

Interview with John Kelly, George Gannon, and La Claire

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

February 27, 1996

JK = John Kelly, GG = George Gannon, LC = La Claire

Q: So, boy, today's Tuesday, isn't it?

JK: Today's Tuesday.

Q: I'm kind of getting turned around, when I'm traveling this much. OK, and this is an interview with John Kelly at St. Benedict's farm. So can you give me some of the history of what you're doing here?

JK: Well, I can say it started with the rule of St. Benedict. Or I guess you could say it starts with Christianity, because -- in fact that might be a real good place to start. And, somewhere in here, I have a paper, and I might as well get these out so you can refer to them and they might go hand in hand with what I say here.

Q: OK.

JK: OK, so this, this little paper is a brief history of the religious life, and it starts with the Gospel, you know, and the uh, the response that certain Christians made, including in Acts, there's the story of where the first converts contributed all their money into a certain pool, and that you might say, is a model for this community. Where common ownership, witness to the Gospel, discipleship, uh, and it's very much done in a victorious spirit, because of course, that's the spirit of the Gospel, you know, the idea that no trouble in this life is, you can overcome -- the power of God working through Christ, you know, in the Resurrection and in the life that comes through belief in him and belief in the Gospel. So, uh, and then there is this ideal in the beginning that Jesus, uh, offered the rich young man, where he said, you know, if you want to really be perfect, sell everything you have and give it to the poor and come and follow me and work for this other kingdom and it's done in different fashions, this, this kind of uh, letting go of this world. And only a very, very few uh, a very small percentage of Christianity does it in the way we do it. Does it in this way that those first Christians did, where they sold their property and gave to the apostles, and said you give this to whoever needs it, or build, do what you need. And that was impractical on a big scale. You know, it just doesn't work. So, uh, I guess after the early Christians quickly got into a confrontation with the state, you know, and many of them were martyred, and then, of course, came Constantine and the deliverance, and the dissociation of church and state, and, and people were looking for a way, again, to express their dedication, they, martyrdom was what used in the very, very first centuries, now we're getting away from that Acts community, but, individual expressions of piety, uh, the hero, I guess you could say, of those early centuries, I guess you could say, was the martyr. And, uh, then they were looking for a way, well, let's, let's, how can we show that we really want to do this, you know? Other than being a missionary and carrying the Gospel and that's when the monastic communities started. And they got off-base, as I was saying awhile ago, in this athletic competition for, to see who could go without the least, you know, the food, and stuff like that. So, you, you started in with established communities with laws, and, and the Rule of St. Benedict really became a model, that, that moderation and sense, you know, incorporated into this dedication thing. And, uh, course the monks became very wealthy, as you might imagine, you know, because, I mean, as far as ownership of property and things, 'cause they were single, they were uh, organized, they were hard-working, they, and so they started getting more and more stuff, and then, always they have to renew it, and go back to the simplicity and stuff. OK, so that's kind of where we were, we come in at St. Benedict's farm, here. Uh, one of the reforms initiated in the Middle Ages was called the Trappist reform they, the

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Benedictines were too soft, you know. They didn't eat meat, but they had lavish fish dinners, and things like that, so some of the other people said "That's, that's, we can't have that, you know. We gotta go back to when men were really monks and women were real sisters, y'know."

Q: [Laughs]

JK: [Laughs] So, the Trappists were far -- started in the Middle Ages, and out of that came the group that George became a novice at, in Georgia in 1950. He went to the Trappist community of Conyers, Georgia. And they were the monks that wore the hoods, you know, the long robes, and they spoke in sign language, because, you know, that was more penitential than ... well the idea was silence and retreat from the world, and prayer and penance, you know. That was, that ideal. But in the process of uh, transmitting that spirit from person to person and generation to generation, they, they thought they could preserve the sanctity of the thing, by keeping the customs. So these men in twentieth century America were observing seventeenth-century French customs.

Q: [Laughs]

JK: Including their underwear, even. And they had a book of rules that had accumulated over the centuries, that they were supposed to observe, including which hand they raised their seat with in church, and how they were to bow. And they had different bows for different people, you know. The abbot got a certain bow and the ... and this, this, uh, from an American standpoint, as you might imagine, is this -- to George, who was a person that analyzed things, he was a lawyer, when he went into the monastery. And he said this, you know, that's not seeking God. That's not what this is all about. That's not, uh, necessary. So he felt called by God, and this was in 19, after he'd been there six months, and then he stayed another six months, so he was there a year. He never got to be what you call a fully-formed Trappist, he, they require much longer than that, you know. So, but anyway, at the end of this year, he was convinced that he was called to start a contemporary community. And he, he, as crazy as it sounded, and really, it did sound crazy, because, you know, everything in those days in the Catholic church was really regimented and organized and official, you know. But anyway, he, he had this feeling that he was called to do this, so he did it, and through the help of a friend, went to West Point, Texas and lived as a hermit, you might say, just on a bare modicum of money and, uh, lived the Rule of St. Benedict. That was his idea, was just, instead of all this big, thick book of rules had been added on, added on, added on, they were in prayer seven hours a day, every day. And that's too long. You can't pray that long. In church, I'm talking about. And, uh, Benedict had a modest two-and-a-half hours, you know, so he, he said, well, we're just going to try to go back to the Rule of St. Benedict and just forget all these rules, these customs, these French underwear, all of that stuff, you know. And so, he did that, but he was just by himself, and a year later, he was drafted in the army. And that's where I met him. And two weeks before I met him, I had determined that I was going to be a Trappist, just like he been. And then he had this, by that time, he had a prospectus, he had a written paper on what he wanted to do, and he, he had analyzed the Trappist system completely and I went over the point by point with him, and I was thoroughly convinced that the Trappist was not the wisdom for me, you know. I wasn't yet convinced that I was to throw in with George, but I was highly moved by what he had to offer, and so we went through the army together, and he got out ahead of me, and then he went, he thought he had

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found another community that was trying to do the same thing, a Catholic community in northern Wisconsin, so he went up there. But, uh, that was an entirely different thing. This man was a scholar, he tried to make scholars out of his monks, you know, and write footnotes, and all of that, you know. And so, it was just not, not, not the simplicity that George was looking for. Uh, the other man was a Benedictine priest who had gotten permission to try this little experiment that he had. It, it failed, I think, it didn't go anywhere, so. Anyway, but George decided that was not what he wanted so he stopped in Illinois, in my home, on the way back from Texas, and we talked again, and he said, well he was going to go back and try this thing again on his own, and so that's what he did, and, let's see, that was in October. I was working for a newspaper, or no, I was, yeah, I guess, I was anyway, I don't remember exactly what month I started on the newspaper. I must have been on the newspaper by that time, yeah, I worked there six months. I, I can't remember. [Laughs] Anyway, my mother died, and a short while after that, I decided that I was going to come to St. Benedict's farm. So, by that time, his brother had decided that he was going to come to St. Benedict's farm. So, by the time I got here, his brother was here. And, uh, we lived in this shack, and I don't know whether I got a picture of it in here somewhere. [Pause] You, you could still see it if you look out the door. Oh, what the devil, here. Oh, here it is. This is a little one-room house that George built.

Q: OK, yeah.

JK: Yeah, OK. So, I, I joined Robert, which is his brother, and George and this was, let's see, I came, he came in January of '56 and I came in July. And all the dates when we came are written on this little picture here.

Q: OK.

JK: So, well Robert had, had something else in mind, too, the other man who was here, and he finally left and, to make a long story short, he entered a, an official community, he became a priest, he became a monk, he became a hermit, and now he's living as a hermit in Saskatchewan, up in Canada. I correspond with him.

Q: A cold hermit. [Laughs]

JK: A cold -- very cold hermit. He just, I just got a newspaper article from him, and inside his house in the bad weather it can be as cold as twenty degrees Fahrenheit. I mean, that's with his heater on. That's with his heater in the wall, that's with his -- and he lives like this year in, year out, all by himself. 'Course, it's not like that all year, but, I wouldn't want to live like that.

Q: No, me either.

JK: But anyway, other people came and went, until finally La Claire came, and this was a big, big, big, big change. In 1968 she came, but we had met her in '65, which was the year the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic church came to a close. And, they, the Second Vatican Council was just like a time bomb in the Catholic church. I mean, it exploded and, and, the idea of John XXIII, I don't know whether you know the history, this history or not --

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Q: Not really.

