

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: [Laughter] OK, it's December 9th, 1995 and this is an interview with Lauren and Jack Churchill. Kay, so Lauren, you want to start just by telling me a little bit about your background, uh, maybe where you're from, and some of the events that led up to you joining the farm?

LC: I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, um, I was, as a teenager I became really interested in what was going on in San Francisco and uh, the [unintelligible] and everything that was happening there. And I felt that I had a, a connection. I felt symbiotic with them, as it were, and, 'cause a lot of the things that I'd read about, heard about, were a lot of ideas that I agreed with. And, I guess I was unusual for a teenager, because I got more interested in spirituality and started reading all kinds of things -- my, I didn't really grow up in a real strict religious environment, and I was real interested in finding out about all kinds of different things. And, uh, I carried that into when I went to college. I went to the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan is a real free place, there's a lot of ideas going around and around the place. And there were a lot of people there with all kinds of different things going on. I was also fascinated with the idea of mind expansion and was anxious to try something that would expand my mind. And I felt that going to the University of Michigan would give me the best chance to do that. [Laughs]. And so, when I got there, one of the first things I did was take mescaline. And, uh, it was not a completely good experience. It was OK. And altogether, I probably experimented about five or six times and of course, then there was the usual, the [unintelligible] and everything else, but that wasn't as strong as some of the stuff that [unintelligible].

Q: When were you at the University of Michigan?

LC: Uh, nineteen sixty . . . -- uh, I got there, September 1970 and I stayed until May of 1971. Somewhere around the end of my first year, I met a guy named Eddie, Edward who uh, knew about the farm, and he was telling me about the farm, told me about this book that student had Monday night class [?] And I got a hold of the book, and I was flabbergasted, because there was so much stuff in the book that meshed with what I was believing at the time. And um, it had always been kind of fantasy for me to go live in the country, because growing up in the city, I really, really craved being out in the open spaces. And um, when all this stuff was happening, I read about the communes [unintelligible] idea, and after I read about Stephen, I made up my mind that I was going to live on the farm. So this was, this was in, when I made up my mind it was like, beginning of my sophomore year, and I decided to finish up the year, because I thought that if at any time I ever had the opportunity to go again, it'd be better to have two full years under my belt. And I was going to the school of architecture and design. Um, and uh, --

Q: Were you living in a group house or a co-op house?

LC: I lived in a co-op, in the second year, I lived in a co-op.

Q: One of the ICC [?] co-ops?

LC: Yeah.

Q: Which house did you live in?

LC: Aoxomoxoa.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: I don't know that one.

LC: You don't know that one? We set up off the beaten track. It was actually, it was kind of set up separately from the ISS [?] thing. Because actually, I couldn't get in to any of those, because there was waiting lists and uh, when I found a friend of mine, told me about this house that was being set up, it was going to be like that, but not connected to it, I thought yeah, you know, so there were thirteen of us in the house. And it was really cool. [Laughs].

Q: Can you say the name again?

LC: A-O-X-O-M-O-X-O-A.

Q: [Laughs].

LC: It's an album, it's a Grateful Dead album.

JC: Sounds like an antibiotic. [Laughter]

LC: It's a Grateful Dead album.

JC: Oh.

Q: OK.

LC: Not that I was ever much into the Grateful Dead. I liked them and everything but it was more like, I was more into Led Zeppelin. And [pause] well, at that point, after I made that decision, I started hanging around people that were sort of connected, or knew about the farm. There were not that many but I would just sort of interject myself, you know? Whenever I had the opportunity. The farm actually sent up an ex-, expedition of people to an apple orchard in Ann Arbor, and that was in spring of 1971. And, uh, was it '71 or '72? Actually, it was the spring of '72, because of the exhibition and I went out there a couple times to visit with them. And at Spring Break, the people I knew were going down there, Eddie and this other, he was a character, he --

JC: Eddie Vedder.

LC: No, it wasn't Eddie Vedder. Maybe his parents. Um, [pause] yeah, he wanted to go live on the farm, and he wanted to bring his mom, who was in a mental hospital in Canada. Because, I guess, at the time, Stephen was talking about how people who were in mental hospitals shouldn't be on drugs or something like that. He, he had somebody down there who was schizophrenic and they tried taking her off drugs and had disastrous, disastrous results. She died. She died of suffocation, because she was having a, a, what were the . . . ? An episode, she was having an episode [unintelligible] --

JC: Was she having a seizure?

LC: No, she was having an episode, a schizophrenic episode, not a seizure.

JC: Psychotic episode.

LC: Psychotic episode. He's a mental [?] helper for a year, now. Yeah, so that was before I got to the farm. So anyway, in the meantime, Edward started to get his mother out of the mental hospital, he made several trips to Canada and then he got caught with pot in his pocket, a big wad. [Laughs]. And then, we, we finally, you know, we took, we went down there and, you see, I had already made up my mind that no matter what I was going to go live on the farm. So when we went to visit it, I had the idea that I was going to go down there and ask if I could live on the farm. And actually, I guess, there wasn't

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

really a real big policy on who should be living there and who shouldn't. Basically, everyone who really wanted to live there could. So I went in there and I was, oh, man, I was really impressed with the place. All these open places, all these fields, all these trees, I went up and I sat in the trees and I looked out into the meadow and I just fell in love with the land. And I, they had, they had a farmhouse. It was just a modern ranch house that was near the gate, that was what had been there with the people who previously owned it, had made that house. And that was the only structure, formal structure on the farm at the time. So that would be where Stephen used to hold court. Uh, and then, they had all the offices and everything. There was a room that Stephen would sit in a chair and the weren't any other, any other, no other furniture in the room, so everybody else would kind of sit on the floor on pillows and stuff. So there's Stephen sitting in the chair and everybody else. And if anybody wanted to address Stephen, they would sit in the middle of the floor in front of Stephen. Across [?] from Stephen. Well this, this is what really happened the very first time I went to the farm. [Laughs].

JC: It was like --

LC: And I was waiting my turn --

JC: -- the guru [?], the master.

LC: Yeah, I'm, I'm waiting for my turn to talk to Stephen. And actually, when it was my turn to talk to Stephen, I sat down in the middle of the floor.

Q: [Laughs].

LC: Said Stephen, you know, I live here [?] Fine, you know, he talked to me a little bit, I can't even remember exactly what he said, you know, basically, he would say "Oh, OK, if you really want to, come on."

JC: You had to agree to be his student [or servant? JC and LC are speaking simultaneously.]

LC: I had to agree, and all this kind of stuff, and he told me, you know, uh, there were agreements and things like that, and I'm going, "Yeah!"

JC: You had to agree to be his student.

LC: And at the time, there's a little voice in the back of my head going "What the heck is going on here?" But I'm saying "Shut up, shut up, I want to live here." [Laughs] So that little voice in my head, that little voice that, my intuition was telling me that uh, not, it wasn't quite as perfect as I thought it was going to be. And then I had this utopian idea of what it was going to be like to live on the farm, I thought this is, this perfect, this is exactly what the world should be like, this is what I have to do [unintelligible]. So, uh, then the school year ended and I got all my stuff together and oh, boy, I had a hard time getting out of Ann Arbor. Edward was going to be driving down there with some friends of his, and he was going to go down there and live, he couldn't get his mother out of the hospital, and uh, the morning that we were to leave, I waited and I waited and I waited. I finally went over to where he was living, and he was living in a crash pad and sleeping with his girlfriend in a corner, I'm going "Get up! I want to go!"

Q: [Laughs].

LC: So I finally packed everything in there, including my cat. I brought all my art supplies, including a roll of canvas for [unintelligible] paintings. All my art supplies, books that I, my most treasured, my ten most treasured books in the whole world. [Unintelligible]. Not all of them, just [unintelligible] all these other

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

treasured books that I, like Aldous Huxley, what else did I have? Something by Leon Uris, Tr, uh, Hawaii, I just, just these books that I loved the most in the whole world. Lord of the Rings, you know. And I jumbled everything down there and went to live right to this tent, brought all my stuff in, and was almost immediately told that I couldn't keep most of it. Number one: there's no use for art. Number two: the only books worth reading are Stephen's. And I committed another no-no, I guess, I immediately fell in love with somebody and sort of had fun that night, and then the next morning, they said "OK you guys, you over here and you over here and I don't want you talking to each other anymore. We don't do those kinds of things on the farm, you know?"

Q: [Laughs].

LC: So, you know, said "I don't know what kind of stuff." [Laughs] That's just, what I thought.

Q: What did your friends up in Ann Arbor think about what you were doing?

LC: Uh, they thought I was off the wall.

Q: Really?

LC: Yeah. They thought I was, you know, being led. Led by the nose.

Q: Did your family know what --

LC: Yes.

Q: What you were doing?

LC: Yes.

Q: What did they think?

LC: My father was like, totally, he was totally freaked out. He was totally up in arms. My mother said, she's our daughter, we love her, whatever she does, you know, she, she's an adult now, she needs to make her choices, we just have to pray and hope that everything will turn out for the best [?] And she continued that way. She continued that way. My, my dad, you know, they came to visit me the first six months I was there, after the first, visited me, um, in the summer, and it got to be a ritual, [they would come in?] the summer and I would go off in the winter [?].

Q: And what was it like when they came to visit?

LC: Uh, I was really glad to be able to hang out with, be with them, and eat real food, and sleep in a real bed and stay at a motel a night or two, and they would just, you know, they talked with people, and they, my parents are open-minded. They saw the people that were good, they knew were good, you know, they knew were honest and had real feelings for what they were doing and wanted to accomplish. You know.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: So they wouldn't try to talk you out of living there?

LC: My dad, well, actually he didn't really, when I was up visiting them in the winter, he would ask me questions that would, in effect, he had a way of asking questions that would turn that little intuition that I had, that knew he was right about certain things. So naturally, at the time, being in my early twenties, and wanting to have things go the way I wanted them to go, naturally would rebel against it, and say "No, you're wrong," you know, yeah there's human nature, but we can change things and all this kind of stuff. 'Cause he saw stuff. And, and now, you know, I see those things, and I, and I internally groan to myself, and say how could I have, you know, let myself be brought into everything, believe all this stuff. It was just a microcosm of the larger society, it really wasn't that revolutionary.

Q: Now I interrupted your story a bit. You were talking about how they took your stuff away and, um?

LC: Well, they didn't exactly take my stuff away, they just strongly suggested that I get rid of it.

Q: Oh, OK.

LC: You know.

Q: Yeah.

LC: Tolkien has no place on the farm. "What? Tolkien's awesome." No way. It's just a fantasy. You know, I, I developed a lot of my belief system from books like that. And, when I was in high school.

JC: There was a lot of censorship.

