

Interview with Elena (Ellen) Broslovsky

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

January 9, 1996

Q: This is Tuesday, January 9th, and this is an interview with Ellen Broslovsky. That's B-R-O-S-L-O-V-S-KY. So Ellen could you describe the events that led up to your joining Synanon, and you mentioned that you had tried out some other communal groups.

A: I left home when I was 17. I tried college briefly, and ended up in San Francisco. And I went and stayed at Morning Star Ranch for awhile. And there was another commune in Sebastopol that I'd looked at, and then tried various living situations -- people that I knew tried living together, and um. . . there were always things that just didn't work out. And also at one point I was renting rooms, I was a landlady, basically, but I tried to make it like a communal thing where everybody shared, and it didn't work out. And it was a thing that I was longing for, that sense of family and that sense of being able to be open with people. And um. . . let's see—

Q: Well tell me what you thought of Morning Star Ranch, I'm very curious.

A: It was, initially, it was like a wonderful, beautiful space, and -- I can't remember the name of the guy that had the property, Mike? Anyway, I can't even remember where it was like, thinking back, I can't remember where it was, somewhere north. And I remember it being very sunny, I remember people just walking around without clothes, and I remember the guy trying to get people to work. And he could not get--, there was some, they needed to build the toilet, they needed to dig holes. And he could not get people to do it, well, man, you know, there were people smoking pot, people walking around without clothes. And people were friendly and lovely and nice, but it was totally open, and totally an anarchy. I remember this guy, and it was his property everybody was on, and I do remember him doing this selling job on why we needed to build the toilet lines, and . . . no. It didn't happen. I think maybe –

Q: Was it Lou Gotley? Was that the name?

A: It could've been. I remember he had, um, dark hair, with streaks of gray, and I think he had a ponytail and a denim shirt, and, it just stuck in my mind how he couldn't mobilize the people. And I went up there with a friend, you know, kind of a--, God I could go on for hours if I told you about this guy who took me up there, but I ended--, I liked it because it was sunny and beautiful and I was walking around without my clothes, and he told me, "I have a place at Morning Star Ranch! I've got my own place up there." And I went up, and all it was, was like a table! There were people that had tents, you know, and they--, and this guy had, it was a little more than a table, but it was like this big, you know wood thing that was open on the sides, and that was his "place", so. I remember sleeping in the sun once and I went to--, it was hot, and I went kind of underneath the table, and I had no clothes on, and I'm lying underneath the table, and I woke up, and there are these guys, and I'm pretty sure they were Mexican, and they didn't speak English, and I'm naked! And I don't--, you know, because anybody could come or go, and I remember these guys, they were just real close to me, and they, they weren't trying to hurt me, but they were just standing there, like looking at me. And I woke up and I went, "I don't think so." You know? And that's when I, you know, it's not like I really made a go at living there, participating at the community, but these are just like little washes that I had with communities that I went and visited. The one in Sebastopol, I remember being very, and I'm sorry I don't remember the name of it, but I remember this girl, with a baby strapped to her back, and she was sweeping. And there was bread baking, it really smelled good, and she made it very clear that people were not welcome unless they did a chore. And I remember that was very much--, and I liked that! I mean, it was a more, slightly more

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structured. So, I guess having had those experiences, plus a very good friend of mine from the dancer's workshops, just a lovely, gentle woman, went to live in a community, and she's the kind of person that nobody would get mad at, I mean, for any reason, and ended up, one of the guys living in the community with her, this is small, like I think eight people in a big old rambling house in San Francisco, I remember this guy hit her, gave her a black eye! Somehow the tensions were so unresolved that, you know, that happened. So these are all like little snapshots that I had, putting them together. I think that because I'd had those snapshots, the structure of Synanon did not turn me off, as it might have, if I hadn't seen the chaotic side of community.

Q: Would you have described yourself at that time as a hippie?

A: I wouldn't have at that time, but looking back, I certainly was described that by other people. I didn't think I was, because most of my friends that were hippies considered me very straight. I used hardly, I mean I wouldn't even say I used drugs, I smoked pot, I took LSD once, had a great experience, then said, "I'm not going to do this again until I can figure out what that was about." And I never have, so, I never did take it again. And you know, I've, in my life, maybe smoked pot six times. And so, plus I didn't think of myself as flamboyant as--, you know I had a job. I was one of the first female letter carriers, female mailmen in the city of San Francisco, and then later work at the dancer's workshop, so I always worked, and I always, you know, was considered straight by people that were living on the land, or were more, hip--, I don't even know what the definition of a hippie is! So, I during that time did not consider myself a hippie, but when I came to Synanon, I was called a hippie, a hip-liberal square, which, you know, all kinds of things, all kinds of things I was called. So, all propelling me towards one of the things I like best about Synanon, which was that, you live from within, and you decide what you are. And, um, so, I don't know. I had, my picture was taken, delivering the mail, by Look magazine, and there was some quote about "Ask the hippie mailman what she thinks about such and such," and of course they had never interviewed me, they never asked me anything, but, it implied that I was a hippie, and had free love, and drugs, and whatever. And that caused a great stir in my family. Anyway. I ended up actually suing the magazine, and that was a whole other story. That doesn't sound like a very hippie thing to do, does it? So.

Q: Over that particular photograph?

A: Yeah. Yeah. Somebody recommended that I do that. I actually went to Melvine Belie's office and he referred the case out. It wasn't like a very big deal. But that's a whole other story that's not even related to this, but, but it was--, so I'm telling you that to tell you that I think other people would've considered me a hippie, but I didn't consider myself one at the time.

Q: So how did you find Synanon?

A: Hmm. Um, a guy that I met through a dancer's workshop type of experience was involved in what was called the Synanon Game. And I really liked this guy a lot. I think later I learned that he was gay; he was a really big guy, and I just was drawn to him, I just, I just, I don't even know on what level it was, but I was really strongly drawn to him, and he invited me to come down to a Synanon Game, to see what that was about. And, um, I'd actually heard of Synanon earlier, in college, I was going to a school in Southern California called Pitzer, and taking a class in experimenta--, in uncommon social worlds, it was

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called. It was a wonderful class. And we were supposed to go interview--we were supposed to go to an uncommon social world and do a report on it. And I tried to go to Synanon, but they would not let me in. And, actually, going back even further, I'd read about Synanon in a Life magazine article, and having come from a home where there was a lot of, uh, verbal chaos, and a lot of yelling and fighting and doors slamming, I saw this picture of these two girls in a Synanon Game confronting each other, and resolving their differences, and then it described how, after the game, they walked out arm in arm. And it described the whole process of a game where there was conflict and differences, and chaos, but it stayed in that room, and when you left, it had to stay there. And that, that idea appealed to me so much -- I'm telling you the story kind of backwards, I see -- but idea appealed to me so much, that I had a little fantasy, I think I was 12 years old, and I actually went to the bedroom, and I -- 'cause at that time Synanon was almost entirely just for drug addicts -- and I took an eyebrow pencil and I went like this, and I said, "I wonder if that's what a track mark looks like?" And I could go in and I could tell them this whole story and then by the time I really told them who I really was, they would let me stay, because, you know, they loved me so much -- or whatever. I had this whole little fantasy worked out when I was 12 years old. But then, I mean I had a lot of other fantasies, like being a cowboy or a movie star, so that, that was one of many that I never did, and then the thing happened in college where they would not let me in because of, I don't know. They used to have on the beach, they used to have Art Pepper, and some pretty well-known jazz musicians do a Saturday night party. Now I had never heard of these people, and I was coming down to interview drug-addicts, or people that, whoever lived there, I didn't know, for an uncommo--, but they still wouldn't let me in, because it was a very exclusive thing to this music thing. And uh, I begged and I pleaded, I wasn't as pushy then, so I was not successful in getting in. And I was kind of pissed, actually, but then a couple years later, Michael Rhodes was playing the game -- I probably shouldn't have said his name, but who knows -- you don't, like—

Q: Tim wouldn't use it.

