

Interview with David Brown

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

June 22, 1996

Q: This is Saturday, June 22nd, and an interview with David Brown. And I don't know anything about your communal experience, if you've had other experiences besides Lunasi. Well I guess you've hung out with Steven Gaskin in San Francisco, but maybe you can just start from the beginning and catch me up to date.

A: I have lots of bits and pieces, some longer than others. In the sixties, I grew up in Chicago. Somewhere in mid-sixties, just the concept, I mean . . . I don't know the proper definition of communal living. There were lots of times in Chicago where we would have separate apartments but there would be any number of persons in any one of the apartments, but we would always have gatherings in the parks or in someone's apartment. It just seemed to be a whole group, and we called ourselves The Family, and we all had nicknames. Just all kinds of names, did tons of drugs together, so there was a very communal spirit, but it wasn't a total communal-style living. But the spirit was there, and certainly the connections were there. But the living space is more of broken down into units, but it wasn't one large unit, and it was urban. I really never lived in a rural community until this one. But then we migrated '68, '69, '70, we migrated back and forth between California and Chicago. At any given time there would be some in each city.

Q: And when you say "we," you're talking about this sort of family you had?

A: The Family, we called ourselves the Family. It was before Charles Manson. It was just wonderful to be able to have a place in either place, and some of us would be in Los Angeles, and we were very mobile. But we had places. Any time we went -- and there were probably 60 or 70 of us. The core was not that large, but there were enough of us that any place you went, you were welcome. Someone had a place in Los Angeles, and if you were in that area you were welcome to stay as long as you liked. So I don't know if it was a true commune, and the fact that people were doing their own thing, but they were doing it as a community, I thought it was very neat. I thought you had more freedom to be mobile, and to make more choices for yourself and what you wanted to do at any given time. You weren't tied. It seemed to work very well. And it went on for four or five years. But my own personal experience was to go back and forth a couple of times, and sometimes we lived with four people, and sometimes six or 8 people. In San Francisco we had as many as 12, 14 people in one large apartment. Sometimes we would wind up renting two or three apartments in one building, and almost get the entire building.

Q: How did someone become part of the Family?

A: There was really never any official, I mean it wasn't like, like here at Lunasi, we have land trust meetings, there was never anything official, it just seemed to happened, and it just was. You just, I think you just assumed your place, in spirit and being. You were just welcomed. It felt very natural. I think it would be our natural, if we were still able to do tribal-type living, I think that would still hold. I mean, I've been in third-world countries where there seems to still be a flavor of that, where, when you get away from a very money-materialistic society, that it's a real natural, inherent way that humans are. I think of Native-Americans, just as an example, by reading them, if you're part of the culture, you're sort of welcomed. I read a lot about Aborigine-type South-American rain forest people, and that's sort of like, you just are, I don't know what brings it out. I hate to think that it's the drugs, but some of the hallucinogenic really broke the walls down. I'm not suggesting that that's what people should pursue, but it certainly seemed to break a lot of barriers really quickly.

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Q: Now, about when was this? This is late '60s?

A: It started, yeah, it started '67, '68, '66.

Q: And was it in Chicago first?

A: Yeah, my experience was in Chicago first, and then we sort of migrated to California. More people followed, and then we had -- and there was a group of us that started going to Steven's classes. Monday night classes, the core of us that lived in San Francisco. It wasn't very long, maybe six months to a year. People came in and out, and it wasn't -- and at that point, we had a communal apartment, we had everybody put in so much money or whatever money they could put in. Everyone had certain duties, all the household chores were divided and rotated, the shopping and cleaning and so forth.

Q: What part of the city was your apartment in?

A: It was on Haight St. Probably about six blocks up from Ashbury. It was on Stanion. It's a long hill. Tax my memory here. Stanion and Haight? I'm not sure they even run together. But it was right outside of the Haight-Ashbury district. That was probably '69, '70, so Haight-Ashbury at that point was fairly dead, for all practical purposes. There were a lot of damaged people at that time. But we were going to Steven's classes, going to his Sunday morning services. And we bought a school bus, an old bus. Eight of us. And we were having engine problems, so we weren't able to go with the original -- if I remember correctly, they did an original trip, they did the trip, and they were gone for months, and they came back, and decided to settle in Tennessee, or they just wound up in Tennessee. I think they just wound up. You probably know more of the history of that than I do.

Q: I don't remember exactly how they found their land, but I have it on tape.

A: Okay. I know when they took the caravan, they went up north, up toward Washington State, Montana, did a big arch, and I'm not sure, I don't think they all came back. They couldn't of, there was too many buses. I know they had support vehicles and pick-up trucks with fuel containers for people who ran out of gas and had mechanics. Incredible group of people. They could take old school buses, diesel, Greyhounds, and rebuild the entire diesel engines to run like tops. But the bus made it, I didn't make it to Tennessee. The bus did and some of the people from our core group made it to the Farm. At that point, our core group -- I think what happened for us was some people got really wiped out on drugs, and just started getting burnt. Some people reverted back to "being non-hippies," "back to normal," I don't know what the term would be.

Q: Straight?

A: I guess that would be a good '60s term. I think life just changed, and people change according to the influences around them. I came back to Chicago. We all got into a real heavy spiritual trip. I think a lot of us got very confused. A lot of people who were following Steven that stayed behind in San Francisco got very confused about spirituality, and what it meant, and what it meant to have -- I just think a lot of people got very confused and very hurt. I think it still goes on, like at Waco, and there's a lot of people, Jonestown, lot of people got very confused around spirituality and religion. So some of the group wound up in Hawaii, they followed a spiritual leader, some guy from LA, called Father Jim [?]. He owned the Source Restaurant, which I think is still there, it's a fairly famous vegetarian --

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Q: In Hawaii or in LA?

