

Interview with Craig Blaker

Interviewer: Tim Miller

July 21, 1995

Q: Let me write a couple of things down. I don't think I know your last name.

A: Blaker. B-L-A-K-E-R.

Q: [unintelligible]

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. So, you graduated from KU in '71 and, then, did you go start your first community right after that?

A: Okay, I might as well just follow the story of my life.

Q: Yeah, sure. Yeah, that's cool.

A: I graduated from Kansas, yeah, in '71 and my parents had moved from Chicago to Arizona that year and they had made me an offer to give me a trip to Europe, or something, and come back and my dad would get me set up in business and my girlfriend, whose parents moved from Chicago to South Carolina, or actually just her mom, about the same time, was travelling from Mexico and came by Kansas for my graduation. Her offer was come with me to South Carolina. Yeah. Yeah. So, clearly that was the one that won out. So, I did that and we moved into her mom's house on the beach and the three of us managed this little restaurant in Hilton Head Island for a while and then I decided I didn't really want to do that and I had some friends who had, actually one friend, who had a shrimp boat. I became part of his crew. So I did that. I really started with him in October. Stayed October and November and then the shrimping season was over, so I decided to get out of town and move to Key West. Actually, he was going to bring the shrimp boat down to Key West and shrimp down there but I went on ahead. This was actually my first "communal" experience in Key West, you know, it was real street scene and a lot of stuff happening to us at that time and I was sleeping in a field when I got there and didn't know anybody. I had a car and that was about it. A bunch of hippies were also sleeping out there and, so, I started talking to them. They said, well, they were looking for a house and asked if I wanted to live with them and we got a house right on the main drag of Key West. This was your sort of typical LIFE magazine economy where we'd wake up in the morning and pool our change and walk down to the store and, you know, buy some flour and bananas or something and make pancakes. There was 25 pounds of honey left on the back porch by the previous person. We'd do that and then scatter throughout the day and then we'd usually meet together at -- somebody would be assigned to go on down to the charter boat docks and get fish, you know, that tourists would catch and then throw away. Usually, pelicans would get it but we'd get it and have fish fries at night and go watch the sunsets. It was a real free-for-all thing -- a lot of drugs. In fact, the place we were was a second story over a Chinese restaurant. About two buildings down on one side and two or three on the other were the most frequented bars by the hippies, so they'd go there for the alcohol and then come up to our place for pot. So, actually, I tired of that after about three months and the shrimp boat never came down. So, I didn't like the agreements too much and felt like I wanted to get some spirit in my life and, actually, it was about that time I became a vegetarian and I might have been smoking cigarettes back then and I quit that. I started doing some yoga and, you know, I knew I wanted to live with people and do a collective endeavor, but I felt like I wanted to have more agreements around it.

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Q: More structure?

A: Well, focus, you know, it was totally unfocused. We were just sort of out there.

Q: Right. Well, that's the way a lot of those things were.

A: Right.

Q: Sometimes unusual plots developed.

A: So, I went back to South Carolina and got a job on another shrimp boat and spent that summer just sort of dreaming about it and making connections with different people. I finally, at the end of the summer, ended up breaking up with my girlfriend and I moved. Well, actually, I was sort of travelling around the south and I went to visit some friends I knew from Hilton Head who lived in Athens, Georgia. They had about ten acres of land and were building a house and I was a roofer by this time and they needed their house roofed. So, I said, well, for rent I'll do that. So, actually there were about six people living on that piece of land and it was sort of -- everybody had their own setup -- so, it wasn't a commune or anything but it was group living and shared meals. Then, I decided to move into town where there was a house that was sort of a famous hippy house called Grady Street House.

Q: Grady Street ...?

A: Grady Street.

Q: Grady Street House and that was in Athens?

A: In Athens.

Q: Grady Street. [unintelligible]

A: I lived -- well, I heard that it was famous. Maybe it wasn't.

Q: [unintelligible]

A: So, I moved in there -- this big, old southern house -- residential area and most of the people living had, you know, just graduated from college and were trying to figure out what they were doing. Let's see, we had four guys upstairs and a woman up there and, downstairs, there were 11 people, I think. I mean, it was more of a college-type shared housing thing, not really a commune situation and what happened there was that the guy that I knew, who asked me to move in, was named Clifford. He was starting to get together with a woman who lived out in a teepee on that land I had been living on named Geri Sue. Oh, what happened was I think she moved in with him. No, she didn't. She moved in with the lady nearby on the same floor as us but had sort of a separate apartment.

Q: At the Grady Street House?

A: At Grady Street. So, well, I know, we all took this trip across country. That's what happened and we went out, you know, through Kansas and Colorado and ended up in San Francisco and came back through Arizona and that whole thing. There was, again, six was the magic number. There were six of us doing that trip. There was this guy, Basil, who decided to make the trip but he didn't come with us in the van. He came by different [unintelligible] but he was sort of in love with Geri Sue also. So, there's

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this interesting little triangle happening and Geri Sue was real confused and in love with both of them. The reason this is important will become apparent. So, anyway, we got back from this trip and we had, you know, really developed a strong bond between us and, then, this guy in the house became totally schizophrenic and, for three months, it was like the dominant theme of our household. The effect it had on everybody was kind of chilling. Actually, at one point, me and Clifford had to kidnap him from the emergency room where they were about to admit him to the state psychiatric hospital in Georgia which you can imagine in the '70s ... Finally, after the third month -- every month, at full moon, he would just flip and he would be up for 96 hours straight. We would try to take shifts and, eventually, somebody would always fall asleep and he'd end up, the police would call us, naked on the meridian on some highway somewhere. So, anyway, finally, at the end of all that, we finally decided that we just can't do this anymore and he needs professional help. So, we bought him an airplane ticket back home and sent him back but the effect it had on the household was that everybody sort of, whoa, where's my life, you know, what am I doing. So, Cliff and Geri Sue finally decided they were a couple and decided to move to the Farm.

