

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** I'd just like, just for orientation, just to know when and where you lived communally, just if you could kind of for the record, mainly where was it, when were you there.

**NT:** Okay, I joined it in October of '69, and at that time the name of the community was Cathedral of the Spirit and that was in Heath Massachusetts.

**Q:** Heath, Massachusetts.

**NT:** Heath, Mass., yeah, and it was there for, it was basically a summer cabin with no insulation. It was about sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, and there was like thirty people living there when I came.

**Q:** In '69. And, was Michael in charge at that point?

**NT:** Yeah, you know about him?

**Q:** Yeah, well, it was Michael Metallica, was the, I guess the leader, and that evolved out of a tree house that he had in Lyden, and it was comprised basically of three or four people, and they all had drug addiction problems, and they all got together to dry out, and he sort of, I guess he created the space for them to do that. And, he was basically an ex Hell's Angel, slash, druggie.

**Q:** Is that right?

**NT:** Yeah. I don't know the exact story, but he hooked up with a psychic in Northdale Massachusetts by the name of Albert Babbet, who was basically this transmedium who used to have various, allegedly, various entities speaking through him, everything from Sam Clemens to Pontius Pilate, I was there for that one, that was a good one.

**LB:** Krishna, Vishnu....

**NT:** Krishna, Vishnu, Jesus the Christ, you know, speaking as a man, kind of interesting. But, yeah, so it basically, Michael, as the relationship developed Michael was supposedly the reincarnation of the Apostle Peter. I didn't know all this right away, this isn't what drew me, that was sort of a sideshow. What drew me is that I had a circle of friends that I had known and been involved with before that were slowly being siphoned off and attracted into that, so I just kind of...

**LB:** And, how old were you?

**NT:** I was 17.

**Q:** So, they were out of the tree house, and into other facilities by the time you got there.

**NT:** Yeah, they went from the tree house to Gilford, Vermont, which is this wild like mountainous place in Vermont, they kind of like lived up in the hills, there's, it's like Scotland or something. You had to carry water and everything, they did that for the summer so it, had started in '68, they were in the tree house for I think, like a winter.

**LB:** Did you visit in Gilford?

**NT:** In Gilford, no I didn't. In Heath, they went to Gilford, and then they went to Heath, which is kind of a mountainous area in Western Mass., basically the way they supported themselves, worked, did free labor for food with farmers. They had food stamps, and got bulk supplies of U.S. Government cheese, we had a turnip cellar, and just donations, when I joined I was like the 33rd member, and over the

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winter, the place got to be about 70 or 75 people, and there was like a loft built in it, it was like a summer camp. Kind of hard to describe. One end of it was a kitchen area with tables, another end of it was a bunk, then there was like a middle living room area, then there was like a loft, and basically what they did was, they extended the loft to cover from one end to the other and beds were stacked in there like big enough just to lay out a mat.

**Q:** So, everyone just slept in one place?

**NT:** Pretty much, yeah, it was packed in there. Plus, there was a band rehearsing, we had a truck that was converted and we built a little house on top of it, like a little moving chapel, in the middle of winter, we'd drive around, we had a jug band, and we used to go to the Unitarian Church, they were the most tolerant. Any Unitarian Church anywhere, would take us. We'd do services, like the jug band. Sort of performance art stuff with huge like crosses, I cut off all my hair, and I was an eagle in a nest, my Mom and Dad saw at Smith College, I had run away from home, they didn't know who it was, there was this guy squawking...I don't even now what that was about, I don't even really know what that was about. It was spiritual performance art, I guess, is what it was supposed to be. Shock value was very high, very controversial in the local community that's for sure.

**Q:** Did they come watch these theatrical things at all?

**NT:** Oh yeah, I think the main attraction was Michael, he was a very charismatic character. We were just hippies, so it was kind of interesting, that winter was very interesting.

**Q:** That's the winter of '69, '70?

**NT:** Yeah.

**Q:** That was at Vermont?

**NT:** That was at Heath Mass.

**Q:** That was already at Heath by then.

**LB:** What were the spiritual, was it a spiritual community, a hippie community, what were the precepts, or attraction.

**NT:** Oh, it was definitely spiritual, it was kind of new age before new age was a concept, it was very much, meditation was a staple, I guess the idea was that people could somehow be tempered and forged through brotherhood into a self-sufficient community and capable of surviving the inevitable destruction of social structure, because of economic, environmental, slash, karmic type of consequences, so the whole idea was to be like a crucible of spiritual growth, development of, the development of yourself through meditation and work, and developing this community, it was interesting, and I learned a lot about it, I learned a lot about living with people, and about boundaries, because there weren't any in the community, and that was very, it's a nice concept, but in reality, it doesn't work, it's not healthy.

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**Q:** Why didn't it work?

**NT:** Well, basically, everything, the whole idea is that people have these pre-established patterns with each other, which you know are kind of inherently there, even before you meet them, and the whole idea was then, well, we have to work out our karma, you know if there's conflict. You know, there's some people that you're compatible with, and some people that you're not, and the whole thing was, avoid the people you feel compatible with, and move towards the people you have edges with. And, work all that stuff out, and make yourself raw and vulnerable, and somehow, and you know, there were some interesting experiments that went on, so I can't say that's an invalid concept. It's just that, there wasn't enough wisdom really to deal with the problem, it was really just everybody experimenting.