A: He wouldn't? Okay. Um, and he invited me to come down and play the game, and I learned that then they had something for people that weren't drug addicts, called the Game Club, and I got involved in that. Actually, they made it very hard for squares to move in, so I had to work very hard to overcome the deficits that I had, so that they would let me move in. And um, a lot of people didn't want me to move in, because I was weird, you know? I was not your typical anything. I was--, a lot of -- Francie moved in, I'm sure she described as a game player, as a square, and Francie and I were like instant friends back then, but I was very different. I was younger, I was wilder, people could not figure me out. I was like a loose cannon, I'd say anything. I was very hostile. Um, and I didn't have a traditional white collar job, and at that time, people didn't know that I had money, which I did. I had an inheritance, which I donated almost entirely to Synanon. But people didn't know that at the time. So people were confused by me, I should say. Mostly, young people my age, that I kind of gravitated to, were there because of drug problems, so it was hard for people to put a label on me, because I didn't know, I didn't see the divisions that were actually there. I just didn't know about them until later. So . . . I can't even remember what question I'm answering right now.

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Q: Just how you found Synanon.

A: Yeah, so, I played the game, and I got intrigued, and I went on a Synanon trip, and I had a husband at that time who had problems, I thought would benefit from Synanon, so I did everything possible to get him to come into Synanon. Of course when he came in they told me I couldn't come in. They had this rule that if the husband was in, that the wife couldn't be around, but they made an exception for me, because they knew I was, by that time I was kind of like family. So, but at first, I was told that I couldn't come around when he was there. He didn't last very long. He stayed less than three months. And, um, but by that time I was just, I was intrigued, enthralled, thrilled. I thought Synanon was the answer to every unresolved issue in my entire life. And it actually was. It actually was, because I wanted to be committed to something, I wanted to believe in something, I wanted to be a change agent, making the world better, and every time I tried to join one social movement or another, it was so polarized that it turned me off! Like, if I joined, um. . . if I was protesting against the war, then I would have to hear about how awful the military was! And how hateful, and they were the enemy. And I, my brother was in the Reserves at the time, and I wasn't going to hate my brother. And, you know, it was killed the pigs: if you were a Black Panther then you hated the pigs, and it was like you couldn't do any good thing without hating something else! And I couldn't resolve myself to that, and yet I felt very uncommitted. And Synanon allowed me to commit myself to things that I believed in, feel I was part of doing good work, and still continue to resolve. And it's about linking people, and joining people, and getting people to talk and communicate and resolve conflicts and issues. So that was heaven! That was heaven. That made it safe for me to throw myself into it wholeheartedly. And I've been waiting a long time to throw myself into something wholeheartedly.

Q: What year was it when you moved in?

A: Sixty-nine. I started playing the game in I guess '68. Moved in at the end of '69.

Q: And then did you and your husband get a divorce?

A: Oh yeah. Before I, uh, yeah. We were in the process of getting a divorce, and the divorce was final when I was in Synanon. Actually when I moved up to Tamalus Bay, it was final. I kept hoping. I mean, every time I'd see a car come up on the property, I hoped that it was him, but actually after he left Synanon I never saw or heard from him again. Actually, Francie, Francie saw him, um, one time, because he ended up, of all the small worlds, she was leading some kind of group session, and he came there and, so she saw him, and she saw him with another woman, so that helped me out a lot. I remember her telling me this, because I still was laboring under the illusion that my love for him and my staying steadfast would, you know, was the most loving thing that I could do, and of course he would see that and he would come back. And um, I was carrying a tray in the hut, and Francie just started and she told me about this other woman, and she went, "Oh, and it's so funny because she looked so much like you and she's shaped just like you!" And I remember just dropping this tray. I mean, it was like an involuntary thing, but it helped me to close my mind and get on with my life. So that was it. I never saw him after he left Synanon. So. I don't even know if he tried to contact me. I know at one time -- again the thing of them no knowing how to treat me, residents, as they were called, when they came in, they were not allowed any contact with the outside world. So a lot of people that had playing games with me, you know, assumed that that's, you know, that I should be treated that way. There was a lot of incidences

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where people just didn't know how to treat me. Because I didn't carry myself like a square. I wasn't uptight, I wasn't, I wasn't together, you know, so they didn't know how to treat me, and for awhile they didn't let me have my phone calls. And, it's possible that he tried to call me, although I have no idea. I have no idea. I never, and I never heard from him again. I don't pine--, I don't even believe that he's alive, but I don't know whether he is, alive or dead. He was from England, so he very well might have returned, or he might have returned to Mother Earth, or whatever. He was a troubled soul.

Q: So when you moved into Synanon, tell me what your daily life was like?

A: Okay, . . . um, that changed on a daily basis, depending on where I lived. Where I first moved in was in Oakland, and it was funny because I was just so thrilled, I'd had my own flat in San Francisco, and I'd had, you know, all kinds of living situations, that to me, I was thrilled, you know, they were nice! Always nice, but I was thrilled to be in this communal setting, and the first thing I remember is I was in this apartment with these other women who had come there, you know, either they'd been paroled there or they had come there. I had worked really hard to be allowed to move in. I'd had to demonstrate--, and these women, these were women who couldn't figure out what I was doing there, and why I wanted to be there. So I remember that, being in this apartment, and suddenly realizing, "They hate my guts." Which they did, because they just couldn't figure me out. And then, because I was a square, I was put in the "back room", and I didn't know that that was as status thing, that they had to earn by a series of whatever, so I didn't know why they hated me! But it all came out because of the game . I mean, this stuff comes out. And I had a lot of people protecting me, and then I kind of, you know, I was told to hang out with the squares, but I didn't want to be restricted that way. I was certainly safer in those situations, but the game allowed all those, you know, and I would have a --, you know I'd say, "We used to be friends, why are acting this way?" and then this whole thing would come out, and that's how I learned it. What was, what the dynamics were. But you always had a job, and um, I drove the bus. And I hate to drive, and I'm a terrible driver, but because I was a square, you know, there weren't that many people who could be trusted to drive this bus, so I drove this big, you know, bus back and forth between the um, the clump, which was what the living situation was called, and the main building, which was a beautiful club in downtown Oakland. Absolutely beautiful. It's called the Athens Club. Did you see pictures of it ?

Q: No, but Francie told me about it.

A: Yeah, it was just fabulous, and it had been the, this athletic club, for this very wealthy part of town before it had, you know, become what was the ghetto. And um, I mean there are still things left over from that club, I mean it was, there was this huge fireplace, that, you know, forty people could stand in, and this beautiful inlaid wood with these big beams, almost like an old baronial hall. It's just, bigger than Olympic-size swimming pool. And, you know it's just a wonderful, wonderful place. And it was right in the heart of the ghetto. And of course we opened the doors to whoever wanted to come in. We had something called the Athens Notion, and all these kids came in and robbed us blind, but then began to play games, and many of them moved into Synanon, became part of the community, some didn't. Um there were wonderful things that went on, like, getting the Black Panthers and the sheriffs to sit down and talk. And, you've heard about all this stuff?

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Q: Well I read that in a transcript.

A: I mean, it was thrilling to part of that. And you worked very hard, you worked on, um a cubic day, which was really compartmentalizing your work, and your--, which was called the Triangle, and your offtime, which was the Circle. And um, so there was a lot of work, and there was a lot of learning and studying, and group process stuff, and a lot of exciting events that was just fabulous to be part of . And one of the stories that I love the most is when we put on this street fair, and um, gave away a lot of stuff, like people donate things to us. One thing I remember in particular is Jen's pizza rolls. You know, you come to Synanon and there's always food out, it was a Grazing Board, it was called . And there's--, you can always get food, any time of the day. And, um, even though the meal times were regular meal times. Oh except once we were on a 24 hour day. And I worked the night shift, and I loved that, because at midnight you'd come and have a big dinner, and then you'd have what was called a cerebation where you'd sit around, read Emerson, or talk about something, you know, wild group of Puerto Ricans that could barely speak English, there was a big influx of Puerto Ricans at that time, kids that came in from the ghetto, a couple of squares, like me, not very many but a couple of them. This one woman I remember, Elsie Elberts, whose husband had a drug problem, she moved in, you know, to support him, and we were the cashiers at that point, because we were the squares, so we could be trusted to have all the money. And you know, we were the night shift, and we would, you know, have this big meal at midnight, and then do this cerebation, with this wild mix of people, just this fabulous mix of people! You get these points of view that were just fabulous and fun and interesting and mindboggling, all these different accents, and all these different, um, sayings and colloquialism. So it was great cacophony of people. And, you know, that's why I say, it's hard to describe one particular thing, I had a lot of jobs. I was the bus driver, I ran the tape center for awhile. I ended up as the cashier.