LC: A lot. Yeah. Then, then, another thing I thought was kind of interesting, 'course there was no electricity on the farm, so that wasn't really any way you could get any music in from the outside, but there was very very strong opinions about the music that was being made at the time. Stephen used to talk about, like he, he felt, he felt Mick Jagger was definitely influenced by the devil, um, I don't know if he said that exactly, but that was, that was the implication, that he was evil, you know, Alice Cooper was evil, Black Sabbath was definitely evil, [unintelligible] um, he didn't like Led Zeppelin, he didn't like, really much of anything. Stephen, of course, was ten years older than most of the people on the farm at the time. You know, I mean, he liked, he uh, was involved with It's a Beautiful Day, the, the group It's a Beautiful Day, I guess he knew them and that they would come to him for consultations, and I guess he knew the Grateful Dead, he knew some of the people in Jefferson Airplane, those were all OK, they're all from San Francisco. Anything not from San Francisco's not cool. Something like that. And I was with them once in a music store, and, uh, Led Zeppelin came on over the intercom, and he said "Oh, Led Zeppelin's OK until Jimmy Page opens his mouth." And at the time, I thought there was something wrong with that statement, but I wasn't quite sure what.

JC: You're not familiar with Led Zeppelin, are you?

Q: No, I'm really not.

LC: Jimmy Page doesn't sing.

JC: He's the lead singer.

LC: He's the, he's the lead guitarist. Robert Plant is the singer.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Oh, OK.

LC: Like, how much Stephen knew about it. This is how much Stephen knew about it. Yeah, I loved music, I always have loved music. The farm had, had, it's own little thing going on. There were some people that actually had electric guitars, and somebody managed to keep their drum set. So, of course, they had a farm band. I can show you a vinyl. I have two of them. They made two records. Yep.

Q: Were they pretty good?

LC: I don't know. [Laughs] They were o -- they thought. [?] [Laughs] They totally thought. But everybody loved it, you know, because it was the only music we had. There, [unintelligible] and everything, 'cause you know, you're [unintelligible] dancing, and --

Q: Well, the farm band went on tour, didn't they?

LC: Yeah. Yes. They still, they still have a thing about the bands. Now their kids are making in [?] on it. I don't know, I don't know that many of them.

JC: They tried --

LC: There's, there's a person in a group called Collective Soul, and his last name is [pause] what's his last name? Excuse me.

Q: OK.

LC: Roland [?] Oh yeah. And there was somebody, there was somebody on the farm with the last name of Roland, I didn't have a chance to ask him whether or not they're related to anyone from the farm. [Laughs] But they're, they're from Georgia. Um, I don't know. I just, I just, am happy to be able to make my own opinions about things.

Q: Yeah, sure.

LC: [Laughs].

Q: That's understandable. So you arrived at the farm in like the spring of '72, or?

LC: Spring of '72. In May.

Q: So can you describe somewhat of what, what it was like there, then?

LC: OK, it was, it, there weren't that many people at the time, I think there were like 350 people. The roads were dirt, most people were living either in large army tents or in buses that had been painted, and most of the people who were, who were already couples, and were married, had buses. And there were a few single people that had buses. But most of the single people were living in big army tents. And when I first got there, the men and women were living together in the army tents. But soon after I got there it was decided that the men and the women shouldn't live in the same tents. So there were men's tents and there were ladies tents.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Why did they do that?

LC: Well, I [unintelligible] reasons, really for me, you know, I came in there and the first thing I did, um, yeah, they just wanted, they, they had some very --

JC: They had rigid moral standards at the farm.

LC: Yeah, they did.

JC: They were very rigid.

LC: They were really, you know --

JC: Well, Stephen was a Calvinist, so it was basically --

LC: Basically --

JC: A reflection of his Calvinist values.

LC: And a Buddhist. Calvin-Buddha, Calvin, Buddhist-Calvinism.

JC: Yeah. So Buddhist-Calvinism, separate dorms.

Q: OK.

LC: Work ethic, you know, Puritan and all that kind of stuff.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So, did you live in a army tent or a bus or something . . .?

LC: Yeah, I lived in an army tent --

Q: With a bunch of women.

LC: Several, yes. When things started not working out well there, I moved somewhere else. I moved a lot when I was on the farm.

Q: And, and what was daily life like, what did you do?

LC: Well, there were things that you would have, there were different things that you could involve yourself in. You had a choice, you weren't, like, coerced to do one thing or another. You could work on the farming crew or you could work on the canning crew, of course, there were, there were no restrictions, but there were unwritten -- unspoken, um, feelings. People, you know, I, I did all kinds of different things. I did, I worked on the horse crew, I worked on the electrical crew, I worked on the painting crew. The electrical crew and the painting crew were mostly men. It was kind of like, not really frowned on, it really wasn't, but they didn't make me feel comfortable, let's put it that way. Nobody ever told me that I couldn't work on the electronic crew, or the telephone crew. But the guys didn't make me feel comfortable. I, at one point, uh, there was, you know, they had the ham radio thing, and they were encouraging people to learn to become ham radio uh, I was the first woman to try to become a ham radio operator. I studied with a couple of other guys, did a lot of, we spent a couple of months learning about all these things that we would have to know, because there was a test that you had to take and the test was given in Atlanta. And the day that the test was given, the night before the test was given, I got in the car with these two guys to drive down to Atlanta, Georgia to take the test. They drove. I didn't drive. But, I was expected to be the navigator. And because of that, I couldn't sleep.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Oh.

LC: The guy who wasn't driving was sleeping in the back, and then they'd switch. 'Cause it was like, I think it was about a five hour drive, or six hour drive, but I wasn't allowed to sleep. If I'd dozed off, I would have been, I was told to wake up, because I had to pay attention to the roads, and the driver, the driver would start feeling sleepy.

Q: Yeah.

LC: That was, 'cause we were up at night, that kind of thing. Now of course, by the time we got down there I was really exhausted. But I was wired. And we took the test, and I failed and they passed.

Q: How frustrating.

LC: I didn't try again. But after that, of course, there were other women that did it. You know. 'Cause they were cool.

Q: So was it a pretty sexist environment?

LC: Well, it was like under written [?] It was like this under, under toll of things. It was, like I said, a microcosm of the larger society and nothing was really different. And the guys there were definitely into their guy thing, and they didn't really want women into it. I, I the,--

JC: There was --

LC: The reasons that I had, the reasons I had for working on some of those crews was because I wanted to get off the farm sometimes.

Q: Yeah.

LC: And the painting crew got off the farm.

Q: Yeah.

LC: And I liked working, you know --

JC: But I think a woman was expected to take care of the maternalistic --

LC: Yeah, take care of the kids, take care of the, I mean, it was like, I was still, I was, I was washing other women's babies' dirty diapers before I even got married.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. So work was definitely divided on gender lines.

LC: Yeah, and, and there's one, there's one, I'll give you one incident. One time I was working, I was working on the farming crew and I was ill, and a couple other ladies in my tent were ill, too, and we all had some sort of intestinal bug, and it was causing us to have diarrhea. And uh, the guy who was the head of the, or one of the, one of the people who were in charge of the farming crew came down to our tent and said "Come on, we need your help, you've got to get up and go because we, we need people to pick the tomatoes today and, you know, you're on the crew and you've got to go." And he made us get up and go out to the field. I didn't stay very long. I was like having, I had to run out to the field, you know. Which, when you think about it, that's kind of nasty. [Laughs]

JC: Free fertilizer.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

LC: That was, you know, these were the kinds of things I don't suppose anyone on the farm ever told you, did they.

Q: Uh uh, not this part. They did say conditions were pretty rustic.

LC: Rustic. I had dysentery.

Q: Wow.

LC: I had dysentery at one point. And the only way I know that it was dysentery is that he had it in, in, uh, in India and when he described it I realized that that's what I had had. At one point, I, when, I was, when Becky was a baby, I got giardia [?] which is a, a uh, micro that's passed through water, and I guess beavers carry it, and you can get it in Colorado, and there's, there's also breakouts in Leningrad and different places, and when I went to the doctor he was a, I guess he was from the east, somewhere --

JC: Scared him.

LC: Yeah. Yeah, he said, "How can you have this?" You know, "People in the United States don't have these things."

JC: [Laughs].

LC: And he gave me some really strong medicine, and I don't know if he knew I was nursing.

Q: Oooh.

LC: But I took it, but I didn't know. Makes you wonder.

Q: Oh yeah.

LC: So, I have all kinds of stories.

Q: Yeah, I'll bet. So, Jack, you want to tell me some about your background?

JC: OK, my, my background was I, I had been, you know, I graduated from Assumption College in 1971, it's in Massachusetts. And, after I graduated, I paid off my loan in eight months, I drove a cab, working forty, like eighty hours a week, and I paid it off. And as soon as I paid it off I started traveling around the country. And, what I, then I traveled once around the country, then I came back. What what I would do, I used to work for a month or two, three months, save up, save like a thousand dollars and then travel. And then one, one time I went, the next time I went to Europe, and I ended up in India, Katmandu, and I saved up some money again, I took the trans-Canadian, I went across the country and I went up into Canada, and I went, and then I flew to Hawaii from Washington state. And then I got back, I was living, on my return trip, I was living in Arizona, and I worked there for about six months, in Tempe, Arizona. And I heard that there was going to be, a friend of mine from college was getting married, so I went to this friend's wedding and I found out at the wedding that this friend of mine was building a log cabin in Maine, so I helped him build a log cabin in Maine. From there I went, I went to Boston, I built a log cabin, helped them, went to Boston and I got involved in communities there. And it, when I was in Boston, I was at the point where I had this degree and I was going around trying to get a job, and at that time we were hit with a pretty heavy recession, so there weren't a lot of job, there wasn't a lot of a job availability. And also I was pretty revolutionary at that time, because I had been to Woodstock, and

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

been involved in different counterculture things and I, I was very upset, not upset, but very disenchanted by the American dream as we used to say, Ma and apple pie didn't appeal to me, and nine-to-five wasn't turning me on at that time. And I was seeking other, something, there had to be something else besides this type of life, because it seemed pretty boring.

Q: Were you living in a, like a group house in Boston, or something?

JC: I was living, I was living by my, I lived with my brother. And I was with him for awhile, then I had moved out, I had been several different places but most of the time I had been with my brother. And I had got involved in, there was this ad in the paper about, uh, communities. So we got together uh, we used to get together once a week and have a, have a potluck dinner and these particular people that I was meeting were interested in a farm down in West Virginia, it was called Shannon Farm.

Q: Oh yeah. I know friends that lived there.

JC: Do you?

Q: Dan Questenberry [?]

