

Interview with Robert Houriet

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

December 7, 1995

**Q:** So, how about if I start out with a real general question and ask you, um, about some of the events, um, life events that led up to you doing your communal travels?

**A:** Uh, my communal travels was all uh, of, uh, getting a contract to do a book on communes, which in turn was a result of my first writing a, a, uh, story for the, uh, New York Sunday Times on, uh, a commune in Bethel [?] Pennsylvania, um, a commune that was driven, literally driven out of the county. Um, but I stumbled upon, on my way back from the Chicago Democratic Convention, um, that's not true -- I didn't stumble upon it, I knew it was there. I'd clipped a story from the Philadelphia Bulletin before I went to the Democratic Convention, um, because I was interested in alternative lifestyles, as a good editor/journalist is; he's always clipping stories, looking for trends, you know, that can be made into a series, I was, I was editor for uh, a daily newspaper, cadet [?] newspaper in southern New Jersey, and, um, so I was on the lookout and um, when I reached the point of, uh, having to quit the newspaper I went to the Democratic Convention as a participant, rather than an observer, and uh, was radicalized like thousands of other people were, by what happened in Chicago. And, on my way back, I stopped at Bethel [?], Pennsylvania, which I had knew there was this commune that was having this warfare with the county officials, um, and, uh, I stayed there, I don't know, for about a week. Um, wearing a tie, um, and, um, 'cause I was very straight, I was, like, I was very conventionally educated.

**Q:** Where did you go to school?

**A:** I went to Brown, and um, Columbia School of Journalism, and um, went to NYU and almost got a PhD in American civilization, to basically, to stay out of Vietnam. And you just stayed a full-time student, or you, you know, you went to Vietnam, or you, or you went to Canada. And, uh, I was a police reporter at night, which is what I wanted to do, was go into journalism. And I was nominally registered at NYU, so I, and I was, and I was pretty successful in journalism, and um, and I probably would, would still be in if, if, if, if things in society hadn't come to a head in 1968 and things did come to a head in 1968 where you were either on one side or the other. And, and, it was the same for us on this newspaper that, that we were ... the reporters and I were on the side of trying to report the truth of what was happening in America, which was that, um, there was a black nationalist movement taking place in southern New Jersey among, among most other things, and uh, the ownership of the paper didn't want to report about it. Uh, and, uh, [Pause] in fact they wanted to, me to fire, uh, my best reporter, who had long hair, and, uh, it's in the book.

**Q:** You might not remember that part. [Laughs]

**A:** It's in the book, and, and, and as a result of that whole thing, he cut his hair off, dropped it on [unintelligible]'s desk, I mean, I, I, I had no choice but to quit. I wasn't going to be party to this. So, I went to the Chicago convention, not knowing what to do, and um, maybe I should put an app -- application to the New York Times for a job, which I almost got, and came back, um, stopped at this commune, and realized I had a good story. It was a good, it was a great story. I mean, this began as a great story. And I wrote a good story, it was about the first story that anyone wrote in the mainstream press, about communes, um, and as a result of that, I got offers for a book. So then I just got an advance, a book advance, enough of an advance to leave my kids, my family behind and go out for six months and go around the country, um --

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**Q:** What, what, um, when did you start --

**A:** It began as a, as a, entirely journalistic uh, um, enterprise.

**Q:** And it had no personal sort of seeking quality to it?

**A:** No. No, it didn't. At the beginning. At the beginning, no. I mean, I, I guess from, I guess from a -- the only personal part I had into it is that, you know, when I was studying American history, that I realized that, that there was this great, sort of forgotten history of, of utopian, the whole strand of utopian history ran through American history. And, uh, I realized this was the kind of, this, this is a continuation of it. So, as a hist -- sort of a journalist-historian, I was alert to that. And, uh, but no, I didn't see this initially as a way, as seeking a way for me to live. Um, it was pretty self-interest, you know, beginning. But, it very quickly, very quickly turned and, I mean, it, I definitely, it was like, in these years, uh, coming, coming back from what I saw at Chicago, you know, I mean, you were on one side of the street or the other, and, and, and, it was hard to be in the middle and be this guy with a tie on and asking people questions about "Why are you living this way?" without [Pause] You couldn't get any far ... you couldn't get very far, with that, that approach. You had, you had to be in the movement to get anything out of it. And so very quickly, whether it was entirely honest [?] or not, I, I began to identify entirely with the people in the counter-culture. And um, and, and I stopped wearing a tie, I had smoked dope before, as a, as a editor who was older than my reporters, I had smoked dope with them for years before, you know, for about two or three years before I dropped out. So I wasn't straight in that respect. I certainly wasn't straight, um, politically. I was, uh, I was a liberal, but there was, in 1968, um, liberalism had to go -- if you were a liberal you had to either go with Humphrey or Nixon, you know -- you had to go with Humphrey, you know, in the, the Democratic party, you know. There was nowhere to go but Humphrey. Um, so, you know, definitely, there was nowhere to go if you were a liberal. I was a liberal, I [unintelligible] you know, no one likes the word liberal, you know, although I'm sort of [Pause] definitely a Marxist. I wasn't a Marxist then, definitely wasn't a Marxist. I didn't, I didn't, I didn't, hadn't read Marx.

**Q:** What was your family like, growing up? Were they liberal Democrats or...?

**A:** No, they were, they were, they were, uh, Ohio Republicans, Robert, Robert Taft Republicans.

**Q:** Did you grow up in Ohio?

**A:** Yes, northern Ohio -- Cleveland and Akron. Yeah, they were, very politically conservative -- not, not extremely -- moderate Ohio Republicans who voted, uh, consistently for, for, you know, for Eisenhower. And voted for Nixon...

**Q:** So did you start exploring more liberal politics when you went away to Brown or at NYU or something?

**A:** I, I, I ... I think everybody, I think I began, I was the first one in my family to express any, any liberal sentiments, uh, beginning with at least the innocent [?] [Pause] But I wasn't, I wasn't, I wasn't political, I, it, it, it, at college I was more into the arts. I mean this is a time when, when Castro came to the United States, I mean, I, I, probably wasn't unaware of Castro, you know, uh, it was, it was the Fifties were a time of, of political unawareness. And there weren't any sharp edges. You know, and people were not, at least I wasn't, very politically educated. Uh, and the, it only began, my political education really

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began, um, I, I went, I went one year to, to medical school and decided I definitely didn't want to be a doctor. And so then I said, well, what do I, what do I, what do I want to do, I want to write -- but how do you, how do you learn to be a writer? Well, I'd majored in American literature, and it seemed like most American writers began by doing their apprenticeship in journalism, so I was OK, I'll, I'll be a journalist and that way I'll learn how to be a writer. And, uh, so I, I went from medical school in St. Louis to, to Columbia, and at Columbia is, is when I began to get politically educated. Because it was the real world, and uh, most of the stories you were sent on in New York, you know, had to do with politics, and, so I, I quickly got politically educated. And then after that I worked for major papers in New Jersey and everything was politics. I became, I knew a lot [inaudible] politics of the system. You know, and as I learned the politics of the system, the liberal, I mean, John F. Kennedy became, to, was elected, it happened [?] while I was at Columbia. Election night. Um, and everybody was really up on Kennedy and, um, uh, Brave Frontier, and every, everything, and it, it looked good, it really looked good. But like, [pause] um, then the fucking bottom fell out. The assassination, Robert Kennedy's assassination, um, Martin Luther King's assassination, uh, it was just a horrendous year, '68, and uh, if you [pause] the whole society just split apart. You had to go to one side, one side [inaudible] the other, there was no middle ground. [Pause]

**Q:** When did you start your communal, um, tour?

**A:** Um, I don't know, uh, '69.

**Q:** That was really the heyday of communes.

**A:** Yeah, yeah, it was ... I began at the peak, you know, at the, at the very peak. And, um, there were suggestions at the peak that it wouldn't last, there, you know, it, and um, but I think I, I finished my research before, if you can call it research, before there was any common premonition even, that this was going to fall apart. And so, what I got out of it, what I got out of it was I really wanted to do it myself. And, um, I, I, I uh, Maury Jeesa [?] reviewed my book, um, and, um, Maury Jeesa [?] knew me at the time, when I was straight, uh, and he was much more radical than I was. I mean, I was, I was, just, I didn't, I, I didn't know anything about [pause] anything about all the different [unintelligible] groups in the United States; I was completely unaware of them. Who they were, what they stood for, who was a Marxist-Leninist, who was an anarchist -- I didn't know, I didn't know all this shit, you know, and I was, I mean, I knew a lot, a lot of stuff, you know, but I didn't know anything about this stuff, so, and um, um, he reviewed the book, and the book he said, uh, uh, something like [pause] Houriet got aboard the train late, but he bought a ticket to the end of the line.

**Q:** [Laughs] What a great line!

**A:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that's how I sort of feel, is that, uh, especially in Vermont where so many people who, who, who came up here, and uh, started things, have left, have left. Maybe nine out ten people, maybe nineteen out of twenty people have left. Now professors of sociology, University of California --

**Q:** Ben Zoblacki [?] is that what, who you're thinking of?

**A:** Ben Zoblacki [?] no, he, he never was out here. I'm thinking of, of Todd Gitlin. Um, who is not, who is

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not, uh, really the guy identified with Vermont [?] but certainly New England. Uh, but, and, and, Ray's [?] one girl was in Seattle, but lots of other people are not in Vermont anymore, they're in the cities and uh, [pause] and, and, ah, ah, [unintelligible] also I think, I think I do have, I think I became, I think I became more, more, I just became more and more radical. And, uh, both in a lot of my views and, also in my life, I just became, I don't know. But I'm a very determined person and so I, I just –

**Q:** You're a determined what?

**A:** I'm, I'm a determined person, I just keep on doing things, you know. Um, I give up so I did the, but I think it's the end of the line.

**Q:** Yeah. Well, I'm real curious about sort of the nuts-and-bolts of your tour. Did you plan it out in advance where you were going to go, or did, to, um, you did?

**A:** Well, yes, I, I did and I didn't. As, as, as, as you write a book, as you research a book it unfolds. It has a life of its own. It gives you clues as to where you should go next. But, I, I did have, and, and, and as you write a book you are discovering the form. And, and, and some people will say that the form already exists, or that the form exists in some Platonic sphere, or whether it's in you, already, and that, that process of writing is a process of discovering that form. Well, who knows? But [clears throat] I was aware that, uh, I had to develop a form for telling the story and that it meant, really, making good choices about representative communes that would form a balanced whole. So, I, uh, I went to Ben Zoblacki [?] and, and I told the story uh, more or less as the way it happened, or at least I made it appear as if I did, you know, like, I, I made it appear like I'm telling you how it happened, but there was an intent to, when I, I began, I began in Vermont, I ended in Vermont, that gave it a circular form. Which is what happened. I mean, I began in Vermont, went to Calif -- to Oregon, then went to California, I went to Zoblacki [?] and I said "All right, you, you've studied this more than anybody at this present time has, and what I want to do is I want to go to a commune which is open-ended, that's very healthy, that gives a very positive viewpoint [?], positive kind of feeling, it's not, it doesn't have any particular slant, and where, where do you think I should go?" And he, he recommended uh, um, a place in Tacoma. Magic Horse Farm [?]

**Q:** And that's where his, his wife was living, right, or ex-wife, or something?

**A:** Yeah, Elaine. Was living there. So, it did happen that way. And um, I went there and then I just spent a long time there. I spent two months there, um, and, two months commune-time can be two years regular time. You know? I mean, my, I have a theory that communes are pressure-cookers, uh, that everything is intensified in a commune and that, uh, relationships break down faster in a commune than they would normally, it's like, you know it's like, it's like food cooks faster in a pressure cooker. So, two, two months was like, you know, two years for me. Particularly, uh, my never being in a commune, never being in a, in a place where people uh, had no inhibitions about making love in the same room with each other, um, so that, all this was, you know, new for me. I was, as I said, I was like Boswell among the Hebrideans.

**Q:** Yeah, 'cause you'd just shed your tie, right?

**A:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and, [unintelligible] this is true, I'm not making a point -- one can easily

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mythologize oneself. One can make fictions up about oneself. We all do, you know, we all do, it makes a good story, you know. We get off on that. But this is actually true, you know, I was very straight, and I didn't do these things, and you know, that's what happened. So I stayed there, and then, you know, you have to have, a book should have some geographical balance to it, to. There's a northwest, there's a southwest. And, so it was almost natural to go to the southwest, west, but then I, so that was an easy move to make [inaudible] Taos area. Um, ...

**Q:** When you'd go to these places would you tell them you were writing a book? You did.

**A:** Oh yeah.

**Q:** So you were really up front about it.

**A:** Yeah, yeah. And there was this whole thing, when I first came to, uh, near Buffalo, whether they would, they would let me in or not. And I, I, I, and I report that, was that they weren't certain about, they were divided about whether they wanted me to come or not, and I reported all that. And I sort of, sort of, I sort of stuck it out to the point where they finally whole-heartedly accepted me. And, and it was like, they, it was, uh, it was brazen of me to stay even though two people didn't want me. And they, and uh, but they weren't together enough to say, "All right, two people don't want you, you have to leave." And so, they, it, the two people reserved reservations and then, eventually, accepted me. But more than accepted me, they, they became close to me.

**Q:** At this point did you grow out your hair and, and wear the clothes and stuff to try and fit in?

**A:** Uh, yeah, I, I, I started letting, I started letting my beard grow. I think I did. Yeah, I didn't shave. I don't think I shaved.

**Q:** Did you do this because it, it felt like the natural, right thing to do, or did you do it because it would gain you entree into --

**A:** I think, I think it was both. It was both the right thing to do, and both, I fit in better, you know. And, uh, it was uh, it was both, you know, it was both reasons. And, I, I think, I think my, I think I was able to write a better book than some people were able to do because I had a split viewpoint. I was still, I was still straight, and I still had one foot in the old culture, you know. Coming, coming from a very conservative family, being conservatively raised, and uh, conservatively educated. At least mainstream educated, you know. You can't, you can't -- there's nothing conservative about Brown, but it's definitely [pause] is a part of a system [?] And also one foot in the new culture. So I, I straddled it, I was able to straddle it.

**Q:** Did you straddle it the whole time, or was there a point where you started to feel yourself sinking more into the new culture?

**A:** I, I, maybe I had three point. Maybe I had really three vantage points. I definitely, I definitely had a foot in the new culture, and that was, kept getting, I was getting more and more active, getting more in the role of being an advocate for it, although I never became an advocate of it until after the book was published, and then I sort of went on a lot of talk shows, TV things, and I became like this advocate of communes. Who's the, who's the...? My mother and I went to, um, I can't remember. Who's the talk

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show guy, um, you know, the best one...?

**Q:** Like Dick Cavett or something?

**A:** No, no.

**Q:** No.

**A:** He, who does sociological stuff, uh, ...

**Q:** Oh God, I don't know.

**A:** My mind is a blank.

**Q:** Talk-show ...

**A:** You know, you know, he ... with the glasses, with the glasses ...

**Q:** Like Merv Griffin or something? [Laughs]

**A:** No, no, no. He's much better than that, he's the --

**Q:** I don't know.

**A:** Anyways, he, my mother and I went to this talk show, you know, what's his name?

**Q:** McGowan [?]?

**A:** No, no, no, no.

**Q:** Totally [unintelligible].

**A:** No, what's his, uh, no, I'm not going to be able to do this.

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** Anyways, we went there, and, I don't know what this has to do with anything. It was interesting because he brought my mother into the whole thing. But I was being an advocate for communes and then he, he got on my mother's case and asked my mother what she thought about what I'd been doing, you know. She, she was hysterical.

**Q:** Tell me, what, what was your mother's view?

**A:** Uh, [pause] she thought it was crazy, she thought it was absolutely crazy, you know. You know, I, I, I think, I think she was, sincerely, that was, the high point of that was having this expense-paid trip to the, wherever this talk show place -- it was, it was Dayton, Ohio. At the time, he wasn't, he was nobody [?]. It was before he went to New York. He was in Dayton, Ohio. So we went to Dayton and we had this great time. And, uh, she was impressed by that, but she made it, she made it very clear on national TV that she was not impressed by my lifestyle and she didn't want me to be involved in it. [Pause].

**Q:** Now you were talking about before, where you felt you kind of had three things ...

**A:** Oh yeah, yeah, right. The, lot of, I became more and more an advocate, secondly I became much

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more critical of the society and the politics and the economy out of which, I had, I was a product, you know? I was a product of this society. And my third vantage point was more a historical one that was developing. Where I, I, I, I could step back from it and see the new culture, the old culture in struggle. I had a historical perspective that was developing. It was very, very, uh, tentative at the time. But I think I had it. And that's, that's due to the fact that I had studied history. American history.

**Q:** And that helped you be a more --

**A:** Yeah, yeah.

**Q:** --objective journalist?

**A:** 'Cause things get, things go around, you know. Utopian, you know, people do this, you know, and here I am, involved in it, and uh, I'm both in it like, what's his name, who wrote the utopian history of the nineteenth century?

**Q:** Oh, Noyes? Or the other book? Um, Nurdof [?]

**A:** Hofstadter [?] Yeah.

**Q:** Charles Nurdof [?], is that who?

**A:** Nurdof, Nurdof, yeah. Charles Nurdof [?]. The only one that we have. Nurdof is the only guy that wrote a comprehensive thing, that has any, any, uh, [inaudible]. And when I, when I wrote, Getting Back Together [is this the title?] I was a very well, I was aware that what I should do is get as much facts into it as possible, so that it would serve as Nurdof's [?] book did for the nineteenth century. Get, get the facts, get the feel. [Inaudible]. Get that stuff down, first. That's what you want to get down. But I realized also that you have to do it from some vantage point, and you use yourself as a filter, you know. [Pause].