JK: Well, briefly, and it's a, a picture is worth ten thousand words. Many people were against the pope for calling this council, which meant dragging bishops from all over the world to Rome, or, yeah, I guess that was where -- yeah, Rome, where they had it. And John, they says, well why do you want to do this? And John went over and opened up the window. He says I want to let some fresh air in. [Laughs] And that's, that's what it was. I mean we were worshipping in Latin at that time, we had to have a little English, you know, written on the side of the Latin, you know, to understand what they were saying at all. And, anyway, that's what John wanted to do, was open the window. And it had ramifications all over the church, clear down to their Trappist community, who've changed very, very much since that fallout. See, but by that time we were already here ten years or so, you see. And we were doing, in effect, what John was calling the Church to do. So, about that time, as I say, we met La Claire, and La Claire was a member of a teaching community in Schulenberg [?]. She taught kids piano every day, and hated every minute of it. What she really wanted to do as a nun was what we were doing, and that is to spend your life in simple work that would allow you time for study and time for growth in the Spirit and uh, simple apostolic tasks that would be an outflow from that. But in a life centered on religion, not on education, not on teaching, not on making money for the community by teaching piano, that sort of thing. Anyway, uh, she was part of a wave of people that felt like, you know, things are not changing fast enough, I want to go [unintelligible] and do something that, to make it happen quicker. And many, many sisters left, with permission, they left their convent. And she came here, many others just went and got married, or went and became, just got an apartment, you know. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah.

JK: But she came here, and then about a month later, another woman showed up, just, just, uh, I don't know, by happenstance, I guess. She was a VISTA volunteer, uh, looking for someplace to go, and a friend brought her here, you can see a picture of her here --

Q: Uh huh.

JK: She was a younger woman. Uh, twenty-one at the time I think, when she came. I was twenty-four when I came. Anyway, she stayed here six years, so she, but by that, but for that first year, George, you can't even see it on here I don't think, George built a, well, George and I built, I guess you'd say, a little one-room addition on this little house, you know. Just out of plywood. So they lived there, the two women lived there for a year. And then we built this house. So we've been in here since '68, so, and then we had other people come and go as I say. And there was a time when there was a friend in Austin that brought people with problems here, and we helped them for a while, but we decided that is really not what our life is all about. And he was bringing people that really needed, they needed professional help. A kid that burned down a school, an alcoholic, a heroin addict, and we helped some of them. The heroin addict in particular, I think we had a big impact on his life. And another kid that was involved in drugs, we helped him a lot, I think. But a lot of them were just beyond help, you know. They just really couldn't be helped. And it's, it's, it's hard to take somebody like that into your life and deal with them day by day, and so, we decided that that is not what we, we're not equipped to do that, so if somebody wants to come spend a week with us, and they are able to blend in, that's fine, that's OK, we'll take that

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person. But we, uh, we tell people with problems to go find a professional to help you. We're not into that. And, uh, so, Henry came in '60, '74, and Rosalva [?] who's from Mexico came in '88 and she learned English here, and right as we speak, she learned from La Clair, La Clair is teaching our black Columbian pastor English in the next building, as we speak here.

Q: Oh, great.

JK: Uh, so, but anyway, we do a lot of work in the local church. Because, you know, that's really our main prayer of the week, is the Eucharist on Sundays and we serve the church there in many ways: as teachers, as, uh, talkers, and bringers of the Word, uh, social ministry, you know, like an emergency help fund that I'm operating. Preparing the kids for the sacraments, preparing adults for the sacraments, uh, liturgical ministry, you know, like reading at church, that type of thing. And, uh, the hospitality ministry - we've had that a long time, and we write this bulletin for the church here, every week -- uh, I don't know what -- she's maybe working on it right now, I don't know. But, uh, I write these two things, and Rosalva writes this one and La Clair writes this one.

Q: Oh, so that's -- is that a translation into Spanish?

JK: This is Spanish, here. Now this -- I write in English. See, our, our community is bilingual, and our services are bilingual. We'll have some music in Spanish, some music in, in English, we'll have some preaching in Spanish, some preaching in English, some reading [unintelligible] you know, all the way through. But, St. Benedict's farm usually does, the -- let me see, I'll find another that suits you -- [Pause] We normally, we do the outside part, you know, with, we've, since our computer graphics have become so accessible, you know. We do, we do all of this. We do all of this, and then the office does this -- your announcements and so forth. So, that's just the contribution to the church that we're able to do out here in the woods. And that's the kind of thing, we don't have a certain set ministry that we have to do, we do as we're able, you know. And the community is open to other people, as we put out this little paper, here, that's [unintelligible] I just sent one of these to a woman in North Carolina last week. But we do insist, on, finally, on a lifetime commitment. Which Rosalva made, here, a year after she came here, you know. And she wore her regular clothes for the first year, and even went to work, partly, to finish up her commitment to her job as a cactus-stuffer. And, uh, but, then, now her family is all in Welders [?] so she, she has occasionally helped them out, and the rest of us have families further away, if any at all. [Laughs] And, uh, but anyway, this was a picture that we took when she made her promises, which are lifetime promises, you know.

Q: Right.

JK: After a year. And this is a ceremony -- well, let me see, somewhere in here is the ceremony that we did when Henry made his thing -- and that tells you what the monastic vows, as St. Benedict outlined them, are: you know, stability, conversion of manners, and obedience. In other words, stability: you're going to stay here for life, you're going to stay at it, inside, you know, it's not just stay here bodily, but stay here spiritually. Uh, conversion of manners: you're going to keep trying to become more like what you're supposed to be, even if you're not there yet. St. Benedict called it a school for beginners. So it's

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not a place where you have to be a saint to start, but you don't have to be a saint where I am, but we hope you're kind of getting there.

Q: [Laughs]

JK: [Laughs] And obedience, which, uh, is a, was a big thing with Benedict. Benedict would, gave his monks a whole pound of bread a day, but he wanted them to obey. Not just to obey the abbot, but to, to see God speaking in the abbot and in the Word of God, and you know, to [unintelligible] all obedience ultimately goes to God. But there are these signs, signs that we have to guide us, and you have to accept that this can be a sign, [unintelligible] or you can't live in a monastery. You know, and uh, so, it's not for everybody, and it's not easy. In fact, I've been challenged, I don't know whether I'll ever get to it with these other chores I have, to write for a, a community magazine, a story of St. Benedict's farm and telling about, not just the successes, but the real problems involved. So I would like to do that, if I could get to it. I've got some other, I'm working on a paper on the Presbyterian church for our communities, throughout, you know for the, for the church. Plus the bulletin stuff and the Bible study and the other things that I do, but I would like to do that, because Benedict tells the monastery, if somebody knocks on the door, don't let them in right away. You tell them this is not for you, go away. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: And they come back, say "Nah, you don't want to do this, you better find something easy." All right then, they want to come, tell them what the hard things are. Don't give them the, say, like the posters to join the Army, you know, you can go anywhere you want and you can get good food, and you get everything ... don't do that -- tell them the hard things. And we think that's why there's just five of here. [Laughs]

Q: Yeah?

JK: But, that's not the whole story, because, in, in the church, I mean, the seminaries are having trouble getting men to, you know, to become a priest, and sisters, the convents are dying because women are not joining the convents, you know. It's, I think that uh, our Christian population, as far as Catholics are concerned, I'm speaking now of, hasn't figured out how the change from the old way to the new ways, and how to dedicate yourself in this new way, you know, the ways that are comfortable with our, with us. And someday that will happen, I'm sure, but they will always be a minority of course, but it seems like, you know, in, in, uh, other times in history there have been many more. You know, some of these monasteries were hundred, two hundred people sometimes, even. You know, that's -- in the past, I'm speaking of. We don't ever hope to, you know, if we had twenty people here, we'd want to start someplace else, I think.

Q: Yeah.

JK: You know, you know, monasteries do that. They, they get so many people and they start a foundation somewhere else. Well, I think I've pretty well done, what, the basic story.

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Q: OK.

JK: Now, Benedict had a principle. And, of making your own living. In other words, those first hermits would go out and they would weave baskets, even. They didn't just pray, you know. They supported themselves. And then, when, in the Middle Ages, monks became rich, and at the point, ironically, they started saying "Well, we're praying for you, so you really ought to pay for us." And even, I know some monasteries do it today. They send out monthly envelopes, and you get a contribution here and a contribution there. Because the theology did grow up that we're performing a service for the church, in praying for the brethren. Therefore, the brethren, and some, some, some monasteries, their, their rules almost prohibit them from making a living. You know, they don't have enough industry to do it, and therefore they really do depend on donations.

Q: Right.

JK: But Benedict wanted his monks to make their living. So, we started out farming watermelons, and corn, and all of that, and then went to hogs, and then went to a dairy farm, and by the time, when we got to the dairy farm, we began to pay income tax. Until that time, we had never made enough money to pay income tax. So, while we were in the dairy, we got into photography by accident, I guess you'd say. And that little business doubled for about three or four years. Every year it got twice as big as it was the year before, until we built that building over there, in '74, I think. And now we do, like sixty or seventy weddings a year.

Q: Wow.