JC: I don't remember -- I was there during the inception of Shannon Farm, and there was a bunch of people -- there was about forty people that went down there. And somebody, I believe they had already bought the property and we stayed up, I remember staying up for a whole day, we spent a whole day deciding, trying to make decisions, and nobody could make a decision. There was, it seemed like to me, just a lot of ego confrontations, and I, at the end of that weekend, I decided this is not for me. But when I was there, I ran into other people who were involved, actively seeking, they were seekers of communities, there were a lot of seekers then. And I talked to them, and they told, I told them what I was interested in, and they said, well, from what you're telling me, it sounds like the farm's a place for you. And they told me a little bit about it, how rustic it was and you live in tents, and it sounded pretty appealing, but I really didn't know much about it. The only thing I knew about the farm was I saw a, a not Sixty Minutes but CBS Nightly News with Walter Cronkite, they were busting people on the farm for grass. And they had all these people out there, and I remember the interviewer asking questions, and they were all standing, and it looked like the American Gothic painting, they were all standing -- we, smoke, we don't smoke, they had all these vegetables, all the stuff that they grow, said "We grow organic vegetables, that's what we do down here" and they all had smiles on their face. And I thought that was pretty interesting and that was the only other concept I had about them. I didn't know that they were vegetarians. So I went back to, drove back to Boston and I packed up, I had saved enough money and I packed up and I went straight to Summertown, took a bus straight down there.

Q: When was this?

JC: This was, Lauren's going to have to give me dates, because --

LC: Seventy -- it must have been 1974 --

JC: Three or four.

LC: No, no, four.

JC: '74. It was October or November of seventy-f -- did I meet you in '75?

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

LC: You met me in '75.

JC: Ok, so it was October or November in '74. And my last meal, I remember in a bus station, I had this big chicken meal, and then I got to the farm, and I went through the gate, I knew nothing about it, I just heard that there was some gate, and I was interrogated for about an hour. And I'll never forget this guy that interrogated me, to this day. He was very obnoxious and uh, telling me, trying to ask me, it felt like I was being interrogated by the FBI. Telling, asking me all these questions about who I was and what my purpose was down there and, he was telling me "You're not going to make it," before I even went in. And I said "Oh, yeah? I am." I'd already decided I'm going to live here. And uh, I had pretty much made my mind up. And I didn't know that they were vegetarians, I didn't know anything about the religious philosophy of the farm, at all. I knew nothing about it. Except that it was very intriguing, because in college I had studied eastern religions, so I was very familiar with a lot of the concepts that they were talking about, about non-attachment and all that. I had a conceptual understanding of all the religions of the world, so I was pretty well-versed in that. So that, that's how I got in, and I soaked. They had a period, I don't know if people told you, there's a period called soaking, you have to soak for two weeks. Which, what you did was you soaked the environment, the culture, and you learned about it and what it was about and after two weeks, you decided whether you're not, whether you wanted to be there or not. And then at the end of two weeks, you had to go find Stephen, which was a major, major job, trying, it might take you eight hours to find him. Where's Stephen? You know, you keep on asking people. "I saw him going down the road about two hours ago," so you go down the road, trying to find him. He'll be maybe at the guardhouse, so I finally got a hold of him, and I told him that I liked being here, and I wanted to be his student. So he put his hand on my head, or something, I can't remember what he did, and I was his student. You know, and I didn't know, have any concept of what it was to be, what I was to do or be his student. So, that's how I got into the farm. You know, that was my entry into the farm, how I made it in there.

Q: And what was life like when you arrived?

JC: It was, it was, pretty, it was like going into another culture. It reminded me of going into India. You know, it was a whole, it was a culture shock for anybody, but I had been through more culture shocks than the farm had ever -- those people on the farm had ever been, so it wasn't a complete culture shock, because I had lived in India for almost four months. So, initially it was a culture shock, just adjusting and, uh, figuring out, it was very intriguing when I first got there, because I was trying to understand what is going on here. Trying to figure out. Usually you can go into a situation and assess it in two minutes. Well, it took me a week or two weeks to assess what was actually happening there. To actually figure it out. And it was very intriguing and I was pretty fascinated by all this, all these little things that were going on in the group structures, and, I had been, I had studied sociology, so I was kind of looking at it from that point of view, from the sociologist going in there, the outsider. I was an insider, an outsider looking on the inside, that kind of thing. Until I actually decided to be part of it. And then I, I pretty much understood, I had a good idea what was happening, but I didn't really understand. It took me about a year to really know what was going on. To really understand the infrastructure, to understand the hierarchy, the spiritual hierarchy, uh, the power, the power trips and the power things that people were into, and the power structure. 'Cause I wanted to, you wanted to know all that, that was important to know. How

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

to, you had to know how to survive, so you'd have to know what the power structure was. So I learned that pretty fast.

Q: Can you describe what the power structure was like?

JC: Well, the power structure was basically pretty simple. Stephen was the spiritual teacher, he had, he was also the political leader. The spiritual and political leader, on, on, next on the hierarchy were the midwives. They were, their word superseded anybody's opinion. I mean, if they made a comment about what reality was of the situation, if you were having an argument, if, so I don't really think, I really don't, I don't quite agree with Lauren completely, I don't think it was a sexist society. I think it was more, it was more a matriarchal society than it was a male-dominated one. I feel like, I feel like the females dominated, pretty much, their opinions were pretty much setting, I mean, that, that was it. When they said something, it was set in stone. I mean, the midwives. If the midwives said something, that was it. Stephen would concur whatever, whatever they said. I don't think Stephen ever would disagree, in my opinion that they ever disagreed with the midwives. So if they said, that was it. It was final, done, if there was ever a dispute, something happened and a midwife was there, and Joe Schmoe, me was there, my opinion didn't mean anything. Whatever they said. And then the hierarchy from there, from the midwives went down to the group, who they decided said the heaviest spiritual things. You know, if we were sitting in a group, and somebody said this and this and this and this, it was, uh, agreement between all those people there who was, who was in charge, by who said the most intense spiritual things about, who knew where it was at, that was how, basically how the hierarchy worked. But that was all, you know, those people who made those opinions, basically, those opinions were all part of the philosophy of the farm, if they knew what Stephen thought, and they knew what the midwives thought, and they pretty much repeated, if they could memorize what the tenets were, and they could repeat it, then they were the heavies, you know, in the conversation. If we were having a conversation. It was very aggravating, because I understood it so, it was so clear to me, you know, because my, a lot of times my opinion didn't mean anything, or and, and there wasn't so much from a point of view of ego, my personal ego being insulted. It was more understanding the mindlessness of the, of the, of the spiritual hierarchy that was very aggravating to me, you know, at times, you know, when I understood that. But, you know, for the most part, I enjoyed, you know, I liked it. I mean, that was one thing I didn't particularly like, and we, Lauren and I got caught up in that many times. Because, one time, we, I had to pick up Lauren at the airport and I couldn't even get a vehicle. And my daughter was --

LC: Three months old.

JC: Three months old. I had to hitchhike, to pick her up. And luckily, the woman that picked me up, I told her what I was doing, and she went in there and we picked Lauren up and took Lauren and the baby back to their house, but that was an example of the hierarchy, because I wasn't who, who was who on the farm. I couldn't have manifested a vehicle, but if it was somebody else, if it was a midwife, [snaps fingers] just like that, they would have had, snap of a finger, people would have been "Here's my car!" "This, take this car!" "No, no take this car!" But, because who I was, in their, in their hierarchy, then, then I couldn't do that. So it wasn't so much you know, if you could see my point of view, it isn't so much an ego rejection that I'm talking about, I'm talking about this hierarchy that stifled out people who had

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

needs, that didn't, they couldn't fulfill their needs because of the hierarchy, because of what was going on.

Q: Could anybody become a midwife? Like, like, if you wanted to become a midwife, could you have?

JC: Yeah.

LC: Well --

JC: You had to have the spiritual requirements, you had to have, be a Mrs. Heavy to get into it.

Q: Right.

JC: To begin with. You had to be very upright, you had to say the right things.

LC: Say the right things.

JC: The right time. You had to know the right words and the right phrases and you had to carry an aura about you. And some of the midwives, you know, like Stephen said, they were part of, in one, in one sense, I did have, everybody did have a lot of respect, because they were dealing, they were very intense because they were dealing with life and death situations, and they had to be very mature and very on top it, throughout the, you know. So a lot of times the midwives did have the best things to say, you know. Many times they were right. I'll admit, you know. When they said something, they were usually right, because they had, their life, they had been around very intense decisions all the time. Very, they had been in crisis situations all the time, so simple decisions were easy for them.

LC: On the other hand, when Becky, when I was in labor with Rebecca --

JC: Yeah.

LC: Somebody had the idea that it would be a good idea to smoke pot.

Q: For you to?

LC: Did I? We had brownies, we had brownies --

JC: I'm pretty sure you did.

LC: I'm pretty I ingested something.

Q: Wow.

LC: Now, of course, naturally, the effect that had on my body was to keep me from, my cervix opening up.

Q: Yeah. Kind of shut your system down.

LC: I was in labor for forty hours.

Q: Oh, how horrible.

JC: Then they threw me, I got kicked out because I was a nervous father, and I wasn't making out with Lauren, to induce labor, you know, they wanted me to make out in front of the midwives, which I didn't really feel comfortable doing. You know, in this room of ours. And I didn't even know the midwives personally, I didn't know them very well. So I didn't feel very comfortable around them, getting, you know, making out and getting all over my wife while she's ready to have a baby, so . . .

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

LC: And also, nobody told me that, this was my first child, nobody told me that, I could, well, maybe they did, and maybe, it's all clouded up, because when you're in labor your mind is just not there, you know. And, uh, I don't remember anybody telling me that if I got up and moved around and did what I usually do, that that would probably be a better thing for me to do than, than to be sitting in bed, just waiting. 'Cause once, once I started being in labor I thought, well, this is it. It being my first child, I had a lot of misconceptions, a lot of preconceptions about what labor should be like. And there was all these, the, the midwifery book was being written, I think, was being written at the time. And people had been giving their accounts of their births, and how wonderful it was, and how pain-free it was.

JC: But actually they were taking a lot of risks, but their rates, their morality rates --

LC: They did OK.

JC: Were better than the local hospital, and the local hospital used to get irritated at it. But they had enough sense, if they knew if there was a placenta previa [?], if they knew there was a complication, they wouldn't get involved in it.

LC: They'd take the person to the hospital.

JC: They would take the person to the hospital. So they were very smart in that way, they were very intuitive and that's what saved them in a lot of situations. But, when I, the birthing that I was in was not very good, because I was nervous, which, looking back, I don't think there was anything wrong, you know.

LC: That's pretty normal.

JC: I was uptight. And I'm saying, "Yeah, I'm uptight, because it's three days. And we're going on here, what, Friday, Saturday, I was getting nervous, because --

LC: Right. I might not have been in full labor that --

JC: I felt like there was something wrong, of course I was nervous, so they told me to go out and take a walk, you know, I figure, I was very disgusted, and I think I cried because I was so upset, because I wanted to be a part of the birthing, I went outside and walked around and they said "When you cool down, you can come back." But there was really nothing wrong with me, but they felt that I was part of the problem because I was so nervous.

Q: And were you upset that he got kicked out.

LC: I kind of missed him.

Q: Yeah, I can understand that.

JC: And the brownies that, with the grass in them, they didn't induce any labor. They actually, we found out later, prolonged. They actually prolonged the labor. So they had some, the farm had some pretty, uh, pretty primitive concepts about grass that, that, to this day, when I was there I didn't really agree with.