**Q:** At what point did it, did you start feeling like you were on more of a personal quest? Or did you ever get to that?

**A:** Well, I think that [clears throat] you can't do [unintelligible] you can't, it was impossible to do this story without becoming involved. I mean, I mean some people tried to do it [clears throat] uh, from the, looking from the outside in. I forget, I even forget the names of the books, but they're, they're, they're, they're, you know, there were like four or five other commune books.

**Q:** From your time, in the 70s, you mean?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Yeah, uh huh.

**A:** And uh --

**Q:** Like The Bearded Lady?

**A:** The Bearded Lady. You, you, you know about them, right? Yeah, the Bearded Lady and uh, was one, and definitely from, told from someone who was tangentially related to the subject. And, um, uh, you

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can't do it that way. Neither can you subsume yourself into it, like Timothy Leary would, uh, trip, and then come out of it and talk to a mass audience. So that, the trick was, to get into it, and be able to compile [?] it, uh, and you had to go all the way into it. And I realized that pretty quickly. And, it, by going into it, it, it, it changed me. I mean, I had to go into it, I had to, I, I, I had to drop acid, um, I had to speak in tongues at this [pause] place in Oregon. I don't know where that came from, but that, that, the, I had to go to a peyote ceremony in [pause] reality. Uh, and you go to a peyote ceremony, things are going to happen to you, you know? I mean, you're not just going to go in there and, and, uh, you've gotta, it's like, you have to go all the way and uh, open yourself up to the possibilities of change within yourself.

**Q:** It took awhile for you though, didn't it? 'Cause you carried a tab of acid around in your pocket for awhile, right?

**A:** Yeah, that's right. I did, I did, I did. I carried it around for awhile. I forgot about that. Before, I was, I was very deliberate about it.

**Q:** Were you afraid of sort of letting go and not being able to come back?

**A:** Yeah, I was, yeah, I was a little bit. I, I, was a little bit. But, um, I, I've never been one person [?] who makes precipitous changes and dives all the way into the water, you know. I tend to you know, go in with my toes first, you know. Dabble, dabble. And everybody else is [unintelligible].

**Q:** [Unintelligible]

**A:** No, I'd never do that. So, um, but I'm not afraid of, you know, doing things. And uh, I became increasingly so. And um, certainly the psychedelic part of it was, began to change me, but also there was a, there was something else, there was something else. Of a, I think it, I, I, I write as a, as a change of conscious [or conscience?] taking place that that did have, had a very much in retrospect, a spiritual, you can say it has, has a spiritual, although, you know, I just hate, hate to use the word spiritual anymore.

**Q:** Really?

**A:** Yeah. And, uh, I think there's a good philosophical basis for not using the word spiritual. But that's a whole -- Tim Reed and I can go around on that at some other date. But at the time people didn't talk about it as a spiritual thing. It was a change of consciousness, people didn't talk about it as a change of consciousness. Charles Rike [?] talked about it as a, as a, greening of America [?] as a change of consciousness. Um, and it was happening. It was happening on some kind of [pause] massive and in, in, ineluctable manner, I mean, it was catching, it was, it was, it was a change in consciousness taking place that was springing from person to person and group to group and taking people up and changing them in some ways that hasn't happened since. But I know that it's happened before. And drugs were a part of it, but there, there was a dimension that you sensed, even in the midst of trips, that you knew this had happened before, it happened, it has happened other times in history, with or without the drugs, you were aware that this had happened before, that people had been motivated to change and uh, motivated to live in this way before, this had happened before, it, it was an ancient feeling. And uh, it, it, I began in this, when I had the psychedelic experiences, uh, to realize this, and to want to communicate in some more artistic way. You know, which is difficult. It's difficult to, uh, to write about stuff like that.



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You know, to write around it. And also I, I, the, uh, the peyote trip and the speaking in tongues, uh, awakened in me a curiosity as to what this new, what was the spiritual dimension of this new consciousness. And what were, what were the religious historical roots of it ... [pause].

**Q:** Was there a commune that you felt [inaudible] where you felt you learned the most?

**A:** The first one.

**Q:** The first one?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Just because it was such a new experience?

**A:** I, it may have been because it was new that I learned more there, or because, because it was new and because I was so trusting of the people I met there that I, I bonded with them. I more closely bonded with them, I think, than I did with the people at uh, New Buffalo [?] although I really liked the people at New Buffalo [?] very, very much.

**Q:** Was it hard for you to leave? Did you want to --

**A:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Uh, it was uh, I left, and then I came back. I went, I went to Grant's Pass, Oregon and checked into a hotel room and I, I wrote out, I wrote the whole, I wrote a section of the book in this, in this, I stayed at this hotel for two weeks. Or a week. I don't know how long it was. And I, I wrote this whole section. In order to see if, if there was stuff that I missed. I was very disciplined about it. [Unintelligible] come back, write it, look at it, say, then, you know, develop a whole list of questions of stuff, go back, I went back, I went back to the commune to fill in the blanks and narrate it, you know?

**Q:** That's incredible.

**A:** Then send -- yeah. Then, then I went to uh, New Buffalo [?] And I did the same thing there. I stayed there, and then I went to Santa Fe, and Santa Fe at the time was such a great place, it was like, uh, before Santa Fe was discovered.

**Q:** Yeah, I bet it was wonderful.

**A:** And there were, there were just, it was just, like there were writers walking around the streets. Poets walking around the streets. And uh, it, there was, it was like a very, very small town. I mean it, just, after awhile you'd know everybody in the town, in Santa Fe. I'd stay at this Colonel DeVargas hotel, and I had a room which, with fifteen-foot ceiling and a circular fan, you know, and uh --

**Q:** And that's where you wrote [unintelligible].

**A:** Yeah, I wrote about New Buffalo there. Um, and, uh, went back to New Buffalo.

**Q:** With your follow-up questions?

**A:** With my follow-up. So, I mean, I was, I could become completely immersed in the place, and yet [unintelligible] and yet completely withdraw and become this writer on a deadline. Very scrupulously going over the material to find out if he had, if he had overlooked some point or connected.

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**Q:** Were you able to get, sort of, more savvy as your, as the tour went on, in terms of being more able to talk to people and draw people out?

**A:** Yeah, a lot, yeah, yeah. Um, man, yeah. Yeah, I became very savvy. I've, I've always been a good interviewer. I'm, I'm, I'm one of the best interviewers there are. I mean, 'cause I, I, I just, you do this a number of years, interviewing people, I mean, all kinds of people -- from housewives to bus drivers to, to um, wary states' attorneys and governors, and people who don't want to tell the truth. People you know don't want to, you know, tell the truth. And I can tell when people are telling the truth. I can tell when people are lying, most of the time, and I can tell when people are avoiding something. I know how to relax people, I mean, I'm, I'm very, I'm very manipulative in that respect. I mean, I'm, that's what made me a good reporter, a good interviewer. So that was the main skill that I had was not I was such a good interviewer, because it was not an interview. I would never have set it up as an interview. It was what happened, you know. And the conversations that I got in were like, what was happening at the time, I would just ask a few more questions than other people did. But I would ask in a way that it wasn't even clear that it was a question, that would be used. Because the main thing was to not be, not have people think that you're doing it for any reason than you want to find out the truth.

**Q:** But if they knew you were writing a book, they must have known [inaudible] a little worried.

**A:** Yeah, but it, it, it, uh, if you're good, it doesn't matter after awhile, because you can be uh, you can be so up front about the book, you know, you can just lay it -- I'm, I'm writing a book here, [unintelligible] and uh, uh, somehow it didn't make a difference. I, I, I say, how did it not make a difference? It's a good question, why would, why would those people trust me, you know? I, I, I guess, I guess I just sort of conned them in some way.

**Q:** Well, and do you --

**A:** But they, they, they, they really -- I maintained good relations all through the point [?] with all the groups, um, you know, I sent back, I sent back the chapters to every commune for them to read and make comments on, and they all liked it. And they all sent comments and they were all, did not, uh, react, you know, negatively to it.

**Q:** You know, I was amazed by that when I read that in your book, that you could actually send drafts of chapters to people, because, I mean, I think a lot of things do make them look really foolish, and I'm surprised they didn't just, you know, burn it up and say go to hell.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Did that surprise you? That they reacted warmly to it?

**A:** [Pause] I, I, I, no, it didn't, because I think that, um, people at that time didn't take themselves that seriously, and they didn't give a shit about the mass media. You know, um, and, uh, if they were made to look foolish in the mass media, they didn't care at, at, at, at that time, you know? Um, and I, I think also, that the foolishness that I, I think I portrayed their foolishness in sort of a sympathetic way.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And so that, I really wasn't making look people look bad in a spiteful way. We were all foolish, trying

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to do the best we can, but.

**Q:** Well, I thought you did a really nice job sort of getting detached in your descriptions. I mean, you would just describe people doing sort of weird stuff, you know, like taking their clothes off in the middle of the day and dancing on the kitchen table or something like that ...

**A:** Yeah, Elaine [?] went [unintelligible] [Laughs]

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** Right. It, it's funny you bring that stuff back. Yeah. There's, there's been nobody, there's been no one, I get a few letters, like I get, when the book first came out, course you get, you would get like twenty letters a day, I mean, ten letters a day, or a hundred letters a week, you know. Uh, but then, it's a trickle down to uh, maybe one letter a year, two or three letters, um, um, ... but mostly from people -- there was a lot of very, very earnest commune study going on. Especially among the Germans. The Germans were coming over here every week. Every week there would be a contingent of Germans coming here to study American communes. I don't know why. But I think it has something to do with national, cultural cycles, they were one phase [?] right behind us, and so realized that what was happening here [unintelligible] see what was happening. And uh, ...

**Q:** Were these German kids that wanted to do it themselves?

**A:** No, these were German professors, sociologists and, and, and very politicized academic members of the movement in Germany. But then, aside from the Germans, there's been no academic interest in communes. I can't, um, so they're [?] waiting for you to uh, help them. Twenty-five years.

**Q:** Well, there is actually a communal studies association in this country, but it's focused mainly on historic communities. In fact, until just recently it was called the National Historic Communal Studies Association. They recently dropped the "historic" part and have started to embrace studying contemporary communities. So there's some. Were you keeping in touch with your wife...? ...at all?

**A:** The um, the pattern, you're talking about, talk about the Germans following the Americans, um, see, at this stage of her life, this is something that I was doing that she was following me, you know, it, it gradually led to some, some resentment that I was sort of like pioneering in some weird way, some kind of lifestyle change that would affect our whole family. And, uh, uh, like I had been the first to introduce her to grass, and I think I ... as I became more radical in my political views, began to rub off on her, and then, as far as sexual experimentation, that definitely had an effect. I mean, um, that, um, I certainly was the first to uh, experiment with other people and uh, as the section on [unintelligible] west [?] made clear. [Laughs] Um, and that she followed. I mean, she followed. And, and then, I think, in the area of sexual experimentation, uh, surpassed me.

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** [Laughs].

**Q:** And did that hurt the marriage?

**A:** Hmm?

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**Q:** Did that hurt your marriage?

**A:** Oh yeah, that was, that was the devastating point. The marriage was, because, uh, we broke up, um, because uh, I was unwilling to accept her lover, a female lover. Because I didn't like her. And uh, and I felt that she was, she was sleeping with her, sort of just to, just to make it very painful for me. Which was partially true. Um, but, I, I just couldn't, I just couldn't, I just couldn't live with it. So I left the commune. Uh, in retrospect, um, I think that, if I had been, if I had been a little more gracious and less sensitive, uh, I could have stuck it out and the marriage would have survived. Survived in some, some broad context. Uh, it could have, both, because of the different people, but we were not those people. She's, uh, she's not a radical lesbian. She's a very middle-of-the-road lesbian, who uh, has become very, in recent years, towards me and to other men, has become more, very understanding, I think. Um, we're all sort of victims of, victims of each other, and it's the view that the women's movement, the radical lesbian women's movement was, women, men were the main victimizers of women, and I think that has moderated. Good example of that. We have, we had, the last, only in the last two years have we been able to talk about some of these [inaudible]. It's taken a long time. Um, to the point where we've had some family meetings. We've had three family meetings, get together with our kids, and, and talk about things that are going on in the present. We don't talk, we don't, we sort of structured so we wouldn't get into stuff in the past, we're talking about the present, we're trying to help each other in the present, rather than bringing up stuff in the past that's still too painful to talk about. So that's been going on, and it's been working. At least, everyone says it's good.

**Q:** So when your, when your wife came to visit you in, was it New Buffalo, you said?

**A:** Santa Fe.

**Q:** Santa Fe. The kids came too, and ... followed you guys?

**A:** Good question. I, I can't remember if David came -- David wasn't very old. I think, I think David came with her, but Susan stayed.

**Q:** So that was just when you were in the motel. That wasn't when you were in the commune.

**A:** No, she never, she never came to a commune.

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** No, no she never saw a commune.

**Q:** Until after the --

**A:** Until after the --

**Q:** -- the book tour was done.

**A:** Yeah, I mean. Yeah. She, I never took her to a commune, I think that, I think that she visited, the only communes that she went to were the ones in Vermont, I mean, when we went to, there were quite a few. There were like sixty, at one point, or thirty-five, thirty-five...

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**Q:** And you went to all those?

**A:** No, no. We went to ... and I think she, she was, uh, I mean, I was, I was really more out there than she was. I mean, I was more, it wasn't just the fact that I was a journalist and this was a topic. I was, I was, compared to Mary, I was a more social person. I was, I was, she was more in, in, ingrown. She wanted to stay at home and, you know, and, she was more inward, at that time -- she changed, she became, she became more politicized and she became more social and she, much more [unintelligible] work now, she's more, much more out, outward going. So, the tendency, I would go to a party at Long Hill [?], Glover [?] but she would go sometimes too, she would go, so the communes that she saw were ones just in northern Vermont. Because, after the book came out, then, then we entered into this period of, of time when we, 'cause I, I put a floater in the last chapter, of our ... well, if anyone wants to do a commune, just send me a note. You know, I mean, I didn't say that quite that way, but it was sort of obvious that was the way I was headed, and so hundreds of people responded. And um, we eventually ended up buying land for a commune.

**Q:** And that was Tree Frog Farm or something like that?

**A:** Frog, Frog Run.

**Q:** Sorry, Frog Run.

**A:** Well, there is, there is a tree frog.

**Q:** OK [Laughs].

**A:** [Laughs] Tree, or a tree ... [unintelligible]

**Q:** When did Frog Run start?

**A:** Um, 1972. [Pause] Or maybe earlier. Wait a second. Yeah, think so.

**Q:** '72?

**A:** '71 or '72. About the time the book came out.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** Yeah, maybe the year after the book came out.

**Q:** And you bought some land with some other ...

**A:** I think there were, um, there was like, it began as three couples, four couples, three or four couples -- four couples, I believe. All of whom broke up. [Laughs]

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** Every one of us, consistently.

**Q:** So, did you all pool your money and get the farm, or did someone bankroll it?

**A:** I think that I paid for -- uh, the book, the book and some of Mary's money paid for the, well, for the down payment.

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**Q:** And where was it?

**A:** In East Charleston, Vermont.

**Q:** East Charleston. Was it a farm?

**A:** It was a farm, it was a farm. It was a hundred and eighty-eight acres of, of, um, very difficult farm. It had land that's flooded, a spring, and then it had land that was rocky, that you couldn't farm in. But it had tremendous views. It was great, it was a great thing to have if you were a tourist and photographer. But not if you wanted to farm it. Something that I realized, fairly soon, and, and I became, you know, I, I, in terms of buying a ticket to the end of the line, talk about self-sufficiency -- you want to be self-sufficient, you learn how to farm. 'Cause there, and I, I didn't know how to farm, you know. I mean, I got to do this, you know? I'm not going to talk about it, I'm going to do it, you know? And one, one of the signs that are on uh, our all splitting up [?], another source of conflict in the commune that went along the lines between me and the other people was that I was, I wanted to farm. I was a serious farmer and uh, uh, I had a plan for doing it, which involved, 'cause I realized we didn't have the land and we didn't have, we didn't have the markets, and so I wanted to go lease, I had an offer from a guy to lease us this land alongside a highway about ten miles away. It was always est --, always est -- already established vegetable stand, with the prime, prime land attached to it. And he was going to give -- he wanted to get out of the business, and we had all the people to do it, and he was going to give us the machinery and everything, we had the marketplace, and nobody wanted to do it. And it was impossible, this land was impossible to farm. And people want to do, wanted to do, they wanted to do it with horses, horses. And, because they thought horses were ecologically correct and emotionally correct, or something or other, you know? And horses are just a pain in the ass, you know. They are. Um, ask your husband [?] [Laughs]

**Q:** [Laughs] Yeah.

**A:** [Laughs] There's a good reason why we have tractors today.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah.