Q: How'd it go?

A: This other guy that we were living with moved back home to New Jersey and, so, essentially, I was left in this Grady Street House. So, I asked Basil to move in with me. Then asked a friend of his to move in and a woman that we knew, asked her to move in. The day she moved in, the guy she had been living with out in the country who dropped her off, his Volkswagen broke down, so he moved in and he never left, you know. It was like one of those deals. So, this whole new group had developed and, at this time, I was pursuing a lot of things. I had become a yoga instructor. I was working at a crisis hotline. I started a food co-op but I still wanted to, you know, to farm. I mean, we were growing food in our back yard and I wanted to get out there and do it. So, through that summer, I kept talking with these guys and started formulating a plan and, finally, by the end of the summer, we were ready to [unintelligible] from there.

Q: So, what summer was that?

A: '73.

Q: '73?

A: Yeah.

Q: Great.

A: So, we had this plan all -- there were six of us that were in the deal -- and we had this plan to start purchasing land in Tennessee which was where it was pretty inexpensive still -- pretty good quality land. It just so happened Clifford and Geri Sue were getting married right at that time, so the plan was to go there to be at their wedding and then head off from there looking for land around northern, central Tennessee. A funny thing happened over that weekend that we were on the Farm. We had multiple religious experiences.

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Q: You were there for their wedding, is that it, on the Farm?

A: Yeah.

Q: And Steven married them and all that?

A: Yeah. We don't want this on tape. There happened to be a big shipment of mushrooms, you know, around that period of time.

Q: That's no secret. [unintelligible] was well-known for that.

A: It was just intense and the net effect for us was that we decided to go back to Athens and really work on our agreements because we realized we didn't have that aspect together. So, after that -- in some ways, the memories are kind of hazy but, in some ways, they are very clear, sitting around, all six of us, you know, for hours on end, you know, learning to get truthful with each other and just expanding our relationships and creating intimacy and, you know, figuring out really what we wanted to do and, probably, three weeks later with this whole new perception about it, we went out looking for land, just me and two of the guys. After a week, we had found this piece of land. Everything was becoming sort of magical but it was like somebody introduced us to somebody else who knew this person that, you know, here's this piece of land. Oh, but the mineral rights are owned by some other company, so we negotiated price and said, no, we can't have somebody owning any rights to this and the guy says, well, you know, the company is just this week meeting to decide whether, you know, that they [unintelligible] with mineral rights for 20 years ago -- you know, whether they're going to continue the mineral rights, or oil rights. I'm not sure.

Q: It might have been water rights.

A: So, we went back home and we said, okay, you call us and let us know. The company decided to let go of it, right then. So, we bought that piece of land and kind of got off to a slow start. I went to Arizona to visit my parents. I hadn't seen them in a long time and just one couple and one guy moved onto the land for that winter and moved into this funky, old shack that the transients had been living in and had gutted and started building it. I was in Arizona for three or four months and, actually, had developed this whole new life there and I was even considering not going back because I had gotten hired doing solar research, which was also something that I really wanted to do for a long time. You know, it was sort of a backyard deal where there was this woman who had a dream, you know. She was like a social worker at a hospital and she put this ad in the paper and I answered it. We got along great. I went to the University of Arizona to do research and then I would just build one thing after another in the backyard -- a still, hot water heater, you know, cookers, this whole thing. I was just loving it. Then, I get this letter from Susan in January, February, March, saying, okay, it's time to start planting. We need you back and, so, I had to make this decision, which was a tough one for me. Eventually, she developed, partially based on our experiments, but, also, what she went on from there to do, developed a solar cooker that is now in about 33 different third world countries that can be made out of cardboard.

Q: A simple little box thing in a sense?

A: Yeah.

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Q: She developed that?

A: Yeah.

Q: Is that right?

A: Yeah.

Q: Well, that's neat.

A: Yeah. So, there you go. I decided to go back to Tennessee. So, we started farming and we had six people and, let's see, I remember the very first ...

Q: Now, where was this in Tennessee?

A: This was in Red Boiling Springs, Tennessee.

Q: Red Boiling Springs.

A: Yes. It was named for their sulphur springs and hot springs. In the '20s, it'd been a very exclusive resort for the rich and famous but the hotels had sort of fallen in.

Q: There were hundreds of places like that. There was a time when that was real fashionable and they all went defunct. Now, I'm just trying to get my bearings. Where was this in Tennessee?

A: Almost right on the Kentucky border. In central, it was 60 miles northeast of Nashville. Our second farm, which I'll tell you about was between Bugtussle(?) and Frog Pond(?).

Q: Okay. So, just a little bit more on the Red Boiling. What was it called?

A: Spring Hollow Farm.

Q: Spring Hollow Farm. How many acres?

A: The first one was about 100 acres.

Q: Sounds like not many people there.

A: Six people that started it. Actually, we shared this holler with one other farmer, which was another hippy guy and, you know, he had a bunch of people over there but that summer ...

Q: That's the summer of '74 by now?