JK: And that's, that's a big job. Not only do we do the weddings, but we make the pictures. We process all the pictures, so. That has become our principal uh, income. Now, we do have a little, other little-bitty businesses, that are ancillary, and uh, don't really contribute that much to the support of the community. We, we have a small software business, because we made a program to keep track of when our cows are due to calve, and we market that. We keep an ancestry on the cows, we market that program. As George will tell you, we don't do a very good job of it, but anyway. Then we have a small sound recording studio somewhere around here. I've got a, a flyer in here somewhere. I don't know that we need to find it exactly, right now. But we, we started writing Christian music in the, oh, I guess in the '60s and early '70s when this, after this Vatican II change, and there wasn't a lot of music around, because you just had a Latin service, and you had a few, kind of, uh, sentimental songs from the seventeenth century, that's about what we had. So, we started writing this music, based on the Scriptures, you know. But to make a long story short, we found, in order to sell it, you have to perform it. You have to become a name, a performer name. And to do that, you have to go to the conferences in St. Louis and San Antonio and Houston and Galveston and be on the program, and they "Oh, the Benedicts are coming!" you know. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: In order, for, to get people to buy your songs -- it can be the best music in the world, and I think our music is, some of it, really very good. We, we had four cassettes that we made but we stopped there because it's just too, we don't want to get on the circuit and most of the music is done by George and La

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Claire, but still, these days, you can multiply tracks and do an instrument here and an instrument there, and it's, it's a professional tape, so ... anyway, we built this sound studio to do that work and, in order to pay for it, did work for other people. So we've recorded all the polka bands in the country, classical music, jazz, uh, rock, religious, a housewife strumming a guitar, choirs, you know, we've done all of that. Again, it's a very small, tiny, tiny business. La Claire thought she wanted to learn how to make, decorate cakes, and she became a whiz at that, I mean, we had, we served one wedding, I think she served nine hundred people.

Q: Wow.

JK: We had cakes over almost every table in the house. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: She can decorate, I mean, she can do the whole thing. But it got to be too much and so she just let that go. She does cakes for the church, you know, once in a while, but, uh, that's, that's it as far as our business world is concerned. We just really make our living with photography. I still take care of the cattle. Henry broke his wrist on Sunday -- he was normally doing the cattle. So, he can't do that. And I'm just recovering from a hernia operation in January so I'm just barely able to do it right now. But, uh, we still have the cattle, the beef cattle. I didn't tell you in there that we changed from dairy to beef, because the photography was eating up the time and it was making, it was more profitable than the dairy. So, that's how we became a photographer instead of a farmer. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs] That doesn't surprise me. My husband comes from a dairy farm, so I know how hard it can be.

JK: You know about that. Well, I'll tell you how -- when we made the decision we, Henry and I were spending, I think, six hours a day just milking the cows -- like twelve man-hours a day just milking the cows and we were paying all of the money that we made on that -- on the dairy -- to a lady to come work half-time on the photography.

Q: Oh gosh. Yeah.

JK: So we said, "That doesn't make sense."

Q: That doesn't make sense.

JK: [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: So we sold our Holstein herd. It was a beautiful herd. But, uh, we sold it and changed over to these beef cattle, which, they don't take as much labor, and we wanted to breed cattle, and we thought that would be fun, too, but the cattle market is depressed, and, cattle are, not, not a very good way to make a living, either. So, uh, that's about it. Like I say, we're open for other people to come here, but, uh ...

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Q: Can you tell me something about your daily life? I mean, like the routines and things that you have?

JK: OK, we started off with this literal rule of St. Benedict, even saying the Office in Latin, although we learned how to read Latin so we knew what we were saying. But, there were, there were many instances, especially when there were just two of us here -- you know, there oftentimes there was a third man, and he would leave, and it would be the two of us. And we had this, our business grew, we just had less and less time and energy to do that two-and-a-half hours worth of prayer, which is all scattered throughout the day, you know, that's the way Benedict did it, seven times a day, you know, we would get up and praise God. It goes back way to the temple prayers in Israel. And, uh, we found, and this again, is looking at this thing from an American standpoint, we found that we were, we didn't see any change in our devotional life, from the times when we said the Office to when we didn't say the Office, even for long periods of time. And so we concluded that it was not an essential, and it was not, it didn't go to the essential, the essence of prayer, you know, that your life should be a prayer, and that you should be praying inside all of the time, you know, in whatever you do. So, to make a long story short again, we dropped the Office, which was a horror to many official monks, you know, many people in the established communities. We, the only, offi-- what do you call? -- public prayer we have here today -- I don't say that's the way it's always going to be -- but the only prayer we have today is a prayer before meals on Sunday, which we take turns leading. And, uh, of course the liturgy, the Sunday liturgy is the central part of our prayer life, and that's every week. And any other occasion that happens in the church, like, you know, feast days that fall in the middle of the week -- Easter, you know, I mean, not Easter, but Christmas -- there are several feast days during the week that happen throughout the year. Other than that, we sort of make up our own prayer routines. Now La Claire and I both get up early in the morning to do a little of the Divine Office, just privately, you know. I give the book to her after I finish with it. The rest of them just do what they do, you know, and, uh, one of the ascetical parts of our life is discussing among ourselves the word -- any kind of word, really -- uh, the truth of life. And we have these discussions at all hours of the day, you know. Mealtimes, especially. So, religion is a constant, we're constantly turning things over here, including personal problems and that sort of thing, you know, with, with, uh, coming to God, I guess you'd say, I'd say that's the toughest asceticism of this life is that, you have to keep at it, and if you don't keep at it, sooner or later you're going to be confronted with whatever it is that's causing you to slow down, you know. Because -- not in a hostile way, but in a you know, in a -- that's what we're about. And, some, that hurts sometimes. [Laughs] To make, where God wants you to go and grow, and you don't want to, you want to go the other way and grow the other way. It can be painful. But it's true for anybody's life, you know. God asks you to do certain things, and you have to answer to it, and answering, sometimes, is painful. But, that's all right, there's a lot of things painful. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: But, uh, our life is, 'course, we have business to do, uh, like I fed the cows this morning, and I don't know what George is doing over there today. Uh, Rosalva's uh, translating Father Ubaldo's [?] homily -- he writes it in Spanish. She was doing that awhile ago. And she'll translate it into English, and then give it to George, and George will put it on the tape recorder and we'll give it to Ubaldo [?] before he leaves today. He could read it, practice reading it in English, see. 'Cause he's very, very -- English is very difficult

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for him. Not only is he Hispanic, but he's black. And, they, I think he's had more trouble making English sounds than an ordinary Hispanic person. I don't know that for sure, but ... Anyway, we usually, like, Rosalva and I do all of the printing of the pictures in the next building. La Claire does all the finishing work, and she might be finishing over there while we're -- at night, while everybody's watching TV, you know, she'll be doing -- finishing pictures. Spotting them, taking spots out of them, she, she does the whole thing there, as far as making the picture ready for the customer. Course, weekends, especially Saturdays, we do weddings, you know, photograph weddings. We have a cow, or calf out there that needs to be dehorned. I thought about doing that, and put that off because you were coming --

Q: Oh, I'm sorry.

JK: Because -- no, that's all right -- We'll get the little baby. She's, she's glad, you know, because we have to burn those horns off of her, you know. So she doesn't mind. And, uh, since I've had, just not quite up to strength yet, I get help on that. So I get La Claire -- Rosalva, rather, and George to help on that. And uh, I don't know what all we do, we do these, these works, like writing this thing, that takes a good time. Like I said, I'm working on a story on the Presbyterians, and I was working on that when you came. Just personal tasks that have to with our -- like tonight, La Claire is going to go teach a bilingual Bible study. She was working on that yesterday afternoon, I saw. Uh, I've got a black-and-white picture from her wedding to make. I'll make that for the newspaper this afternoon, and also another picture that I've got to do. And, uh, that's the way it goes, we just don't know what we're going to do, exactly, when we get up, but ...

Q: Right. Do you eat together?

JK: Yes, yes.

Q: All your meals?

JK: Well, breakfast is a catch-as-you-can, and some of, well, but the noon meal and the night meal are together and at the night meal we read, read a chapter of the Scripture. We take turns, I mean, uh, there's a reader for the week. And, uh, while the others begin the meal, the reader will read that chapter of Scripture. And then, uh, join the others.

Q: Do you have any special dietary guidelines that you follow, or?

