

Interview with Rasa Gustaitis

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

May 27, 1996

Q: This is Monday, May 27th, and an interview with Rasa Gustaitis. Well, I'd love to learn how you got started on your book project, and what led up to that?

A: Okay, this is *Turning On*, which is my first adult book. I did some children's books. But I was a reporter in the Herald Tribune in 1965 until it closed, shut down, folded. And then I started doing magazine articles. One of them was an assignment by Clay Falker, who had, who was the editor of New York magazine then, to do a story about something he had just heard about, it was an encounter group run by a guy named Will Shutts [?], Bill Shutts. So he sent me to talk to Shutts, and Shutts said, "Okay, but the only way you can do it is by participating." It wasn't my kind of thing, but that's the only way I could do the story. And I went, and to my surprise, I found that it really effected me really deeply, and that I realized why he had said you have to participate, because there was no way to really watch something like that without putting yourself out there. I was writing the article. I wrote it, and it was in proofs, and then the magazine folded, because it was then part of another newspaper. So I thought I'd do a book, because this was very interesting. Shutts was coming out to California, and I thought I would -- he was telling me about this place called Esilon [?]. It was definitely an in-between time in my life. This was some kind of a door opener, that encounter group, which I, detached observer, would never have walked through without having to, because I had an assignment. So I figured I would follow it up. So I came out to Big Sur to do a book. I signed a contract with MacMillan, I knew an editor there with whom I'd done something else, and came to do this book. And before long, I realized that Esilon was just a little piece of what was going on, that it was very exciting to write about. So that led to *Turning On*, the book that was published in 1969. And it was a personal and a journalistic look, following what I had learned, in Will Shutt's workshop. I realized that I couldn't write this either without exposing myself personally. And it didn't come naturally. I don't like to do that, but yet I think it was something that I think made the book worthwhile, and led other people to write me lots and lots of letters, I mean personal letters, and lots of people came out here because of that book. It did quite well. It was a little early, people didn't know what this stuff was, they thought it was weird California. But luckily, I went back to New York to write it, so I didn't write it from here when I would've used already the language and perspective from here. I went back to New York where my friends said, "What?" And then I could write it in a way that reached a lot of people. So, that was how I got here too.

Q: Before you started working on the book, would you have described yourself as ... were you politically involved or part of the counter-culture? I mean, how would you have described ... ?

A: No, I was a reporter, I was a writer. I was covering a lot of things, like I was covering the peace movement for the Herald Tribune, and the things I was interested in touched on -- no, I was not. I was pretty straight, actually.

Q: So was this kind of a shock?

A: Straight had a different meaning then.

Q: Right.

A: Was it a shock? It was a roller coaster ride! It was wonderful!

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Q: Well, can you tell me about some of the places you visited?

A: Yeah, they're all described in my book, actually. It's kind of, I did it better I think in the book, so if, I don't know if you want me to just go over that?

Q: Maybe that's not the best thing to do. But did you get a feel from your travels of why people were seeking communalism?

A: Yeah, well, it was, I'm sure everybody told you the same thing there. It was, there was a spirit of the time. Out of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Peace Movement, then connected with all that came something else. And the psychedelics. What I was writing about was not -- Turning On, at that time, when I chose a title, still had the meaning of taking grass mostly, smoking grass. What I did was expand the meaning. Of course, very quickly all those idioms become common, and now I wouldn't call it that. But a lot of the words I used, now I look, and "Oh my God, did I really say that?" But at that time, that was the only way to say it, because a new language was developing, a new way of thinking. It came out of experiences people had with psychedelics, and also the other two great movements, but it just put you in a different frame of mind. And it was a time when people weren't terrified not to find work, as young people are now. The economy was better and everything. So I think people felt freer to explore. I think maybe, I don't know how it all fits, but maybe -- the book, I think I told that stuff as well as possible, for me, as well as I could, but what might be interesting, if you want to talk about what came later, or the way it looks to me now, from this perspective?

Q: Yeah. That's a good idea. Actually though, I'm curious at the time, since you were experiencing this personally and not just going in as a journalist, were you ever tempted to join any of the places you visited?

A: Yeah, I think Zen Center, more than anything else. I went to Tasajara[?] Zen Center. The communities I visited ... no, I really -- I was admiring what they were doing, but it was, ... I'm thinking. Morning Star Ranch, for example, was pretty chaotic. A lot of them were pretty chaotic and transitory. That didn't particularly appeal to me. I think the people at Libre, who founded Libre, are people who went with a very firm idea of what they wanted, and a real ideal behind it, and it was solid and stable, and they all fully invested themselves into its continuance, where a lot of communities here were a way for people to explore something new, or else people would have just made these great discoveries, and then they went gaga, threw everything to the wind. And it was great, but, some of them were not like that, like Black Bear, that Peter told you about, was one of the really kind of strong, solid ones. Communal living was explored in many ways besides in the communities, of course. There were people who were, for example, tried to buy property together and have households in which they shared a lot of stuff. That also existed because there was this spirit of the time that led other people to do things that were more extreme than that, but right now you wouldn't find people doing this sort of joint purchase as easily. They do it in a different way. It's not that it's not happening, there's still -- co-housing is still happening. But some of that didn't work out so well. Groups of friends, I know there was a writer with whom I taught for awhile in Berkeley, Mike Wise. He and three other families, all of whom saw themselves as radical bought four adjacent houses not far from here, on Fair Oaks St. They knocked holes in the walls so they could pass from one to the other, and it worked for awhile. But it didn't work forever. And then they all were fighting, people split up, and then they didn't get along, and then they had to divide up the

