Interview with Randy Holding
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
July 14, 1996

Q: Today is the 15th. And this is an interview with Randy Holding. I think I remember from the thing you sent in that you were part of Shiloh? I'd love to hear about your background and how you got involved in Shiloh.

A: On February 3rd of 1971, there was a great earthquake that hit Los Angeles. And I was in escrow to sell one house and to buy three others on a parcel of property. And the earthquake was very frightening. We were near the epicenter. My wife and I had talked about leaving Southern California. She said, "Let's just take this opportunity to get out of here, we're in between houses now anyway. I need to get away from the after shocks." So we sent her off to Oregon to investigate. She went to Salem and stayed for a short time, and then she went to Eugene. And in Eugene, in a town there she met some people who said that they lived in a commune, and that she'd be invited to come on over, and she could stay there for the time she was waiting for me to come. It took me 3 additional weeks to close escrow on the house -- we didn't buy the others, of course -- and then to finish selling my house. So they said, "You don't need to stay in a hotel, just come stay with us free, hang out." So she did, and she liked it a lot, and she was telling me, "Oh, this is wonderful." So that was how we discovered Shiloh, and communes in general. When I got to Oregon, I also moved in there and stayed for a little while, and also liked it. And at that time, Shiloh probably had about 20. This is the beginning of '71. They had about 20 properties at that time, 20 or 25. And I would guess 3 to 4 hundred members, at the beginning of '71. And they said -- we wanted to investigate 7 states before we decided for sure where we wanted to live. We wanted to do the whole Northwest, and Colorado, Wyoming, Utah. And they said, "As you go to these other states, just go ahead and stay at Shilohs in those states, and just tell them we sent you." And Shiloh had farms and businesses and also urban houses. So we did. We stayed at houses Twin Falls, Idaho, and Pocatella, Idaho. We liked what we saw at each one. We saw that this was an alternative lifestyle that worked. Everyone was happy, and things were going well. And so we finished our exploration, and finally ended up moving into the Shiloh house in Boise, Idaho. We went there to stay, as we were travelling, but we ended up saying that we wanted to get involved in Shiloh. That was April 2nd of '71. And so we were sent to live at what was called the Ferry [?] St. House. Which was a mansion in Eugene, Oregon. In that particular house, we were 8 families. This was all married couples. So 16 adults and a lot of kids.

Q: So you didn't move into the one in Boise, then?

A: Well, we decided to join Shiloh at Boise, and we stayed there temporarily, but just the same as here, when someone lights here as a new member, we put them somewhere on Day 1, but that's not their long-term place. We needed to be put where there was room for us, and where we were needed, as far as work and whatnot. So it's the same thing as here. So we started at Boise, but then moved to the Ferry St. House. And we lived there for probably about a year and a half, in that particular house. Are you familiar with Twin Oaks? Do you know how things are set up? Well, Twin Oaks doesn't have much of a system in place for people to be kind of one foot out in the world and one here. Members, generally, if they want to try living on the outside, drop their membership or take a sabbatical, and go move out into Charlottesville or something. Shiloh had a mechanism for someone to remain a full member, and also be able to move what we would call "off the farm." And although it was income sharing and meal sharing, we also had this opportunity to move out into your own place. So we did that. We bought a house out in town for a very small down payment. And I continued to work full time within the community. We did our hanging out at the community center in Eugene, which amounted to the same thing -- it was a place

where members in that area got together. And there were about -- now we counted children as members, by the way -- there were about 1,000 members in Oregon, and particularly in the Eugene/Springfield area, by that time. This would be '73, '74. I did what I've been doing here, I was utilities maintenance. Actually, appliance maintenance was my field of expertise at Shiloh -- I did the washer and drying repairs and whatnot, a lot of them. After a while, maybe a year, year and a half, we got kind of homesick for living fully, with both feet in, fully in one of the houses. So we moved back in. And we had just in Eugene alone, we had a number of properties, we had businesses and farms and whatnot just around Eugene, and a bunch of houses. So we moved into what was called the 18th St. House. And I think there were about 25 of us there. We were there until about 1975 or '76. It's a little hard to remember. But we again, at that time, moved out into a place of our own, because I need a handy garage to do the work I was doing . We rented a duplex. And so since we had the whole place, we went ahead and lived in it. And we were there for some time. And that was when the IRS attacked us. They came saying that we'd made mistakes according to our -- we were set up as a nonprofit religious corporation, I don't know which subsection. It wasn't a D, because D's for profit. That's what we are here, we're a for profit religious organization here. Shiloh was a not for profit. And because of that, there was some kind of technical problem with the way we owned our businesses. And the IRS decided to disqualify us, and make the disqualification retroactive, back many years, and they were saying, "We want millions of dollars cash, or we'll start taking your properties." We were very prosperous by then, doing fine, but we didn't have the kind of money laying around to give them what they wanted. They began to seize properties. Morale began to plummet. And a peculiar side effect of that was there began to be a lot of bed hopping. The norms at Shiloh were mostly the same as here at Twin Oaks. But an exception was, regarding sexual things, the norm was married, monogamous, or else celibate. And that broke down, and everyone started sleeping with everyone. And so, my wife and I started to back off for a little while, until the dust settled. We thought Shiloh would win the problems with the IRS, and that when everything settled down and got back to normal, we would move back in closer. But we wanted to make a little space while all this craziness went by. Most -- we had a low attrition rate, many people joined, and very few dropped out, and we had a vision of it lasting forever. We just didn't even think of it ending. Because whatever problems came along, we solved them. Why would anything like that end. It never occurred to us that an outside force greater than us would come in and ruin everything. So anyhow, it didn't get better. What happened was they got everything except the Land . The property we called "The Land" in Dexter, Oregon, hung on for about another 10 years. With maybe 100 people there . That was the normal, it was built, it was about the size of Twin Oaks here. Well the property wasn't so big, it was 88 acres, but it was -- the norm was about 100 people, like here. And so it lingered on, but for people who were there in the heyday, it was just nothing. So that was it.

