

Interview with Linda Fleming

Interviewer: Tim Miller

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**Q:** We're at Libre, and this is Linda Fleming.

**A:** Well we were talking about what the community becomes, where the community started. I think we've all gone through incredible thoughts about trying to maintain what it was we initially planned, what we wanted this place to be, think back at the overriding mission. But of course, the world changes, we change, we're all at different times in our lives. I was 22, and I'm around 50 now, so there's a big difference. So we're just beginning, actually, I was just talking to two of the members of Libre today, starting to write down our thoughts about how we would like to augment the structure, how we would like to articulate what we want the group to be like. I have a fear of just people just sort of dying off or walking away or disappearing, and the land becoming -- I don't know it would become necessarily a great place. I think there's a certain amount of responsibility involved in maintaining it, and that often comes from having built it. It's been my experience that in a lot of cases, people come later, who don't have a stake in doing it, who just sort of walk into an already built house with a water system, road system, that it's very easy to not take care of such a thing. I have plans -- I know when we first started this place, it was very clear in our minds -- me, Dean, Peter, and Judy, this was a place for artists. And that this would be a place that would be a headquarters for artists. We probably all have very different memories of this moment in time, what Libre was to be or become. But that we were not going to be farmers, we were not going to be a commune per se, where we all lived in one house and all shared all of our things, that we all different needs, and we all had different ways of going about creating our work. We were all very dedicated to being artists. Judy was a film maker, Peter was a writer and Dean and I were both artists, Dean a painter, and I very much going toward sculpture. And so we had thought this would be a place to bring other artists to come and work, we could build studios so other artists could come here and work, and we could then go to other centers with our work, and take it for what that was. So we saw this more as a place to come and go from. And that change enormously over time, because there were a lot of things going on around the world at that time. There were a lot of people with ideas about communal living. It was sweeping the nation. And I was completely unaware of it. I knew of Drop City. As I said, I was 21. But I think, Peter was somewhat in touch with other communities, Dean knew a little. They were older, they were in their 30's. But I was completely taken by surprise to see that there was this whole movement, people were doing what we were doing, but in different ways, with different ideas and attitudes. People would come here and say they wanted to join Libre, but they were eight people and wanted to build one big house, and they all wanted to move in and share everything. Or they'd come here, and say, "You guys aren't communal enough, you have to do such and such," and we'd say, "That's not what we're doing. We're trying to create a place where working on our art is the main focus of our lives, wherever that takes us, and whatever that does. The structure of this place is to allow that to occur. And we help each other as much as we can, but we have our own work." So it has always been very individual. And then we got involved in farming, and we got involved in -- we had a cow for a period of time. Of course, it's impossible to have one cow, because then you get a calf. And we had chickens and pigs, and a big community farm. Then we had individual gardens. We've tried a lot of different things. But most of that was all in the first six or seven or eight years. And it's pretty much been a steady state for last 20. It's interesting, when I think about it, because so much happened in those first few years that they were like, twenty five years. And then the next twenty or so, we all sort of got into rhythms of our lives. And a lot of artists who have come here, since went on, it was too rural for them. A lot of people who've come here to stay are not artists, who work in various ways with the

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land. Someone raising horses in a little place nearby, and she's now going to school, she's been here for 20-something years. She's going to Fort Collins, she's the oldest living vet student. I started really needing more input. That's one thing that I really missed here was input. Early on there were lots of people coming through. Lots of artists, lots of thinkers. It was a very interesting time in the world, and people would fly in from Europe and rent a car and come down here, fly to Denver, just to talk about new ideas of community, ideas of restructuring how we live. It was never my recollection, never meant to be a utopian place at all. We all realized really early on, we were just normal people. And every time someone tried to take over, and there were some strong personalities, I was the first president. It was an interesting thing, in that I then was the public face in the community here. And we had some legal disputes. But it was actually great in the sense that the old law of the West requires that everyone be polite to a woman. So I could use that quite a bit. So it was one moment in time when it was really advantageous to be a woman. But there were these strong personalities. And we never, we really tried to then work out whatever disputes. Everyone had a strong sense of what direction we should go, what decisions we should make. And trying to come to some consensus, was often difficult. But certainly interesting. I learned more here than I think I've ever learned anywhere else, trying to start civilization from the beginning, when of course you're not starting from scratch, but it's sort of like a thought experiment, the way businesses have thought experiments. Things that you couldn't possibly do, but that you could focus in a certain way, and then you could think through something. But to imagine, "Okay, if we're starting from scratch, what kind of government would we have? What's a government that really would work? How do you preserve the collective ideals and not have majority rule?" Otherwise you could have 30 people that could be really unhappy about what's going on. So, we can up with a process of consensus. So it's a very conservative government in the sense of, not certainly right-wing, but conserving what exists. That in order to change anything, everybody has to agree to that change. And that can be maddening, but only if you have an agenda other than what's going on. It seems to really promote the kind of constant of what already exists. And that's now something that's really interesting in terms [unintelligible], because we all have to agree if we want to change anything. But um, those first years, it was, we started with four people, and um, I'm sure you've heard all the stories about this land. We found someone who would buy the land for us, surprisingly agreed to do such a thing, it was so audacious. We went to Rick. We were thinking about buying land, in Peter Rabbits kind of dome. It was a double-hedron at Drop City. Peter was living at Drop City, and Dean and I were living in a little house over on a bridge over a stream, in a place called Veheal [?], which is west of Trinidad [?]. We had just come out from New York, and there was a lawyer we met in Denver who said, we'd come out essentially just to spend a year, and we wanted to find a big space to work in, and just be quiet. I was getting a lot of offers to show, and I was just 21. I was kind of frightened, I had no idea what I was doing. And Dean was 33, and had a career behind him, to some degree, and was really needing to think about what was going on. So we decided to leave the city. And we met a lawyer in Denver who had his own family homestead. He was a Veheal, and the Vehehal Land Grant is one of the largest Spanish land grants in this part of the country. And it was his family, he was a direct descendant. There were a lot of Veheals, but he was a direct descendant, and he had this teeny little piece left, it was just a few hundred acres on the Purgatory River. So Dean always like to say we had our vigil on the Purgatory River, about nine months. We'd just come from New York, we were both really just wild from being in the city. The country was something I couldn't really spend any time in. I couldn't walk across the river