Q: And you worked in the wire service, right?

A: I did that -- that was later when I came to Tamalus Bay. Yeah, that ended up kind of being my, I guess if you had a job that defines you, that was the one that I did and I loved. I worked for, um, Dan Sorken. This was interesting, again, in my pre-Synanon life, Dan Sorken was a very popular DJ in Chicago, where I grew up. I grew up in a suburb of Chicago. And my brother used to just love him! He thought he was, you know, wonderful. My brother who would only let me in my room to listen to Dan Sorken -- in his room. That was the only time I was allowed to go into his room, we'd go listen to Dan Sorken. So when I told my brother that, you know, I met Dan Sorken, he was absolutely impressed. And I became his protegee, so to speak. And he's a very important person for me in Synanon. He played the um, he was, there were tribe leaders, you know, when you were game players you had an older person that knew more that ran a tribe so you'd be in a group of about 30 people, because there were so many people, that was a way you'd get to know other people. And you'd play games with that tribe. So you weren't in just a helter-skelter group of different people each time, and the tribes would do things together. They would sell tickets, or paint, do a painting project together, whatever. They were very involved together. So Dan Sorken was my tribe leader, and he played this tape of Thickened Light, which was a tape of some of Chuck's philosophy. I don't know if you've heard of Thickened Light? I can give you a transcript of that. We used to do Thickened Light sessions, it's a very involved, um, it's very, very involved. But it blends Emerson and Buckminster-Fuller, and some of Chuck's ideas about trust, um, the phrase "trust is a way of knowing" comes out of there, and how to build trust lines, and really it's about how to build

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community. And, um, Dan Sorken demon--, it's called "demonstrating the tape", because you, you have to go through a series of steps, and you have to have people do things in chairs, and um, it's about a three hour, maybe even longer, session. And I was very frightened of it, I was very frightened of it because I've, I had at that time a severe math phobia, and geometry phobia, and I came and I saw all these rulers and um, you know, triangles and compasses, and I was like, because you do diagramming, you do diagramming and you actually make a tetrahedron, that's part of how this process is explained. And when I saw that, I tried to get out of the session, I was that terrified by seeing those instruments. And Dan sat me down and said, "It's not that bad, it won't hurt you." And that was one of the first mindopening, life-changing experiences, was hearing Thickened Light, and then later going on the trip. And then, um, when I--, skipping way ahead in time, but when I went up and lived at the Ranch in Marin County, um, Dan, we were starting the wire, and Dan hand-picked a few people that he wanted to work on it, and I was like his protégé, and worked for him, and at one point, kind of, I guess I didn't see it then, but he was on his way out, and he had done this fabulous two-hour show that, to me, I don't know if other people looked at it that way, but it was like it held the community together. And it was a show on the wire, and it was broadcast all over the country to all the different Synanon facilities, and it had music, and fun interviews, and tapes from games, and tapes from all--, you know. It was just fabulous! And people would call in, and it had little features, like it was after Betty died, there was something called the Five o'clock Shadow, and there'd be a quote from Betty D., and her voice played at five o'clock every day, and there was a show about money, -- there was just show about everything. Everything you could think of. And any key person would be interviewed in Synanon, and excerpts from games that were particularly interesting would be played, and you could call in and , you know, tell them what was going on, or argue with him about something, and it was kind of a precursor to the talk shows that are all over the place now. You know, he trained me to do that, and when he ended up, um, I don't know, it's hard to remember, but it was kind of like he got in some kind of, he was removed from doing that show, or he removed himself, and I ended up doing the show for awhile, which was just the best! I mean it was so much fun to be in that position to do that and to actually have that be my job, you know. I loved it, I loved every bit of it! I loved the music, I loved kind of being at what I pictured was the center of things. Because in my mind, every person in the foundation, all over the country, was sitting and listening to this show! In fact I was shocked once when I went down to another facility, and they had it on in the background, but they didn't stop and freeze and listen to it. Anyway, in my mind it was like being in the center of the universe. And it was just, I loved every single bit of it. I loved what I was learning, I loved what I was doing, I loved connecting people together, I loved having music to play, I loved feeling like I knew everything that was going on in the foundation, because it had to come through the wire. Anyway, that was my illusion. And I was married at that time to the guy that ran the electronics department. He was a wonderful man, named Rudy Stephanel, just a wonderful man. And he built me this little travelling console at one point, so I went, I remember taking it to New York, I went and I took it to New York, and set up the wire and broadcast a show from New York, from the basement of the New York House, where my current husband now was living at the time. And it was great. I loved that job. That was probably the best.

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Q: Can you describe to me what a "trip" was?

A: Yeah, and I might even be able to dig up a pamphlet on a trip, and -- Francie, I'm trying to get Francie to do a paper on the trip for the next communal studies thing, because she was very active in the trip. Okay, and to do this, um, I haven't thought a lot about this interview, I had no idea what you were going to ask, and I thought it would be, you know, help me to organize my thoughts, which are still pretty scattered about Synanon. So I'll babble and make the most of it. The trip was a three day experience. And it was about stripping away your image and stripping away programming, that, allowing you to look at what drives you, and really stripping it away. And the structure of the trip, um, was such that the participants, the "trippers", would come and, every vestige of image would be taken away. No makeup, no jewelry for the women. You'd be given a simple white robe that you would wear. And you'd be told basically about the process, but you were encouraged to trust. You would be in a game room, a game group of probably about 12 people, and there were probably about five game groups in the entire trip. And the staff of the trip was a "conductor", and an assistant conductor, and sometimes this would be a couple. And they would wear a different robe, they would wear a red robe, perhaps trimmed, with something. And then there would be "guides" who would also wear colored robes. And each game group would have two guides, and then there would be floaters who would go between all the different rooms. And then there were "shepherds." And the shepherds, um, took to trippers around to the various events that they would attend. And um, I was actually hired into Synanon to develop one of the events, which was called Body Movement, at that time. I worked at the dancer's workshop and had done a lot of this type of trust movement experiences. And so I told you that I wasn't the traditional person hired in, and many of the people, especially a lot of the traditional drug addict types, who had become administrators, were a little freaked by me. And Miriam Berdette really was instrumental in developing the trip, and she knew that I had something she wanted to put into it, which was the whole Body Movement thing. And I'll describe one of the, give you an example of one the session that I did in the Athen's club, which was one of the things that made me want to move in, if I could do that, would be so much more powerful than the classes that I was teaching, I mean, I could reach so many more people. Um, so she was instrumental to getting me hired in. She was married to the director of the plan at that time, and that's kind of how that happened. Okay, so you come into the trip, and the first session, you're in a big room, and you see all the other people in the trip, and again, you're, everyone's in a white robe, all the trippers are in a white robe, and no makeup, nothing. You're just you. You're just, almost naked to the world, you're stripped of your image. And, um, . . . one of the things that might happen is that you begin to see who is alike and who is different, and various questions would be asked, some of which would start kind of light weight, like "Who's been to college? Who's married? Who's divorced?" And I remember on my trip, the first one was, "Who's had an abortion?" And it's like, you know, . . . but then you stand up, and you realize that, you know, okay, six other women in this room did, and you're standing with them. And there's a sense of peace, especially--, that was a big unresolved thing for me, and then suddenly, okay, I'm standing here with six other people that had that experience. Um, I don't even remember what they all were--, and it was not a judgmental thing, like you're good or you're bad, if you do this, you just stand with the group, which was the same as you, or different from you. And various games would have, you know, people would come up, and they'd introduce themselves. In fact, when I was a game player and I went on my trip, they asked me what I did with the body movement session, and I got up, and I had somebody, I demonstrated it, and I think that's how

