Interview with Michael Broili
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
September 5, 1996

Q: September 5th, and an interview with Michael Broili. I don't know anything about your communal involvement, so I'd love to hear about your background, what led to you becoming involved in communal living.

A: I was in college. Started college in 1968, [unintelligible] ... and in the Spring of '69, was the first time I heard about The Mines. I was in a forestry class, associate degree forestry class, [unintelligible] Community College. Kept hearing about The Mines. And so I was interested in finding out more about it. It had quite a reputation. Grandpa Hewitt [?] and Indian Billy, who were known as The Old Man and The Indian, had a propensity to shoot at people that wandered into The Mines. The Mines were somewhere around -- there was 150 claims on the little north fork of the San Iam [?] River. Grandpa Hewitt had come in there on Indian trails back around the turn of the century. Mules and stuff. He was the one who pulled it all together, and they eventually bought out all the miners, and created the San Iam Mining District. Maintained the mining camp, 150 claims, up until 1969. Through numerous -- they raised money, some of them probably questionably, through stock and so forth. He built 3 camps. Upper camp, Middle camp, and Lower camp. But the ore wasn't rich enough to really warrant full scale production, and I don't think he was really interested in full scale production, I'm not sure, I never really got to know him. I came there just as he died. His grandsons inherited the place by proxy, through one of their mothers, who was married to a politician. We were all ex-military, Vietnam vets. So anyway, I went in there, it was in the spring of '69, I believe. Me and two other fellows decided we were going to take motorcycles and ride in, and so we did. About halfway in, we met this woman who was driving out. The way it was set up, there was a forest service road that went up to this big gate. At the gate, there was no way to get past the gate, it was a major gate. Well-locked and protected and barred. But you could get a motorcycle in it, which we did. We were riding in about halfway, it was about 3 and a half miles into the camp. We didn't know what was in there, we had never been there before. We expected anything, because we'd heard all these horror stories and stuff. We were curious and young and foolish. We met this woman coming out. She went off on us, just screaming and hollering and telling us to get out of there, and just being really obnoxious. So we told her that we were just interested in going through to the top. We had looked on the map, and we knew that the road eventually came out up on top of the pass, the head of Battle Ax Creek. And so anyway, she went on out, and as soon as she was out of sight, we continued on in, and came upon the mining camp, which was a small town. It was like stepping back 60, 70, 80 years. Pretty much a flash. We were met there by this woman's husband, Arnie [?] McDonald. And he was a little mellower, but he told us that we weren't to go into any of the mines, and gave us a lecture about this, that, and the other. So we said, "Okay, that's fine, we're not going to disturb anything. We're just here to look around." So we continued up the road. We got way up on top, and we couldn't get through because of the snow. So we turned around and came back out. And that was our first time in there, and it was really beautiful. It was virtually unlogged. Never been touched. There were some patches that had been touched. Old mine shafts, and this old steam equipment. It was a major flash. So I was determined to go back, because I was really turned on by it. So I went back maybe a month or two later, by myself. And met this other fellow, who -- nice guy. We got to talking, and we got to be friends. So I got to go get up there frequently. He lived there, along with a couple of other guys, and their families. So, after about 7, 8 months of getting to know them, becoming friends, and so forth, they invited me to move up if I wanted to. Which I jumped at. I was pretty much done with college, hadn't graduated, but at that point I didn't give a shit whether I graduated or not.

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Q: Where were you going to school?
A: I was going to school at Mt. Angel at the time. Working on a degree in fine arts.

Q: Where is that?
A: That's in Mt. Angel, Oregon, out of Salem. So I moved up there with my wife, and lived there for almost 2 years. I could spend days telling you about it, because there was so much that happened, that it's just brushing over the top. In fact, there was a book written by a writer from Time-Life about the whole thing. It's actually where the spotted owl issue started. In fact, the spotted own issue started there in order to save the mines from being logged. Loggers had been wanting to log it for, have [unintelligible] forever. Because it's virgin, never been touched. There's trees up there that are a thousand years old. The most gorgeous canyon you're ever walked through. So the spotted owl issue was the way that they saved it. And it's, to this day, it's still there because of that. So I lived there for 2 years. And it wasn't your typical love and peace hippie commune. It was more just the opposite. Everyone there were ex-Vietnam vets, and some of us had seen battle, and we weren't shy of confrontation, and we carried on Grandpa Hewitt's legacy of wing 'em in the knee philosophy. Most everybody carried guns. Either side arms or rifles most of the places we went. It was a big area . I think it's about, 150 claims -- 1500 acres? And we had to maintain the claims, do the assessment work in order to justify our existence there. So we were required to do some work, maintain the roads, do assessment work on the camps. We had to cut our wood, because we were snowed in for 4 or 5 months in the year. So the summer was spent cutting wood, getting things together, and doing the assessment work, getting ready for the winter, getting stores and supplies in. The mines got $200 a month for their existence. We got nothing for living there. Which was fine -- that was the understanding going in. We were moving there because of the lifestyle. And $200 a month is nothing to keep up an operation as big as that was. That was all there was. And so we had to make do with whatever equipment and tools and stuff that was there, which there was 70, 80 years of stuff there. So there was a lot of -- we learned to Jerry rig [?] and make do with what you had, and salvage nails out of boards and pound them straight just to build another place, or to restore what was there. Of the three original camps, only the middle camp survived. The other ones, the snow took out over the years, because they were let go. The middle camp was where the married people lived, during the heyday of the mines. Grandpa Hewitt -- and of course as married people will, they would get to bickering with each other, especially in the long winters and stuff, and Grandpa Hewitt called that "jaw boning." And the place became known as Jawbone Flats. It was right at the confluence of where Battle Ax and Opal [?] Creek met. It was a flat there. Jawbone Flats is still there. That's where we lived.