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without tripping and falling. There were cows. It seemed so exotic and wild, and we thought we were completely alone. And we lived in this little house, and there was a little road nearby. We had no idea that everybody was watching us because we were so strange. There were these two sisters who would walk past our house. They were really funny sisters, they were these old Spanish ladies, and they would make the sign of the cross when they passed our house, because they thought we were devil. And we would be frolicking in the stream naked, we had no idea anybody was around. It became really clear after a couple of months that we were lonely for people of like-mind. And Dean knew about Drop City, he knew it was nearby. So we went to visit. And that was very chaotic. It was nuts there. Just chickens and goats and people and babies running around. Lot of people babbling. It was pretty interesting. But a lot of really serious people, really interesting people. And at that point it had started to become a place where people were crashing, coming through, running away to this legendary place. We just met them around Thanksgiving I think, and then at Christmas they invited us to come because they were having a production. And we went. I don't remember his name, he was one of the original members, but anyway, he wrote a play, of the Christmas Story. And everybody was in it. It was the best experimental theater I've ever seen in my life. There was no audience. Everybody who was at Drop City was a participant. Since we showed up late and didn't live there, we became the narrators. It took place all over the whole land and all the different buildings -- the goat shed, and the big dome, the communal dome. And it was the Christmas story -- it was Mary and Joseph, looking for a place to stay. So they were coming, looking for a place to stay, so of course they had the meanest person at Drop City, who always turned people away, he was the one who was telling them there was no room, and they couldn't stay, "You can go stay in the chicken coop!" But it was the most brilliant kind of play-writing, because it was diabolic -- each person was themselves. And they agreed to say the lines, that was what was shocking to me. We were really just mesmerized by it, I think nobody had ever seen anything like it. They had no idea it was going to turn out that way. It wasn't the kind of thing you could ever advertise or invite people to. Because it required that everyone be really -- because it wasn't just audience participation, everybody lived there. So that was my first real introduction to Drop City. And then we became really good friends with Peter. Dean and I painted all the domes there. They had these little cabins that were -- then we realized, "What an audacious thing to do," and just sort of woke up early in the morning and started painting people's houses while they were inside sleeping. Made this artwork out of the whole place. Some people were upset, some people were very happy. But Peter was unhappy about the number of runaways. He was spending more time trying to take care of people than he was talking about things that interested him -- writing. Then we all began to realize that we had this similar vision: a place where you could be surrounded by people whose ideas were stimulating and exciting to you, there weren't a lot of distractions and interruptions, and everybody focused their time on allowing this to occur. And you wouldn't be dealing with a bunch of lame-o people, who were looking for thrills or running away from something. It was really trying to further thought. So then we started formulating an idea to start a community. And we had no resources, we had nothing. We didn't have four cents! But we kept planning. We'd have these meetings, and we'd write things down. And Peter said, "Well, there's this guy in New Mexico who's got a lot of money that he wants to give away. We should see him. I bet he'll give us the money." So simple. Well, it sounds kind of preposterous, but sure, let's go. So we went to New Buffalo, and met Rick Klein. And it turned out that I'd known Rick. I didn't know him well, we only knew each other to see each other and to say hello, from college. I had went to Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh,

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Pennsylvania, and Rick lived in Pittsburgh. He was slightly older than I, but he was involved, there was a group, this wonderful church of old women who, volunteers, this really sweet, upper-middle class old ladies who would cook a meal every Thursday night in this very fancy part of town, and it was a free dinner. And it was essentially to feed the poor. But of course, the poor people couldn't get to this part of town. It was only college students who could get to this part of town. So it became this really amazing college hang out, and then it became a program afterwards. We'd bring in poets and speakers, and there was an underground film, really interesting new avant-garde film showing every week. Rick was very involved in the structure of this social thing, the cultural program. So we saw each other at New Buffalo, it was only a couple years later, but it seemed like a lifetime. We were very surprised. So we spent a lot of time with him, and after everybody had gone to dinner, and several people had come to ask Rick for money, so they were kind hanging around to see what was going on. He'd already bought New Buffalo, and he was living there. He put a huge investment into New Buffalo, because land in New Mexico was quite expensive then.

**Q:** Is there quite a bit of land there?

**A:** It's a couple hundred acres. And I'm sure they paid a thousand, to guess. He put down a lot of money then. This was 1967, the winter of '67, '68. No, it was the fall of '67. So we talked about an ideal community, what it would be like, and how interesting it would be to structure such a thing. Individual houses, and studios, and people all weren't living together, but were sharing this common vision. We hadn't done hog. We couldn't ask him. Neither of us. It was me and Dean and Peter. Judy ... maybe Judy was there. But we couldn't ask him.