A: No, in Los Angeles, it was on Sunset Strip, and I think the Source is still there. But the guy that started it, two of the real, my very very close and dear friends, went and got very heavily involved in his religious teachings. As a matter of fact -- and they even came his "adopted" spiritual sons, and denied their own parents. His whole thing was "Don't write your parents, don't even acknowledge your other life exists." And they bought into it. They came out of it fine, and then this guy died hang-gliding. They all moved to Hawaii, he took his whole little tribe to Hawaii. And so one of my best friends now owns a restaurant in Hawaii called The Source, because he was Father Jim's very close spiritual son. So we dispersed in different areas. But I came back to Chicago and lived in the -- we had a house, at that point, probably 12 or 14 of us rented a house in Chicago, and it was a communal house -- it was the only complete house we had ever had. All the others had been apartments, but in this case we were able to find a house. And that worked very well for a couple of years, and that was very neat. But it's hard. I think communal living, in itself, is hard. And the fact that who sweeps the floor, and who washes the dishes, and who didn't do this, it gets lots of feelings going. It's sort of ironic, I have the feeling that communal living works better after 40 than before 40. It's like parenting, it works better especially after 30 than before 30.

Q: Was there a particular type of person that was attracted to the Family lifestyle? Like would they have a particular political bent or philosophy of life?

A: Well, political bent, if they were political at all, it was almost always left, to far left radical. I think the thing . . . I think the pull to communal living, first of all I think it's a pretty natural way to live, I'm not sure about total communal, but community, certainly. And the good thing about a land-trust, like here, is I think I remember Ken Keasy [?] wrote once, after years of communal living, he thought communities were just dandy, because you knew when you went home you were going to have your bed open at night. He thought communities were a much more viable solution, tightly woven land-trust or communities, because, and I feel the same way, because you do have your own space. But I think the people that I know that were pulled to it were mostly people who didn't have any tight-woven family as children. And I think we were all seeking that, some kind of love and connection and support. I really, . . . I don't know, it would be interesting to see, if you do research on it, what the answer would be if you took a poll on people in communes -- did they have a real tight, supportive family life growing up?

Q: That would be a real interesting question to ask.

A: Now, it could be that the communes that work real well, a lot of people may have had that, so they know how to do that. But, . . . to me, that was the pull, was just to be with a group of people that loved me and, supported me, the best they knew how. I mean, you didn't always get the support you totally needed, but certainly, the core, it was a very dependable -- and we still know where each other are today, most of us. We may not communicate, I mean, I may call Bob Paul in Hawaii and say, "How's Boshah?" and he will tell me where she's at and what she's doing and how her life is going. So somewhere there's enough communication between individual members that you can pretty much check up on each other.

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Q: How many folks were in the core?

A: Maybe 30, at different times through the years, maybe even more. But I can think of 25 or 30 off the top of my head. I don't know if I can rattle off the names, but I know there were that many.

Q: Did you have any special beliefs or life-style patterns, like were you vegetarians? Or --?

A: At times, we were vegans. Some of us got pretty drastic, microbotic. We weren't real consistent for long periods of time. I know what my reason on that was, but I'm not sure what everyone else's is. I mean, drugs certainly played a big part in that. Drugs and lifestyle.

Q: Would you meditate together or anything like that?

A: No. I never did.

Q: But I think you mentioned a while back, I don't know if you meant The Family, or you yourself, personally, got on a pretty heavy spiritual trip?

A: Yes. With Steven. That's when it mostly started with the core people. Steve and Father Jim. Some went off in different areas. I think spirituality just frightens some people to death when they don't know anything about it, and they don't much about it, but they're trying to figure out -- I don't know. As much as all the beauty and love that I saw in communal-type living, I saw a lot of confusion, because of drugs. And I think the people that I knew that were attracted to communal living didn't have very supportive childhoods. So we weren't, and I know from my personal experience, I was never taught or given the space to be able to do conflict resolution, problem-solving, emotional-type problem-solving. I don't know why I'm on this --

Q: No, it's interesting, though, I'm always curious what motivates people to seek it.

A: Well it's a very good question, because I've never thought of it. I think to belong, I do think we all want to belong to something good.

Q: When you were in Chicago, did you ever had any interaction with the Jesus People?

A: No. I didn't, but I know who they were, but I never had any interaction with them. I'm aware of them. They weren't anywhere near as large as they are now, from what I understand, back in the early '70s. I don't know, when did they start?

Q: In the early '70s, I think, yeah, right about the same time you would've been there.

A: I think they started in the neighborhood where I lived.

Q: Really?

A: I think so. They're on the north side, aren't they?

Q: Well, right now they have an apartment building in Uptown.

A: Yeah, north side. Yeah, that's where they were starting. No, I never got involved with the Jesus People.

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Q: Were there other communal experiments happening in Chicago at that time?

A: I think there were little pockets. We were never organized enough to seek out other communities. I know of people that were . . . the thing that I remember was like people, like maybe three young families with three couples or three people getting together and doing a communal buy on tree flats. Now that seemed to be a thing that a few people were doing. They'd get together and buy the building as a group, with joint ownership, but they would all have their own space. I thought that was pretty neat. But I just think we were much too mobile to even think of buying our own or anything. Our whole core of people were just -- some people would take off and go to Afghanistan and take a trek from Wandon [?] to Nepal, be gone for 6 months to a year or so. It just wasn't that -- so I don't think we were as well-footed as some communes or communities like the Farm, or some smaller communes.

Q: How did people support themselves?