A: Yeah. The summer of '74. These people from Tampa, Florida, who had a friend, who knew the guy we shared the hollow with, stayed with him and they started looking for land also. They were a very similar group to us. He told them that they should come over and meet us. They did. Probably over the course of the summer, three or four small groups of that group came up on land search endeavors. So, we got to know them very well. In fact, one of the women decided to stay with us and an interesting thing had happened. Basil developed what I now suspect was giardia but, at the time, we didn't know what it was and he had diarrhea for two or three months and couldn't figure it out. Finally, he came to the conclusion that it was the water that we were drinking on our place. He and Susan decided that they were going to leave and two out seven people [unintelligible]. So, we decided that, well, actually

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after a long period, we decided what to do when buying other land, blah, blah, blah. We finally decided to send a letter to this group in Florida which about 12 people and see if they wanted to join forces with us. That group in Florida, on the very Sunday, decided the very same thing and sent us a letter. Our letters like crossed in the mail. So, we produced the communal equivalent of marriage and decided to sell that piece of land and buy a bigger piece of land, which we did the next spring. We bought 234 acres in Lafayette, Tennessee, which was kind of nice town over. That was a happening scene. We had a farming crew, a construction company. We had groups of volunteers actually go out into our community and do various jobs. We were kind of finding that the tobacco thing is big in Tennessee. Well, every farm comes with a tobacco base, which is the amount of acreage the government allows each farm to farm tobacco. So, as part of the purchase deal, we gave up our tobacco base totally on our religious beliefs. I mean everyone. We gave up the most valued piece of land writ to everybody around us but we had no problem actually going out and helping our neighbors harvest their tobacco and heads even though we didn't want to participate in raising cattle or participate in actually promoting tobacco but we wanted to help our neighbors and they really respected that and returned the favor, you know, multiple times. Within three months of moving to this piece of land, we had to harvest the wheat that had been growing on it. We didn't have a stitch of equipment but we did it because all of these neighbors came around with their combines and cutters, hay balers and trucks, the whole thing. We also had -- some of our women would go and stay with a stroke victim and people like that in the community. So, what started happening, actually, when we became a viable community, was that, on the guru circuit, we were the stop either after or before the Farm because it was a four hour drive.

Q: Now, what was the name of this place?

A: Spring Hollow Farm.

Q: This was Spring Hollow Farm. Now, what was the earlier one?

A: Now, that was Spring Hollow but we moved it. It was the community of Hollow Springs. Spring Hollow II, I guess this was. So, what started happening -- I mean, during this whole process, you know, there was a continual -- I mean, I haven't even mentioned -- a continual process of defining who we were and what kind of community we wanted to be and how we wanted to live together and all of that stuff. Like I said before, there were sort of two kind of strong camps and then people at various areas in between. We were all in agreement that we didn't want to be dogmatic about anything but some people really followed the teachings of Steven Gasp and then some people really followed Rham Nas (?) and others were doing different meditative and [unintelligible] type things. The one that I was really into is Jewish heritage. The way we worked out our religious thing was we decided that each member of the community was the preacher for a Sunday and they could do whatever they wanted to. So, it was very eclectic, you know, sometimes we'd be chanting these maharishi chants, you know, and other types, you know, it was the classic farm meditation with alm afterwards, you know, and sometimes we'd sit down to a seder (?), you know. I remember I led one that was mainly I read the Sermon on the Mount. You know, and it was great, so, and I liked that -- we all liked that. The way we did our thing, other than that, was we had a Friday night meeting every week. It was the only total requirement that we had -- that everybody had to attend that meeting and, at that meeting, we would do it all, you know, figure it out, as a group, how we were going to pay the bills, you know, whose taking care of child care,

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you know, what construction projects to do, farm projects, all that stuff. It was interesting, last Thanksgiving, we had a 25 year reunion, equipped with, you know, up to, let's see, the oldest kid was 21 years old and we had a Friday night meeting and, in that meeting, we did story telling and it was great. It was truly tribal and, for our kids, it was such a great experience because, I mean, we've stayed in touch over the years but we're pretty scattered around, now, and our kids don't know each other that well and they got together and it was just magical for the kids. I mean, it was great for all of us but these kids are every one of them unique and beautiful and they've all been in various forms of public schools and various things and I always got the sense with my kids that they had felt like fish out of water. They were a little smarter and a little more in tune than most of the kids that they had to deal with but they also have that strong urge that all kids have to fit in the part of what's happening. So, when these kids came together at this reunion, it was like they were home in a family and we had a drumming circle going for probably -- it probably only stopped for an hour at a time but it was going for, like for the whole time we were there, which was three days on the beach. The kids, they hardly ever went to sleep and laid up all night just playing music and getting really spiritual in their thing. So, anyway, I digress. So, yeah, most of us had coupled up by this time and we were having babies. In '76, when the first wave of children happened, I think there were four babies born that year and we all went down to the Farm to have them because it was close by and it was free and couldn't get better care in the alternative world than was on the Farm. So, of course, as we would scatter out on the Farm, we'd make new friends down there and, even before that, we were having communications with the gate on the Farm, because we'd get these people travelling through and they'd have wild tales about their experience on the Farm and so we'd call up to say what's going on, this guy told us this and that. Oh, well, watch that guy, this is what you're going to probably experience and, sure enough, that's what we'd experience. And we'd have things like a guy came through who said he was Jesus and chose us to take care of him so that we could minister to him and he would have been out of there in two days, which was our policy, except that one of our little babies had whooping cough and so we had to quarantine half the farm, and it happened to be the half that he was living on. So, he stuck around for like 30 days, which was nuts. So, actually, more and more interactions occurred at the Farm and when I went down to have our baby in February of '76, it was right after the big Guatemalan earthquake in Guatemala City that Plenty was planning for spring project. So, I went and talked to the service where they talk about how they want to get involved in that project.

Q: Was that Peter Schwitzer, by any chance?

A: Yeah, probably Peter. Yeah, it was Peter. Philip and Peter are brothers.

Q: Oh, okay. I didn't know that. I've met Peter. Peter is still with Plenty, today.

A: Yeah, it probably was Peter, actually, come to think of it. Anyway, he said that they were just going to send down like three carpenters to begin with but that they needed stuff, medical supplies and just material plain stuff. So, I decided to just go home and start plundering everything. I got incredibly lucky. I found this Seventh Adventist hospital in Portland, Tennessee that was built on farmland and, back behind the hospital, they had these huge barns where they put all their used equipment and they hadn't cleaned it out in years and they said, you know, you can have just about anything you want. We went there and there were like x-ray machines, I mean, so much stuff. The Farm sent two semi-trucks full and

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we filled them to the brim and it wasn't just medical stuff. It was like generators -- all kinds of stuff. That's how I first got involved with Plenty. Meanwhile, the big debate on our farm was whether to adopt the farming practices that the Farm had adopted. You know about that?