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property. And that kind of thing happened a lot. I'm sure you found that a lot.

Q: I've heard a lot those kinds of stories. Well, do you feel like you've learned any lessons about living together from doing the book, and meeting lots of people? Lessons about what makes a community work, or what causes them to fall apart?

A: I don't think things work forever if they are centered around one charismatic leader. The communities that have worked had either strong people who were committed to a particular kind of way of life, or, for example, communities that are centered around gardening. There are some in the East too. That's a growing thing. Everybody shares that, they can meet on that common ground. Or, communities that have a spiritual practice, which, the Zen Community, and there's some others. Are you going to visit the Tasajara and Green Gulch?

Q: Actually, I don't even know about it.

A: Maybe that doesn't fit into the picture, but it seems to me it should. Because --

Q: It's in Green Gulch? That's the name of the place.

A: Yeah. This is -- it's the San Francisco Zen Center. Which is, -- you should really visit it. It's a Zen center, it's definitely a Zen center. But people also, there are two other places besides the San Francisco practice place where people also live, there and around it. But there is also a farm in Marin County, it's called Green Gulch Ranch. And uh, every Sunday, you can go there in the morning and there's meditation and lecture and lunch. A lot of people just go for that, but other people live there. And they have a garden in which they grow plants that, some of them were giving to them. They're plants from England that were in the plant library of Alan Chadwick, who was a Shakespearean actor, and also a great gardener, who started some communal gardens up in Santa Cruz. And he came to die, he was very sick, at the Zen Center, and brought all these plants. And now these plants, they grow them, and the sell the seedlings, and they're growing all over. We have a couple here. We had raspberries, and we had a couple of other plants, horseradish from there. That's sort of a continuum, it's a beautiful continuum. Zen Center's gone through all kinds of changes and all kinds of difficulties too. But, including like a personal disappointment in the roshi [?] at one point when he had an affair with somebody. That kind of shook it up, but it's continued. And because it's had this stable, I mean Zen Buddhism is an old practice, they started around a teacher from Japan, and they're very serious about it. And they still shave their heads and everything. There's a Zen Center here. Philip Walen [?], who is a poet, is a Zen priest, and his center's in Hartford St. I haven't been over there, but they have a hospice attached to it. It's in the gay district with lots of AIDS. And so the people who are there are mostly gay. That's a very important community. I don't see how all that fits. You have to make boundaries somewhere on what you're talking about.

Q: Yeah. But it came out of the sixties and seventies?

A: Yeah, well all this stuff did, sure, because the Zen Center, there was a Zen teacher, Sazuki Roshi, who had a congregation, he was Japanese, and was here. And some of the poets, Gary Snyder and Alan Ginsberg, and Jo-Ann Tiger, went out there and started sitting with him. And then there are more and more of these beat poets, and their friends, and Americans, so that eventually he formed, they asked

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him to have another center. He felt his, well that's in my book too, how that started. Because it's easier to read it than to take notes, right? But anyway, it did start in that time, and out of it at the same time as these other communities were going, some people would take psychedelics, and they would see something that then opened up their awareness to another way of perceiving life. Then, most of them didn't keep on taking psychedelics, because it takes you only so far, and it's hard on the system. So the next natural step is meditation. And one of the forms of meditation was Zen Buddhism. So, that's how that connects. It's a direct kind of link. And many people who joined the Zen Center later had started out by taking psychedelics.

Q: So do you think that, Philip Walen -- was that his name? Would he be a good person to interview?

A: Well, he's 80 years old, and he's not far away. You could try. Let's see if we could find it in the phone book. Yeah, he's certainly a good person to talk about communities and communal living, and what's happened in that. That would take you in another direction, you know, not just the communes. Because, it's very broad. How are you going to narrow it down? It's not like, "How are the communities defined."

Q: Right. Well, we're trying to not make really tight definitions, because it's sort of hard to now. I feel like maybe in a year or two we'll be able to look back and say, "Well, here's how we should define things." But right now, I'm trying to be as open as possible to get as much as I can.