A: Lots of different ways. I would do factory work. Odd jobs. My way of supporting myself, since it was Chicago where I would come back to, to make money, was -- Chicago is a very industrial town, and I had, my whole thing was doing factory work, just going to work a lot, make a lot of money, and then just check out for six months for a year. And then just go back and forth. A little bit of drug dealing. Some people would make money off of drugs. I'm not sure if our whole lifestyle was a definition of commune, but there certainly was a communal focus on the group. We never got organized enough to say, "Okay, this is a commune, we're going to make money by blah, blah blah, we'll start a candybar business, or natural foods." There were people doing that in San Francisco. I had a lot more contact with other communes in San Francisco than Chicago. San Francisco, even though the Haight was burnt up, in the surrounding neighborhoods, there were a lot of people doing what we were doing, renting either two or three apartments in a building, or having large apartments with 10 to 12 people, and it's more like big families. I remember going to the Morningstar Ranch, at the tail end, the very tail end, it had just been trashed. I was devastated. I think that was '70. We went up a couple times. And the buildings were pretty much gone. The bikers had just come in and burnt them and tore them down, partied. The people, one of the original founders, was still living in a tepee, he and his partner and two children. I remember being somewhat disgusted. I don't know if "disgusted" is maybe too strong a word. When I asked them, "Why did this happen?" they said, "Well, you know, the land is deeded to God, and it wasn't our place to stop them." So at that point, I'm thinking, "Something's wrong here." Because apparently at one time, it was a nice commune, with liveable buildings. They were actually torn down, just trashed. The whole thing was. He was like, "Peace and love, and we don't have the right to do anything." I never went to do any title search at the courthouse, but from what I understand, the land was actually deeded to God. They had went to the courthouse and said, "It's God's land, we have no right to ownership." I think if I remember, one of the founders was a bass player from the Lime Lighters?

Q: You know, I don't know. Tim knows a lot more about Morningstar than I do. There was Lou Gotley, I think was one of the big people in Morningstar. I think he may have been the owner of the land who deeded it to God.

A: They had great apples. They had a wonderful apple orchard. It had been going wild, but the apples were just incredible. So we went up once with a van, I don't know, we got a thousand pounds of apples

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or something, just came back through Golden Gate park, put them in boxes and gave them away, because we had nothing better to do. But I think the Lime Lighters was an old sort of folksy group, and he played stand-up bass. I think that's where some of the seed money for that came from.

Q: Was the Family political at all?

A: What do you mean?

Q: Would you get involved in protests, like anti-war protests and things like that?

A: Oh yes. I thought you meant, did we campaign, blah blah blah. No, we were actively, yeah, very active in protesting the war. I mean there were a few of us that got somewhat radical later on, in the early '70s, after '71, '72, we pretty much had somewhat split up and became more "individuals." Some people got married, some people moved, some people just decided to have one or two roommates, some people got into disco. People changed a lot. But, and some people got very radical. Some people got into SDS, and there seemed to be a transition from peace and love and drugs, to "Let's drink a lot of alcohol and off the pigs." Go protest and break windows. A couple people got caught, did a little bit of time. In Chicago it was a hotbed of radicals. So I got involved in that a little bit.

Q: Were you there during the democratic convention?

A: Yes. Lots of friends. I lived very close to Lincoln Park. It was an incredible event. It was very ugly. I think about this occasionally, I think about how we took to the streets, and how it just doesn't happen anymore, and how we can't even get it to happen anymore. It amazes me when I think back on it, how bold of a move that actually seems, how bold it was just to do a confrontation in Lincoln Park in the middle of the night, against hundreds of city cops, with guns and all the other crap. Pretty radical, I mean it was incredibly radical. I think about it and wonder if conditions will ever be such that that could ever happen again, without it even being uglier.

Q: When you look back on this, is this something you're glad you were a part of? That that's the path you followed?

A: I think it changed my life for the better. I think it changed my life drastically for the better. I had a heavy drug alcohol problem. It certainly wasn't from that. Yeah, I do. I don't do drugs or alcohol anymore, and I haven't done them for years. And I've lived here at Lunasi for, I've lived here for 5 years, and I've been coming here for probably seven or eight, and I think it's an incredible way to live. I think it's an incredible way to live when it's almost drug-free. I know Lunasi is drug-free. It's not that we have a drug-free policy, it's just we don't do drugs. And very little alcohol. And it just seems much more mature, and much more -- and I wish, if I have any regrets at all, it's that I didn't, I'm not sure, -- yeah, I have regrets that I never went to the Farm in Tennessee, although I heard it was pretty bloody and hard in the beginning, that people were still, and I still think, even with Steven Gaskin, that a lot of people that I know with Steven Gaskin, and I'll go back to this again. I don't know if it's just my stuff, just sometimes you see yourself mirrored in lots of people -- the fact that I grew up in an incredibly dysfunctional family, I think a lot of people who were in a communal thing that I knew, grew up in a very dysfunctional family. And when I say over 40 is the best time, it's because I think some of us wind up having to do the work sooner or later, of conflict-resolution, relationship, figuring out relationships,

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figuring out our lives, figuring out all that stuff, and it's wonderful to be able to do that without drugs. And I know that drugs and alcohol, when you do them continuously, they just don't do that kind of work. You just don't do your work. So the thing I like about it now, is that we're all raising our children, and we give our children lots of space. What I mean by space is I listen, I encourage my son to show his feelings, and so I think that they're going to be able to work through lots of stuff that most of us adults here never had the chance as children. Never had the space or the support to figure it out. And so we went out and did a lot of wild things. And I don't think that communal living in itself is wild, I just think some of the lifestyles were pretty wild. I mean, look in Israel in the kibbutz -- there's lots of wonderful communes that work well for people who have stuff figured out.

Q: Even they've had some problems, though.

A: Yeah, you'll always have your problems, but they still exist. Even the Farm, apparently, it still exists, have some hard times. But it's like a relationship, it's not all going to be rosy, but at least you hang in there and figure it out. I don't know about statistics, but how many long-term communes are there left?

Q: I don't know. That's one of the things we're trying to find out.

A: Good. Because I don't think a lot of them were able to hang in there when the ship came down.

Q: Certainly most of them crashed and burned, but there have been some long-term ones, surprisingly long-term ones.

