Interview with Peter Bartzchak
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
May 25, 1996

Q: OK, this is Saturday, May 25th and an interview with Peter, and how do you pronounce your last name?
A: Bart-zak.

Q: Bartzchak. OK. And, um, well, I'd love to hear something about, a little bit about your background and what led up to you being a part of Project One.
A: Well, I grew up on Long Island, which I hated immediately. And I went to college in Brooklyn, New York, because I wasn't brave enough to make a further jump from home, even though I was dissatisfied. And then when I turned 21 -- I went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and took art, film-making, advertising ... and then worked as a cabbie in the summers and also directing and producing my own movies, which became too expensive a habit for me to support. And then when I turned 21 I inherited stocks that my grandparents had bought for me on my birthdays and stuff and I cashed them in and bought a Volkswagen van and spent a month, uh, going across country, and ended up in San Francisco, August 1972 with about $135 in my pocket and not knowing a soul in the city.

Q: Now what year was this?
A: 1972.

Q: '72. OK.
A: So I became a street artist down at Fishermans' Wharf, and started drawing pencil portraits, then eventually got into airbrushing t-shirts. And so that time I was living on Octavia Street, which is sort of like in the, sort of in the only ghetto that San Francisco had, and one day I happened to bump into one of my neighbors, and we got to talking, and a friend of his dropped by, and this friend worked for a business that was in Project One. The business was called "Imageworks." It was a film production, uh, laboratory, and so he invited me to stop by. And I was very much into film and film-making at that time, and I erroneously assumed that the whole commune was a film-makers' commune. So when I went over there, and saw the actual situation, I was a little bit disappointed, and so I started working at Imageworks, which was in the basement of the building, and the basement and the first floor were like the industrial sections, where all the, uh, recording studios, and rehearsal studios, and video and -- it was a massage business, down there, too, and then eventually I got to know more people in the building and wanted to live there. And they had these Wednesday meetings, where everyone in the building, theoretically, would meet, and it was more like a tribunal -- their honesty was very painful. They wouldn't think twice about tearing someone to pieces in front of everybody else, and if you could put up with that, or if you could speak well in front of a group of people, you did well. And I found out later that Imageworks was a real lemon and that the guy who ran it was the laughingstock of the building, and that they took advantage of a lot of people. But that was my entryway into the commune. So I got rent-free -- they called them "spaces" instead of apartments, or rooms. Rent-free, because supposedly it was being used by Imageworks employees, so I started off in that room, then I moved to the second floor, and I ended up on the fourth floor in a very cush [?] room, which was determined by how many windows you had. And I had lots of windows overlooking Twin Peaks. Beautiful view. And uh, lived there for four years, really. Became sort of a village elder. I became the rent collector. The responsibility came to whoever couldn't run fast enough, essentially. I think the, the biggest problems with the commune

was how do you be tolerant and get everybody to pay their rent and clean their room.

Q: Right.
A: It was like you can't enforce with no teeth. That was the central contradiction that the commune -- all the time I was there -- how can you not be police, not be authority figures, and still run a community of 350, 400 people.

Q: Wow. That's how many people were there?
A: At one point --

Q: That's huge.
A: -- it got up to five, six hundred. Sometimes it dropped down to like two hundred. But, easily a thousand people would visit a week, through the businesses. We had tours, I mean, we were sort of a showcase commune. Uh, that might have been part of the deal for the funds that they got from whoever they got them from.

Q: Mmm hmm. Now what part of the city is this in?
A: This is south of Market -- 10th and Howard street. The building's still there. It used to be a molasses factory. In fact, in, when the, documents I've given you, they talk about how it took them weeks to chip the molasses off the walls.

Q: Whoa!
A: Yeah. And, and these were big rooms. Well, actually, each floor was one room. It was like being on an artificial prairie, and the original folks were pioneers -- they built their own walls, they put in plumbing, electrical -- it was all very funky, none of it was up to code. And then once that was done, those people lost interest and went to somewhere else to become the pioneers -- see, each wave became more sophisticated and more civilized. And the trend used to be of lots of people living together in a large space to more separate spaces with fewer people living in them. That's why the population went down over the years. It was from a lot of broke hippies sharing everything, to more professional people or artists, or whoever. There weren't that many straight people, like architects or doctors, just mostly musicians, artists, hangers-on -- experimental folks.

Q: Do you know when it started?
A: I think, probably about seven years before I moved in. I think the commune lasted about eleven or twelve years.

Q: So it started in, like, maybe '65 or '66?
A: I think so. The date might be in one of the documents. But originally Ralph Scott, I think twelve other people went on K-SAN radio, one of the local stations, and announced their intention to start an urban commune, and from the reply, response, they were able to get a core group together that negotiated with the landlord, who never got his rent on time. There was always an eviction notice on the outside door. There were always going to be these inspections to close us down. But the city, pretty

much, had a see-no-evil, speak-no-evil -- it wasn't legal, but they didn't want to deal with it, and ... uh, there was no official way to categorize what we were doing there, so they just left us alone, since the south of Market at that time was uninteresting officially -- the real estate wasn't worth anything, nobody had any plans for it, so nobody really cared what was going on there.

Q: And, um, did people eat together, and stuff like that?
A: Well, the penthouse, as we called it -- the top floor, there was a kitchen up there, along the laundry machines, and that was another perennial fight -- everybody wanted, or liked the idea of eating communally, but nobody wanted to do the work. There was a lot of buying and maintaining and organizing, and then kicking everybody's butt to show up to make it worthwhile, and so that was very erratic over the years, but there was usually someone who carried the torch for communal eating. In fact, one of the most amazing Thanksgivings I ever had in my life was up there, uh, looking down a table of about a hundred people that I all knew really well, and about twenty turkeys, and it was a real sharing. I mean, when it worked, it was wonderful. It was like an ongoing pajama party. Everybody could just walk into everybody else's space, uh, there was a lot of communal nudity -- it was non-sexual for the most part -- each floor had only one bathroom, but there were like six or seven stalls in each bathroom, with no doors on the stall -- that was where I learned how to go to the bathroom in public. Uh, and there was a shower on the third floor that was built out of mesh and stucco -- it was almost like this Turkish-looking, adobe thing, which always leaked and had lots of problems. So there were only communal showers and baths, and uh, the barest of kitchens in each room. Hot plate, multi-cooker [?] fry pans, the like.

Q: It's surprising you didn't have a fire or something.
A: Well, the whole building was cement.

Q: Oh, OK. OK.
A: And in fact, the sprinkler system was one of the ongoing projects. It took years to build a sprinkler system and a variety of work crews would take on the project. It was like the churches in the medieval times would take several generations to build a church. And the generation in Project One was about a year. People rarely lasted longer than a year. I mean, physically, the place was freezing, hard, very unfit for human occupation, but the social life and the goals, the emotional goals of everybody living there really made it a much more friendly place. I mean, it pretty much set a standard of relationships that I touch down on even now. That, the type of openness and caring. I mean, there were politically correct problems, and stuff like that, and there were various "isms" that would sweep through the building -- like people would get into Mao for awhile, at one point the women got into lesbianism, for a while -- the guys never went gay -- and communism and various ... people would become leaders because of the force of their personalities or their confidence, or their ability for public speaking. So there were always these political axes being formed. You know, any human community -- but one of the funniest phenomenon was the people who refused to participate would condemn the people who participated for stone, for running roughshod over everybody else. But things had to get done, decisions had to be made, and supposedly we ran on a consensus system, which meant that if any single person disagreed, the whole thing got stopped until everybody agreed. And sometimes people would disagree just for the

sake of making trouble or getting attention or ... or annoying people. But how can you vote to go to majority if you need a consensus vote to go to majority? So we were stuck in the consensus mode, which really does not work. Not if you have hundreds of people living together. But not everybody would go to the meetings. You know, uh, it varied greatly. Every Wednesday would be a meeting, but, more often than not, you get tired of going to the meeting -- it was a lot of arguing that got nowhere.