Q: I'd love to hear some about what group house life was like in terms of meals, and how you shared the work, and how you were set up economic arrangements, meetings, things like that.
A: Okay, let me take a minute to tell you how it started, because this will give you the idea of why things were the way they were. The way Shiloh started, there were two fellows -- John Higgins, and Jim ... his name slips my mind. Well the way I remember it was, in 1968, John Higgins rented a house in Riverside, California, and moved into it. And then he took on a roommate, whose name I'll hopefully remember, Jim something. Anyhow, they begin to let other people move into the house. As I recall, John and Jim

were both working full time, and somebody said, "Well, I need a place to stay. If you let me stay, I'll do the dishes and keep the house up and cook dinner." So they said okay, so that person moved in. And then another and another. And eventually, they were up to about 25 people living in the house. And they said, "If we're going to do this, why don't we go somewhere and do it right? Let's get out of the smog here and everything and go somewhere pretty, get ourselves some land, go do the whole thing." So they bought the land in Dexter, Oregon, which I think is now another community. There's a community called Lost Valley Community, in the Directory. I think that's our old property. It's hard for me to imagine that place being anything but a community, that's what it was built to be. So anyhow, they bought that land and moved up there. Jim Manning --- that was his name. So, John and Jim were Christians. And they were involved with a church in Costa Mesa, California called Calvary Chapel. That's where they met. So from the beginning, Shiloh had a Christian theme. Day to day life there was just about identical to life at Twin Oaks. But the -- if you were to ask any member, "Was there a theme?" "Yes, it was a Christian theme." And I presume that at the house in Riverside they held -- because this was kind of a thread that ran through the place -- is they would hold Bible studies at night. They would go out after work, in the evening, they would go out and invite street people, whom there were a lot of at the time, to come over and come to a Bible study, and have free dinner, and they could stay over night if they wanted. So they deliberately began to attract what we would call crashers, hippies drifting around. That's kind of how my wife ended up there. So -- we weren't homeless. I think the property they got was called High St. House, and that was a big house in Eugene, Oregon. And they did that, they would go out and round up people and have them come over, and have the Bible study and have dinner. Well, they began to say, "We don't want to work out in the world by ourselves, but we'll work as a group." So it began to be the norm that, of a particular house, about half the people on a given day would stay home, and do the house things and take care of kids and cook, and the other half of the people would go out and do some kind of work, together. We didn't want to be out one person in an office here and there, but we worked as a group. So people would -- a group would go out fighting forest fires, or planting trees, or picking crops. Or picking chickens. Whatever they could do, that they could all do at once. Many of these people who came liked what they saw and joined. So pretty soon there were too many people, so we had to rent another house. We also began to buy the houses that we were in. We would usually rent first, but then after awhile, it makes sense if you can to buy the house, so we bought it. So it built up and up, and then we began to get more organized in about '72. And we turned the land into a school, a training center. And we would form teams out there that would have maybe ten new members, and two older members, and they would all get acquainted with one another, and get comfortable living together. And at least one person on the team would have a skill, so that as a group, they had all the skills they needed for one house. We called everything a house, our different properties. So even if it was a farm, we might say, "the house at such-and-such." So a team would have someone who knew all about nutrition and balanced meals. Because we had some bad experiences with illness, from eating the wrong things. And we had someone who knew about health, for sure at least one person who knew CPR and whatnot, and someone who knew about money, how to balance a checkbook, and keep the finances straight for the house, and so forth -- all the skills needed to have a successful house within the community. Then the team could go wherever they wanted. And they would go, for instance, maybe to Madison, Wisconsin. They would land in town, and they would go out and find some work to get started with, and they would rent some kind of a house, the biggest one in town