A: I would be real curious. I'm eager -- because we know people in New York State too that have some, there's a couple big land trusts up there -- we're tiny. Big, to me, is a couple dozen or a dozen people. And they seem to work well. I think what you have to do first of all is have some organization. And you have to have problem-solving skills, and you have to have all the stuff that a lot of us didn't get, to make stuff work. You have to have some policy, of some kind. And you have to have commitment. Obviously, commitment is the first thing you need. I just don't think you can do lots of drugs and have a real strong commitment to much of anything!

Q: Do you think there needs to be some sort of shared spirituality?

A: Where . . . ?

Q: It seems like some of the religious communes have lasted the longest of all, like the Hutterites, who've been around for almost 500 years. Do you think that some sort of common religion or shared spirituality is necessary?

A: Oh, okay. How organized?

Q: I don't know. I'm just wondering if that could be one of the keys of success.

A: I think it is one of the keys, but I don't know how -- it depends how you want to label it. Yeah, I think, yeah, I do. But I would say spiritual, and religion too, if you're into religion, sure. Yeah, I think that would be a very, very big thing that would be needed, some commonality around that, sure, would be . . . way far ahead.

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Q: Now the Family, it kind of broke up in the early '70s, is that right?

A: Yes.

Q: And then after that, did you seek out any other communal living experiences, or was that kind of it?

A: I didn't seek -- I kept roommates. I'd never lived by myself -- I lived by myself for 6 months when I was 17 or 18. But I left home at 15, but I lived by myself for 6 months, when I was about 17, I got an apartment, and I lived by myself . . . oh gee -- when I moved here, it was the first time I've lived by myself since I was 17, in a house. I don't consider myself living by myself here, but it's the first time I never had a roommate, or a partner, in my dwelling, I was 43. So, I've never, so I've always sought out other people to be with, whether it be one roommate, or a partner -- mostly roommates. Sometimes 5, 4, 3, 2, depending on the size of the dwelling unit.

Q: Is Lunasi, is that the most organized group situation you've been involved in?

A: As far as actually having some sort of policy?

Q: I guess, yeah, and having land that you own.

A: Yes and no. Land ownership, yeah. I think that the house that we had in Chicago was fairly organized, considering our lifestyles and the fact that none of us had any ownership in anything, we did have, we had meetings, organized meetings. We had organized dinners, we had dinner at a set time. We cooked the meals. So we strove to have a very hard -- I don't know if hard is right -- but we strove to have a good solid core of continuity, around food, we did food shopping at the food co-op type farmer market. Cases of food. We had committees to do that, and rotate. I would think that would be more organized as far as communal living. That would have been, that as well as San Francisco too, but the one in Chicago was longer lived. And it had a core of people that lasted, the core there lasted longer than San Francisco.

Q: And that was like around a dozen folks?

A: Yeah, we had a house and we used every available inch. We built rooms in the attic. There's a paper, I don't have a picture of it, but it's July 4th, 1970, or '71, Chicago Tribune, front page, I don't know if you're interested, there's a big picture. We had a huge American flag, and we strung it across -- it was an old Victorian house, pretty small, actually, and we strung the American flag. We didn't put it upside down or backwards, we just put it across the whole front of the upstairs, I believe, and we were all on the porch, and the reporter came by and stopped the car and jumped out and took a shot. A lot of the members went out and bought it and kept it. I was never to hold onto that kind of thing.

Q: I'll have to see if I can get a copy of that.

A: It's a bunch of hippies on the porch, so it will probably be July 4, or 5th, the day after. Seventy or '71, I'm not sure of the year. It might have even been '72, things were kind of a flash, but I'm sure it was '70 or '71, probably '71. And that was a very tight -- we took a couple of bus trips, we bought school buses. We had two school buses leave that household and take long journeys, like months. And then I bought an old pick-up truck and tagged along. I'd had my fill of buses, and I'd been on a bus -- we did live on a bus in San Francisco, we just never made it to Tennessee, and I'd had my fill of it. I didn't mind the

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communal living in a house, because we still had some individual -- the thing that really bothered me most about communal living, that really got me about people that were confused, is that they had this thing about ego death, or something. You can't have an ego or something. I just couldn't buy it. And I still don't buy it, I think it's fine to have an ego. You'd die without an ego. I think individuals are fun. But I think some people got confused. So, I tagged along with the school buses. I had an old '57 Chevy pickup truck, built a box on the back, and I tagged along with them for months, my partner and I. I just didn't want to be in bus living, I didn't want to have to eat steel cut oats and brown rice. I ate it, but I wanted to eat it on my own terms, I didn't want someone to say, "Okay, today we're having brown rice." So, but there were a couple of nice school buses that came out of that, and we did a lot of travelling. Yeah, I think that would probably, be -- but it's different now, it's different with children.

Q: Did people in the Family have kids?

A: We didn't have any children. Maybe a couple infants, yeah there were a couple. Yeah, I'm sorry, there were, Apple, there were a couple of children, there were a few. Not very many. We were mostly early to mid 20s. But I love children here, I love being involved with like an extended family. I adore children and they adore me. We have people outside of Lunasi that are just as close to us as -- like Grant and Randy, and other people who are just very close to us. Sort of strange that we're not on the same piece of land, we're so close. And the children are just very, very nomadic. All of a sudden they'll be at one house and they'll stay for two days. Sometimes they'll all end up here. Sometimes there will be six young people here, and just they get on the phone and call their parents to ask if they can stay. Parents are pretty cool about it. So it's a wonderful experience for them. It's just incredible, the alternative lifestyle that these children are able to experience. I think they thrive on it. They are so tight, this group of young people. It's amazing to watch. It's a joy just to grow up, for them to grow up around me, and to have them crawl over me, and just come and jump on me and play with me. I thrive on it also. It's a real treat.

Q: And you have a son that's a part of this group?