**A:** That was another tension in the community. Another tension was that I, I, I was, I, I became sort of a leader type. I became more and more a leader -- I want to do things and I was very, I was, as I said, I wasn't very attentive to the group process, I, I want to do things. Want to get things achieved. So that was, other people wanted to say, well, uh, let's talk about it. [Pause]. I was, I was uh, sort of uh, was result, I was achievement oriented, I was still in the, in the old society, in that I wanted to achieve things. And, uh, the uh, the ends, the ends were more important than the means. I mean, I'll give you an illustration, that during this time, um, you know, part of the thing was that the men did not monopolize tractors because women should learn how to run tractors and men shouldn't just monopolize them, otherwise women will never learn how to run them. And so, so, we were supposed to be moving all this chicken shit from Madruck [?] farm down to East Charleston and we had, I had, uh, [clears throat] I had rented, I had rented a tractor from a farmer with a bucketloader to move the manure into, a, a, to a truck, you know. And then, then, we, we had two trucks going, 'cause we were moving this whole, we did all, we did everything as, a, as big scale. And, [clears throat] so the women, this again, this illustrates the whole, the whole male-female conflict at the time, and, uh, I was up there and I went and said, "You've got to give us experience doing this. You cannot monopolize the equipment." OK, all right. Go

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ahead. "Don't tell me what to do! I'll, I'll find out myself!" All right, all right, all right, all right. So she gets the tractor up, and gets the loader caught underneath the carriage of the truck and then turns on the hydraulic and breaks the whole, the whole, the, the tractor actually pulls apart, the front end pulls away from the body of the tractor.

**Q:** Did you see this coming? Were you watching this?

**A:** Yeah. I mean, it was like, five thousand dollars of damage.

**Q:** Yeah. So where did you go from there? [Laughs]

**A:** That's when it became an organized, I set it up. I'm going to go, I went down to the phone booth, the, during this time, a guy named Samuel Kaener [?] had come up to, um, Vermont like a um, uh, a roving uh, evangelist, preaching the gospel of organic farming. And his idea was to form a cooperative group of organic farmers in the Vermont-New Hampshire who were market down the Connecticut valley to New York, to cooperatives in New York. He called this thing the Natural Organic Farmers Association. And, uh, he went around, uh, recruiting people to work on this mad scheme. You know. Nobody had heard of organic farming, and no one had heard of putting organic farming together with cooperative structure before. Samuel, who was this very fast-talking, smart Jewish guy from the lower east side ... former uh, uh, uh he's not in the book, so, um, ... came up and gave a talk at the Barton co-op, and, uh, when I realized things at the farm were disintegrating, and I had to find a place to go, I had to find a place to go to find work within the movement -- I can't go back, you know, I've gone too far, I can't go back. I've got to go somewhere else, so I call up Samuel -- Samuel, I want to come work for, for this NOFA, you know? He said come on down. So the, [sighs] he had an office in again, again, through this whole thing that we, we had, we had all these facilities at our disposal. We had an office set up for us at the, uh, the co-op store in West Lebanon [?] New Hampshire and I moved in there and, uh, started putting out a newsletter and did fund-raising and someone donated a truck, and I started driving around and organizing farmers in the Connecticut valley. And, having, you know, having meetings and Dartmouth gave us money, and, uh, the whole thing just took off. And I worked, uh, for almost six years doing that. [Pause].

**Q:** How long did, um, Frog Run Farm last for?

**A:** Um. It was one of the, the last communes to break up in Vermont. Um ...

**Q:** So it lasted past, after you left?

**A:** Oh yeah, oh yeah, well after. Um, um, into the early '80s.

**Q:** When did you leave?

**A:** I left in seventy, uh four.

**Q:** So you were there, like, two years?

**A:** Yeah, yeah.

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**Q:** Did your wife stay, after you left?

**A:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah, she stayed, yeah. Yeah. [Pause]

**Q:** Wow. So it, it lasted ten or fifteen years.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Oh. Why did it break up, do you know?

**A:** Uh, I'm not in a really, a good position just, just to say, you know. It wasn't a break up. There was no, like, breaking up like Nick's [?] broke up in the '70s. It sort of, it sort of fizzled. It just lost energy. It, it, it just sort of, it just sort of, it just sort of reached the point when people said "What are we doing here?" I mean [pause] "Well, maybe we should sell the place." "Well, we can't do that." "Well, why not?" "Well, maybe you're right. Why not?" I don't know. I don't know. I wasn't part, I wasn't part of it, you know --

**Q:** Was your wife part of it?

**A:** -- Even though, I'd had -- oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. I think it was her decision, basically. Uh, I, I think that maybe it, it would, it would still be straggling on, but I think she saw that it really wasn't going anywhere. Um, it wasn't because it didn't have a -- they, they, financially they could have made it, I think. It wasn't a financial consideration. I think it was just a, people lost the ... passion. Lost the passion. I think it, it, I think one thing that it did become would be, I, I think it, maybe it became too predominantly lesbian. Um, and, and that, it was unbalanced. This is the, this is the [unintelligible]. People, women could string me up for saying this. You know, but, anyways, um, because it certainly was a lesbian, uh, communes, like the Circle of Angels in, in Walden [?]. Have you heard about that? Um, that survived. Although, it's not exactly democratic. Whereas this was certainly a democratic-run commune, but, um, and Mary was certainly in no guru position. Um, [pause] it uh, and they were not militant, you know. Certainly not militant. Uh, and the men that lived there, uh, tended to be, I think, tended to be passive types. And so, there, there, while there weren't, there weren't any areas of conflict, I think, I think, it became a, from the outside observers' point of view, it became rather a dull, a dull place. I don't know. I really don't know. You know, I think, I think I, you ask me a question, I should know the answer to that, but, it's probably too close to me, it's probably something to close to me for me to really be objective about, you know. You know, I could probably tell you all what happened to Mabruck [?] Farm, um, than, than, you know ...

**Q:** Did you join any other groups after Frog Run?

**A:** Yes, I, I, I after, after, after, after, well, while I was in Nova, I was, a lot of the farms were communal farms, and I would go from one farm to the other, I, I lived for a long time at the Wooden Shoe which is mentioned in the book. And many of the people at the Wooden Shoe became the prime movers of, of NOFA.

**Q:** And NOFA stands for?

**A:** Natural Organic Farmers' Association. [Pause]. And um, my best friend, Jake, me, um, up at the [?] Wooden Shoe, which no longer is in existence. But Jake is now another organic farmer, to my knowledge [?]. Then, from there I went to a commune in Marshfield, Vermont, called Pie in the Sky.



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**Q:** [Laughs] Great name.

**A:** Yeah. Yeah I lived there for two years, two or three years.

**Q:** Tell me a little bit about that group.

**A:** It was um, no farmers, uh, all, uh, political, all people in either the co-op movement or some political movement like the Ver --, we had a group here that was the forerunner of the Rainbow Alliance. It was, was a forerunner of Rainbow Alliance. It was the Vermont Alliance. And, uh, the, the organizer of the Vermont Alliance and uh, there was another group, another set of people who were working to take over a public utility and make it into a cooperative, which they did. And, very, very effectively. Only people that are very successful today, making lots of money. [Laughs]. And, um, there was me, I was working with NOFA and there was Susan Veechem [?] who was working on, on, on food co-ops, organized food co-ops in New England, Vermont. And, um, um, Susan and I got together, the commune broke up because, uh, we were renting this place in Marshfield, and some of us wanted to, wanted us to buy a farm and move there together. We had a series of meetings with a facilitator that we brought up from Cambridge, Massachusetts to, sort of, pull us together. And we realized we were not together on this at all, and, uh, the, most people wanted to stay where they were, which was about two year [?] and do their organizing, you know, and not live together. Um, and the only people who wanted to buy a farm were Susan and myself. So then we, uh, [clears throat] Susan and I then moved to Gratin [?] for the winter and then next spring we bought this place. [Pause] She had three kids and my kids would visit here, too, so we had a lot of kids here. And then she died of cancer [inaudible]. Certainly [?]

**Q:** Were her kids grown at that point?

**A:** No.

**Q:** No. So they went to live with [unintelligible] or something?

**A:** They went to, they, yeah, it was, it was, it was, it was a painful experience for me because uh, for the kids, because I wanted, you know, part of me wanted, I wanted them to stay here with me. But then, um, their father, they, they went to, they went back to their father. And he did a very good job of, of raising them. He remarried and uh, I've maintained close relationships with two or three kids. Then Stuart died, uh, two years ago.

**Q:** That's one of the kids?

**A:** No, Stuart, their father.

**Q:** Oh, their father.

**A:** Died, yeah.

**Q:** Mm, wow.

**A:** People die.

**Q:** Yeah. You don't always expect your parents to die, though, when you're a kid, that young.

**A:** I know, I mean, it, it, yeah, I know.

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**Q:** So was, um, can't remember [?] what this one was called. Um, commune, Pie in the Sky, was the I -- was that the last one you lived in?

**A:** Yeah. This was never a commune. I mean, we had, uh, people who lived here for periods of time, collectively, but it was never, never a commune, even though I wanted it to become such. Different, no one came along and said "Hey, we, we want to make this new commune, let's do something to do that." It just never happened. People have talked about it, but it hasn't been -- and I've been open to it but it hasn't happened. It's coming closer to it, though, it's coming closer.

**Q:** Is it?

**A:** Yes, uh huh, yeah.

**Q:** With the, with the, I don't know what you call them -- the people that come here to work on the farm?

**A:** No, not so much the deadheads. Older, older people who, who maybe, I don't know, I don't know, the older people and the younger people, there's two sets of people who responded to, I have a listing in, in the intentional communities --

**Q:** The directory?

**A:** Directory -- the directory, you know. And, also, I put an ad in organic farming for a partner for the farm, saying, very, very, very terse ad. So, uh, people call and don't know exactly what I'm looking for. But I'm looking for someone who wants to buy into the --

**Q:** The business?

**A:** The farm and the business. And, and, and run a partnership that's open to having a land-trust community with other people here. 'Cause I think that it's, it's good support to have people, it does. And um, there are some people who express an interest in it, are serious about doing it, and, and sound like they are, but, I'm not counting on them until they actually --

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** [Inaudible].

**Q:** When you say older people, what do you mean?

**A:** Older people meaning people in their forties.

**Q:** Oh, I thought, I was envisioning people in their seventies or eighties or something.

**A:** Well, [unintelligible] dealing with people in their twenties, ah, it was [unintelligible] crazy. You know [unintelligible] in their twenties I can't stand them!

**Q:** [Laughs] Like your kids, is that who you're talking about?

**A:** Yeah, but, mainly these deadheads.

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**Q:** Oh, the deadheads, right. OK.

**A:** And I'm, I'm just an old fart about the twenties [?] Where are we going? You've got me through Pie in the Sky.

**Q:** Um, well I guess I'd like to backtrack maybe a little bit. And I'm, I'm curious as, um, did, did you have a commune that was, that was your favorite, that you were really drawn to ...? You maybe wanted to stay? Would it be that first one? That you felt you learned the most at?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** That first one. And, and, well I guess you've kind of already talked about that. Is that where you'd say you had your best experiences? Sort of the peak experiences? What was the worst one?

**A:** [Pause] I only, you know what, I only have one copy of my book.

**Q:** Do you really?

**A:** Yeah. I can't [inaudible]. [Pause] I, I, I, I don't think, I don't think you can put them on a worst-best [unintelligible] scale.

**Q:** Well, what was your worst experience?

**A:** Um, um because they're just different, you know, and it, and, uh, um, my worst experience ... I felt, I felt really uncomfortable at, at Lovett [?], too.

**Q:** At, oh, at Twin Oaks.

**A:** Twin Oaks, yes.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** Because of the, of the, of the, sort of like the, I don't know, maybe because I, I was, I was, maybe I'd taken too many drugs, or something, and uh, I was feeling like, uh, rebellious hippie, and, and, somehow displaced from the group and the world. But then, couldn't, couldn't you tell by the time of my, of my commentary that, that, that the whole place pissed me off?

**Q:** I'd have to go back and look at it.

**A:** Yeah, it did. Yeah, it did. Um, but I didn't have a bad experience there, I mean, you can't have a bad experience there. Um, --

**Q:** It just didn't interest you?

**A:** No.

**Q:** You'd seen too many interesting things at that point to --

**A:** Yeah, right.

**Q:** What did you think about B.F. Skinner? Had you read Walden Two?

**A:** Oh yeah. I, I, I'm not a behaviorist, I'll tell you that.

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** But that doesn't really bear any relationship to the community [inaudible] behaviorist, but, it's like you can social [unintelligible]. Like, the whole, the whole, the whole stand, the whole premise that you can socially engineer something. Well, I think that's true to an extent, you know, I think that, you know, nurture and environment are important things, in that, it does create a different context for people to develop. But it's not, something else has to happen, you know? Given a choice, what would I say ... [pause] It doesn't have, it certainly doesn't have joie de vivre. Um, it doesn't have it. Maybe that's why East Hill was sort of the same way, I don't know, I've never been there. But maybe that's why.

**Q:** Oh, East Wind?

**A:** East Wind. Um ...

**Q:** Well, Twin Oaks has more than East Wind, I think. Just 'cause they don't have to work so hard to keep communal [?]

**A:** I think it's, I think it's, I mean, certainly they have survived, [inaudible] and, uh, the open-ended communes that had lost of joie de vivre, uh, but um, [pause] and maybe that's something, maybe that's something, maybe it's better for survival.

**Q:** Do you think the reason they've survived is because of their structure?

**A:** Yeah. Yeah, I think the structure is important. And getting, getting, getting a, getting a financial thing down -- you know, running a business like [unintelligible] and, and running it in a democratic way [inaudible] do an equal amount of work, you know, because, uh, as I said, out there about, people not getting [inaudible] with each other, about certain things. Things that, under the guise of being anarchistic, going with the flow, is how a lot of people used that as a, as a mask for getting away with not doing work or not taking responsibility.

**Q:** Tyranny of the structuralists.

**A:** Exactly. Exactly. That's exactly what happened. So that, in retrospect, the, Twin Oaks is beginning to look good to me.

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** [Laughs] And, I, I think I would have revised my, my rather sophomoric stance on Twin Oaks at this point. But it was, at the time, the one I didn't enjoy particularly.

**Q:** Now you told me earlier that you thought the [unintelligible: DA and RH are speaking at once]

**A:** I had, I had some really strange experiences. I had, um, New Vrindaban was really strange. It was a Hare Krishna community. It was, there was, I, I, interviewed this guy from Ohio State, he dropped out and was later accused of murder, named Harvey something or other. But it wasn't that, it was, it was certainly strange, but I, you know, so what, you know? I wasn't uncomfortable there, but I certainly wanted to get out of the place.

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**Q:** [Laughs] Did it feel cultish to you?

**A:** Oh, extremely so. I mean, it was, it was cultish before people were, you know, in the United States were aware of cults, you know, this is top of a mountain in West Virginia. The Vrindibandis were, um, doing some pretty strange things at that time. Um, ...

**Q:** Did they try and get you to join, or stay?

**A:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

**Q:** But you were able to extricate yourself.

**A:** Yes, yes I uh, took the first plane out. [Laughs].

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** It means following this creekbed down three miles to get out. You had, you had to walk out.

**Q:** Did you have to sneak out in the middle of the night, was it that bad, or?

**A:** Uh, no, but, we, I, I, I got out the next morning with another guy. We were both uncomfortable there. I can't remember exactly -- I, I it's in here, but there was something going on -- it was making me really uncomfortable, but I don't know -- maybe, maybe it was just my inexperience with cults, you know?

**Q:** So did, did you feel more comfortable with the secular communities than with the spiritual or mystical groups?

**A:** Yeah. Yeah. [Pause].

**Q:** Now you told me earlier that you thought the movement was, the communal movement was pretty much dead by '73, is that right?

**A:** Yeah, that's right.

**Q:** So, it really went from what, like about '68 to '73, about five years?

**A:** Well, no, it began before '78.

**Q:** When would you say it began?

**A:** I think, I think, I think it began with um, I think it began with the civil rights movement and SDS and, on the political front, I mean there were two, two sides of the communal world. There was, the, there was two sides of the youth movement altogether -- I mean, there was the hippie side and then there was the political side. OK, and the cultural and the political. There was all kinds of people in between, but those were, those were the two polarities. And, uh, on the political side, the freedom, the freedom riders, they lived communally and, and, blacks and whites together, amazingly. Um, and, not, maybe not, like com --, more of a crash pad thing, but the people living collectively in houses, both north and south before the civil rights movement became split. This is in the fifties and early sixties, you know? And, um, then you had SDS, uh, uh, and Tom Hayden's, and the SDS experiments in going into neighborhoods, living collectively and organizing the poor -- I forget what the name of the project was -- it was that part of SDS that dealt with organizing in low-income neighborhoods -- like Tom, Tom went to

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Newark and I was there, and they had a house and lived together. And so, when the blacks kicked the whites out of the civil rights movement, then, and SDS, um, began to break up, you had people had already had living together experience, living together as experience, and then sort of, it sort of coalesced. Living together became a way, too, like, ride something out, and um, what people, people began to live collectively, first in cities, like there were a lot of uh, before there was any kind of term called communes, um, [pause] didn't call them communes, they didn't call them anything. It was just happening, man, and we lived together, we shared and we did a lot of drugs. And [pause] the, it became more a conscious goal when people left the cities and moved to the country and that's a whole part of the history, is that, you have this break-up of the crash pads and, and, whether it's the Haight or the lower east side, and the break-up of the crash pads had to do with, one, heroin coming in, uh, two, the police coming down harder, after the Democratic convention, this whole, uh, we-they kind of a struggle that was taking place. It was particularly strong in the cities and, and, and then, the heroin and other drugs, hard drugs came in and gave the police probably cause for breaking up communes or groups of people. And politics became nasty, you know, the whole country became nasty in 1968. So, everyone's response was "Let's get the fuck out."