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they kind of found out that I did it . At that time, they couldn't, I was supposed to be, you know, a lowly tripper, so they, but then went "Ooh, this looks good. This looks like something that we'd want to do on our future trips." But um, you know, you're in, you go into the game and you're really challenged . I remember somebody asking me the question, "What is your image?" and I went, " I don't know, I don't have an image. I just put my clothes on and go out." And he went, "Yeah, but why do you pick those particular clothes?" And really examining why you choose to present yourself the way you do. And I had a whole thing about my religion at that time. And I remember this--, first of all you get dissipated because you don't sleep. Your sleep breaks are weird . And I remember, this sounds so bizarre, but I remember, even though I came from a Jewish family, and even though I'm like really turned off by a lot of Christianity, at that particular time, I was sure I wasn't really Jewish. I don't know why. But this was something that just--, it was like I'd been raised in an alien home. This just kind of came up. It wasn't anything I walked around consciously. But in a dissipated state, it just somehow came out. And I remember that being challenged. And a lot of things that came up on the trip, you just observe them, and they swim around, and you sort them out. Later on you could sort them out. But they challenge your assumptions about how you got to be who you are and why. So the gaming process goes on, the gaming is very heavy, and then there are breaks for Emerson sessions, we used to weegie sessions that were pretty wild, and you know, you break and you go back with the whole group, and then you go into your game room. The Body Movement that I did in the Oakland club, was wonderful, at least for me it was. Um, a lot of it was trying to get people to trust and to relax and to trust other people. So we do simple physical things like, physically, if you lean your back against somebody else's back -- let's you're standing like this. I don't know if you've ever -- have you ever done this kind of thing? Okay, if you and I stood back to back like this, and then we moved apart from each other, but we leaned on each other, we would actually be supporting each other, and we could actually move till we were like leaning this far, and the more we leaned on each other's shoulder's the more we support each other. But that's a really scary thing, because you think you're going to fall! But you don't. And it's just, to have that physical experience, and to realize, wow you can do it, you can step a little further away, a little further away, and really lean on the person, is powerful. And other things was like you go up on a high platform, and people hold their arms like this: they're not linking their arms, they're just holding them like this, like a line of maybe eight arms, is that clear in what I'm doing? And you leap off of a high surface, and you are caught, and you caught softly and gently, and, again, it's a think you look at and you go, "Nyah, that can't work." But people start and the first time they do it, they just fall, and then they end up going higher and higher and falling backwards, and again it's a thing where it's a wonderful thing of trust is internalized. So this thing I would do, I would move them through space, we would do some of those things, and then took them to this Olympic pool, this was why--, like the kind of crazy resources that would just come to you, you know, that you'd be able to use -- there's this huge pool, and we took people into the pool, and I had a flute player and a um. . . oh my God, this guy is coming to visit me, I haven't seen him in like a gazillion years, and he's a rapper. There's this swimming pool, a bigger than Olympic size pool, it's just this fabulous pool, we had it heated to the max. I had a flute player, and-fairly well-known, his name was Frank DeMarco, he was like a fairly well-known jazz musician, and at the time he was dating a Berkeley harpist, and I had the two of them up on the balcony, playing flute and a harp together, with this echo of music, you just could not believe how beautiful it was, echoing in this pool. Because the pool was so big, it was like, there's the pool and then there's three stories of big, open

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atrium, and their up at the balcony playing, and, we just did a thing where people floated. And, again it's a trust exercise, if you just go back like this, you will float, but you have to release, you have to let go of your tension. So there were people, except for one guy, and I later found out it's because he didn't have an ounce of fat on his body, I kept thinking he wasn't letting go, and it was really because I think you have to have a little fat to really float. Anyway, I ended up holding him, he was a real thin, you know, pencil-thin, long basketball player size guy. But anyway, all these other people just lying there while this music is echoing through every fiber of their being, and having this deep relaxation floating in the pool, then they got back in their robes, and went down this stairwell, had this beautiful, beautiful ornate stairwell, this rich wood, and, and just had them be aware the space and aware of moving through space, and space moving around them and their whole body, and they ended up in this room with this roaring fire, this huge fireplace that I told you about, and then we did this exercise where you find your own space, and you listen to your heartbeat, and you begin to move to the rhythm of your heart, it was just, it was heaven. I just love doing that stuff. And so, that was my job, doing that for trips, and that was, after awhile, the trips, like many things in Synanon, would be done wholeheartedly, and then not done for awhile. So after the trip--, I moved in thinking, "Oh, I'll be doing this, this is my job! I'll be developing it and taking it further," and then I found myself driving a bus. But, that was kind of, you know, the way it went. But um, yeah I had a lot of wonderful jobs in Synanon. Anyway, so the trip would have Emerson sessions, body movement sessions, weegie session, interspersed between the gaming, and then there would finally be a trip break, which hopefully where each person would break and ask for what it was that they really wanted or really needed, and the trip breaks themselves were filled with people crying -- it was like, you know, your religious charismatic experience at the end. Huge room filled with music, there's usually a band playing, and you know, people crying and hugging and resolving, and, you know. And so it was after my trip that I decided that I wanted to move into Synanon. And um, actually I had a second trip with my husband, Allen, who had lived on the East Coast, but that was like a foreign land. Even though he thought he was involved in Synanon, and he was, and he is on Synanon, but he took a trip, and I knew that I wanted to get us closer, so I went on the trip with him, which is something, if you do that as a old-timer, which I was at that time, I had been in Synanon ten years I guess, you know, you get all the heat, which was good, I could take it. But, um, that was the second trip that I was on after I had been in Synanon a lot longer. I was able to notice the process in a different way. But it's a very powerful experience, the trip. And um, again, a hierarchical thing that you couldn't just do, you couldn't just have a trip outside of the community. It worked because it-, only certain game players were allowed, and those were game players that were very connected into the community, and it worked because it was all part of the community, and one of the most powerful things for me about the community was, that because you'd had gone on a trip, later we had something called the stew, these long games, these dissipating experiences, you knew people so intimately, that many prejudices that you would have, you could get beyond so easily. Many--, I was a pretty paranoid person, I was like, "So, you think you're better than me?" or "Ha! You're talking about me?" I mean I was pretty much like that, and I began to realize, "Hey, it's not about you." Somebody is rude to you, well you know, they just found out their mother died. Or they didn't get the sales figure that they had projected. It's not all about you, okay? And so I began to see, you know, it began to help me relax around people, it helped me tremendously connecting with people. . . it just, I don't know. The friends that I have now, from having gone through these processes, I mean, I feel so incredibly rich, because I can go to almost any major city

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in the country, and there are people waiting for me, like the thing that happened for us in Florida. It was just so wonderful. There's Barbara, who is our sister! You know, who we haven't seen in--, and Sandy, who came from New York, and Francie, who came Visalia. We were up all night having the most intense, you know, religion, life, sex, each other, you know [tape ends] . . . many, many places, and it's just exciting, it's a kind of wealth, that, you know, is wonderful. Cory, my friend Cory just came out. Cory, um, and Jeff are some of the couples I told you about, they adopted a Black child. Cory used to be married to Leon also, and is Zoe's mother. So, again, that's our family connections. And, um, then Annette, who's another really good friend of mine, who lives up in Berkeley, beautiful house, adopted a daughter that's half Guamanian and I think, um, Hispanic, adopted from a woman who was here from Guam who'd been raped in a phone booth, and, it was horrible. But this child is fabulous! I mean she's wonderful. And there's Annette bringing Delia from Berkeley, and Cory coming out from Austin, and they just called me and said, "We want our kids to see the snow." So they could call me in Visalia, I set up a snow trip, and then Zoe came, and we went up and had just a phenomenal day. And it's just, I don't know, I don't know how to say it other than a richness, and I know it came from those kind of processes that we did with each other. And an ability to connect. And friendships, like with this woman that lives up Pualla, who also I consider one of my sisters. We don't write or talk or hang out, but we went up to visit them once in Pualla, but I know we'll go to Washington, and there is like, I mean, heart connections, and it will be just wonderful to see her and spend time with her, it's--, you never lose that, you never lose that when you're connected like that to people. In fact, leaving Synanon was one of the hardest things for me, was to not be, I just hadn't realized how comforting it is to be totally surrounded by people who really know you, who know what drives you, and who you really know. And so I was very off-balance not having that until I learned that I had the ability to make those connections with almost anybody. Then that was like, wow! You know, it goes on. I continued to make passionate and strong connections with people, which is very exciting.