Q: Did you live in cabins, or what sort of dwellings?
A: Yeah, cabins. Some place, there's -- I wish I had all this stuff together -- some place there's a newspaper article about the whole thing, with pictures of us up there and stuff. Each family had their own cabin. There was like a garage, there was a supply shed, there was the galley and the cook house. The cook house was storage. There were maybe 20, 25 buildings total, a number of them residences all the way from one room cabins to the big house where Grandpa Hewitt lived, which had a huge Oriental rug, and a big grand piano. That was where everybody sort of -- that was the center, nobody lived there, it was kept for the gatherings, and if guests came up, they would stay there. Everybody else lived in the

other cabins, all of which are still there, except for the Big House, which burned. We built a new one, which was much more dramatic [?] than the original old one. But anyway, each family had their own house. There was no electricity. The running water came from a water line that was way up the mountain and freezed in the winter, so you had to pack your water. Wood stoves. The only electricity we had was what you could generate from a battery, and we had a Briggs [?] and Stratton [?] with an automobile generator that would charge the batteries, and then you just run your lights or your radio or whatever from that battery, that you charged when you needed to. I designed the water line that actually put the -- this I do have. I was the water and power engineer. So I wrote the proposal for the new water line, which was to supply both drinking water, fire protection, and water for [unintelligible], so they'd have power. Which we put in, and it's still there, still operational.

Q: And where did the water come from?
A: One of the creeks up above, about a mile up above the camp. Here's the original proposal I wrote. Let's see if there's a date on it. I guess not.

Q: Did you have to treat the water to drink it?
A: Oh, no. This was spring water. No one lives above us. We were so far up in the wilderness that there was nothing above us. There were some vehicles there, real old beaters, most of them antique. We kept those running.

Q: Where was the nearest town?
A: It was Mahama [?], which was 25 miles.

Q: What part of the state is it in?
A: East of Salem. Up in the west slope of the cascades.

Q: And about how many people were there?
A: At its peak, I was trying to figure that out earlier, there were 6 families, with children, and the children were home schooled. Each person in the group -- I taught history. These kids are all grown up today, and I see them all the time. They've got children now of their own.

Q: Did you guys eat your meals together?
A: No.

Q: So families ate separately?
A: Yeah. We were not so idealistic as to think -- we weren't into that kind of a gig. It was a room, and we wanted the privacy. We did a lot of things together. It was not uncommon to end up having a community dinner, little holidays. The way we worked basically, especially in the summer time, was we would get up pretty early, like 5 o'clock in the morning, and work until noon.

Q: On the mines?
A: Doing whatever, roadwork, or cutting wood, or whatever had to be done. And then we'd knock off at noon. And there was a big swimming hole right there in the camp, so the whole clan would go out there in the swimming hole. Of course, nudity was no big deal then, and the kids and women, everybody, would just go down to the beach, and that's where we'd spend many of our afternoons, swimming, and visiting, and so forth. We always had a lot of people coming up and visiting, especially on weekends, for three and four days. And it was understood that you brought your own food, because we didn't have anything. We were too poor to spare anything, and they always brought gifts and things -- gifts in terms of lots of food, case of beer, whatever. So they -- and they were also required to work, if you came up you didn't just sit around and visit. There was work to be done, and when work was going on, you worked with us. And it was always fun. There were never any -- nobody every killed themselves. But -- we'd go into the mines, some of the mines were a quarter of a mile deep. Some of them went up, some of them very dangerous, some of them you had to climb over cave-ins, up to you waist in water.

Q: Did anyone ever get hurt?
A: No, not seriously.

Q: Did you guys have meetings or anything like that?
A: Oh yeah. If there was any problems or whatever, the group would get together and we'd hash things out. There was never any real big confrontations. We were busted three or four times, or attempted to be busted over different things. They thought we were growing drugs up there. It's not that we probably wouldn't have tried, but there was poor soil, and we were in a canyon, so you didn't have a lot of sunlight, and a short season, so you couldn't grow anything if you wanted to. You couldn't even hardly grow a garden. Let alone anything like that. But they had these fantasies. And that was during the time when they were bombing the ROTC's and stuff. Some of the people who had been involved in some of that had visited at the mines, so they thought that this was the center of all of this. They wanted to -- this was their fantasy. It wasn't. So a couple of times the state police with the National Guard and stuff would surround the place and take it by force, and find nothing, so they'd have to go away with their tail between their legs.

Q: So did they see you as hippies?
A: Oh, we were. I had hair clear down the middle of my back.