Q: Now, this guy you mentioned who was the founder, what was his name?
A: Ralph Scott.

Q: Ralph Scott. Did, did he continue to live there and sort of act as a leader?
A: Sort of. He was like the highest echelon there, so he would float through and show his presence, but he wasn't accessible. He was a very grouchy person, and uh, I think he was an architect. I think he was fairly successful, so that he could devote a certain amount of his time to this project, but I think after -- when I first moved in, he was a very faint presence and then he disappeared altogether. It changed from how he envisioned it. That's what would, it defied everybody, it was something, definitely, it was something. But it wasn't what any of us wanted to be, or, no one could control it. It was like, who got accepted into the building? Sometimes people who nobody wanted there would be there and be living there, and other times people who wanted to get in that most of us would support or sponsor, wouldn't make it. So there was some sort of organic screening mechanism that kept a number of dissidents -- there were always people in the commune that opposed it and hated it, but wanted to be there. And then there were also projects that people would take on, like criminals and runaways and things like that, thinking that the atmosphere of openness and freedom we had there would, uh, be like an elixir to people who were on the edge of going into a very dark life, or who were mentally disturbed. A few people went crazy there during my stay. One, one of the people, it was too much freedom -- she just went nuts. Literally, uh, officially crazy, and a bunch of us decided to try to heal her, and eventually we had to commit her, because it was so labor-intensive, and it wasn't helping her at all. So it was kind of disappointing to know that, uh, this love power that we had wasn't under our control and couldn't solve everything.

Q: Now, could you -- I'm not sure I quite understand how someone became a resident there. Or maybe you weren't even sure.
A: Well, you would present yourself, and then you would be put on probation, but also you had to find a place to live. But you could sleep in the stairwells, you could sleep up in the penthouse. There were spaces like the estates or the heights, which was a large communal space within the communal space. And then there would be, sort of like, fringe areas, that no one claimed, that if someone had enough moxie, or nerve, that they could "I'm staying here." And again, it was politically incorrect to be intolerant. So even if you did dislike someone, it didn't behoove you to speak of it. Because you would be chastised for it, and analyzed for it, and people would come up to you in the hallway and just read you the riot act. I think a few of us were more tolerant than we really wanted to be, but then again, there was a feeling in the air, that there was enough to go around. So you could afford to have things in the environment that you didn't approve of, because there was so much that was great, that was good. It seemed, uh, it was enough to share. So people would just hang on, and through endurance become

part of the background, and boom! You're part of the commune. Things would disappear, people didn't lock their doors. And that was OK unless big things disappeared. Uh, one of the running jokes was -- we were always borrowing each other's clothes, and -- what happened to that vest -- then you see someone on the third floor wearing it, and you didn't say anything, but you've had their sweater for a year and a half.

Q: Right. Now, this guy Peter -- did he have a mission, or?
A: His mission was to create a new way of urban living. Instead of everybody living in their ow little cubicle and being isolated, would be to harness -- it's like putting computers in, what do you call that?

Q: Oh, a network?
A: Right. Exactly. And so, like there was a free school named "Simbas" [?] in the basement. So Simbas students would have access to everyone in the building, and they could apprentice themselves to anyone in the building, to a carpenter or an electrician, a video person, and artist, a photographer. And uh, everybody's children had several parents in the building. That was the other thing that communal living made it easier on single parents. People were a lot more up front about imposing their views -- and nobody would discipline, or spank someone else's kids, but, you'd speak your mind, and it was OK. It seemed like there enough like-mindedness in the building where it wasn't a problem. And, there were gay people, straight people ... the sexuality at that time, again, there was no taboos, essentially. Actually, the only taboo was being uptight.

Q: [Laughs.] Right. Was there much of a drug culture?
A: Oh, totally. Totally. Lots of cocaine, pot, LSD, uh, you name it. I mean, there'd be sometimes, everybody in the building would be tripping, you know. There were a couple of official drug dealers, and some people, there was a lawyer -- there were a few professional people who were living there, or on their way to becoming professional people, and they would frown upon it, but they participated. They just didn't want it to be so public. Some people were more private about it than others.

Q: Now, this guy who founded the place, was he, did he sort of have one foot in the straight world and one foot in --
A: Oh, definitely. He had to have a foot in the straight world.

Q: Because of his job and --
A: Well, the rent for the building was like twenty grand a month. Something like that. And plus, one of the biggest accomplishments was getting a boiler, so that we could all have hot showers supposedly. There were all these building-wide projects that were going on that needed funding, as opposed to individual effort of putting up walls and lighting and stuff like that.

Q: So he was running around fund-raising most of time?
A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.
A: Yeah. And you know, people would condemn him for his foot in the real world, but I'm sure they appreciated the hot water when the boiler got installed.

Q: Yeah, right.
A: And I think that's one of the things that got to him, was that people would harangue him as he was spending a lot of time to keep this building afloat. I mean, most of the people who became quote unquote leaders eventually fell prey to that of "How can they diss us while we're helping them to remain here?" But they did. You know, it's easier to be counter-culture if you don't have responsibilities. And if you do have responsibilities, then you need structure, you need some sort of interface with the bankers and the inspectors and the city.

Q: Yeah. Would you have described Peter at all as being counter-culture?
A: This is Ralph.

Q: Oh, Ralph, OK.
A: He was, in the way -- you know, you had your first wave of people born in the late forties, the first wave of the baby boomers who had already developed as people before that energy hit the world. I mean, when I came into it, it was ongoing, and there was already a uniform and an attitude that you fit into, whereas the people who discovered it were on the -- were there before it happened and then were there when it appeared. They had to have a foot in the real world, because this other scene didn't exist yet. And uh, which is funny, because the bohemians hated the hippies and vice versa. But they were the same species, albeit different geneses. And so, of course, there were conservative elements in him that -- I'm sure he disapproved of the drug use and some of the, the rampant sex that went on, but otherwise, I think he had the wisdom to know that he gave birth to this thing and he didn't really control it.