**Q:** Was it Anne?

**A:** No, Anne was later. Judy was Peter's wife when we first met him. And we couldn't do it. We talked about politics, we talked about crops, we talked about everything, but we couldn't ask him. It was horrible. It was getting later, and later. Everybody had gone to bed, Rick is yawning. But he just sat there with us, which was really remarkable. He wasn't slippery or jumpy, like, "Oh, they've come for my money, I'm leaving." He just sat there with us. And then finally, he said, "Well, that sounds really interesting. You find the land, and I'll buy it for you." He said, "But I've got to go to bed now." He just sort of walked away. And by then we were so tired, I think we'd driven down there that day, so we were just really exhausted. And we looked at each other and we said, "Did he really say that? Or did we just dream it up because we wanted it to be true?" And then we didn't want to bug him about it, so we left the next day, and we had no idea what that meant, "You find the land and I'll buy it." Did he mean 1 acre? How much money? We had no idea, so we thought, "Well, let's just see if we can find the right land." We looked a lot down by Trinidad, because we were all living there. We found a place sort of at the base of Fisher's Peak that was pretty interesting, but very remote, and very rugged, really wild country. In fact, we got our truck stuck, there was such a dip in the road that our truck got stuck across the dip. It was really hard to get out. And Dean and Peter were obsessed with -- every time we'd look at a piece of land, they'd plan out every detail of what it would be like. Before we would even find out what the terms were, what the price was, and that made me really crazy. Because I wanted to know more about what was available. And also, there were just pieces of land that didn't feel right. Wrong orientation, was facing the sun in the wrong way, which sounds silly, but even if you don't know land --

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which we didn't then. We really didn't know what we were looking for. There were just, it would feel dark. I didn't realize that if you have a south facing slope, in the winter it's like paradise. If you have a north facing slope, you're up to your neck in snow all year long. I didn't know any of that. But we sort of went by this and that, and we'd find a piece, and decide, "Okay, it'll work." And then we'd talk to whoever owned it, and there would be 8 brothers and sisters, and they would all have a different pricing on it. Finally we decided we can't deal with individuals anymore, we have to deal with a realtor. We're trying, we thought a realtor would be a horrible thing to do. But they have contracts with whoever's selling. We would have like one relative come and say, "I will block the sale of the land unless you agree to give me X amount more. But I won't tell the others." Can of worms. So we looked around and found this realtor in Watsonville. And he was this, and he and his wife, Jeanette, Jeanette was the local from this area, and he was from the East Coast, really, his family was from Denver, and from a socially prominent family. She was really from a landed family. They were very active Republicans. Just really active. I think they had an invitation to Richard Nixon's inauguration. I thought, "These people are never going to be the right people to help us." They were wonderful. They loved us. They were both artists. She was the historian and chronicler of this area. And they just loved what we were doing. Even though I had skirts up to here, and hair down to there, we were just completely outrageous. Right at that moment, I think there was an article -- but anyway, they decided they would show us the land. They showed us several pieces around here, and we were about to buy one that's now Dorgeconzon [?]. I didn't like it. And I kept hammering on about it. Peter and Judy and Dean liked it a lot. But it just seemed there were too many canyons and hills, and it just didn't have enough expanse to it. And meanwhile, again, we had no idea what we could afford, or what Rick was going to give us. Finally, that land fell through, and this became available. Peter came and saw it, we were doing something else, and we came rushing back, we were all still living down south. He said, "You've got to go see this piece of land right now!" So we jumped in the car and we drove up here, and we got here just as the sun was about to set. And it was, we walked into Dean's meadow, because there was nobody here, there were no roads on the land, there was nothing on the land. And it was, the meadow was just gorgeous, filled with wildflowers, and the sun was starting to set on it, it was all pink. And you heard all these animals crashing in the bushes, we had a hound dog who was rushing everywhere. You heard all this snorting and crunching going on in the bushes. It had seemed so wild and beautiful. We had just saw the one meadow, and said, "This is it." We had no idea what the rest of the land looked like, but we thought, "We've got to explore this more." So we came back and looked again, and decided this was it, we had to buy the land. So we found how much it cost, which was really reasonable, it was unbelievably reasonable. But it was, 360 acres for \$12,600. It was \$35 an acre. So, and what we found out later was that the guy who sold it to us thought he was really taking us to the cleaners, because this land had been traded back and forth between ranchers just for taxes. It was like \$5, \$6 an acre they were charging each other, and it went up to like \$10. So he was really tripling the price. I thought, "Oh my God, this is another planet, because of the rest of the world is not like this." So we thought, "Now we'll go see if Rick will give us the money." So we drove to New Buffalo. Two days before, Buffalo burned to the ground. Rick by then had moved out, and was living in Carlston Rd. in a little house with his wife at the time. So we were standing there, showed up for money, standing there looking at the smoldering ruins of New Buffalo, and he looked at us and he said, "Boy, you guys came at a bad time." And he said, "I'm really committed to rebuilding most of New Buffalo, I've put most of my money in there, I'm really committed