**Q:** So the back to the land movement started in about '68.

**A:** Yeah, it really, it really, it really, it started before then. Um, it already, by the time, by the time SDS was breaking up, by the time and, and, and the Democratic convention was sort of the, the, the, the nail on the coffin of SDS, it was like the failure of us to do, really, any kind of, of organizing -- it was given up. We'd given up. It, it, not given up, we blew it, as they say in Easy Rider. There, there, there were always people around who had already given up, and gone to the country, and this is the, this is the, the mood of the people who went to the country was one of political despair. Political and cultural despair. It was a negative response, really. It was, get, getting away from something, rather than toward something. Just like being, it was a great organizing principle, you, uh, organize, organize around something negative and you get people to get, to get together. Like, to be against the Vietnam war, or so, you don't have to say what you're for, because it's clear what you're against.

**Q:** So was the, the hope and the joy and the love of the, sort of the flower children, was that gone at this point, when people started going back to the land?

**A:** Well, no, no. It was like, it was like the problem with the, the, the, was with not with being a flower child, but you couldn't be a flower child in, in Du Pont's Circle [?] or the lower east side or Haight-Ashbury or the north side of Chicago anymore. It was too hard to be a flower child so, that's what I meant --

**Q:** Because of the heroin and the police and the nasty politics?

**A:** Yeah, yeah, the country, [inaudible]. Um, so, a lot of people just went to the country to get away from the city; that was the initial thing. So it was a negative, to begin with. [Coughs] Where are the -- oh, here we go.

**Q:** You're eating chocolate chips?

**A:** Yes, yes. [Paper rustling] You can have chocolate chips, can't you?

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**Q:** Sure.

**A:** Good.

**Q:** I'm a real sucker for chocolate chips --

**A:** You know what's good with chocolate chips is, um, orange, orange, candied orange slices.

**Q:** Really? Never tried that.

**A:** I discovered, only discovered that last night.

**Q:** [Laughs] So, talk some about the back to the land movement.

**A:** Well, [pause] focus your question a little better.

**Q:** OK, all right, sorry. Hmm. [Laughs] I told you I don't know anything about interviewing. [Laughs] That's a perfect example.

**A:** Well --

**Q:** Um --

**A:** Or you can discover your question. It's all in the question. You know, Heidegger says, uh, that, if, if you, the trouble with civilization is that they haven't clarified the fundamental question to ask about existence. So all, all reporters should take that to heart.

**Q:** OK [Laughs]

**A:** [Unintelligible]

**Q:** Well, the places you went were mainly back to the land places, weren't they?

**A:** Yeah, I was more interested in, in back to the land communes, I think. I didn't write about a single urban commune except the Herod [?] West, group marriage, which was really atypical. But, uh, there are references to a lot of urban communes that are in the history of some of the rural communes. I think everybody, a lot of people love [or left?] the lower east side, who came to Vermont. The anarchist people who did, or the people from ... from, um, Acker's Corners [?] before Montague [?] they lived together in the city in different collective situations.

**Q:** Yeah, doing the news service?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** You know, staying up all night -- you might as well live in the same house, if you're going to work together for twelve hours a day, you know.

**Q:** So all the back to the land groups pretty much came out of urban collectives and ... did you see them as retreatist sort of groups, wanting to be insular, not trying to change the world --

**A:** -- Yeah, just looking at Vermont, and, and, and just looking at Vermont, that will give, I, I, can talk

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more generally if I reduce the scope of my answer to just Vermont rather than the country, in that the communes in Vermont, which I know more intimately, um, uh, some were uh, activists who came to the country to organize a, uh, rural infrastructure that would feed and shelter, uh, their brothers and sisters in the, in the city, once the revolution took place. And there were those who didn't want any part of any politics, whether it be guerrilla politics or, or Republican politics, period, and whose only god was that of the compost pile. It ran, it ran the gamut, you know? From Franklin, who were the former, and Red Clover and Putney's [?] was another thing, and, and, and, um, then you had people like Mullein Hill who, you know, it's like, the compost pile is where it's happening. And, uh, the only kind of organizing they wanted to do was maybe a food co-op and it was very, very low-key kind of organizing. They didn't even talk about the politics of food. Um, so there was apolitical and very political and the, the people who stayed tended to be apolitical. The people who were the most out there, like, uh, John Douglas and Robert Kramer, who were from Newsreel -- you've heard of Newsreel? -- this alternative, radical --

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** -- thing, and these guys, uh, uh, came up here and founded, they were the main organizers of something called Free Vermont, which was a confederation of communes in Vermont, which was almost a fiction, in that they were, they were uh, photographing at the same time that they were organizing what they were photographing, which was this confederation of communes which was going to free Vermont from the United States, so that we would become the Viet Cong up here, and we would lead the revolution. And, um, and, they actually put out a lot of newspapers, and we, I participated in somewhat on a, tangentially, and we had a demonstration at the State House and, and showered Free Vermont manifestoes on the floor of the legislature and um, more seriously put together the first co-op, food cooperatives. The food cooperative movement, one of the most successful things to come out of the communes were the food co-ops. I don't know about other areas of the country but the seedbed for the whole cooperative movement in Vermont, for cooperatives, for the communes, I have a feeling that, this is not atypical, and it was a spin-off, a direct spin-off of communes. And so, Free Vermont was first a confederation of communes, who met and had these gatherings at different times of the year and then they had, uh, a children's collective that the children who were, this is something that actually happened, this is not, this is [not] something, uh, that I'm making up, that someone made up, but we actually had the children form a collective, that went from commune to commune, and Susan's children were part of that. They moved from Mount Philo to Glover [?] to Franklin and back to Mount Philo [?] as a unit. And it was a very conscious thing, 'cause you, you would, you would bring, you would, the children were then, would relate to other children as equals, they would not be dominated by their parents, but instead would relate to other adults as equals.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** And it worked, I mean, it did work.

**Q:** That's wild. So you'd have a period where you had a total break from kids in the community.

**A:** Yeah, then, then, they'd come in, back your place --



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**Q:** They'd come en masse.

**A:** Aa-hah, the kids are coming, the kids are coming! Oh my God!

**Q:** [Laughs] But I wonder if those periods of respite really helped.

**A:** I don't know. I think, it balanced out.

**Q:** Pardon?

**A:** It balanced out.

**Q:** Balanced out, OK. Wow. [Laughs]

**A:** I guess uh, and then there was, then there was, a whole, then there was a Bierfort [?] doctors' brigade, where, uh, you, we formed, uh, like a health collective that went from commune to commune which became the model for the People's Free Clinic in Burlington, which is still going. It's become a very standard clinic, using alternative health techniques. That was a direct spin-off of, of communes. Um...

**Q:** Was there a midwifery movement going on?

**A:** Uh huh, yeah, that, that, that was it. That was one of the main thing was midwifery and then the people, then, then, then the People's Free Clinic became [pause] became a, mostly abortion center. I mean, God, it had, they had terrible experiences with the fundamentalists picketing and everything. But that was a direct spin-off of the Free Vermont movement. I don't think any of this has got, this is a, I've, I've written about this, but not published anything, I've lectured about it, this whole period in Vermont communal history [coughs] which occurred, most of my understanding of this occurred after I published the book. I mean, some, some, some of it I wrote about, and there are pictures in here of some of the gatherings, but I didn't quite understand what was happening, because I wasn't really involved in it as much as I became.

**Q:** Were there other, um, spin-offs?

**A:** Cultural, there was a group, I can't remember the name of the group, it was like the cultural brigade of the, or something, whatever, that became, um, oh yeah, became the, the uh, [pause] nucleus of the Fair Community [?] which became, the Fair Community then became the nucleus of the, the uh, the um, oh, what's, um, the um, of uh, what was I, the name of the Vermont groups that I said, the people who live at Pie and the Sky were members of the, of the, I mean, I should know this -- uh, God, it's like the talk show guy --

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** Um, oh, I'm losing my mind! Um, the, the Ver-, Vermont, then it became the forerunner of the Rainbow Coalition.

**Q:** Oh, right. OK.

**A:** Um, but anyways, that, the Rainbow --

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**Q:** Vermont Alliance, or something?

**A:** Vermont Alliance, right.

**Q:** OK, OK.

**A:** The Vermont Alliance came out of the communes. The people came out of the communes. The people who formed the Vermont Alliance came out of Mount Philo and Red Clover and Franklin. And those people, then, while they, even after those were communes were over, then associated as members of the Vermont Alliance. And even after Pie in the Sky ended, these groups still continued, although the people didn't live together anymore.

**Q:** And still, I mean, some of them were [unintelligible].

**A:** [Unintelligible] Sanders [?] is a result of, you know, this political infrastructure being formed, you know in the '60s and early '70s.

**Q:** Was there a sense of cooperative, did the cooperative movement exist in Vermont, in like the '30s and '40s? Were there co-ops [unintelligible] back then?

**A:** Yes, there was, there was a very successful co-op store in Hanover, one of the largest co-op stores in New England. And there was also a co-op store in Putney. There was a whole wave of, you know, intentional communities and co-ops, Twin Pines [inaudible] became, in theory [? almost inaudible] you know, the whole back to the land, Marxists would have a much more a Marxist content to it, and uh, I went to one conference here, uh, uh, I don't know when it was, early '70s, where I met [inaudible] and uh, other people who were, uh, had come to, had done the back to the land movement in the '30s and it was a very successful conference because it brought together the New Wave and the Old Wave, and now I feel like I, the old commies who came up to Vermont in the '30s, I feel like I'm in that position.

**Q:** Yeah. Well, did, did those folks have any influence on what was happening in the Sixties?

**A:** Oh yes, oh, oh, yes, yes, it did, they did a lot. I mean, um, uh, we, uh, listened to them a lot, we visited them, we sounded them out, they were sympathetic, they did a lot, give us some financial help, they gave us a lot [clears throat] of uh, personal assistance and guidance, um, [pause] I don't think that, I think that, it, it, it could have been stronger. There was, there was definitely, there, there was definitely, generation, it was a generational gap. It was a natural generational gap, and there was, um, they disapproved of our drug use, and uh, uh, [pause] uh, I think, I think, they didn't, and also they didn't like the anarchistic part. I mean, a lot of them were communists and socialists. Communists, really. And I would have been a communist in the '30s. [Clears throat]. And so they, they just disapproved. They thought we weren't really intellectually rigorous, politically rigorous enough to figure it out, and I agree with them now, you know, I [clears throat] I'm definitely, I'm not a communist, but I'm definitely a Marxist -- I'm not a Marxist-Leninist, I'm a Marxist dash Western Marxist [?]. But, uh, and I believe very strongly that, that one of the, intellectually, that's one of the main problems of this country, that we don't have a, a good critique of capitalism. And, and, if you talk about critiquing capitalism, then you're somehow un-American.

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**Q:** That's true. That's really true. You know, I've always wondered about the period in the '40s, well, maybe not so much the '40s, but at least, definitely the '50s. It's like, what was happening then? 'Cause you had these, these active communists in the '30s that came and started the co-ops and things like that. And then, you had kind of this dead period, and then things happened again in the '60s. So what, what was going on in that dead period?

**A:** I don't know. They were all watching MGM musicals. [Laughs]

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** Fred Astaire, and, I don't know, I don't know.

**Q:** What was, what was a '30s communist doing? Did they go underground at that point? Like the [unintelligible] and stuff?

**A:** Well, what happened was, I know what happened is that -- here, have some -- I went overboard here.

**Q:** That's enough. [Laughs] We won't be able to go to sleep at all.

**A:** Um, [pause], well that's when they came to the country. That's when they came to the country.

**Q:** That's when they went back to the land?

**A:** Yeah, that's when, he got into World War II, and then, um, Stalin made a pact with Hitler, and, and, that's when the American communists lost their whole confidence in communism. [Clears throat] 'Cause they didn't know where they were, you know, and they certainly weren't, they were suspected at home, and Scott [?] lost his job at the University of Pennsylvania, you know, he was blacklisted, blacklisted. And um, [pause] ...

**Q:** So they went back to the land.

**A:** And they went, also, back to, it was, it was an inward direction. It was not just a geographical back to the land. It was a, it went from being political and be focused on external public events to building stone houses. It was an inward movement, Bolshevik, you know -- it was all Bolshevik this deal with what we can deal with in our own lives, in terms of our basic needs and, and do that right. 'Cause none of this is right, so, we can't do that. Not going to teach history at Pennsylvania, then I'll learn to build a stone house right.

**Q:** So was that --

**A:** [Unintelligible]

**Q:** -- rep, was that repeated to some extent ...?

**A:** Oh, yeah, I think a lot of people thought '30s, yeah ... or repeated?

**Q:** Well, I mean in the '60s.

**A:** Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Pause] I, I, um, maybe the political disillusion was not as great, you know, it's hard to compare one's disillusion, um, one's, one's own disillusion with another generation's disillusion. I know they were quite disillusioned, very bitter, I mean, I talked to them, you know? Very

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bitter people, socialists that came back to the land. Um, very, very cynical about communal experiments, they were, I mean, very cynical about even, efforts of people to live together. Nothing, they were sort of at a stage where nothing is going to work except, you know, your own individual effort -- nothing else can work. I mean, they were disillusioned by communism as well as by American isolationism and American blacklisting, McCarthy era, you know. There was a lot to be, there may have been more to be disillusioned about in the '30s than there is today. You know, although it's hard to say. But they were very, very, deeply disillusioned people. And I, I didn't understand it at the time.

**Q:** And now you do. And you share some of that bitterness and cynicism?

**A:** Mm-hmm.

**Q:** About communal living?

**A:** Not so much about communal living, no. [Pause]. More about [pause] I'm more, I, I don't feel, I mean, I, I don't feel, feel that way about communal living as I do about the political, alternative groups I mentioned before, like the Clamshell [?] Alliance and um, the peace and justice groups that were doing refugee work, um, even [unintelligible] and I'm more disillusioned about the sell-outs that occurred. Um, than I am about the break-up of the communes. Maybe, maybe it's only because it's more recent --

**Q:** That's true. [Laughs]

**A:** But somehow I feel like people can, since I've seen communes work, I've experienced the highs, I know they can work. If you've experienced the high you know it can be repeated, you know? Um, I know they can work. I'm not too sure about our dealing with other structures, you know? I, I think that maybe we have to, there's no point, let me, I'm getting ahead of myself -- I mentioned before that there was an evolution of the people who were the walking wounded survivors of communal cul-- of communal break-ups, who, looking for something to do, like myself, lent them [?] to work in organized cooperatives, which then repeated the mistakes which were made in the communes, on a larger level. Um, so that taking a, um, having had the benefit of reading Heidegger, and appreciating his deconstructionist approach -- deconstructionist means there's some fundamental error in, in, either in a thinking process or a culture, or a civilization or a philosophy that lies at the very core, and that the only way that you can, um, overcome that problem is to deconstruct that system step-by-step, work yourself back, work yourself back historically, and, and then you take a new course of development, once you've under, discovered that error. So that, I feel, what needs to be done is for people to, on a very basic level, to begin to learn to relate, to talk to each other, you know, to overcome basic human problems. And, that, that, if they can get to live together, maybe then we can begin to develop a new agriculture, a new economy, etc. etc. etc. But we have to solve the fundamental problems first, of living together before we can take on the greater [?] problems of the world. I know we can do that, 'cause I've, I've seen it work. So I remain a little more optimistic about that, but I think that's the work to be done. It's a very, on a very, uh, primal, prim --, primary level, you know? It doesn't seem too much to ask. [Laughs] Have you, have you ever lived communally?

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**Q:** I've never lived in an income-sharing community. I've lived in co-op houses, group shared households, but we never shared our income.

**A:** Yeah, that's what I meant.

**Q:** Yeah, well, no.

**A:** Yeah, it, it, it's harder; I mean, the other thing on the tape is that, is this thing about the economy was much more affluent, there was much more money going around in those days that made income-sharing easier, you know? It just was. I mean, I, I, prime example, at, at, at Pie in the Sky I was making like sixty dollars a week as a Vista, at some point. At some points I was not making any money at all. I, I, from NOFA, I had expense money from NOFA, very meager expense money. I was making no money at all and my work was completely financed by Stuart, who was working at Goddard College, in the admissions office, and giving all his money into the commune. And there was never any question about that's the right thing to do.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** Today, today um, [pause] a person like Stuart wouldn't get a job at Goddard.

**Q:** Why is that?

**A:** It's just, it's just the way things are.

**Q:** 'Cause he'd, he'd be too radical?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Too fringy for them?

**A:** Yeah, right.

**Q:** OK, and, and, places, universities were a lot more open to the radical left at that time?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** You said they were --

**A:** They, they, they could afford it, I mean, I mean, they could afford it, you know? And they can't afford it today because of their, they have to attract a certain kind of student who can afford to pay a certain kind of tuition. If they're going to afford this kind of student, then they have to present a certain kind of image. Thus, you don't hire people who look like this, or talk like that, or believe like that. [Pause]. That's the way it is. And it's getting more so.