Q: But not the peace and love and flower children kind?
A: No, we were of the vintage of that movie, where Burt Reynolds was floating down that canyon -- Deliverance. It was sort of a Deliverance sort of thing. People came in there with fear, and drowned. That's what we wanted, because we had people trying to jump the claims, and people would go into the mines. And so we never outright threatened anyone, but we'd get in their face, and we'd do whatever we could to scare them, because we didn't want them there first off, this was our private domain, even though it was public property.

Q: Right. So that's why that woman had chewed you out when you rode in?
A: Yeah, that was part of the gig.

Q: So did you become friends with her eventually?
A: Actually, no. Her and her husband turned out to be major crazy. As an example -- I can start getting into some of the stories -- one of the things that they did one day, Larry McDonald always carried a 357 Magnum. The chicken house was next to his place. This happened just before I moved up, I missed this, actually, but I've heard this story so many times. So he woke up, and he didn't like the chickens being next to him, and he tried to get everybody to let him move the chickens away, and they wouldn't, because that was where they were, and it was a big hassle to move them. One morning he woke up, and the rooster was crowing. So he grabbed his 357 Magnum, and he was stark naked, walked out into the chicken coop, threw open the door, and blew the head off of this rooster. And the rooster -- chickens don't just fall over dead, they start flying around. And its feet got in his hair, and he's throwing blood all over, and Larry's freaking out. Of course, the gun shot, everybody comes running out of the cabins. And they run out, and here's Larry McDonald running down the street, stark naked, with a gun in his hand, this chicken in his hair, and blood spurting all over the place. It was a pretty good scene. So that was a Larry McDonald story. It was that kind of shit that got him kicked out. They finally asked him to leave, he was too far out on the edge. He was the kind of guy that actually would kill somebody eventually, we were afraid. He got into a lot of trouble after he was thrown out. In fact, I think he ended up getting shot. Not killed, but he got shot by somebody for burglary or something weird. But no, we weren't the peace and love type hippies, we were very aggressive. Like I said, we all carried guns. One of the leaders, one of the main people, there was some real talent. Some of those people, who I probably won't name, because they don't know about this, they are major businessmen. Smart businessmen. They weren't willing to put up with that kind of crap. The point I was going to make was that one of the things that everybody was told that first came there was, "You're welcome to wear a gun or carry a gun, but the minute you put it on, remember you have to accept 2 pieces of responsibility. One, is that you may have to shoot somebody. And two, you may bet shot. And if you're not willing to accept that reality, then don't put on the gun." That was made really clear up front, so that no one had any illusions about it. Because a couple of times, it came -- things got kind of heavy duty a couple of times. That was an issue that people had to accept, or you didn't partake in that. But everybody did. I was the sheriff. Even had a little sign. In fact, one of the times when they busted us, this guy went through my cabin and he started opening books and stuff. Somebody said, "What are you doing searching us?" And he said, "Oh, I saw you were sheriff, so we were just looking at your records." He knew what the deal was, but he was pushing the deal.

Q: This is such an interesting place. I haven't encountered another group quite like this one. What about groceries and things? Did you have to pack in a ton of food for the winter?
A: Yeah. That was a big deal. We made up lists. There was a road in. But it was gated. One of the things you had to was cross Opal Creek Bridge, which was 100 feet up, and it was a logged bridge. Which was just wide enough for a car to drive across. And it was 50 years old. So it was -- the first time, anybody who even walked across it, the first time they walked across it, there were people who wouldn't walk across it. And we drove across it, which freaked people out big time. We did some really stupid things.

They're half bridges, where the bridge is built out from the cliff, just to give you enough road to drive. And it's 150, 200 feet down into the canyon. One time going around one of the corners in the snow, with a 4 wheel drive rig we had, we started sliding. They got it stopped. I was on the outboard side, and that was the side on the cliff side, we were coming in. When they got it stopped, I opened the door, and I was looking straight down. I had to climb out over the top. So we got it back on the road. It was stuff like that. But like I said, we were young and foolish. We were invincible at that time.

Q: Was everybody there pretty young?
A: Yeah. Late 20's. Like I said, we were all Vietnam vets for the most part. Between 25 and 30.

Q: Were you able to make do financially there, or did some people have to go outside to do some work?
A: No. We got $200 a month, which was for propane. We got a big propane tank, so everybody had a propane stove, and there was one propane refrigerator. You had to have your own source of food. After the first year, the mines were bought by someone with money, and from then on, the finances were not a problem.

Q: They paid you more?
A: They paid for the food, and we got like $50 a month cash for living there. But still, we got food money, and allotments, and money to put new roofs on the buildings, because the roofs were starting to come off, and there was no way to repair them anymore, to stop any degradation of the buildings that were there, to save them. And they're still there.

Q: Is it still being used as a mine camp?
A: No, it's actually now owned by the Friends of Opal Creek. When I lived there, it was unusual to see 30 or 40 people come through in the summer. Now there's 10, 15 thousand that come through in the summer. It became very popular.

Q: So they must have fixed the road and the bridge in?
A: No. You still have to walk in. They did put a new bridge over Opal Creek. But the road itself is still pretty much the same, and you still can't get in, you still have to have a key to the gate if you're going to drive in, otherwise you have to walk in. So you could actually hike up there if you wanted to, it would be one of the more beautiful trips you ever made.