Q: Well, you mean the vegetarian ...?

A: No, no. We were already that but the Farm decided they wanted to be commercial farmers and chose to go from small, organic growing plots of land to huge acreages of chemically fertilized and sprayed.

Q: I didn't know they did that.

A: Oh, baby.

Q: I knew they got tractors and that kind of stuff.

A: Did they ever. Well, what they did was they took out about \$300,000 worth of loans and bought all this equipment and then rented all this land in various parts of the county and planted all this stuff and, then, lousy weather and not enough manpower to harvest and it just went belly-up. I mean, I think if there's one thing caused the demise of the Farm, it was that, even though that occurred years before what we commonly refer to as the Farm demise. I don't know if it's called that but we put it that way. So, anyway, at that time, on our place, it's a farming crew of three, which was myself and two other guys and one guy was strongly into doing it just for the fun and decided to do it. One was sort of mellow and I was really strong into keeping it organic and stuff. So, we ended up compromising after quite a bit of discussion and we just rented one 20 acre field off our piece of land and decided we could use chemical fertilizer but not sprays. It was quite successful for us, actually, unlike the Farm, we were able to pay off all of our equipment debts at the end of the year. We bought a brand new tractor and four-wheel planter -- really nice equipment, you know, combines and stuff and, you know, eat for free and you have no debt incurred. So, actually, I felt we were pretty successful with that and we were pretty successful with our construction company, which, you know, built a number of homes and we had a back hoe and doing septic systems and things like that. The thing that I loved about Spring Hollow Farm was that we didn't have any leaders. We were all the leaders and we had the agreement amongst ourselves that all of our decisions would be unanimous and they were. It took sometimes a huge amount of time to come up with that unanimous agreement but what we really found was that, once you got that agreement, then actually manifesting it on the material plane was easy, whereas, if you didn't have the agreement, you'd spend so much time trying to get things together that the amount of time to getting an agreement was much cheaper in the time sense. So, let's see, it was a wonderful experience and everyone learned and grew and had great things happen. There was a restlessness among a number of the people, especially the women, about sort of being stuck from [unintelligible]. They were wanting to pursue other stuff -- go to school, pursue a singing career for one lady but most of us had our hippy ideals and we wanted to change the world. So, it became, what happened was we started losing some people to the Farm and, actually, our connections to the Farm kept growing quite a bit. For example, I grew sorghum -- it was one of the things that I was doing, and it was really a wonderful experience, sort of brought back a lost art in Macon County, Tennessee and some neighbors would grow patches of sorghum [unintelligible] and all that kind of stuff but, anyway, this sorghum crop, the last year we grew

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it, which I guess must have been in '75, I decided to dedicate all the profits to Plenty and so she ended up getting like a bus full of Farm people come do our harvest and it was a big party but I think that that just really solidified our connection to the Farm, because all 30 or 40 people just showed up and joined forces with us. So, through that winter, I think our farm went through a lot changes about what to do and we finally decided that we were going to sell our place and join the big Farm.

Q: So, that was the winter of '75-'76?

A: No. It was, actually, I got that wrong. It was the winter of '77-'78. I think, by this time, the Farm was really suffering from their debt and I know that they were very grateful to see us show up because I know the farming crew was fairly decimated and, you know, we sort of showed up to the Farm with \$72,000 in cash, three tractors, a combine, a back hoe, a construction company, you know, all this stuff but I have to say that the Spring Hollow folks were very naive about what a great thing we had going. We thought that the people on the Farm lived just like us. In other words, agreements were obtained by unanimity and that people were motivated by solely spiritual motivations and that everybody would be generous in living when we got to the Farm. Consequently, actually, at one point, I think somebody suggested to us that we use our money to build a house for Spring Hollow Farm people and we said, oh no, we don't want to do that. We just want to merge in the Farm. We've been living together for four years. In retrospect, I realize that what that did was meant that we were homeless for a couple of years on the Farm, drifting around until we finally sort of got situated. You know, for me, at least. I mean, I can't speak for everybody but, for me, it was kind of a relatively rude awakening to get to the Farm just because my concepts were different. I think the thing was that the Farm was just a big organization and, with communism, the bigger you get, the more bureaucratic it is and the less human and I found that to be true and, of course, I got to the Farm and, by this time, I was doing construction full-time. My desire was to pursue solar construction. Down there, their construction scene was what they had decided was going to pull them out of debt. So, it was a huge operation and had 100 guys a day going off the Farm making money but, because of the very nature of it, the solar just did not exist and nobody really wanted to hear about that. When we wanted to experiment, it was like no way. To me, it was, considering the [unintelligible] Ashbury scene in which the Farm had its roots, I couldn't believe how conservative the Farm was on a lot of traditional hippy things, you know, and it's interesting. They had become very conservative about male/female relations and single people dating things and purely monogamous marriages, even though Steven had ...

Q: I was going to say there had been quite a bit of experimentation.

A: Yeah, that's right. That was the interesting thing, you know, it was like, if Steven and his family and people he knew for years and years experimented with something and come to conclusions, then there wasn't a great deal of tolerance for anyone coming to those conclusions on their own, which I thought was interesting but really didn't bother me because I was halfway married and had two kids and, you know, I didn't care much. The thing that really got me was the solar thing. So, by October of that year, there was this sort of controversy that developed on the Farm. Steve was taking the band to Europe.

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Q: That was '78, right.

A: Taking the Farm band to Europe. Ostensibly, to spread the word. Well, it turned out that [unintelligible] people on the Farm saying, you know, we don't need to spend this money. They were going spend like \$13,000 that came by way of a windfall. It wasn't until quite a bit later that I found out that money was from the sale of Spring Hollow Farm.