JK: No, Benedict, didn't, wouldn't let his monks eat meat. That's in the Rule here. And we did that for nine years, but, again, it was thing about, well, what difference does it make, you know, exactly, to your spirit, whether you eat meat or not? There was a point, the point where we changed was, George's brother was a doctor, and we were really getting overweight on peanut butter and milk and he, he suggested this all-protein diet. At about the time we had a bad cow, a cow that was in trouble. So, poor as we were, we killed the cow -- [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: -- and, and ate the meat that we could, you know. Most of it was good. But the butcher said "How did that cow eat?" you know. He wanted to know, because that cow was pretty crippled up, you know,

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and nobody, ordinary people wouldn't kill a cow like that, but you'd take her to the glue factory. Anyway, we started eating meat at that time, and uh, have been ever since. And then of course, when La Claire came in 1968, she uh, we had this thing that came, again comes out of the Rule, where you take turns preparing the table, you know week after week, and that's what George and I had done for nine years, ten, or whatever it was. However long we'd lived here before La Claire came. He would do one week and I would do the other week, and we would, it was a question of "Which can are you going to open?", you know, and uh, we told La Claire, or George told La Claire -- he's kind of the abbot, you know, the head of the community -- he said, well, La Claire, we can do this two ways. We can trade off week after week and you can take what you get. Or, if you want to, you can assume the duties of preparing the meals. And she says "I'll take number two." [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: And so she did, and she's, she's a whiz at it, too. I mean, she, she allows half an hour for supper, and that's our main meal. And the things that she comes up with in a half an hour, I'd challenge anyone to beat her. She comes up with a great variety of things, and she gets it done, and she gets it on the table, and ... 'course, Rosalva helps out a bunch now, too. But she does much less of the preparing. She cleans, helps her clean up and stuff. And, uh, George is the fix-it man in the house, if, you know, things are always breaking and there always calling for him. So...

Q: Can you describe how your leadership structure works?

JK: Well, uh, Benedict, the abbot in Benedict's monastery, uh, was like a king, in the sense that whatever the king said went. Now, there was the Rule, to, as a, as a balance, you know. The Rule was to guide the abbot. And in such things as, when there's an important decision, you call the entire monastery together. If it's not so important, just call a few of the wiser men, the older people in the monastery. And, we, of course have always, especially in a small community like that, always followed that policy. Uh, we discuss things to a fare-thee-well here. And ... but George has the, the say-so on it, you know. He claims that he never exercises it apart from the consensus. I don't, I don't know, that everybody would agree with him. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: But he's, he's good at it, I would say. He's awfully good at it.

Q: So does he control the, the money? [Inaudible]

JK: Well, uh, La Claire's our bookkeeper, and we, the money that we have, we call this a partnership, for purposes of taxes. Since we are not a canonical house -- do you understand that concept of canonical and non-canonical in the Catholic...?

Q: No, I don't think I do.

JK: OK. Canonical means that, you go by the church canons, and you answer to the, ultimately, to some bureau in Rome, you know. Or, you know, you answer to the Church, and the Church is responsible for you, in a way, you know. And, they, in order to become canonical you have to have, uh, submitted

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papers in triplicate, you know, and be investigated, and have the trial period and all of that. We have never seen the usefulness of that particular [unintelligible]. Feeling that, just like it started in the beginning, you know, doing the thing substantially is the important thing. Now, one thing that we're doing, still, that a lot of contemporary canonical communities are not doing, and that is wearing a religious uniform, which is called a habit. And we wear these, we have worn these from the beginning. It's the only clothes we've every worn. I mean, this, this, the girls have to adapt it, you know, naturally, and so their clothes are a little different, but it's basically a uniform. And they would easily, they're easily recognized when they go with us, you know anywhere, as being part of the group. But, uh, that is a public sign of profession. And, the, the official church has accepted it as such. We have, our auxiliary bishop said, was leader of our church service Sunday, and he refers to us publicly as brother and sister, even though we don't particularly -- we don't promote that at all, because we don't want to assume a canonical identity and confuse people. But I know when the bishop and the archbishop was visiting a prison the other day, in Huntsville, and a man inquired about a religious community, the archbishop gave him our name. And I have corresponded with that man. So, for awhile, but ... but anyway, I mean, so we're well-known in the archdiocese, and we're, of course, leaders in the local church, but, uh, we try to, the monastic life has always been, or tried to always be, a life that is a life of discipleship, primarily, not of apostleship, and not of caretakers of the church, you know. 'Cause those involve you in a thousand responsibilities that uh, can consume a person, really. [Laughs] Shake [?] your life, to say the least. But we do, we do a lot of work in the church and try not to let it interfere with what we do here.

Q: Can you describe your, your habit and why you chose what you did?

JK: Well, OK, it goes way back to Elijah, you know. The Elijah, uh, wore a hairy mantle and a leathern girdle around his waist. And then John the Baptist did the same thing, if you'll recall. His clothing was camel skin and a leathern girdle. And the tradition is that the leathern girdle symbolizes dedication and celibacy particularly. But the simplicity of the, Benedict said your dress should be simple and whatever you can get most cheaply in the area, you know, that's what he said. So we got Sears and Roebuck. But really, La Claire, when she came, in the uh, Sixties, her community was still in a habit and it cost a hundred dollars to make that habit, which in those days was a lot of money. And, uh, George came out of a community that had a habit, too. But a lot of the nuns, you wouldn't recognize them on the street today, because they, we had a woman visit here the other day, just stop in off the road and you would never know she was a sister. But they're experimenting with it, I think they're finally going to go back to this, I think they're going to discover that, I mean, something simple and uniform because it is a constant reminder to them, and to people. Uh, they're trying to get rid of it as a sign of privilege, as a sign that "We're not part of you, and you're not part of us," you know, they have a lot of good reasons to experiment this way. But I think they're going to find that it's more useful to have that reminder. In fact, our first chapter in this book is dedicated to that, to calling that a problem. Talking about that.

Q: And you chose denim just 'cause you wanted something simple and inexpensive.

JK: Something simple and cheap and that identifies with work, which is what we want to identify with ... idea of the Christian vocation, you know. That our kingdom is not of this world, and if you try to make it your kingdom, you can't, you can't have it both ways, you know. And so, as a public sign of that, that's

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what the habit is supposed to be. For the individual that's wearing it, and for the individual, or the people, that see it. And believe me, when we, we doing weddings in a fifty mile radius of here, and we can go in just about any hall within about fifty miles of here. And if somebody doesn't know it, know us, they immediately ask somebody. [Laughs] "Who are they?"

Q: [Laughs]

JK: "Who's that?" you know. And you, I can hear them whisper, I can see them whispering a hundred times a year. "Oh, that's those monks..."

Q: [Laughs]

JK: Yeah. [Laughs] So. It does tell people who you are and what you're doing. And, I mean, they may not agree with it, but at least they know what, what it is.

Q: Right. What is your relationship like with your neighbors and the surrounding community?

JK: Well, it's, uh, this is the title is the best thing, you know.

Q: "Your Friendly Neighborhood Monks" [Laughs]

JK: Yeah. [Laughs] That's about it. But, uh, two of the people in the congregation, they don't understand our life, and they're very simple people for the most part, who've never gone even, some of them, to high school. So, they don't ask, they don't ask a lot of questions, actually, when you rub shoulders with people year after year. But they accept you as a dedicated religious person, who is living in a, somewhat, in a world that they don't understand, and yet, you're very much a part of the world that they do understand and they know that, and they know that you're with them a hundred percent. And, uh, oh, La Claire's been teaching this little Bible group for, I don't know, fifteen years or something like that. Long, long, long time. And we were involved for twenty-five years in an ecumenical dialogue with ministers of different faiths. We always promoted that. So we've tried to reach out beyond the Catholic community to make Christians understand each other better. That's why I'm doing this paper on the Presbyterians for our local church. But it brings me into contact with Presbyterians. In fact, I'm going to see some on Thursday night this week, to help them, well, they're, they're blessing a building. It's not a big deal, but, uh, see, to the local people, of course, we've had a business relationship, you know. We used to sell hogs. I met a fella Sunday, the day Henry broke his wrist, I took our photography exhibit to Shiner [?] to an arts and crafts show, and passed out these little brochures. Uh, and we exhibited the pictures, brought sample books, and I had a fella stop there and he said he used to buy hogs from us, years and years and years ago. So, [Pause] Also, whenever we did anything of significance, I would put in the paper for business purposes, you know -- if we had a prize hog at a fair or something. So we, we, we became pretty well-known around here. Actually people -- anything that's eccentric or out-of-the-ordinary is a conversation piece. And then, uh, then we built a, uh, slide show -- an audio-visual presentation of what St. Benedict's Farm is. And every Lions Club and Rotary Clubs for thirty miles has seen it, you know, for sure. In fact, I've got another program to give in, in Flatonia [?] in May, April or May, I don't know what [inaudible] but, so, even when La Claire came, the day before she came, I gave a

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Rotary program in Gonzales, sort of announced that she was coming, and got some initial reactions, and, whose going to be in charge, and all of that stuff. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: So, I guess, we're just average -- we're photographers to some people, we're beef cattle people to some people, but most people see us, see the religious part of it. In fact, if you notice, in here, we, we tell people in a very, in just a few words, that we come like we do on purpose. And we have had at least one customer over the years that asked, could we wear a suit? And we said "No, if you don't -- if you want us to wear a suit you need another photographer." And, uh, once in awhile, people will look at you crazy, you know, like when they meet you at the door in their tux and they see, they'll look at you, you know, are you for real? [Laughs] Did we call the right place, you know? But, uh, most of them take it, just in stride, you know, so. We get in line with the people in tuxes, and ... [Laughs]

Q: Right. Now do you have any, um, behavioral rules for living here, like, like no smoking or, things like that?