that they could find, the biggest house for rent in the city that wasn't too pretentious. No, they didn't go find work. The teams also had -- each team had a skill. They would learn how to, say, paint houses. So this team paints houses. And they would get all their equipment and they would go out and paint some houses in Oregon before they left. So when they got there, they already had something to do for a living. So they would do that, and they would rent this house, and perhaps buy the house, and that was the Madison House. And people would join. And a lot of people who would join would stay there, at least for a while. So pretty soon there would be maybe 25, or 30, or 50 people who lived in the Madison house. Some of the houses were involved in evangelism, where they'd go out, round people up, invite them over for Bible studies. Others weren't. It just depended on the house. They were like what we call SLG's here, the small living groups. And every small living group varied. Every house, it was all one community, but the -- what they did varied, what kind of work they did, and how fancy they had their house, how much money they had. Because each house kept 90% of its own money, and sent 10% back to the administration. So when I lived at the Ferry St. House, we didn't work very much. So we didn't have very much. We were real poor. And we ate a lot of mackerel, lot of rabbits. Found out you get sick if you eat too many rabbits. They give you a vitamin deficiency if you eat them every day. Other houses, the 18th St. House was prosperous, because of the work they did. They did roofing, and they did tree planting, and those are both highly paid things to do. And so they had nice, you know, it was a fancy lifestyle by comparison. They ate very well, and it was a pretty house. But that's how the community would vary from one house to another. In some places, the dishes would match, in others, they wouldn't, and they would have paper plates. Members could move from one house to another, as long as there was room for them at the other place. It had to be sensible, but generally, you could move around if you wanted to. If you wanted to go have a change of scenery, and say move back here somewhere, you could move to a house, I don't know if we had any in Virginia, but you could move to a house in say Charlottesville, if there was room there. The government was similar to Twin Oaks government. We had a planner-manager government. We used different words for everything. Most of the way everything was set up was the same as here. And we thought we were pioneering. Twin Oaks was doing all this about the same time as we were, thinking they were the first to do it. We called our planners "elders," but they were planners. We didn't have a guru, although we had John Higgins, who was a founder, and he was special to everyone, because without him, there wouldn't have been any Shiloh. But he wasn't a guru -- the power was spread out. And the elders were over different areas, same as planners. It was similar to here. There were about half a dozen, about six or eight elders, and they didn't rotate on an 18 month basis, but they could kind of stay in as long as the members were happy with them in their particular office. So there was some turnover, more from burnout. I don't know of any elder being asked to give up their particular office. And then we had managers over areas, the same as here. If the manager was over a people-type thing, they'd be called "pastor." If they were over material things, they'd be called a "steward." So you might be the steward of the goat dairy. Or you might be the pastor of the goat dairy if the goat dairy had a lot of people living there. But if it only had 5 people and 100 goats, then it would be a stewardship. And we had -- the norm, it wasn't a requirement, but because people's hearts were really in this, people would usually give all their worldly goods to the community, after awhile. Maybe after 6 months, or whenever. If they had anything to begin with, once they'd been there awhile and saw that this was their life's work, then it would make sense to give whatever you had to the community. And that's how we got some of our business and farms and things.

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What else can I tell you?

Q: I'd be interested in daily life, what a typical day was like, if there was a typical day.
A: Now, this varied from house to house. So I'll give you just an idea. At the Ferry St. House, for instance, one of the main places I lived, we would have a morning meeting at, say, I'm going to have to guess a time. Let's suppose that it was at 7:30 in the morning, that's a good guess. And we'd get together there and talk about what everybody was going to do that day, who would stay home and who would work, and what the work was. And if there wasn't any work, who would go out and try to scarf up some work. And our businesses -- they varied at every house. What we did for a living at the Ferry St. House was we had a small crafts business, and 2 or 3 members worked on that, out in the garage, and they made little airplanes and windmills and whatnot out of coat hangers and welding rods and so forth, and sold them at the Saturday market in Eugene, which is still going today. We transferred U-Haul and Easy-Haul trucks for those two companies. Rental trucks tend to pile up in the wrong places. For instance, at one point in time while I lived there, Boeing aircraft was laying off in Seattle, and everyone was moving out of Seattle. So we would go to other parts of the country and round up trucks, and drive them to Seattle, and they paid us by the mile. And one of the companies also paid our motel and food expenses. I had a car. Members there were allowed to own their own cars under certain conditions. I had a new car when we arrived, so I was allowed to keep it, as long as I made it benefit the community. So -- it was a small Toyota. So five of us would go in my car, and go pick up 5 U-Haul trucks, and we would drive my car into the back of one of them. And then we would move the 5 trucks over to the other state, wherever they were headed, then we'd all hop back into the car, and either get another batch somewhere, or else we'd come home. So we did that for a living there. And we did chicken picking, which is picking up frying chickens out of the huge barns they're raised in, and carrying them six at a time out to the flat bed trucks with those wooden cages to be hauled off. And we did other odd jobs, like fire fighting, and picking crops. Whatever the best job we could come up with. In the early days, the houses didn't have a particular skill. Whereas in the later days, each team had something certain that they did for a living. When I left, there were 50 houses. We had a celebration when we reached 50 houses, plus we had farms, and some of them were big. We had a berry farm, up near Portland, Oregon. Zillions of people went there during the high season to pick berries, and then there were only a few people who lived there during the off season. Maybe on this particular day, the work would be picking strawberries. So half of us would go up outside of town to a strawberry field, and we'd pick strawberries, and they pay you so much per flat. And of course, we kept our money in common, so if ten of us went out picking, the check for 10 people working is pretty good. Financially, we were fine as long as we working. At that particular house, we had some spaces where we didn't work, and we just decided not to have much, and not worry about it. Whereas other houses would knock themselves out. Our group at that house wasn't very materialistic. At the 18th St. House, where I lived a couple years later, we did roofing, and tree planting. And those were difficult jobs, but the money was good. And we lived well there. And we did fire fighting. Course, there has to be a fire. But if there is, it pays well. Also, in those days, because we eventually had about 1,000 members around Eugene, Oregon, it got to where there was nowhere we could all get together at once. We wanted to be able to have meetings not just in the houses, but we wanted to have community meetings. Well, what do we do? So we bought the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Eugene, they happened to be building a new one. And this gave us a big auditorium to meet in

and have parties in. And also a school. So we started our own school. Up until that point, we had had a hodgepodge of kids in public school and home schooling. We wanted parents to do whatever they wanted, and so some of our kids were home schooled, and maybe some went to private schools. I don't remember. I didn't have my kids -- my first baby was born then. My kids were born at Shiloh. But anyhow, so then we had a school. So all the Shiloh kids in the Eugene and Springfield area could go to our own school there, which was nice. That's what it was like. We started our own financial system. We didn't use labor credit system like Twin Oaks, but we came up with the idea of Shiloh sheckles, because we owned businesses, and it made sense to keep our hard currency for things that we needed to buy from the outside world, and to be able to have what amounted to the same thing as a labor credit system, within the community. So that's where the Shiloh sheckles idea came up. For instance, in Springfield, Oregon, we owned a supermarket, and a service station and whatnot, so members who lived out in their own houses of course would buy at those places. So if they worked in the community, they could be paid partly in hard currency, and partly in Shiloh sheckles, was the idea.