Q: Oh, really?

A: But, even without that piece of knowledge, I was struck by the discussion at Sunday's services about how, you know, somebody suggested that the Farm band charge admission for the Farm band gigs in Europe but Steven said, oh, no, we could not do that because that was a spiritual thing. The Farm band always played for free. So, I'm sitting there and going, well, God, you know, that means that what they do is spiritual and has to be done for free but what I do, which is going off the Farm and building homes for people, was not spiritual, somehow, and had to be charged money for it and creating alternative building styles was not to be heard. So, at the time, there was a guy from Wisconsin farm living at my home and he was developing solar panels and had a contract to put them on this banker's home in Ettrick, Wisconsin and, so, it didn't take long for him to convince me that I needed to move to Wisconsin in October, with a three month old child but I did because I was kind of ticked off.

Q: So, this is still '78?

A: Yeah.

Q: So, you weren't at the Farm that long, then?

A: No.

Q: Been there just a few months.

A: Yeah. So, I left and went to the Wisconsin farm.

Q: Now, that was the Wisconsin farm of the Farm?

A: Yes. Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: And, you know, we had a good crew up there. My friends, Clifford and Geri Sue were there and we had two midwives, farming crew, construction crew and they actually owned this big, old dairy -- what used to be a dairy -- it had a ladder company in it -- built ladders. We turned that into our solar company where we built. I mean, this guy Douglas Cot(?), he's one of these guys who is a genius, no doubt about it, but he has no way of converting his ideas into the real world.

Q: Yeah. [unintelligible]

A: So, that was sort of my job-- was to try to like keep him grounded and to convert it into the real world nuts and bolts of it. That winter was kind of, when I look back on it, was very funny. It was like the coldest and snowiest forever and ever in Wisconsin. We would make the seven mile trip everyday going to this dairy, which was a big, block building with no insulation and would take until like, I mean, I

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remember we'd get up like at 4:30 in the morning and start the fires in the houses or keep them going and then we'd, you know, each of us would have like a truck battery that we had brought in the night before. Kept warm. You know, we'd take it, put it into the truck, get that one started and then jump start all the other vehicles. Then, we'd come in, you know, and chop the wood for the day for the families and, you know, we'd have breakfast. Then, we'd take off to this big, old, two-story dairy made out of concrete. Then, we'd unthaw that place and it'd take until about 11:00 to get it unthawed. Then, we'd, you know, work for an hour and eat lunch and clean up. Then we'd work for about another hour or two and then we'd go back home because we'd have to do the fire wood for the night and all that stuff. It was pretty wild. The whole winter was like that. The work we did was -- the design that Douglas came up with for the solar panels was really a good design and he used a thin aluminum and it was shaped in Vs so that, when it's sitting on a flat surface, with the sun going across this way, those Vs would catch it from each direction. We painted that black and run air underneath the Vs into the house and have heat exchanges and all that kind of stuff. It was a great design but we had built 30 panels -- took us the whole winter to do it. The way we did it was we took ash -- it was a really hard wood -- and made these V-shapes. We had two of them we attached to plywood -- two sheets of plywood that these wood blocks, v-shaped blocks, we'd put the aluminum in between them and we'd get up on top of them and stomp down to make the V-shapes but we finally did it. That spring, the guy had his house built and was ready and we put it all on. What a great job it was. It was kind of creative because Doug kind of took off to Florida for that winter. So, the designer was in Florida and the other guy was me instead of this other fellow. So, anyway, I remember, when we returned to the Farm -- the Wisconsin farm went through a lot of changes and it, they themselves, had some debts and things and, eventually, they decided to fold that place.

Q: Just what was the location in Wisconsin?

A: Ettrick. E-t-t-r-i-c-k. It was just north of LaCrosse, close to the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. We returned to the Farm in '80 or maybe '79. Yeah, it was '79. In December, we got back to [unintelligible]. I sort of left the [unintelligible] a lot of the other folks because I wasn't intricately involved in dealing with all of this stuff and [unintelligible] up and all that stuff. I got to the Farm and interesting things happening at that time was a lot of the small farms were folding. People were all coming back to the big Farm and housing was really scarce there. I think our population got up to about 1,500 by then.

Q: Yeah, right at the end of the '70s it went up.

A: Let's see. Well, I'm going to make -- what I want to do is kind of quickly go through the rest of this experience because I don't even know if you have questions you wanted to ask me but I don't even know if I'm touching on things that you're interested. Let's see, I was the farm construction crew boss for six months when I got there and that was a very interesting and unique experience for me and a good one, although very frustrating at times, but there was a lot of building going on, at that time, on the farm, because so many people were coming. So, I had a pretty good crew and we were able to do a lot of construction work -- really hadn't had quite so much in a long time. Then, I got a little frustrated doing that and joined the off-the-Farm construction, again, but, with the influx of all these other people over the year that I was gone, things had changed and now there was a solar construction crew. So, we

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started to do solar construction projects and we actually had a design team and building team. I was a part of the team for a while that installed solar hot water heaters through Nashville and central Tennessee. Actually, our company became the authority on solar construction work in Tennessee. I think, even now, it is possibly doing stuff but I'm not sure because I noticed ...

Q: There's still solar stuff out at the farm, for sure. In fact, when I was there last time, I took a solar shower. It's there.

A: So, I was glad about that but, actually, I threw my back out somewhere in there and it was really one of those bad moments and I couldn't get out of bed for a couple of weeks and it was really the time I started to re-evaluate what I wanted to do. I actually found myself being rather bored with construction and dealing with money issues of that and, actually, kind of wanted to work with women for a while also. I liked the [unintelligible] in that way. So, I decided to start volunteering at night with the Farm ambulance services and drive and, then, I took an EMT course and, then, I became the driver for this neonatal intensive care ambulance team from Vanderbilt hospital. I think I was the third Farm driver -- there's four drivers -- and the Farm sort of had a slot, you know, and we could trade. So, I was the third guy to do it.

