land payment, but probably by taking equal shares from people who were there for any length of time. We didn't do formal membership type of things. So it was, I would say, semi-intentional community, in that we wanted to cooperate and live together, but there wasn't a sort of blood-oath required. Basically, if you came there and people liked you and you wanted to stay, you probably could stay. You'd just have to find a place to live. We probably exercised some control over who was going to build what, where. We didn't want people just starting to dig a lot of holes in the ground and leave them. That's a problem.

Q: Would you have regular meetings?
A: I think we must've had some kind of meetings, but I don't know that they were regular. This was a fairly raggedy community, I would say, compared to others I've heard about. People were not so serious about the ideals of cooperativeness, like there wasn't really a political component here, sort of a feeling that I imagine there was at a number of other communities, a feeling of a revolutionary way of doing things, and we've got to do it right and be very successful to prove our point. This was much more to provide people with a reasonable place to live and be able to be communal, act in a communal manner, live together, eat together, that kind of thing. It didn't have a lot of ideology.

Q: Was there any sort of leader or any governing structure?
A: Well, there were certainly a sort of circle of principal, people who had been longer term residents or founders: myself, Dick Stewart, Jan, Al, and Billy. Then later, as things evolved, as some of us left like myself, and others came and stayed permanently, then it shifted so that the governing group would change. But I don't remember that we had anything -- we certainly didn't have any formal board of directors or a president or vice-president or any of that stuff.

Q: What did people do for work? Did you guys have cottage industries?
A: I don't think anybody made money there. I'm trying to remember any kind of workshops or anything that got set up, and I don't remember any. So it's all dependent on off-site work. For example, Billy had a full-time job with the railroad. So he was an extremely energetic guy and could hold down a job and commuting, and community stuff, girlfriend, and everything. Al … I don't know. I think I was still living off savings at that point. I had only dropped out of work in San Francisco in '69, so … but we had cars, and

we'd go to Eugene. Usually Eugene, to go shopping at the health food store. But yeah, people had jobs. Some people had jobs, some didn't, and I don't remember the pattern of that.

Q: Did you guys have any rules about behavior, like "no smoking," "no drinking," anything like that?
A: No. It was a funny thing. In those rural communes in those days, people are kind of poor, don't have much cash to go buy things, so you could be a big hero at one of these communities if you brought over a case of beer. No, we didn't have any -- this was not a Puritan community, it was not a self-denial scene. We probably would have, I mean, we didn't have hard-drug dope addicts there, so we probably would've frowned on that, although I don't know. We might not have. I would say no, we didn't have any rules about personal behavior.

Q: How did you get along with your neighbors or the surrounding community?
A: Well, I'd say that most of us tried hard to do that. Made some efforts to contact the neighbors and be friendly and so on. Of course, I'm sure they were pretty wary of us, since we were a pretty weird lot. But, generally speaking, we didn't have any wars with our neighbors or difficulties.

Q: Were you ever hassled by the sheriff or anything like that?
A: No. Not in the time I was there. We did have a fire, though, that probably got quite a few people mad at us, because at that time they still weren't in the stage where they charge you if you light your own fire. But anyway, just a side issue here, there was this hilly property with a big, rocky outcrop at the top. Rattlesnakes lived there, which are pretty rare in Oregon, but in isolated spots, there are rattlesnake colonies. And so, this was an issue in the community, because people had children and they were running around, and rattlesnakes would come down the hill, go for the water. So we'd encounter a rattlesnake on the trail once in a while. And nobody ever got hurt. But there was always a debate about what we should do about this horrible thing. My solution was to catch the rattlesnakes with snake-catching equipment, and take them somewhere else. But one day Jan got really upset about her 2 or 3 year old running around on the trails, and maybe they'd seen a rattlesnake. So she kind of freaked out and got and -- the result was that her husband, Al, got a can of gas and a gun and went over there and started hassling the rattlesnakes and ended up burning about 5 acres, 3 acres of grassland. Up the hill, it was a bad day for a fire. So the bulldozer had to come and bulldoze out a fire trail, and put the fire out. So it was very embarrassing, and it was not good for our reputation.