JK: Well, we discourage, discourage that. I think in the old house I picked up a cigar a couple of times. I don't know why, how I got into that.

Q: [Laughs]

JK: Uh, we don't have absolute rules about it, but, I mean, we do discourage, like, jewelry for the women, you know, we do discourage that. Uh, 'cause we, we tease Rosalva about it all the time. She has this lust for earrings that she expresses about once every three years or something like that, you know. But, uh, we try to live plain, and we do have a rule, I would say, is that, we don't just feel like free to pick up and go to a movie, or something like that. No, we don't feel that. And, uh, we want to, in other words, Benedict said you should do everything in obedience. Even little things. So, if we're going to go downtown or somewhere, we really have to tell the community about it. Most of the time, of course, there's certain permissions that are just understood. And we carry pocket money, if you want to buy a Coke or something, you just do it. Uh, you started to ask about the finances. Well, we basically discuss things before -- are we going to invest money, or something, or spend money to buy a new washing machine or whatever. You know, we'll talk it over, yeah. Pretty well work on consensus, I'd say.

Q: Are you incorporated as a monastery?

JK: No, we're not, I don't think. George, we're not incorporated, are we?

GG: No.

JK: No. It's again, complicated. Huh?

GG: But we're taxed as a partnership.

Q: A partnership.

JK: A partnership.

GG: For simplicity's sake.

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JK: Uh huh. OK. So, we're just a business. And we can't be exempt because we're not canonical. That's, I know that's why I brought that up a while ago. We're not canonical, so we have to pay taxes. Uh, just like everybody else.

Q: Do you ever network with any, I don't know if network is the right word, but, communicate or do things with any other kind of um, religious groups around the area? Like, for example, I went to a monastery, a Russian Orthodox monastery, outside of Austin, Christ of the Hills Monastery --

JK: Oh yeah, we know those people, yeah.

Q: I don't know if you ever --

JK: Yes, we know those people. [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: I'd have to say ... we know them with reservations, in a way. I, I, I'm, I have this, I don't want to say anything bad about them, uh, we have always had a little, inner doubts about some of the, their authenticity, I don't know. Because they changed from Roman Catholic to Orthodox, you know, years ago.

Q: They were Benedictine, weren't they?

JK: Yes.

Q: And then changed.

JK: Yes, but again, they were non-canonical Benedictine. And very much with the same, similar history to ourselves. Their leader, Bishop Benedict he calls himself now, I think. He had been in a Benedictine community and left, just like George had apprenticed in an, in a Trappist community, you know. And went, he went to work in San Antonio and then he decided to form this ecumenical house, which is a little different from what we're doing, of course. Like, you have, an ecumenical house means that you have a Presbyterian here, an Episcopalian there, and uh, you know, a Catholic here, and they were doing things, I think, that weren't altogether approved, uh, by the authorities, even though they weren't canonical, they were doing some things that lay people shouldn't do, you know, like having Mass, you know, or something like that. You know, I, you, can't do that.

Q: Right.

JK: Unless you're ordained.

Q: Right.

JK: So, anyway, I don't, we, we've had a friendship with, with the house, and they, they've come here and we've gone there, and they've written, but I tell you the truth, they got into this Orthodox thing and the weeping statues and all of that, and it's just very, very far removed from our spirituality. And so we don't feel that emotional link with them now. We've bought furniture from them to help support their

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business, when they were in San Antonio, they made these real beautiful -- well, that thing you sat on there a while ago, that's made --

Q: Oh, OK.

JK: That's made by the monks. And, uh, we're, we're, friends, you know, but we just don't have that feeling of real closeness to them, because of the difference in the spirituality and the approach, and the cultural difference, now that they're, uh, ... as well as the religious differences. I mean, they're definitely in a different tradition, although it's Christian, and we would support them, and be brethren with them in that respect. But, uh, uh, I don't think we could network with them in a sense that, you, we'd trade ideas and that sort of thing. Although we do share certain basic foundational views on things, you know. Worship of God, and that sort of thing.

Q: Yeah.

JK: There are, we get letters from the Pecos community in New Mexico, which is a canonical house that is bisexual, you know, men and women, and uh, but again, they're really, their spirituality is quite a bit different than our own. And, they're official, and we're not, and I don't think that they would think that we were important enough to ... [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: Uh, that may be stretching things. They work very much like an organizational house, and we don't have any other personal contact with them. And there aren't any really little communities around here that are doing kind of what we're doing. I've always kind of wanted to have something like that.

Q: Sure.

JK: We were involved in a correspondence circle that was started by a Franciscan community several years ago. And, they, they, they finally wanted us to drop out of it because we were so confrontational, you know, always challenging ideas and things. I'll tell you the man that did it is John Michael Talbot, have you ever heard of him?

Q: No.

JK: Now he is a national recording star. As far in a liturgical circle. You know, I mean, he's a name. You know, John Michael Talbot, in the Catholic liturgical community. But he's, uh, his Franciscan community in Arkansas, they just, he thought we were too upsetting, you know, when we asked, you know, George is a lawyer, and we just have a confrontational style, and talk everything out. But from that experience, we developed what we call the Baroyans [?] And that is a correspondence circle that includes, uh, a cloistered convent in Arkansas of women that never go out of the monastery; they're on our mailing list, uh, a lot of individual priests that we've known here. We worked for a while with a man that was in charge of forming the priests that are in seminary, spiritually. We wrote a book on formation with him, was used in the seminary at that time. And we met a lot of people there at that time, and we corresponded with them in this circle, called the Baroyans [?] But the way it works out is, we do most of the contributions, you know, and George will gather up a packet of materials, you know. It might be

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something he saw in Time magazine. [Pause] A religious journal, or an essay that we did here. He's written a lot of stuff himself. And so we'll send that all out to the Baroyans [?] and there'll be twenty-five packages in the mail that will be about that thick, you know, and then, then, we invite responses. So, in that respect, I guess you'd say we do network. But, uh, and we had this dialogue with the Protestants for so long, both in Gonzales and in La Grange, that kind of petered out. People quit calling each other names, and what was the fun in that, you know? [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs] Yeah.

JK: there was less need for it after that. After that, I guess.

Q: Now you've probably already told me this, but --

JK: No, [unintelligible]

Q: But, um, --

JK: Do you want something to drink?

Q: I'm fine, thank you. Would, what would you say is your purpose, or your mission of your community?

JK: To seek God. That is it up there.

GG: No, no [unintelligible]

JK: Well, no, that's, that's not the answer, that's the question. Why have you come, that's Latin -- Ad quiveniste? Why have you come? And the answer is "Queremos Deus," you know, to seek God. And that's basically it. But, of course, we do it in a Christian way, you know, not like a Buddhist monk would, with similar attitudes, but uh, viewing Christ as part of the answer. So, to seek God is the answer to that, and to grow and go like he moves us, day in and day out. And, as individually and as a community. And you witness as a community too; it has an impact here and there, you know. But it's basically, it could do without all of the fruits and the works that are palpable to the human eye, you know, feeling out a relationship with God is, has a value in and of itself. But, it, that does not exclude a relationship with a community, see, because in the Christian theology, Jesus is God. [Laughs] You have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Jesus is part of that, and the Body of Christ is part of that. So, it's unthinkable that I could have a relationship with God that's apart from my relationship with my fellow Christians, you know. So, it's very much a corporate search in that respect. And, uh, although I well understand the theology of hermit life, you know, which we have in our brother Robert, up in Alaska, no it's Canada, I'm sorry -- Canada, Saskatchewan. But, uh, a lot of times people have trouble with that idea, you know, that, that, there, although there is a value, there was a value of Jesus on the cross, you know, just suffering and dying apart from the world below him -- there was a value there, that transcends all of the good works and the handouts to the poor and that sort of thing. Because it was winning God's favor, and that is basically the theology of the eremitical life, the hermit life; is we are praying and suffering and bonding with God for the grace that he will draw down on the rest of the brothers and sisters. So that's they're theology. And it's a good theology, but, I think, Benedict even says that this is not, the hermit life is not for very many people, you know. It trips a lot of people up. You know the old story about the monk that, uh, was getting, the brethren were getting in his way all the time. And he said "If I could just get rid of

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them, I'd have, I could pray." So he went out into the wilderness by himself, and he tripped over a tree root and turned around and cursed the tree. [Laughs] So the problem is not always in the brethren; it was inside him.