A: Yes, a 14 year old son. Part of my choice of coming here was to come here for that reason, so that he could experience that, and also to live in this house, it has no inside plumbing, for him to experience that lifestyle. He lives with his mom. So he gets the experience of indoor plumbing and TV and all the other stuff. I have offered, as he gets older, he's 14, he goes to school in town, so during the school year, during the school week he's mostly with his mom. Because I'm in a different school district, and I leave for work early in the morning and I can't get him to the bus -- it just doesn't work. I have offered to move into town, about 12 miles away, to give him some kind of space other than his mom's in town. Not that his mom -- she had a little bit about, I don't know about communal living, but certainly she had been exposed to a little bit of alternative living -- but I don't know if she gives him the same space that I do, to have his friends over the make noise, or do the crash thing where all six crash in one house. I'd be willing to do that in town, particularly now that he's hitting high school, I just thought he needed a "safer" space in town. And he flatly refused. He said, "No, I don't want to leave Lunasi. Are you nuts?" "Well," I said, "that's your choice, but I'd be willing for the next five or six years, until you're through with school, so you can have parties or whatever for your high school friends, your other friends," you know, most of his friends here, a lot of them are home schooled. And he just flatly refuses.

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Q: That must've made you feel good.

A: Yeah, it did. So, I know they thrive on it, and I think that's . . . so I think the answer for me is, after all these years, is yes, communal living is wonderful, it's a fine way to live. You've got to have some tools to make it work. Do you remember the movie Easy Rider? Remember when he stopped on the commune? Remember they were travelling for awhile, and they stopped, they were in Colorado some place, and they stopped at this, I think it was a famous commune at that time, and they're walking around –

Q: Maybe Drop City or something?

A: I think it may have been Drop City. But Peter Fonda, and they're walking around out in the garden, and it's all dusty, and there are no vegetables growing, everything is real tiny, and people are [tape ends] . . . I think that movie came out when we had our commune in Chicago, that building, so I never had to deal with the rural commune, just an urban commune. And I remember then kicking the soil, Peter Fonda's kicking the soil, and said, "Boy, not much growing here," or something, and one of the older commune members who was there said, "Yeah, these fucking kids from the city had this misconception that you just drop a bunch of acid and move out to the country, and say 'Wow man, this is where it's at!'" And I think that happened a lot. So I think to make communal living work, you've got to have a bunch of mental tools, and I just don't think a lot of people had them. And I think the beauty of the children here is they're going to get those tools -- they already have them, and I see them do conflict resolution. They do amazing stuff. We also do -- every hear of Peer Counselling, RC? Do you know about it. A lot of us are RC-ers. So the kids have their own young persons' group, and so they do this -- I mean, they have this communal living, they have RC. They don't have a lot of people walking around puffing on cigarettes or joints or chugging beer. So I think they just have this incredible gift. I don't think it's just a gift, I think it's the way it should be. Do you do RC?

Q: No, but my, I had a roommate that was real involved in it for a long time.

A: Okay, so you know. I do lots of session about just how incredibly fortunate we are to have these children, and just have lots of tears at the beauty of it all. I couldn't have done that 25 years ago. I didn't have anywhere near the tools. So, I'm real interested in seeing how your research turns out, to see who succeeded, and who didn't. What would be even more interesting to see would be to see what tools they had, being able to do all the conflict resolution, and you've got to be able to get food, you've got to be able to figure stuff out. You just can't drop a bunch of acid and say, "Well . . ." That lasts till the end of the summer, or until the money runs out.

Q: Yeah, I have had a number of people say to me, "I wish I'd known about," you know, "conflict resolution back then. I wish I'd had those tools."

A: Conflict resolution comes with commitment, true commitment will bring that in.

Q: That's a refrain that I've heard from people.

A: Yeah, first big mistake, and you're dead. Things can go, you can have a wonderful picnic for months and months on end, but somewhere along the line, the craps going to come down. Just like Morningstar Ranch. You just don't let people -- you don't let the Hell's Angels come in and burn your fucking house! Don't care how passive you are! You just don't do it. You don't have to bring out guns, but . . . maybe

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you have to move along, maybe you're not going to be able to stop them, but this man's whole attitude was like, "Hey, well, it didn't belong to us. Why should we try to stop them?" Well, you know, it's your family, it's your community, you take action of some kind.

Q: Did the family have any sort of leadership?

A: No.

Q: Were there people who took strong roles, or were charismatic figures, anything like that?

A: Yeah. But I don't think anyone was able -- I mean, it's pretty much, I don't think anyone took any leadership other than being . . . I mean, just, I don't know. No, . . . no, there was really no organized leadership. I mean some people obviously were just natural leaders. And people would ask them what they thought, or people would come to them with problems, or depend more on one person than another. I think it depended on the people, some people just don't take leadership well, of any kind. By leadership I just mean like making decisions in life.

Q: When you lived in the communal household in Chicago after you came back from San Francisco, and you said you had meetings, were there leaders in those meetings? Someone who would run the meeting?

A: No. It wasn't a formal leadership thing at all. I think there people -- myself, and probably other people -- that would be more vocal, that would say, "Maybe we should look at this, maybe we should do this." But it was never an organized thing. But there were people that would take leadership by just wanting to make things go well.

Q: Did you follow a particular decision-making strategy, like did you use consensus, or did you vote?

A: We probably just voted. By majority. I know whenever we wanted someone to come in it was majority vote.

Q: Did you pool your income, or did people just kind of contribute some to the pot?

A: We contributed a certain amount, whatever it was to cover the expenses, the food. Now the thing around the food, now obviously we had fuel bills, we had utilities, we had rental, we had food, and whatever else we might need, and so we had a pot that we took it out of, and people contributed a certain amount. With food, though, I remember the decision was made, a majority decision, like somebody said, "Maybe I don't want to be here at 5:30," too bad. We need to kick in X number of dollars. They said, "Okay, 50 cents a meal." I never lived in a communal environment where people would just come in and empty their pocket. Except Steven, he was like that. The deeper he got into it, the more I realized that there were people that actually got into the bus trip that were from, -- had money! To me, big bucks, because I was raised very poor, and here people said, "Well, you know, yeah, I had \$10,000, and I just kicked it in." I said, "Whoa! Would I kick in \$10,000?" That would be a real test of faith, it would've been for me. I had very mixed feelings about that. I've read other stories where people kicked in a lot more than that in some communal situations.