LC: I don't know what they, I don't know what they're doing now.

JC: They still do it. It was part of the religion, they're not going to tell you that it was part of the religion. They're not going to admit to it. Because they'll get busted, it's illegal. Even if it's on the farm. But it was part of the Holy Eucharist, is [unintelligible].

LC: Makes you pretty stupid. After awhile it just put me to sleep. It's not --

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: But the problem with it is that, that people were trying to get to a spiritual place and they figured that the grass was going to get them there. But it didn't really get them there, because it created more psychosis and more -- there was a lot of drug abuse on the farm, I feel, in retrospect, when I see what was happening. I had a couple of psychotic episodes myself, smoking. You know, certain people have a predisposition to have psychosis when smoking, and they had no concept of anything like that. As a matter of fact, Stephen did not believe in mental illness, did not believe in medication, and he, I remember people being mentally ill on the farm, just wandering around without any parameters, without any discipline, or anything, without medication, because Stephen believed that it was all a, uh, a misconception, that there wasn't any such thing as mental illness, somebody decided that there was.

LC: Yeah, somebody decides what normal is.

JC: That the psychiatrist decided what normal was and abnormal was, it was this conception of, that mental illness was really just a preconception of society. So there were a lot of people that were mentally ill, so, and we had people running around, and at the time -- now I'm a mental health worker, and I really understand what was going on a lot more clearly. And I could see that these people, abs -- definitely, there's a lot of abuse of medication in psychiatry, which everyone's aware of, but these people, there were people that definitely needed meds. And they definitely needed uh, some type of one on one, some interaction which they weren't getting. You know, they weren't getting the, they weren't being taken care of. They were being neglected is basically what was happening to them. And they were getting further and further out into their psychosis. In their, in delusions and, whatever --

LC: I had some pretty good-sized depressions there.

JC: What was going on.

LC: I've had that problem, and it wasn't until lately that I've been able to know where it's coming from, and how to control it more. But I definitely had depressions while I was there.

Q: How did the two of you meet?

LC: Well, there were times, like I said, there were times when I'd get really depressed, and I'd want to leave. But there wasn't really any way for me to leave, other than just leave on my own. And I was not, I did not have the intestinal fortitude to go out to the world and stick out my thumb, which was probably the only way I would have been able to leave. -- [End of Tape 1, Side A].

Q: -- Would get tickets [?]

LC: You know, but, I would have had to have gotten to Nashville, sixty miles north, so I still, I, like Jack was saying, I wasn't really high on the priority list for getting a vehicle, for getting a ride to these places. I remember once, when I tried to leave, when my father suggested, and it was June, and no way.

JC: There were definitely the haves and the have-nots at the farm. There was no question about it.

LC: So there was, there was a time, there were always, I was always uprooting myself and putting, trying to find, the, where I would live where I would be comfortable. This lady's tent didn't work, that lady's tent didn't work, one time I lived in a little van by myself for a couple of months, which was actually very good. Being by myself.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: When you'd live in these tents, how many other people would be in there with you?

LC: Between twelve and fifteen.

Q: Wow. Pretty crowded situation.

LC: Yeah. Fairly crowded. And then at one point, at one point it became a, something for single ladies to do, to move in with a couple and help them, --

Q: Maid service.

LC: -- With their children. Yeah, with their children. So I moved in with a couple who had three children and were working on their fourth, she was having complications with her pregnancy, which she was being given moonshine for to keep her from having her baby early. Moonshine. And uh, through them, uh, I learned there were friends of theirs, there were a, another couple who lived off the farm and had a little farm of their own in Nunally [?] which was about fifty miles away. They had three children that they used to bring to the farm. Two of them -- actually, they had two children that they were bringing to this farm school, every Sunday they would come and bring their child, their children back. And the woman was also pregnant. These two couples were friends. I found out through them, they had, they came to visit, and they said, oh, we're looking for people to live with us, because it's just us two, plus, there was one other single guy. And now, we kind of would like to have a little satellite farm going on, they really liked what was going on on the farm, they were sending their kids to school there, they wanted to kind of be a part of it, but they still wanted to have their, their land. The land was owned by the man's parents. So, uh, after awhile, I approached them and I said "Look, I'd like to go out and live with you, too." 'Cause I thought, oh, here's something --whew! -- I can leave this farm. You know, this is, this something different, you know. So I went to live with Richard and Erlyn [?] Mackintire [?] in Nunnally [?] and uh, I was there for -- I think I got there, probably around the time that Jack came to the farm, it was in the fall of '94 [does she mean '74?] Over the winter, the guy who was the single guy, there, actually in the springtime, he decided he was going to leave. He was tired of everything, he was going to leave. So Charles left, so, Richard and Erlyn were trying to enlist another person to come out to the farm, hopefully a man. And Jack volunteered. So --

JC: They stood up in there in the service,--

LC: So he came, yeah, it was during Sunday service --

JC: We had Sunday services, and Richard said he needed somebody on the farm, needed another male, so I talked to him after services and told him I was interested.

LC: You know, it was an alternative. It was something, it was like connected with the farm, 'cause I wasn't really ready to get, to uh, break away from the whole idea of community yet. I still wanted it to work, you know. And I thought that maybe these people that aren't exactly like the farm, they like the farm, they like what the farm is doing, they want to pattern themselves on the farm, but they're not the farm. So, I went to live with them, and it was also, you know, we had our farm to run. We had vegetables and canning, and did a lot of work.

JC: Yeah, it was much healthier, too.

LC: We did a lot of stuff. Well, it was, we were still vegetarians, you know.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: But I think, what, what moved me, too, was I had been pretty healthy up, other than coming to the farm, and then suddenly I was a vegetarian, but we had gone through a very harsh winter, and I was eating, I mean you can understand, being a meat-eater suddenly I was eating vegetarian foods based on soybeans and potatoes, that's all we had. I remember I went, I used to go out into the fields with just a jar of soybeans, which is pretty disgusting and you put some sugar on it, and that was it. I mean, the food was, was below poverty. The diet that we were on was, was really bad. But there was --

LC: One time there was nothing but soy grits [?] and honey and corn syrup to eat. There was no honey. Animal product! No.

JC: I used to go foraging through the kitchens to get food. You know, I was st --, I was starving, I remember getting up early in the morning, I'd go foraging through the community kitchens to get something because I was really hungry.

Q: Did pregnant women get any extra?

LC: Yeah. Pregnant women definitely got extra and the kids got extra, too. If we got citrus or anything special, the kids and the pregnant women would get things first.

Q: Would people get illnesses related to their diet?

LC: Yes.

JC: Oh yeah, there was a lot of illness.

LC: All the time.

JC: Basically because it was --

LC: Well, your immune system was down, how else did I get dysentery?

JC: It was protein-deficient, because soy is not a complete protein, you know, it has to be balanced with grains.

LC: And it's very hard to digest.

JC: It's really hard on your system, on your digestive system. And, I think the hardest thing was, while we were there, everyone was learning, I don't think they really realized about universal precautions, and things. You were, we were sharing outhouses --

LC: Not to mention pot.

JC: And, yeah, smoking if someone had hepatitis, we're passing the grass --

LC: That did happen once, but that was a little bit farther down the road.

JC: And I did get epididymis, which brings another thing about a midwife, I have a grudge, and I'm going to say it here. To this day I still have a grudge. And I had epidy -- at the time, I didn't know this. I had epididymis I talked to the midwives, I went to the clinic, that was where you went, I told them what my problem was, I was on a work crew, I had been working off the farm, and my whole check went to the farm, whatever I made, and I had a problem, I could just about pick up a glass of water and it hurt, I told the midwife, and she said, "Well, why don't we wait a couple, a week and see if it gets better." I said, OK, fine. It still hurt. I told her, and I told her, and I told her. I mean, I was pre -- I was, you know how you can get obsessed with something, I was obsessed with it, because the pain was driving me nuts. And finally they said, OK, we'll take you to our, we'll take you to a doctor. Well this, no they never, no wait a minute, no, they never took me to a doctor there -- it was -- I had to go to New York, then I went from

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

there, to uh, we went to Nunnally, back, somehow we got back to the New York farm. I was on the New York farm and I was telling this midwife my problem. And I had picked it up on the Summertown Farm, I'd never gotten rid of it, it was almost a year, this was going on, a problem for a year. I used to have to take sitz baths in the morning, for like two hours, I did this for five or six months, because the consensus of the midwife was that I was in my head about this pain. This was something that I, I was creating this pain in my head, you know, that I was being psychosomatic, that was the diagnosis from the midwife. And then they sent me, and then finally they said, OK, we'll send you to a urologist, and I think, well, first of all, they sent me to a practitioner, and they prepped the practitioner to tell him what was going on with me. He was, they, he was prepped. So when I got in there, he looked at me and said "There's nothing swollen. I don't see any problem. Are you sure this isn't just, you know, something in your imagination?" I said "I'm positive this isn't in my imagination." I went to a urologist that they sent me to, and he must have been prepped to, which I was really amazed that they could get by, here's a specialist, a urologist and a practitioner, and he's doing all this testing, "Does anyone have cancer in your family?" He's asking me all these questions, and I went to him for two or three times, and then I just stopped going, because he wasn't doing anything for me, he wasn't prescribing or anything. So I went to my sister, who's a nurse, I went and visited my parents, and I told my sister what's going on, and she says "Well, I have a really good urologist" and I said "Well, I had bad luck with the last one, I'll, I'll try this one." I went in there, he checked me out, he checked my sperm and everything and he found out that I had an infection. I had, I had originally I had epididymis which led, let to prostatitis, and this went on for a year because of, well, all the midwives telling me that I was in my head. So this is a, this is a thing that I resented of the spiritual hierarchy that somebody said something, you know, she said that I was in my head, so no matter what I said, no matter who I talked to or what I said, I was in my head. Everybody believed there was just this universal agreement across the board that I was in my head. I couldn't defend myself and tell them that I actually did have pain, it's really sore, it hurts, so this went on for a year. I had this problem, I got the medication from somebody in New London, Connecticut. In one day I was, I could feel it getting better. Because --

LC: They thought he was getting out, trying to get out of working.

Q: Wow.

JC: Yeah, I well, I, and I wasn't trying to get out working, they thought that --

LC: They thought you were --

JC: I was just this psychosomatic person that was into his head about pain, is what --

LC: Yeah. And being lazy.

JC: And that's how, that is one example of how the midwives were totally, totally out of control, because their opinion meant so much to the point where, it didn't, if somebody had a serious problem, you were totally ignored and put in the back, because the, the egos, the big egos decided this was it, the midwives spoke and it's finished. And you're, there's no recourse, there's no appeal, there's no nothing. You're just going to have to get rid of the pain in you head, and you'll be all right. That was the, that was the solution, so this thing went on for a long time and eventually was healed, anyways.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Did that incident make you want to leave?

JC: Well, at that point, we did, we were --

LC: We were on the verge of leaving.