Q: And you could use the sheckles at the grocery store?
A: Yeah, any place we owned. And we began to have a lot of trade. I think this is partly what the IRS didn't like. This was at a time when the IRS was clamping down on barter. It used to be if two people traded, then that was just that. It was an even trade, and it wasn't taxable. The IRS decided that they wanted to tax trade, equal exchange, so they began to tax these barter clubs. You give me your hundreds dollars of your plants, for my hundred dollars of your groceries, then all of a sudden we would both get taxed. Well, here we were, perhaps a house would need food off in some other state, and we had a farm in Junction City, Oregon, we called the Widow's Table. This used to be the county farm. There was a time when there was no welfare, that poor people were put in an institution, it was called the county farm. Well we bought the Lane County Farm. And what it really looked like was a -- it was very institutional looking. It kind of looked like a big convalescent hospital. And it had a farm, it had a few acres of land. And it was single moms -- that was kind of the starting point for single moms who joined the community. Single women with little kids would go to the Widow's Table. And there was farm work there. So they would can up the food, and so we came up with the idea of distribution that food around to our own houses around the country, with our own trucks. So now you begin to see all this commerce, and all this labor credit, moving around within our own organization, and here we are now up thousands. And the government is not able to tax any of this, it's all out of their reach, and they didn't like it. So they said, "We've decided to get rid of you, and we will back into a reason." That's the way it looked to me.

Q: Maybe they didn't think you were a real church? Were you incorporated as a church?
A: Well, as a nonprofit religious organization. No, I don't think they doubted that. We were, really. It all started with the idea of evangelism, and it was a Christian community. But the -- an important thing for anybody who would visualize it is that life was the same as it is here. The day-to-day life wasn't churchy, except that we used Christian terms to go with things. We might call the morning meeting a prayer meeting, and we might have a little prayer. But it was more of what here would be called an SLG meeting, a small living group meeting. And some SLG's here have meetings often, and others have them once a year. It was kind of like that, it depended from house to house, what they did and how much of a

Christian flavor it had. But mostly it was just like here. The same advantages and the same disadvantages. Didn't have a lot of money, but the social life was good, it was a safe environment, it was, we thought, secure. It was for the time it lasted. It had many of the same benefits as life here has.

Q: Would you have -- I know you said you had prayer meetings -- would you have other services or religious gatherings?
A: No. If someone wanted to go to church, they could. Most members did not go to church. Some did, on Sundays. It was completely up to the individual. That wasn't pushed or anything like that. Now, when we'd have a community meeting out in town, there might be a Bible study along with the other things. Because it was part of -- it was part of what we were all about, and we would enjoy that. It was nice. But that's all. In a moment, in the land -- our property that most resembled Twin Oaks was a place in Dexter. And if we were to go out and walk around here for 15 minutes here, now, and to do the same thing at the land, at the same time if day, it would be very much the same. What you'd see people doing would probably be about the same, and just the whole -- we had more children, a larger proportion of children at Shiloh. But mainly, it would look about the same, and people would seem about the same. I think we attracted sort of the same kind of people.

Q: Back in the early '70's, when you joined Shiloh, would you have considered yourself a hippie?
A: Yes.

Q: Would you say that a lot of the members also would've?
A: Yes, most. We didn't have a rule that you had to be. But yes, definitely, we were mostly hippies.

Q: And did you share all your meals together at these houses?
A: Yes. We had -- meal sharing and income sharing were universal as long as you lived in one of the community properties. If you lived out in your own house, then it was a little different. Like for instance, I had some cash, because my house payments went to someone outside of the community. We did some grocery shopping. Yet I worked within the community. That was kind of a combination too. But when Sue and I bought a house out in Eugene, well, it's too complicated to try to tell you. But it was, as long as you lived on one of the properties, it was meal sharing and income sharing. And meals -- at my first house, we ate -- well we ate breakfast and dinner together, and then the lunch, the people that were at the house at lunch together, and then the people out on the job took sack lunches from that house.

Q: Did you follow any sort of special diet?
A: No.

Q: You weren't vegetarian.
A: Inexpensive, whatever was cheap. We got free food from the government. There are 2 government food programs. There's food stamps, and then there's a program called Abundant Foods. I don't know if you're acquainted with that. Each state chooses which of the two programs they want to be in. Oregon had Abundant Foods and did not have food stamps. Because we were low-income, as individuals, the

same as Twin Oakers are, our house there at Ferry St. was eligible for abundant foods, which was a supermarket operated by the US government, and you go there and you get food, free. And they give you a list of what you're eligible for, and you just go in and get everything that you want on the list, and they check you out, and you don't pay. It all comes in funny looking silver cans with black letters, and a lot of numbers on them, but that's the grocery store. Also, we got bags of grains and so on, and they came from somewhere else. They were from the US government also, they were free to us. We got a lot of bulgur and lentils and powdered milk. The powdered milk came with all kinds of strings attached. We couldn't drink it, but it was okay to drink it if we put chocolate in it, or used it on cereal, but you weren't supposed to mix it up white and drink it. Some agreement the government made with the dairy industry. But anyway, we followed the rules, we wanted to be doing the right thing. So we obeyed all these silly rules about what we could do with the milk. But that's where we got part of our food. And we bought very inexpensive stuff. We ate meat, but we ate cheap meat. Like the rabbits we grew, and mackerel, and so on. We had a goat dairy in Springfield, Oregon, and we drank goat milk, and we ate goat cheese, which was like jack cheese. And I guess we ate goats. I don't remember goat meat at my house, but I do remember the goat milk.