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Q: How are things arranged here at Lunasi? Do you share the land in common?

A: We share the land in common, we share tools in common -- ladders, tillers, lawn mowers, washers, dryers. We have individual ownership of vehicles, but it's pretty . . . we ask to use each other's vehicles, but if someone's car breaks -- I have an old truck and a car, and so if anyone needs one of my vehicles at any time, they're more than welcome to use it as long as they need it. Each individual house -- my house, I moved into a house that was already built, so I just pay -- we have a debt because we bought 25 acres of land across the road a few years ago, so we kick in so much per adult to meet our debt load, but each person pays -- we go into the courthouse and figure out the millage on each dwelling unit, and each person pays the tax. We get one tax bill for the land, houses, everything, but each person kicks in enough to cover their house. And the rest of it is divided up into communal bases.

Q: So is that legally considered your house? Could you sell it to somebody?

A: No. This is something that we had a meeting a couple weeks ago, on trust, what kind of . . . equity rights, if any, would a person have if they were to choose to leave. Now, I don't have much invested, only a couple thousand dollars is invested in this building, so I don't have a problem with that, considering I pay \$52.52 a month for taxes, and that includes everything, including utilities. So I could walk away tomorrow. But Greg and Molly have, I don't know how much they have in their house, \$25,000 - \$30,000 in materials, because they built it. Can you walk away from that? Chip and Jenna have a house. Do you walk away from that? So we were trying to figure out, what do you do now that we're all approaching middle age, what do you do when you're 60 years old, and winters are so unbearable, or you have arthritis, and you want to move to Florida, and you don't have any equity. And you don't have enough money -- I mean it's fine if you have half a million dollars stashed away, but what do you do if you're living hand to mouth? So we're trying to figure that piece out. So legally, all the land belongs to Lunasi Land Trust, it's a non-profit charter corporation with the state. So I'm not even sure the legalities of it. I know my ex-wife, we have a land trust that I still belong to, but it's a Hutchinson family club, and it's a summer place for her extended family, and I know it's a non-profit, I know what the state law is on that, and I'm sure it applies to this one, you can't sell it. If you sell it, anything profit you have to give to a charitable organization.

Q: Right, reinvest it in another non-profit.

A: Some sort of charity. And I don't know what they consider "profit." If you paid \$500 an acre and it appreciates to \$2,000 an acre, is that profit? Do they allow you so much? See, I wanted to build up the hill here, and I may or may not. But if I put \$40,000, I don't have \$40,000 two times in my life to invest in housing. What do I do? Do I go by "trust," land trust? The very nature of the word, and trust that if I want to move to Seattle, some place in Seattle is going to open up to me and say, "Here is a house for you?" I'd like to think so. But I'm not sure it works that way.

Q: So when you moved into this house, you didn't have to buy somebody out?

A: No. That's the thing we were looking at, can we have some kind of buy-outs, can we establish a 99 year lease where we can sell our long-term lease rights to another party? We sort of decided we were going to look into it, we were going to talk to people we know in New York state with land trust, because they've been working at the same issues, and when you're young and you don't have children, or you

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have very young families, everything looks great, "Oh, I'll be here for the rest of my life." Well things change. Your families grow up, maybe you have one child and they move to Florida. Do I want to be away from my child? Never in my life? Would I follow my child? Certainly. My ex-partner had intended, her family was in Hawaii, and she had intended to move to Hawaii after she went back to school. Was I shocked? I was devastated eight years ago. But very quickly I made up my mind -- and we still have a wonderful relationship, but she just said, "Well, I need to be with my parents before they die, and I want to spend time with them. I'll probably finish going to grad school and move to Hawaii." Would I deny her that, to be with her parents before they died? Of course not. Would I stay here no matter what? No, I'd go to Hawaii. It wasn't even questionable to me, it was just so -- those kinds of things happen in a person's life, and so what do you do with equity? I mean the whole concept of equity to me, and land, is crap anyway. But unfortunately, this little plot of land here, every little plot of land doesn't have the same concept. There's ownership, there's deeds, etcetera. And so, we're not able to pick up our tepees and go a thousand miles and pitch the tepee and be just as well off as we were. And I have a lot of feelings around that, and the children here know about land trust, and Jess and I discuss that all the time. We think the whole concept of private ownership, of land, is so weird. It's incredibly weird. But, so we don't know, we're trying to figure that piece out, about what do we do with equity now that our children are getting older and, do they want to stay on the land trust. We're buying land up here, we're trying to get land for other people, our children.

Q: That's great. How many acres do you have total?

A: I may be wrong, but I'm thinking 65.

Q: And is this area zoned?

A: Not very much. The most restrictive thing we're going to find here is septic. I'm having a problem with getting permits for putting septic on the parcel that I was choosing to build on. Slowed me down.

Q: Yeah. So they don't have any limitations as to the number of people that can live on the land, or the number of dwellings you can have?

A: They may, but I'm not aware of them, and if they do, they're probably like an acre. Our problem would be on the sewage.

Q: And you said this house here doesn't have indoor plumbing, right?

A: No, it doesn't.

Q: But I guess Chip and Jenna's does, doesn't it?

A: Yeah, they have some at their place.

Q: So do you use a composting outhouse?

A: No, it's a pit privy. There's two of them. One in the woods and one back here. I put in --legally, I did some research, legally here, you can have -- the Department of Environmental Resources, DER, controls on lot sewage and building permits and so forth. You can build, but you can't have pressurized water. Okay, now this is real weird. I can go up there and build, but I can't have pressurized water. When I

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moved up here, I put up in the sleeping loft a container. And so I piped -- there's an outside connection which I run a garden hose, a frost-free spigot over here, and just pump water up every two weeks. So I have running water in my kitchen sink.

Q: And is that well-water?