Q: So it's like an educational center now?
A: That's what had to happen in order to save it. It finally was bought. The spotted own issue kept it, and then we finally got the people that owned it to donate it to the Friends of Opal Creek, which became a bunch of rich people. Now the bunch of rich people had their hands into a bunch of rich liberals, they fought to keep it, and so now it's become this educational center, and that's what saved it from being logged. That's what had to happen, unfortunately. It's sort of sad in one way, but it's still there. So it's good for that. I'm just really glad that I got to be a part of that, back before it turned into a tourist trap.

Q: How long did you live there?
A: A couple years?

Q: Was there anybody that played the role of leader?
A: Yeah. I'll leave his name out of it. They're names still fairly well known throughout Oregon. If you wanted to do some research, you could probably figure them out on your own.

Q: I don't need to know the name, I was just curious if there was a leader figure.
A: Yeah, there was. There was actually 2 leaders, they were cousins. They were related to Grandpa Hewitt.

Q: So they kind of inherited --?
A: One of them grew up on his grandfather's knee, and knew geology, and was very sharp in that respect. The other one was also a grandson. So those two guys were sort of the head honchos, if you will.

Q: Were there any rules, either written or not, about conduct or anything.
A: Unwritten rules, sure. There weren't many. We didn't want people who had dogs that killed the chickens. In fact, I shot my dog, much to the disgruntle of some of the ladies at camp, because he twice killed a bunch of chickens. And -- I don't know how to tell you.

Q: There were just things you did do, and things you didn't do.
A: Yeah, nothing that had to be spoken, it was sort of known. You backed each other up, you didn't lie and cheat with each other, you did the work that needed to be done. There was never a question. Larry McDonald was the only one that pushed the edge, and he was just too crazy for the rest of us. And all of us were crazy to start with, still are. So you had to be way out there in order to get kicked out. To give you an example of the kind of thing that wasn't tolerated, or was frowned on, I'm sure the peace and love hippies would be aghast at this, but there was a guy who I'd been going to school with, who heard that I was living up there, and came up to visit. He was sort of timid. And he's heard these stories, and he didn't know. So he was walking in to visit, and somebody had come in and seen him jump off the road and hide. And they couldn't find him, so they alerted the camp, so we all went out to find this person. That was the way we did things. We figured if they were hiding, they were up to no good. So we found him, turns out to be this guy I knew. So I took him aside and said, "Hey, this is bull shit. You're hiding, jumping off the road and running -- what kind of a deal is this?" He said, "I didn't know." I said, "Well what were you doing up here if you don't know?" He said, "Well I came to see you." "Well why didn't you just stay on the road and tell somebody that." He said, "I was afraid," and I said, " You're not welcome here." And that was pretty much the way people felt about it. Either you had the balls to come up and talk to people and face people down and be straight forward -- because we respected that. We didn't respect wimps and whiners and people who were afraid of anything. You had to have the courage of your convictions, I guess that's the way to put it. If you didn't, hit the street. It wasn't even a rule, it was just a foregone conclusion. You had to be willing to do whatever was necessary to keep it together.

Q: Did you guys get any hippie crashers that would show up, who didn't know anybody there, but just heard about it?
A: Sure. Again, if they came in and they were willing to work, and weren't intimidated, then we felt we could trust them, and they were welcome. We called everybody grubes, that didn't live there, it meant an outsider. Or some guys would refer to them as flat land shoe salesman.

Q: Now could someone, if someone showed up and was a hard worker and all, could they move into a cabin?
A: That happened. Sure. That's how I got there. I wish I could find all that stuff. You could read the book. Show Down at Opal Creek is the name of the book. And it pretty much covers the story between the two. I guess I might as well tell you the names of the people, because it's in the book, but I'm not telling you anything that really isn't in the book. George Utia [?] was one of the main players. He was Senator Grant's nephew. Grandpa Hewitt's daughter married Vic Utia. And Tom Utia was the son of Vic Utia, and Tom was one of the two people, and George, his cousin, was the other one. So the mines were actually under the control of Senator Utia at the time. He was a little concerned because his name was sort of in the limelight. It was because of that we were able to get away with a lot of shit . We had a senator on our side, later a governor. One of the friends that I brought up, Tom Hirens [?], is the logging side of the spotted owl issue. He represents the Oregon loggers' group. And George represents the environmental side. So these were two guys who worked together at the mines together, who now represent opposite extremes of the environmental issue. That's what the Show Down at Opal Creek was about, these two people. So if you read that, you'll learn a lot about the mines. I've got the book around here someplace, but I don't know where -- I've got so many damn many books. I've got the newspaper article that was published at the time we were living there. I think it was from the Oregonian. It might be in my chest there or someplace.

Q: Did people do any sort of artistic type of stuff in their spare time, like crafts, or anything like that?
A: Some of the ladies did. We were too busy surviving.

Q: Did you have outhouses?
A: Yeah. Sixty cords of wood we had to chop to get through the winter.