Q: How did families live, within these houses, or how did people live within these houses?
A: Okay, now most of our members were in their 20's, because of the way we recruited members. People who are out drifting around on the street, and have no where to stay the night, crashers were our source of new members. So they were mostly people in their 20's. So people who joined Shiloh were mostly singles in their 20's. When I joined, the married -- the leaders of each house were usually a married couple, and the other people who lived in that house were usually all singles. And the guys would sleep in one -- well, it depended upon the house. For instance, the High St. House in Eugene, Oregon, was a singles' house. That was the one where Sue was staying when I first went to Oregon. The women slept upstairs on the second floor, the men slept in the basement, and the middle floor was the main living area. And a married couple pastored the house, were the managers of the house. The one where I lived, we were 8 families, and that was the size for that house, so if someone moved out, another couple would move in. So that was all married couples, but this wasn't an absolute -- the 18th St. House where I lived later was a mixture of singles and married couples. Here, every individual, except for small children, has their own room. At Shiloh, married couples had a room, and singles would usually share a room or have dormitory style, be all in one big room with partitions or whatever, depending on the house, depending on how it was built. But married couples always had their own bedroom. There was a lot of marriage. And we had a peculiar norm -- if a couple wanted to marry, they were required to be separated for 3 months, to think about it. And if they still wanted to after that, they could get married. So, sometimes single guys would look for excuses to work the widow's table, with all these single women up there. So then, let's suppose that a couple falls in love, wants to get married. Well then he would come back here, maybe, come back East to one of the houses back here, to spend 3 months. And they would write and call in the meantime. And then after that period they would get married, and then the two of them as a couple, and perhaps with kids also, [tape ends] ...

Q: Would children be in the rooms with their parents, or was there a separate space for children?
A: Let me see. Well, babies slept in the room with their parents. Older children -- we didn't separate, we

never tried the experiment of separating kids completely from their parents. We were okay with the idea of a combination of nuclear family, and communalism. But we didn't take the kids to a home off the other end of town, because it just seemed the natural thing to have them around. Older kids had their own space, but I'm just trying to think -- well, it's safe to say that older kids had their own rooms, or they roomed with other kids, a friend. I didn't see that very much, because the ages of the -- the children were all small at the Ferry St. House, and we didn't have ours yet. But the -- the pastor and his wife, of that house, had two children, and then 3, while they were there. I think their kids had their own room. Their two kids had a separate bedroom. It's just funny, I can't remember, because it didn't matter. It was a great big house, and everybody had somewhere to sleep.

Q: How did membership work?
A: Well, you first could be invited to come over for the Bible study and dinner. And then, if you seemed okay, you'd be invited to stay over night, for a few days. The initial stay was about 3 days. And then, if a person wanted to stay beyond that, they were expected to work. You got about 3 days with no obligation at all. And then, the 2nd phase was about a 3 week visit, during which the new member would be expected to work. And then at the end of the 3 weeks, there'd be a little interview, and the person would be asked if they wanted to stay. There was always an opportunity all along the way for members of that house to give their opinion of the new person. And so, at the end, the pastor and his wife -- because I think almost all of the, well, most of the houses had a married husband and wife pastor team. Many of the members would be single. That wasn't an absolute. There were single pastors. Single men pastors, and perhaps single women pastors, I don't know. That would be over an only-women's house. Like the place in Junction City, I don't know who's pastoring that. I was out there many times, but it just, there was no looming, you know what I mean. If you live there, there's somebody who's responsible, somebody who has the last word for that place, but this was not anything where -- you wouldn't even know unless you asked who was running things. What were we talking about?

Q: About membership.
A: Then the person would just be invited, if they were liked, to stay with us, and the person would just say yes. We never had a formal membership, and we officially did not count heads. We had kind of a thing about, "It doesn't matter how many of us there are, it just matters that it's working and we're doing what we ought to be doing." So we had a norm against counting heads. We didn't feel that our strength was in our numbers. So -- we had an enemy community. We were -- we thought that we were the largest or second largest of all communities in the United States, except for the 19th century ones, maybe the Hutterites [?]. But of the '60's and '70's communes, we felt that we were one of the largest two, and we didn't get real involved with a lot of the other communities like Twin Oaks, but we knew about them, and we just, we were doing our thing, and they were doing theirs. The other large community was called The Children of God. And they had also a couple thousand, or 3 thousand members at the time. Last I heard, they claimed they had 6,000. They changed their a couple times. They changed it from Children of God into the Love Family, and then to the Family. So there were thousands of them, and thousands of us. And we bumped into them all over the country. And they had a couple of norms that we strongly disagreed with. They were calling themselves a community, and they were. On top of that, they were calling themselves a Christian community. So we had two reasons to be