Q: Did you guys have any sorts of agreements about child rearing?
A: I imagine we had a feeling that the children were partially the responsibility of everybody, and certainly, kind of like an extended family, but it wouldn't be to the point where someone who wasn't interested in paying attention to the children would be forced to. For the more core members of the community, there was only the one child there for awhile, and then the new baby, that was Gaven, Al and Jan's boy. He was pretty young, but he was also pretty dependent. He was an insecure child, probably because his dad was pretty harsh, well, unpredictable. And his mom sort of protected him, and his mom's kind of timid, and I think he picked up a lot off of that. I think that there wasn't a lot of co-parenting going on, because Gaven was pretty much hanging on to Jan all the time. He wasn't really running around freely and enjoying all the grown-ups that much.

Q: Were the kids homeschooled, or did they go out to school?
A: Well, during the time I was there, there were no school-aged children.

Q: Were people artistic at all?
A: Yeah, some dabbling. But again, there was not, I mean somebody might have got into making bead necklaces or something like that for awhile, but I think that maybe Velvet, maybe she made some stuff for awhile, but I don't remember specifically. It was certainly not a communal project. We didn't have any cottage industry or anything.

Q: Did you guys have any regular routines or rituals that you would do together? I think you mentioned prayer meetings before?
A: Yeah, and I'm pretty vague on that. Maybe we did have something like on Sunday mornings we would get together for an hour or something and talk. But, I'm not, I don't have a specific memory of that. What I remember is that I was putting myself in the position of being kind of the spiritual leader, although, I mean I would chuckle at that a little right now. Probably I was the most oriented that way, reading, catching up on yoga, and I'Ching, other kinds of things like that. So, it was . . . so we, yeah, I think occasional prayer meeting the reasonable thing to say.

Q: Was there a sort of person that was attracted to living there? Like did you have common characteristics?
A: Well, I mean, this was definitely a rural community. So it had to be somebody who didn't mind mud and rough living conditions, relatively rough living conditions. Lack of conveniences. So, and typical of those rural situations that don't have a lot of infrastructure, you tend to have the situation where the men want to be there, and the women want to go to town. So the women hang around for a year or so and then they get disgusted either with him or with the rough lifestyle of "I've got to wash dishes all the time, and I've got to carry the water, and I don't have any help," move into town and live a different life. So they had to be willing to put up with a rough lifestyle, and appreciate nature. I think that was one of our major focuses, was to respect the land, and to take care of it. We did an okay job, I would say. I was probably the one who was acting most like the park ranger, and others wanted to build roads here and there, dig holes, and make -- you know, people would say, "Well, I can't get my car in here, I've got to do this, I've got to do that." And, "Why do you have to get your car in there?" So I would tend to be on the side of preserving, and anti-development.

Q: What was the best thing for you in living there, the thing you liked the most?
A: I think the major thing for me was quiet, and a rural place. I had just come, two hops back, well -- the previous two, well, the place, when I moved to Oregon, I moved to Kiesely's [?] place in Pleasant Hill, and that was a pretty jazzy, busy scene. Almost a little urban enclave in rural situation, in a farm situation. So by the time I got to the Church of the Creative, I was really interested in spending time in nature, being a vegetarian, you know, nature appreciation was a big thing for me. And being -- so that was, taking care of the land, and just being there, and not having it be noisy or full of machinery. Did you ask what brought people together, what was the common thing?

Q: No, well actually, I was wondering what was the best part of living in the community for you?
A: Oh, the best part. I would say, the nature side. Having access to a large piece of land that was not being used intensively. And then secondly, the kind of companionship and the challenges of communal living. I felt more at home there than in the previous places I had lived, just because it was a little more stable, and less jazzy, more down-home. But eventually I left, partly due to conflicts, and . . . partly just wanting to get away from the West Coast, go to an even more rural place, which I ended up going to Montana.