Q: So, you were going up to Nashville?

A: Yeah. I was going to Nashville. So, my job, the income of that, supported the Farm ambulance service. Then, quit EMT course on the Farm, [unintelligible]. In 1982, Vanhousal, who had been the Director of the Plenty Ambulance Service in South Bronx, had let people know of his intentions of going to medical school and I was asked, along with Basil, my old friend from Spring Hollow, if we wanted to go up there and continue that project. So, we did and then got to see an urban commune situation in the ghetto.

Q: So, there were -- I've wondered about how that worked. There was a communal of farm people in the Bronx?

A: Yeah. We had squatted in two, I don't know, it was two buildings that were linked together and a total of eight apartments, which we turned into like one big house -- squatted in it and broke through the top floor, so that they weren't two separate buildings anymore. This is one building with a kitchen there and put an office on the third floor, then a dispatch center on the first and had our ambulances run right out of that. We had a little courtyard parking lot. It was, gosh, a great project. It was probably the highlight of my life, I guess, doing such good work and, you know, clearly expressing the hippy ideals and just, not meaning to but showing up the city ambulance service time after time. You know, I mean, obviously you must have heard about it. The media got hold of that one and loved it, you know, hippies seven minute response time and quoted all the police praising us, you know. I mean, it was just your ideal hippy endeavor. It couldn't have been better. The only problem, at all, was that, at that time, actually by 1984, the Farm went through its metamorphosis -- a commune to a collective. It went from like 1,500 to 300 people, you know, in a matter of months. So, we were up there in the ghetto and, all of a sudden, our support -- it was kind of like Apollo 13, you know, it was all of a sudden mission control is not there, you know, and they didn't have any answers and there we were floating around. So, you know, lack of funding, at that time, oh, a whole bunch of things were happening but what was kind of

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cool, at least in my mind, was that it became apparent to us that we had accomplished our mission in the South Bronx in a way that we had not ever really visually and it took us a long time to realize we had. But, you know, Plenty always does their projects by moving a small group of people into a community, getting to know the community, not even having the project in mind, finding out what communities' needs are and then designing the program, getting money for it, then building it, teaching the local people how to run it and then getting out of town. That was going to be our idea with this ambulance service was to, you know, turn it over to the local volunteers. Well, what we didn't take into effect, the third world communities are far different than the South Bronx. In the South Bronx, nobody wants to live there. Anyone who can get out will, unlike in established third world towns where it's their home and their homeland. So, what happened to us is that every time we trained like a high school graduate to become an EMT, give him experience in the South Bronx on our ambulance, invariably they would eventually get a job with the city making \$21,000 a year, which was great. You know, some would volunteer with us a for a little while but, eventually, they'd just end up doing overtime with the city and making more money and moving, you know, to the North Bronx or Manhattan or somewhere else. It finally got to the point, also, because of all the notoriety of the press we got that the city was putting a lot of pressure on EMS (Emergency Medical Services) to cut their response time in the South Bronx and put in more dispatch areas -- not dispatch areas but ambulance stations and all that kind of stuff so they could do a better job and, sure enough, towards the end, in 1984, very often we'd come to an emergency and we'd either get there one minute before or one minute after or right at the same time as the EMS ambulance. Invariably, one or both of the people in the ambulance were people we'd trained. So, it was like, we realized, you know, here's what we'd done. We did what we set out to do but, the thing is, we don't need us anymore to try to fund raise. I mean, the city is going to take care of the ambulances and actually pay wages, which we can't do. So, we decided ...

Q: Really, it's the ultimate success in a way.

A: Yeah.

Q: Gave the community what it needed.

A: So, we sold one ambulance to another volunteer group and gave another one away to Oneida Indian Reservation and then just sort of cut loose of the program and continued the training program which was real helpful for a while but, then, different Plenty members took that on as sort of their jobs because we were no longer a commune.

Q: So, basically, you went private like everyone else and you stayed there for awhile, then?

A: Yeah.

Q: And continued working in the training program?

A: Well, my wife and I took a look at each other and said, you know, you and I've had some incredible experiences in our lives and we know a whole lot of stuff but we can't sell any of it to anybody. So, we decided to go back to school and she got a nursing degree and, then, her nurse practitioner license while I worked as a paramedic in Manhattan. I did continue to teach with the training center and I took on the

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contract that we'd had for a long time teaching CPR to all the doctors at Lincoln hospital. So, I kind of put her through school and, then, I continued working and went to PA school.

Q: What's PA school?

A: Physician Assistant. So, you know, we were there six years after the Plenty project was over and immediately moved to Eugene, Oregon.

Q: So, when was it when you finally left the whole thing several years later?