A: That's great. That's how I did it too. I started to do a book about something, and then I found it was bigger and wider, and my concepts changed. So, yeah, so and then there's the Zen Mountain Center. If you can go there, in Tasajara. That is deep in the mountains behind Big Sur. Have you been to Big Sur? Okay, you know those mountains that go up toward the sky? On the deep inside, if you go for 25 miles on a windy road, that is not paved, and you come to this deep valley. And there is a stream and a hot spring, and the Zen Mountain Center. They have actually, I guess, have seasons. Part of their making their money is they have guests who sign up for the guest season, and they have vegetarian good cooking, and you can also meditate. But you could probably arrange to go, since you're doing the research, and -- you should go to the Zen Center and talk to them, or talk to Philip Walen, about getting to Tasajara. You can't just drive in there, it's too complicated. It's too far. But treat yourself to that.

Q: That must be where the Tasajara Break Book came from.

A: Yeah. One of the things they had was a bakery. Now they sold it. And they had a restaurant called "Greens" at Fort Mason. I don't think they own that anymore either. Because the idea was to allow people to practice, and also make a living, survive. And it paid very low wages. But that was because everybody had low wages, and it was the idea to keep it going. But these places became quite elegant. Greens is a very gourmet restaurant. The cookbooks they've done are marvelous. So, and that came out of, a lot of people got there through psychedelics, they came out of a desire for some kind of proto-community that grew out of their experience with psychedelics and their experience with other movements. But then they wanted to practice that in some kind of a way that worked. With the practice, you didn't get it into as many of the, you know, ego collisions that tore other things apart. Like Brotherhood of the Sun just couldn't work. Whatever his name was, and the nine brothers, and then there were the sisters, and they all looked a little downtrodden to me, I don't know. It's, that didn't work, even though they also had a nice restaurant and a good cookbook. But it's that power corrupts

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business, you know.

Q: When you would visit these communities, would you announce yourself as a journalist?

A: Oh, sure, I never went undercover.

Q: I didn't mean to imply that you were doing that, but I would just think that some people wouldn't have wanted --

A: Everything was really open. And, but when I went to the Zen Center, for example, well, I made arrangements through the roshi, the head of the Zen Center then, to go there. And then I took part in their whole practice. So I did do the work, and the practice and everything. And then at the end of it, -- and I felt really kind of part of it, you know? But there was actually an interesting little moment, because it's sort of embarrassing. It's all very intense, getting into this stuff. And then at the end of it, I said, "Okay, I'm going to pay my bill, I've stayed here four nights," and he said, "Okay, guest rates." And I said, "What? I was a student! I was a student!" It wasn't that it cost more, but it's that suddenly, my trying to be a student didn't count. I was still a guest. And I almost stated crying, I was upset. I don't know how to explain it, you make yourself very vulnerable, if you do want to be a part of something, when you're there. It takes more than just a few days, a visit, to be a part of something that's a real community. There were other, okay, but that was part of ... that's not a story you can actually use, because it's so in context. It's very different from any other kind of writing I've done, when I did that.

Q: Was it hard to write?

A: No. I went back to New York, and just disciplined myself. I did yoga in the morning, and then only saw friends who wouldn't be disruptive, and just wrote it at night, in a great big rush. I like to write it that way, just put everything else out of my mind. It was not difficult to write. I've done other books since then that were a continuum from that, just like everything is. Because out of that came the environmental movement, which is not communal, but it's recognizing -- I mean a lot of this, a lot of what you're writing about, was their recognition that people were one thing, body and mind and spirit, and that there was spirit. And that human beings had links together. The desire for community came out of this sort of putting together the separated parts. And then the next step after that, in the '70's, was recognizing human beings as part of nature. So that's the environmental movement. And that's going on.

Q: When I talked to Peter yesterday, he said he felt that the communal movement sort of died when there was the first Earth Day. Would that have been around '71 or '72? I don't remember exactly. And, would you describe it in the same way?

A: What did he mean by communalism?

Q: I think he meant that that's when that sort of phase ended, and then the environmental movement sort of started. That's the way he sort of defined things.

A: Yeah, well, ... I'm thinking. Give me a minute to think about that. Because what I'm thinking is, was it a communal movement, really? It was never a thing that I could see as having its own ideology, really. It was people going into communes and forming communes or going back to land was part of this great

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big wave that encompassed a lot more than people doing just that. It encompassed people who would stay in their own lives and in their own homes and with their same partners, but suddenly their values shifted, and how they did things shifted. It was like a broad sweep of change that happened. And people going to the Haight, kids going to the Haight and sitting on the street, finding crash pads, going to eat in the Hari Krishna's and singing in the park. Or joining, what's his name, Tennessee and the caravan --

Q: Oh, Steven Gaskin.

A: Listening to him here, and then going there. Or going to Black Bear, or up somewhere in the woods and finding a few other kindred spirits. All of that was one broad swath, you know. And it had this -- rainbow is a good word, because it did have this um, variety. What happened I think in the '60's, though, was a high moment which things did change after that, but I wouldn't classify it quite so much. It's true that the next wave of awareness was the environment. That started with the Sierra Club Wilderness Conference, to which Gary Snider went. And he writes about how that changed things for him.