Q: Now you said you put in a water system, but before that you had to carry your water?
A: There was a water system there, but it was very undependable, and it wasn't sufficient to do anything but supply drinking water. There wasn't enough for any fire protection system or for [unintelligible] the wheel or anything like that. So after these people bought the mines, then there was money, and that's when I did the water system.

Q: How did you deal with things like bathing and washing clothes and stuff like that?
A: Down at the creek.

Q: What about the winter?
A: Heat some stuff up.

Q: Would this be a propane stove?
A: We also had a shower. A couple of houses had wood-fired hot water heaters. In fact, I found all the parts and built a new one. So we ended up with 3 showers in the camp. At the end. Originally there was only 1, and then we got another one going, and later the third one. All wood fire. And all the stuff was there. There was very little we ever bought and brought in. Grandpa Hewitt had been stockpiling this stuff for years and years and years. And that was the reason it was able to survive, because there was that backlog of spare parts. Plus our own ingenuity in terms of making do with what you had, and improvising.

Q: Did you cook on a wood stove or propane?
A: Some cabins had both. Wood ranges and propane stoves. And some of them had just propane. Most of them had wood cook stoves. They all had barrel stoves, that was all the heat that you had, big 55 gallon drums with cast metal fronts on them.

Q: For you, what was the best part of living at the mines, what did you like the most about it?
A: The community feeling. The place -- it's the most beautiful place I've ever been in my life, and I've been all over the world. Virgin, uncut, steams, pools, thousand year old trees. Things were the way they were a thousand years ago, and I was living in the middle of it. This fantasy, I couldn't have dreamed up a better trip. Also the community, and the place were living, and the testing your manhood sort of thing. It was like living 100 years before. It was testing all your skills, your ability to survive, to deal with adversity.

Q: Was there a downside?
A: I can't think of any.

Q: Did it get kind of hard sometimes in the winter?
A: Yeah, but that was part of the -- well, not really "hard." I'm sure that the ladies would tell you a different story. But I think they enjoyed it, and the children loved it. They still -- it's the main point in their lives, all of them. It's the one thing they remember most. Some of them were 6 at the time, all the way up to 14. A couple of the older girls. They remember it fondly. And I think most of the women do too.

Q: Why did you end up leaving?
A: After it was bought, the politics got kind of strange, and I was ready to try something different. These friends of mine opened up the hottest new tavern in Portland at the time. And the mines were tied in with the tavern in terms of friends and the people they knew, so I was invited to come tend bar. They opened this new tavern, so I got to live the next fantasy, unattached bachelor tending bar in the hottest tavern in the Pacific Northwest.

Q: Was that fun?
A: Oh yeah. I could only handle it for a year though. I burned out big time, and moved to Alaska.

Q: Wow. Where in Alaska did you live? Because I'm going to go up there next week. I'm going to Homer [?].
A: I lived not far from Homer, 60 miles on the Keynine [?] Peninsula. At Kasilof [?]. That's just north of Homer.

Q: Did you ever know of any communal groups in that area, or in Alaska?
A: Not really.

Q: It's more homesteaders, isn't it?
A: Yeah. Very much so. Real anarchists.

Q: How long did this mines community last after you left?
A: It's still going on today. Now it's just the caretakers -- the actual situation, I guess, lasted from '68 through '75. But people have lived there since Grandpa Hewitt first walked in there on the Indian trails.

Q: And when was that?
A: Turn of the century. There were so many stories, some I hesitate to tell you, because they're not even in the books. Nobody wants to be the one to reveal it. But one of the things we did was, at the Black Prince cabin, up one of the side canyons, the Black Prince mine, not far from it is Grandpa Hewitt's original homestead. The cabin's pretty much gone, it was a log cabin that collapsed. You still find little artifacts around. You can see where the cabin was. And there was an anvil up there that Grandpa Hewitt had taken in. So the deal was whoever carried the anvil out got to keep it. It's three miles from where the cabin was down this path. This is steep terrain. I'm talking about within less than half a mile horizontal distance, it was 3,000 foot elevation change. So we're in a canyon, this is steep stuff. So the deal was whoever carried out the anvil got to keep it. Tom and myself David Green, who's a real stocky guy were up there one day, just screwing around, so we said, "Well, let's carry the anvil out." So we said, "Okay." So first David [tape ends] ... I don't know, a couple thousand feet, and poops out. So Tom takes it. And he poops out. I'm getting a little disgusted with this, and again, you've got to understand, this was not a typical hippie trip. Everybody was out to prove how macho they could be, and how manly, and we were living the Wild West trip. To full born. So I was as macho as any of them could be, so I got disgusted with them, and said, "You're a bunch of God dammed panty waste. I'll show you how to get this anvil out of here." So I threw it up on my shoulder, and I took off. I can be pretty committed to things, so I just closed my mind off, and just focused on getting that anvil out. I didn't stop. I walked nonstop all the way down to the road, which was at least a good 3 miles. So supposedly I got to keep the anvil. I never kept it, it's still up at the mines. What are you going to do with an anvil? So that was sort of, illustrates some of the attitude of people. Who could outdo the other. We had a bunch of dynamite, and for the fourth of July, we would cut up dynamite into quarter sticks, take a stick of dynamite and cut it into fourths, and put fuses in it, and we'd blow up anything we could find, with quarter sticks of dynamite. We'd go through a half a case of dynamite. So anyway, we had this one box of dynamite that was sweating really bad. The nitroglycerine was going to the surface, and it makes it very dangerous when it's that way, you don't want to use it, because it's too volatile. So we decided we were going to detonate it the next morning, get rid of it. So we went over across the creek, there was this flat area,