Q: Yeah. Did he have a really nice spot, living spot, in the building?
A: I don't know, because when I was living there and he was still there, he hung out in a group that I didn't hang with. There were hierarchies, there was an upper class, a middle class, a lower class. Everything. It was a microco -- it was macro, you know, of the larger society, except it had a different goal, and that goal was to knock down as many of the barriers and boundaries as possible. I mean, there were marriages of three, four, five people. Uh, there were multiple-lover situations where everybody knew who was sleeping with each other and that was supposedly OK. But eventually, everybody settled into monogamy. For as far-flung as the experimentation went, it was very painful. I don't think people are emotionally capable of dealing with, with these complicated situations. I mean, it's hard enough, with a one-on-one relationship and dealing with that truthfully and honestly, but, to be carrying very intimate relationships with three or four people, it's confusing. It's exhausting, it's, I mean, you would get these clusters that would spring up spontaneously, but inevitably jealousies and hurt feelings and emotional needs, I think, we can't play politics with basic needs. I mean, you can cop attitudes, but if it hurts, you're going to stop doing it no matter how politically hip it is. And at that point, being monogamous was very unhip. Later on, being heterosexual became very unhip. You know, oh "Come out of the closet -- make love to your brothers!" You know, it's just like, hey -- I have no desire. "Oh,

you're just repressing that." I think, that was one of the reasons eventually why I left San Francisco and Project One is that, uh, wouldn't let me be. You know. Everybody was supposed to be pan-sexual. Because it was possible. And I just wasn't into it.

Q: How did the economic arrangements work? Like if somebody had a job, were they expected to contribute their income to the pot?
A: Well, the rent changed every month. You had to pay a basic rent, which was called a BTU or something like that, I forget what it was. And then, depending on how many people paid their rent, everybody else had to make up the difference. And ... nobody, I'd say ninety percent of the people living there didn't have a job. And I can, I was a street artist, but I only worked two or three days a week. It was too much fun -- I mean, I could go for two, three weeks without leaving the building. Maybe you go down to the corner store to buy food, because the people you're mooching off are running out of food. But, uh, the rent varied from month to month because of that. And it seemed to be OK. If it got out of hand, people would complain, and you wouldn't pay the rent, and an eviction notice would go up, then people would run around and try to scare up more money or guilt-trip the people holding back.

Q: Right. Now you were the rent collector for awhile?
A: Uh, the last two years.

Q: That must have been a hard job.
A: Oh, it was ridiculous, because I didn't keep any records. I would just put the money into the bank, and ... previous rent collectors had embezzled money and split. Now I was just handling thousands of dollars. But I knew all the people, and I knew how hard it was for them to come up with their money and it was impossible for me to steal, you know. I, I wouldn't be able to live with myself. Other people didn't have that problem. And, again, nobody wanted to do it. Nobody wanted to clean the bathrooms, nobody wanted to cook the meals, and nobody wanted to pay the rent. And, uh, people would get away with it.

Q: Well, it's amazing that the community lasted as long as it did, given that nobody wanted to do the, the hard work.
A: Yeah. It wasn't the cleanest of buildings. But there was a core group of about thirteen people -- that number keeps on coming to mind who would fix the clogged toilets at two o'clock in the morning, or who would lend a tool that would come back broken if it came back at all. And who believed in the bigger picture to the extent that they were willing to do a lot of personal sacrifice. And people would depend on those people more and more. Would borrow another tool and not return it. Would ask even more. And some of these people were, would be resented for being so good and making the rest of us feel bad. You know, it was like Christ. We love him, we love him, and then you string him up on the cross, because he's just too nice and too good and ... too bad. It was also very anti-religion. Unless it was some exotic religion from the Orient. If you were Christian, you're a Catholic or Protestant, uh, it would be like farting in a room. People didn't want to ... religion and ambition. Those were two things that were no-nos. You know, if you hung out and didn't care about making a living, you didn't care about being broke -- that was the cultural paradigm at that time. If you had any sort of ambitions to me more -

- at one point I got involved in making this film and I was surprised at the negative feedback I got from that. Because that meant I had less time to hang out. I was moving faster through the hallways. I mean, to go from the first floor to the fourth floor could sometimes take hours, 'cause you'd bump into all these people that you know. And "Oh, come over here and smoke this joint" or "check this out!" or sometimes late at night when you couldn't sleep, you'd just wander around from room to room. There was always something going on. And people were always willing for another person to join the group, for the most part.

Q: Um, was this -- see, since I don't really know San Francisco, is this a sort of industrial area?
A: It's sort of like interface. There were apartment houses, but there were also a lot of abandoned warehouses. If you go from south of Market, if you go east, then you hit Patrayal [?] Hill which is real industrial -- Hamm's Brewery, you have the really big buildings that everybody was salivating about, because they could be had very cheaply, or in some cases, you just break in and squat there. That happened, to a certain extent, too.

Q: So, did you guys have neighbors? Really?
A: We did, but again, the building was such a sealed system that sometimes people would move from the building into the surrounding area, but then people wouldn't visit them that much. There was so much going on in the building. And plus, the surrounding people were lower-middle-class, Chicano, whatever, they were not interested in a hippie commune. They were trying to make it in the American dream.

Q: Yeah. Were they antagonistic at all?
A: No.

Q: No.
A: No.

Q: They just pretty much let you be.
A: Yeah, and would frown or, or make some attempt at voicing their displeasure -- I mean, it was obvious what was going on there. In fact, I think the rumor in the neighborhood was that Project One was one continuous orgy. Which it wasn't, you know?

Q: Um, were there very many kids there?
A: Uh, I'd say at any time, probably eight, ten, twelve kids.

Q: And, were these kids home-schooled or did they go out to the public school?
A: Home-schooled in Simbas [?]. And the interesting thing with Simbas [?] is that they all eventually wanted to go back into the school system. Because the alternative schools at that time taught people how to have relationships and how to be people, but as far as the academics were concerned, like math and English, very weak. And eventually the kids would want to learn the basics, I mean, Simbas, even the students slept in the school.

Q: Oh, really?
A: And so, the students were having sexual relationships with each other, at very early ages, and the building knew what was going on and didn't frown on it. That was part of the schooling was how to be a human being. How to maintain a relationship, how to communicate. In fact, one of the members, Robert Burkhart [?] kept all the books from Simba, Simba's kept an ongoing diary. So, that'd be interesting to read now.

Q: God, you're not kidding.
A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.
A: And um, it was a very open situation. I almost taught, was a resource [?] in this, but again, you'd inevitably get into personal relations and hang out with each other, and then information or knowledge exchange would take a background to that. People are more interested in living than learning, until they got to a certain point. I think some of those kids, and I still think that now, it's almost a drawback, because eventually, you have to fit into the real world. You have to learn how to deal with being in a public school, and it's difficult for the parents to deliver their children to a system that's going to sort of ruin them to a certain extent, but I think the home schooling and the alternative schools then, it just didn't provide the hard knowledge.

Q: Was there any attempt to set up a work-sharing system, where people signed up for jobs and stuff like that?
A: All the time. And punishment if you didn't do something. Oh the lists, and the schedules -- you can imagine. It broke down that each floor was an autonomous unit, each floor was responsible for its own floor, but for general spaces like the stairwells and lobby and the penthouse, that had to be a building-wide effort. Inevitably, one person after another would come up with another system and try to beat it into all our heads, and people would sign onto lists and then just not show up. Who wanted to sweep the stairs? Life was too exciting to spend it sweeping stairs and mopping floors and cleaning toilets. And God forbid that we should hire people to do it, that would create a class consciousness. But that might have been a much more honest way of approaching the problem. Simply put, it didn't work. The maintenance system, the nuts and bolts of things didn't work. But that was the story of San Francisco in the four years I lived there, no visible means of support. No logical reason why things should continue, but they do. You don't know how you're going to get your rent, but somehow you do. You don't know where the work comes from, but it seems to come at the last moment when you need it, and it's just enough money to pay the bills. You have to, so they don't cut off your telephone. That's just the way it was back then.