Q: Would you say you live communally because you see seeking God as a corporate search?

JK: Very definitely. That's what they call the cenobitic life, as distinct from the eremitical life, and those are Latin words, which simply means, the cenobium is a gathering of brethren, and the eremitical thing is hermit. But, alone with God, you know, that is the concept, that's what the word "monk" means, from mono, it's basi -- it's an individual search always, you know, as well a communal search, you know -- "What is God telling me?" And we have to answer one at a time, you know. We're called by name, so, uh, but I wouldn't want to serve God as an individual, as solo, I think, I think I could survive solitary confinement a lot better than if I hadn't had this kind of training. Because there is a lot of, as Jesus says, "I can never be alone," he, he complained because they all left him, you know, and he said "But I can never really be alone" because he's three persons in one, is part of that. But ...

Q: What would you say is the best part of living together communally?

JK: The best part? I would think the fellowship.

Q: The fellowship?

JK: Yeah, and that's, it's not just with individ -- with each other, but with God. The fellowship is the best part. Uh, there is even a parable on that -- the best part -- Mary and Martha, that has do with the kind of work you do, I guess. But there is a sweetness in following the Word of God, too, that is part of the fellowship, that I, I'd say fellowship is the thing. I think that's what we're going to have in heaven, don't you?

GG: Mmm hmm.

JK: [Laughs] Going into the bosom of Abraham.

GG: There's a, there's a sweetness to it, but then there's also the challenge; you've got to be willing to --

JK: Yeah, I remember that, that, that, we were all over here one time, we were [unintelligible] to a Lutheran fellow, and uh, and uh, this, this man, I don't remember whether you [unintelligible] I forget his name now. He was from Shiner and he was telling us "Yeah, you guys got it made -- you don't have a wife hollerin' at you all the time, you don't get any back talk." And, and George turned around to him and said "Yeah, and we don't get any front talk either." [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: So there is pain involved in it, but we, we, we laugh, and this is in our book too, but I got to tell it to you. We were friends with an old cowboy over here in Welder [?] and he was over here doing business with us one day, and his wife had just jumped on him for stepping on the floor that she'd just mopped, and he said "Boys, what you need around here is a woman to keep things all stirred up." [Laughs]

GG: That was at a time when there were no women here.

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Q: Oh, gosh, that's funny.

JK: That would not be politically correct today, would it? [Laughs]

GG: [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: But as long as you know that a man can keep things stirred up, it's OK.

Q: What would you say is the most challenging part of living together communally?

JK: What's the most challenging part? Growing and going where God wants you to go and you don't want to.

GG: And I think that the basis of our life depends upon you're being, you're following a perceived call, a vocation to do this, and that's the hard part. Getting along with people, it's got it's problems, but, I would say that once you have decided that this is what you're going to do, well, then, that's the hard part. That's the really, the hardest part is to --

Q: Making a decision?

GG: Making a decision that you're going to seek God in everything. Now, that's not easy. Particularly because you've got to make it over and over and over and over again. All the time.

JK: You got to keep stretching out to it.

GG: Yeah. It's not just a decision you make once. You got -- it's constant.

JK: Uh huh.

GG: And when that is the case, uh, well then, things don't necessarily, they're not necessarily easy, but there not so very hard, either, once you've made up that -- I notice your microphone -- that's an interesting thing. I've seen those microphones advertised before. Does it work good?

Q: Yeah, it seems to work real well.

JK: I've never seen one before.

GG: It's a, what do you call it? The elephant in the microphone is a little bitty thing that's down underneath and it's reflecting off that plate.

JK: Uh huh. George does the recording [Unintelligible] [Laughs]

Q: Ahh ... you know a lot about technology. So George, what led you to want to leave the Trappists and start a different kind of monastic life?

GG: Well, uh, I had the, it's kind of an eerie feeling that the Lord wanted me to do it. And, you know, the Trappist life is a hard way to live, so you could always say, "Well, you know, you're looking for an easier way to live, but, actually, that was not, too much the case. We, uh, when we wound up here, our way of life was not any easier than the Trappists. It was different, but it wasn't easier. But the, I would say that the sense of vocation is what made me leave the Trappists, and in fact I had the feeling that this was a crazy thing to do, and if it just didn't work out, that I'd go back to the Trappists, so I really didn't, I didn't just reject the Trappists as all. Although that's a very hard way of life to live. It's a --

JK: Especially in that day.

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GG: It's highly disciplined. Yes, well, that's true. The Trappists themselves have changed quite a little bit since Vatican II [unintelligible] the Catholic church has changed immensely. A lot of its institutions. But, anyhow, this did not ultimately fail to work out. It looked like it was going to fail there for about a dozen years [Laughs] but, uh, we had several people come and leave.

JK: Now people always ask "What are you going to do if nobody else comes?" [Laughs]

GG: Well, of course, I'm old enough now to say I'm going to say "Let them take care of that, because when I die, they're going to have to figure it out for themselves." I mean, you know, we were reasonably young then. Just, I don't know,-- thirties --

JK: Twenty-four and twenty-seven.

GG: Well, I was twenty-seven, I guess.

JK: Yeah, when you came here.

GG: And now I'm sixty-seven, so we've had forty years here. There's a different perspective when you get that age.

Q: How do you feel about those, the past forty years? Are you glad that this is the path that you followed?

GG: Oh, oh, quite. I'm very upbeat about it. I don't know what will happen to it as a community. That's just a mystery to me and I'm not going to really worry about it.

Q: Yeah.

GG: It has grown, and it has had some positive influence in the surrounding area, but that's up to God, and I don't worry about it. [Pause] I'm kind of fascinated to know, just what is the nature of your inquiry into community life? You're, you were working with a professor that's [unintelligible]

Q: Yes.

JK: Kansas State.

Q: Yes, no -- the University of Kansas.

JK: University of Kansas.

Q: [Unintelligible] in Lawrence, Kansas and he's a professor of religious studies, his name is Tim Miller, and he's um, studied communal groups for a long time; historic groups as well as contemporary groups, and, um, he has a particular interest right now in groups that came out of the '60s and '70s, 'cause there was such a wave of communalism then, so my job is to go around the country and interview people who lived communally during that period. And we're not just interested in hippie communes, but any, any type of communal group.

GG: There's quite a, been quite a difference in growth in the thing, and, and some, well, they just flourished and then a lot of them died out.

Q: Mmm hmm, exactly.

GG: But of course, we, we antedated that --

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Q: You did.

GG: That phenomenon somewhat. Uh, we had, we used to have a thing up there that, you know, on our barn, that said "Shalom." Well --

JK: No, "Pax" wasn't it?

GG: Well --

JK: Oh, yeah.

GG: It, we had "Pax" up there for a long time, and of course people didn't know what that meant. P-A-X, it's Latin for peace.

Q: Peace.

GG: Well, uh, when the sign gave out, we thought of just writing it in English -- people saying "What in the world does that Pax mean?" But at that time, it was around in the Sixties, so we said, no we couldn't put "Peace" up there, we'd be just completely misunderstood. [Laughs]

JK: [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: We'd be branded --

GG: So we put "Shalom" which also means peace.

Q: Did, did you get um, any hippie seekers that would stop in and see what you were doing?

GG: Oh, I don't know that we did. Well, a little. A little. Oh, --

JK: Oh, Juan Lorenzo?

GG: Juan Lorenzo.

JK: He was a Haight-Ashbury hippie. And he spent a year here, or so.

GG: But he was married, no -- he married after he left here.

JK: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, that was was before. But, you see, after Haight-Ashbury, John Michael, I mean, not John Michael, but Juan Lorenzo, he had a Christian conversion, and came out here under those auspices to live with us. And since that time, he married and studied theology and became sort of like a lay pastoral teacher. In fact, he did that in Austin for a while. Now he's in Chicago, doing something similar to that. So, but most of the people that have come here to try this life have been middle-aged people that have, are still looking, you might say, for something. And, uh ...

GG: And we really are, well, if community life is off-beat, we're, we're kind of out of step with the average kind of image of community life.

JK: Yes, and let, let me tell you this, that, this, this, directory that you found our name in, we have gotten, I'm going to guess, from twelve to twenty inquiries through that directory. And if they're really serious, I generally will, these days I send them a card, and then I send them the book. And we've never anybody want to come back after they read the book. So --

GG: Well, it's something different than what they're --

JK: Whatever they're looking for is not what we are. And, I have a feeling that, and this would be something I would explore if I ever do do this article, you know, that the hippie movement generated a

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sort of Shangri-La image of community life. And that that's what, I would say, ninety-nine percent of your seekers are looking for. One way or the other, whether they get it through vegetarianism or --

GG: Well, I think a lot of it was the watchword, but, uh, emptying out yourself is not the watchword and never has been.