Q: When was that?

A: That was in 1970 or '71. Actually, I have some of that, I hope I brought it back. He just wrote an article in the Poetry Flash, and he refers to that. Gary's got a community up there. You should talk to him rather than Peter. That's a real community. Try to go see him. I don't know how accessible he is.

Q: Yeah, do you have a number where I might be able to reach him?

A: I can give you his address. I don't know if I can give you his number. But it's near Nevada City.

Q: Oh okay, it's a long ways away then.

A: But he, Alan Ginsberg, Bakker Roshi from the Zen Center, and an attorney, whose name I've forgotten, all bought pieces of land adjacent to each other up in the hills in the gold country.

Q: Near Nevada City?

A: Near Nevada City. Gary has been living there ever since. The others haven't. But around him formed another community, and that is a community that tries to live within -- well in a way that is harmonious with the environment, basically. And he's written some things about it that are definitely worth reading. There's an article in Autobahn, not too long ago, it's within this past year. And he talks about how, that's the first thing I've seen that really describes it really well, about the way he and his family were living up there, and got involved with the land, and how -- just read it. It's really good. He's definitely an important person. And he's been not only writing poetry, but also teaching, and there are people around him who've been inspired by what he's done.

Q: Did he kind of provide a bridge from the beats into the hippies?

A: Well, no, he was known as a beat poet, and then he is a poet in his own right, and he was in Japan during the time when the hippie movement started here. He came back, I met him in '69, maybe. So it was later that he came back here. I don't know about bridge, no. Well, I don't know.

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Q: I've just been trying to figure out how the beats and the hippies sort of coincided, or maybe they didn't.

A: Well, no they didn't. The beats were the fifties, and they started climbing mountains and having mystical picnics, right? And they talked about Buddhism, and most of them still are Buddhists. And they evolved their own way, being poets.

Q: So it was something different, okay.

A: But one was connected to the other, they're not alien to each other. Because... I don't know if Philip Walen was one -- I was going to say, Jo-Ann Tiger was definitely one of the beats. So the whole thing, even calling them beats was somebody else's word. But, I mean, Ginsberg was certainly a big figure in all the communal gatherings during the hippie times.

Q: Yeah, we actually had a beat reunion in Lawrence a little while back, because William Burroughs lives in Lawrence, and so Alan Ginsberg and a bunch of other folks came back, and for about a week read all their poetry, and gave presentations. It was really fun, I enjoyed it a lot. Unfortunately, we weren't doing the project then, or I could've gotten some interviews, I suppose. Well, I'm curious how you do reflect on this era now, and how your views might be different now than they were then, in terms of how you looked at communal living.

A: It's hard in this society, because we're so, it's so ingrained that we should compete against one another. Especially hard now, because parents are -- I mean we even had a woman try to shoot a competitor, a girl who was competing for a cheerleader prize, where was that? You know, I mean that's an extreme case, but it's horrendous what is happening to get "my kid" out there, "me" out there. Everything, the competitive edge, all that thing, it's eating itself up, and destroying the fabric of this society, and it's destroying people, I think, too, because it isolates so much, so it's very hard to go against that and do something together. But people are trying. And so, I know that there are some friends of mine outside Washington D.C are now seriously exploring building on their farm a co-housing thing. And there are a couple of them, I think there's one outside of Davis that I visited that's really nice.

Q: Mere Woods, or Mere Commons, something like that?

A: Something commons, right. It's a great idea. I don't know how it works, but it looked really good to me when I went. And it's very well-planned and the people see a need for that. There's another one in Emeryville. But it's just very, very hard. I mean look out here, all these little gardens, you know? Everybody's got their own garden. Now why couldn't we have one large garden? Why isn't this built in such a way that we could take down the fences? You know who's being very community-minded now are the people with AIDS. Across the street is, and um, ... well they know they don't have much time. So a lot of those stupid things that keep people apart fall away. And they are the best neighbors here. They are the ones who take care of other sick people, including an old guy who's out there, he's not gay or anything. They picked his plum trees and made jam and distributed it to the neighbors. They're the ones who have a community party. They sweep the streets. And they look out for other people. Across the street there were three guys, now there's one. And they were, like, the neighborhood's connoisseurs and gossips, they were wonderful. The couple, they really loved each other. And when David was dying, I mean, we put out -- well this will give you an example of how influential they were in building the