**LB:** What kind of experiments?

**NT:** Well, we had, there was one thing we did, where we all got in groups of seven, because seven is the numerological, the spiritual number of perfection, and then we'd like, for a week, we stayed in a room together, and nobody talked, there was no verbal communication at all, and it had to people that you were not, that you didn't really know. And, that for me, was pretty profound. It was very interesting to see what, you know, since you didn't have all these social niceties, to sort of set up your framework of relating to each other, you just had to, everything was like, immediate, kind of stuff, some people had these complex, silent relationships that came out of nowhere, and I had this really incredible experience with a woman where I realized that for some reason, I was always like looking away, or feeling very much like, it always triggered some issue of self-esteem, and then the whole point was to reach out. The whole point was to be vulnerable, and reach out, and either they're going to chop your head off, or something's going to happen, and I had this pretty amazing experience, where I pretty much, I reached out, it wasn't a sexual thing, the energy could be a reaching out to someone, it could be acknowledge just in a look, or a touch or something, and there was nothing to dilute it, you couldn't talk, you couldn't say anything to get rid of that uncomfortable feeling, it was just reaching out, and I had this experience of whole like out of body experience of seeing like a court in like medieval England with myself as the court jester and this person as nobility and having like been in love with them or something. All this kind of stuff, so what do you think about that, I don't know. That was, that was like a drama play of an emotion, or a pattern that was like inside, so that was my experience of working out karma with someone, and of course I saw that concept used all the time. But, I had some pretty strong experiences with that. I don't know, it was an experiment.

**Q:** So you'd been there for five years when Laura finally got there?

**NT:** I guess, yeah.

**Q:** So, what brought you there in '74?

**LB:** Let's see, I had met someone who had left the community and was traveling, when I lived in Atlanta, my first couple of years in college, I was in and out of college. You know, well, actually, I had been in boarding school in Massachusetts, and visited the first time, and that was probably like in '70, well I graduated in '71, so that would have to be in '70. And at that time they were 200 hundred people, and there was the dorm in Warwick. Whatever, how much land that was 60 acres...

**NT:** 25.

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LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**LB:** 25 acres, and they had built a huge dorm to house 100 people and I came to visit and it was just very much hippie commune, it seemed very chaotic, but full of energy.

**Q:** And, hundreds of people?

**LB:** Yeah, it might have even been three hundred around that time.

**Q:** And when was your first visit?

**LB:** In '70. Well there was three hundred at one point. So, and then I met someone in Atlanta, and then I went up to visit from Atlanta and had a very profound experience, and a lot of people there, and Michael speaking, and he could just magnify a room, and everything would kind of like shimmer, and turn to light. You know, you just have, and anyway, so I kind of dropped out of everything and college, and you know it was much later in the process, it was in '74, I can't remember what part of the year it was. I think it was Spring. And, it really had, the name at that point called Metallica Aquarian Concept, so it went from Cathedral of Spirit, to Brotherhood of Spirit, to Metallica Aquarian Concept for awhile. There was much move toward, there was a lot of property including a whole, almost a whole town in a town called Turner Falls, with an old Theater Complex, a bowling hall. Video cameras, sound equipment, a lot of real interesting media stuff, experimental new age, video, multimedia kind of services, I don't know if we really called them services. Maybe we did. And, it was thrilling, just thrilling. So, I came out, and kind of lived in the old property in Warwick, where the old dorm was and the house, there was probably only thirty people left in that facility, it was kind of like the outer edge of the community.

**NT:** That had been the hub, but now it was an outer edge.

**LB:** And, at that time there was property in probably like five different towns. And in Turner's Falls, there were like six houses, or buildings where people lived, and but, so I kind of went out to the outer fringe. The main part of the community was more pushing into contemporary stuff, but I worked on, I worked with the farm crew for awhile, digging potatoes with one of the farmers, and then there was kind of a move for people to start working out.

**Q:** You farmed, meaning community farms.

**NT:** Well we rented farms, we rented space and farmed it.

**LB:** What I did was work with a crew at a person's land where they were doing their own potatoes and we would help them out, for a portion of their crop. But there was a pretty high contingent of people that were starting to get jobs in the community at that time, in '74. And a lot of us went to work for the state school for the, at that time called, retarded. And some people were custodial, and some were personal care, I was a custodian. Yeah, so I really came in at a different time. I had a good six months of feeling like I was on a hippie commune, working a job, coming back, and giving all our money, 100% of your paycheck into the community, and if you had a special need, you needed winter boots or something, you'd get on the list, and you know your name would work down the list of when you could get what you needed.

**Q:** Did that work well, was everyone reasonably happy with...

**NT:** No.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

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**Q:** No? Feel deprived?

**LB:** Yeah, there was definitely times that you felt deprived, and there was definitely an inner circle that got whatever they wanted.

**NT:** That's where it really started to break down.

**Q:** Michael had a few close associates that...

**NT:** Yeah, I guess you know, the ideal was one thing, and reality was different. And, I don't know if you really want to know about that.

**Q:** Whatever you think helps tell the story.

**NT:** Well, it was interesting, people came there, you know, supposedly there titular head, that was always kind of claiming that he's, you know, he's not really what the community's about. The community is about the town and the people that are there and the vision that they're bringing to the community. So, basically, in essence, he's symbolic and he's sort of a guide, but he's not the leader, he was always proclaiming this. So, what made the community go was all these talented people, you know, all these motivated people, they had, what did we have, we started a greeting card company, which is now called renaissance greeting cards, it still continues, they bought themselves out from the community it's like a \$50 million a year business. It's beautiful, their stuff is incredible. You know, that's still going.