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to helping them put it back together. Even though I can't live there anymore, I just feel I should help, and that is my first priority, is New Buffalo. So, but how much money do you need?" And we said, \$12,600. And he said, "Well, let me think." And he wrote out a check for \$10,000. Just got a check out of his checkbook, and he wrote "\$10,000 only." Signed it. And we said, "Gee, thanks Rick." He didn't say, "Where's the land? How much land? Can I see the land?" Didn't anything. Just wrote the check. So we folded it up, came up here. By then it was a couple days by the time we got to the bank, it's all kind of crumpled. We took it to the bank and handed it to them. And so we figured we'd owe \$2600 on this land, which seemed like a fortune, we'd be in debt for the rest of our lives. But we could at least could buy the land, put it in escaro[?]. Moved right onto the land immediately, put it on escaro, and I kept telling Dean and Peter, "We don't want to invest anything in this land until it's really ours." They were ready to build things. I said, "You know, we don't want to move to fast." And it was funny, because I was 22, and these were thirty-something year old guys. They were just wanting to get into the land. Anyway, we just kind of went slowly. We didn't rent a house actually, we moved out to stay in a house that was owned by one of the owners of the land, and we lived there while we were building. I was pregnant then, I had my baby there, in that little building across the ... So by the time we bought this land I was very pregnant. And, but after, anyway, to get back to the money, we um, about two weeks later we got a letter from Rick, and in the letter was this little note that said, "I got the money guilt," and a check for \$26,000. And so, we said, "Whoopee!" and we went and paid for the land. It was an amazing thing just to, a really extraordinary thing. And in fact, he at that point said he didn't want anyone to know that he was given the money. Obviously, he would start getting hit up constantly if people knew. So we didn't tell anyone for years. "An anonymous donor," was how we always put it. But he didn't even come to this land until we'd had it for five or six years. Never even visited. Really amazing. We told him -- I think at one point he did want to know what the structure was going to be in terms of ownership, and we told him it was going to be a corporation, and he wrote a check to that corporation. He might have balked if we had said, like, "Fleming," you know. Then I was very pregnant, and we moved into that house and we started building, Dean started, Dean and Peter and Judy Hine worked two groups. We would work one day on Peter's house and one day on our house. Dean and Peter worked up on the land on the floors. Judy and I worked down at the adobe on cutting struts. We were building a geodesic dome. And they were building a zone, which was designed by Steve Bayer, who built and designed the buildings at Drop City. He was a real innovative architect who then became very involved in solar energy and solar products and stuff. And he had something called the Zone Works, in Albuquerque, I think it still exists. And so Bayer designed Peter's zone, which was a dome that was expanded, it was more like a crystalline structure. But instead of being circular, some of the panels were elongated, so it had these almost rectilinear kind of forms. It's a pretty extraordinary structure. Unfortunately, we had so little money, we couldn't build these things out of really good material. So they ended up being less than gorgeous. It was like you could live your dream according to what you could afford, and what your own physical skills and energies were. So we alternated days: one day we worked on the struts, Judy and I would cut the struts for the dome, and the next day we'd cut them for the zone. And Peter and Dean were working on the floor. So they were putting the filings, and cutting the floor and stuff. And then when we were looking for how we were going to have this baby, we went to town and tried to talk to some of the doctors there. I wanted Dean to be there, and he wanted to be there. We wanted to do natural childbirth, Lamaze. Nobody had ever heard of Lamaze up here. It was completely insane, they thought it

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was really weird, and that we were really weird and strange people, "The husband wants to be there! That's impossible, absolutely impossible." And every doctor in town -- there were like three or four, there weren't that many -- but, turned us down. Absolutely couldn't. And the public health nurse said, "Go to Gardener. There's an old doctor there. He delivers babies. Go and see him." So, we went to, his name was Dr. Knight [?], so we drove to Gardener, and went to this big house. It was an old hotel that was never finished. Dr. Knight and his wife were living there. And his wife came to the door and asked what we wanted, and I said that I was going to have a baby, and had heard that her husband delivered babies, could we speak to him? And she said, "Oh, the doctor's retired, you know, the doctor's been retired for quite awhile." And we said, "Oh, that's very disappointing." And she said, "Well, why don't you come in and talk with him." And it turned out he was an osteopath. He was 86. He'd come to Gardener to retire 21 years before when he was 65. And she was probably 20 years younger than he was. She was a nurse. So I thought, "Oh well, this is really not possible." And he came out while we were just ready to leave. He came out and introduced himself as Dr. Knight. And he said, "Well, so what brings you here." "Well, we're having a baby, we wanted to do natural childbirth." "Well, what is natural childbirth?" And I said, "Well, there are these breathing techniques, and I've been studying them." And he said, "Oh, you know, I've studied the Hindus, I know that you can really do a lot with breath. I'm very interested in this." So, I explained it to him, and he thought it was very exciting. He said, "Well, I'd really like to deliver the baby!" So we said, "Well, great!" And I said, "What should we do to prepare?" And he said -- you know, I was thinking he was going to say, "Boil the sheets," or whatever -- and he said, "Well, do you play a musical instrument?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well do you sing?" And I said, "Yeah, I sing." And he said, "Well, sing all the time. It really makes the baby happy." Those were his instructions. So we went out the door, and actually, it was the public health nurse who told me I should plan on having the baby at home, because, she said, "It's raining all the time, and you're either going to have the baby at home or in the car." She was an amazing woman. I really liked her. She was a very practical woman. Middle-aged, very straight. Really solid, Midwestern morals, but just a wonderful person. So she told us to plan on having the baby at home, and to get Dr. Knight to come up, and what to do in case he didn't show up in time. It poured rain the day she was born. We tried to go get him, and luckily they were able to get him. But in the meantime, the woman who's phone we used in St. Louis came, and just sat there. She and her husband was one of the leaders in the church. He delivered all their children, so she wanted to make sure we were okay. She was great, a very wonderful woman. [unintelligible]. Anyway, he came and delivered the baby. It was a very long labor, it was very interesting, strange day. There was lots of people in this adobe building. I was in labor for 18 hours. It was a long time. She was big, she was 8 pounds. Dr. Knight, he just shook, because he was so old. So it was like, "Oh my God, what have we gotten ourselves into?" Think of what you'd do without knowing, just trusting everything to go alright. And then Lea was born. The minute she was born, his hands completely stopped shaking. He was just like a rock. He was so excited by natural childbirth that he went on to deliver babies for the next three years. Anyone who was having natural childbirth, he would deliver. He thought it was such a great thing. It was really amazing. There were lots of people here visiting at the time. So there was a kind of a big celebration going on, a baby being born.