JC: We were on the verge of leaving at that --

LC: When, when, uh, when we met in Nunnally, when we finally, we decided that we were going to get married and have children and uh, after, when I was about my eighth month of pregnancy we went back to live on the big farm, because that's where the midwives were.

Q: Can I back up for just a second? When you got married, did you get married, um --

LC: On the farm.

JC: On the big farm.

Q: With, with Stephen officiating?

JC: Yeah.

Q: Was it just you, or were there other couples getting married, too?

LC: There were two or three other couples at the time.

JC: And Lauren's father came down and mother came down, and my parents were going to just, were going to take me out of the will. They were --

Q: Oh really? They were pretty upset?

JC: They were mad.

Q: [Laughs]

JC: 'Cause --

LC: They had met me. They liked me, it was just --

Q: No, the whole commune issue --

JC: Yeah.

LC: Yeah.

JC: They were pretty disenchanted and, you know, looking back at it, you know, I hated, I didn't like their decision, and I hated it at the time but I understood that they were right, because everytime I came back I would work and make a thousand dollars, or nine hundred dollars and I put it in, I didn't even spend a nickel of it, I went back and I was so guilty, if you had any possessions, that was part of being on the farm, you had to give all your possessions, I gave everything that, everything in my name, I gave to them. So they knew, if I suddenly got fifty thousand dollars, or twenty thousand dollars it was going to go the farm. So they were going to write me out of the will. So that's how, that, how much they agreed with it. Me being down on the farm.

LC: I was surprised at how warm Jack's parents were. They just accepted me, I just felt accepted right away. Like, um, they didn't wonder who is this little hippie chick that our son is, wants to marry, and she's not even Catholic.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: But soon afterward --

LC: [Laughs]

JC: But soon after we went to the New York farm, and then Lauren took a vacation, did I --

LC: Well, well, well, no. [Laughs]

JC: We're getting jumbled [?]

LC: First, first we had Becky. We had Becky, um, we lived on the farm for another eight months after that, I think.

Q: The Summerton farm.

LC: The Summerton farm, yeah, but we were there from September, well, actually August to April of the next year. Uh, we moved, during that time we moved about eight different times.

Q: Wow.

LC: Six or eight different times. With an infant! Because we just couldn't find a place that would -- one place we went to we were just there because somebody was off doing something somewhere and we took care of their kid. And we lived where they were. Another place we lived in, there was somebody that went somewhere, and we were able to use their room for two months. That place burned down. We weren't living there at the time it burned down -- good thing. No, that was the time I went to visit my mother without Jack --

Q: Oh, and he couldn't get the car to pick you up.

LC: And he couldn't get the car, but I, at that time, I was in Michigan with Becky, she was three months old. At that time, I wanted to leave.

Q: Yeah.

JC: Well, for [unintelligible], you know --

LC: But he was on the farm and he said --

JC: Being on construction, I was on, also learned construction, which I'm grateful to the farm for, that's where I learned carpentry. You know, there were unlimited amounts of trades that I learned -- carpentry and, and seeing the situation, if the fire marshal ever went to the farm, that place would have been shut down.

LC: Yeah, it was pretty amazing [?] structures there.

JC: There was so many code violations and really, really, safety --

LC: Dangerous sites [?]

JC: Dangerous, where a place I was living in, a child was burned to death because, it was just unsafe living conditions, having kerosene lamps --

LC: Actually, he was asphyxiated.

JC: Yeah, well, it, there, there was kerosene lanterns and there was tarp, they used to put this, it's a half-inch tar paper, they used to sheathe, they sheathed the exterior with. Rather than, I don't even think there was any plywood, they just used this tar paper, which was highly combustible. And I never saw, I watched the place go in ten minutes, it was a two-story building --

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

LC: Three.

JC: Three-story building collapsed. It just, it just fell [?]

Q: And that's the place you guys had been living?

LC: We lived there for two months --

JC: We were living --

LC: -- When I went to visit, and by the time I went back, he was living somewhere else.

JC: Then I decided to move, and I had to physically carry the mattresses on my back from point A to point B, which was about half a mile through the woods. I had to carry everything, because I didn't have the connections to get a vehicle and I was about to go begging for 'em, so I figured it would be easier for me to just carry the stuff on my back, so I carried this, must have been a ninety-pound mattress on my back through the woods. But I was in pretty good shape, you know, I was, in, doing carpentry, and I was used to lugging tools, you know, five -- hundred pound pieces of wood all the time, so I did all that stuff, I carried this stuff to these other people, and the reason we got into this other tent is because they both had bad backs. So --

LC: And they had five kids. So we helped with their kids.

JC: So we had to do the cooking, we had to do the laundry --

LC: And the hauling of --

JC: Hauling their laundry, they actually did the laundry, we did the wood-cutting. I used to --

LC: Yeah.

JC: -- cut the wood. I had to go out --

LC: I was very upset when I got --

JC: And I had to feed the --

LC: I just didn't want to be there at all.

JC: I had to feed the stove, we had two wood stoves in this semi-tent house, and I was up all hours, I used to wake up three or four times a night to stoke the stoves, because it would just burn.

LC: [Sneezes] Becky's crib was so close to the woodstove that I wouldn't put her in it at night.

JC: Yeah. And then I woke up at five o'clock, and they used to say to me, "How come you don't have any time to talk to us, you're not being, you can't, you don't even have time to get stoned," I said I don't have at all, I only have time to -- and they said, "You never help out with the cooking" and I said "Well that's because I'm out cutting firewood. I worked from, I had to get up at five every morning and I left about six. I got home at four. And then I would cut wood from four to dark, till it was dark out, to get wood. And then, and then I would eat and then I would stoke the fires all night, so --

LC: And we lasted there -- [?]

JC: I got about five hours of sleep every night, and I was doing all this stuff for the people we were living with, saying "Well, how come you're not helping out with this and that." I was so frustrated at that point, I couldn't even talk, you know?

LC: I think we were there for a couple months. And then we went to live somewhere else. And at that point, we found out about the New York farm and that was another satellite farm that was actually started by people who had lived on the Summerton farm. At that point, there were other farms that were being started. There was one in Michigan, I think there was, they were trying to start on in

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Colorado, people on the farm just decided they wanted to try to do the same experiment somewhere else, they wanted to go back, maybe where they had been, and, but they still wanted to be doing the farm thing. So, um, people on the farm in New York were looking for people to come up and live there, and we decided we would, and we got a ride from a woman, a couple of women who were visiting, and they were from Binghamton, New York. Now, Binghamton, New York is on the western edge of New York. It's near -- south of Buffalo, uh, no it's -- they weren't from Binghamton, where were they from?

JC: Who was this you're talking to?

LC: The people we had arrived with. We were, what's the name of that town?

JC: It was west of Davidson [?] --

LC: It was way west. It was like down there, Lake Erie.

JC: They were, they were, they were near, they were into Hare Krishna farm.

LC: No, no they weren't. No, they weren't. They were just visiting the farm.

JC: Uh --

LC: So we went back, but of course --

JC: Oh, they were from Pennsylvania. That's --

LC: No, they were from New York. It's a town --

JC: Oh, OK, it was a western, a very western --

LC: Western --

JC: Western part of New York is where they dropped us off.

LC: And, uh, that's as far as we were -- Jamestown, I think it's called Jamestown. That's as far as we were able to get.

Q: And where was the farm?

LC: The farm was near Oneonta, which is just beyond Binghamton.

JC: Which is more east.

Q: OK.

LC: It's kind of the New York --

Q: You were a long ways away.

JC: Yes.

LC: We were quite a bit, a ways away, we sort of like, were in this town, with a baby on a back, and some belongings, and no money.

Q: Oh my God. What time of year was this?

LC: It was April.

Q: OK, so at least the weather was OK.

LC: Yeah, we went to the, we went to the health food store --

JC: The only thing I had from the farm, I had a nail pouch and a hammer.

LC: We had a couple of bags.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: That's all I had from being a carpenter, and I worked, I mean --

LC: Yeah.

JC: -- I worked probably six or seven months off the farm, and I didn't get a penny -- you didn't get paid, because everything went to the community.

LC: So we went into this health food store and we got to talking to some of the people there, and there was a couple who seemed really nice, and they said that we could come spend the night with them. They were Hare Krishna's. They were weird. [Laughs] Totally off the wall. Their place was a dump.

JC: They were scary.

LC: They were totally scary. Their house was so dirty that they had stuff on the floor -- I was afraid that Becky would touch, put anything into her mouth. They had one room that was immaculate -- that's where the statues were.

Q: Uh huh.

LC: Anybody touched the statues, they would kill them.

JC: They had, not only that, during the time, I don't know if you've followed the Hare Krishna movement, but they were having a fight out with the government or the FBI or something, and they had these pamphlets, if you read in the Bhagavad Gita, there was so many, I think ten reasons that you could kill somebody.

LC: And one of them was by messing around with one of their statues.

JC: Yeah. So Lauren and I [Laughter] we're sleeping here, we were terrified. We thought they had guns all over.

LC: Right, I had --

JC: -- We thought they had guns all over, we were looking for guns, and we thought they had guns, and we didn't know if they were going to let us out of there or not. I didn't know what the heck to expect, I was real nice to them, I said "You think we can leave and take a bus now?" you know?

LC: Now, now here, --

JC: They were trying to convince us to stay.

LC: Now here's the question [?] that I can't remember -- did we have money to take a bus, or did they give us money to get a ticket.

JC: They must have given us money.

LC: They gave us money.

Q: Wow.

LC: To buy a ticket to Bing -- to Oneonta.

Q: Oh, you guys.

LC: We got to Oneonta, now they might have been weird, and they might have -- but they gave us -- right? [Laughter]. They got us to where we needed to go. Which was nice. Thank you, folks.

JC: Then we called up in Oneonta, and I don't think they knew we were coming, or something.

LC: I don't know, but it took them a really long time to come pick us up. There we were with an eight-month old baby, and we just waited.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: We were there for hours and hours --

LC: No, seven-months.

JC: -- and hours.

LC: And then, when we got to the New York farm, it was the same thing all over again, trying to find a place to live, and, you know, fitting in, and everything --

Q: How many people were at the New York farm?

LC: There were --

JC: There had to be --

LC: About a hundred.

JC: Was there that many?

LC: Maybe less? Seventy-five?

Q: That was still pretty big.

LC: Seventy-five, maybe.

Q: Yeah.

JC: If that many, I think that would be high.

LC: Maybe not.

JC: 'Cause there was one-two-three, three houses.

LC: There were three houses. Well, actually, a trailer --

JC: And a --

LC: A house, no --

JC: A semi-house, and, and --

LC: A trailer with a house attached to it.

JC: A house that had a bunch of trailers coming into it like this.

LC: Yeah, yeah. That was like a bus. Those were like --

JC: And then there was a house.

LC: A house.

JC: There was actually a farmhouse.

LC: And three families lived there. We eventually got to live there. That was like the pinnacle.