**LB:** We had a restaurant and a record store, and a grocery store, and a bunch of things, and a book store.

**NT:** There's a construction company that's still going strong in Western Mass...

**LB:** A company that converted bands for buses,

**NT:** Buses for Elvis Costello, you know, actually customized buses for Elvis Costello, Yes, the Who, Joe Cochran, Linda Ronstadt, they had a company that toured and take these people around, they'd build the buses, and have the drivers, so you know, it's a community, and there are a lot of talented people there, a lot of motivated people, and basically it fell apart, because Michael started feeling threatened. He'd say one thing, but he really wanted control.

**LB:** He became more and more out front about that, this is more around the time we left, and much later in time, you know ten years for you, and five years for me.

**NT:** The thing was, the thing that really soured it was power, power, control, manipulation, you know the thing about the community was no drugs, no alcohol, no promiscuity, those were the cardinal rules.

**Q:** Promiscuity meaning, you had to be in a...

**NT:** You had to be in a committed relationship. Supposedly, but, of course, none of that applied to Michael. You know, this is the first time you heard it and then you hear people later, like Rash Nish, saying your so spiritual that you've overcome the need for material wealth so you can anything you want. You can have sports cars, motorcycles, cocaine, you know. All the women you could sleep with. I was very naive, I didn't want to believe any of that. It took me years afterwards to even be able to let that in, because I didn't want to believe that it was happening. And, when Jim Jones, his thing, we'd been hearing things, toward the end, Eon and I were in a band together, and we'd been hearing things when we'd come home about Michael having people tear walls out of the theater so he could look and

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see if the FBI had planted bugs in there, cause he was flipped out on cocaine. I mean, it soured. It wasn't like that in the first few years, but, it just...

**LB:** Tell them about more of the experiments. The community experiments, I'm always fascinated hearing about those, and it was really more the time frame.

**NT:** Well we different things like you know, in the summer months we decided to see what would happen, if we slept during the day and stayed up all night. Three hundred people try to do all your things, all your work, sleep all day, and stay up all night. Throw your bio-clocks, it was like, open your third eye or something, that was a fail.

**LB:** Definitely fucks with your pineal.

**NT:** Yeah.

**LB:** Tell 'em about the toilets.

**NT:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. The whole concept, we had the largest leech field system, this was interesting, just establishing the community and fighting off the local government, just to legal, have clearance with the health department, we had the largest leech field system in Massachusetts, we had an alarm system on it. Because the percolation in the land that we bought in Warwick was not very good, so, what they did, they had these percolation tiles, in other words, those guys come in any time and see if the water wasn't leeching through the gravel in this tile, then it wasn't percolating properly, and then they'd worry about, they could shut us down, basically. So, we used to get raided by the health department. The way we got around that, was we dug up the tiles, and put a piece of plywood on the bottom of the tile, you know, so, and empty it of any water, then place the tile back in the ground, and put sod around it, tamp it down, then they'd look and see that the water was percolating, there were things like we had to do in order to survive, I mean, cause they just wanted to shut us down. And it got to be like Laura was saying, once we got to Warwick, it grew from like 70 to 350 people, that was the peak, there were actually 350 people living on five different properties.

**Q:** When was that? When did it peak?

**NT:** Like around '73, '72. Then we had people visiting from other communities, like Vendhorn came, and spoke a couple of times, the Farm, Steve Gaskin came, that was really, yeah, he came, and Michael had this real competitive thing with Steve Gaskin, like who's the great leader. And by that time, Michael was full blown into this thing about being Apostle Peter, being the reincarnation of Robert E. Lee, the Apostle Peter, and some Roman General who defeated Hannibal, Sippio. So, he's all these things according to, megalomania. And of course, people around him were various Apostles, not me, I was a schmoe. I wasn't anybody important.

**LB:** Around the time that I came, there would be Sunday Morning Services, or they would be a couple evenings a week there would be something, there would be like major music blasting, I mean, we'd be in the theater house by then, all the seats were taken out, it was just a carpeted, huge space, with a stage. Elwood would come and do transchanneling, the room would vibrate, you know, real humorous stuff from Sam Clemens, real heavy stuff from Hish Nu, or Krishna, people could answer questions. I even remember some drumming stuff. Just once, and there would be kind of like video things, late show things, real high energy. A whole lot of experiments going on in the time that I was there, with the

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

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LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

media and the businesses, but there was always like this push to be in positive energy, need to be positive energy.

**NT:** It's very allentus in the sense of this is the core, work on the core and make it stronger, so then you can fan out, it was like...

**LB:** It was very apocalyptic.

**NT:** Yeah, in the sense that there's definitely going to be earth changes, society is definitely going to crumble, community is going to be everything, people need to be like, tempered, you know, like a sword or a piece of metal, to be strong.

**LB:** This is where it's at.

**NT:** This is where it's at, you know, meditation, developing self-sufficiency.

**LB:** There wasn't really a lot of farming going on, you know, by the time that I came, you know, it really wasn't self-sufficient.

**NT:** Yeah, it fell away. It got much more savvy as far as that goes, businesses, a lot of different businesses, plumbing, electricians, we had a pizzeria.

**LB:** There would be a lot of drop-ins, people just traveling through and dropping in. Some people that were really insane, you know.