Q: Was the group political at all?
A: Oh yeah. Definitely. Very left-wing -- and we would go to marches and rallies. And again, we had our own causes: we would adopt runaways or someone who escaped from juvy, or something like that. And the politics would change. Like I said before, different "isms" would sweep through the building, depending on who was excited about it. It was a lot of discovery going on then.

Q: Did the police pretty much leave you alone, or did you ever have any busts or anything like that?
A: I think once or twice the police actually came into the building, and it was the most surreal vision I've ever seen. They wanted no part of being in there. It was live and let live. If it had spread outside the building and someone else would complain, I'm sure the police would have been more active. But I think the only time the police came into the building was to take one of the runaways, because we were having trouble with him. There was no violence in the building.

Q: Were there any rules?
A: There were lots of rules, but nobody followed them.

Q: What would be examples of rules, besides doing your work?
A: Well, the maintenance system, going to the meetings, not being violent, not hitting your children. You were open to censure by anybody in the building. That type of politics I liked. If you were a "leader" and you were being an idiot, people would come up to you every day and tell it to you, to your face. I think one of the problems with Washington and the federal government is they are not accountable on a personal level. So, they can do all sorts of things and they will not be personally attacked or bothered by it. Whereas in Project One, -- you didn't know what the rules were until you broke them, essentially. It's like these unwritten, unspoken social contracts. If you were too jealous or too possessive or have an ongoing complaint -- people would put up notes and then the notes would be put on the notes, and notes would be put on the notes that were on the note, and there would be these ongoing dialogues. Everybody's action was under the scrutiny of the entire commune.

Q: But these would be by notes?
A: Yeah, there would be a poster. The progressions were really funny: the poster would go, "Fred is such an asshole for holding up the meeting last night." And then Fred would write, "Well, you're an even bigger asshole, why didn't you say something at the time." And then someone would say, "Both of you were being children."

Q: Would people sign their notes?
A: Yeah. That was probably one of the rules. If you're going to complain, you'd better stand behind it and not do it in secret or behind people's backs. But people would gossip behind each other's backs and spread rumors too. Again, it was like a small town. For as liberal and as advanced as we were, I think there are basic human conditions that pop up all the time, no matter how advanced you become.

Q: Now you mentioned before that there were a lot of artists living there. Was this a real haven for artistic expression and creativity?
A: Oh yeah, well we had a freight elevator, for one thing. And the rooms were huge. I think my room was 40' x 40' with 14 foot ceilings. And I had a door that was like 10 feet wide. So it was perfect. And there was no OSHA or EPA, so you didn't have to have ventilation systems or anything like that. It was just perfect for working on big, messy projects. Also, you had a lot of other skills -- you had welders. There was a guy named Baron Rose who was an incredible scavenger, and his space was filled with everything from engines to TV sets to soda jerk fountains, and you could have anything you wanted for

free, unless you asked, "How much do you want it for?" and then he wouldn't give it to you. In fact, I used to go dumpstering with him late at night, and we used to get all sorts of great stuff in the garbage. So you had a lot of resources at your fingertips. If you needed help or information, it was great. At that time, I was more of an artist in word than in action. I really didn't start becoming a real producing artist until actually after I left San Francisco. But I definitely was known as an artist. If you said you were something, then people assumed that's what you were. There were stained glass people, potters, musicians, there was a dance group that rehearsed there. A computer group, recording studios, video tape, the motion picture processing lab, a few architects, writers, that guy across the hall from me printed up a 120 page book on this old off-set press . Every day I would go, "Well, what page are you on, Bobby?" "Page 9." "Oh, let me look at them." There would be 40 page 9's, each one printed ... it was really neat. There was an electronics guy there. He actually invented the system that BART uses reading the magnetic strip. In fact, the company ripped that off from him, and because of a law suit he got a lot of money, and so he was able to live off that money, and he lived in the building. There was a DJ, there was a radio station in there for awhile. I don't know how far it broadcasted. And a school.

Q: And was the school pretty stable in terms of the people who worked in the school, or did that rotate a lot?
A: That rotated. People who taught at the school were pretty much students who never left. And again, there was no certificate, there were no standards. It pretty much had to be popular or interesting or just have an enthusiasm. It was a very non-critical time. Like I said, if you said you were an artist, then everybody treated you like you were an artist, and just the fact that you thought about doing something, you got a lot of praise and strokes for it.

Q: Do you know any of the kids now who were living there then?
A: I don't know anybody from that time. A lot of the people would go around the world, I mean, it was a far-flung group, nobody really stood still, and that was -- I went through a really hard time where I'd get to know somebody, and of course relationships sprung up really quickly, there was no resistance -- in fact, that was the point, to get as close as fast as possible, and to proceed from there. You'd get to know someone, really like them, and then they'd be off to Yugoslavia for two years, and I went through a period of time of, "I'm not going to get to know anybody." The turnover is just too drastic and it's just too emotionally exhausting. Then I'd meet someone that I'd really like and break all my vows and oaths. And eventually I evolved into the position of, you appreciate them for while they're there. Everybody's going to take off at some point or another. It's like moving into an apartment that you're going to live in temporarily -- do you decorate it the way you want it, or do you just keep on living out of boxes? Eventually it came to, you live the way you want to live for as long as you can. And it's worth the effort, because like I said, without relationships, that building was very cold and hard.

Q: Did you guys have relationships with any other communes that were happening in the City?
A: It was competitive. All the communes hated each other. They all had different systems, like Arteau [?], you had to buy into the system, and that's why it still exists, there was less turnover. Project Two had a king and a queen. They had a government.

Q: Project Two? Did that come out of Project One?

A: Came out a little bit later than Project One, but they never got as sophisticated or as advanced. I remember going over there once, and each floor was one huge room, and there were tents and cardboard shanties, and this pipe coming out of the wall, without even a valve on it or anything -- that was water for the whole building. God knows what they did when they went to the bathroom, I didn't dare check it out. You had various forms of insanity. The more insane people could live in a more fringe way and enjoy it, whereas the more people closer to center needed the creature comforts. Project One always had the problem of government. We're against the government, we're artists, we don't organize, but we have to make our own government, and we have to organize among ourselves. Trying to organize artists -- forget about it! Artists don't like to be organize. Artists, they don't join clubs, they don't join groups. That's even a problem here in Santa Cruz. Artists complain about this and that, but they're not going to organize. So communes did not communicate that well with each other, and they were very competitive: "Oh, we're better than you are," or, "We're getting along better without any sort of structure, because it's magic, and magic likes us more than magic likes you." I always laughed about it. We would deny it, because we weren't supposed to be competitive. Officially it was denied, but unofficially, there was very little commerce or connection between the three communes.

Q: How did Project One get its name?

A: We were the first project. And I guess they wanted some ambiguous name that nobody could have any objection to.

Q: Okay, so mainstream people wouldn't say it sounded too hippie or something?

A: Right, and also, always, it defied labelling. I'm sure when they tried to think up a name for it, no one name would encompass what was going on there, or they didn't want to be defined by that.

Q: Did the commune have any rituals or things that people would do together that were kind of like celebrations?