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**Q:** Which leads me to ask, what were relations with neighbors like? I can think of many communes that were established where the neighbors were up in arms. It was horrible. What about you?

**A:** You know, it's interesting, there were -- we had some terrible relationships with neighbors. But most of this part of the world is Spanish, and there are some small ranches that have been here for generations and generations. The people here have been through a lot. They have a great love of work, family. They're always -- the stories we've heard of the locals, and when they were building and when they were young, and the wild parties they would have and the things they would do, they all sowed their wild oats, certainly. The local Spanish loved us for the most part. They were a little, you know, nervous in some ways, but they loved our energy. No young people had come here -- all the young people had moved away. Everybody would grow up and move away. No one came near to have their house, to build a family, to make their home. And they loved this place so much, and they respected work. And they saw how hard we were working. And they loved that. I think for the most part they were wonderful neighbors. But we had, a neighbor, a Texan, who built a summer home, a second home here, a multi-millionaire who would fly in. He lived, his land borders on ours, and he was, he didn't like us at all. There were a lot of ego things. He was rich and we weren't, but we were having more fun. That, I think, was really difficult. We had a dispute with another neighbor on the other side -- these are Anglos. Dr. Farendeli, who still owns the land, but there was a pipeline that went through our land, from a spring up on Dry Creek, and took water to his pond. He has a spring over there, where there's a pond, right over on the other side of the fence. We used to go swimming there a lot, and that drove him crazy. But he wasn't living there, and it was hot. One of the members of Libre, Dallas Hanes, who came after the first 8 or 9 months, he asked Farendeli if he could put taps on the line, so he could get water to make adobes. And Farendeli said, "Sure." So he put, he dug down, put a pipe. And then a year went by. Meanwhile, Farendeli became more upset with us. I think it -- I'm trying to put myself in their shoes, it seemed completely irrational to me at the time. But it had to do with publicity about who we were. There was this whole thing about hippies going on. We didn't think of ourselves as hippies. We sort of became more so with time. We thought of ourselves as artists and creating a community. There was a lot of stuff in all the magazines -- "Do you know the signs?" "Your kids are going bad ... they're all rushing off, dropping out." So there was that going on, and also then we would sneak over there to swim. And he caught us one time and got really upset. But anyway, he decided that he didn't want the tap on the line anymore, and that he would -- instead of telling us to take the tap off, or instead of filing a civil complaint against us, his personal attorney was the D.A. in Walsonburg, and he filed a criminal suit for stealing water. And he had the sheriff come up to arrest me, because I was the president. But the sheriff was bereft. He'd never heard of such a thing. And plus, to arrest a woman, who was just a mother, oh my God! He was just beside himself, he was almost speechless when he got here, and was shuffling around with his papers. He said he had come to arrest me, and I said, "What for?!" And he told me, and I said, "That's insane!" And he said, "I know, I know. I'm just following orders." He said, "Just come into town. You don't even have to come tomorrow. The next time you come to town, come into the office, and we'll fill out the papers." So I went down and "turned myself in." And I got the complaint and everything. And I went to the public defender, because we couldn't afford a lawyer. And I started talking to the public defender about the case, and I just didn't like the way he was talking about -- I would bring up a point, and he would sort of not even acknowledge what I was saying. And so finally I said, "Have you been in Walsonburg for a long time?" And he said, "Oh, just for the last three years."



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And I said, "Did you come here as a public defender?" And he said, "No, no, I came here to clerk." And I said, "Oh, who did you clerk for?" And he said, "The district attorney." So he clerked for the guy who was bringing the charges, who was the private attorney of this local dentist, actually. So I said, "I don't think you can be an unbiased defense attorney, do you?" And he said, "Well, that's your decision." And I said, "I've decided that you couldn't be." So I went to Pueblo and got another public defender, who was not actively against me, but was a complete idiot. It was really quite a shock. The guy was just walking through the motions of being an attorney. So I had to do all the stuff myself. I started investigating, and I decided to look into the pipeline. What were the [unintelligible] on pipelines. And I found out that the pipeline had been dug a few years before we bought the land, by a local rancher. This land was owned by the man who dug the pipeline. He did the pipeline across this piece of land for Farendeli. [tape ends] ... So, what I found was that they never applied for [unintelligible] for the pipeline.