**Q:** And you had to cope with them.

**NT:** A lot of people going insane, saw a few of those. I have a theory about that. I think that there was no understanding of boundaries at all, there was no respect for that, people were like, expected to be completely vulnerable, without any safe guards, and to be confronted, confrontation is a heavy thing, people that were supposedly picked out by Michael because they had developed certain awarenesses, it's like, you know, there was all this talk from Elwood about all these progressions of awareness and people were on certain levels, and most of us were on fifth progression which was the development of spiritual love, but without any compassion. Or, you know, it's like, you've got this raw, essential thing, but you don't know what to do with it, so part of your evolution is. So, anyway, there was this, it's hard to explain, but there was this whole philosophy about any bad vibes had to be worked out right away, so people would confront each other, and that was the whole thing, I mean, and especially the people that supposedly were more evolved, I mean, I remember walking by the kitchen one time and seeing Randy confront some person, and just hammering him you know. So, people were constantly pressured to try to open up, and work stuff out, but they really didn't have any idea what they were doing, you know, and it was just this feeling of, there are no boundaries, and I really learned a good important lesson about that. I mean, I respect that so much now, I can respect the concept of people's boundaries, where back in our community, the idea of a boundary was, you're being defensive. And now it's like an important, it's an important basis on which to function. Until I learned that lesson, I saw people just lose it, I saw very highly intelligent people with a lot of self-esteem come into the situation, get ground down, and go crazy, run off in the middle of the winter without any clothes on, get picked up by, a friend of mine from high school, a real good friend of mine wound up strangling some woman, on a, was working on an asphalt crew. He was just, he was delusional, and I know this person, I just saw people, but he basically became very dependent on his parents not self-esteem, I saw that. I saw it happen. So it

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August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

was like mass experiment in human psychology, without anybody really qualified to do it with any compassion.

**LB:** I would say that the part about the toilets he needs to know.

**Q:** Oh yeah, the toilets.

**NT:** This is the essential philosophy of the community. There was this thing called toilet city, which was a semi-circle of about, how many toilets was it, did you ever see it?

**LB:** I never saw it, I just heard about it.

**NT:** It was about twelve toilets in a semi-circle, and there were no stalls, so everybody go to sit across from each other.

**LB:** Was that part of the dorm, was that in the basement of the dorm or something?

**NT:** No, that was in the main part of the house.

**Q:** Those were the toilets just for the whole community, they were plumbed in and all.

**NT:** Yeah, it was plumbed in and everything, but it didn't work, it was like a disaster. You know, plumbing sense, it just wasn't natural.

**Q:** So people were just, that was the bathroom.

**NT:** Well, yeah, for awhile.

**Q:** What did people think of that? I mean obviously you must have gone along with it or you wouldn't have lived there.

**NT:** Well, it didn't last, I mean, basically it failed within the first month. It was pretty crazy it was stupid. It captures a metaphor, you know. We all know that it's nice to have a little privacy every now and then, and we're much happier human beings.

**LB:** I can think of times when there really wasn't any privacy, and I wasn't even living in the early years, or Heath, you know with mattresses piled up, you know, you were always living with somebody, you weren't ever in your own room, you know, you were living with 2 to 4 to 6 to 8 other people.

**NT:** It was really a lot of fun in the beginning.

**LB:** And you know, all your meals, and if you're in an outlying property that has land, you can walk out and sit under a tree and be by yourself some of the time, but if you're in a city property, and you know, working a job and coming back, there's never really that alone. And I remember sitting in my room and doing a lot of journaling, some of that I still have, but a lot of it was like, what is this stuff about positive energy? I just don't get it. I'm not making it, I'm not cutting it, you know, cause I'm supposed to be something that I'm not living up to, but there aren't any real tools for understanding what it is. It was pretty, I was just trying to thing, just in retrospect, I see it as being a pretty patriarchal system, and pretty intellectual, you know, not real grounded, a lot of it was on transcendence. You know, not on eminence or connected with the earth or spirituality.

**NT:** There was this whole thing with people being charged with the fact that now is the Aquarian age, and there was this great grand opportunity for us all to evolve.

**LB:** This could be your last lifetime if you do it right.



Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**NT:** And part of doing it right is following Michael.

**LB:** Right, oh there was a lot of stuff about, if you leave the community, you've blown it. There was a lot of stuff.

**NT:** That was a real manipulative thing, you know you really buy into that, once you buy that concept, he worked that for all it was worth.

**Q:** Let me just press ahead, how did you come to leave then?

**NT:** Well, Laura had a good sense. We were on the road, we were in Toronto.

**LB:** We ended up in a community band together.

**NT:** And we were playing in Toronto, and Jim Jones, happened. And, I guess, that just freaked us all out, because here was a charismatic leader.

**LB:** And we just said, you know, "There are people in our community that are that."

**NT:** That would do that, you know.

**LB:** We were devoted, that could set something up, you know, we gotta really get out of there, and Michael had become more and more...

**NT:** Tyrannical.

**LB:** Yeah, and just adamant about his power, you know, either you're with me or get out, and if you're going to question me, you know, you've blown it, but get the hell out.

**NT:** It's really interesting too...

**LB:** And it seemed to be having some cocaine psychoses, and we just didn't believe it for awhile, but there were like stories of him being, frantically paranoid, and doing cocaine, and still all our money is going into the community, and it's, you know, wait a minute, what is this with cocaine? What the fuck is this?

**Q:** I think cocaine's being provided to anyone who wants it.

**LB:** I think another turning point for me, in terms of the whole spiritual philosophy everything, there was one point where I didn't want to sleep with Michael, because Norm and I were in a relationship, but we didn't live together when we went back to the community, like off the road, you know, we'd be in our separate places. And, Michael laid a trip on me like, I can't even remember specifically what it was, but like, you know, you've just blown your chance for evolving to the seventh progression, or something like that, you know. It's like, wait a minute, wait a minute here.

**Q:** Were you trying to keep it a secret that you two were seeing each other...secret from him?

**LB:** No, no, it was...

**Q:** You were being open with him.

**LB:** You know, it wasn't like anything one way or the other, you know. And, so then it was like, well wait a minute, this sounds really manipulative, you know. So, that happened some time before, and then when Jim Jones happened, it's like, we've got to get out of there, you know, this is really sick.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

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**Q:** When was this?