concerned about whether or not they were making a good name for the communities movement, and particularly calling themselves a Christian community. And they had a couple of norms we didn't like. One was, they had a norm of sleeping with visitors to try to induce them to join. They called it "flirty fishing." We didn't think that was too cool. And another is they had a strong doctrine against age-ism. What that cooked down to was allowing sex between adults and children of the opposite gender. They taught against homosexuality, but they were open to this sleeping with visitors, and then they had this "no age barrier" between members. And so because we disagreed on that, we didn't get a long with them. So rather than have shouting matches on the street and so on, there was a meeting, and we decided to split the country in half with them. And so, now this was second hand, I wasn't involved in this, but this is what we were told at the time. What happened was we carved up the country kind of half and half, and they had Washington and Hawaii and California, we had Oregon, Idaho, Utah, and so forth, on across the country. So our teams would go out to certain states and not to others. And they did the same thing. As far as I know, both communities respected each other's space that way. And they were what we called marked, which meant our members were not supposed to associate with their members. Of course, that makes you want to. There's a mystery. So, for instance, when I was in Hawaii, they had Hawaii, and so there were many of them there, and for us, they were very easy to recognize. They wear a little band on their wrist, a luggage tag with a verse of Scripture. And so you can always tell Family members by this little tag with this verse of Scripture. I don't know if they still do it. So I get to Hawaii, and there they were. So anyway, -- and they also had a lot of members in the Navy, and I was in the Navy in those days too. I had been on active duty before I was in Shiloh. But at Shiloh, I also -- I went to reserve meetings off and on during the Shiloh days. So anyhow, I went out to the Children of God's place on Owahu, and they had hundreds of members there. And they lived on tents on the beach, on the backside of Owahu. You could do that in those days, it was allowed, and of course it doesn't get cold there or anything. And so, what I saw -- and of course, I went out there, I'm married, and I'm not interested in sleeping with anybody, in fact, the reason I would come and investigate is because I'm looking for things to do besides meeting women. And they said, "That's fine, come on out." So I went to their place, and life there, although the way they were living was kind of primitive in Hawaii, but their day-to-day communal life was the same as ours. It was really very much the same. That was one of the few exposures I had in those days to another big community, when I was in Shiloh. Here they were, and they were doing pretty much the same thing we were, and they were a lot the same as us, except we had this weird kind of rivalry. So we didn't go to Washington, which was weird, because we had a lot of people in Oregon, and it would be normal to spill out that direction, but we didn't. Instead we went to Idaho. And ironically, they're still going. What they did, is they do have a guru, a guy named David Burg, and he calls himself David Moses. He prophesied that Kamakahutec [?] was going to hit the United States, kill everybody, so the Children of God all ran off to England. And then Kahutec didn't do that, and then they spread out all over the world. Sometimes, because of their norm about adult/child sex, they've been booted out of entire countries. I heard that regarding Argentina. But here they are, they're still going today. And you call 1-800-4-A-FAMILY to find out where their nearest house is.

Q: Really? So, but Shiloh never had a guru or a charismatic leader, then?
A: Well, we had this -- I would separate those two. Because, we had a charismatic leader. John Higgins, who was one of our founders, was. He was our charismatic leader. But it wasn't a dictatorship. We never

felt like he was trying to control everything or everybody. It wasn't a cult. It was more, as I say, the way the government worked there, was like here. It was reasonably egalitarian. There were some things that Shiloh was a little stricter about than Twin Oaks, but there were some things that Shiloh was less strict about. On balance, it was a lot the same as here.

Q: Was there any sort of labor credit system for sharing domestic work, for example?
A: No, it was all -- it was up to the house how they divided up the work. And at both the houses where I lived, the three that I lived in, let's say two -- Ferry St. House, and 18th St. House, I was there awhile -- things were casual. It was just kind of, the work was parted out on a day-to-day basis. And as far as I know, there was never any trouble. The meals all got cooked. We had to split up timesharing on the -- members did their own laundry. We had to do time sharing on the washer and dryer. There were probably 25 of us at the Ferry St. House, with one washer and one dryer. So, there are ten of us here, with one washer and dryer, and it's running most of the time. So we did have -- we had a sign-up sheet for that. As we do here, for the owl computer, which is our most popular computer, because it's on the internet. So you sign up for the times you want. But the work distribution was just, who wants to cook today? But we made sure that everything got done. As far as going out and doing work, we just did it. We didn't have -- let me say something about expulsion, because each community has to deal with what happens if you have a bad member. I only know of two cases -- we had a member at the Ferry St. House, who got into using heroine. Got back into it, it was something he had done before he was a member. And he was -- that wasn't okay. And so he -- I think he was suspended for 30 days or 60 days, he was suspended from the community, marked. And he had to go to some counselling, and get clean, and then he could come back. And he did. As I recall, he did come back, and that was the end of that. We had another member, who lived at the land in Dexter, that's where he eventually was assigned after he joined, and he claimed to be a foreign exchange student from Russia. And people went to great lengths to get him a Bible in Russian, and all this kind of stuff, and I can't remember what his name was. After awhile, some questions began to be raised about -- "If he's from Russia, how come he's got a Timex watch?" "Oh, well, he might've just got it." "No, it looks kind of beat up, like he's had it awhile." "Maybe he bought it at a pawn shop." Because we didn't trade with Russians at the time. Just little things like that. One time he was going on a vacation, going off to another house, or going somewhere. And this was when Sue and I had our own house. We were asked to take care of his dog. And so his dog came over, and this dog was very unruly and undisciplined and everything, which was not typical -- our pets were like the pets at Twin Oaks, pets there were well-behaved, the dogs don't bark or run around and dig holes or anything, they're trained to be good communitarians. Well this dog was just a disaster case, and we thought that -- it was about this member. But we didn't say anything, we decided to wait and see. Well then, one day he -- okay, the way the people at the land lived, was there are cabins there, and members, a couple of fellows maybe, would share this cabin, and there would be a little living room and a wood heater, and a loft, and that was their room. Then there was a common bath house, bathroom, shower, and then there was a dining hall like this. It wasn't as fancy as this, but same idea. And so he had a gun fall out of his clothing. A pistol. We didn't have a policy against having guns, because we didn't think we needed it. But it was way weird for a member of Shiloh to think they needed a hand gun. He was expelled, and permanently marked, is what we called it. He's the only member I can remember ever having been expelled permanently. And we occasionally had trouble with visitors. There was some