**Q:** It did come through your land?

**A:** It came through the land. So, what had happened was two days after the land was sold to us, they filed for easement [?] for the pipeline, but they didn't own the land. But they somehow got this easement through. The dates were very clear. The land was sold to us on such and such date. The day that the easement was filed was two days later. They did not own the land.

**Q:** So they were filing it illegally.

**A:** Exactly. He did not own the pipeline. So I got all these documents together and I showed them to my lawyer and we went to court. It was hysterical. The court was hysterical, because first of all, I had my daughter, who was then probably about, a little over a year. She was falling asleep. So the sheriff said, "Put her to sleep in my office. I'll turn the phone off so nothing bothers her." So nobody could get to the sheriff the whole time we were there, because she was asleep. Then we went into the courtroom, and at first they started bringing all these witnesses who were local ranchers, witnesses for the prosecution, wanting to establish that I lived here and that I was the president of Libre. And every one of these guys they asked just said, "Oh yes, I've known Mrs. Fleming for two years. Oh, she's a very nice woman." You know, they couldn't say anything bad about me, because they're cowboys, and of course we'd had really great relations. So nobody could say anything bad. And the prosecutor's getting more and more nervous. And then, the D.A. lunged across the table at this pile of papers that I had, and he said, "Let me see those!" Right in the middle of the court proceeding! And he was used to doing that to every woman in this town. And I said, "No, you can't see those!" And I dragged them back. Meanwhile, my lawyer was just sitting around like a bump on a log. So, finally, I made my lawyer present this documentation, showed it to the judge, and he said, "Well, let me see that." And he looked at it, and then he called Sam Deval, the district attorney's office, and they all looked at the papers, and the judge said, "Let's talk about this." And he talked with Sam Deval, and he said, "Okay, I rule that you never use that water again, and the case will be dismissed." And my attorney was about to leave, and I said, "No!" And I said to the attorney, "We disagree with that! That's our pipeline!" And he said, "That's their pipeline!" And the judge said, "Okay, well, case dismissed anyway then." He just dismissed the case, that was it. And then Farendeli just stopped using the water. He didn't use the pipeline anymore. That was it. We would've let him, but he didn't do it. He was just too upset about it. So that was my great criminal

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record. And one of our only disputes, with him, and Bob Hudson, the Texan, who was just, didn't like our lifestyle. Had a lifestyle problem.

**Q:** You weren't doing anything, right?

**A:** No, not even vaguely. No. In fact, he liked coming here to visit. He thought it was great. And then he actually shot our dog. We had a black and tan [unintelligible, kind of dog.] He had a German Shepherd female that was in heat, and our dog went over there and he shot the dog. Which was really shocking. I mean I'm sure ranchers do that all the time, but we didn't know that. And it wasn't even chasing his cows. I was very fond of this dog. And a few days later was Thanksgiving, and he came to the dome, we always had Thanksgiving in our dome, and he came sweeping in with his wife, and his pilot, and his pilot's wife to join our party, because I think we'd invited them a week or so before. And he went up to Dean and said, "Howdy Dean." And he shook hands with Dean, and Dean said, "You have a lot of nerve, you mother-fucker! You killed my dog! You get out of this house and don't come back!" And you could just see the look on his face, in front of his wife and his pilot. He suddenly was just being chased out of the building. And he went, and the next day had his foreman cut a log down across our road, and then started the battle of the roads. It went on. But it was never horrible. Nobody was threatening to run us out of here. It was just strong personalities.

**Q:** [unintelligible, asking about people objecting to their building structures]

**A:** When we first started building here, there was -- I don't even know that there was a building. I don't think there were. There certainly were no enforced building codes here. There wasn't a uniform building code in Colorado. So, we could just build whatever we wanted. And that was no problem. But by the time I built this house, which was '76, '77, there had already been building permits required, within several years before that. A lot of people would build without one, and all over the valley. It's hard to initiate that sort of thing in a place where people are used to doing whatever they want. People live in the country because they want things their way. So it took a long time for them to get people to comply with building codes. But we were able to build all our structures. We never would have been able to build a dome if there were building codes, because they were other kinds of structures. And we didn't have to deal with that at all. We just started building. The electricity was put in for free. The rural electric, in those days, used to put in electricity for free. Now, it would cost as much as zoning. But that was put in. We didn't have phones for 16 years, we've only got phones recently. And we really liked that, actually, no phones, initially. We didn't have trouble with codes. It was pretty interesting, the idea that you could just say what got built, and build it right there. You had to go through a council, and tell them exactly what you were going to build, and where, and how you were going to do it, how you would have the means to do it, what kind of resources do you have to put to it, both economic and energy-wise, the kind of help you were going to need from the community, in terms of people. We were very willing to help each other build early-on. Now, I think we've all gotten older, more committed, busier, our lives are so intensely busy, even here. I'm only here four months of the year, I'm now part-time. Everything's so densely packed in. It's very hard to take the time to be working on these sort of things. And everybody now has some resources. We all are earning money, whatever. So there are resources to help -- back then we had no money, so we had to spend time.

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**Q:** I do have one more question. [unintelligible] ... I was curious what you wanted to say for the record.