**NT:** '79.

**LB:** So, I think it took us a couple of months to get it together to get out, and it was pretty...you know, you have to be quiet about it, you can't talk about it, you kind of have to...

**NT:** Well, we were rare in the sense that we actually went to Michael and told him that we were leaving, I guess it's just like, we felt like we wanted to be up front about it, for some reason.

**LB:** I don't even remember that.

**NT:** Yeah, we did, we actually drove up, said, "We're leaving." And he said, well, boy you're really going to fuck up, you know, kind of like, you're really going to screw up you're karma by doing that. Well, "Too, bad!!" , you know.

**LB:** Did we do that when we were packed up?

**NT:** We drove up to go, and we told them.

**Q:** When you were leaving.

**LB:** When we were getting ready to go...

**NT:** Pretty much we were ready to go.

**LB:** Oh, that makes sense. There was kind of a movement of people leaving around that time, you know, what with him saying, "You're with me, and you have total faith in me, or you get out." So, a lot of people were saying, "Okay, it's time to go." And around that time, the greeting card company tried to buy out, and our friend Richard left around that time, he was not able to come today. He left a couple of months earlier. And, I remember we were still in the band, the band was in the community, but, we still continued with the band. Isn't that true? Yeah, we did. But, we went to live in Norm's parents' mill house by the stream, in another part of Massachusetts, and it was like, so quiet. Soooo empty. Sooooo lonely.

**NT:** And we were like..."Where's all the people? It's gotta be more than you!!"

**LB:** The only thing that saved us was PBS I Claudius, I think.

**Q:** Can we go back, you talked, I don't understand, how did Michael get to this point? Do you know anything about his background, or did he just suddenly pop up, proclaiming himself the great spiritual teacher? I mean, where did he come from?

**LB:** Didn't he got to the Summer of Love?

**NT:** Well, he did all that stuff, I mean, he was a, I guess he was like, he was really, he pushed the motorcycle thing, really hard. I mean the hell's angel thing, and I guess he really broke through, as far as like, realizing that, beating people up and stuff, wasn't where it was at. And, starting being a seeker.

**LB:** He went to California, he was there for the bay area stuff, and it was like a big turnaround for him.

**NT:** And then he hooked up with Elwood.

**LB:** The thing about Elwood and the transmedium, I just think it's interesting for the community, I think there's a hot bed of spiritualism in that part of Massachusetts. There's like a long history of theosophy, and transmediumship.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

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August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** Yeah, spiritualism was real strong there.

**LB:** And there's, I can't remember the name of the place, but there's like some little town.

**NT:** That's right, well this guy by the name of Charles Hapgood, and Beth Hapgood, Charles Hapgood would like work with Elwood, who did transmediumship around the lost continents of Atlantis.

**LB:** Oh yeah, we were really into Atlantis.

**NT:** He published some books, and then Michael had hooked up with...

**LB:** That's my sense of it, like Hell's Angels over to the bay area..

**NT:** Over to the drug thing, completely pushed it to the max.

**LB:** The drug, psychedelic thing, or whatever, and then came back and somehow hooked in with the spiritualist, and Elwood.

**NT:** And then they had this tree house, which was where people were drying out, you know, and it was just, they were completely bottomed out, druggie types, who later became, like, leaders in the community, you know. And, I actually have pretty fond memories of some of those people. You know, it's hard to, I don't want to spoil the whole experience, because I don't really have, it's not all negative, obviously.

**Q:** Well, you wouldn't have stayed with it for ten years if it were not giving you anything, I presume.

**LB:** I'd say one interesting thing, for Norm and I, was that, when we left the community, he had been from age 17 to 27, never had a checking account, you know, never like, worked in the world, you know, it was like, developmentally, you're just off from your peers in the world, and you have to really kind of do a whole different kind of developmental thing. See, I'd been in and out of college, and you know, had worked some...

**Q:** So, a little more worldly knowledge.

**NT:** A lot more.

**Q:** Were there children in the community?

**NT:** Yeah.

**Q:** So, born there sometimes? Were there any restrictions about conception and birth, were they promoting families, or discouraging them, or anything like that? I mean, some communities thought children were a big expense, and don't want them or whatever.

**NT:** Oh no, there was never anything like that.

**Q:** So, just your choice.

**NT:** You know, there was daycare, you know, that was organized, very well organized. I even tried it one day, nearly killed me, 17 kids.

**Q:** Working in the daycare?

**NT:** Yeah.

**LB:** Still, mostly a woman's activity.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** ...traditional. Is that true? The women do the cooking, and that kind of thing?

**LB:** Well, maybe the guys would do the cooking too. But, I mean, you know, with chopping wood, and things like that, I mean, maybe it was different in your...

**NT:** The crews were mixed.

**Q:** Were they?

**NT:** The crews were all mixed, pretty much. I mean, I think maybe the thing that was gender specific was like, Krishna Electric...

**LB:** Construction...

**NT:** Construction, rock band, but...

**LB:** Yeah, and the core group was pretty well mixed.

**NT:** It was pretty well mixed, the core group of people,

**LB:** The business manager could be a woman or whatever.

**NT:** I guess the only thing that pulls me up short on that, is like, in terms of what they were to Michael, I mean, what my experience with women in the community was so refreshing, as far as when I first came there. Because, nobody wore make up, there wasn't any of the societal kind of thought form around what's beautiful, and what isn't beautiful, it was just like being able to mingle with people of the opposite gender without having there be some kind of sexual tension. Because there wasn't for me, at first, it was just really cool. It was very, very refreshing.