visitor that came to the High St. House one time. We did have a strong norm of nonviolence, as Twin Oaks has. And so this guy decided he'd hit everybody, and test them, and see if they were really nonviolent. So that was something that -- the elders got a call in the middle of the night, "There's this guy going around hitting everybody, what should we do? Are we supposed to hit back? Are we supposed to call the police, what should we do?" The word back was, "It's not okay for him to hit you. Get him out." They called the police or something. But even with visitors, we seldom had any trouble. Also, we did not have trouble with theft or anything else that I ever knew of. Basically, things ran smoothly, as they do here most of the time.

Q: Would you probably have stayed a part of Shiloh if it hadn't been for the IRS?
A: Yes.

Q: Do you think the community would still be going?
A: Yes. Because the norm there was just to expect to be there for the rest of your life. And if there was anything you didn't like, if it was you, you'd either get counselling about it, or you would move to another property, if there was some kind of conflict where you couldn't stand the kind of work they did at that house, or something like that, you could move to another house. The community was willing to make whatever outside changes needed to be made for the member, and there was a strong sense of family. We were very cuddly. That was one thing, it was a little more so than here. We called each other brother and sister, and we were very huggy and very close. Maybe that's why everything got sexual as the place began to collapse, because we were all really close in a brother and sister kind of a way already. And so I expected to be there forever, with maybe some leaves of absence, some time away, same as here. But we felt that it was a wonderful lifestyle, and something to plan to stay with.

Q: Was it a good lifestyle for the kids.
A: Yes, it was great for the kids. For the same reasons that Twin Oaks is good. They've got plenty of attention, there's plenty of time. Generally, we didn't have a lot of money, but we had a lot of time. Of course, now that's another thing -- the community became financially very prosperous over the years. At the beginning, we had jalopies that might make it all the way to the grocery store and back, and might not. At the end, we were buying the largest vans, the big Dodge maxi fans, the longest ones you could get, several at a time, and the houses had these big vans and everything, and things were wonderful. We also had a medical center at the land, we had a doctor. Of course, we had a lot of babies being born. Women could have a natural child birth, or they could have a doctor. We had people who did midwifery, and all those -- so we had the range of options, as Twin Oaks has, about things like child bearing.

Q: Did you and your wife choose a home birth?
A: No. We -- Jeremy, my oldest boy, was born at the hospital in Springfield. It was just what we wanted to do. That was when we lived at the 18th St. House. And Erin was born during a visit to my parents in the Los Angeles area. So he was born at the hospital in Los Angeles, because that's where we were when the time came.

Interview with Randy Holding
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
July 14, 1996

Q: After Shiloh fell apart, around '75, '76, did you come to Twin Oaks?
A: No. We moved -- we stayed out in the world for years, and then in the '80's, around 1980, '81, we decided to join a community again. And we got a communities directory, I think it was the one Harbon[?] Hot Springs puts out, called New Age Communities Guidebook. And we made our list of all these communities we wanted to go visit. And I also went a la carte to at least one. I went to Chrysalis, in Indiana, which was part of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities at the time. I stayed there for a week. Went back, and we went off, and we had Twin Oaks on the list. And I had kind of forgotten this, but when I joined here, Valerie came up with a letter that we had written to Twin Oaks way back then. She was cleaning out some old files, and here's this letter from me. "We have these two bitty kids, and we want to come." Well, Twin Oaks was on the list, we didn't get this far before we found 3 communities that we liked. We started out and just went up, and we went to Roandoke -- there's a place. Have you ever heard of it? They had hundreds of members at the time, now they have about 10. It's still going. It's in Moro Bay, California. And in its heyday, it had over 200 members. And it was quite a place. Now it's just a shadow of what it once was.

Q: But it still exists?
A: Yes, but it's dilapidated, and there are just a few people that live there. It was still there a couple of years or so ago. I have to try to figure out what year it was. It was still there in the '90's. We went there, we went on up, and we visited Oregon communities, and we ended up liking several. We stayed at Alpha Farm for a few weeks, we were offered membership there. We liked Lichen, which is still going, in Oregon. We ended up in a community called Russel's Mill, in Murphy's, California, in the High Sierra. We were there for maybe about a year. And it was a wonderful place. And it was a very, very pretty farm community. Owned by a family who wanted to give it over -- wanted the community to form, and then they wanted to set up a trust, give the property to the community. And they would be members. Well what happened was every day life was wonderful there, but we didn't have anybody who was a real governing kind of a person, to write bylaws and whip this place into shape, politically speaking. None of us were politically motivated, we just liked the day-to-day life. So in time, the family that owned it kind of called off the deal, said, "We decided we're just going to give up on trying to have it be a community," which is a shame, because it was wonderful. But I left because of -- my wife left, she felt a need to leave after a certain point, and she left, and she took the kids with her. If she's left them, I'd probably still be there. But I wasn't willing to be separated from my children. So I gave a notice, and then left. But that was Russel's Mill, and it's defunct now, but as I say, it could start again. It's a wonderful property for a community. It's in Murphys[?], California, which is about 70 miles east of Stockton, California, up in the mountains. We had about 10 members, and about 25 friend out in the area that we hung out with. Wonderful, real nice.