JK: Th, th, that's the difference.

GG: That's the trouble because that's really what, what Jesus is talking about when he speaks of loving one another. He's not talking about just having a grand old time. [Laughs] Or accepting one another -- although that's part and parcel of it, but the other thing is that you have to give up so much of your inner self that we cling to with great jealousy. And so it's quite a challenge. And our life naturally has a religious basis, so... that's different than the hippie movement which really didn't have a -- it was an irreligious basis, almost.

Q: [Laughs]

GG: Uh, yeah, I don't know. It had another kind of religion, it was almost a religion of its own. Uh, but it had little to do with Christianity, which of course is the basis of our life. But it is true that out of this, what do you call it, uh, a group of -- well, uh, where did, how did she get a hold of our name?

JK: Through this Community Directory.

GG: The Directory. The Directory is mostly communities of the secular --

JK: Secular, secular type.

Q: Secular, yeah.

JK: Yeah.

GG: Now they're secular, by and large.

JK: Which are valid.

GG: Doesn't mean they're irreligious, really, but, uh, it just has a different ... people are looking, I think for a way to, for self-fulfillment. Well, there's nothing wrong with that. What I think, what Jesus has to offer in the way of self-fulfillment is emptiness and crucifixion -- [unintelligible]

JK: But, yeah, but he says --

GG: Just the, what sounds like, on the surface, the exact opposite --

JK: He does, he does speak about self-fulfillment because he says whoever --

GG: Oh yeah.

JK: Gives or go, if you go sell what you have and give it to the poor and follow me, you'll have a hundred-fold in this present time. Along with persecutions, you know. But --

GG: That takes quite a risk.

JK: But, the, uh, the decision to do that also follows his counsel to, if you're going to save your life, you've got to lose it. And those are, that's a mystical kind of a concept, but it is, it does have practical translation, you know. I mean, you translate it into real, practical language.

GG: I guess the monastic --

JK: Not, not, not terribly burdensome things all the time, you know. I was thinking, like, trying to give you an example of a little problem that we would have. When I was going to have this surgery last

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month, uh, the doctor told me, you know, if this gives you problems, you know, you can call me and we'll get this thing done earlier. And so, I started feeling problems [Laughs]

Q: [Laughs]

JK: And I started --

Q: 'Cause of his suggestion.

JK: wanting to call, and he kept telling me, "Naw, you don't need to do that." So, I hear, hear, God telling me "Lookit, now, put this thing off," but I hear John saying "No, you gotta get this done, you know, you're gonna, you're miserable doing this way. You're not going to be able to make this wedding." I had a wedding to take pictures at. But I'm glad I waited, now. Because I got through the wedding, although I didn't think I was going to. But I got through the wedding, and by God, even got to preach on Christmas, at their Christmas liturgy, which I wouldn't have done if I'd have been, been, uh, out. But seeing that as God's will, you know, this little decision that I can just call the doctor and he can set me up a week ahead of time, or two weeks, or three weeks ahead of time, that kind of thing, I see, that's the asceticism that we live -- to try to seek God speaking there and to answer Him with, uh, positively. Not complaining, you know. Benedict hated complainers. Now he said if you do it and you complain, that's worse than not doing it.

Q: [Laughs]

GG: That's right. Murmuring, he called it.

JK: So, that's the essential --

GG: To obey but have a bad [unintelligible] about it.

JK: Getting along everybody, we all naturally do things that irritate the other person, but, when you're in a group, I think, especially, you, you have some comforts, or some cushions against when somebody blows up, or somebody's out of sorts, you, you have, you sort of share the load. [Laughs]

GG: Mmm hmm.

JK: This is La Claire.

Q: Hello, La Claire, I'm Deborah.

LC: Nice to meet you, Deborah.

Q: Nice to meet you.

LC: Hope John's been telling you everything?

Q: Yeah!

JK: Hope he's been telling you the truth, that's what.

[Laughter]

Q: No, this --

GG: Deborah, do you go all over the country, doing this work?

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Q: Yeah, I've been going all around the country.

GG: But you came from Kansas?

Q: Yes, that's where I live.

JK: But you, they have a grant.

Q: Yes.

JK: That's what pays your salary.

Q: So this is my job for the year, to travel around. I go home a lot, though, you know.

GG: How long have you been at it?

Q: Um, since October. So I'm about halfway through.

JK: Where is your home? In, in --

Q: In Lawrence, Kansas.

JK: Lawrence?

Q: Uh huh.

JK: And do you have a family there?

Q: I, I'm married, but I don't, I don't have any kids. Mmm hmm.

JK: That permits you --

Q: That permits me some leeway, you know, so I can go out.

JK: Your husband can go fishing ...

Q: [Laughs] That's right. Uh huh, yeah. So I've been to really fascinating places and met some [unintelligible] --

JK: I'll bet you have.

Q: people.

JK: That's, that's interesting. Do you ever get, do they get short, short-shrift, or, I mean, do people not ... want to get rid of you, or...?

Q: Well, um, some people have been, I would say, by and large, most people have been really welcoming, you know, like you have, and just invite me in and say, "Sure we want to talk." Some groups are a little bit more cautious, and like, there's a, there's a, I think sort of a hippie-type community up near Austin called Greenbriar...

JK: Yes, that's been there a long time.

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Q: Yeah, and they didn't really want to talk to me. Um, I'm not sure why. I think they've had some problems with the press, kind of giving them, um, negative attention that, you know, has been [unintelligible] --

JK: But they've been there a long time, haven't they? And they have a doctor?

Q: I think since 1969, or something.

JK: A doctor that --

Q: They do have a doctor. Yeah, mmm hmm.

JK: Does he practice in the community?

Q: And some midwives and things. I think so, yeah. I really don't know that much about them. I wish I could go talk to them, but I don't think it's going to work out.

JK: Oh, they don't want you?

Q: They, well, apparently they're just a little wary of people who want to come in with their tape recorders, because they're worried about getting misquoted or something, and I can understand that. 'Cause a lot of times people, when they are a little unusual, they do tend to get bad press. You know, people come in and call them a cult, or something like that, and then, you know, they don't like that.

JK: Uh huh. They don't want the people around them to ...

Q: Yeah.

JK: Yeah.

GG: Well, I think we were rather suspicioned by the powers that be in the Church there, for a number of years, although they finally decided that we were all right. [Laughs]

Q: Oh, that's good.

GG: That has no worry about it at all.

JK: Well, we went on the radio. That was the first time we were looked askance at, I think.

LC: I heard this expression the other day about the, the baby bear assessment, or something like that. I read it in Time magazine. Some political thing, you know, where he, he's not too liberal, or the liberals think he's too conservatives and the conservatives think he's too liberal, then he must be just right, you know, like the baby bear ... you know --

JK: Porridge.

LC: You know, baby bear's porridge. And I, you know, we have been looked upon as very conservative by liberal, wild liberals, and we're looked on as sort of liberal by the hard-line conservatives. So I think that puts us in the right place.

Q: [Laughs] Do you do any service work in the community? Is that part of your ... your mission, or?

GG: We do a lot of it. But the fact is, that it's not exactly part of the mission.

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Q: OK.

GG: It's sort of ... things that are just, we have an opportunity, so we do it, but we don't dedicate our life to serving the community. That's hard to describe, because it's a contemplative orientation, I'm sure you're bound to have, uh, an, a conception of the idea of contemplative life. Where there are people --

JK: Discipleship.

GG: Where there are people -- yeah, it's discipleship. Where people even go off into these monasteries and have a wall around them, and they just have practically no contact with the outside world at all. Well, you know, we don't go that way, but on the other hand, we're not dedicated to service work.

JK: We're not at every public meeting, you know.

Q: Right.

GG: We are actually, as it turns out, rather involved in the local community, in particular. Both in the --

JK: Uh --

LC: I would say most of our service is in the context of the church. Just the way it worked out.

Q: Right.

GG: I mean, they teach, uh, the CCD classes --

JK: But that again is church, church oriented.

GG: That's church related, yeah. But, and John, you've done some of the ecumenical work, which, uh, uh, it's religion, but it's not necessarily the Catholic church, it's just quite the opposite. And then there's a few things that are [unintelligible] in the picture --

JK: Well, we have -- yeah -- the fun thing that we do is, reaches out to beyond the church sometimes --

GG: To people in need, uh, uh --

JK: But that's a, that's a small kind of a ministry. Although to some people, it's important, sometimes.