A: Well, you know, Plenty broke up in December 1984 or '85, well December 1984. So, we moved out in 1985 and got our own place and then we moved to Eugene in 1990. The community of Plenty ambulance people continues to be real tight and they're all living up in, well, upstate New York about 60 miles from the city. They're in different houses but, you know, they all get together all the time -- meditation circles and that kind of stuff. It's funny because we all sort of moved to New York Bronx to continue our social lives together and, one by one, we moved up there. Gosh, it's been a while since I've been [unintelligible]. But, anyway, it's probably not that important. Debra(?) and I, my wife, have always felt like we would, when my kids were out of the house, which isn't too far away now, would do a Plenty project again and help there. We'd like to. Unfortunately, this cancer thing is sort of rearing its ugly head. Things are very tenuous. But I will say this, that I'm going through cancer support and all that kind of stuff and I find that the majority of people who have cancer value their relationships with their family. It's very supportive and I have like five or six families who are just unbelievable. Just wonderful to have. I feel totally blessed. I've been hospitalized like 14 times in the last 21 months, or something and, of those hospitalizations, at least eight of them, somebody who I've lived with communally has flown here to be with me and my wife and my family to support us during that. So, you know, this kind of living situation, you know, it's kind of one those deals -- it's very much like a family where, you know, it's hard to live that way. Families, they're hard because they're so intimate and there's so much shit but the ties are so intense. It's funny that Lawrence called me last night because I was driving home, yesterday -- I went to the lake and was thinking -- I'm giving my life review right now but -- I was thinking about how important community always was for me and how much it was a sort of a theme for me. I look at different people and see, you know, their careers and I've never really had a career path at all. But the thing that has always been my push was community and I was realizing, yesterday, you know, that I have felt a real sense of loss when I no longer was living communally and tried, since coming here, to make my neighborhood, you know, a true community type scene. You know, it's a nice neighborhood but just the very nature of it it doesn't have the same level of commitment and intimacy.

Q: Neighborhood's not going to.

A: Yeah, right. Of course, it's not but, I was thinking, maybe, that was something I'd like to refocus on, especially when the kids are gone. I mean, it's always been my philosophy that when the baby boomers get 65 or so that we're going to become collective again. The reason for that is because I look at nursing homes, now, and nursing homes are really communes.

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Q: Except, ...

A: They're a model of capitalism. So, there's like one guy, some owner, calling all the shots and the residents are, you know, very dependent on each other in hiring people to assist but ...

Q: But they're niggerized by the people [unintelligible].

A: Exactly. So, I mean, what is it? I mean, they give up all of their life savings into this collective fund but it's for the purpose of making some younger person rich. So, I figure, when we get to that stage, I mean, we will become communal about it because we'll just, you know, pool together all of our life savings and resources but that, instead of enriching some other person, we'll be able to invest and, you know, maintain and we can use each other's strengths to cover each other's weaknesses which is what that whole thing's about.

Q: Okay, so the question is would you do it again?

A: Right. And I said, absolutely, I would as a youth. But that, if I was to start a group living situation now, especially if it included families, that I probably would not have it communal. I would try to, oh gosh, you know that's something I'm still dealing with but I became a believer that communism does not work in the real world and that it's that classic problem of how to motivate the people that are not motivated and how to deal with these so-called hangers-on or spongers, or whatever you want to call them -- folks that don't do stuff. I realized that the one thing about capitalism, or whatever it is that's motivating America, is that you are rewarded for, you know, effort. I have come to believe, in terms of economic systems, that America has grossly exaggerated that system. So we have people who are billionaires and other people who are homeless and I think that's inappropriate and I've always fought against that and that's partially why we created the commune system, you know, of hippies but, at the other side of it, I have gotten the chance to see what communism does and it makes it very hard for the people manifesting the community, I mean, extra hard, so that they're working, working, working, working all the time and they see their kids with no shoes and no ketchup on the table and, you know, giardia, being treated for intestinal parasites three times by the age of ten. That's very difficult to keep doing that for very long when you see other people who get to have the exact same living standards and are not doing one thing. So, I personally feel like the system is a synthesis [unintelligible]. You should be rewarded but, you know, I think there should be a minimum wage and a maximum wage. That's how I feel about things and nobody should really be allowed to be too rich or get too much land or too much of the stuff and I don't think that nobody should be allowed to starve to death, either. They should have a certain level of health care and food and money and all that stuff, you know. [unintelligible] But, to form a community, again, I feel like one of my friends, actually two of my friends, from the Farm are living in this community in Tallahassee. What they did was they took a big chunk of land, about 200 acres, I think, and started with a circular road and in the middle of the road they put a swimming pool, since it's Florida, and a big clubhouse, okay, and some gardens, community gardens. Then, they sold plots of land, you know.

Q: Around the outside?

A: Around that road. To me, that's just perfect and the houses are all built close to the road. So, behind everybody's house, it fans off like this. So, your land is like you get more and more space of your own

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the farther back you get. The houses aren't that far apart from each other, so you're neighbors but, if you keep going back farther and farther, it's like more and more land available to you. So, you know, the central focus is here and they have weekly meetings and they have community dinners and all that kind of stuff. But you still get to have your own family dynamics and you have neighbors, you know. I like that.

Q: You know, that's what people call a land trust, usually, and that, I think, is the model that is working today. I mean, there are a lot of those, actually. Everywhere, people like it. It's like it has solved the problem of the deadbeats who were a big drag back then. What'd you do at Spring Hollow? Did you have an entrance policy or did you let anyone come? Did you let the deadbeats come in?

A: Yeah. We let everybody come for, I think, was three days. Anybody could show up and stay with us for three days.

Q: Okay, so not a fully open door?

A: No, no, not at all. After three days, they had to make a decision whether they wanted to make this their community or not. It was very similar to the Farm. We had like a 30-day period of time in which everyone would get to know each other intimately and then, at the end of that time, then they had to make the decision whether they were going to throw all their worldly goods into the pot or not.

Q: So, it really was a communal economy?

A: Oh, yeah. It definitely was. I find it interesting that I keep hearing about co-housing but I've never seen a community actually manifest. I know there's one up in Seattle.

Q: There's one out on a island off Seattle.

A: Right. Mercer Island or somewhere?

Q: Yeah.

A: But, from what I hear around town here, there was like a co-housing group of people who met for like ten years.

Q: Really?

A: Yeah. And they finally just gave it up. I mean, I think a few of the people did go up to Seattle but they never seemed to be able to put it together.

Q: Well, there are some that are together. There's one in Davis that's working and fully sold.

A: I read about that one [unintelligible]. I thought it was interesting that Seattle, I mean, that Eugene couldn't put one together.

Q: Yeah, of all the places.

A: Yeah, right.