A: Yes, it's a frost-free spigot over here in the well, Chip and Jenna's well, so I just pump it up about every two weeks. And I carry water. I have five gallon containers, and I have a water cooler, like a little dispenser room-temperature water cooler you'd see in an office. And it works fine. I can wash and brush my teeth, and boil water -- I don't have a water heater so I boil water and clean up ever morning, I take showers at Chip and Jenna's, and pay them so much per month for utilities.

Q: Are you off the grid, do you have electricity?

A: I have electricity, but it's a 20 amp service that's coming out of Chip and Jenna's house, underground service, and I give them so much a month to cover showers. I'm also in a relationship, Claire and I have a relationship, and she lives in town. You met Claire. She's going to talk to you later. She lived in some part of a little communal. She was curious if you wanted to learn about her experience. But she and I have a relationship, so I stay with her a couple nights a week, shower at her house, and she comes out here sometimes. So it works well. I'm not real hung-up on . . .

Q: And you heat with wood?

A: No, coal. I switched to coal, because I can stay warm for two days at a crack. I have a little coal stove. I have some guilt around that, but I actually, think coal --

Q: Why, because that puts off worse emissions?

A: Well, I think actually, after burning wood for 18 years, I started burning coal, and came out to look at my chimney after the coal burns off, and I thought, "Boy, I don't see any smoke!" I shut it right down until it just burns it real low, and I don't have to clean the chimney, no creosote. So I don't know, but just visually and the way the way I experience coal, it probably burns cleaner than wood. But I really don't know. But I will bet you it does. Wood is a very nasty, toxic fuel. Does it create more acid rain than coal? I don't know. I know that it puts out more solids. Because I know that when I burn three cords of wood, I know how much is left in the ash pan, and I know when I burn a ton of coal, I know what the solids are when I finish. There's much more solids in coal than there is wood, it's a finished product. What's going up the chimney? I don't know what's the nastiest. I know what puts out the most solids. But I chose coal because it's much more even, much more efficient. And if you burn hard coal, it's great. I can leave for two days, come back in the middle of winter, two days later, my house is warm. Do you burn wood at home? And you have that peak, it's 85, and all of a sudden it's down to 60? Coal is like, incredibly steady heat. Very easy to use. After about the first month, you get used to burning it, and learn the tricks of it. There are a few tricks, but once you get those tricks down, it's a good fuel. Don't know if I'd burn it forever, but it's okay for now.

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Q: So the township requires that you have a septic system with any house that you build, is that what you were saying?

A: They only require you to have a septic system if you have pressurized water. That used to be the case when I was seeking a permit up here three to four years ago. It could have shifted, but I don't think so. But I had to beat it out of the guy, literally. He said, "Well, you can't build unless you have a permit, if you're going to put water." I said, "Could you just read the regulation to me?" And he said, "Why?" I said, "Well, I'm just curious." I was on the phone, so he reads it, it says, "Permits . . . septic, and you have to have an on-lot sewage system if you have pressurized water." And I said, "Wait a minute, what's the word before 'water'?" He said, "Pressurized water." I asked, "So that means I could carry in water?" And he said, "Well, I guess." I asked, "What do you mean by 'pressurized water'?" He said, "Water under pressure, where you have a holding tank, a well, and water comes in and it's pressurized so it gets distributed throughout your house."

Q: So could you do the same system you do now at your new lot, or you just didn't want to --?

A: Probably. My thought was, if I'm going to invest \$40,000, I'd like to have a shower. Out-houses I don't mind, but showers are nice. As a matter of fact, if I go on a trip, I look forward to going home and using the out-house. At ten below zero, it gets a little tricky. It just feels very natural to me.

Q: Yeah. Well I interviewed a guy down in the Ozarks who said he felt that flush toilets were the biggest scourge if mankind, and I really could agree with him on that.

A: Well they waste a lot of water.

Q: Yeah, they're horribly wasteful.

A: Well I guess they do give the -- what chews up the sewage lines? The microbes, I guess it gives them a chance to actually utilize it. But in a pit toilet, you let in insects, everything gets composted in its own way and own time.

Q: I guess it's really good learning tool for kids too, that you just flush things away. Because when I was a kid, I thought you just flushed things away and they were gone, and you never had to deal with them again. What happens with your garbage here? I take it you wouldn't have garbage pick-up, right?

A: No, we make a dump run. We compost, and we recycle, so we don't have tons of garbage. We have a burning barrel where we burn paper trash. I don't burn paper trash. For some reason I have something against burning paper trash, but . . . I guess I don't like to deal with the ashes after awhile, the burning barrels get full of ashes, and I feel like it's pretty toxic stuff. Especially when you have a lot of color print, it leeches in the ground. I have a little bit of a problem with that, so I try to recycle as much magazine and paper material as I have. Sometimes you have wrappers off of cans, you have some paper that's not recyclable, particularly in a rural area, you don't have the best recycling centers in the world. So we don't generate a lot of trash.

Q: Looks like you guys have a pretty good garden. Do you grow a lot of your own vegetables in the summer time?

A: We do. Trying to think something else about out-houses . . .

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Q: Well I had asked you if you had a composting outhouse, was that it? . . . Well, this is kind of a wrapup question -- would you say there were things that you learned from your time with the Family that you've brought forward to your life today? Either practical skills or sort of life philosophy, anything like that?