where the saw mill had been. There was this big log and some sawdust piles. The mill was gone, but the area was there. So Billy and I went over there, and took this half case of dynamite, and put a fuse into it, and put it on one side of the log. This was like 5:30 in the morning. Because we got up at 5, and we worked until noon. That was our first job. So Billy and I went over there. Touched it off, and -- the log was between us. This was a big log, 4 or 5 foot diameter. So we jumped across the log, and we get down behind the log, and put our fingers in our ears, and of course it goes off. Like I've said, we're in this canyon. It's a lot louder than what we had been thinking it was going to be. And this one woman who's husband was sort of accident prone, was woken up out of a dead sleep, and she was a very vicious woman, had a really mouth. She came running out of the cabin, stark naked, screaming, "Oh my God, Ron has been killed!" She's running down the street, expecting to find her husband dead. And then when she found out he wasn't, then she was really pissed off. And she was pissed off at Billy and I, because we scared her half to death at 5:30 in the morning with this huge explosion. So we had to suffer the wrath of her for about a week before she finally mellowed out. Another time, we had to build a bridge across one of the creeks in order to get to the other side to get wood. So we felled this tree, which was 4 foot on the small end, and it was 5 and a half foot in diameter on the big end. It was 80 feet long. We needed 2 pieces to string across to lay stuff on, build the road across. So what we did was we drilled holes every two feet into the log, down to the center, and then we put quarter sticks of dynamite in each hole, and poured mud into it and hooked this all up to a wire, so it would go off at once. We had never done this before, we just sort of read about it. It worked. We split this log right in half, which is what we were trying to do. Split it right in half, and then we used this old beat-up cat [?] that would barely work, it took us almost 4 days to get the logs across. But we split the log, and built the bridge, that's the kind of stuff we were doing. It was big time stuff with little time knowledge and equipment.

Q: Did you have any sort of system for dividing up the work?
A: No.

Q: Did you have people who were freeloaders?
A: No. It wasn't tolerated. Well, I take that back. There was one guy who was a freeloader, and he was despised, but he was a well-to-do guy, sort of a fop. He wanted to come up and stay, he was a friend of the family, and Vic had said he'd come up and stay the summer. So he did, and he wouldn't work. We just put up with it, because there wasn't anything we could do about that. But he was the only one. He always dressed nice, he always had a jumpsuit on, and he'd come out with a martini at 10. It was really out of step with what everything else was going on. So it was a very strange situation. But he was funny, and we got to like him, and that was his contribution, was he was always there with a cocktail when it was time to break, so he was okay.

Q: Were there other unforgettable characters?
A: There was lots of them, everybody there. Some of them are dead. In fact, quite a few of them. There was the time that Larry McDonald, this is just before he left, and Billy, were coming in -- they'd been into town to pick up something. And they were coming in, they were inside the gate, and about halfway in they ran into these two high school kids. So they stopped and gave them the old song and dance, "Don't go into the mines," got tough with them so they'll leave things alone. And as they drove off, Billy heard

one of them telling them, "Go fuck yourself," under his breath. Billy heard it, and he didn't say anything to Larry until they got into camp. And he told Larry, "One of those kids told us to go fuck ourselves when we drove off." So they put their groceries away, and they went out and sat on Billy's front porch. The cabins line the main street that went through the camp. They were maybe as far apart as from here to the houses over there, it's about this wide apart. The street just went through, this dirt street. And these kids came on in. And Billy and Larry were sitting on the first house on the left, coming in. And I was up about 3 houses on the right, and I was sitting on my porch with some friends. This was in the evening. This was in the summer time, maybe 6 o'clock in the evening. I saw these two guys walking in. I saw Billy and Larry McDonald walk out to meet them. So what happened was is Larry and Billy are talking to each other, and Billy had a rifle which he left on the porch, and McDonald had his 357 Magnum pistol on. They walk up, and Larry said, "Are these the ones you said told us to go fuck off when we were up there?" And Billy said, "Yeah. It was that one there." Larry said, "What do you think we should do?" Billy said, "I don't know. They haven't found those other two we threw down that other mine shaft up there. We could do that with them. " Larry said, "No, it's getting too full up there, we don't want to do that." Just telling them stuff to scare them. Finally Billy said, "Why don't we just shoot them?" Larry said, "Sure, that's fine with me." And so he takes out his 357 Magnum and hands it to Billy, and then turns around and bends over and puts his fingers in his ears. So his back is to these two guys, and Billy's standing there with this 357 Magnum, looking at Larry bent over, and he's looking at these two kids, and by now they're starting to get real paranoid. So Billy figures, "Sure, why not." And he lets go a round right between them. He wasn't trying to hit them, it was over their head and stuff. Well two things happened. Of course, they turned to jello right there, they fell down on their knees and were screaming and begging for forgiveness and so forth. And Larry thought Billy had actually shot them. And so now he jumps up and whirls around and his eyes are real big, and he's expecting to see this carnage. So anyway, that was that. It turns out that the kids apologized profusely, and they turned out to be nice kids, and actually came back 2 or 3 times after that. But that was part of the initiation that you had to go through. If you could put up with the bs on the first time, then that was cool. Then there was the time when there was a prison break down in Salem. They came over the top. I'm not going to tell that story. But anyway.