**LB:** Yeah, it was you know...maybe some of the farm crews were mixed, or the kitchen crews, but maybe like the Electrical, or construction, or whatever, it was mostly men. The child care was mostly women.

**NT:** Women were like, heavily involved in the promotion of the bands, you know, there was this thing called Free Spirit Press, which was a community owned and operated paper that came out.

**LB:** I'll have to find a copy.

**Q:** Yeah, I'd like to see that.

**NT:** They painted a bus blue, and drove all over the country, you know, I guess, getting vendors to take the magazine, it was kind of interesting, and so it was a combination of like, communal stuff actually happening in the, and then more global kind of new age stuff, and articles about one person's experience in Viet Nam, and actually being on the battle lines, and things that happened to him, you know, I mean, there was some interesting stuff, and women were really involved in promotional stuff. There was a rock band called Spirit Flesh, they put out a couple of albums through MetroMedia, never really got anywhere, they had a Carnegie Hall concert. They used to go, this is an interesting story. They had a silk screen studio that I used to work in, and we'd run 24 hour shifts for like two weeks, generating like 10,000 posters, huge posters, Spirit Flesh, with a picture of Michael on them, and they would go down in New York City and in the middle of the night they would plaster, like Brooklyn Bridge, and completely like, plaster Manhattan, and do these raids, it was sort of like promotional terrorism. Stuff like that. I remember marching down 5th Avenue proselytizing, Central Park, trying to get convertees, fanatic for the first couple of years.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** You must have done pretty well, because people seem to come streaming in.

**NT:** Well, I think I was partially responsible for getting the money together to buy the first piece of property, cause I remember talking to Phyllis Hamilton and Ruth Miller, and I talked to them a lot before they joined, and they brought the money in to buy Warwick.

**LB:** People gave all their money.

**NT:** Middle aged women, you know.

**Q:** All their assets...

**NT:** Yeah.

**Q:** Well, a few good inheritances, could certainly pick things up. That's the story again, over and over, one or two people with inheritances, that's how communities bought their property, repeatedly.

**LB:** My personal theory, I mean, I think it would be really interesting for somebody in Social studies, to look at this in the big picture, and to the now, because you know, I think psychedelics were real significant, impetus for the movement. Not necessarily in community, but in people's experience with that, to coming to one of the spiritual communities, I know it was for me.

**Q:** But, supposedly, in the community, psychedelics were banned, right?

**LB:** That's correct. And pot, we didn't really spoke any pot, and I know that when Norm and I were first in the band, and the band went on the road, we went to West Palm Beach, was like our first gig away from home. And we started out just as like, playing locally at little nursing homes and prisons, and went to Boston, and got a manager, and costumes, and you know, a rock band, but our first gig, and then there was like, cocaine, and marijuana, and I know some of the people in the band were like, really into it, and I was like, no way. The community, it was just like, part of our precepts, you know, I won't do that. But, it was around, you know, it was like the disco years, and it was like partly a disco band, and still affiliated with the community and still trying to be about light, and consciousness.

**Q:** Did you keep in touch after you left?

**LB:** Well, that's really interesting, and I hope that Deborah can perhaps meet with Richard, because there's a newsletter, that still continues.

**NT:** It's called Imagine.

**LB:** Imagine.

**Q:** Former members, as opposed to the current people?

**NT:** That's quite interesting.

**LB:** Richard has like, a lot of back issues, we were involved in it, we probably haven't been involved in it for like eight or ten years. But we used to be on the list, and get the newsletters, and they also have reunions, every year, pretty much, every year. And, over the last five years, they've met, sometimes at the community, where there's like sixty people still.

**NT:** I don't think there's that many.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**LB:** Maybe with kids there are. This one piece of property [unintelligible], from the ten different pieces that the community had, maybe a hundred acres.

**Q:** Is Michael still there?

**LB:** No.

**Q:** He's gone.

**NT:** He's somewhere in upstate New York.

**LB:** Did he get kicked out?

**NT:** Well, they did kick him out, eventually.

**Q:** Is that right? But, after you were gone?

**NT:** Yeah. We heard stories that things really significantly degenerated for a number of years after we left, until finally...

**LB:** Stuff about guns.

**Q:** Really? Guns?

**LB:** More drugs.

**NT:** Getting people to sell drugs, actually going to that point of corruption. [unintelligible]

**Q:** So, now as I understand it, today it's what is commonly called a land trust community, essentially, which is, there is not a communal economy, but people actually own their own houses, and live, you know, they have a sort of a common outlook, maybe, but really, are just independent families living in there.

**NT:** That's what I hear too.

**LB:** That's the way it's set up now?

**Q:** There was an ad in communities magazine maybe a year ago for a house there, and it was a fairly high priced thing, and then it says, you know, within the Renaissance Community, but the way the ad is set up, you didn't have to subscribe to any particular point of view to live there.

**NT:** That's the way that I understand it too. It's people just living there.

**LB:** Well, that would be interesting for one of you all to go there, and interview that have had that 25 year, 30 year history with that.

**Q:** There would still be some old timers there, I think.

**NT:** Very old timers, yeah. Very old.

**LB:** Kathy Murphy...

**NT:** Jim Sullivan lived in the tree house, he's been there since '68. Doug Bear, he's been there since '68.

**LB:** It would be interesting to hear from some of the kids that came in the community, like the Klinerock kids that were like 9 and 10 when they came in. You know, that are in their mid-20's now. It would be interesting.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** Yeah, well, we ought to see if we can connect there and see if we can meet some of those people, I think we could work that out probably. Did you ever get motivated to live in a community again? Try to do it so that you work the bad parts out of it, and retain the good? And start over?