**A:** Say for the record. Well, for the record, those things all happened here, in one way or another, absolutely. It's ridiculous to talk about the '60's and communes and what people were doing, without talking sex and drugs. And certainly not to go into any detail, but, ... I think that certainly, it had a lot to do, in my mind, when I think about it, my generation, one of the most highly educated generations to come out of this country, at a time of economical prosperity, just sitting there on this conveyer belt heading for the major corporation. We went through very good public schools, I came from a very poor family but was able to get a great education in the public school, and was able to go to college on scholarships. But everybody I knew was heading to work for, you know, IBM, and major chemical companies. Anybody with a brain was being tapped for major kind of engineering, or science, theology, political science, whatever. And there was this moment of realization, and I'm not sure how much the drugs had to do with this realization, but a moment of realization that there was a great misuse of the resources of the world, and a great conglomeration of power in the hands of a few. And a terrible war in Vietnam was going on. It was a very dark time. And certainly the drugs, I think, helped a lot of people see things in a different way. It changed the structure of linearity, the way you thought your life was going. And you were able to realize that, "I could go that way instead!" I don't think, I mean, there are drugs now, there are drugs everywhere, and they don't have the same kind of effect. I don't think it was just the drugs. It was a moment where a whole generation of people were talking to each other through music and through activities, and drugs were certainly a part of it, but something else was going on. I don't know what that something else was. I thought it was the beginning of something that would continue on. But certain young people today -- I teach, I spend a lot of time with 20 to 30 year olds, and they're very separate from each other, they're not involved in the same way that we were. But I think there are so many people now trying to figure out what that was, or what happened, what caused it, was it the drugs? But I think it was a particular moment in time that simple ideas of education -- I'm a firm believer in how education can change society. And affluence. We had an affluent society then. There was a lot of room to protest. There was a lot provided by the society then. When you start thinking about how this country has changed, one thinks of the rise of violence and barbarism, but why is that so? There are no community services, there is no education, there's no public health, there's no -- there's nothing for people. It's so shocking to me. I was in a shuttle going to the airport in San Francisco, and there was a gay man, a gay woman, and me, and a Black driver. So, we're rushing down the road, and the driver started talking about, I guess he started talking about Clinton. And we started talking about politics, and then it involved into, you know he was this rabid Republican, and he was studying economics at Berkeley. And he was very much against any kind of taxing. And "Corporations would take care of themselves! They wouldn't pollute!" It was unbelievable. And this gay man was saying, "Oh God, I wish I had a video camera for this!" Because an audio cassette wouldn't do it, you had to see what the racial mix is here, and who's the Republican. And I was just quiet the whole time, and finally the driver said to me, "Well, would you pay those kind of taxes there are to have public services?" You know, in Germany -- I certainly don't think this is Germany or should be, but -- people make \$35 an hour, it's like the average salary. There's public health, there's education. I said, "I would pay, if I could have gone to college for free, if my child could have gone to college for free, if I had health care, if I could walk out into the street at night -- I'd pay a lot of money!" We have no idea what the real cost of our lives are. But anyway, this country has changed enormously during that period of time, so everybody is much more

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desperate and frightened. So that kind of collective coming together I think comes together through affluence and ease. There's a different kind of coming together that happens when things are really bad, and that becomes a very heavy duty revolution. We could intellectually discuss the politics of the time. It wasn't that we were starving in the streets. There wasn't a revolution that came out of poverty. So I think that, and certainly drugs, had a big part in it. And the saddest part, really, happened in conjunction with rethinking what restrictions are, "Why do I have to live this way, why can't I live this other way? If these people are so wrong about all this other stuff, maybe they're wrong about sex too." And so it was a lot of experimentation that went on at that point, and a lot of bad things happened. But I think it was a really extraordinarily important thing to be done. And in my life, certainly, I just learned so much. I think I've lived six or seven different lifetimes, when I think about all the things that I've done and seen, it's incredible to me to have been able to participate. And it really was focused on the times, and focused on this place, having a place to really put all of our energy, and work really hard. We worked really hard. There's only a certain amount of recreational drug use you can do, and I was never very much into it myself. [unintelligible] ... 12, 16 hour days, really working like crazy, building this place. And you can't do that when you're distracted or deranged. I think, like I was saying earlier, how really, [unintelligible] ... that we were doing things, we were raising families, we loved our children.

**Q:** [unintelligible]

**A:** We had separate houses. That was a very early rule that we made, we didn't want single people. That's terrible. It would be hard to get away with saying that now, but we wanted couples. We didn't specify "heterosexual," but single people, we thought, we very destabilizing as members of the community, because they were always spending a lot of time away trying to establish a relationship, were looking for a relationship within the community, or were likely to just start trying out various partners and then dumping them on us. And that happened a bit, because of course people split up once they were members, and were single, and would bring, go out and find a mate, and decide that's no good, and then they're mate would be there, and what would we do with this person? It sounds very cold, but it gets to be a problem. Because we found pretty much, after the first five years, that the ideal size of this community was around 20, 25 people. Bigger than that was much too big, and that's including kids. We couldn't make decisions with our government structure the way it was, we couldn't have consensus. You have to start having representational government by the time you get to 30. Everyone can't know all of the details and make all of the decisions. I think also luckily, the kind of verve that struck the populations of communities was sort of dying, and people weren't more into that. It was a natural curve. We turned a lot of people away, and we were always sort of known as the "snobs," and "older people," "elitists," because we really would be very clear that we didn't, this wasn't a revolutionary community. We were approached by SDS people who wanted to store guns in our caves, and wanted to -- there were a lot of revolutionaries who asked us, "What are you doing for the revolution?" We were just living our life in a creative way, being an artist, and whatever that becomes, I'm willing to see what that is. There should be a place to see what happens. We would have silly incidents, like I was here for a number of years, had built my house, had built two houses. We had a communal chainsaw that we bought as a group that we would take turns using. You would have your days with the chainsaw. Somebody several years later was building their house, and they wanted to keep the chainsaw during my days, because I just wanted it to build a sculpture. I got mad. And there