JC: And we eventually got into a wall [?] we got out of the bus into this warm room, and we were kicked out, because these other people had more, they had, remember? We had --

LC: Well, it was their room. We were only, again, we were only there temporarily because it was their room.

JC: But we had an infant, we had an infant child and they had --

LC: They had a baby, too.

JC: They had a baby, too, but they also had, they were in the spiritual hierarchy, you know.

LC: [Laughs]

JC: They were higher up than we were.

LC: [Laughs]

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: And they were cousins of somebody else who was higher up, so there was no way -- I, I argued with them, I was pissed, we had a family meeting, and I was screaming, I was yelling, I'm saying this isn't right, this is unjust.

LC: Right.

JC: You know. And I argued my case, but we didn't win, and we were out in the bus, with a, with a --

LC: But the bus was also somebody else's, and when they got back we had to move somewhere else.

Q: Oh my God.

JC: We [unintelligible]

LC: Eventually, eventually, that next winter, that next winter, my parents, once again, sent us tickets to come stay with them. And this time, Jack came with me. To visit. And at the end of our visit, which was two weeks, we were on the phone with the people on the farm --

JC: Saying we were going to come back.

LC: And I said "We are not coming back." And I hung up. And Jack's going "What?!" [Laughter]

JC: She didn't tell me a thing about it.

LC: No, it was like it was all building up in my head and I was almost like, there was all these, like noises in my head, this whooshing sound, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, this is it --

JC: We were really going --

LC: This is it, I'm not going, because I was afraid I wasn't going to get picked up at the airport.

JC: We were nomads on --

LC: He didn't care one bit about us! Nobody cared. They're, they're --

JC: So it wasn't like a commune that, you know, how people think of these places where people are forced to --

LC: All-inclusive.

JC: You definitely weren't -- there was nobody forcing us, [unintelligible]

LC: I wasn't from San Francisco. [?]

JC: You had to stay here, or anything like that. If anybody thinks that that's what type of commune --

LC: It wasn't like that, but on the other hand --

JC: -- community it is.

LC: -- I had no way of, besides, if I had left, I never would have met Jack.

Q: Right.

JC: Yeah.

LC: [Laughs].

Q: Well, and also, it's hard to leave a place when you have absolutely no money, like you were saying.

LC: Not only that, but you also have it in your head that you're going to make this work, no matter what. And I had that, --

Q: Emotional attachment, or --

LC: -- for quite a long while.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: Well, see, I did too. I still wanted to make it work, and everybody down there did, really.

LC: Yeah, everybody wanted to make it work, and it's not like I never made friends, it's not like I never had fun.

JC: Yeah, we had a lot of good times and a lot of experiences, and . . .

Q: What were some of the good things, I mean, . . .

LC: [Laughs] Yeah, [unintelligible]

JC: Like, uh --

LC: [Laughs] I had some good peyote trips.

JC: I remember going on --

LC: I had some really good friends. I had, one, one woman, Susan Goldberg, we just, were really good friends, and I --

Q: Did you keep touch with any of them?

LC: Not really. I, I tried to after a while. And then there was Peggy and Joe, they were a lot of fun.

JC: And I had one really good friend, I had one guy that, uh, his name was Randall, Randall Pride, I think was his last name, that, I could really, he was the only person I remember, I was on a, the Tennessee farm, that I was able to confide with, who really understood, you know, really became good friends and we really understood each other, and understood what -- he was there a lot longer than I was, so he really helped me out. And I remember one other time in the New York farm, we all got into a truck, or, there's two or three trucks, and we went out to this pond and we all went skinny-dipping, the whole farm.

LC: Yeah, that was fun.

JC: Because it was OK, you know, that's one thing I thought was pretty neat about the farm, about clothing. It was pretty revolutionary, as far as how you behaved --

LC: Yeah, guys liked that part.

JC: Yeah. But there wasn't any, it wasn't a sexual thing, it was more --

LC: Oh no. [Laughs].

JC: It was, there was sex, obviously, when you see somebody naked --

LC: Yeah.

JC: -- but it was more, uh, --

LC: It was fun.

JC: -- just a revolutionary thing of throwing off your garb --

LC: Yeah, yeah.

JC: -- throwing off your guise, just, throwing off your clothes and going skinny-dipping with the whole community.

LC: There, there was a swimming hole in Tennessee that we used to all, just go up and swim at. And there were lots of times I took walks in the woods with people and we would, I should show you some of the pictures I took.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Oh, I'd love to see them.

JC: As a matter of fact, the first time I went in, it was a community shower, and I had never experienced anything like this, you know, I walk in and I was only there like two or three weeks and everybody's stark naked, everybody --

LC: Just sitting around.

JC: Just sitting, waiting to get into turn -- you know, into line, and it was a very strange experience to me, 'cause I had never been stark naked with anybody, except a girlfriend before, and all of a sudden, there was guys, women, you know, everybody's stark naked, and I was trying to figure out how to behave, and you know, you didn't know what to do, because it was a pretty shocking thing.

LC: [Laughs]

JC: But I got used to it, and everybody did it.

LC: Mmm hmm. We had one time when we had a Fourth of July ceremony, not ceremony, celebration, and we had fireworks, that was a lot of fun. The farm band played.

JC: Yeah, and I liked the services. We, I think everybody liked sitting in the --

LC: I didn't like sitting for an hour --

JC: I did.

LC: [Laughs].

JC: I liked, we'd sit in this field --

LC: I liked listening to Stephen.

JC: -- and we would all omm together. Everyone, we'd meditate, we used to do zen, zazen and then we'd meditate and one person would start omming, and then we'd stop, and then Stephen would speak, and it was like being a class, you know, taking this advanced course in religion.

LC: Spirituality.

Q: Yeah.

JC: And Stephen had this pretty intense, he was very, uh, very educated, and very intelligent and very perceptive --

LC: He had taken a lot of acid.

Q: [Laughs]

JC: Yeah. And he had a lot of, he had studied, what was it? Semantics in college and religion and he was pretty bright --

LC: Not religion.

JC: To this day, I think the guy's a genius. If you listen to him talk, he's very, he's very brilliant and perceptive, and he used to really take everything and put it into a nutshell, all this stuff that was going on in the farm. And he would see something happen and he would just see right through it, like glass. He was --

LC: He had a real clear --

JC: Clairvoyant, he was very clear. He was almost like a clairvoyant, he could read your mind, he could see through you.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Was he charismatic?

LC: Very.

JC: He was. He was really charismatic. That's probably, got to run, he was running the farm. And everybody, I mean, there's people that, like I was saying, they used to go around the farm, "Stephen says, Stephen says." You know? Like Simon says, and they were so, and after a while, after people started telling you that, you started believing it, at first I said you got to be kidding.

Q: Were you there when Stephen got busted and had to go to jail? No, that was after you left.

LC: No, that was just, just before I got there --

Q: Oh, before you got there, oh, OK --

LC: He was in jail the year I got there, I think.

Q: And was Ida Mae kind of in charge at that point?

LC: Sort of, yeah.

Q: And what was that like? What was Ida Mae like?

LC: She was a very, very intelligent woman. She is a very intelligent woman. Very calm. Um, I really don't know --

JC: Good midwife, she was a really good midwife.

LC: Yeah, she had a very calming effect on a lot of people.

JC: Most of the midwives really, really had to be top-notch to be --

LC: They were.

JC: -- Not just anybody would be a midwife, that's why their opinion meant so much to so many people, but, they were wrong too, but --

LC: Well, yeah, it depends on who it was --

JC: In my situation, they were wrong.

LC: I don't know [unintelligible]

JC: And when they were wrong, they were really wrong.

LC: [Laughs]

JC: I mean, to the point where you were neglected. Where you have prostatitis or epi-, epididymis for a year and --

Q: Well, were, were they out of their league at that point, I mean, if they're midwives --

JC: They were, they were. They were out of their league. They were not capable of --

LC: They were not -- I think some of them did get nursing degrees.

JC: Yeah. They were not capable of making any type of medical diagnosis like that.

Q: Right.

LC: They did have a doctor.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: They were far beyond, far beyond their reaches when they were making opinions about it, is what it was. But they did learn a lot of stuff just from being midwives. I mean, they knew a lot of stuff, they learned from their local doctor, and taught them a lot of things, but not to the point where they were even close to being a nurse, I mean, they really didn't, didn't have those capabilities --

LC: Some of them did.

JC: What they were given -- they were given those capabilities whether they had it or not. You know, people thought, 'cause when you had a problem, you would go to them, and they would talk to you, and they would decide -- they would filter you out and decide whether they're going to send you to the doctor or not. You know, just the local doctor.

Q: Yeah. Did you guys know about the, I forget what they call them exactly, like a three-marriage, or a four-marriage.

LC: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: Can you describe what those were and who were in them, and --

LC: OK, Stephen had the first one, I guess, and I guess what exactly, kind of what happened is that he was married to Margaret Nofsinger [?] and when they all came to the farm, he was really close friends with Michael and Ida Mae, and then they came to the farm.

Q: So Michael, uh, Ida Mae was married to someone else?

LC: Michael -- Ida Mae was married to Michael. I didn't really know Michael. Before I came to the farm, Michael had left.

JC: He left the farm --

LC: He left the farm area.

JC: So there was three.

LC: So there was three and then there was another couple that they got close with. So actually, what it ended up to be was --

JC: Was it a five marriage?

LC: -- three women and two men.

Q: And were they the only ones that were allowed to do that? Did everyone else have to be in a monogamous marriage, whatever you call it?

LC: Well, it had to be -- no, there were a few others --

JC: There was, there was Schweitzer, Schweitzer[?] ?

LC: Schweitzer and --

JC: There was a couple of other four marriages --

LC: And then Mary, oh, one of the midwives was in a four marriage.

JC: But we, we always wondered how they knew who's kid it was.

Q: Yeah.

LC: Right.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Probably didn't, right?

JC: To this day, they probably don't.

LC: In fact there were, several of the midwives were in four marriages. Louise [?] Haggler [?] we, hmm, -

JC: Yeah, she was --

Q: She's a cookbook author --

LC: It's upstairs. Um . . .

JC: I think it a different Louise.

Q: Oh, OK. I have a cookbook by Louise Haggler [?]. I don't know if that's the same one --

LC: No, I don't think --

Q: Oh, it's a different Louise, OK.

LC: But there was, the spiritual midwifery book?

JC: She used to follow Stephen around a lot.

Q: I haven't seen it, but I've heard of it, certainly.

LC: Well, I'll have to show you that --

Q: OK.

LC: 'Cause there's people there.

Q: Uh huh.

LC: Who were in the four marriages. [Unintelligible]

Q: Did it feel like a double standard, at all? That they could do it and other couldn't?

LC: I really didn't care. I had a hard enough time --

JC: No, because everyone knew that if you wanted to get in a four marriage you could.

LC: You could.

Q: Oh, I see.

JC: I think that everybody --

LC: It was just a matter of relationships, I think, --

Q: But, did you believe in free love, I mean, I --

LC: If you were single, the way, the way Stephen said it, if you were single, [pause] then if you were single and you decided to fool around, you were engaged.