**NT:** I don't know, I'm pretty cynical about it I guess. I mean I like community, I don't know, it took me a long time to get to the point where I trusted just groups, again. It took me a long time to get back to where I was willing to let somebody facilitate anything, you know, in a group.

**LB:** Well, even in our marriage though, after we left, we lived, we often lived with a house mate.

**Q:** Is that right?

**LB:** Yeah, at a couple of different points in Atlanta, then also when we came here, to Albuquerque, Lucille, I mean, that's not big community, but that's kind of untraditional for a marriage, or whatever. I currently live in a house with three other people, we have one or two close friends that come over a lot. And we call ourselves the Honey House. We've been talking about land for a couple years. And, I will say that it seemed like, you know, when we left, we were both very bitter, you know, about spirituality at all. I mean, not much less community, but just about spirit at all. But, it took me about a year to start looking around, and then connecting more with Goddess energy. More eminent kind of things. It was like, oh, okay, there's the missing piece, so I'm going to go forward, so, I've been pretty devoted to that for the last ten years, thirteen years. And, I really want to live in community. I'd live in community, but I want to live in the community out of the city at some point, I don't have an inheritance, I guess I have to get out there and proselytize.

**Q:** Well, you got any other great anecdotes to tell, or anything like that? Anything else we should put down here?

**LB:** Put it on pause for a minute.

**NT:** This one, I'm embarrassed about this..

**Q:** You mean Michael decided that you ought to be an insider?

**NT:** Yeah, I'm in the core group, you know, I'm spiritually evolved now, for some reason, and I should be in the core group, and they're like, people in the core group, and then lieutenants sort of like a padre you know, Michael, and then the first lieutenant. So, we had one thing where, I'm really ashamed, I'm just going to say this for the record, because it just freaks me out when I think about it, and where it came from, but there was one time, I guess Michael was feeling like, people were sort of distracted, they were like doing things, instead of working, they were in their rooms reading, or something. So, they had a book, this was eerie, they had a book collecting party, and it started, it was like a midnight party, it was like the core group people, went around the dormitory, and parts of Warwick waking people up, and having them come together at midnight. You know wake people up, they're like totally exhausted and tired, and told them to bring their books out, collect them in the middle of the road. You know, do a book collecting thing, and I was part of that you know, I mean, that really freaked me out, I mean, that I was like following orders like a little Nazi, you know.

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** What's the implication of the book collecting, what's that?

**NT:** The idea is that people were having too many, supposedly distractions.

**LB:** Did they burn them?

**NT:** No, it was just collecting the books, it was just one incident, you know, there weren't a lot of things like that, but just the fact that I participated in that. I was just being a good little Nazi, you know, I mean, the thing is that you have, you bought into this power structure, and then, your whole thing, your whole self esteem is tied into it, and then you start doing things like that, it's kind of a negative story, but it did happen.

**Q:** But, you didn't survive as a member of the core group, it sounds like.

**NT:** No, I don't think I was ruthless enough. I wasn't ruthless, really. I did, there were some other things, that happened, for me it was, I had some very powerful, stimulating experiences that were profound in like a sense of spiritual experiences too, I think that I learned a little bit about you know, relationships, you know, I think I definitely learned a lot about human relationships, and saw them in a different way than you see in a day to day sense, as far as, with that level of intimacy, because here in a day to day sense, people sort of come and go and they have limited interactions, and they sort of take how much they can take, and then they just walk away. Well, the community couldn't do that, without constant, intense, day to day thing. I mean, you could go, you could have this, I mean like, I've had amazing, very profound experiences, form like going walking, I mean, I had this experience going in like 10, 20 degree below zero weather, going logging, and the truck gets stuck and people start decompensating, and other people have to pick up the slack, and I was like, able to pick up the slack, and get us sort of organized, in giving people my gloves and my coat and my body temperature warming up, and seeing people in these different sort of roles, like forty year old men as a young boy, usually very competent and capable, but losing it as a child, and sort of experiencing things on the concept of karma with people, like, reliving this, roles from another lifetime and all that. I didn't really like, I wasn't looking for that, but I really had those kinds of experiences where I saw that could be very like kind of a reality, were normal relationships aren't what they seem to be, you know, there are dimensions of intimacy with people that can be very profound, but, I haven't been able to match that since the community, but nobody really taught me that, that was just something that I kind of learned myself. I don't when I'd get that back.

**LB:** Do you miss it?

**NT:** Yeah, I feel like it would be hard to match that. I mean, it's like when you really see things, when you really see the way relationships are with people, beyond the normal kind of decorum, that there's something else going on, that it goes a lot deeper than just the limited time you've been together, it seemed to be a truth for me that I found out. Yeah, I do believe in reincarnation, I do believe that, there are things that are really like from experience, not because I think I'm buying into a doctor, but because of things I've actually experienced. I do believe. There's like a depth of human experience that I had in the community, that I cannot really touch.



Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**Q:** Which is the heart of the attraction of the whole thing, really. It is a level of living that you just, in modern jive society that you just can't reach.

**LB:** I think that principle is still true, you know, we used to think about how when we lived there, it was like stepping up your evolution to like live in a community, and I mean, I still believe that's true. That it did and still does.