A: A couple of things come to mind. One is -- communal living . I think the household in Chicago did teach me some conflict resolution tools. Not as many as I wish I had gleaned out of it, but it taught me how to sit down as a group and make decisions. I think the household got into really healthy eating, although I quite often fall off the wagon. But my first exposure to real healthy foods on a consistent basis was in San Francisco, because when I moved into that household we got into very healthy food for a long, long time. And I went away from that for a number of years, but now I'm somewhat back on that, I've been a vegetarian for the last 8 years. So there's a period in there where I didn't stay with that, but I'm glad to have had that experience, so that I knew how to get back into that very quickly. I think those would be the two that come to mind. Health issues and some conflict resolution. I think also just belonging to a loving group. You have an idea of what RC is like. About 8 or 9 years ago I gave up drugs and alcohol. I always felt this wonderful loving human being inside of myself, but I also felt very hurt, that if I had to not have drugs or alcohol, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to stay in contact with this warm person inside . I don't know if this sounds crazy. My thought, if you gave up drugs and alcohol, you were going to be a born-again Christian. There weren't any other options. "If those are the options, I'll keep using," you know? So somewhere along the line someone showed me that that wasn't true, that you could still be a loving human being, have fun, you could go out and dance, laugh, and you could have joy in your life. And I thought, "Oh, that sounds good." And so that was my goal. I made that a goal for myself. If I quit using, I'm going to have these things in my life, without using. Because I could do them while I was using, most of the time. It's just the payback got to be too great, as the years went by. And especially my son, at that point was 4 or 5 years old, and I thought it wasn't a good role model, not that I was using a lot. I may have two or three beers a day, but to me to have to have that dependency was not an acceptable role-model. So I think in those early days in learning that a group could be loving, even though it was drug -- I'm not going to say "drug induced" -- but it put down some of the barriers, particularly hallucinogenics, peyote, MDA, there's a lot of stuff out there. I think a big, big major tool that I learned in those early days was the fact that human beings are incredibly loving. Somewhat damaged, a lot of us got damaged, but underneath it all, we were just incredibly loving. And I was never confused about that. It was very painful for me to leave that. I even got a little bit into disco and cocaine and stuff. And quaaludes. And I know why I did quaaludes, because you get real loving on quaaludes. Everything's real loving, but you can't function. So my lesson for that is that people are incredibly loving. Just our inherent nature, we're just incredibly loving. And it's just so joyful today to be able to fill . . . so it's just so joyful to be able to keep that intact and practice that. Just our inherent nature is to be loving, and it's not even questionable. So that was a big lesson for me. Because that's not the environment I grew up in. -- Oh, I know what I wanted to say about out-houses. I grew up in the rural South for the first eight years, and that's all we had, were outhouses. I remember when we got electricity in one of our houses. This was in the early to mid-fifties. So, for me to move back here, it was no big deal to have out-houses, I used to camp a lot, plus I grew up that way, so it's not a big deal to me. But I did not grow up in a real loving environment. I mean as loving as my mother may have wanted to be, she grew up with an alcoholic father, and a mother on welfare in Chicago away from her family, with five children,

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and mostly a single mom on welfare, it doesn't leave a lot of time to be very loving, when you've got the oppression running and all the other crap that goes with that. You've got being raised poor, you've got a single mom, you got the women's oppression, being a waitress when you could work for, I don't know if you even made \$5 a day. It doesn't leave you a lot of slack. So for me to be accepted and loved by a group of people was an incredible contradiction to what I had experienced. We all left home at 14, 15 years old. As soon as we were able to go out and work either in grocery stores bagging groceries - I mean to get a fake ID, I registered when I was 16 with the selective service so I could have a draft card, which they drafted me. So yeah, it was an incredible contradiction to me, was being loved and accepted.

Q: So if you registered with the selective service at 16, then did you get drafted?

A: I did get drafted, and I called them up and told them how old I really was, got my birth certificate. And they said, "Okay, nevermind."

Q: So you never ended up having to go to Vietnam or anything?

A: No. Then I got drafted again when I was 19 and a half, but I had been arrested on a drug charge, possession of marijuana, and I had a six months probation. And right at the height of the Ted Offensive [?] -- I had already done my pre-induction physical as my sack time, I got a draft notice, saying "Report, blah blah blah," but I was on probation for six months, and I had been -- so I called the selective services and said, "Hey, I'm on probation, and one of the things on probation is that you cannot perform military duty." So I called them up and they said, "Well, okay, we'll reclassify you." And they sent me a 4F, instead of a 1Y.

Q: A mistake?

A: I don't know. I think it's good karma, myself. I think I'm a good enough person that I deserved that. It's not a mistake -- there aren't any mistakes. I was elated. I opened it up thinking I'd get a 1y on a six month deferral, and there was a 4F. I thought, "Wait. 4F, they never ever, ever, look at it again." I had already made plans, because I was in -- this was prior to my communal type living, because this was '68. I had already made plans with my partner to go to Canada. We had already talked to people at SDS, talked about the Underground Railroad to get to Canada. Because I didn't have a lot of family ties or commitments. So it wasn't a big deal for me, but I would've gone to Canada. There was no way I was going to Vietnam, or any other place for military service, to support that. But I was very fortunate. It was unbelievable. So I got drafted twice, and I didn't even have to leave the country, or go to jail! But a lot of my friends had horrible, horrible experiences. But that's a whole nother story. So I would recommend either tight-knit communities, i.e. land trust or communes, to anyone. Highly recommend it. Just make sure you're ready for it. Be ready to be loved, also be ready to figure out conflicts. And be ready to be unselfish. Particularly around material stuff, because I think that's where a lot of it lies for a lot of us. We're willing to give ourselves, but the material stuff, I think, gets hard for some people. And wait till you're 40 years old. Unless you were fortunate enough to grow up in a good, supportive environment.

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Q: Yeah, like the kids here.

A: Yeah. I do think there are probably lots of kids that grew up in the suburbs that could probably adapt to communal living, with conflict resolution. I use "suburbs" loosely -- in the city, anywhere where, nonalternative lifestyles where young people are getting what they need, as far as support, the tools to figure out their lives, without going through incredible adventures to get there. I think RC, I mean I go to tons of workshops, and I see people that live in the city, and don't have an alternative lifestyle, a lot of them possibly RC, and they do a lot of work with young people in RC, and they're not all from hippie families, or alternative lifestyle families, and they're doing just fine. They're going after life in big ways.

Q: Well, it sounds like good advice. Thank you.