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community here -- the guy down the street is an orthodontist, has two kids. And then, next to him on the porch are two old Italian sisters, they're from the neighborhood as it was way back. The orthodontist is from -- who can buy houses here now? Only orthodontists. Their kids go to private schools. But he goes to Robert Blye workshops. And then, us, who bought it before the prices went up. The three of us -- but on the initiative of the orthodontist -- put up Tibetan prayer flags, so David could see them from across the street. Because we didn't know what we could do. And he had such a great spirit, and he always kept his humor, and you couldn't just go out there and light candles or anything, it wasn't for David. But we put out these bright flags, and so he could step out and he could see we were all thinking of him. So three very different kinds of people did that. And that kind of thing happens a lot. And I would say that the presence of death of young people amongst us has really built a sense of community in what I see around here. And it's made us all much more aware of the shortness of life. And what the true values are for us. I mean, one man just committed suicide. He was already so sick that he had to have injections into his eyes. Can you imagine? And he just knew it wasn't going to get better. A lot of the current medications keep people looking okay, but they're really suffering horribly, and it's all down. So he chose to leave. Next to him, if you just walk up the street, is a guy named Larry, he's an artist, he's gay, he's lived here for a long, long time. And he, um, said, "Gee, that's sad about Stephen." He said, "Why? It's not sad. He had a fabulous death." He had a death like he wanted, and he just before he left he gave me a big hug, and he said, "You were a wonderful neighbor." And I said, "I can't say that for you. You were fabulous neighbor!" And they laughed. They didn't know it was going to be the next day, but that's what he decided to do. And so a lot of the people with AIDS have developed really, rituals of death, to do it graciously. They do it different way. It's so much part of their everyday life, that it's very different. We used to have a taboo about death, and even in the sixties, everything was life, everything was youth. But now, it's more like other places in the world, where death is part of every day, at least here. I think it builds a sense of community. Go over to that Hartford St. Zen Center. I haven't been there, but I would imagine that in exploring where things went, that's an aspect you could go to.

Q: It sounds wonderful, like it would be full of information.

A: You'll probably have to spend some time -- I've learned in doing my book that you can't, like a lot of it wasn't interviewing. You have to go, and you have to be there, and you have to look, watch, and see, and spend some time. This is fine, but you'll probably want to do some of that too.

Q: And I have. And it's been wonderful. Well you know, I don't know if you're familiar with the Communities Directory? It's put out by the FIC. It lists something like over 500 intentional communities over North America. The people who put that together feel that that number's just the tip of the iceberg, that there is a lot of intentional community happening. Do you feel like there's maybe a resurgence of interest in community? Maybe we could be leading up to another time like the late '60's?

A: I don't think it's ever really gone away, it's just, you know, the desire for community is something that is so important to human beings that it's always, there are always people trying to build communities. Now that we don't even have families -- I mean our daughter, on our 20th anniversary, wrote us a card, saying, "Thank you for being the only parents I know to be together in the same house." There's so much divorce. So when you think about it, building community when you can't even keep a family intact -- there's a desire for it all the time, but you can see what the obstacles are. Because everything in this

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society fragments. I think there's a continuing desire for that, it's just the obstacles are always different. And depending on the time, people explore in different ways. A lot of people move out into the country, not to necessarily for an intentional community, but hoping to find community in a small town. That's part of the same thing. I mean, they may go and join the Rotary or something. I friend of mine who was part of the Zen Center, and her husband was a Zen priest, they had a kid, and they found that they didn't feel that the Zen Center was set up in such a way that it provided for families and taking care of the kids growing and their needs. They had to have more money for ballet lessons or whatever. So he became a dentist, and moved to the town of Heelsburg. And now they're real members of their community, not of the Zen Center. But how does that count in the picture, you know? I don't know. They participate in all kinds of town things, and she's involved now in -- she's organized a course in the Russian River. People are studying the Russian River and planning to restore what's been damaged on the river. So there's a big study in lots of communities going on. And that's community joining up with nature. A lot of this, I [unintelligible] a magazine that's called California Coast in Motion, and it's published by a state agency which is rapidly losing it's money, so I don't know how long it will go. But it does a lot of work with communities that are working to restore their natural resources. And some of the people are like David Simpson, we helped David Simpson and his Metol[?] group work on restoration of the salmon runs up on the Metol River.

Q: He told me about that.

A: He probably never mentioned the Coastal Conservancy, right?

Q: I don't think he did.

A: He probably didn't. But look, here it is, out of the sixties came the Coastal Act, Proposition 21 for California, the first huge land-use control measure -- people were just angry, what was happening to the coast, they felt it was everybody's coast, and couldn't just be subdivided for individual use. So they passed this voter initiative, which established a coastal commission, you have to have permits to do things, and wetlands are protected, all kinds of things are protected. Also, at the same time, they set up this coastal conservancy, which I work for, which is supposed to help people do what they want, and provide public access, and restore habitats. So people who have moved out, like David Simpson, they have this wonderful theater group, they travel around, he probably told you about that. They're also working on the Metol River restoration. But everybody claims it as their own thing. But it's everybody's thing. What's not happening is people are not very good at giving credit. But it all joins together. This agency was formed because of things that happened in the '60's. I know the guy who wrote the concept of the coastal conservancy. And he had gone to a Buckminster Fuller workshop. Now, he was influential at that time, his ideas, not just his domes, but his whole way of thinking. So, this act and the coastal conservancy, they're all a direct outgrowth of the sixties and the kind of thinking that was going on. The big thing that it's accomplished at conservancy is to help communities get together and be stewards of their own land in their area, but for a great than local interest. That's what's written in the law, it can't just be for that town, to have a path to its beach -- it has to be for everybody. But the town has the greatest interest. So they're taking care of the path, or they maybe build the path, and they do it most effectively, with the greatest sensitivity to the environment. It maybe sounds muddly, but I think all these things are connected, and those are the influences of the '60's. And the thing is that the