Q: Were there any other communes in your area at all?
A: I think there was something at Brighton [?] Bush Hot Springs. They were over the hill from us, and we didn't know anything about them, and I don't know what they knew about us. Most people that knew about the mines, it was not as a commune, but, it was looked on as the Deliverance sort of thing. Only the bravest. And families would come in there. If it was a man and a woman and their children and stuff, we would tell them, "Hey, stay out of the tunnels." The only people who we really got into their face were people who looked like were potential trouble. Either they had guns on -- lot of people came in with guns -- or they had mining equipment, looking to jump our claims. These were legitimate claims. Part of our trip was to keep people from jumping the claims. Or young kids that were just into vandalism or stuff. If it was just a family, we just told them to stay out of the claims, stay out of the mines, stay on the road, and enjoy yourself. So we didn't get in the face of families. It was only people who were potential trouble. The whole idea was to scare them enough to where they'd stay out of the claims and stuff, bide by the rules if you will. From the top down to the gate, there was a gate at the top too, it was 12 miles between the two gates. So that was a lot of area that we had to control. Most of the people

came in from the bottom, but there were people who came in from the top and would vandalize stuff. So this wasn't just a whim, there was actually reason for being this way. We all enjoyed it immensely, but it wasn't just a frivolous sort of aggressiveness, there was actually a reason for doing it.

Q: Are there things that you learned during your time at the mines that you've carried forward into your life today?

A: Absolutely. I learned how to survive with nothing. I learned how to make do with whatever you had. Improvise. We'd get old equipment running that hadn't run for 20 years. We'd steal off of other things, we'd make do, we'd jerry rig, whatever you had to do to make it work. The thing that's most important, which is the whole focus of my being, from here on, the rest of my life, is community. My whole goal now is to global sustainability, sustainable communities. I'm working on developing this street here into a community. I had a community garage sale, and just last Sunday I had a community potluck. There's 36 houses on this block, 20 people responded, and they loved it. They were ecstatic, it's the best thing that ever happened. And they want to do more of it. So I'm turning this map into a directory, so everybody that came up their name and phone number and everything. I'm going to turn it into a regular directory that'll have everybody's name and phone number, and I'll pass it out. And I'm doing this on my own, because it's a part of the learning process, and development of community. The reason I'm doing it is because the most memorable time in my life was the time at the mines. The brotherhood, the comradery, the togetherness, the working together, I would give anything to get back to that again. So that's what I'm interested in doing on a big scale. And in the main stream, not in the mining camps someplace. Doing it so everyone can get involved. That's 99% of what you see around here in books and stuff. I'm a sailor, I'm gone for 2 months out of every 4. Six months I'm at sea, six months I'm home. When I'm home, I put all my energy in that with the goal of not ever going back to sea again, come next June. Doing it full time. So that's what I learned out of it. It's taken a few years to get there to here, but it was that -- that helped give me my focus now. When I sat down -- the last 2 and a half, 3 years, I've been doing the research, trying to figure out -- okay, I've done most everything I've ever wanted to do in my life. Money had not been the driving force. Adventure, experience, is what drives me. And I've done everything I've wanted to do. So there was a point in time when it was time to make decision, okay, what do I want to do -- I'm 54 now. I figure I've got one more good gig in my life span, and so what is it I want to do? So the last three years have been spent trying to figure that out. Global sustainability is the big picture goal. There's a lot of tools. Permaculture, bioregional mapping, bioregional planning, sustainable communities, ecovillages, etcetera. I've got books down here on community environments and community roots. So that has led me to this. In fact, one of my goals this time home is to make a trip down to Opal Creek. Just to get back in touch. It's about 12 miles down Opal Creek from Opal Lake, into the mining camp. It used to be there was no trail, now there's a trail down Opal Creek. One of our trips was 2 or 3 of us would go up to Opal Lake, have somebody drop us off, and then we would hike down Opal Creek for 12 miles, through this totally virgin, beautiful, untouched -- no trails or anything. And we'd fly fish as we went along, and it took 12 hours to do it. You'd end up coming into camp right after dark. That would be our gig for the day. We used to have dogs, everybody had dogs. The dogs were the most powerful dogs around. They ran everywhere. We had vehicles that were in the mines, and they never rode in the vehicles, we forbade them. Dogs ran. And they'd run 12 miles up and 12 miles back down the roads and stuff. They went with us everywhere.

Q: Did you hunt for food at all?
A: There was nothing to hunt for.

Q: There weren't animals around?
A: This is up in the middle of a forest.

Q: So there weren't deer and things like that.
A: No, not in the forest. Along the edge of forests, where the grasslands and the forest meet, or the river, are the riperian zones. That's where you find your wildlife. You get into a deep forest, there's very little wildlife there.