Q: And do you think you were taught those skills in community?

A: Absolutely! There's no doubt about it! I did not have those skills at all, I definitely did not. I might have had a tendency towards that, but um, right at the time I moved in, I told you, I was pretty angry, um, disappointed, you know, confused, and uh, hostile person.

Q: How often would you have trips? Were these fairly rare?

A: Um, during the period that the trips were flowering, they were having them every month. But it wasn't -- like a game was a constant, until the end of Synanon, you played one game a week at least, and sometimes more. That was a constant. But the trip was more like a seasonal, but not even a seasonal, because there was a trip bunch, Francie was in that, and Sydney, who was the husband of Barbara, you've met Barbara? They live in Santa Bell, which was near where we had the conference. And he was part of the trip group, and there were a lot of people that formed this group and they put on trips real regularly, in fact I think at one point they were doing them every week, and that was their job, but other than that it would kind of usually come from people seeing a need to uh, pull people together, or to reward people, or whatever. Um, we'd just say, "It's time. Let's do a trip." And it would happen. And as Synanon got, I'm trying to think of the last trip, I was going to work it, and then I didn't work it, and, you know, Synanon got further and further away from that kind of work, they just petered out. I mean, the

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last ten years, I don't think there was a trip. I think some people tried to get one together and it didn't happen. And there are people with theories about why that is, and I don't really, I know that Francie and Sydney have a very definite theory, and they think -- but I don't even want to get into it, because I don't really know. A lot of things evolved and changed and stopped and started, so.

Q: Were there other rituals besides, I don't even know if you call it "rituals", but events, besides trips and games?

A: Oh yes, constantly. Well you heard me talk about the educational things, the talk that I gave. And there was something called "the stew", which was like a long game that people would be fed in and out of, and you'd go into it for three days, and part of it would be a 24 hour game, sometimes a 12, 12, 20, 10 hours with you know four hour sleep breaks, and oh, we were talking about, when we first went up to Tamalus Bay, and I think I was about 20 years old. And I came from a Midwest, pretty, straight-laced, uptight, upper middle class, you know, sexual really ignorant. I didn't know what "giving head" was. I was unbelievably guilty about masturbating, unbelievably-- I mean you can't even imagine. And um, I'm in this room with this woman, because it wasn't just gaming that would go on, different people would make presentations, and you know, all kinds of stuff would happen. We read a lot of Bucky Fuller, and Richard Greg, and you know, there was all kinds of learning. The Dynamics of Change was one of my favorite books that we read. And um, . . . there's this madam, who was this wonderful woman, Wilma Motley, this big, beautiful, Black woman, who was a madam. And she's up at the blackboard like a teacher, and there's a big vagina. And she's got a pointer. And she's telling us how it works, and she's teaching us about sex! And so, for me, like this, really it's like, wow! I never gotten exposure to stuff like that. And then somebody else comes in and does something about flight school. You know a pilot would come in and do something about how an airplane works, and so there was constant stuff going on. And the stew would just cook along, you know. It was like the reach, there was a grazing board, and there was always good food, and um, you know. The elders would come in from time to time, they would sit in, and there was a gallery, and people could watch. And later it was piped in through the wire.

Q: You know, I haven't heard about the elders. Who are the elders?

A: Well, elders would be, you, like Chuck, and Betty, board members, people that were older. You know, when I was in Tamalus Bay, I was part of the academy, and we were considered "kids". We were in our 20s or below, and then there were people in their 40s, 50s, 60s, who ran the place. And so, like Betty D. to me was really The Elder. I mean, she was wise and beautiful, and um, very religious in the truest sense, but very open and honest about herself and her life. And I just viewed her as tremendously successful, in areas, and I admired her on every level. And um, so she to me was an elder. And there were older people who had different areas of role models -- but you were always expected to be a role model too. That was another part of it. I remember that dawning on me, you know, this whole thing about being a square, it didn't fit with me. People kept saying, "Well you're a square, you should do this and this and this." At first it was like insulting, I didn't realize that that was supposed to be -- "No that means that you're supposed to be this, because people who came here with problem are expecting you to behave in a certain way." So it suddenly dawned on--, "I have to have behave a certain way, because I'm going to help people just by the way I behave? Wow! Okay." And that changed me. So everybody was expected to act a certain way to help other people. And that was a new concept. But then of course,

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you had people to look up to. So you had role models, but you were expected to be a role model. And, one of the things--, the more people that you took care of, I mean as far as, um, ways of achieving status, it wasn't about how much money you had, or this or that, at that time. It was about how many people you took care of, and how much you were able to accomplish, and the kind of character you had, it was said, "Character is the only rank," and that was true in those days. That really was true.

Q: Was it hard on the community when Betty D. died?

A: Uh-huh. Devastating. And there are many people that think that's what killed Synanon. I didn't think so at the time, but I've come to see how she was the soul of Synanon. And how she did keep Chip balanced. And um, yeah, she was a magnificent human being. Truly magnificent.

Q: When, um, I have a hard time understanding like, all the different places that Synanon was happening in, and the numbers of people. Like for example, when you were living at the Athen's club, how many people were there, living there?

A: Oh, man. I'm not really good with numbers, but it could've been as many as a thousand.

Q: Oh that 's huge!

A: Oh it was huge! It was absolutely huge. And please, do not take me as the final word, because I told you about my math phobia. But we had, first of all there was the club itself, and then we had apartment complexes all over the place. We had, they were called the "clumps". So I would drive a bus, make constant trips to take people, and we had a school, and we had --, you know these were full apartment complexes, with, I don't know, 50 apartments, and the two-bedroom apartment would have maybe six people living in it, because they didn't need to use the kitchen or living room, because all the living was done in the club, all the eating and living was done in the—

Q: So you always took your meals together, everybody?

A: Yeah.

Q: At the same time, or staggered time?

A: Yeah. (at the same time) In the dining room, Athens clubs had an exquisite dining room. You wouldn't believe how beautiful it was. But dining and eating was always a very important function in Synanon, it was one thing that always done very well.

Q: Were there any rituals associated with meals? Graces, things that would happen?

A: We had something called "gracious dining" later on at the home place that was developed, and we experimented with eating. Gracious dining was um, everybody got a chance, you would dress up and have these very long meals. As you've probably seen, we had round tables like Oneida. Round tables with lazy susans on them. And so that would keep the conversation going. One of my favorite experiments with the eating ritual was something called "session." And what we did, rather than have three meals a day, was we had two, and at that time, at the home place, our schedule was you get up 5 o'clock in the morning or earlier, you do aerobics -- actually at that time, we had something we'd called "sindo" , which was a combination of aikido or judo or something, and, you know, a bunch of exercises,

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you know, like those kind of military tai-chi exercises, and we'd get up and do aerobics and do sindo, and then work. And you'd be done, you'd take a break from work, um, at eleven, I think. Ten-thirty or eleven. And there was this meal called session, that had breakfast food, and some lunch food, and it was like a two-hour meal. And you'd sit down in the middle of the day, and you would have this meal, and talk, and then you'd take a nap, and then you would come back after your nap and you were prepared for the other part of your job, which at the homeplace, was hosting. And we were really good at it. People would come in, you'd greet the bus, make up the rooms, I mean, we ran this little property. The home place was a smaller set of our property. And then you were expected to be up all night hosting them. And it was a wonderful, it was a wonderful schedule.

Q: Wasn't it exhausting though? If you had to be up at five?

A: No, because for me, for me, oh, I popped up like toast every morning. For me, the nap -- Chuck was into naps, he would call it "filing your input", you know, because you have all kinds of input during the day and then you take a nap, and you file your input, it's not like a full fledged sleeping situation. I still do that. When I'm on an oil-burner type of schedule, and you can go, if you take a half an hour nap, you can sleep four hours a night and be totally refreshed! And I'm not sure why that works, but it did, it definitely worked with that schedule. It was considered a privilege to live at the home place. That was a wonderful way to live, and I loved the idea of session, I loved that--, left to my own natural rhythms, that's probably how I would eat! I mean I'd--, and I'm pretty left to my own natural rhythm, that is how I eat! Like I'll eat something at ten and I'll eat something at four. And it's kind of hard to get people to eat with you when that's the way you do it, but um, you know, that was an interesting experiment. In the early days, Chuck had a horrible time getting people to eat together. It was always, people wanted to go home in their own little apartments, and the community structure made that less and less acceptable as the community developed and evolved. And the eating times together were a real family, real wonderful, and really made nice. Like at the home place, every season the dressing on the table would change, you know, and the women did a lot of that Martha Stuart type stuff.