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communities are -- the communities you're writing about, mostly, are linked to all these other things that are happening.

Q: Now before I turned the tape recorder on, we were talking just a little bit about how there's this sort of backlash against the sixties, and what happened during the sixties. What do you think causes that, and why are we experiencing so much of that?

A: Why the cynicism? Well part of it is deliberate, I think it's really created by people who want to discredit. But before just seeing that, I think it's very hard now for people who are graduated from college, say, my daughter, born in 1970, was really inspired by a community service project she did when she was in high school. She met a teacher who was working with children from very poor homes, and this teacher was just amazing. So she decided that she wanted to be a preschool teacher, because that's where so much happens in a child's life, it's all shaped. So she became a preschool teacher, and she was teaching in Palo Alto, in a Montessori-type school, called Head's Up, which is a very '90's term. "Head's up" is somehow, it's business. But, parents pay a lot of money, and parents have worked very hard at jobs that pay a lot of money, and they don't see their kids. So the teachers are so important to these children. And she's wonderful with them, she really loves her work. Well she just had to quit, because she can't afford to pay her rent and pay for her car at \$10 an hour, which is all she gets. Everything is structured in such a way that people can't make a living doing the things that we need to have done. It's so twisted, because these parents really value their children, and yet they're in this trap, having to work so hard to pay for the child. Somehow the options aren't there anymore, of staying home with your kid if you want to, and then go back into the economy if you want to. Everybody's very driven, very speeded up. They're very afraid of -- because there are things that were very inconceivable in the '60's, and now are true. We know people who have lost everything, who were in our position, and now they're practically homeless. So the kids are growing up, and this is the world they're growing into. She would love to, my daughter would love to teach environmental education -- there aren't any slots for that. Now she has to leave this. It's so sad, it's heart-breaking. So how can you not become cynical? But you can't afford to become cynical. Like, I tell her, "Well early childhood education people have to now form a different kind of union." And she says, "Oh, mom, that will never happen." I said, "It has to happen. You have to get together, see a common interest, and it can happen, and then things will change." Because these parents, they don't know. They don't even know what you're getting paid. They just want to make sure their kid is in a good school. So, there's a lot of the work that was done in the thirties [sic] has to be redone again. Part of it is the hard times. If you happen to be Black, and you didn't go to a good school, then it's harder and harder to get a good education now, because the schools are so cut back. And you don't have art or music or anything that is a way for people for whom other things aren't. Then you're read out of the system so early. Just think, in the sixties, there was integration, and now, how many Black people do the White people know, and have in their houses, and vice-versa? It's changed for us, we don't like it. We used to have many more Black friends, and somehow we don't.

Q: It seems like the world is getting more and more segregated.

A: It is! So there's all that. But then also, I think, that greed has won in many ways. If you -- I don't think it's permanent, but if you look at everything being for sale. Have you heard that people are taking insurance out [tape ends] ... so there's been, there's a very strong deliberate attempt to manipulate and

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discredit. I think the term "politically correct" is -- people use it without really thinking it true, because when you say, "Oh, that's so PC," you're saying, "This person's values are just a fashion." But this person, it so happens, really, truly believes these things, and just because you call him PC, doesn't -- I mean, you can call him PC and discredit him in that way, but people don't see that that's a way of discrediting him, you know? It works. And people are afraid to be called PC. And that term "nimby," you know, I read this in Mark Dowe's book, *Losing Ground*, is that what it's called?

Q: "Not in my backyard"?

A: Yeah, you read that?

Q: No, but I know the term "nimby."

A: Well, it's sort of put out as, "Oh, you can't be such a person, you have to accept this pollution, it's got to be in somebody's backyard." But he tracked down that it was actually PR for the big industry, the polluting industry. Because if you can say, "You don't want it, you're not a citizen, you're a nimby," what about the other way, "No, I don't want it in my backyard, and everybody else should refuse to have it in their backyard too! This is something that shouldn't be in anybody's backyard!" That's what it is. Otherwise, if you say, "These people are nimby," you already discredit them. So there's this kind of subtle thing at work, which has made a lot of people cynical. So it's hard to be really optimistic right now, but I actually think everything does go through waves, and things are subterranean for awhile, and then they surface. Because in the '50's, when I finished -- in '56 I graduated from Oberlin. And I was born in Lithuania, and I came to this country as a refugee in '47. So I was very interested in working with refugees or doing something that was very ... well, sort of, something like the Peace Corps or something. So I -- but there was no Peace Corps yet. So I went around and I went to all the organizations where I thought I could find a job -- there was nothing, there was nothing really happening at that time. Well, a little while later, there was a hell of a lot. And at that time, I just didn't have the imagination to find it on my own, somebody else might have. But we are all part of our time, and sometimes, now, I think young people who can't find the thing that gives meaning to their life to do, it's just a time right now. It will change. Because we need all that. So.