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Q: But there are several and I think there's going to be more than that.

A: Yeah, I hope so. I think it's definitely an option my wife and I are considering. We're considering all options, at this point. I mean, our kids are 19 and 17. Two years, maybe, and we're back to being hippies, again.

Q: Yeah. That's great. Well, you know, to speak of classic hippy behaviors, were there sexual rules at Spring Hollow? You know, the Farm was some, by what I know of, was pretty monogamous [unintelligible]. Was Spring Hollow that way?

A: Yeah. It was pretty much monogamous. Although, there was a little sleeping around here and there but the way we were with each other was -- our agreement was to be 100% out front and honest about things, truthful. I mean, we were such a small group of people that, when something like that would happen, you could almost, I mean everybody knew it. It was kind of hard. I think that is one of the drawbacks in this kind of living situation if you are single or if you're looking, maybe not happy with your mate, or something like that. It's like everybody's business, you know. I mean, it's the ultimate small town.

Q: How many people were there -- 52?

A: 35.

Q: Oh, 35.

A: Yeah. So, I mean, I don't think we ever sat down and said, you know, we had to have one mate, you know, and had to be sexually true to that person but it was so -- the whole thing was so available to all of our consciousness that there was this sort of natural process where that occurred because it was too complex. We had work to do and, you know, it's just not worth it to pursue that. So, I don't think it was huge religious thing that made us do that, it was just that's how we coupled up. You know, I think we played with some of that energy some. I know I did but I never had an affair, you know, the whole time I lived on the Farm. [unintelligible] close but I didn't. You get very intimate with a lot of women, too, which was cool.

Q: Well, that's not bad.

A: That's the ideal I think. Actually, I'm sort of working on that whole idea now, again, with my wife and saying, you know, I want us to have this primary loving and spiritual relationship and I want to be intimate with other people, as well, and do it without making waves. I think that it's helpful -- positive experience.

Q: What about dope? Was there any restriction on that at Spring Hollow?

A: Our rules were or our agreements were very much like the Farm that we didn't do alcohol or any synthetic drugs, at all, but freely smoked pot and did [unintelligible] mushrooms [unintelligible], which wasn't very often.

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Q: Did you grow?

A: No, we didn't. We, actually, we sort of learned the lesson from Steven getting busted on that one. We realized we were very much in the center of the community eye and realized there was no way we could grow and not get busted. So, we didn't.

Q: Smart decision.

A: I think most -- I don't even know where most of the pot came from but it was mostly from visitors.

Q: Back in those days, that was the way it worked. People would just give it to you. Not quite like this fancy, expensive economy that's going in it today -- very different time.

A: Yeah, actually, you know, I have, let me think about this. I want to make sure this is a true statement. I think it's true that, since Kansas, in 1970, I've never bought pot.

Q: Really? Ever?

A: Yeah.

Q: But you've had it around quite a bit?

A: Well, yeah. Actually, my wife and I pretty much quit smoking in about '85 or '86 and, then, -- certainly on a regular basis. I mean, we were smoking everyday. Now, I mean, in the last five years, probably, let's see, five times a year, except when I went through chemotherapy and I was using it for medicine.

Q: Everyone says it's good medicine for that.

A: It's great. I mean, it's like, to me, it's completely absurd it's not legally prescribed. I mean, completely because, you know, I mean, I can prescribe codeine and morphine, cocaine, even. I mean, I can use cocaine in my clinic. Right? But I can't tell somebody who's doing chemo to smoke a joint and, for me, it was -- there's no way to really to describe what chemo's like except, possibly, to a pregnant lady who's got morning sickness all the time. I had some severe and awful problems with chemotherapy and I took every drug that was available to combat the nausea and stuff and, you know, nothing really worked. I wouldn't even say that marijuana works but that what happened was my consciousness went to a place from wanting to die and thinking I was going to and feeling nuts and just horrible to, oh, yeah, this doesn't have to last forever and I'm okay with this. I can live with this.

Q: Yeah, that's wonderful treatment.

A: I mean, it didn't make me feel good but it made me feel not awful. I saw on top of one of those pages that going to the Farm was a rude awakening and I didn't want to leave with the impression that I have like a negative feeling towards the Farm because I don't.

Q: Oh, I don't think that.

A: And that, actually, that some of my co-Spring Hollow people did a lot better on the Farm than I did. Actually, most of them. It's interesting I was almost proud of the way that Spring Hollow people moved into positions of steering the energy on the Farm. Out of six families that moved there, three or four

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were represented on the Council of Elders, two families went to Saint Lucia and were the Saint Lucia project and two families became the South Bronx project and we just sort of merged right into the Farm pretty well but I was sort of -- I felt homeless when I was there, which I was in a way. That's how I felt about the Farm. It was like moving onto somebody else's place. I never really got a sense that it was my place like I did at Spring Hollow throughout this [unintelligible].

Q: Are you still in touch with Farm people?

A: Yeah.

Q: You get FarmNet News?

A: I never did get FarmNet News. I mean, I did for this little while. Some crazy lady was doing it and it was weird.

Q: Well, it was being -- there was a version of it being done out at the Farm that kind of didn't ever quite get together. But I think it's coming out somewhat regularly now out of Texas. It's out of Austin -- a woman named Joy Newcom I think is her name.

A: Who's that?

Q: Well, I don't know. She was at the Farm [unintelligible]

A: Yeah. Well, there's a lot of people at the Farm that I never really got to know good.

Q: She, I believe, was a medical person somehow. She was a nurse or something. You get a lot of those, of course.

A: Well, I did know a lady named Joyce -- probably a difference name, though.

Q: Joy. Well, could be. She was blasted by a drunk driver and is in a wheelchair now and I think that has to do with why she's doing the paper, you know, it's something she can do easily. Anyway, I get it and it's coming out and all that.

A: So, how are you involved in all this stuff?