**Q:** Do you think as we have to tighten our belts, though, that people might start sharing more?

**A:** You know, you know, it's one of, one of the great ironies, right? We thought that, um, during '73 to '76 period, when we realized things were breaking up, we began to talk about why it was breaking up, one of the theories that was floated around was that's because it's too, it's too, it's, it's too easy. We have it too easy. We have too much money. There really isn't anything real here to bind us together. What we need, what this country needs, is a good depression. That's exactly what was said. What this

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country needs is a good depression, and then people will again cooperate. And we had all this thing, we said, "Look, if you go back, and you look at, look at the oral histories of the 1930s, you can realize that people really had, had a natural basis for sharing and cooperation during the Depression. So therefore, communes will work out better, too, because there's a real basis for us, to hold us together. See, we realized that the, one of the things that got us together was this negativity, what we were against, we were against the war. And once the war, sort of became a covert war, a hidden war, and the movement came to divide over it, then our focus became less sharp. After May Day of 1973, is that the right day? May Day of 1973. The last national antiwar demonstration, in which all the leaders stood up and said "This is the last demonstration. We're no longer going to demonstrate against the war because it's over." I mean, this covert war, and, and, and, and organizing doesn't work anymore. We want you to go back to your neighborhoods, to your communities, and work for positive social change. That was the great injunction of May Day, 1973. A lot of people were arrested and we bonded [?] and went back to the communities. And what did they do? Fight. Each other. Because there was no longer any war, there was no longer any common enemy. I can remember taking down, at the end of the Sky, we had a, we had a poster over the kitchen sink of Mao walking through the fields of grain being followed by radiant-faced farmers, peasants, farmers. And at the same time I was sugaring and people were leaving the commune. And it was the same time when the Americans were evacuating the embassy in Saigon, and people had already left the commune. But I was only staying there with Susan because we had hung all these buckets up, and I had all the sap, and by God, I was going to finish, I was going to go to the end and finish the job, you know, boil that, boil it in. And, uh, I came in, and I think I had been listening to the radio, sugaring, I had boiled off the last gallon, and I came to the kitchen sink, to wash my hands -- very sticky, you know, sticky -- and I looked at the picture of Mao over the, over the sink, and I dried my hands off and I took it down. [Pause]. I took it down. [Pause].

**Q:** So, affluence, um, go ahead --

**A:** Yeah, I mean, it's the, it's the, it's the, as it's gotten harder, people have become meaner and less cooperative. And I'm astounded by it -- I don't know what to make of it, you know? I mean, I know what this community here in Northern Vermont is about, we don't have any more parties that cut across, you know, lines anymore. We've become, we've become as class-structured, as economically stratified as the rest of society, you know. People think about, um, I'm not going to hang out with people who smoke dope because I don't want my kids to, you know, to know what that is, because they might get thrown out of school, or something, because they smoke dope or, or whatever, and, and people change, people have kids and then they become, I don't know, they become more, more regimented in many ways. And, uh, I am, I am no, I am no, I don't do anything outrageous, you know, I don't, I don't, I don't deal dope, I don't smoke dope, I don't go and um, demonstrate in the nude, um, in front of the police department. Uh, you know, I don't do anything, these days, and yet, in many ways, I represent, somehow, to people, in this community, some kind of pariah. And so I'm very sensitive to, uh, that, I for one, am not invited to certain parties anymore. Because I am not, I am not, uh, socially, politically, economically or culturally acceptable in those circles. [Pause]. But the, the, but, I mean, that, that, I mean, it's no great loss. I'd rather watch a CBC movie anyways. But, um, but the point to make of it is that there is that, uh, class structure, or whatever you want to call it, that has set in. We used to be a much more open, fluid type of, of cultural community here. And now it's become much more stratified

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and closed-off. But I think, I think this, this is not just my experience, I think this is, this is a wider experience, too.

**Q:** Possibly due a lot to the economic situation.

**A:** Yeah, that's part of it. That's part of it. Something else is going on beside the economic thing. I mean, the trust-funders have as much as they did before. [Pause]. So, why, why, why're the trust-funders' attitudes change? The trust-funders being, have become much more, um, conscious of status and, and uh, who they associate with. Like, I, there's certain people, there's a guy that lives behind me here who's a friend, who was a friend, who got elected to state legislature. State legislature. And I think that he has been told that, um, if it became known, widely known, that he was a good friend of mine, that I would be a political liability for him.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** I think it's true. I think it's true. That he has to protect himself, in a way. Because I think he has a chance of being governor, you know, one day. And that, that, yeah, you have to consider things like that. But the thing is that, people who once didn't consider those things, are now considering those things. See what I mean?

**Q:** Oh yeah. [Pause]. Do you see any parallels between the communal movement of the 1960s and what was going on a century ago? Or have you studied --

**A:** Uh, yeah.

**Q:** -- the nineteenth century movement enough to...

**A:** Yeah, well. Yeah, I've studied it enough to, um, well you have, you have one thing, you have, at the initial phase you have the parallel of the intense local reaction against the community. Um, [clears throat] and certainly in the Perfectionists, who started in Putney and went to Oneida, they were driven out of Putney.

**Q:** I didn't realize they started in Putney. Wow.

**A:** Yeah. John Humphrey Noyes started it in Putney, [unintelligible] and he was driven out to Oneida, where they had a [or to?] compromise. And uh, that's one parallel. And you look at the Perfectionists, at, uh, they're complex marriage, there's certainly a parallel with, you know, the extended families that were, the extended family, uh, was really, I, I think, when people talk about the '60s, and they say, oh, well, this all began in the '60s, and the break-up, they talk about the, the, Republicans talk about the break-up, they don't talk about the extended family, they talk about the breakdown of the family, right? Breakdown of family values. I think, you, if you want to get a handle on it and say where did these things in the '60s take place, you know, they took place in communes. That's where, that's, I mean, there were extended families elsewhere, but where you really can look at them is at the communes. That's where the extended family form is really experimented with. Um, and, I had, you know, I think, personally and, and as a, reportorially [?] uh, my impressions and my experiences have been that there are a lot of positive things that took place with these experiments with the extended family. Yeah. Um, ... I think, I think, to put it succinctly, you, you're probably happily married, you know? And [pause] I probably

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shouldn't make absolute statements, but sometimes I feel like saying monogamy sucks. And, um, it does, at times, monogamy does suck. And, it's horrible, and it's unrealistic, and it's poorly structured, doesn't really, doesn't really connect people with each other. You know, it doesn't make any sense. So [pause] this way, probably, this is one way that I've persisted in being more radical, is that, I think that, aside, [unintelligible] in capitalism, one of the things we have to do away with is monogamy. Is to move on. And also, uh, uh, also, uh, with the traditional religious structures, um, [pause] I think this is getting off the base of the question. What was it, what was the --

**Q:** Keep going!

**A:** What was, what was the question you've asked me? I've been going into [unintelligible].

**Q:** Well, we were talking about parallels between the, the [unintelligible] and the nineteenth century.

**A:** Right, right, talked about the Perfectionists and the complex marriage, brought me to extended families, you know. And that's, I think John Humphrey Noyes had his finger on it, you know, you really have to change, you can't change people theologically, you know, you can't, you can, you have to change them in the way they relate to other people. And that, that's, you know, changing the family form is the way to do it. You know? Not only do you change people the way they possess things, [unintelligible] you change the way kids are educated and brought up, and I, I really believe that. You know, I, it's really, you know, I feel weird even, even saying it today, because it seems so out of mode, you know, for me to say that. Do you find other people saying that?

**Q:** [Pause] Not really.

**A:** I know. I know.

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** I mean, I have a, I have a, I'm not saying out of, out of just cynical relationships, either, 'cause I was very good, uh, relationship with a woman, it's a monogamous relationship, we don't see each other except on weekends, she has her place, I have my place, she has her kids, I have my kids, we all get together sometimes, all the kids get together sometimes, and, we, we, we do good. We have our fights, you know, I mean, I, it is what it is. It's not the typical marriage, you know. Economically related and everything. She helps me out a little bit, I help her out a little. Very limited kind of relationship. Um, [pause] so my, my cynicism about monogamy doesn't derive from any general cynicism about men and women in relationship, because I think I have a, a satisfying relationship at present. Um, I think it's um, just an overall kind of take on the situation. A take, meaning a lot of people, knowing a lot of peoples' situation. Beside my own. I have seen [?] if you look at the divorce rate, which is 60 percent or more, it's more than 60 percent now, and rising, you know? You really have to begin to ask some questions about the form which we're expected to follow. Let's do some experimentation without people getting uptight about it. Let's, let's talk about it. [Pause]. People can't even talk about it, I mean, can't even talk about capitalism in schools anymore, you know what I mean? You can't talk about, you know, Jocelyn Elders gets fired because she talks about masturbation, you know, talking about human sex -- got into a state in society can't talk about things anymore.



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**Q:** That's right.

**A:** I mean, how can you change things if you can't talk about things? So, the extended family form, I think, is an important kind of vision of communes. But, like the communes, there's a whole thing about the '60s you gotta know, you gotta know this, like -- beginning around um, it's hard to date it, but I got a feeling it was around '85, there began this kind of snide attitude toward the '60s, and it came, it was developed by the Yuppies. Now, if you, if you scratch a Yuppie, what have you got? You got a guilty hippie. You got a hip -- you got a hippie who is, you know, is making big bucks and still has, still has that old social conscience, so doesn't feel right about it and so, what do they do with that feeling of guilt? They look at the '60s and say "Oh, those fuckers were all wrong." You know? Those are all druggies, you know, who can't do it right, you know, marijuana, they still smoke marijuana and they should be snorting coke.

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** Yeah, really. That's how, that, that, the Yuppies developed this whole attitude toward the '60s, and you have this, "Oh, he's a burned out '60s person," and you know, the Yuppies generated this whole negativity toward the '60s which was taken off by these young Republicans who became Yuppies and it got into the Republican party, so that they became the -- blame everything that was wrong about America on the fact that it was somehow replicated or started in the '60s.

**Q:** The '60s.

**A:** It, it, the whole thing about the '60s; drug use started in the '60s, divorce started in the '60s, break up of family values started in the '60s, the schools began to deteriorate in the '60s, because we had, too much respect for other people's diverse ethnic -- you know, etc. etc. etc. -- it all's traced back to the '60s.

**Q:** What's your take on that? Why are they [inaudible]? They need a scapegoat?

**A:** Yeah, it's, it's a scapegoat, and it's also, this country has become defensive about itself. And this country's no longer a country -- it's an empire. And it's, it's, it's a deteriorating empire. It's an empire that has gone past its economic and uh, historical [unintelligible]. And, uh, when empires, it happened very quickly, because of the acceleration of history. [Inaudible] acceleration [inaudible]. But, so, it's, it's on the downside, definitely on the downside, um, and when things, when empires get on the downside then the people want, who are sliding down, you know, want to correct the slide, they have to find reasons why it's sliding, other than the real reasons. And, uh, they blame immigrants, or whatever. And they try to cut the borders off, that's what empires do. [Pause]. Go on witch-hunts. Witches. Witches.

**Q:** So, do you think that, um, we'll swing back into a communal phase again? One of these days?

**A:** I don't know. I, I, I think that, I think that history is really unpredictable, that's why, it's a story that you tell after the, after the fact, and no one has been very successful in uh, crystal-balling. Um, it, it, it, if you look at it as a long historical cycle, and you look at utopian movements, you know, that started in the 1840s in this country, they had a utopian movement in the 1840s, whole period of social ferment in the 1840s, and then you had a wasteland, you had, you had, uh, you had political, Populist revolt in the 1870s and '80s that didn't have a communal, uh, counterpart. You had a scattering of immigrant utopian

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communities, but there weren't any connected to each other, and then a, ph -- you know, in terms of a phase, the only phase, clear phase you have was the 1840s. And then you had a wasteland, just a little war [?] until the 1920s. And then you sort of had, 1920s, 1930s, you had another crop. So that's how many years. Huh?

**Q:** Seventy years.

**A:** 1840 to 1930, let's say. Let's, let's, let's --

**Q:** I thought you were saying till now, OK.

**A:** Let's say 1930 -- 1840 to 1930.

**Q:** So about ninety years.

**A:** Ninety years. OK. Now, let's mark that down. Let's write that down. 1840, 1930 is equal to ninety years period. Then you have 1930 to 1965 is equal to thirty-five years. So, what you can see, is that if you assume that there is some kind of cycle taking places, that the cycle has gone from ninety to thirty-five years. [Pause]. So, let's say we're wrong, let's say it's just cut in half. Let's say it went from ninety to forty-five years --

**Q:** -- that didn't happen. Do you mean that there wasn't a cycle?

**A:** No, it didn't happen in 1987.

**Q:** Oh, I see what you're saying. Got it.

**A:** It, it, it, if the cycle, is, is being cut in half because of the acceleration of history, which is a, is a, which is a scientifically observable phenomenon -- I mean, some scientists, that talk, I can talk about this happening, it's being cut in half. Historical cycles are being cut in half. Then the communal cycle should have come around by 1987.

**Q:** And it didn't.

**A:** So ... either something's wrong with the theory, which is, you know, greatly possible, or, or, or, it ain't gonna happen for a while. I don't think it's going to happen for a while. I think that something much, major has to happen. You know. Much more major. The fall [?] I think that the popular fantasy is, and this is sort of like, the echo apocalypse fantasy, is that we'll all begin living together again after the, after the environmental holocaust. You know? We'll go back to living this sort of tribal, tribal society of survivors. Because then we will really have to, you know, we will really have to do it.

**Q:** So you think it will only happen when we're really forced to? It won't be out of someone's choice?

**A:** It, it'll be, uh, either, either, either, uh, we're forced to do it, or forced to do it in resistance to a Brave New World, 1984, which has come and gone. Um, or, by some kind of miraculous intervention that will transform our consciousness so that we begin to really treat [?] each other out of this new consciousness rather than the old consciousness into which we seem to be, um, bound. [Pause]. The, I mean, that's not a very, not a very imaginative scenario. [Pause]. I, that, that, you know, when you read it back to me, I can say "Boy, that guy doesn't really see many possibilities in between, does he?"

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**Q:** [Laughs]. Do your grandchildren, um, have, have, have they changed the way you look at the world? Have they given you more optimism, more hope, or, about the future?

**A:** [Pause]. Well, you think that, I would have been optimistic about my own children, you know? And I'm, well, I'm pleased with my own children. Um, in general. There's some things about my own children that don't please me. Um, and I think that's a pretty natural ... um, [pause] I, I guess, [pause] seeing, and seeing my grandchildren grow up and uh, aside from the built-in pride of a grandfather, I think my grandson is, is extremely smart; maybe I didn't, you know, I think I, I, I, he appears to be smarter than his father was at his age, you know. Um, but maybe I've just forgotten my own son at five. And then my granddaughter seems to be really physically in control of herself and very sure of herself; she can walk across the floor and just --

**Q:** She's the two-year-old?

**A:** Yeah, she's just, very, very confident, physical [unintelligible] -- boy, I can take her, by fifteen, she'll be on the court at Wimbledon, you know, um, what it does, I think, is, it makes me more hopeful that humankind gradually improves. That, [unintelligible] that even though my grandchildren may be greatly forward, when it's all averaged out over the billions of people on the earth, I think that the, the improvement, from generation to generation over a period of a hundred to a thousand years is incremental. That we don't, because of the nature of our, our, of our biological and uh, social selves, which are rooted in our biology, these changes take a long, long time to occur. The improvements that are needed take a long time to, to, to occur. You know, um, and that's the way it is. That's just the way it is. I think, I think that one of the, um, [pause] one of the leading suppositions of the '60s communal movement was that the revolution, both the political revolution and the revolution in human relationships was, quote, unquote, just around the corner. There was all this feeling that, hey, hey, it's gonna happen next year, or if it's not gonna happen next year, then the year after that. And it's just like, we were on the edge of something, and it was going to take place, it was really, revolution in the making, and we were in the making, we were just ahead of everybody else. And everybody was going to catch up with us because of this, like, all the atoms [?] were being raised to this quantum level and then, they would certainly [?] all interact, and, and, it was a feeling that you, it was not, it was not, an intellectual perception. It was a feeling as well as an intellectual perception of imminent revolution taking place. And it, it, it, it was, people had this expectation whether they had taken drugs or not. I don't know where it came from, but it was unrealistic. It didn't, it didn't happen, uh, we lapsed back, you know, instead of going forward, we fell back, and almost reacted away from revolution. And retreated backwards into older patterns, more [unintelligible] traditional patterns of interacting, because we found ourselves out there and, with nothing to hang onto when the revolution didn't happen. Um, and many of us retreated, the, uh, I'm talking about the Yuppies who then became, you know, the states' attorney or Republicans [?]. Um, reacted with this cynicism that, there can be no progress or reform, not to mention revolution. Became very traditional. Very reactionary. [Clears throat]. But my position is um, is more or less like Robert Frost's position, it's that yeah, we fall back, but uh, we advance, but our advance is very slow. It's probably, maybe one percentage point over a long period of time. Over a long period of time. But still that's, that's the optimism that I have, is that we are improving, we are evolving, we are learning. But it's a slow process, both individually and collectively, and that, I think you really have to appreciate the slowness by which you do that in order to not become disillusioned by your own

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life or by your own generation. Frost has a poem, has something to by, uh, the title is Our Hold on This Planet? Do you know Robert Frost?

**Q:** Not really.

**A:** [Pause] Why don't you turn your tape off while I just look this up.

**Q:** Okeydokey.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Well, it's getting late, and I don't want to keep you up too longer, but how about if I ask you kind of a wrap-up question?