A: Yeah, well the Thanksgiving and the Christmas, and there were outings all the time. In fact, there was slide shows of the outings. There was a group that was the most popular and powerful group, and Robert Berkhart [?] was sort of the leader, and they would do everything together and document it, and have little slide shows to show the rest of us. I just, combination of jealousy, and -- I was never a joiner. Even though I was in a commune, eventually I had my own space so I could pull out when I wanted to. A lot of the spaces have locks on the outside of their door, so people would know when you were home, because if there wasn't a lock on the outside, that meant you were in, and people wouldn't even have to knock. So I never joined this group, in fact I sort of made a point of not being a part of it. But they were the biggest ritual producing group in the building, it was like a tribe. And so the slide shows and the multi-medias and the parties, parties all the time. It was the same party though, if someone was leaving or someone had a birthday -- it was the same party, same music, people would dance the same dances. After a couple of years I got very [tape ends] ... pessimistic.

Q: Just sort of bored?

A: Bored, yeah, but what's the word when you've seen it too many times?

Q: "Blasé" I suppose is a good word for that.

A: Okay, for lack of a better word. But you talk about a culture that was anti-ritual, that didn't want to repeat the same motion twice, that believed that only in the spontaneity of the moment that we were truly ourselves -- so, you couldn't have a date with anybody, you couldn't plan anything. "Oh, you want to go to the movies tomorrow?" "Oh, that's too far in advance. I don't know if I'm going to be the same person I am today, tomorrow at that time." So things would happen, but you really couldn't plan them.

Q: I think that would get kind of hard, or kind of old after awhile.

A: I guess one of the other rituals was sunbathing on the roof. The roof was made into a garden. There was all sorts of dirt that was put up there. We had goats and chickens. Ray Patch was our spiritual leader. Ray Patch was one of the most magnificent people. He was the only one -- well he wasn't the only one, he was one of maybe 10, 13 people, that actually lived the talk, lived it fully. His room was always open, there's always soup or tea, sympathy. He was very wise, he was an amazing guy. And he did not make a big show of doing anything, he did not ask other people to help him. If he was doing it, and you wanted to join in, that was fine, but he was going to do it whether you helped or not. Other people say, "Well, I'm going to do this, but I'm going to need 5 other people to show up." Ray would do it. And when Ray Patch left, the heart left. Ray Patch, Shaw Whitney -- these people were the closest to living saints in this culture that I've ever seen. No complaints, always there to help. You felt uncomfortable around them because you couldn't live to those standards, not realistically, not without some form of resentment. But the sunbathing up on the roof, that was pretty much a ritual. There were no rights of initiation. It was like Ken Keasy -- you're either on the bus or you're not. If you can walk into Project One and just open someone's refrigerator and eat their food and sit down and take the next hit on the joint, people would let you do it. If you asked permission to come aboard, you'd never get it. You either felt comfortable and fit in, or forget about it. There was no structure, no welcome wagon, nothing.

Q: So would you say you had to have a pretty strong ego to be there?

A: Either a strong ego, or just fall in love with the place, and be drawn in.

Q: What were those Wednesday criticism sessions like? Were they pretty hard to take?

A: Oh, God, yes!

Q: I would think they would be kind of frightening.

A: Because under the form of honesty, people could just brutally criticize the way you live, who you are, how you think, what you feel. And I remember one woman by the name of Carrie, and she would take it upon herself to grill any newcomer. I remember people just wilting. Here, they would hang out in the commune for a week or so, and everybody was loving and sharing, and then they go to this meeting, and they would get nailed. And these people would go for your most weakest spot. I'm a good talker, and I can have these snappy comebacks without even thinking about it. So I remember going through the grilling, and I gave back as good as I got. In fact, I got applause, and people would laugh, because it was the same thing with the people who would dip into the free school and sleep with the young girls -- nobody would criticize them, nobody would warn the sweet young girls coming in, about this guy sleeps

with everybody and then goes on to the next one. Nobody told me about Imageworks, and how the head of Imageworks was a complete jerk -- they would let you find out on your own, and they would let you make your own decision. Later in life, I looked back on that, and I go, "That's not quite right." People were taken advantage of. But that, in a way, was a form of respect -- people expected you to have the ability to sort it out for yourself. Like any other system, it works, and it doesn't work. But those meetings, under the guise of a political ideology, people would just personally attack each other. But they would hide under communism, or they would hide under whatever "ism" they were using, when they were working out personal problems in a political arena. And again, that was all known. If it got out of control -- anybody could speak up and nail anybody else. There were old-time feuds going on, like the Hatfield and McCoys. There were some differences that were never really successfully dealt with, and people would go, "Ah, ha -ha, they're at it again. Better not get caught in the crossfire. Better know how to navigate the minefield. " So I can't say that we became any more than human beings. Again, there were times when the magic was there, and it would all work, and all the walls would come down, and there wouldn't be all these petty differences and squabbling and stuff. But that didn't last all the time -- that was the goal, to go beyond that. I think that's why it was forgivable, because essentially, we were there, on the same platform, to get beyond that -- through massive drug use, and breaking all the social conventions. It was not difficult to experiment there. In fact, it was a good place to experiment, because people were willing -- if someone was freaking out or having a breakdown, just about anyone would be willing, "Oh, I have some tea," "Oh, I have a little bit of this," "Feeling better?" A lot of people had experience with that, through their own drug use and stuff, they knew how to handle someone who was having a hard time. I remember one -- there was this gay guy, he had just broken up with a lover, and he went from door to door, he wrapped himself up in bloody bandages, and put a sign on himself called "Rape." And he would just walk into your room and stand there quietly, and we would acknowledge him. He was going through the grief of breaking up with his lover. Then he would go onto the next space. We also had the Vietnam Vets Against the War, the VVAW, so we had a lot of shell-shocked vets from Vietnam wandering around. That was one of the few, fully acknowledged projects that we all took on, to help these guys somehow come back to sanity, because they were messed up really bad.

Q: Were you too young to be drafted?

A: I was in college. I had a deferment. And I had a high number, so I never got called. But, no, the war was politically incorrect, being a soldier was politically incorrect, but we as a group realized that these human beings needed healing. More vets committed suicide than died in the war. They were really in bad shape. There was one, I called Befuddled Friend. He was one of my personal projects. It took him two or three years to get used to the fact that he was gay, and then he fell in love with a woman, and it just completely confused him again. I remember Fred coming by, and I'd make him a meal, and we'd sit down and talk, and he was on the verge of being psychotic, on the verge of being officially, clinically insane. The vets would take care of their own, because they'd knew what they'd all been through, and then we would take care of them, but we could never know the core of their experience, because we hadn't been over there. There was no way you could understand what they had gone through. So they stayed there for awhile.

Q: It sounds like in some ways, Project One might have hurt some people that might have been kind of fragile, but then in other respects, it helped other people too.
A: It was very -- when I think of the word, "carefree," I usually think of it in the positive sense, but "carefree" also means "uncaring." Because if you were hurt, and it was deemed that you were hurt because you were uptight, then you weren't a sympathetic character, people would not help you through that. It was kind of merciless and brutal in its own way, but on the other hand, I think it was a very opening experience for an awful lot of people. The number of people that went through there in the 4 years I was there, it was in the thousands. So over the period of time that commune was open, maybe ten, 15 thousand people went through that place. And you couldn't help but be touched by it. There were people who wanted to get in and couldn't, and resented that. There were people who got in there and there was a honeymoon period, and then there was a period of disappointment, and then they left. But no matter which way the Mix Master mixed you up, it definitely was a force, and a vision, that was memorable.