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was a lot of that going on, the righteousness, "This is your ego art trip, and this is my building my house for my family!" I very strongly believe in making art, and I think that it's one of the most significant things that humans can do. Otherwise everything is all neat. This is something that has to do with consciousness and understanding, physicality, the interaction with physicality, which begins to be building on fulfillment. And I just hit the roof with this person who was building this house. After I'd worked on everybody's house, I built this place from the ground up, and wanted the chainsaw to build my sculpture! And I just took the saw, and said, "Sorry. Time for my ego art trip. You can build your house later. I've sat through all these different people building their houses, I've worked on them, and now it's time for my sculpture. I'm taking the saw." They would be silly squabbles like that. But it was fine, and this person is still my friend, and they began to understand what it was I was doing, that I was in a different part of the cycle than they were, because I had been here years earlier, and that it was my time to do whatever I want.

**Q:** I have another question. I have a real fascination with where this communal energy came from. [unintelligible] ... but I'm still curious about predisposing factors like Jean and Julian Bernosky [?] both had parents who were communists -- so like the whole idea of cooperative mentality, I was think was somewhat a part of their background. I just wondered if there's any kind of thing like that in your life?

**A:** No, not even vaguely.

**Q:** What about, like, were you conscious, in your artist view, were you conscious at all of the tradition of artist colonies?

**A:** No. Not at all.

**Q:** There were a lot of them. This is very much like ones at the turn of the century. There were quite a few.

**A:** These are things I have since found out about, since we started this place, but absolutely not even vaguely aware of any of that, and I don't think -- I've been trying to think of what other people were thinking at the time, particularly Dean, Peter, and Judy, and what their knowledge was. Certainly Peter was at Drop City, so he knew about Drop City. And he'd been at Black Mountain, Peter had. He went to school there. He was there, I think it was '60, when they were just closing. So he actually went there, so he knew about this. We looked at communes when we first came out here. I think there was a definite need to have a community of minds, I was saying how lonely we got, because we didn't have people to talk to about our ideas. And we'd come from the city, where there were a lot of artists who met regularly and talked about work, created shows together. There's something about making art, about any kind of thing -- well, some thinking is very solitary -- where you really need to have a context for your work. You really need to be building as a group, because ideas grow exponentially, through communication. So there was the need to create a community of thought. We went to various communes, we went to New Buffalo. I hated it. I couldn't believe people would live that way. When we first came out in 1967, all the women had skirts down to the floor, and the guys were out on the tractor, and the women were stirring these big pots of beans, and they wanted to know when I was going to have babies. They had these dirty little babies hanging onto their skirts. I told them, "I'm an artist," and they thought I was really disgusting. I was not interested in any way being involved in Drop City. It was

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only when we began to think about -- initially Dean and I just wanted to be out in the country with a big studio, and have time to think and reflect and walk, and escape from the chaos of the city. And then we realized that what we really wanted was an exchange of ideas. And then when we realized, for one thing, we didn't want to be a rock, and for another, we needed to have more resources, to be with others. Peter, who was very sick of [unintelligible] ... support for a commune. He was, as the adult, responsible for doing everything, because everybody else was too [unintelligible]. So then it really seemed to start to make sense, that we could actually structure a place where people would come, whose ideas were interesting [unintelligible] ... how our work could grow [unintelligible]... And it's that, and it's not that. And it ended up being not enough. As I said earlier, I had to leave and go out and start doing lectures and being a visiting artist, and living in New York three, four, five months out of the year, because we've become like a family in our criticism. We love each other, and each other's work, we criticize each other hideously, but mostly just the way you do your family. So the kind of, the stimulation that you need for ideas has to continuously be renewed. So I find it great. I'm not here enough, but I would not give up [unintelligible]... I would probably want to be five months, seven months [unintelligible] ... Last year I had a sabbatical, [unintelligible] ... just the fall, I just took the fall off. [unintelligible] ... So, it's not what we thought it would be. It's more and less and it's an extraordinary place. And it works for me. What's interesting to me though, is that I'm using it the way I always thought I would, only I'm here a little less than I would like to be. And our initial thing was to come and go from here. But most of the people, luckily, for me, actually, stayed, because they needed places to live. [unintelligible] ...

**Q:** [unintelligible] ...

**A:** Actually, I don't. I have, in the past, to disastrous ends, and great results, all of the above. But what I'm trying to do now it have just a residence for artists. So I'm trying to establish a precedent that, artists can come here and stay. And I know it sounds ridiculous, but as I said, people who hop on one foot, we sound discriminatory, but that's what I would like to promote, is a place where artists can come and do work. So I let various artists that I know come and stay. Not a lot, but some. People who are here who are artists, I let stay. So I'm trying to establish that as a precedent. Because there's an incredible need for houses. Some people will move in, and it will be time for me to come back, and they will have had a baby or something, and I won't kick them out in the street. I don't want to have to do that. I really put a lot into this place. I had to build two houses here in order to get my house. So I'm feeling perfectly fine about saying "I don't want anybody in here unless I approve."