JC: Yeah, he said, [unintelligible], he said that you got --

LC: That was it, you were engaged.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: He said, Stephen said, well, you ought to get married, I remember Stephen, it was funny, we went and talked to him, because you had to get Stephen's permission. So Stephen goes like this, he goes like this, "You're engaged, right?" He [Laughs].

LC: Yeah. Once, once you started fooling around, and then once you were pregnant you were married. That's how it went. I had several boyfriends on the farm.

JC: So then, so one, the other thing was, once you were engaged, you had to ask for --

LC: Permission --

JC: Permission from Stephen. Then you had to ask for the father, to have the daughter's hand. So I said -

LC: [Laughs]

JC: -- to this father, I said to Lauren's father, "Can I have your daughter's hand?" And she, he goes, "What's the matter, won't she give it to you?"

Q: [Laughs] Why did they do that?

JC: Because it was this formality --

LC: Well, 'cause, Stephen was, like the spiritual father of all the women --

JC: Yeah.

LC: He wanted to make sure nobody was being taken advantage of. Basically it was a protection.

Q: OK.

JC: I remember Stephen even saying at services, I would, he said, it's not that I'm in a four marriage, but I would like to be in a hundred marriage, but I can't do it.

LC: Oh, I'm sure he would have.

JC: He had so many women following him around.

Q: I'll bet, I'll bet.

JC: And what was happening with those women that weren't in a marriage, they never talked about, but I'm sure there was stuff going on. He had more than, more than two women, I know that. But it was, it was a double standard. Because, yeah, Stephen said very stringent, he was protecting all the people, it was very stringent morality about sex and having sex before marriage, you know, that Calvinistic approach, and you couldn't be fooling around, those were the tenets on the farm, but I believe, and I didn't talk to a lot of people, I'm sure there were a lot of people fooling around that didn't talk about it, either, you know, that were having relationships, more than one relationship, possibly. But we never knew about it, but the ideal was not, was very stringent. You know, it was the very opposite of free love. You know the stereotypes that you heard, that you heard people talking about all the time, you know. At least that's what they were saying -- what was happening behind the scenes, we don't know. And, I guess another thing was that there was no drug, there's, you weren't supposed to make any sale of drugs, or do anything like that, because drugs were for free. But my brother came down one time, and I was so into the farm, he told me "Jack, there's a guy in the farm who's selling drugs to visitors." And I said "There's no way that can happen," because Stephen talks in services and we don't do that stuff. I just refused to believe him. It took me about two years after I left the farm that I believed my brother. And my brother kept on telling me, he was laughing at me, because I wouldn't believe him. He says,

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

"Jack, you're crazy, but I saw it happen." And he was in the tent and saw the guy, this farm guy selling drugs. But it was all undercover, you know, nobody, nobody knew about it. Because we weren't supposed -- I said to my brother first of all, we take the vows of poverty, so we can't have any money, we couldn't take any money from anyone for anything, you know. So there's stuff like that going on, and, and that's probably the tip of the iceberg of uh, as far as different, the sexuality of the farm, what was really going on and what, you know what I mean, it's just like society, you can be in the Catholic church or whatever, and what they tell you, the doctrines and what actually happens is two different things.

Q: Yeah.

JC: You don't always hear about everything.

Q: So what did it feel like when you decided to leave?

LC: Relief.

Q: Relief?

JC: It was a relief.

LC: Oh, I was so totally relieved, that finally I had made a decision and that no matter what was going to happen, from that point on I knew that I was free.

JC: But for me it was harder --

LC: To think anything I wanted.

JC: It was really difficult, for me. Because, I, I remember having, I almost, I think I was having like a nervous breakdown, because I was having these anxiety attacks during the night. I had them for about a month.

LC: After all, I was the one who had the baby and taking care of the baby and everything, and they, he didn't have --

JC: I had to go out to work, and I was sweating, I remember, and Detroit was, more predominantly black, I remember riding on a bus, and these bus drivers are looking at me, and I used to talk to the people on the bus, and they were talking about racism, and I said "What are you talking about?" Because I was on the farm, and it was this ideal community and there wasn't any such thing as racism.

LC: But there weren't too many black people, either. Maybe one, two.

JC: But that doesn't necessarily mean that it was racist.

LC: We would have accepted them if they came.

JC: They would have been accepted, it was just that --

LC: They just were --

JC: -- when I was talking to these bus drivers, and they're looking at me, like "Where is this guy from, another planet, that you don't believe in racism?"

LC: Right.

Q: Did you look funny to them, too? I mean, did you have your hair long, and?

JC: Yeah. I, I walked strange, too, because I had a beard down to here and I --

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: 'Cause they, they required you to grow your hair out at the farm, right?

LC: No, it wasn't required.

Q: It wasn't? Oh.

JC: It was.

LC: It was required?

JC: If you didn't grow your hair, or you didn't grow your beard, somebody would have said something to you.

Q: Yeah.

LC: Well, OK, I see that.

JC: And that, I mean, the greatest, I, I --

LC: Nobody [?] was going to the barber.

JC: It was so bad that we were vegetarians, so bad, that I can remember going to the farm and I used to, you know, I was brought up as a meat-eater, and I could always remember, I could smell, when I got home, now a lot of vegetarians say they're grossed, grossed out by the smell of meat, but it didn't, even when I was a vegetarian, when I smelled meat, it used to drive me nuts, because it reminded me of all the food -- like if I smelled chicken or hamburgers, so I remember when I first got off the farm, we were out about a week, and I had this, I used to have wicked, wicked cravings for food, you know, like hamburgers. I had this wicked craving for hamburgers and I went into McDonald's, and I was looking over my shoulder, I was looking left and right to make sure nobody from the farm was going to see me, and I had --

Q: [Laughs]

JC: I had to sneak into that place and get my hamburger, and look around, and even after I ate the hamburger, I felt guilty, I felt really bad, somebody's going to find out, or somebody saw me, or something, you know?

Q: So I take it you're no longer a vegetarian?

LC: Not really, no.

JC: Well, we're kind of --

LC: Well, we're not real big meat eaters --

Q: Yeah.

LC: We don't eat red meat.

JC: We still don't, we're still pretty, we try to eat on the food chain really low, with grains and everything --

LC: Mostly it's beans and rice.

JC: But right now, we're, I don't know if you're familiar with Ayurvedic, I'm more Ayurvedic, I eat, and according to Ayurvedic tradition, you can eat how you feel. If you feel, ideally, we should all be vegetarians is what the Ayurvedic tradition says, but if you feel that you have a need, if you're working

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

very physical work and you have a need, and you feel you have a craving for meat, then have meat. Don't, don't neglect, don't restrain yourself from doing that. So that's how I go on how my body feels, not my conditioning. Sometimes I go two or three days without meat, and then --

LC: The boys eat, I mean --

JC: They do.

LC: I mean, I feel everybody, I don't necessarily eat what everybody else eats. Boys need protein.

JC: But when I'm doing construction, I might have five days in a row, I might have meat, but I don't have it every meal, I only have it one meal, usually, I'll only eat meat.

LC: Yeah. And sometimes I go a couple days without meat, so . . .

JC: She doesn't eat fat.

LC: I, I, yeah, I'm not supposed to eat fat anymore, either, so I --

JC: She had her gall bladder taken out, so . . .

Q: Oh, man.

LC: That kind of restricts me.

Q: Yeah, sure. [Laughs]

JC: But we learn, we learn the sense [?] and there was one person who was running, at the time was running the diet on the farm, who was head of the, who didn't, looking back on it, didn't really understand, was in charge of diet control, or what people were eating. Didn't really understand what she was doing. And when I look back on it critically, you know, there wasn't a balance of beans and grains.

Q: Yeah.

JC: And all that. There wasn't that critical balance of all the stuff you need to be [?] a real healthy vegetarian.

LC: Because we didn't have enough money to have all the foods we needed.

JC: But I think it was Margaret, I think she was the head of, and she was saying that it was OK to do that, and it was OK to have white sugar, I remember the macrobiotics at the time, white sugar was like this cancerous stuff . . .

LC: Exactly.

JC: It was like, these two opposing camps, and the farm used to have tons of sugar to go, because, when you have a lot of protein, even if you have meat, a lot of times you have a wicked craving, it's because --

LC: When you don't have a lot of protein.

JC: Well, even if you do, if you ever notice, if you have meat you have a wicked craving for sweets, because they're on two different extremes.

LC: Oh, I see.

JC: You know, sugar is expansive and the meat is yang, and then you have the cravings back and forth.

LC: [Laughs]

JC: But we used to have cravings, we used to have sugar. I remember one guy, he used to sneak out -- he had this bag, and he had a jar of honey about this big, and I'd see him guzzling his honey.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: [Laughs]

LC: Not honey, 'cause honey was an animal product. Must have been corn syrup.

JC: No, it was honey. I saw it.

LC: It was honey?

Q: A secret stash, maybe.

JC: He had, he had a, it would be like someone out here doing liquor, you know, having a drink of liquor, he was doing his honey.

Q: [Laughing] That's funny. Well somebody told me, I don't remember who it was, said they really like to do the laundry in the early days because they were given spare change and they'd go to town --

LC: Yeah, we'd go to the laundromat --

Q: And they'd slip out and buy something, you know, like some candy or something like that. [Laughs]

JC: Oh yeah. Candy would be like [unintelligible]

LC: People would go out and buy hamburgers.

Q: Yeah.

LC: People would go off the farm and buy hamburgers. I remember I was on some crew and somebody said that they would --

JC: And then they got reported and it was like a major crime -- there was no, no crime on the farm.

LC: [Unintelligible] hamburgers.

JC: It was very --

LC: No, you could walk through --

JC: The biggest crime was somebody going out and buying a hamburger.

Q: So if you did that, was there some sort of discipline?

LC: No, not really, except that you were -- we would have these talking sessions.

JC: You would be castigated in front of 500 people.

LC: Right.

Q: Like at the Sunday service or something?

JC: Yeah, right in front of Sunday service.

LC: It was more of a humiliation --

Q: Oh, God, how horrible!

JC: So you got humiliated, which was worse than being incarcerated. Everybody in the community would know that Joe went out and had a hamburger or had, this one guy had an egg. Remember Wilmer went out --

LC: Oh yeah.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

JC: -- these truck drivers went out and had some eggs and they were caught [?] they were put before, they had to stand up in front of the group and everybody in the place knew that they'd had eggs, and they were horrible. I mean, that was the worst crime that ever hit the farm, I think, when --

Q: Oh, that's so sad. Well, what was the, why did they have the prohibition against eggs and animal products?

JC: Because it wasn't spiritual to eat, to kill, it wasn't spiritual to kill or to eat any food from animals. You know, it was very unspiritual. But the other argument was that we ate plants, and we were killing the, and plants were lives, so . . .

LC: [Laughs]

JC: It got, that philosophy had its holes in it, too.