Q: Well yeah, I read in the transcript that you had nice things, like nice sheets, and towels.

A: Oh yes, at the home place we always did. And we were taught to take care of them. And with many things in Synanon there was a hierarchy of sheets, you know, there was like certain sheets, the Dior Rose sheets that only certain people could have. At one time that was my job, was to take care of the sheets. And you were trained, you know, that, to respects the sheets, that they were washed -- at that time we had a laundry system, so they were washed for you, but there were separate bins that you put them in, and if somebody was caught putting their laundry in a pillowcase, that was like a no-no, because it stretched the seams of the pillowcase. So we took great care, because in the early days of Synanon, there wasn't money to buy sheets, so when Betty, who was this fabulous mother figure, finally decided to take some of the money and invest it in changing the quality of people's lives, that was a big deal.

Q: Do you think the fact that it was clean, and that you did have nice things, that that helped keep people there?

A: Yes! Absolutely! My standard of living has, in areas of neatness and fine thing, you know, as far as the standard of cleanliness I'd tolerate, has greatly lowered since then. Oh is has.

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Q: Well your house looks really clean to me.

A: Well believe me, it would've looked cleaner if this was my house in Synanon.

Q: Well everybody's house I've been to has been really clean. I wonder, do you think that's a function of Synanon?

A: Absolutely! Especially if someone like Leon had a clean house. Yeah, well I don't know what he was like before, so I don't know. But, I, pig-city is where I--, and I find myself, to me, my house is really a mess right now. I find it intolerable. But yet my earlier imprinting of, you know, somehow came back. I mean, I ran the housekeeping department for a real long time, and I learned how to clean. I didn't know what a baseboard was when I left home. I didn't know what one does. I was not allowed to iron in my house. I remember being in college and asking somebody to show me how to iron, and these girls looking at me like I was from Mars. But I dropped my clothes on the floors and maid picked them up. I didn't know which ones were dry cleaned, and which ones were laundered, they just came back! And so, I learned all this stuff in Synanon. I learned how to run a housekeeping crew, I learned how to scrub the floor with a toothbrush, I learned what a baseboard was, I learned how good it feels to do that. I mean, I also ran the laundry for awhile, and was the laundry for awhile, and um, you know, that was, talk about, you know, and I don't say "character building" in a negative way at all. That was really good for me to do it. And um, but my natural inclinations, when I didn't have the community structure, came back, of, you know, I have a certain seeking of chaos, and these parts of me are at war all the time! There's a part of me that's like, you know, just having this mess here, look at that it's from Christmas, I haven't put it away yet, and there is a part of me that's very distressed by that. But, no my house is fairly clean today, but it's very, you know, it's not together. It's not as together as it should be. And in Synanon things were very organized, there was a place for everything, everything in it's place. A lot of the gaming centered around being the kind of person that would look for solutions, and way of setting up systems to make things run better. Like, during, when I first came to Synanon, people smoked. I don't know if you know, the whole community stopped smoking at one point. Made it a lot more wonderful to live in. But when, one of the things that I remembered when I first moved to Tamalus Bay was this game, and Chuck used this game a lot, especially in the stew, as a teaching form. And it was about the cigarette drawer. And there was a cigarette drawer that they had where people would go get their cigarettes, and, you'd pull the drawer, and if you pulled it too far, the whole drawer would fall out, and time and time again, people just, would do that, and then they'd put the whole drawer back, and this one guy fixed it. He figured out how to fix it, and he took it out and he repaired it and he fixed it. And so there's a great deal of focus put on, "This is the kind of person everyone should be. We want everyone to be this kind of person." And when something is wrong, fix it. And that stuff was wonderful. That made me a different kind of person that I like being. I'm not the kind of person that you can say "No" to, because I'll think, well there's got to be a way to do this. And that's a good little chip that's been put into my computer, that I look for a solution. I don't just say, "Oh darn, that's broken," and that's the kind of people we were trying to build. I mean that's a lot of the reason that I wrote this play, because I think there's messages in there that are important. At the end of the book, the author says, this is more than a book to me, if you feel the same way, contact me. And I don't know how many people did contact, but I felt, I can't get this information and not do something. I have to do something. And that is a direct result from Synanon, and that kind of input. There's another funny story about the beam. And this is kind of around why we all

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shaved our heads. I could just keep you for so many days. . . but this um, the architects, there was a certain building, we used to get these metal buildings and put them up and turn them into these wonderful spaces, and this was going to be the kitchen. And um, this great kitchen was built, and it was given some kind of elaborate kitchen type of name. Up in the kitchen office there was a metal beam, and you had to bend down underneath it, or you would hit your head. So I remember Chuck or somebody said, "This is ridiculous, this needs to be fixed, you have to come in and bend down, and hit your head," and the architect said, "No, it's impossible, it can't be done, it can't be fixed, the structure of the building; that's the way it is." So they took padding, foam padding, and put it on there, so that if you hit your head it wouldn't hurt as much. And Chuck used that as an analogy just like that um, the cigarette drawer, to say, now that's not the kind of people we want to be. We want to do it right, or look for a solution. Don't just say, "No, it can't be done, because it's never been done before." And so, the people that were supposedly learning this lesson, I know one of them was Bob Goldfider, who was the architect, they shaved their heads. And that was a ritual in Synanon that was done, um, sometimes it was done as punishment, if somebody split and came back, or somebody stole something, but it also would have another meaning, which was kind of a solidarity thing, or a "Hey my image isn't as important as the lesson that I've learned." And so, then somehow it came around to, well why do the guys always shave their head, why don't the women shave their heads? And around that time, a woman, I mean this is exaggerated, like in a game, but a woman stole a camera. And they said, let's shave her head. And so, she was the first one that had her head shaved, and then all these other women just shaved their heads too, in support. Oh, you want to see a picture of all of our heads shaved?

Q: I'd love to!

A: And um, how did that feel to shave my head? Well, the first time I did it, it was absolutely exhilarating. And there is a videotape of this whole process and how the whole--, I should say I don't know where our tapes are at this point -- but there was a videotape of um, going through the process and how it got started, and how one of the guys who was up there in the hierarchy tried to stop it, and you know the ball got rolling. Yeah, I was one of the first to do it, I ran down. I heard they were doing it, I ran down, I wanted to do it. I wanted to see what that felt like. And there was a whole lot of dancing, and people were interviewed, and a tape was put together, and there was a great spirit about it, and then we all went down to Oakland and had this big press conference, and, you know, it was being part of something exciting where we said our image is not as--, our individual image is not as important as the work we're doing together. There was a great freedom about not being so caught up in the way you looked. And for me, my hair was the only feature I've ever gotten lots of compliments on, I never really, um, you know -- loved to play with my hair. When I was pregnant I bought this beautiful silver natural bristle brush and spent hours brushing my hair! I loved my hair! I still love my hair. And um, only recently have I let it grow long again. But, so that was a little feeling of loss, but then there was just this great sense of unity, and you looking at people and you begin to look at them beyond the image, you begin to look more into their eyes and into their hearts, and see them for-- see them on another level, and see yourself on another level. And that part of it was really good. I remember though, um, thinking we were going to do this once, and that'll be it, and then when it kind of filtered down that the hierarchy, or Betty, who I admired tremendously and probably would've off a cliff, wanted us to do it, as forever! The second time I had to do it, that was hard! The first time was, "Oh, this is new experience! "

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and the second time, looking at my face, and having to accept the way it looked, without the hair that I always kind of hid behind, that was hard. That was real hard. And I didn't like it at all. But, you know, I don't regret that, you know. I'm stronger, and, I don't know, it's almost a whimsical freedom that I have from the constraints of certain image-binding things, because I've had that experience. So I consider that an empowering experience. Um, some of the fun things were, like brother/sister looking exactly alike, and just not recognizing somebody from behind, and then getting to, "Wow, that's who that is?"