Q: Now, the people who couldn't get in, was that because there wasn't room for them, or because somehow they weren't wanted?
A: One woman couldn't get in because she was too rich. I remember I took on her cause, she wanted a studio. She wanted contact with the counter-culture. But again, one of the prejudices was against the wealthy -- they were the enemy. So they said, "Well, no, someone who's broke like us should get that space. This is like a yacht to you -- you're not getting in." And some other people just weren't popular enough. You sort of had to be popular -- it was a popularity contest, unless you had a skill or really good dope, or something that they wanted, then they'd let you in.

Q: So you couldn't just show up and crash there and say, "I'm here."
A: And force your way in -- you could do that. And a bunch of people did. In fact, one of the most obnoxious people in the building did that -- Darrel. Everybody disliked him, he was horrible, he was a user. He was psychotic, he was ruthless, and he made no bones about it. I think that was the only way, in general, that you were approved of. If you were who you were. One guy told me, "I'm a vegetable, I don't do anything." And I respected him for that. If you were yourself without any alibis, with no explanations, no excuses, then you would be accepted. But if you were trying to cully favor or try to be what you thought they wanted you to be, we don't want you. So if you had the courage to be yourself, that was your ticket in, for the most part. Because again, there was no teeth. Nobody -- it was very rare that people would actively kick you out, get a following and help kick you out, because it was politically incorrect to be intolerant, except if you had a crew cut or an RV or had too much money, or your shoes were too expensive.

Q: Did you evict people? Did you throw people out?
A: It was impossible. There were these two guys, Mark and Clark, musicians -- they owed thousands of dollars. They would go to meetings and brag about how they weren't going to pay anything at all, ever. In fact, they were thinking of getting another space. And they rubbed it in everyone's faces. Those guys lived there for a long time. Nobody would face up to them. There was a guy there named JC, that had a welfare scam going. He would have some of the children of some of the parents in the building cashing

fraudulent checks for him, and they wouldn't stop him. Of course, this guy was like a Charles Manson, he had this incredible power over people. Behind his back, they would criticize him, but nobody would stand up to him. Plus he was the coke connection for a lot of people in the building too, so that had something to do with it. He was doing all sorts of stuff. He eventually got arrested -- no, he didn't get arrested, he got off on that, he was able to pull something even with the police and the city. But he was a neighbor of mine for awhile, and everybody in the building wanted him out, but nobody had the guts to face him, and he stayed. It came down to personal power -- if you had personal power, that's what counted.

Q: What were demographics like?
A: White, middle-class. No Chicano or Black person wants to be poor -- they lived like that. For us, it was like a novel experience. If you go to Appalachia and like really poor towns, they don't call it communes, but there's a lot of collective living going on. We thought we invented it, but we didn't. The age ranged probably from 14 to like, I think the oldest person in the building was in his late 70's.

Q: That's a pretty big age range.
A: Yeah, but the older people, it was too uncomfortable, and also the mindset. You pretty much had to be pretty open to being uncomfortable and worried -- falling through the rabbit hole. There was no security, there was no regularity, there were no guarantees. There was no structure. Periodically I would have these panic attacks, "How am I going to keep on doing this?" If you thought about it too much, you really would get scared. Again, the way it worked, it was no visible means, no rational, reasonable way for it to continue, but it did. And I've been involved in show business and movie-making, and it's the same thing. Ten minutes before the show goes on in the theater, behind stage it's complete chaos. People are going, "It's impossible, we can't do it!" Then they go out, they put on their play our their circus, they produce their movie or their event, and it happens. You set up the context, and then you hope to God the universe comes in at the last minute and supplies the missing ingredients. It did a lot, for Project One. A lot of the time, those last minute, miraculous bail-outs would happen. But it got kind of nerve-racking at times. We had people from all over the world. I remember one of my friends was Italian, spoke very little English. We had an amazing friendship -- it was amazing how we could make the simplest words carry so much information. But it was mostly White, middle-class.

Q: And would you say most folks were in their 20's?
A: That was the prime, 20's, early 30's. I think after that time you start getting into having a home. This was an extended family. It was like the last stage before leaving home and going into the outside world. No, you weren't living with your parents, but the type of approval and the type of support system there was very much like a family. You could pretty much do anything and be accepted and forgiven for it. Except ambitious religion, straight --

Q: -- having too much money ...
A: Right.

Interview with Peter Bartzchak
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
May 25, 1996

Q: Well can you tell me some about how the commune ended, what happened?

A: It was really ugly. I left before it ended. I moved to Santa Cruz. It was very hard for me to move from having 30 close friends in the same building to moving to a town where I didn't know anybody. But I got tired of it. I got tired of the parasites outnumbering the core group. I got tired of people taking advantage of the system. And what happened eventually, a friend of mine sent me a newspaper article -- they shut off the gas and electricity, but people kept on living in the building for a year, 2 years afterwards. They'd fill up one room with filth, move to the next room. See, as the commune got closer and closer to the end, only the worst, the cream of the crud, would remain. Eventually, the police went in and physically evicted everybody, and they shut down the building. And then they cleaned it up, and I think it's a warehouse or some design center now. I really don't know what's in there now. But it ended most ignominiously for something that started so wonderfully, with such high flying ideals.

Q: What was the very best part of the experience for you?

A: That you didn't ever have to wake up completely. I don't know if you remember being a kid and waking up and just knowing the meal was going to be made, that the parents would take care of anything -- it was that feeling. Surrounded by softness and love and friendship, and not having to deal with the "realities" of life. You could get off the wheel, and still keep on living, and still keep on eating. Everybody was open, there were lots of -- I'm very much of a people person, and it was a smorgasbord for me. There was lots of time, I hardly worked at all. We just spent time hanging out and talking. One of the things that would bother me is if you did like someone and wanted to spend some time alone with them, being alone with someone meant only 5 or 6 people around instead of 15 or 20. There's a song on the Jefferson Airplane album, "You and Me at Pooh Corner." And it's just too many people around. That's eventually one of the things that got to me, just too many people, and there was always a jerk. It was always a dud. You'd have great conversation with 10 or 12 people, and there would be one person that didn't get something, "Oh, what did you mean by this?" and drag everything down. But by our politics, we couldn't exclude anybody. So the jerks and the duds and the fools had as much as a right to be there as anybody else. I think it diluted it, but also I think those folks were also an essential part of the mix. It's like the thorn on the rose. You think you don't need them, but it was amazing, some of the fools provided essential services, like kept us human, or kept us open. Hard to define, but they were there. I remember trying to be exclusive and just couldn't. You couldn't design the group -- it was whoever showed up. I learned how to say "No," there. People would always drop by during dinner time, would borrow your things without asking, do all sorts of stuff, unless you confronted them and stood up. I was very nonconfrontational back then. I'd rather let it go by. But it would go to such an extent, it would be ridiculous, and you eventually would have to go, "Wait a minute. Get out of here. You've come over every night for the last 6 nights just in time for dinner, and you don't put any money in, you don't bring any food, you don't do anything. You don't even clean your dishes. Get out of here." And they'd come back again. I remember the guy at Imageworks, I had a VW van, and I had these side scoops to pull in the air. He borrowed my van, and he had an accident, he had swiped one of them, just sheered it completely off. At first he denied it, and then he said, "Well it didn't matter, your van's a piece of shit anyway." And then he asked to borrow it again the next day.