LC: It's like the extreme that some Hindus, the Jainists, make --

Q: Right. They wear those little mouth parts [?]

LC: So they won't get like microbes in them and kill them --

JC: Yeah, but actually, you're killing to be a vegetarian, but, it was healthier if it was done right, too. You weren't ingesting all those hormones -- and the other thing which was true, even now, today, and I'm sure in the future it's going to be true -- it's very inefficient to eat meat, to because of the ratio of five-to-one, and twenty years from now, we'll probably all be vegetarians again, there won't be any meat for anybody to have.

Q: Yeah, might not have a choice.

JC: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

JC: But their, their main focus was the spirit, it was not spiritually conducive to eat meat. That was, that was the main reason you don't. And the inefficiency kind of went along with the argument, you know.

Q: Did you bring anything away from your farm experience that, that you would say is still part of your life now?

JC: Yeah, I think we learned, we learned a lot. We learned how to get along with people, how to be in situations, how to be, I'm very capable of going into a kitchen, like where I'm at work, but I don't think any, I could be in a kitchen with three or four people and it doesn't faze me, bother me at all. You know, that, and I've learned how to be with people in close quarters and I've learned how to confront, you learn how to confront people, how to be more honest, um, I think there were a lot of positive things that we did learn.

Q: And then you also said some practical skills, right, like carpentry?

JC: Yeah, and I learned carpentry, which I still do now -- I'm a subcontractor and I do mental health work, but I, I did, I had been full-time since I left uh, about fifteen years, I was doing carpentry full-time, which I learned basically on the farm. I learned a lot more off the farm, but my basic foundation was on

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

the farm. You know, what I, what I did learn. And had I not had that experience, I might not have been able to get into the trade. Because it's hard, you have to know, you have to either go to trade school or have some knowledge of carpentry when you get into it, so, that was really an asset to me to have you know, to have gone through that. And we were building houses and doing all kinds of stuff on the farm. You know, from not knowing anything, suddenly there was a need for carpenters, we had to build a house, we had to put a roof on somebody's house. Uh, you know, I really liked that part about it. You know, there was a lot of good, positive things that happened on the farm, and basically, everyone was trying, but, like Lauren said, in reality, as hard as we tried, the farm was a microcosm of the society that we came from. We had all the, you know, we had all the status symbols, and the money here, and then we went to the farm, and suddenly --

LC: It just got transferred to something else.

JC: It got transferred to a spiritual hierarchy. All, all the people, you know, the people who were working for wages and being big income earners on the farm, the big the big thing, the status thing there was to be on the top of the spiritual hierarchy, you know, that, that was, that was the top of it -- it wasn't how much money you made, it was how good of a midwife you were, or, you know -- [End of Tape 1, Side B]

JC: [Beginning of Tape 2, Side A, Side 3] -- uh, kind of things.

Q: Do you think --

JC: Values.

Q: Do you think it's inevitable in, that any sort of try at a new society, that that's going to happen?

JC: I think so. I think, I think so unless you have some really super, unless you have superb people that have a very strong basis before you go into it, but even then, it's almost like you have to have perfect people to run a utopian society, and really nobody is perfect. We all, we all carried our baggage into the farm, and, and it was merely transferred to somewhere else, a lot of times. You know, into, into some, into another area on the farm. So it, it would be really hard. I mean, there's some people like, uh, like Stephen, you have to have people like Stephen to be able to, he was, he was, he was a visionary who was able to envision this and to actually, to be able to carry it out. You have to have somebody, a strong, strong personality like him to say "This is, everybody, this is black and this is white." But, I, I would think, inevitably, what a community is is what the people are, were before they went into the community, and all the things they learned in their, in their environment. I don't see how they can't be carried over, you know, what, all your values [?] and suddenly you have a new value system, but you're really holding on to your values that you learned, in the new community. But there, there was definitely a different, one thing I can say, that there was definitely a more, more of a spiritual focus on the farm than there was, much more so than out here.

Q: Did you like that?

JC: Yeah, I, I liked that aspect of it. That, that there was an effort to have more of a spiritual focus, that there was more concern with that, but like I was saying, even that got twisted into, you can have a spiritual focus, but it some, sometimes be a cloak for your own ego, and a, a lot of times I felt like, for a

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

lot of people, it'd become their, their cloak for their own ego, you know, to pursue their own, what is, their own ambitions.

LC: I think spirituality is something that has to come from way within you. And it's a very, very personal and individual thing. And as soon as you start trying to take something from the outside and make it match what you're feeling on the inside, you run into trouble in the very, very beginning. Because that's not going to happen. You mostly, what I have found, is that you have to take what's inside and just put it out. If you, if you have, if you're coming from a pure place and you come, and you go out into the world and do whatever it is that you're going to be doing in the world, then the world around you is effected, and that, you could be in the most unusual -- any, any kind of situation you can be it, you can be in the world's worst place in the world where there is horror around you, or you can be in Michael Jackson's yard --

JC: [Laughs].

LC: And you can, if you are doing, if you are being who you are from the inside, then you're going, then it's going to work for you. That, that's, I spent a lot of time trying to find out something from the outside that was going to work for me. And I eventually found out that I had to work on it from the inside.

Q: Are you glad you lived at the farm.

JC: I am. I'm, I don't, I learned, like I said, I learned a lot, and basically, most of the experiences were positive. I mean, there were, the couple of experiences that I mentioned, there was some negativity, there's unquestionably some negativity that happened, but, I haven't been anywhere and I haven't seen any utopian societies and any --

LC: No. [Laughs].

JC: Any, any groups that don't have their imperfections. And uh, I think everybody realizes that, and to think otherwise would be hypocritical.

LC: I don't think enough people realize it.

JC: Because it had its negativities doesn't negate the experience --

LC: Right.

JC: -- or, it doesn't negate the reality that the farm is still happening.

LC: There's been times when I've thought --

JC: But the farm went through some pretty tough times, and it almost folded, a couple of times, from what I've heard. You know, they, just about everybody was ready to pack up and leave at one point, so --

LC: There was a big exodus out of there in 1980 or something.

JC: But it withstood a lot of, a lot of stuff happening. I mean, it's just like, you look at the Catholic church, the stuff that's happened to them through the centuries -- the Crusades and the selling indulgences, and they're still alive, you know, they're still thriving. You know, while the negative stuff that's happening, that has happened, and somehow they've survived through it all, and they're still churches --

LC: Yeah, there's still churches [inaudible].

Q: Are you glad that you did it?

LC: There's nothing to get away from the fact that I did.

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: Yeah.

LC: So it's kind of pointless to wish that I didn't.

Q: Yeah.

LC: But there's been times, there's been times when I've thought to myself "What if I stayed at the University of Michigan and got my degree in art?"

Q: Yeah, yeah.

LC: What if I had gone into medical illustration [?] then?

Q: Is that what you do?

LC: I'm, I'm an illustrator. Like for, for books, well I'm trying. I, I, I illustrated a couple field guides. And it's kind of difficult because I'm trying to start my own business.

Q: Medical illustration business?

LC: Well, illustration. I've done, I've done scientific illustration. It wouldn't be classified as medical illustration, but there is a medical illustration degree that I could have gotten at the University of Michigan.

Q: Oh, yeah.

LC: But who, it's not there -- it's not one of the possibilities that I took at, I took. I chose to do this. And if I can say anything that was the greatest thing that ever came out of the farm, for me, was meeting Jack. And having my kids. And, and the most important thing that ever happened to me from the farm. If I hadn't stayed on the farm as long as I did, I wouldn't have met Jack. So --

Q: Did you have you next [?] kids in a hospital?

LC: I had Joseph, I had Joseph at home with a midwife in Detroit. We were in the process of being in contact with a midwife for our third child when we found out that he was a placenta previa [?]. We, I carried him for seven months. I had, I had him at thirty-three weeks, he was due -- almost two months early.

Q: Mmm. Yeah. So that was hospital.

JC: Yeah.

LC: That was definitely a hospital, definitely out [?], it was definitely a, you know, a caesarian, after having two children with midwives, I had a caesarian.

Q: Wow.

JC: I don't know if you noticed it, but this is a very rare phenomenon -- there's three left-handers here.

Q: Really, I had --

LC: [Unintelligible]

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

Q: I noticed you were, but I didn't notice --

JC: I'm left-handed, too.

Q: Oh, that is really funny. [Laughs]

LC: That's really awesome!

JC: That doesn't happen too often, that you get three left-handers.

LC: Oh, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Q: Are you guys surprised that the farm is still going?

JC: No, I'm not. I figured it'd be going for a long time.

LC: There are some people there that were definitely likers [?]

Q: Yeah.

JC: We knew, yeah --

LC: It was their thing. It was their thing --

JC: Their dharma.

LC: And they're still there. Yeah, it's their dharma.

JC: Their dharma to be, that they were going to be there, we knew that, we could see through thick-and-thin that there're some people there -- although we're pretty surprised at the changes, like Stephen was kind of cast into oblivion.

LC: But I don't know how much oblivion he was cast into, because according to some of the newsletters we've gotten, people still really value his opinion. And his, his, word.

Q: Now, they have something called the Second Foundation, which is like a, a, a mini-commune within the farm, where about twenty people or so share everything in common, you know, have a common purse, or whatever you want to call it, and Stephen's part of that, and I get the impression that within the Second Foundation that he's --

JC: He's still at the top.

Q: -- He's still pretty important.

LC: Oh, I didn't even realize that! I didn't know about that.

JC: And, and, I guess it's broken down into, I was trying to read and understand the financial system, it sounds like chaos, you know, having chits and --

LC: You want some more [?] of this?

Q: I'd love to! Thank you.

JC: But that's, uh, evolution is just natural, I mean, I, I could see that there was a lot of problems with the community and the individual, that eventually that would have to, that would have to, something would have to happen. You know, a lot of things were done to the detriment of the individual on the farm, because of the community. You know, there was, there was a lot of, like, one example, I'm sure a

Interview with Lauren Churchill and Jack Churchill

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 9, 1995

LC = Lauren Churchill, JC = Jack Churchill

lot of people won't [?] agree with me, but, this, the Plenty, the Plenty thing that they started, the farm could not even take care of their own, but were so concerned with this spiritual utopia that they were going to create, that they started this Plenty thing. Which is good, you know, I'm not putting it down, but, it's really good, but the fact is that the farm could not take care of its own people. I'm eating soybeans and uh, potatoes, and they're going to go out and spread the, whatever's left over to people that need it in South America, which is crazy to me, you know, that doesn't make any sense. First take care of, build a strong material, financial base, and then take the leftovers and spread them out, but don't start with this spiritual concept, and go all over the world and neglect your people, your foundation, you know? And I think that --

LC: I thought that was pretty cool, that they were going down to Guatemala to help people build [?] [unintelligible].

JC: Yeah, some of the stuff was, but there was so much poverty on the farm that they should have been taking care of, there's a lot taken care of the farm that has to be done right [unintelligible]. --