Q: When you were at Oberlin, were you part of the student co-ops there?

A: Yeah, I lived there. That was great. Did you live in them?

Q: No, but I'm very interested in student housing co-ops, because to me, they're sort of, they're very similar to the communities in a lot of ways.

A: Oh, yeah, it was great. And they're much bigger now, I just got a newsletter, there's a newsletter from the co-ops.

Q: Yeah, OSCA, they call it, I guess, Oberlin Student's Cooperative Association.

A: Yeah, I think ... where else, let's see. To look for the stuff where you don't expect it is the thing. Community. Well, a lot is oriented around jobs now, but that's ... I don't think that's ... no, I don't think I have anything else to say on that at the moment.

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Q: When I interviewed a man in Santa Cruz a couple days ago, he was part of Steven Gaskin's Farm in Tennessee, and now lives in Santa Cruz with his kids, and they have to rent a house. He can't afford to buy a house. And he was saying that he sees a lot of people getting together and buying houses together, basically for economic reasons, and I'm wondering if there could possibly be a new wave of communalism that's really fueled by economics more than anything.

A: Maybe. Certainly can't easily find an apartment by yourself here, young people have to share, but that was always true to some extent, although it's almost impossible now not to. That's sort of a little, mini-level of community, right? I don't know. I haven't come across people buying houses together, but I know of people who have thought about it. I mean, I haven't heard of it recently. There's some other communities where people have bought land together, but I'd have to make a phone call to a friend. I mean, are you looking for a lot more communities?

Q: Um, well, communities that came out of the '60's and '70's, we're always looking for references, so if you have any we'd love to take them. I don't know if I'll be able to finish this in a year, but I'll definitely do that.

A: Yeah, go to the Zen Center, be sure you go to Libre. And, try ... the Hartford Zen Center. Those are really good.

Q: Is there, if that man, Philip Walen, isn't available, is there anyone else you would recommend talking to at the Zen Center?

A: I don't know anybody there, I haven't even been over there, but you know, I'm sure you can find somebody to talk to. Just go over there. Philip Walen is a very good poet. And his book just came out. And he's a roshi there. Very old, and quite wonderful, so if you get a chance to talk to him ... he doesn't know me though. I know a lot of people who are friends of his. So, Gary Snider, the City of a Thousand Buddha's in Ukiah. That's the Buddhist group. Green Gulch Ranch. What else? And yeah, the hospice.

Q: And Green Gulch Ranch was part of the Tasajara?

A: Green Gulch Ranch is part of the Zen Center. Zen Center has Green Gulch Ranch, Tasajara, and yeah. Let me see, let me go get ... a lot of copies, I'd like to give you one, but I don't know if I have another one of these.

Q: Well, maybe Tim has one that I could borrow. Is that you?

A: Yeah, that's me. And that's an English edition that I could lend you, but this one, I should have more copies, but I may just have this. I don't know. I'm just not good at holding onto things. Then there's this one, the next one.

Q: "Holy Rand."

A: Yeah, and that's the environmental movement. So that's the progression. And this is Black Elks, based on the mandala a friend of mine did, it's hanging on the wall in the hall, that is based on Black Elk Speaks. This, let me see, does it talk about anybody? People's Park, and all kinds of ... Bucky Fuller. A lot of things that grew out of that, went onto this, you know, it's a continuum.

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Q: Do you know how the bioregional movement started?