Q: Wow. That would get old.
A: But you had the same privilege if you wanted it -- no responsibilities. People would forgive you and lend you a tool again. You really had to go far off the deep end for someone to cut it off.

Q: Well maybe you've already told me, but what do you think was the worst part?
A: The worst part were the "ism's" that would go through the building, and people would think that they were beyond reproach because of the politics behind their decisions. There's nothing worse than being in a commune and you're pissed off, and you hear all these other people laughing and having a good time. And the jealousy, that people had all these sexual partners. I wasn't into that. It was confusing enough having sex with one person. I'd see these idiots, these fools, just hitting on women and getting in relationships with them, some really neat women too, and then just dropping them, and doing it again, and getting away with it. It just didn't seem to be fair. But I think deep down inside I wish I could've done that, had that freedom. But I wasn't built that way. For as much as a hippie as I wanted to be, there had to be more going on, for me. I definitely had my opportunities, but like I said, there had to be a real connection there for me to become a partner, or to have an affair or a relationship. But with a lot of other people, that didn't matter. I felt like that wasn't right, I didn't feel like that was a good thing. But it went on. You tried to open up as much as you can, but even under the best of circumstances, you are who you are, you're ready-made by that point. The drugs helped to numb certain parts of yourself, or to create a euphoria that engulfs, but essentially, it was the people that really didn't care about anybody that had the most fun.

Q: Are thing that you feel you learned during that time that you feel like you've brought forward to your life today?
A: Oh yeah. To be able to talk to many different types of people, to be able to speak each person's language to them. Just that feeling of being a part of a big family, instead of being in competition. I think that's the thing I cherish the most. And when I say "family," I don't mean blood family, where you're forced, because of the blood connection, to deal with each other. The family I'm talking about is the second family, the family you choose, your circle of friends, your mate, whatever, that you consciously choose to have. And I believe it's possible for all of us, to love one another. The Japanese felt that you could fall in love with anybody. A lot of the arranged marriages, statistics are that the arranged marriages worked as well as current marriages work. And that -- if you can release yourself from preconceptions, and if you're open to possibilities -- like I said before, I am who I am, and I have my limitations, but Project One opened me, and I think burned away a lot of the ingrained limitations rather than the inherent limitations of who I am. I mean, we're programmed to be who we are, as well as we already are someone, and I think the challenge of life is to get rid of the program and to realize which parts of you are there and real and substantial, what the underpinnings of you are, and which parts are added on or impressed upon you. I felt like living there, I sorted though an awful lot of that. And I continued that sorting into my early 30's, and then I decided to get into a career, and get into business and making money. I'm glad I retired for 11 years before I started working. Because I believe what I believe, and I don't care whether it makes sense to anybody else. If it works for me, if it makes me happy, and if it makes me grow and be more compassionate and open, that's all it needs to be for me. I don't have to make sense of it, I don't have to understand something. I just have to know if it works for

me or not. It's like the skunk -- the smell of the skunk that drives the animals away, the stink, is also the smell that brings it to mate. So the people who don't like me, "Goodbye!" I'm not going to trim my sails to fit into anybody else's expectations. I'm not into being popular, but my belief is, I am who I am right up front. And then you can make your decision whether you want to play with me or not. And if you don't want to, that's fine. There's one woman at the commune who, we hated each other, it was an immediate reaction. And I told her, "It's okay that we don't like each other." But because of the politics of the commune, she felt obliged to like me. And so, I went, "Okay, let's give this a try." It didn't work for either of us. I said, "Listen, it's okay. I think you also you need someone in your life that you can dislike without any guilt at all." If that's the real response -- as long as you don't go out of your way to sabotage that person or to hurt them, it's okay to dislike people. It's just some people like vanilla, some people like chocolate. You shouldn't be eating chocolate if you don't want to. I realize life is not as simple as that, there are compromises, for sure. But my basic policy is just stand up for who you are once you discover what that is, and do the things you want to do as much as you can. We all have to do things we're not completely happy about, but the bigger picture is to unfold in a happy place. I don't think reality is out to crush us or anything like that. I think reality is fairly benign. You better watch your ass just the same. It's just like at the commune -- yeah we all loved one another and all that, but don't leave your stash out on the table -- someone's going to grab it.

Q: So would you say all and all, you're glad you did it?

A: Oh, no doubts at all. That was a real peak experience in my life on a lot of levels. But like any other peak experience, you can't live like that all the time. But I can manipulate groups of people. I can make things happen. If I have a vision that I believe in, then I can rise above any personal likes and dislikes I have and make it happen. I don't say I choose my causes -- my causes choose me. And I know I have the abilities to follow through and manifest it. Mainly through living in a situation like that. Feeling comfortable in a large group of people, and having the audacity or the strength of vision to tell people what to do, and explain it to them, and keep them on course. I'm not into manipulation. Manipulation is not a completely negative term, but your motives better be in heaven, they'd better be, or they won't work otherwise. The I'Ching talks about it -- it's only when people are drawn together by inner values and inner needs to groups get together and succeed. If you are drawn together by surface reasons or by thoughts of getting a foot up in the pyramid, it's not going to work. The people who are drawn together -- the only communes that work are the ones that have some sort of shared platform. When I was at Project One, the other communes that worked either had a religious belief, like they were Buddhists or into this or that -- that was one of the problems with Project One, was not to want to have a project platform, because that was to deny the individuality, but to have one so that we could have at least one thing we could agree upon. Because everybody's got a different opinion and a different take. And how does that work in a community. A community is a contradiction. A bunch of individuals working concert. If you lose your individuality, the health of the community goes down the toilet, but if you don't have that one-ness, that communal feeling, there's no reason to be together or work together.

Q: So do you think for awhile, Project One had that?

A: Definitely. And sporadically. It's like Saturday Night Live, having a best season, the number of duds to the number of hits are kind of intimidating, but all and all it was worth it. I think everybody who lived

in Project One inevitably went through a period of time where, "This is stupid. This doesn't work. They lied. They were only paying lip service. They fooled me." And then the newcomers would believe more fully in the dream than the old hands that were more corrupted by the disappointments and the frustrations. So in some way it was like a vampire that fed off the new blood. But people like Shaw, and Ray Patch, they believed it before Project One even existed, and I'm sure they're living that way now, without Project One, without any fanfare, without the entourage. Some of the people got into the entourage, having a group of people just looking up to you and thinking you're great, and you could see these people swelling in size from all that. But so be it. Maybe the people in the entourage need to have people to look up at adoringly. I never got into either being part of an entourage or wanting one. People tried to form one out of me, or make me into another leader, but I was very contradictory about that. At one point I was the one who had lived there the longest, but I refused to take on the role of the wise man. I mean I would tell them where the toilet plunger was, or this is like this, or don't do that, but it's better for there to be no leaders, for each person to assume responsibility. As soon as you have a leader, people go, "Whew, I don't have to be responsible. That person is going to be responsible." It's such a contradiction.

Q: I was going to ask you what happened to those two people you called living saints, but you don't know?