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** And that's the -- your life took a pretty radical turn, back around the time of the Chicago convention, and you embarked on your --

**A:** Yeah, the Chicago convention was something --

**Q:** Uh huh, uh huh and I'm wondering now --

**A:** In a few words can you describe that?

**Q:** [Laughs] So that was, that was, it's been almost thirty years, I suppose. Can you reflect back on, on this, the turn that your life took, and how do you feel about that?

**A:** [Pause] Well, [Laughs] the road not taken, you know. Uh, well, I don't know, it's, it's, it's, it's, I felt all right about everything, about my life, until roughly, I don't know, two or three years ago, you know. And two or three years ago I began to feel somewhat um, I don't know whether I was feeling sorry for myself or what, whether I was just getting old, but um, I thought my life had become unduly difficult. That, I felt stuck, and uh, it had, it'd, it'd, and, [pause] I really, I really, you know, I talked about trying to be of service, you know, and, and I, I didn't, I couldn't find any way to be of service to any movement, to any group of people, you know, who would have me, you know? Um, and I know that's not the case. I mean, I can, I can do something, but I, I, I just couldn't find a way to do it. And, then this whole thing about farming became much more difficult. And I think got overly connected to saving my own farm, because my own farm represents so many things to me. Uh, not only does it represent a way of life that I've dedicated many years to, but it represents, you know, my own retirement, my own equity, and um, my own, my own roots in the land, land, which I have a lot of identity with. I can't, it became very hard for me to, to uh, conceiving myself living in Vermont, unless I was farming and uh, and then it became hard for myself to conceive of myself not living in Vermont, and what my identity would be, somewhere else. And um, [pause] I, I, until, I think another thing that made it difficult was, uh, um, whenever it was, was it three years ago? Whatever I said, two years ago. I thought I could still, I thought I could do, do both. I could both write and farm and have time to do other stuff, community work. But then these things became exclusive of each other. I mean, I couldn't do all three things. I don't know if it's getting old or not, you know, having arthritis, or having less energy, or what, I just could not physically do all three things. Then I couldn't, then I, then I gave up community involvement as I was concentrating on writing

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and farming, never, never go off this hill. Get up in the morning, write for two hours, go out in the field, work until nine o'clock, come back and go to sleep, get up and write. You know? I couldn't do it, couldn't do it. [Pause]. I could do it for a period of time in the wintertime. I mean, I could, I could get it down to a schedule where I was only working four, three or four days a week, two days a week I could do, I could do writing, because it would be un-, un-, uninterrupted. Um, but I just, 'cause, last year, last winter, all I got done, I did, I mean, all I got done in the whole winter was, um, basically one chapter and then, the chapter wasn't even completed, it was just a sketch of the first chapter, of the first chapter of the book. Which is the most difficult section to write, you know? It's the beginning of the book, which is written in an unusual form, which is a hybrid between a novel and a screenplay. And uh, and I was taking on a lot -- I was developing a new form, taking on the beginning of, of the whole thing. And I have very high standards for myself, and it's hard, it's hard for me to write crap. And so, when I write a line, I don't like it, and then it turns me off, and everything, but uh, I had felt good about myself, my life, until I reached the point where I realized that life does pose, um, um, what do you call them? -- Oh, one thing's exclusive? It, that, it poses some things, you can't have one and the other. You have to choose, one or the other kind of thing. You can't have it all. And, um, it's been hard to accept that. But, but, in answer to your question, I think that's not at all related to your whole subject of communes. I think it's a, it's a, like a universal, existential thing that has come upon me, that this is what everyone faces, that they, you know, as they get older.

**Q:** So if you'd stayed in the straight world as a reporter, you think you'd --

**A:** Yes, --

**Q:** -- be asking these same questions right now.

**A:** Absolutely, I'd, I would be asking the same questions I am right now, and it would be the same thing, about life having these exclusive options, they dangle these things before you and then they take one away, take the other away, till you're left with what? You know? Survival? Life itself? I mean, it's [pause] the existential questions become greater than the ones you have when you were thirty. I mean, they, they transcend everything. 'Cause you have less time to live, and so you have to make greater choices, and so you have to look at the big questions. The big questions in your life.

**Q:** Are you glad you're here, rather than sitting in a Time office in New York City like your daughter is doing?

**A:** [Laughs] Yeah, yeah! I'm, I'm, I'm where I want to be. It's where I want to be, but I put myself in a very difficult position, um, trying to be a farmer in 1995. I mean, everybody is, you know, everybody wants to rip me off, 'Cause that's, that's [unintelligible]. Farmers do all this work, and then you work for fifty, you know, years on a place and then you rip them off, you know, take the land. You know, that's the way they've always done to farmers. So here I am -- screw me, you know? And that's what's being done, you know? And it makes me angry, you know? 'Cause I understand, because, it makes me angry because I understand the whole system, I know how it works. I know exactly how it works. Top to bottom. And I wanted to find out. This is, this is, I wanted to do this farming thing, not so much because I have some um, romantic love of the land. I wanted, I, I began because I wanted to find how it worked. Not just how you do it, but how it fits in with the whole economy, and I found that out. I mean, it was, I paid the price,

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I paid the price of education. I thoroughly educated myself. Um, but, um, [pause] I don't know, sometimes I don't know if it was worth it, you know? Because what do I end up with, you know? I ended with knowledge about, but, but sort of like, what's the knowledge worth to know that I live in this system where it's based upon exploitation, screwing people, you know? OK.

**Q:** But maybe you didn't participate in it, you didn't sell out. Maybe that's why you did it.

**A:** Yeah, I didn't want to ... yeah.

**Q:** And maybe that makes it worth it.

**A:** Well, yes, but what good is the integrity if you don't have any place to, you know, if you don't have a roof over your head, you know? And you work thirty years and you have to sell the place or you have to let the government take it because, you know, you know ... I mean, you got to consider that. I mean, I mean, it's nice to retire. And it's nice to have a place to retire to. It's nice to have a house, a home, you know. So, and, and my feeling was that OK, sometime this cycle is going to come around, and there's going to be six people here who will say oh, we'll do it, we'll do it, we'll do it, we'll do it, we'll, somehow we'll do it. It hasn't happened. Hasn't happened. And I can't wait any longer, you know? I'm hoping, -- go ahead -- you know, you know six people that want to do it, do it! You know, there's plenty house sites [?] all over there, what do you want to do, I'll form a land trust, I'll sign anything, take it, it's yours -- I won't even come to the meetings!

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** I'm very flexible!

**Q:** But you said it was getting closer to happening, right? That you, there are some old folks around, you called them ...

**A:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, maybe, maybe. But they'd better show up pretty fast.

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** Next spring. I don't want to do this again, I want to, I really want to --

**Q:** You want to write?

**A:** I want to write. You know, it's, it's, it's crazy, I, I, I can't go out there and trip -- just put another three thousand red cabbage plants in the rain. Pull, pull a spinal nerve, agonizing pain for two months. Um, I can't do that anymore. [Pause]. It's, it's, it has become, I enjoy it, I enjoy, I enjoy dealing with the restaurants, I enjoy the feedback I get, you know, everybody says my carrots are great, his carrots in Vermont, etc. etc. etc. Um, [pause] but it gets to be a grind, I mean, you just do it again and again and again and again [unintelligible]. You know. I mean, I know, I, I realize life is composed of doing things in a monotonous way, and that's work, and that's why, certainly I've experienced that -- but I've paid my dues, you know? I've paid my dues in life, you know? One of the reasons I became a farmer was that I was so long a journalist, looking from the outside in at other people's experience and being a vicarious liver, a vicarious liver. And so I want to say, I want to know, I want to know life, I want to know it. Like Thoreau said, I want to know life and report about it, if it's bitter I want to say it's bitter. So, be a farmer

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and I did a lot of things. And, OK, I did it. And I can report it's, a lot of it's bitter [laughs] -- Henry David, it's bitter! [Laughs].

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** Uh, you want to suck the marrow, what is this quote, a great quote -- Walden -- I want to suck the marrow out of life and report if it's bitter or sweet. [Pause]

**Q:** It's bitter.

**A:** Well, it's sweet, too. But enough is enough. Yeah, I feel sort of stuck in my life, I really, I, I, really, and I'm stuck in this dilemma of being on this farm and being committed, and having invested so much time, I just can't, just abandon it, because I feel, I feel the Protestant part of me, the egotistic part of me feels like, I feel like a failure if I just walk away from this. And I mean, what do I have? You know? Where am I going to go? You know? I don't think I'm going to go off on the road again, at fifty-eight, and say "OK, um, New Buffalo, I'm back!" [Laughs]

**Q:** [Laughs].

**A:** No, no, no, 'cause you get rooted to a place.

**Q:** Sure you do.

**A:** I can't, I can't, I can't leave Vermont. I mean, I, you, you, younger, this only took place in the last five years. I think five years ago I was saying, "Hey, I got one more move left in me. I can go to Nova Scotia, start a new life, you know?" I like Nova Scotia. But, uh, I don't think so.

**Q:** Do you feel a connection to this particular farm, this land? I mean, would you like to stay here?

**A:** Yeah, yeah, I do. I've got another piece of land in Derby.

**Q:** Where's Derby?

**A:** Derby's on the Canadian border. And, uh, got that, bought that in 1965, you know, as a fishing camp, when we first came to Vermont. And that's where we went when we, when we dropped out in '68 and we went up there and [unintelligible] cabin. I still have that, and I may end up going there, but, if I get foreclosed here, then I'll just go up and live in the cabin. There's still that. It's free and clear.

**Q:** Well, you know, I --

**A:** Has no running water, but who needs running water?

**Q:** I really think you get people here, I really do. Are you advertising in Communities magazine?

**A:** Uh huh.

**Q:** [Unintelligible] or the directory. Those are --

**A:** The directory, yeah.

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**Q:** You might also consider taking out a small classified in the magazine. It's very cheap. And people who are seeking community, that's, that's one place they're really going to look. And they have a special section in their classifieds that are basically poor people, who are seeking, for them to look.

**A:** Mmm hmm. Yeah.

**Q:** It's just a thought, it might help.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** From my travels, and from what I've observed, I really think there's an increasing interest in community among [unintelligible].

**A:** I, I've heard that from people at Communities magazine. In fact, from, what's the name of the guy?

**Q:** Jeff Kozini [?]

**A:** No, the other guy.

**Q:** Laird [or Larry?] Shaw? The people at Communities? Well, Laird Shaw's the publisher, Diane Chris [?] is the managing editor, Jeff Kozini's kind of the peripatetic communitarian that goes around everywhere.

**A:** Yeah, and there's another guy.

**Q:** Um ...

**A:** Maybe it's Laird.

**Q:** Laird's kind of the main mover and shaker.

**A:** I had, I think I had a phone conversation with him and some correspondence in which he said, yeah, my observation is that there's a rising interest in it. It just isn't my observation at all.

**Q:** Mmm hmm. Well more people are coming to these --

**A:** Maybe, maybe it's because, because he sees, maybe he's in a better position to see because he can see, you know, the number of inquiries which a central organization receives, as opposed to someone living up in northern Vermont, whose no longer on the map, you know?

**Q:** Well, I think he's looking at things like, you know, directory sales, or increasing the magazine circulations, increasing, more people are coming to the FIC meetings, things like that. Um, students seem to be more interested --

**A:** But, but over what, what time frame, and, and, I mean, if you're beginning with one and you go to two, then you can say there's a fifty percent increase, you know --

**Q:** Well, I think --

**A:** Or a hundred percent increase. But you've only gained one person.



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**Q:** Yeah, no, I know what you're saying. But the publication of a directory was certainly something. You know, I think that, the fact that that was even done, 'cause that took a tremendous amount of work, um, and that, that was, what, in '90, that it was published, the first edition? So I think that that's when you really started to see interest increase. And I've been going to these student co-op classes for the last [inaudible] students, more students seem to be coming to them, and they seem very interested in community. And you know, "What am I going to do after college?" And a lot of them seem to really want to go join a community. Maybe that's where you need to go to get help for the farm?

**A:** [Pause]. Are you, are you, do you, do you got anymore wrap-up questions...

**Q:** Not really.

**A:** 'Cause I'm going to ask you a wrap-up question.

**Q:** OK. Should I turn the tape recorder off? [Laughs]. So I don't embarrass myself? Well, one of the things, um, I've been asking people that I'm curious about is, what sort of, um, books people were reading at the time, and I'm curious what books you were reading that --

**A:** Let me see...

**Q:** -- influenced you?

**A:** Heidigger in the bathroom?

**Q:** I did, but I'm talking about at the time.

**A:** At the time, oh, OK. I think I, I uh, uh, the books I was reading at the time are some that I, I mentioned in the book itself. And um, [rustles paper] [pause] uh, I can't remember. Uh, I'll start [?]. I don't think I was, I don't think I was reading any -- uh, there were, there were some books that I read, as, as, as, as background, um, to this type of journalism. And, um, it was ah, ah, ah Oscar Lewis? Who, the anthropologist who wrote about Mexican peasants. Um, ... I don't know if it's the right name. Famous, famous anthropologist ... Oscar something, Oscar, not Oscar Hamlin, Oscar Lewis. And I also read, um, a long time ago, but I think I re-read it, was Now Let Us Praise Famous Men by James Agee. Um, after, after I visited Living Springs Community in Oregon, I read, began reading, re-reading the Bible, New Testament, New Testament, not the Bible. Um, I mean a lot, a lot of times a lot of reading was prompted by the experiences I had and I can't recall what I read.

**Q:** How about what other people were reading when you'd go to the communes? Did you find similar books?

**A:** Well, it was like, it was, it was occult stuff, a lot of it --

**Q:** Really?

**A:** And uh, um, the Querian [?] Gospel. I think I mentioned that. I men -- I mentioned some books and in the spiritual section they were reading Watts [?].

**Q:** Were people reading Aldous Huxley?

**A:** People, it's, it's, it was very few people had, even though they were familiar with the Doors, they

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didn't know that the Doors came from the Doors of Perception which is a book by Aldous Huxley. Unless they were, you know, a few of the academic, uh, people. Uh, so Ald -- it was, you know, Aldous Huxley really wasn't appreciated very much. A lot, lot of the stuff, um, was sort of intuitive type, I mean, the ideas, ideas people had, they had, they got intuitively and then they transmitted intuitively and it just happened, it happened to have a reson -- it happened to have a resonance or parallel in something that had written before, but many people didn't go back to the source of these ideas. That's why it made it a movement, you know, is that people spontaneously um, would, uh, adopt anarchism without having read, uh, Proudhon [?]. You know, they, they would just know these things, or communicate them um, verbally, orally, without having read these things, so that when you, when you look at the books that are read, it doesn't really reflect the um, the seminal ideas that were percolating in the counter-culture. Um, for example, I think, I was one of the very few people to read Charles Wright's Greening of America, which I thought was a pretty, very perceptive book, but it wasn't really read by people in the, in the counter-culture. Um, Theodore Rothzak [?], the Waste Land was another book, which maybe came out later, I can't remember the date, but it had a lot of counter-cultural ideas in it, but was more, I think it was more of a book that reflected more what was going on and, and tried to, uh, um, connect it? Marcuse, Marcuse was a, was read, um, certainly more than Rothzak [?]. Um, [pause] um, Richard Alpert um, Auberondas [?] was read after he wrote his book. And continues to be.

**Q:** Was there one book in particular where you suddenly went "Ah ha! This is it."

**A:** Black Elk Speaks, which I quote, I think I, I think I, if, if you go, if you look at, if I had an index in the book and it had literary references, I made a point of always going around, uh, and even in my descriptions of rooms, I would note the books on the bookshelves. And that was, that was on conscious effort on my part to allow people like you to go back and say, "Oh, these were the books that were read, read." And so I think I covered, the, they're all there, you know?

**Q:** Yeah, I guess I was just curious more about you personally if there was something that just really, you went "Ah ha!" about. But maybe Black Elk Speaks, is that, is that one?

**A:** I think that, yes, um, at the time I really was not, even having done, uh, a dose of American history, but I think I did my American history at a time when, you know, when there was not an appreciation of Native Americans. And so, uh, it was, uh, that really introduced me to, uh, Native Americans in a way which I hadn't been. Um, and since then I've really become very diligent about attaining the history and the culture of the Native Americans in this country. Um, so that, that did, that was one part of the counter-culture. Another part of the counter-culture which educated me, you know? Because that, it wasn't, it wasn't, that they, that they would, other people read a book, they intuitively knew that the Native Americans were into a similar culture, that they were -- talking about circles and being, having a, a, I want to avoid the use of the word mystical, mystical relationship to the land, uh, a profound relationship to, to land, which was um, that feeling which people then [unintelligible] said that was the beginning of the environmental movement. But there wasn't anything intellectual about it -- it was a very rooted feeling. It was a feeling function, not, not an intellectual function that you find today. Um, but it had its, you know, it had historical parallels with Native Americans, and so, people in order to explain what they were feeling looked around for books that would, would, uh, articulate those feeling. I think, I think you, I think what happened -- people, to put it in direct terms, people have trips in which

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they had visions of, not only new relations to people, but new relations to land, that even, new relations to history, as well as ideas. And then, in order to, um, not rationalize, or even intellectualize, but in order to connect this to, uh, uh, uh, the [coughs] printed culture, they went and found books which um, talked about some aspect of these experiences. So the experience came first, and then, the, the intellectual sources came later. [Pause]. That's what, that's, that was the pattern of the movement, of, in, and people like me, who had read all these books really, um, um, not all of them, but, ... sort of tailed behind people who were, uh, having these experiences and revelations. [Pause]. Lot of terms out of the, out of the culture, it's happening then, at the uh, uh, go with the flow, um, these were, they sound like cliches today, but, um, they expressed um, a certain insight into, into a certain level of consciousness, uh, that, at that time was new. And then, if you, if you take those terms and, and think about them, you can, today, you can find intellectual uh, uh, links, you know, with philosophy, for example. Uh, like many of the uh, uh, like I'm reading Heidegger, I've read, he says that a larger work called Being in Time, um, and, uh, a very difficult book to read in translation, but I can't read German, but many of his, uh, his terms have a direct corr -- have a direct correlation in hippie, counter-cultural lingo. I don't know what that means, exactly. [Pause].