Q: I didn't even know that. I figured there would be bear and deer and things like that.
A: No, there's not much to eat, except vegetables, and you couldn't even grow vegetables there, because there was little sunlight. It all had to come from outside.

Q: But you fished a little bit.
A: Yeah. We did, but that was for sport.

Q: Not for eating?
A: Well, we ate them, but it was certainly not enough fish to be sustainable. Opal Creek Pool was sort of the gathering place. Just above camp, there was this huge, deep pool, and there was this rock ledge that would go out on the river, when the creek would run down deep in between. You could sit there, and it was the most tranquil, beautiful spot. In fact, --

Q: Do you have a picture?
A: I don't know where the picture is. But there's Opal Creek. Some place I do have a picture. It might be in the chest, I'll have to dig it out. Well it's too bad I don't have some of that stuff out. There's another big book that I've got either here or there, that shows a lot of the buildings and stuff. If you're really interested, I can check and see if it's in there. I'm not sure that it is. I can't remember where I've got it stored. It may even be down under the stairs.

Q: Could I take this and copy it and send it back to you, or do you need to hang on to this? This is that friends of Opal Creek thing.
A: You can take it.

Q: I can just write down the address. I was just curious about it.
A: Why don't you write down the address and phone number.

Q: I think that's all the questions I have, unless you have more anecdotes.
A: One of the first times the police raided the mines was, Larry McDonald and George were -- see, there had been this battle between the forest service and the mines, for years and years. Because the forest service very much wanted to log the area. And the loggers kept pushing the forest service to let them in

to log. And the mines kept fighting every way they could to keep the loggers from coming in. And so the forest service were the enemy. Because it was forest service land, the forest service would come and go at their leisure. And the mines, because the mines actually controlled access, it had certain rights, because of the mining camps and the mineral claims also had rights. So the battle would go back and forth. "If you come in, you have to let us know. You have to stop in camp and tell us where you're going to be, and who you are, and so forth, so we know in case anything happens." The forest service, they didn't want to get along with a bunch of hippies, so they would just ignore that. So there was always this confrontation. So this one time, Larry and George -- these two motorcycles came through camp, didn't stop, buzzed right on through before Larry and George could come out. They could hear them coming back down. So they were out there waiting for them. Both Larry and George had on pistols. Plus Larry also had a rifle. So as they came down the hill through the camp, Larry and George walked out to meet them. So these two guys stopped on the motorcycle, and one of them they knew, and the other guy they didn't know. One of them was a forest service guy. And so they stopped this time, because Larry and George were out there. Larry starts getting in their face about, "Well, you didn't stop, you're supposed to stop, why didn't you stop?" And so forth. The forest service guy was being very antagonistic in return. At one point -- this other guy didn't say anything. He just kind of stood back. At one point, he started reaching to the side of his coat. And Larry saw that, and jacked a shell into the rifle, and threw it over on this guy. So the guy threw up his hands, and said, "You know how I am?" And Larry said, "No, I don't know -- who are you?" He said, "I'm the man." "Oh, okay," the man -- he was a state cop. He was with the forest service guy as protection. Larry didn't know who he was. So at this time, George -- wait, I missed part of the story. So this confrontation is getting heavier, and this forest service guy tells Larry, "What's the gun for?" Larry tells him, "It's just there, I've got it." He said, "Well, I may have to take it away from you." Larry says, "I wouldn't advise it, unless you want to be carried out in a casket." So he starts to walk toward Larry. So George is standing on the right hand side of him, Larry's right hand side, and he walks behind him, and as he does, he undoes the loop on his pistol, to free it up, and comes out on this side of him. George does not want to get into a shoot out with these people, and Larry is aggressive enough that it could develop into that, and that's when this guy started to reach inside, and Larry did this, and the guy throws up his hands, and says, "You know how I am, -- I'm the man." George took that as an opening, and said, "Oh, hi, well I'm George Utia." Walks up and shakes his hand real hard, trying to cool things back down. And it worked. Everything sort of settled down, and George says, "Hey, we don't want any trouble here, but we're telling you that this is what has to happen. We have control here, and this is what has to happen." So everything sort of mellowed out and so forth. And they left. The next day, this was on a Friday, the next day was Saturday, and that evening a bunch of people had come up, as they always did on the weekends to party and just hang out. That Saturday about noon, in comes this car, driving up into camp. It's a state police car. George and Ron walked out to meet the car, and it's the head of the Oregon state police. So suddenly, they hear some noise behind, and there's some guys coming out of the brush. What they had done, they had about 30 state police and people, they surrounded the camp, and armed with tommy guns and machine guns and stuff, and took the whole camp by force, military action, and arrested George and Larry for assaulting a state police officer, and hauled them off to jail, over this incident that happened the day before. So they had to go to court. Push came to shove, and what happened was when it came time, they questioned the state cop that had been there. And the state cop told the truth. The truth was, was that they'd been aggressed upon,

the people in the mines were protecting their property. And so the charges were dropped, because the state police told what really happened. So all the charges were dropped.

Q: It was lucky he told the truth.
A: Yeah, well George would've probably gotten off anyway, because of his connections. And it was partly because of that that he probably got off anyway.

Q: What a place. I guess that's it.