Q: I was just going to ask you how long you did it for?

A: Years, years.

Q: And the overalls too? Was that for a long time?

A: Uh huh. Yeah. That was Martin Luther King died. That was putting that on in his honor and saying, "We're going to get to work." And um, it's so funny that that's now kind of a fashion, a fashionable thing, but it certainly wasn't then. And me being a rather broad-hipped woman, wearing overalls was rough, really rough. They didn't make them fitted for women in those days. They were like coveralls, you went to a surplus store, you know, to get them, or supply store. They didn't . . . I had to buy huge ones to cover my hips and then shorten the straps, and it was not a comfortable uniform for me, but it felt good. It was again like, kids that go to school when they have a uniform, that's one less thing they have to think about in the morning. But then we would, you know, you dress them up in various ways. And it wasn't like every single--, you'd go through periods, you'd go through periods where the guys were clean-shaven, and then for the wedding, we wanted the wedding to kind of um, have a cowboy feel -- there were several, couple of group weddings, but. One was a Renaissance wedding, and one was more of a country wedding, which that one was. I got married in [unintelligible] in the back woods -- different people. But um, the guys would grow their hair long and grow beards. So it wasn't like you were ever -- the only constant was changed, and that was talked about a lot, and you weren't locked into, uh, you know, that was the thing, you weren't locked into it forever. Although I got really used to the bald head, and I remember when Chuck came back from Europe, and he was pretty much starting to deteriorate at that time, and I remember hearing him get on the wire and say something about, you know, "The women will now grow their hair one inch," and I'm thinking like, "Who the hell is he? What does this have to do with him?" And um, you know. And that happened, people began to grow their hair longer and just look stylish instead of extreme, but, I remember that call, and that was kind of the first time I began to doubt his decrees, and think, "Excuse me!"

Q: What did your family think of all of this?

A: Oh God. When you say my family, do you mean my parents?

Q: Yes, I guess.

A: Um, very threatened. Wanting to be supportive, because that's the stance that they like to take, but very threatened, especially my mother, very resentful. And then when I donated the money, that threw her, really threw her into the arms of a psychiatrist. And, um, . . . it helped our relationship, because I don't think I'd have one with them at all. And it helped me, it helped me to have relationships with any living being. And to be a more forgiving, understanding person. But, I didn't want anything to do with

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them for a long time. You know, they would come to visit, and, one nice thing was that my mother, I believe, Synanon helped her stop smoking, because I never liked her smoking, was one of the reasons I didn't smoke, because, raised with a mother that smokes, and tries to kiss you and stuff -- you don't smoke do you? So you kind of know what I mean, huh? And um, . . . anyway, I would always not want her to smoke, but when the Synanon stopped smoking, I had an excuse to say, "I'm sorry, if you come and visit me, you can't smoke. And she came and stayed for awhile and stopped smoking, and the last time -- she'd been trying to smoke -- but the last time she did it, she said she never smoked again. And I think that was nice that that kind of helped her. You know, they're good people, and they want to do the right thing, my parents, but they didn't like it. It was a threat. It was definitely a threat. And when Synanon died, on one hand there was kind of a, "Ha-ha ha!" And then on the other hand, a great sorrow on their part. And they've been very respectful -- a lot of the things that my mother used to put down about Synanon, she talks about wistfully now. And I think she is in awe of how many friends I still have, the kind of support that I have, still. A couple of times they've come out when my son graduated, first from high school, and then from junior college, and you know we had a little party for him. And um, you know, actually Chuck came to the last one that we had here. And um, I think they were very moved and impressed by it. But after the fact more so than during. Not that they weren't supportive. I mean, my father wrote letters during the years when we were being attacked, and my, you know, when they visited they would leave some money. And um, you know, but. . . you know, that -- I even got them to play a game once, but that didn't turn out real good. But anyway. I mean, I didn't know this until later, but somebody. . . probably leave that one alone. But, you know, they're just kind of like curious outsiders. And, um, my mother's thing's been more like a pick, pick, pick, pick, pick, more of a jealousy thing, I guess.

Q: Um, I don't know if I'm jumping ahead of myself a little bit --

A: No, you're doing this too: we're both being scattered!

Q: Can you describe the, um, the death process. I mean, I know that took a number of years, so, it could take awhile to describe it.

A: We had something called the "celebration of life," that, um, -- the first death that I remember was Ray Sweedleson, who was a very well-loved guy that took care of a lot of people, worked in food service, and he was one of the early, early members of Synanon, one of the earlier, you know, real old-timer. Just a wonderful, big, loving, you know, guy. Took care of a lot of people that came through food service, and he was killed on a motorcycle. And people gathered around, I remember this happening, it was the first time I had experienced it, and um. . . a circle was formed of people that began to talk about Ray. And it was amazing to hear how many lives that he had touched, from the littlest new-comer in the door who worked with him in food service, to someone who had been his best friend for years and years. And people'd sit around and tell stories and laugh, and it was very deliberately called a celebration of life. It wasn't about beating your breast and, you know, -- it wasn't like, don't grieve, it wasn't like that either, - but that was a way of helping the grieving process. And when um, -- and a lot of celebrations of lives were hilarious, I mean, really funny. People, you know, most of them were people telling funny stories about the person in a great release of laughter. Laughter, tears, people would cry also. I remember at the home place, when Betty got sick, um, Chuck really pushing her to talk about dying and confronting

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death. And in her book, you know, she talks about what that's like, and I can, I'm pretty sure I can find, there's a little poem in her book about how he makes her confront it and talk about how she's going to wink out of existence one day. And he set, some people did a tribute to her, and it was a video tape of pictures of her doing things. By this time she was very frail, very thin, in a wheelchair, and really wasting away. She was brought in to watch this tribute that they'd made to her, which was quite lovely, and I think she started crying. And then Chuck, never giving her a break, gamed her about it, like, you know, "Couldn't you have held together as a role model?" She was even expected to be role model there. And, um, whether that's good or bad, I honestly don't know. I'm just telling you my memories of it. But I do remember -- and I was brought up in a very death-a-phobic culture. And I was brought up to believe, when you died, that was it. There's nothing more, that's it. It's over with. And I had never been to a funeral other than I made my mother take me to a funeral to know what that was like, before Synanon, it was for an uncle I didn't know very well. And I had not been very much exposed to death or anybody I cared as deeply about until Betty died. And um, Betty had a wonderful brother, Wilbur, and I remember going up to the room at the home place, it's called "Betty's room." And in that room, one of the most beautiful rooms on the property, filled with beautiful artwork and pictures, and up on the shelves that were specially built were these gorgeous urns that had the ashes of other people that had died, and a picture of that person, and a description of who they were. I remember once, it might have been Betty's, touching the ashes, and that was a first for me, and that was very helpful for me to begin to get over the death-a-phobia. And Betty was actually set up in this room as she was dying. And. . . with the beautiful Dior rose sheets, and she was kind of on a platform where people could -- and then there were chairs all around, big comfortable, soft chairs. And people could come and sit, and just be with her in the room. And there's kind of a story, this is true, --legend type of story, but it's true -- um, there's a big picture in there that an artist did, because he was called the horse and she was called the bird, and there's this big beautiful picture, "The Horse Loves the Bird," this big horse and this bird, and that was kind of what their little names were. And he would sit by her side, and people could come in and just sit and be in the room. And I remember having been so close to somebody who had that death rattle in her voice, and wheezing, and she was pretty, you know, not that conscious, and I just remember him holding her hand and saying, "It's alright to let go. It's going to be beautiful. You can let go." Even before she got that bad, different people would come and pledge, you know, "I will stay and take care of Synanon and do this. . . " Of course they left several months afterwards. So people would have a chance to come and talk to her. Very royal-like, you know, she's very much the queen. And I was there the night, supposedly her final words were, "Take care of each other." I was there, even I, I wasn't there when she said that, that's what people said. But I was there after that, when he was holding her hand and saying, "It's alright to let go," and just sitting there by her. There was a whole group of us, sitting around in these chairs, and I was sitting next to Chuck's brother, Bill, and we were in the room, and suddenly a bird flew in the room. And there was no way a bird could get in that room. That's what was so weird. There was a fireplace, like a buck-stove, but it was closed. There was no open window. . . it was just so bizarre. This bird started floating around, and we were sitting like this, we're like. . . you know, like, "Duh, what do we do?" And even though Chuck is in this role of "It's alright to let go," and the soft voice and holding her hand, he turned around and looked at us and you know, "Well open the window and let it out!" You know, it's like, but there was like, "The bird! We can't let it out!" and whatever. And so I remember Bill took one - - it was these big sliding glass doors -- and he took one side and I took the other, and we spread them

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apart, and the bird flew out, and she was gone. The next morning, she was gone. And. . . people were gathered for a celebration of life, right away. A lot of the kids had come by, they'd been, kids who wanted to see her had come, so they had filtered through, so there were a lot of kids on the property right then. You know, this very beautiful ceremony took place immediately. And um, --

Q: And you said that that kind of marked the beginning of the end for the community?