Q: Sure. Yeah.

JK: And our food pantry at church, we have that. We did have a Boy Scout troop in the beginning. Again, it was made up mostly of people from our church. But that, that was a fiasco. [Laughs]

[Laughter]

GG: We had --

[Laughter]

GG: Well, we had --

JK: But you know --

GG: a basic orientation to the religious life lived here. On the other hand, since, you know, we don't have some hard-and-fast wall that we can't get, get past. And so, leading a Christian life involves you with other people --

JK: It involves you with other people, but --

GG: beyond just this community, so.

JK: Well, you gonna talk about this --

LC: Well, you probably going to say the same thing but, about twenty-five years ago, I and this other woman that was here had a little club, it was like the Brownies, but we didn't call it that.

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JK: Call it the Pixies.

LC: And we got little girls from the school, and we'd bring them out here and do things. And to this day, I'm always running into young women who say "You know, I used to be a Pixie, and I remember that ..."

Q: Oh ...

LC: And we thought it was a complete failure at the time. [Laughs]

Q: Oh yeah --

LC: It just never worked out.

Q: But it was meaningful to them.

LC: It, it was. Because there's not too much to do, or to, you know that --

GG: In a town like Welder, [?] yeah.

LC: Offered, in Welder. And it really meant a lot to them.

Q: So, La Claire, what, what brought you here?

LC: Well, I don't know if John told you. I used to be a nun, and I never wanted to do anything with my life except give myself to God and to religious life, since I was a little kid. So, I ended up in the convent, which was the normal way to look for what I was wanting.

JK: Thought your picture was in here, but it isn't.

LC: But, I don't know, it just came out sort of disappointing. Although I didn't think that they were not coming up to my expectations, I just thought, I never could cut it, and really feel a part of it, and I didn't know why. You know, I was music teacher, did that all day, and, anyway, I got acquainted with George and John after I had been in the convent for thirteen years, uh, they ... I was teaching in Schulenberg, [?] which is a town about twenty-five miles from here. And, uh, just right off, their brand of religious life just appealed to me. But of course, 'specially in those days, --

GG: Which was in, about mid-'60s.

LC: Mid-'60s. It was shocking to think that I would come out here and join the, you know, out in the woods with two men. But, um, the more we thought about it, the sillier it seemed to give up this opportunity just because of what people might think. So I got permission to leave the convent, uh, in 1968 and came here and it's just ...

JK: We studied the question in history, too. There used to be double monasteries, you know, where the men and women lived side by side. The Shaker community in the Protestant world. Uh, we just felt like it was possible, you know. It was altogether possible.

LC: But the ironic thing, you know, here I find, have found the kind of direction, help for growth, and at the same time --

GG: The challenge.

[Laughter]

LC: Yeah, opportunities. Like you were talking about service, you know. I think I do more for the Church and, you know, even on the outward thing, than I ever did in the convent. Even though, here we earn

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our own living, we, you don't fool time [?], we earn our living, and we do all that, and still have time for service. So it's sort of ironic --

GG: That is ironic.

LC: When I think about it ...

Q: That is.

JK: You do more now really than --

GG: Because the sisters --

JK: in the convent, yeah.

GG: The sisters, thing, the convent, was set up to do service in the world. From a religious base, but, the, the object is the active life, as they call it, or, uh, uh, religious good works. And our life isn't set up that way at all. Our life is set up as, so that we can grow in the Spirit, and we don't have to do anything outside of the house.

LC: Uh, I don't know if John mentioned why Father, about Father Rubaldo [?], this young priest that's right here right now. He's from Colombia, and he doesn't know English very well, so we're helping him study English. And that just reminded me about eight years ago Rosalva and I ran this little English school for immigrants.

JK: Now that was a real community service, yeah.

LC: Uh huh, it was a big thing. Uh, and uh, I guess for about three or four years. And we had maybe a hun -- well, close to two hundred students at one time. There was a certain requirement that they had to meet, I think, forty hours of instruction to get their papers. So a lot of them dropped out after they got their forty hours. But that was a big deal, and I enjoyed doing ESL teaching, a whole lot. So ...it's been nice.

JK: [Unintelligible]

GG: [Unintelligible] first step on their naturalization papers, I guess, yeah.

JK: You've, you've prepared a few people for GED's, too. I know that was kind of along the same line.

Q: So Father Baldo's [?] basically here to learn English? Or ...

GG: He visits us --

LC: See, he's --

GG: what, twice a week? And La Claire --

LC: See, he's stationed in Gonzales, which is our home church. And there are two priests there, and they send one to say Mass in Welder [?] once a --

JK: Every Sunday, yeah. Yeah.

LC: So he's one of our priests.

JK: Since our community's bilingual, see, he gets the bilingual church, because he can preach in Spanish, which he's very good at. But he's really, his English --

LC: His English is --

JK: Very poor.

GG: Very, very slow.

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Q: Right.

LC: But he's getting better.

Q: Oh good, good.

JK: He can read the prayers of the Mass in English pretty, pretty good. And then he reads his homily, which is not as good as his Spanish, but it's pretty good.

Q: Well, as, as a final question um, I'm curious what advice you would give to a group that wanted to live together communally, 'cause your group has lasted so long, much longer than most groups that try to do something like that --

GG: Exactly.

LC: Well, I would say first of all, if they don't have some motive or reason --

GG: Purpose.

LC: Beyond just everybody enjoying themselves together --

GG: Self-fulfillment.

LC: they are not going to last. They have to have something that keeps them going in the hard times. Because there are --

JK: A purpose beyond their own enjoyment.

LC: Uh huh, that's right.

GG: Beyond your own enjoyment, and yet, you would say that there is a fulfillment, even from your standpoint.

LC: Oh, yes.

GG: [Unintelligible]

JK: You're fulfilling your purpose, yeah.

GG: But you're not into it for that primarily. You're primarily here to serve God, or to seek God, if you will, that's the way a Benedictine speaks of it, to seek God. And that puts you out of yourself. Well, uh, if you're here to seek yourself, you're not going to be satisfied.

[Laughter]

JK: Well that's --

LC: But you know, if you are --

GG: That happens to a lot of groups.

LC: If you are just trying to establish and maintain a certain type of lifestyle, with, with very particular requirements, according to your desires, it's not going to work out the way you want it, and you're going to find people with other ideas of how it's supposed to be. And I don't think, you know, if you don't have something to hold you together, it's not going to last.

GG: We, of course, have the religious life idea, which, ultimately, uh, the idea is to seek God, and so you do this with other people. But, uh, [Pause] there is the principle of authority in the, in a religious house. We don't emphasize that, particularly here, but we've got it, needless to say, as a final resort if you will. But, uh, mostly our concept is to get together about things, and to hash them out with each other and that is the fundamental way of authority.

JK: Well, I know that --

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GG: Although in the final analysis, if there's a disagreement, then the leader is the one who is to make the decision. But usually that isn't the case. I can't even remember an instance in which that's been the case. We come, we hash it out, and we get together. That's not to say that there aren't [End of side B] [Tape 2, Side A]

LC: [Rea]?listic about how you're going to make a living. If you just dream about arts and crafts, or having a few sheep, or something, it's not that easy.

JK: Yes, remember that, oh, Mother John Marie came here looking for advice on how -- that's a community you might think of visiting, I don't know. The Disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in Channing, Texas. Uh, she came here and spent a couple weeks with us and ... she was in, near tears when she left, when we told her, you know, "You can't make it with a few sheep. You're going to have to, I mean, you know, the, it's wonderful to depend on God and Providence and all of that, but you, if you've got your head to plan with, you want to plan with more than a few sheep.

GG: Several hundred sheep might help.

[Laughter]

Q: Yeah.

GG: But not a handful. Economics is really a, you know, that's a genuine challenge for anybody. Of course, we live in the country --

JK: I think, I think there might be something else --

GG: That was another aspect. We didn't want to live in the city, now in the city, I guess, people could get work places, I don't know how they --

JK: Something else to successful community, and that's to be sure that you keep it that way. That you don't try to go your own, on your own. Like if a person, in this community, tries to solve their problems on their own, the rest of them will come down on that person, you know, with all force, you know. And you've got to work it out with the community, you can't just go and figure this thing out yourself. You know, or, we had a woman that wanted to come here to get away from her mother-in-law, and to paint pictures, you know. Well, we told her, you know, that's, this is not what you, where you want to come, you know. This is a community.

LC: I think that's been, that was a problem with a lot of the hippie communities in the early days, that, people wanted to enjoy the fruits of the life, but they didn't want to make the adaptation and uh, --

JK: The do your own thing. You know, you can only carry that so much out of it. In a community, you got to somewhere you've got to sacrifice that do your own thing. To some extent. [Pause]

Q: Well, thank you all so much.