**NT:** I'm still very confused, you know, because, I can't really separate that part from like, the structure and the political aspects of it, the power, the hierarchy aspect of community, where all the mistakes that people normally make, this is thing that I came out believing after I got out, was that community was a microcosm of greater society, we thought we were elite, we thought we were better than, and when I came out of it, I realized that society works a hell of a lot better, I mean if three hundred can not keep it together, and the degradation I saw occur there, then I thought, well, society works pretty well, considering you've got billions of people. That's your [unintelligible] release of that whole idea, that community could be better than, you know, there were a lot of things that I thought about philosophically about all of this stuff. That power corrupts, that the knife edge of spirituality and developing of awareness and psychic ability and all of this other stuff, little gifts that are given to you through time, is that power corrupts. It's sort of like everybody's challenged to develop and become powerful and to come into their own, yet it's also everybody's challenge to not abuse that power, I mean, when you get really, like that self confidence and that self esteem and you're just pushing, and you're producing, and you're just kicking butt and you know how to talk to people and you know how to relate to people, it's like you own up to being powerful, which is part of what is spiritual development is supposedly is about. And then, we step over the line, we start believing that. You start believing that, it's like an ego thing, that it's you. So, I can sort of see like Michael's sort of, fallen hero. Because anybody could do that, I mean, that could happen to anybody, anybody could start out with a real vision, work towards it, and have people attracted to you, and start feeding you, and making you feel like you're more important than you really are. So you know, I have like a lot of compassion for it, but it's sort of just like a play that I think about, you know. The human tragedy thing, and the thing about community and power. It's just really, complex.

**Q:** I wanted to ask one other thing, this just occurred to me, one question, that has been intriguing me, as a historian, all along, is why there was suddenly this great mushrooming of communities starting in the mid 60's and I don't know if there's really any complete answer to that really. But, one thing that I've been spotting here and there is that there are very specific predisposing factors and I was just curious to know if any of you had any such as, a remarkable number of people that I run into had families that were, that would have socialist or communist in them, some kind of communal oriented, or parents that had lived communally somehow, or at least aunts and uncles, or something like that in their background that kind of, you might say pushed, left them more open than the average person to that kind of thing, I just wondered if either of you might have any kind of background like that that might solve that problem.

**LB:** I would say, yeah, not in terms of socialist, my Dad, he was raised by missionary parents in India, and then he was a physician for Indian health services, so we moved a lot working with Native American reservations, [unintelligible] West Africa, where the people are more tribal in general, than just Wester,

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

so whether not really specifically into that, but I felt like I had more upbringing aware of different cultures or different ways of living. And our friend Richard would say yeah, his parents were socialist. I just see it really come very, I can't say directly, but intimately with psychedelics out of the 60's. Just new ways of being.

**Q:** See, that's interesting, there's another little bit of it, that's surprising how many people can identify something like that.

**LB:** I mean, I think of your Mom, I think of the farming community that she came out of Wisconsin as being real strong extended family, I always think about that part of her history, even though she was way far away in Massachusetts, and your Dad, [unintelligible], being a little bit liberal, but coming out of the Jewish immigrant.

**Q:** Well, people coming from the late nineteenth century Jewish immigrant, Jewish men, there were a lot of radicals in that bunch, a lot of socialists. I don't know, that's a culture that gave rise to some of it I think.

**NT:** I just remember feeling like, nothing was working. I was like, I needed to completely...

**LB:** I love that story of your walking twelve miles, just leaving your home, just running away from home, and just walking twelve miles.

**NT:** My parents tried to stop me, I told them I was going. I announced it a month ahead of time. This is the kind of, "hi, I'm leaving, I'm going to leave in a month." "Oh, no you're not." "No, really I'm living." This is the whole credibility factor, you know sixteen years old, or whatever, it was like the whole issue of no you're not. "Three days Mom, I'm leaving." Oh, no, no, yeah sure. Oh, he really left. For me, it was like, for me the kind of thing that had snapped for me, I had tried to do the drug culture thing, you know it was supposedly peace love and flowers, and brotherhood, I think I went to a couple of hippie events in Boulder. I dropped acid on Flagstaff Mountain, it was like the biggest bands used to play up there every Friday night. And I stayed with my brother for summer and I just got embedded in the hippie, and I thought okay, this is where brotherhood, peace, love is happening, and I did it one time, I dropped acid, nobody said anything, there wasn't anything going on that wasn't just completely superficial. It just shocked me, it was like, there's nothing happening here, there's nothing, there's no spirituality here, there's nothing profound about this at all. All people could talk about was what drugs they were taking, and "Oh man, chocolate chip, you think that's something, you should try that purple flash." You know, it was always very superficial, and it was like, this is not the answer, and I remember thinking, I just want to walk down the street and look someone in the eye, and know they're really looking at me. Back then I thought like, people were so far away from anything real, any kind of intimacy. And, I wanted real intimacy, I was part of a youth group, our Unitarian minister, a great guy buy the name of Rev. Barnett, and we used to go on these retreats, you know like in Western Mass. that was like the Shakers, they had a retreat, Roman Hill. We'd have mixed ceremonies and ritual, we'd share the Eucharist, and we'd sing folk songs, and do like different experimental things, like, group like, blind fold each other, and that whole idea of like trusting, you know, letting yourself go, and letting people like hold your weight up and stuff. That was all when I was 15 and 16 years old, and some of the people that were involved in that ceded off into the community, and then I kind of ceded off. That's kind of...

Interview with Laura Berg and Norman Troy

Interviewer: Unknown

August 4, 1996

LB = Laura Berg, NT = Norman Troy

**LB:** It was a really exciting time, it really was. These times are exciting too.

**Q:** Maybe that's a good place to quit, that's nice and upbeat, right?