**Q:** Were you influenced much by the music of the time?

**A:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. To such an extent that, af--, after, after the period ended, in the '73-'76 period I, I stopped, stopped listening to popular music.

**Q:** Wow.

**A:** You know ...

**Q:** 'Cause it just didn't match what you'd heard?

**A:** It didn't match, it didn't have, you know, there were some exceptions, I mean um, Dylan did some stuff later, there was some groups, there was some individual folksingers that continued to sing, and I listened to them and played them, but, um, I mean, um, I'm such and old fart. I believe that this stuff, it just doesn't have the resonance of the music of that period. It doesn't have the resonance.

**Q:** Were there particular bands that you liked?

**A:** Yeah. [Clears throat]. Well, singers -- Dylan, uh, the Rolling Stones, um, uh, [pause] I, I, I guess Dylan is, is stands out, rather than any, any, any, any group. I mean, the Doors, are the Doors, the psychedelic stuff. I, I, I liked individual singers who expressed an individual outlook ... more than the groups.

**Q:** Do you like James Morrison, Jim Morrison? [?]

**A:** Mm-hmm. The band? [Pause]

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**Q:** When I was talking to Cat Kincaid [?] the other woman at Twin Oaks that you met, um, one of the things that she said that I thought was sort of amusing was that, um, she could always tell when she was in a commune because she got served gray soup. [Laughs]. And she said she always found the food really unpalatable, that that was something that was always common to the groups that she visited, was that they ate this sort of tasteless soup every night for dinner. Um ...

**A:** Lentil, lentil soup.

**Q:** Lentil soup. Were there, were there identifying features like that that you found common from group to group, that you said, "Yeah, I'm here."?

**A:** I'm at a commune, this is what is is?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. There were certain things that, that just, as soon as you walked in the door, "Oh yeah, I've seen --

**Q:** There it is.

**A:** -- this before." Uh, like um, mandala hanging over, um, mandalas everywhere, um, round tables everything, people ... like, I think we adopted some generic commune features at Frog Run Farm, and uh, um, and developed some rituals on our own, too. A ritual grace, a silent, a silent grace, um, [pause] was one thing. Um, sort of a innocuous food, I mean, I, I, I, I really didn't particularly like commune food, and so I was always going out on the sly to get Snickers bars, you know. And I still, still will occasionally stop, even though I'm delivering organic produce in Burlington, I will stop and get a, a, a hamburger at a McDonald's, you know, just, just to be perverse about it. I'm just not, I don't have any kind of ideological purity in anything, um, and um, and it was like, we'd all put, it was like this period where it, it was like, uh, you don't put anything, you don't season food, there was a period when, I don't know how long this lasted, but we didn't put any seasoning in the food. It's like, you want to taste the pure essence of the vegetable -- well, I mean, God, if you just taste the pure essence of things, you know, it would be extremely tasteless, you know? I mean, there is a place for salt and pepper, you know?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And, uh, you had to, you know, you had to, and this whole thing about tofu -- oh, God, how I hate tofu, you know. I think tofu is the most tasteless stuff in the world. And, and, um, so you go around and people talk about tofu and eat tofu and oh, bleah.

**Q:** Did you go through a vegetarian period?

**A:** Well, enforced. At, at, at, at Frog Run Farm we were vegetarian, because you had to go with the majority. And I, I was not, by disposition a, a, a vegetarian, though I, I, I tried, I tried to be a vegetarian, because that was the will of the people and so ... but I didn't like it, and I don't think it agreed with me. [Pause]. And I, I don't see any agricultural, philosophical basis for it, you know?

**Q:** You don't think it's living lighter on the earth?

**A:** No. No. I think, when you look at it agriculturally, um, it makes much better sense to eat some meat,

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especially if you're looking at, at, at, at self-sufficiency. It, it, it, animals really form part of a whole system and uh, it's really unrealistic on, on agricultural to be vegetarian in North America. I mean, if you, you could be vegetarian, I mean, where are there, where do you find vegetarian people, tribal people? Who are living close to the earth, anywhere? You don't. I mean, you don't find it anywhere.

**Q:** Yeah, I can't think of any, offhand. [Clears throat]. Tim has come up with a, a list of communes, um, that existed between '65 and '75, and, and last night before I went to bed I was looking up some of the ones that you mentioned, and I, I couldn't find a couple, and, I'm wondering if maybe I spelled them wrong. And one was, I think you called it Philo Farm?

**A:** Mount, Mount Philo, in Vermont. Yeah, I talked about that last night as being one of the, one of the members of, of Free Vermont.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** It was, it was in, um, Farrisburg [?], Vermont. Or Hindsburg [?]. Hindsburg or Farrisburg.

**Q:** I probably looked it up wrong, 'cause I was ... how do you spell Philo?

**A:** Um, P-H-I-L-O.

**Q:** OK. [Pause] And then, um, there was one called Glover, or something like that?

**A:** Um, well, Mullein, Mullein Hill -- M-U-L-L-E-I-N. It's no longer in existence. That was in Glover. All the people, many people from, who lived at Mullein Hill in Glover still are in Gl -- in the Glover area, and Glover, where the bread and puppet circus is?

**Q:** Oh, OK.

**A:** There are many people there who are, uh, communal veterans. But most of the people who, who live there are, are out. Uh, the editor, the publisher of the uh, the, what's the uh, the counter-cultural Reader's Digest, the uh, --

**Q:** Like the Utne Reader?

**A:** The Utne Reader.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** Craig Neal [?] is a, a veteran of Mullein Hill.

**Q:** Hmm.

**A:** You can call -- write that down. 'Cause he would be a good, uh, he would be a, a very good person to interview on, on the telephone.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** You could do it, can't -- and he's out in, in your direction. Craig Neal.

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**Q:** OK.

**A:** Uh, publisher of the Utne Reader.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** Tell him I referred him.

**Q:** OK, I'll do that. Yeah, um, Mount Philo is not on, on Tim's list. He must not have known about that one. And, um, where was that?

**A:** In uh, Hinesburg, Vermont.

**Q:** Hinesburg, OK. [Pause]

**A:** You'll, you'll have to keep the continuity of, of the, uh, of the uh, questions going, because I'm going back, between answers, to invoices.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** It's OK with me.

**Q:** Well, I also don't want to stop you, either. Um, [pause] well, I'm curious, if you were doing this project, who would you talk to?

**A:** It's, it's, it's, if I were doing the project, I would, I would, uh [pause] uh, also, it depends on how much money you have to do anything, you know? One thing I thought about this morning, that, that, uh, would make sense, is that, and it stems from your reporting to me about Marty and Miran -- and Miranda. It must have, must have been a scream to talk to them.

**Q:** Oh, it was.

**A:** Isn't she funny?

**Q:** Absolutely. Yeah, they were hilarious.

**A:** Yes, they, they, when they get together, see? And I was thinking, "My God, what I'd love to do is have, have, have, have, have, have, uh, have your university or your department sponsor a conference to bring us all, --

**Q:** Bring everyone together?

**A:** -- all, all together, and in a weekend -- it would be hilarious -- you could tape us, and we would, the interaction between us would change, would be different than what we would individually report to you.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Because we are, we would be interacting in the present, and also correcting each other's perceptions of it, and arguing about the interpretation. It would be a much more dynamic thing, you know? I mean, you, you wouldn't have to make it such a national thing, but you might set up situations where people who haven't met for a number of years meet and interact and discuss, uh, certain issues. Now, I think

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you'd need, one thing your project needs is a focus. At least a, a, a, tentative focus on what are you, what are you, what kind of information, what interpretation, what issues, what questions are you seeking, you know? And then pose them to us. And then, if you don't bring us together, at least quote to us what, like, you can say, "Well, Marty says the reason why it fell apart was dot, dot, dot, dot, dot," and then I can say well, I can see how Marty says that, you know, yeah, I can understand that, yeah I agree with that, and then I would be able to add something to that. Because you have focuses a question.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And I think, as I said at the beginning, not, not the be-all of, of, of, uh, of um, [pause] of all communes studies, but I think it's essential, uh, to look at the communes that didn't last, and didn't, and, and, and a lot of people don't like to use the word failure, you know? And I think there's something in, in, in the fact that we don't critically look at things as failures, I mean, I think, on all, on a lot of grounds it was a failure, and, this is not to deny that, you know, all the things I thought, I said last night, that communes contributed, um, you know, like understanding of the extended family, the cooperative movement, etc. etc. etc., you know, and all kinds of alternatives, which, from energy to organic farming, were first tested in communes. This is not to deny the success, but, look, we're here to learn. And one learns, sometimes more from one's failures, and by honestly acknowledging our failures and looking at them squarely than one does by coasting on one's supposed successes. It's, it's, it is, is inadequate, inadequate, incomplete analysis, which looks only at success and does not recognize failure and discontinuity. And one thing, one, I think, it is journalistically, historically, you have, sort of a primary responsibility, given your vantage point, is to look at it critically, you know? Not, not as an outside observer, but focus the questions to the participants of the movement, um, and saying, well, you know, what went, did something go wrong? You know? How do you look at it now? Was it painful for you? Do you feel disillusioned? Why did you leave? You know? Go more deeply into why people left, why people broke up. You have to, that is, is, people, and you have to be a more persistent interviewer because, even at this stage, at this time, so removed from this period, people are still traumatized by it. So that they don't want to talk about it. And, and since it was a traumatic experience, that no one has written about -- no one has written about the trauma. It was uh, it was like a tremendously high event, you know, when communes were great, they were really great, but they were bad they were really bad. And there was a downside to the whole movement that was as low as it was high. There was a, to Woodstock there was an Altima,[?] to use the terms that rock, you know -- and it happened individually in all these groups, there was a really, uh, and I don't think I'm, I do not think that I'm dramatizing or overemphasizing it. But when you have that kind of trauma it's very natural that people, not only do not talk about it honestly, but they deny it, and then they don't face it, and then they sort of build justifications for it, you know? As the Yuppies have done. And don't look at it squarely, and it, we can't, we've got to get beyond that, you know, that denial of our own family break-up, so we can talk, you know, let's not, let's talk about the break-up of this stuff, you know? Just as we would try to talk about child abuse or, or alcoholism, or anything else that's dysfunctional in the family. Let's talk about the counter-cultural families that broke up and look at it, and try to learn from it. So that's where I think that the project, um, I'm not saying that you dwell on that --

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** -- But I think that you have to make an effort to get at that. Because everybody has written about why the movement started. But they don't write about why they ended. And there may not, there may not be any final answer about why a movement ends, but there is certainly a narrative, as I said before, there is a historical narrative, there's certain things that happened in sequence, you know? OK, I'm sure they're not just, one linear, causal connection, because it all, it's all related to everything else, but there was a sequence that forms a story about how it, how, how groups broke apart. And, and you're able, I think you're able, in a position to be able to um, deal with that. [Pause]. [Unintelligible] ... here. Go ahead.

**Q:** Um, well one thing that I'm interested in is the role of leaders in groups. And it seems like almost every group I've talked to had a strong, charismatic leader. Um, do you think that communal groups have to have a charismatic leader to survive?

**A:** No. Um, I think it's, it's just easier, it's just easier for a charismatic leader, because, that, people being sort of conventional, traditional, cultural types in Western culture expect there to be leaders in a group. You know, we expect, we just sort of, we, I don't know if Nietzsche would call it our herd instinct, and people in communes are no, no different than anybody else in that they expect groups to have a leader, you know? And I think it's bullshit, you know? I think, the thing is, it's like the problem with the whole movement politically is that it's very difficult to exercise group leadership. What happened was that the leaders that we did have failed. I mean, not only was there group failure, the leadership failed. Tom, Tom, Tom Hayden failed as a leader. I failed as a leader. Dave Nollinger [?] didn't really fail, he struggled, and of all the people around, Dave really, uh, came out, uh, looking pretty good. But, there was some atrocious male [?] failures. Atrocious. And because of that, there was a reaction against leadership in general. Let's do without -- let's, -- rather than saying "We still need leadership, we all need to be leaders," there was this whole thing, "Let's do without leadership." And then you had this period of anarchy where, you know, there were no leaders. And then they talk about leader, leader of this group, it's like complete bullshit. You know, leaders of this group. Not that you don't have, not that there shouldn't be individual leaders, but you have to take turns being leaders in the, the group process in particular. You have to focus discussions, and whether that is one person or whether you rotate that doesn't make any difference, but you have to have leadership. And if you don't have leadership you flounder. And it doesn't have to be individual, you know, but it has to be collective, but you have to take, people have to take responsibility and people should not be afraid to be occasional leaders. You know? Leadership was, a, is a big issue. Was a big issue. And there were a lot of, not only the women's movement, but the anarchists made it very difficult to realistically approach the whole issue of leadership. [Pause].

**Q:** Did you encounter any groups where you felt that the, the leadership was working?

**A:** Yeah, oh, yeah.

**Q:** Successful models?

**A:** Yeah, yeah, I think -- it was like that, occasionally everything worked, it's let's get out of this --



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**Q:** Yeah, it's cold.

**A:** This room is just ... [Pause] -- paying money for these holes, holes-in-the-knee jeans.

**Q:** [Laughs]

**A:** Would you mind if I, I smoked a pipe?

**Q:** No, go right ahead.

**A:** I don't know, maybe it will stimulate my, my [unintelligible] but -- we should -- there definitely were times when group leadership clicked, you know? Um, and it clicked, but it clicked, I could tell you that it, that I'm doubtful, not doubtful, but I'm um, I don't know why it clicked. Uh, is it, is it because we were smoking dope and that everything was sort of like intuitive and easy, and that sort of glossed over problems? Or was it because we were on the same wavelength because of some other factors, you know, that you can't, you can't put your finger on. But people, when it clicked, it clicked because people were intuitively working together. And it didn't work when we lost that, when we lost that, then there was, we lost it entirely. And I know that sounds abstract, sort of vague and obscure, but that, that's the feeling I have. There was, there was something that held us together -- a glue. And when the glue went, then, you, the, the group leadership, the sense of being together fell apart, you know? Um, and all the efforts to form, it never, all the efforts to raise the consciousness about the structure of groups and decision-making um, consensual, just consensual decision-making didn't really put it back together again. Humpty-Dumpty fell of the wall, you know, and all the king's horses and all the king's men and all the facil-- facilitators in the world couldn't get back that feeling together.

**Q:** Yeah. So you think that even if you'd studied group process that that still wouldn't have helped?

**A:** We did study group process. At the time. Um. There was much more study being done in the group process once we started falling apart. And, and, and, when we started having, we had facilitators in meetings who were not conscious facilitators. We didn't have the term facilitator. But we, we, we would, when we had meetings, because we had studied uh, uh, we studied mostly Mao, and so we understood how good communists have meetings, where they are open and mutually, we had mutual criticism sessions that were, that were, that were facilitated and, and uh, I think that, we had, we had an understanding of group process. It was a rather, you know, limited one, and colored by our readings about the Chinese revolution, was a big model. Um, was Mao. And so, [pause] we tried to do things in that fashion and um, then other, other groups sort of, uh, broke [?] through it. Um, they were good meetings, they were good meetings where everyone was able to, to, uh, participate and, you did arrive at a consensus. And people, as I said before, people strove for consensus before they understood that's what we were doing. You know, people, a lot of people didn't know what the word consensus meant, but participated in groups which, you know, said we're not going to do anything unless we all feel good about it. And, and, a lot of times it worked and sometimes it didn't. But there's, it wasn't because of any intellectual understanding of that, it was a non-intellectual, there was some kind, and I can only point to Heidegger again, as saying there was some, some kind of presupposition that was working, un-, un-, unstated presupposition that held this movement together. And we shared it for a while, and the it, it, it evaporated. And when it evaporated, decision-making went down, you know, consensual decision-making suffered. I don't know what that idea was. I mean, Heidegger speaks about there being

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presuppositions which are shared by people, um, and that are unspoken, just like there's a grammatical uh, structure in our language, which we all share without talking about it. And when that, perhaps the, perhaps the counter-culture had, had some kind of a new grammatical uh, structure, that made it possible to, to talk and to work together. And that we somehow lost that, it just, it just, it, it just eluded us. It went away. I mean, it was, it's like grace, you know? Grace is something that's given, but grace can be taken away, to put it in, in religious terms.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** I don't know why it was taken away. I mean, that's, you, you feel, I mean, uh, people feel um, um, this is why there's a lot of guilt, probably a lot of unnecessary guilt that communards feel, because they feel like they had, they found, they were kicked out of paradise. And um, like uh, we found the garden, yeah, we lost it, we blew it, to quote again, Easy Rider, we blew it. Um, and so we feel guilty because we feel like we were being punished, but we don't know exactly what we were punished for. And so you have anxiety, too, attached, we don't exactly know what we did wrong, that we should have lost it, that we should have uh, blown such, such, such an opportunity, you know? We had, we had the opportunity to make a, a, a very substantial break-through, in, in, in, in American life. Uh, I mean, we had, we, we had the best brains, we had, we had a lot of money, we had our youth, we had, uh, a great opportunity, and we blew it. And now we don't know exactly why, and we're suffering from the anxiety of that, of not knowing why, and a lot of the guilt. It's a, but I, I think, to, not to absolve us of responsibility, it was like something went away, I mean, a lot, the standard analysis is that the Vietnam war ended and we were unable to focus on positive, constructive things, so, once the war ended, then, then we were lost. Um, which I think is a fairly narrow analysis of it. Um, [pause]

**Q:** [Laughs] -- Maybe, maybe some of a [unintelligible] will come in --

**A:** Yeah, that's it.

**Q:** Well, yesterday, you did talk about some things that have come out of the movement that have lasted, you know, like food co-ops, free medical clinics, things like that. So it's not like it all just crashed and burned. I mean, there's still some good things that came from it.