Q: And what was the worst part? What was the hardest part of living in community?
A: One bad part was people friends would arrive from California, or some place, and they would bring with them a big dog, or quantities of drugs, their really out of place lifestyles, and it could be very disruptive to what we were doing. Another one was that I got into a triangle with a guy, this is Tom Mitchell, known as Mitch. His wife didn't want to be his wife anymore, I don't know if they had really gotten a divorce or not, but we got together, and he was jealous and upset about that. So there was some crazy schemes. So that kind of, it's kind of like after 1972, it was over for me, and for her, and so we both were, that summer of '72, were looking around for new adventures. And we both ended up in Mazula, Montana.

Q: Did you live in community since Church of the Creative?
A: Not as much fitting the criteria as you would say, as that one. I lived in a, in Montana, in the Jocco [?] Canyon area, I lived sort of in communal relationship with a number of people, but separate houses, just people around the area. So I guess you'd call it a community rather than a commune.

Q: Now you said that Church of Creative is still going on?
A: Yeah, the land is there, there are people there who think of themselves as successors to the original concept, and who are striving to it. The land is pretty much unchanged, and it's a very nice place. But it's rough. It's not slick.

Q: Well, I'm curious, did you have electricity?
A: At the rental house we had electricity. I don't think there's electricity -- we had a small part on one side of the creek where the road was, and then on the other side of the creek, was where most of the land was, and I don't think there's electricity over there.

Q: And you said you had to carry water, so you didn't have running water or anything?
A: Right.

Q: So did you use out-houses?
A: Yeah.

Q: And then did you burn wood for heat.
A: Yes.

Q: Did you have a well?
A: I'm trying to think what they've got there now. We had a well at the rental house. I think they're still carrying water. You keep things that primitive, and then lots of people don't want to live there. So I think that's why it's really that stable, is there's a few people who want to be there, and it's not gotten crowded or overrun.

Q: I think you said you built a bathhouse?
A: Yeah, there was a little building where maybe we had a stove in it, a sauna in it, I'm not sure. There's been, there was another bath house built later, the old bath house is still there, but a mess, and just used for storage. There was a new bath house built, but I can't remember what status it's in when I was there last, whether it's still there or not. But yeah, probably what we would do is to go take a sauna, and then go jump in the creek.

Q: What would you do for things like laundry? Would you take it to town?
A: [no answer]

Q: Do you consider Church of the Creative a success?
A: Yeah, it was successful in a limited way. For me, it gave me a pretty good place to live for a couple of years, and . . . I think it definitely a success in that it has lasted, continued on this way. All the way through now. That's 26 years.

Q: It's kind of unusual for communities at that era to last to today. Any feeling for the glue?
A: Well, there's nobody there now who was there before. So it's been a kind of -- I think the glue is the availability of the land. And the, somehow that it's avoided having been developed, so that the attraction is the primitive lifestyle and the ability to do that for very little money. Some people are attracted to that. I wish I could remember Zimmerman's first name.

Q: Are there things that you learned there that you bring forward to your life today?
A: Well yeah, I mean I got, I think through reading and talking with people I got introduced to yoga and meditation there. And then went on to join a yoga society in Mazula, and get initiated and practice pretty heavily for about three years. So it was really the beginning of my spiritual life, which is now a strong part of my world.

Q: Where there other communes in the area at all?
A: Yes, there were. There was a Christian community named Shiloh. There was another one called Crow Farm. And we would not have had much to do with Shiloh, just because of the Christian nature, but, or they wouldn't want to have anything to do with us probably, but Crow Farm was kind of a companion community. It was a little bit far away, maybe 20 miles, probably an hour's drive over back roads. But they were more a testosterone community, they were into macho feats and weirding everybody out, stuff like that. They were pretty funny. And pretty entertaining. They liked to gross people out. They lasted a long time too. I don't know what their history has been, but –

Q: Any chance they're still going?
A: I don't know. But they'd be well-known in the Eugene area.

Q: Would you guys have big parties or anything like that?
A: Well, we would sometimes, and we would invite a bunch of people over, but I don't have a real clear picture of that.

Q: I think that's pretty much my list of questions.