A: Bioregional, that was Gary Snider and Peter Burg used that word a whole lot, and they were, I think, the first ones to use it. And also, watershed consciousness, and that thing. Now, the conservancy's doing watershed plans, for whole watersheds, because people, for completely different reasons, recognize that they have to pay attention to the watershed. Not completely, but they didn't come from the same place. But they're front yard is washing away. Or the stream is all silted in. And something doesn't work, and "Oh, we're part of the watershed!" So there's this sudden rediscovery. And I'll give you one other thing, an interview that I did with a guy who was working in this area, which reflects this kind of watershed consciousness, but probably, I doubt that Peter would ever have thought to mention him. And yet, he comes out of the same stuff. You'll see, I'll give it to you. And, this book, both these books have to do with a perceptual shift, people recognizing, "Oh, mind-body connection." You know, all that. "There is such a thing as awareness. There is a larger thing, I'm part of a large mandala, I don't have to do it all." All that, that was my first book. The second one, "Oh, there's a landscape, and I'm part of it. There's streams underneath, right here, running under this ground." And they'll be all channelizing, running into -- "but there is a landscape, and I'm part of it." All of that makes you part of a larger community. This is a book about perceptual shift also, in that terrifying direction. And that is, infants born very premature, I watched them in an intensive care nursery at Stanford, and followed up very borderline cases, because I wanted to know, how decisions are made about who lives and dies. Well, it's not simple as I found it, it's very complicated, we're all trapped in a technological kind of situation where the fact that we can do certain things makes it impossible not to do them, or it takes so much energy not to do them that they go on. And it's like a metaphor for the intensive care nursery -- for me it's a metaphor for the whole society, and for what we were talking about, this is just an extreme case. Just like the commune where everything is deeded to God was one commune, right? Tried to deed it to God. That is a far manifestation of something, but it's, this is an extreme manifestation, but it's prevalence throughout society, the technological system that drives us and controls us, we invent something, and then we can't control it. And it controls us. Computers are supposed to save time, supposed to make it easier for us all. We all work harder and faster. It isn't getting a better product. It's a wonderful thing, but it's captured us for the moment, and somehow, everybody will tell you, it's great to have a fax, but at the same time, there was a time when the letter had to get there, and you had to get the response, and there was the time in between. That shapes life. The fact that you have to immediately respond, e-mail is even faster, right? And I no longer have somebody who is doing certain things like, on the magazine, because it can all be done on the computer. So you do it all yourself. Okay. Intensive care nursery, the babies that are born to die really, not everybody is meant to live, and they're kept alive through, what I found to be real torture, because nobody, it's too complicated, too difficult, there are too many things at work to be able to let them go. We're all trapped in this technological trap. And their parents who come into the nursery, instead of seeing their baby -- the baby's all out with such heavy tranquilizers they can't move, so they can't cry, and they're all attached to all these tubes -- to see how the baby is, they don't look at the baby and hold the baby, they look at the dials that are attached to the baby. That's a perceptual shift. Okay, so this book is connected to the others. And this book, is something I did, it's a very joyful book, and it's bioregional. Never uses the word. Peter wouldn't review it in his Green City because it didn't fit. But, but it is. That's fine, I don't care, it doesn't matter. I'm just telling you that the rhetoric doesn't always describe what exists. This is done by the University of

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California Press. Most of its production was paid for by the state through the conservancy. I was the one in the fortunate position of being able to initiate it, pull all this together, pull people together, and wonderful energy materialized to do things. This is a comprehensive guide to the entire San Francisco Bay, so that somebody who just wants to ride a bike somewhere on the shore, without ever being lectured at, just in simple ways like this, learns a whole lot, about, here is the Bay, and I live on it. It's a bioregion, you may not know the word, but here it is. The trail will go, eventually, all the way around, and we've shown how now, you can go all the way around. So you learn about all kinds of things on the bay and the landscape, and it enriches people's lives. And the idea is that if they go out there and enjoy it and recognize -- we put just common birds, it's not for wildlife watchers, it's just for somebody who goes out there. But one guy called me up, he said, "This bird here, I've seen it all around, it's a red-winged blackbird! I finally know what it is!" Well, I was so happy, because that's the idea. He just went for a walk. And now he's going to see, "Oh, a red-winged blackbird." And he'll notice some other things. These photographs, drawings, everything, people gave their time, they appeared, magically, somehow when I needed them. It was very hard work, but everything totally gelled, and we have this wonderful thing that's a contribution of many, many people. And it's just a book, it's just a guide book. Nothing says it's anything special, but anybody who uses it is going to be thinking in a slightly different way. And it's a communal effort. People gave me their time because they thought it was a good thing. They thought this was really a good thing. And now people see it, they say, "Oh, my God, we have to have one like that for Monterey Bay, for ..." you know. But I don't know if they can, because they have to have, what it takes to do this, I don't know if it can be repeated. I wouldn't do it again. So you have this, what's in this book, and you have this, which is a joyful thing that's happening. The reason we could have this book, was because it was a conservancy, but also because people decided in the late sixties that they were going to protect their bay shoreline, and they weren't going to let it all turn to garbage dumps, and now where there were garbage dumps, there are parks. And because people discovered they were on the water, and how wonderful it was to be on the water, and then they said, "Everybody has to have access to the water," and so right along Chesapeake Bay, I think, only 4% is accessible to the public of the shoreline, the rest is all private. Here, 40% is. And more and more, it's becoming accessible. So, this is a product of the sixties.

Q: But superficially, you wouldn't know that.

A: No. So it's gone in two directions. The word "bioregional" is in my magazine, it's in government, it's in watershed management plans, it's in official documents. People who never heard where it came from, it's been incorporated into the mainstream.

Q: Thank you so much for your time.