**A:** Yeah, yeah, although, I, I do not, but I will take the, take the [unintelligible] again.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** Point out that what I said before about people who became the founders of the cooperatives, who went, they came out of the comm -- even though they came out of the communes, they brought some of the, the, the, uh, um, how shall I put it? They came out of, of, of failing communes, where the relationships were breaking down and they went into cooperatives, bringing with them, not only the failure, but a lack of new direction, so that in many ways the same problems they had experienced in the communes recapitulated in the cooperatives.

**Q:** Mm-hmm.

**A:** And then you have, the you had a wave of cooperative failure that followed the communal failure for reasons which magnified the reasons that the co-- communes failed. I don't know if reasons is the right

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word. We don't know, rationally, what they were, but they didn't work.

**Q:** The co-ops?

**A:** No! [Pause] We do not have a national, we have co-ops, but we do not have a national co-op movement that has the same kind of vigor it promised to have in the, in the seventies, you know. And that gets into a whole other area of discussion, which is probably beyond, something I know as much as communes, 'cause I put my life into cooperatives, I mean, and you, you can verify this, what I said about from communes to cooperatives with Craig Neal.

**Q:** The Utne Reader publisher? Yeah.

**A:** 'Cause he, this is a question you should ask of other people. 'Cause there was an evolution from communes, to community, to cooperatives and you have to look that, that, that, that critically, you know? [Pause] I mean, I would, I would have loved for the cooperative movement to have succeeded, uh, um, and stimulated a local food economy, for example.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** It hasn't done that. That hasn't been done. It is not just the fault of the whole cooperative idea, it's the people who carry it out fail. I fail. It's, it's, it's, it's like human failure. It's not because the ideas are wrong or the structure's wrong. The structure's right. The structure, the cooperative structure has been right since the 1880s, you know? We've had the right idea. But we, our, our, we're not strong enough to stand up against the forces that oppose that. I mean, there are forces that oppose cooperative economic organization. I mean, you're not, you know, line us up against the wall and shoot us, but they still oppose it, you know, 'cause it's contrary to their interest. No matter if they're, whoever you call them, whether they're, they're organic food distributors, they're still another form of economic organization which is opposed to uh, cooperatives. They can talk about working with cooperatives but they have a different form of economic organization which dictates more hierarchical kind of, uh, social organization. And we just have to recognize that, that is a problem for us, trying to organize co-ops, and being, trying to organize also a different social organiz-- socially different, and politically different.

**Q:** Do you think in the, in the 1990s there is a co-op movement?

**A:** [Pause] It's like any other movement. Is, is there, is there an alternative health movement? And one can say "Yes, there is a movement," but it's not a movement that, it's very different than it was in the '70s, um, there isn't, there just isn't the, the vision, and people are more, more trying to meet, trying to survive within the co-op, the cooperative movement today is trying to survive within the multinational economy, trying to find its niche. Rather than, there's no, there's no discussion at all about being alternative, about standing on its own, you know, apart, it's finding, it's finding, it's, it's being, becoming an adjunct of the, the free-market economy. Uh, co-ops today, and this is, here's an example that makes a lot [?] I'm trying to say, um, many food co-ops today, given the choice between buying potatoes from me, from me at uh, at sixty cents a pound would buy potatoes from Wisconsin or wherever at fifty cents a pound if they can get it. So they don't have, the people who are running the co-ops, the boards, staffs, everything, don't have that kind of buying local consciousness. They will just go and buy the cheapest organic products, and then they can say, they can say, well, we're serving our consumers, and they are

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...serving the consumer, but that's the, the consumers have less and less a consciousness of the whole local, trying to establish a local food economy which is tied into the cooperatives. And they did, uh, twenty years ago.

**Q:** That's really sad.

**A:** Yes. And natural food stores are just atrocious that way.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah. Do you guys have some of the big chains up here, like Whole Foods [?] or Wild Oats or anything like that?

**A:** No, we don't have the chains. You'll find that in Boston.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Bread and Circuses.

**Q:** Right.

**A:** It just has no, it's, it's, complete hypocrites.

**Q:** Absolutely. Yeah, we have one in Lawrence that's about to put our co-op out of business.

**A:** And what happens is that the co-ops compete against these guys and then they have to do things that they're doing, because they're in the same economy. Adjuncts of --

**Q:** That's right.

**A:** -- free-market economy. Where the best thing is the cheapest product, you know? And uh, rather than trying to look at food as agricultural development of an area, or a long-term, you know, which is what we did, we did that for a while ...

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** But that failed. It really failed. This is something I know --

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** -- 'Cause I spent years trying to do it, you know?

**Q:** Well, I, I understand in places where there is natural foods competition, maybe why the co-ops are doing what they're doing. But why up here, when there isn't a natural foods competitor, why are they buying potatoes at sixty cents from Wisconsin rather than from you at seventy, or whatever?

**A:** Yeah, mmm hmm. I don't know. You can go, go ask them, you know. [Laughs].

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** I hope you get a straight answer.

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**Q:** Who, um, who are the managers and the boards? Are, are they new people, or are they people from the '70s?

**A:** No, see, the continuities change, I, I, I, I deliver to, uh, [unintelligible] for Onion River Co-op in, in Burlington. Which Susan founded, um, I mean, we, we, we had a thing going, you know, she was founding food co-ops, I was founding growers' co-ops, and we were also trying to integrate them. And we were somewhat successful at doing that, but, I started, I was the first organic grower to deliver to Onion River Co-op when they had a little storefront in Burlington. And today, I go down there to the co-op and talk to a co-op manager, uh, produce manager who doesn't know anything about the history of the co-op that she's running. She's running, and she doesn't know who I am, and so, and she has her, uh, friends, who she buys from, and it's a personal thing, and there's no institutional loyalty at all, and so, I just say OK, here, what, what I got [unintelligible] well, I'm getting this from so-and-so, I'm getting that from so-and-so, I'm getting that from so-and-so. So, well, I'm gonna have this stuff until April, you know, and these people are going to run out. Well, when they run out, we'll buy it from you. Thanks a lot.

**Q:** Yeah. And is that pretty typical? That co-op? Of what you're encountering?

**A:** Mmm hmm. Except my own co-op here in Hardwick, you know? I mean ...

**Q:** It's loyal to you?

**A:** Oh yeah. I mean --

**Q:** That's good.

**A:** That's good. I have one co-op that's loyal.

**Q:** Yeah. It's good it's the one in your backyard, too.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Yeah, yeah, wow. [Clears throat].

**A:** But, but there's a lot, I know, I know I put this all on, on the backs of the consumer co-ops, but what's happened is that, since the growers' co-ops also broke down ... I'm wearing a T-shirt from a defunct growers' co-op right now, Vermont New England [?] Growers' co-op in East Hardwick. Uh, you have more competition between organic growers for markets. And you have less cooperation, even on, on establishing price levels. Before, um, when people were members of co-ops, they would, growers' co-ops, they would sell at the same prices and, this, you know, this exercised some control over the market, rather than playing off farmers against each other. But now farmers, lacking the structures, you know, will tend to undercut each other, 'cause you know, the stru--, just like other farmers do.

**Q:** Wow. Do you have any sense of why that's happening? Why the co-ops fell apart?

**A:** It's like, human failure. It was, uh, it was uh, we didn't, we had all, we had everything going for us, at the time, at the time that we were organizing, we were on top of the whole trend, and we could have, we, we, we were in a position to take over the food economy. We could have done it.

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**Q:** Wow.

**A:** You know, rather than, than, than the national distributors. We, we could have done that. We had it within our grasp to do it and we didn't do it because ... not, not just from lack of capital -- we could have raised the capital, there was a, there was a, there was a capitalization problem, you know, but we could have, we could have capitalized it. But if we had been, if we had worked harder. But people didn't really have the, the confidence in those, those, those schemes, and uh, didn't work hard enough. I mean, I, myself included. I didn't work hard enough. I mean, I worked pretty hard and, on this, on this last co-op, um, uh, and uh, [pause] then the people, then I reached a point where I, I have to just do my own farming and I can't run the co-op anymore and farm, so [clears throat] another guy succeeded me as manager of the co-op, and then he sort of let the co-op die, and I sort of didn't support him enough during the transition period. And he sort of lost his way and then became angry at me for giving him all this work to do and then it got to be a personal thing between him and me, um, and the whole thing, but not one, the, the, there wasn't a board that was strong enough to say, "Hey, we got a problem here in the management of this co-op -- let's sit down and work this out before it gets to be a bad thing." And, and everybody didn't take responsibility for the problem. I mean, we all sort of failed on all kinds of levels to hold the thing together. It was, it's bad, bad. One of the great disappointments.

**Q:** Well, you know, I've spent a lot of time working in communal housing co-ops, and one of the things that I've noticed over and over again is that you have a lot of really good, well-intentioned people, working their butts off, but the, there's also out there a whole bunch of freeloaders.

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** And after a while, the, the well-intentioned, hard-working people just get incredibly exhausted and burned-out and just --

**A:** Burned out.

**Q:** -- can't, can't sustain it.

**A:** Yeah. Well that's what happened to me. But I think that, not to let myself off the hook, [pause] I think that if I had persevered, you know, that I, that I really said, "Look, this is -- all right, we're not going to do it this year, but let's do it next year, let's keep this thing going, let's do it right." And kept on working on it and working on it and working on it, you know, and tried to work with other people in ways that built, kept the infrastructure alive, um, gradually it, it might, it might, might, might have worked, you know? Um, but I didn't. I didn't do that. Same as if I had stayed at Frog Run and developed a new, extended family relationship that would have included my wife in it, if I'd had the courage to have done that, it would have been different. But I didn't have the courage, the stamina, to do that, you know? So there was, there was a great [?], it was a human failure. You know? Involved. All sides. You know.

**Q:** But I wonder if you're almost expecting people to have this superhuman level of courage or strength?

**A:** I don't know, I, I, I don't know, if that's what it takes. I, I think it, I don't know if it's superhuman, but it's more than human, you know? I think we have to be more than human, you know? Um ... because it doesn't work. I mean, the good have to be really good because the bad are really bad.

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**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** You know?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And if the good are just ordinarily good, it doesn't work out, we're not good enough, you know, we really have to be better than just good. [Pause].

**Q:** Do you think there was a failure of the leadership to, to motivate the general membership to work and help out and carry their, their burden?

**A:** Yeah. I think there was a failure of leadership. It's, I think if you have, a, a really good leadership, um, that's, that's honest, that's realistic and strong, and other people will see this happening and, and want to do work, you know?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And it doesn't take a whole lot of people -- if this, if Vermont Northern [?] Growers' Co-op had had three people, three people, just three people on the board who were committed and dedicated and were putting a certain number of hours per week into, into co-op education and, and, doing it then it, it would have succeeded. But we ended up, we [unintelligible] three people, we had, we had it for a time, we had, started with eight growers, you know, and of the eight growers, five of us were committed. And then we went to six growers, of which four of us were committed. And then we went, you know, it kept on shrinking. And then, the number of committed people kept on shrinking. So the core group lacked that, that critical mass, which I think is three people, to get anything done.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Then it got down to two people, you know? And two people tends to be divisive, you know, two people get together and, to conflict, you know, there's just two of them, two doesn't work out. You have three people to make a group work, you know? That's the basic, minimal number.

**Q:** I've often wondered if some of the failures of co-ops was due to the fact that co-ops tended not to educate their members, especially, you know, when new people came around. People didn't know anything about co-op history, about that particular co-op's history, just about the co-op, what it meant to be part of a co-op, and so [pause] did you see that too, that there was a failure to educate?

**A:** Well, well, yeah, like we don't, the counter-culture, the cooperative movement as a whole doesn't honor its own history, you know? We haven't learned by it, you know?

**Q:** Well, a lot of people I've encountered think that co-ops came out of the '60s and have no idea that there was a, a nineteenth-century aspect to it.

**A:** Yeah, well [unintelligible]

**Q:** Yeah. [Pause] It does sort of seem that way. Well, I actually have a couple other questions that are kind of on a very different, um, track. Well, last night you mentioned that you'd met Dorothy Day and I'm really curious how you came to meet her and what you thought of her, what she was like.

**A:** I, I, I, I think that I was, I was, I was, I met her at a stage where I was really formulating what I was

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trying to do.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And I, I was looking for historical precedents, intentional community movement, and so, like, she was in Tivoli, New York, Catholic Worker Farm, and I just went down to see her, in, in order to make that historic connection between the earlier communities of the '30s, beginning of the '30s and today. And she had, at the time, there were lots of people who were making a pilgrimage, uh, to see Dorothy. Um, just like lots of people later went, um, to see the Neerings [?] um, and uh, uh, she's a person of great, well, I mean, you, you felt something in her presence. And um, but what the main thing that I really dug about her was her, um, personal integration of, of Marxism, socialism, and communism with, uh Christianity. That's the main thing I got out of it, was that these are not exclusive things. And something that was a new idea to me at the time, and which I, you know, really, over the period of thirty years, have developed more. This, this, it's the essence of liberation theology.

**Q:** Mm-hmm.

**A:** Which I think is the most important, uh, um, intellectual and spiritual and moral movement taking place in the Americas today. Uh, I think, and if you look at the community movement, um – What's happening in South and Central America today is really the most dynamic, uh, movement in community taking place, and uh, what I'm waiting for, is for, uh, it to spread with the, with, uh, Latin Americans into the United States, but that doesn't seem to be happening. There are, there are examples of communities being started, um, around refugees in Texas, but they're really not, I think, maybe, maybe I'm unaware of it, you know, but I'm looking towards that as a movement that will, sort of, sort of reinvigorate the communitarian movement in the, in the U.S. I think that it has to, it has to have, what has happened, I think, has been, that the only communities we have of note are the spiritual, uh, slash, religious communities, you know, with charismatic, guru-type leadership. And what I think is necessary is that we combine, uh, uh, the spiritual -- I don't like the word spiritual -- with the, with the political or the economic. And uh, we integrate those, because I think people just don't act out of spiritual impulse only, um, they act out of many, many sources of motivation, and that communities themselves have to reflect that, and have to integrate that. So, I looked at the, the called Comunidades de, de Basa [?], grass-roots communities in Central America, um, and I look at Panem [?] as like an ideal, but a working ideal, yeah, working, really working there. And um, [pause] I've devoted a lot of study to that. I haven't visited Central and South America, but I've, I've uh, I've talked to people, mainly refugees from uh, Central America, mostly El Salvador who have lived in them, and um, and they have, I thought that maybe there would be examples of those types of Comunidades de Basa [?] that we re-established in, in Canada since, in parts of the, but that doesn't seem to be happening, they seem to be, they seem to either go back, they either go back to Central America and do it there or else they become assimilated here, and then there's no need to do that. But many of the Salvadorans who, uh, were influenced by the Jesuits, by the Comunidades de Basa [?] have gone back there, are working on these large-scale projects, like Cesar Romero, the other Jesuit, um, who was killed, large-scale community development is taking place there in El Salvador. That's the one country I'm very familiar with. Where you have a very vital, uh, community improvement [?] taking place.



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**Q:** Would you like to go down [?] there?

**A:** Yeah, I really would. I almost did.

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** And I was, I uh, um, but I, it was a time of, of the, of the fighting, and I was invited to go down there and um, work for the FMLN [?] but I realized that it was pretty foolish, uh, for me to do that, and um, I would either get killed or I'd be useless. You know, it would, it was said that they wouldn't risk putting me, you know, in a place where I could get killed, and then if I couldn't get killed, what would I be doing? You know? Why was, why was I there, and was it, was it, was it some sort of romanticism that, that I was, you know, trying to live out, you know?

**Q:** You probably had some technical farming skills that would be real useful.

**A:** Yeah, but, you can't, I mean, I, I, it would be better for me to go there now that there's a truce, and, you, you can probably farm, you can probably do that, you know?

**Q:** Well, maybe you still are [?]

**A:** Yeah.

**Q:** Did you meet the Meerings [?] too?

**A:** Yes, I met both Ellen and Scott. At that conference. Um, in New Hampshire in the early '70s. I, this, this, looks like the Norbert [?] ahh ...

**Q:** Oh, OK. So you need to get loading?

**A:** Well, I, I need to finish the cabbage.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** God, he's got a, what is he using for a back end of this truck?