A: Yeah, people have said that. There was a softness, a nurturing, a whole feminine principle that left with her.

Q: Can you describe some of the process that, the ending of the community, what it went through --

A: See, that was '77 --

Q: When she died?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, and the community didn't end till what, 1990 or something?

A: Right. But it changed. It changed then. And I'm not saying I 100% believe that, but there was something that really -- you know a lot of other women tried to keep that going. And, because Betty taught us a lot, I mean she taught me a tremendous amount, just being around her as little as I was, although I was lucky to be around a lot more than most people. But, um, I think women that were, had been around her and benefitted, tried to carry that on, very much so. But, it be--, the community became more hierarchial, more frightened, more, you know. Chuck -- the changing partners right after that. And I love changing partners, I'm not a person that will complain about changing partners, that again was a fabulous learning experience. I am honored and delighted that I took part in it. There was nothing that wasn't easy, but it was um, I feel like I was a part of a little history. And that happened right after that, the vasectomies happened -- and again, there are people that held that in a way, like, that those were bad things. I don't think that was a bad thing. But areas that had been traditionally female areas, the school being one of them -- and for me the school was like the best part of Synanon, best thing that, that there was -- that began to deteriorate, and not be given the resources. It was basically very simple of not being given the resources, in money, in people, in space, in very real ways. And then of course we weren't having any more kids. We were supposed to be taking in the world's children, but then all these legal problems and other things happened. Chuck had a series of strokes -- Chuck's manic-depressive, which I have come to learn a great deal about. And we did not understand the dynamics of that. You know, I had a talk with him, he was wonderful, by the way, he came to visit my son in the hospital. He was one of the only people that did. And um, he said, "I built Synanon in a fit of mania, and then I got depressed and started to destroy it." And, I don't think he -- and I had this thing about, you know, well he can't destroy it: Synanon is us. We're Synanon, he's not Synanon, he's not all there is to Synanon. And um, but with all the other factors in place -- in the form it was in, it separated. I'll just put it that way. And I think there are sparks of it, like a big fire, the embers went all over the place -- I definitely think there are embers of it all over the place. And more and more, you know, with the kind of a new consciousness that's waking up, the new millennium or whatever you want to call it, a lot of the things we did and talked about are coming back into the conversation, and into being. And that's kind of

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fun to see that and to know, "We did that!" People are talking about that like that's the future, well. . . and that's what it felt like when Synanon ended. Like I'd lived in the future and had been propelled back into the past.

Q: Wow. What about that lifestyle have you carried forward to today? Or what did you learn that maybe you've carried forward to today.

A: Wow. It's so much a part of me that it's really hard to separate out. Um, well, um, a lot of things that I had a hard time giving up, I've come to really like, now. Like one of the things that was just unbelievable to me was that I had to go make a meal for my little family, that I had to go shop, a couple times a week and buy the little cartons of milk, you know, it was just unbelievable. Because everything we had had in big quantities and big vats and we'd share it. And now I've really come to like that. I like that aspect of it. I was writing to this woman in Fendhorn about community and how I knew I was going to live in community again, and she just started say, "Yeah, but it must be so nice to have your own little garden." Talking to somebody who is in community, and I was lusting after community, I began to realize, "Oh, there's a lot that I really like about my life." You know, I wouldn't have been able to write a play in that particular lifestyle, I was very busy with our business, which I loved. And I learned a lot, and it wasn't a problem. But as soon as the business was no longer connected to Synanon, I had no interest in it. It was just a business, and it didn't have a heart of soul to me, I had no interest in selling stuff to maintain my, um -- not that that's bad. It's a fine business, and I'm still connected with it. I still am able to, you know, have my house cleaned, and have a horse, because I'm still connected in that business, and a little bit of money comes in from it. But to have that big a focus of my life, there was no, no interest in that. And then I began to, because I was not connected [tape ends]. . . oh absolutely. Oh definitely, without a doubt.

Q: Would you like to get Synanon people together and do it again with them?

A: We talk about it, a lot of us talk about having it happen, in a very sophisticated way. Yeah, and it'll happen. I have no doubt it'll happen. Yeah, I never thought I'd be in this house more than five years, and it's already been three, and um -- although parts of it are starting to grow on me, I have to admit. It's not where I'm going to end up. Yeah, I'll definitely live communally again.

Q: What do you miss the most?

A: Hot and cold running: people. People. I've said this before: easy access to the hearts of so many people. Just, wherever you are, there are people around to talk to you at all hours of the night, to be with you and share your joys and share your griefs, and make something happen, bounce ideas off of, and, you know, make something happen. People that you know really well. And they know you. And you've got the same goals, and um, . . . kind of a consciousness. Kind of a very clear, awake, aware, consciousness. I mean, I have that. I don't -- those are things that I don't not have, but that was something I really loved about community. And I am not a lonely person. I am totally surrounded by people, I've got an unbelievable collection of people that have come together to put this play on. And they're all new people and it's all very exciting. So it's not like I'm an isolated person, I had it in community, and now I don't. But that was something that, just having it there. I mean, that was wonderful. I also loved the physical surroundings. This didn't have anything to do with Synanon per se,

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it's just that when we were in the country, I just loved the fresh air, and acre after acre where I could go and have solitude, or run into a herd of deer or a herd of cows, or, you know, I loved being in the country.

Q: If a group of people were going to live together communally, what advice would you give them?

A: Be very aware of the systems and the structures, and the goals. Be very aware of what your goals are, and be very honest about why you want to live together. And it's okay if it's some reason like "I don't want to cook," or, whatever. And people have to be very, very clear about what they're doing together, and what the systems are. That gave us a lot of freedom, you know, for everything that you might say that's wrong with the benevolent dictatorship, that gives you a tremendous amount of freedom. And um, at a certain point, I think Chuck really was tapped into some kind of, his own genius, or some kind of wisdom, that he lost. He lost when he started drinking again, he lost when his manic-depression kicked in, he lost maybe when Betty died, I don't know. And when he was tapped into that, people could follow him and still be following their own dreams, and not be in conflict with their own dreams. And, um, if you don't have that, you know, if you don't have a charismatic leader or benevolent dictatorship, then you have to have people in contact with what their dreams are. They have to know why they're coming together. And it has to be very clear what the structure is, and what the systems are. And if you have really good systems, then the rest will fall into place. And then, also openness to change. You have to be, you have to leave room for constant change and constant growth. 'Cause it will grow and it will change. And if you don't allow that to happen, then you've created a prison for yourself, instead of a community.

Q: As a final question, would you look back at your time in Synanon as a success or a failure?

A: Absolutely a success. Wild, crazy, success.

Q: And why do you say that?

A: Because I feel we made a positive -- we changed the world in a positive way, we took care of a lot of people, we learned a lot about ourselves and each other. We ran successful businesses. We raised successful kids. We had experiences, like jumping out of airplanes, learning to fly airplanes, learning how to camp. We pushed ourselves to the edge of our fears, we confronted our fears and pushed ourselves, as individuals internally and each other. And provided support network for each other, and, you know, attained a level of consciousness about the world that we lived in, the planet that we lived on, the people that we lived with. . . .