A: I don't know. A really horrible thing happened to Shaw. There was a woman, Justine, single mother with a boy, Joe. And Joe was always casting about for a father figure. I sort of pushed Joe away, because I didn't want to be a father figure, I'll be his friend. And so Shaw and Joe started hanging out a lot, and this rumor came up that Shaw was sleeping with Joe. And nobody would talk to Shaw directly. But it would come up at meetings, and this and that, and little innuendos. Finally, at one of the meetings, Shaw said, "Okay, son-of-a-bitches, who's going to face me? Who's going to tell me to my face?" And all that Shaw had done, didn't protect him from dirty little gossip like that. I'm sure that was one of the reasons why he left. What can you do for people that they're not going to shit on you at some point or another. I vaguely remember him going off and starting another commune maybe with fewer people. Hopefully, more responsible people.

Q: Would you ever live communally again?

A: Yeah. In fact, my lady and I are considering a form of it, because buying a house in Santa Cruz is very expensive. And I miss it. As long as you have the option of being private and being public, I really think it works. I think you're talking about a tribe again, and I think we're still herd animals. I think a city or a town, you can't go over a certain number of people without this depersonalization effect taking place. It's the same thing with businesses. Fifteen or 20 people, you can know their personal problems, you can talk to them. You get to 100 people, you don't have the time to know these people. The same thing with communities. I think the tribal level is like the largest level it can work at, and still people can be intimate to a certain extent with each other. But you have to choose carefully -- you have to choose responsible adults who are as hard working and as willing to take on something as you are. It's hard enough finding a partner in business or as a couple, but to find a few other couples that will pick up the piece of paper instead of walk by it, that will anticipate something even though it's not their job -- those are rare, rare people. And those people inevitably get burnt out, because they're tired of being one out

of so many who are willing to take on the responsibility for life. And that's what it is, that's the only way they can work. Unless you have your core group, and then you have your charming, but ineffectual hangers-on. Those folks, they have to be charming, because that's all they contribute. "What you're doing is great! I'd love to help you, but oh, I've got to do this here." So many times I remember Shaw mopping the floor, and each person walking past him, "I really would like to help you but, we're going to the beach!" And Shaw would go, "Okay, no problem." Shaw wasn't into forcing anybody to do anything. I'd know other people like that, they're going to do what they're going to do, and if you help them, they'll appreciate it, but they don't want a help that's tinged with resentment or where you've got to keep on patting someone on the back because they'll helping you. Those people are very rare, who take on what they should because it's appropriate to take it on. People love loop-holes, any excuse to get out of any responsibility, they'll go for it. And I forgive people for it, I've been the same way myself. We all have our priorities, and in the commune, you have to agree on the important stuff, you really do. And it has to be with your heart, not just your head. Because it's those 4AM numbers where, "Oh my God, come one, we need 5 people to go up on the roof to spread this tarp in the rain." You only get asked once, and the ones that show up on the roof, those are the folks that you want to have around.

Q: So you guys are thinking of going in and buying a house with some other people?
A: Yeah. Otherwise, something has to organically originate on its own. Like the zeitgeist, the spirit lands in this spot and attracts people to it. That's the magic, that was Project One, it was meant to happen, the time was right, the people were right, the place was right. Sark [?] calls that "perfect moment," the right people, the right time, everybody knows what to do, and they do it. You have to respect that moment and be the best person you can be. Unfortunately, you can go against the moment, out of sheer contrariness, or some personal emotional problem or whatever, but if you recognize the moment -- these are the high moments of life, where there are no doubts, everything is green lights, to go. That's the magic -- no one is responsible, and everybody is responsible. Unfortunately this society is so segmented and so based on mercantilism, those types of moments are not really encouraged. In fact, there's a lot of bad press about them: "Oh, that's socialism!" "That's communism!" "You're responsible for your own stuff, you shouldn't expect anybody else." But when the communal spirit is there -- those were the years, the '60's and the '70's, those were the years. It wasn't just San Francisco, or Taos, or Boulder, or Boston. It wasn't just there. Even the soldiers in Vietnam felt it. Then, I don't know where it went, but late '70's, '80's, it left. Or, I went on to another place in my own life and my own growth as a person -- because like I said, that commune was the last step from leaving home and actually going into the outside world and standing on your own, and being an adult. Part of the joy was we didn't have to be adults. On occasion, we had to, but only if we had to. It was like being 9 years old again, walking around in your pajamas.

Q: So in a way it was almost like a halfway house from home to the real world?
A: I used to call it a "way station." For the has been to the never were, for the people who are going to be, it was a place where you could, instead of going backwards or forwards, you could go sideways. A lot of lateral movement, find out who you were, what you wanted, how you fit into the world. The fast pace of life does not give us time -- and that takes a lot of sitting and staring and thinking and wondering and conjecturing, very "nonproductive" activities. Now, I spend a lot of time doing artwork to get myself

more business. Now, I'm much more into making a living, and providing for my twilight years and all that stuff. Then, it was like penetrating the veil and trying to see who I was and what the world was. Some people took longer than others. Santa Cruz is a way station too. It used to be non-demanding, very soft, it was a cheap place to live. You were around other people who were seeking also. I mean, if you were living with someone who was working 12 hours a day and has 3 jobs, you're going to feel weird about sitting on the back porch, smoking a joint and wondering about the nature of reality, it's not going to be encouraged. Whereas in Project One, it was encouraged, that you stopped doing, and be. You weren't defined by what you did, since a lot of people didn't do anything. But who were, what you thought, how you responded in an intimate situation -- we were constantly throwing ourselves into situations. Again, Jefferson Airplane, there's a song, "I'm going things there aren't even names for yet." And that was part of the joy, there's not a name for it, then there's not an attitude for it, then there's no connotations, it's whether it behooves you, or doesn't behoove you, or enhances you or doesn't enhance you. The labels came later, the uniforms and the attitudes. Once things were discovered, then the new people coming in could go, "Okay, this is how they act." Whereas the original people, they weren't looking to see how other people act, they were being themselves and seeing if it was okay, if they got shot down. And you usually didn't. There were those sessions, like I said, the tribunals, but there was also the other thing where, if you wanted to walk around completely naked painted blue, fine. But then you would have to put up with other people's responses to that. But mostly it was like, "Go for it, man."

Q: Would you describe Project One as a success or a failure?
A: Both. Good-bad. Right-wrong. I think that's really more how life is -- life is both. You try to figure out how it balances out -- good luck. It's exciting, it's wonderful, it's frightening, it's demanding, it's depressing, it's exhilarating, it's inspiring -- the amount of emotional responses that Project One pulled out of me, you get to the point where you've felt everything about that place, and you hated it. It was full of phoneys. You loved it, it was angels. Even in the same day you go from one -- you'd give up on it and swear you were going move out, and then something would happen, and you'd be stunned, "Whoa, it's worth it, I'm going to live here." And then weeks would go by without more of that, and then you'd go, "Oh, man, I was wrong, that was just a one shot deal, who's fooling who? I'm just here on inertia or lack of a better place to be, or because I'm comfortable here, and everybody thinks I'm an elder." Just, it was both.

Q: Wow, that's really interesting.
A: And this isn't all of it. I've been writing a book for a number of years, but Project One is one of the small things in it. I'm trying to capture all of it, but just like a mosaic, I'll just get a little part. And show the good and the bad of it. I can't really trash it, and I can't really praise it to the heavens, because it's both.

Q: Yeah, it seems like it would be hard to write about it.