Q: How long did you stay there?
A: About a year, I think.

Q: Then did you join a community after that?
A: No. Then I went back out in the world, and things ended with Sue, and I remarried, and I was married for a few years. My second wife was not open to the idea of living communally. We were doing the thing

in the world, and we became very prosperous financially, and we had a lot of things. We lived an upper class lifestyle. And eventually, it's a long story, but that ended one day. And as soon as that happened, I began to set my sights on coming back to community, once I became single again. I wrote to Twin Oaks, and a number of communities, and I got my chain of places to go, and I was -- it was delayed for 5 years. I left East Wind community off the list, because of a misprint in the directory. The directory says they live in dormitories. And it says "Sleeping Accommodations: D" for dormitory. And Twin Oaks says, "R" for room. So I said, well since there's a D and an R, there's a distinction between the two, and I want my own room. All these other communities give you your own room, and I want my own room. I said, "I don't want to sleep in one big room with all these other people, with maybe little dividers. I want my very own room." So I didn't go to East Wind. I came here -- this time I decided to start with Twin Oaks, that I would come here first. That way -- if I started with the California, Oregon, and Washington communities, I'd never get this far. So I said, "I'll come here first." I came here, and immediately met someone who'd been a East Wind member before they came here, and he said, " Oh, no, they have their rooms the same as this." I said, "Well if I had known that I would've gone there!" So I did my visit here and loved it, and then when I did my month away, that's required, I went to East Wind for my month away. And I had a ball over there, and I like East Wind, for different reasons. If I had gone there first, I probably would've stayed. They don't have a time away required between visiting and membership. So if I had known, if that had been an R instead of a D in the book, I probably would've gone there first and stayed there.

Q: So when did you join Twin Oaks?
A: October 1st of '95.

Q: So you haven't been here quite a year yet, then?
A: No.

Q: How does this compare to your Shiloh experience?
A: Well, I enjoy it equally. It's a lot the same. The main difference being that we don't have a bunch of different properties here. That's the biggest single difference. But at Shiloh, the place everyone wanted to live was the land, the place that was like this. And there was only room for about 100 people there. There was only work for about 100 people there. So everyone who wanted to live at the land, couldn't. You had to be needed, your particular skill had to be needed there, or some compelling reason to have you there. People who lived at the land, worked at the land, and didn't have to go out and work in the world, even as a group. So here, we have that. You get to come here, and you can work right here on the property, and stay, and not go off for 10 years if you don't want to. So, that's nice. Twin Oaks was just as I expected it to be. The book, Is It Utopia Yet, by Cat, painted such an accurate picture. Also, I was on the mailing list for several years for the newspaper, the Leaves. So I kind of was in touch. And of course, I'd written over the years. When I finally got here, everything looked as I expected, the space between the buildings was even the same as I'd envisioned. Just the whole feel of the place, and the members, and so on. There were no surprises, just what I expected. So I was comfortable right away as a visitor. Still am.

Interview with Randy Holding
Interviewer: Deborah Altus
July 14, 1996

Q: Looking back on your Shiloh experience, what would you say was the best part for you, that you liked the most?
A: The close fellowship with other people, the social life. That was what appealed to me. And that's what appeals to me here. People come to Twin Oaks for different reasons. People come to Twin Oaks for different reasons, and my number one reason is that sense of family. I can be by myself, I have a nice room, and I can be all alone, and have all the quite I want. Or, I can be out in the thick of things, and find a party, and hang out with a lot of people as often as I want to. Also, the variety of work. That wasn't a reason at Shiloh. I didn't particularly care for the work at Shiloh, we did a lot of really crappy things to try to scrape out a living.

Q: What was the downside?
A: At Shiloh? In the early days, shortage of money. We really scraped. In '71, we were getting our food out of dumpsters. Although, communities do that even after they have money. But we were happy to -- we were really scraping, financially. We didn't have a very well-established government yet. Sometimes you wished that the community -- that there was more official way to have a voice, or get something done, or try to propose something. All that wasn't very well organized yet. As it probably wasn't at the same time here at Twin Oaks. So Twin Oaks now is more highly evolved as a community than Shiloh was then. But at the time, it was probably about equal. But my only concern was the hard financial times. Then in the later days, when the finances were strong, it would've been having a better mechanism for members to be heard, recognized. We certainly have that here, particularly with this board over here, or anything. If I want to complain about something or change something, I can figure out who to go to here, and I can go. I may not get my way, but I'll be fully recognized, even if my idea seems nuts to everybody else. At least I get to speak my mind, and people will think about it.

Q: Since you've lived in several different communities, I'm curious what some of the lessons you might take away from this experience, lessons about what makes communal living work.
A: Let's see ... well, I'm not sure that community is for all people at all times. I have -- this is an open-ended membership for me. I have no -- this is not stepping stone to anything else for me. I'm not trying to work my way from Twin Oaks to anything. I wonder every day, how long I'll be here. I may be here for the rest of my life, I have no -- it's just open ended to me. But I think that the way I see membership here, the trade-off is you give up some freedom to travel, and you give -- and this is from the standpoint of someone who is doing well on the outside, financially -- you give up some material things. And what you get in exchange for that is security, and a close sense of family, and an interesting and varied work environment, and a beautiful place to live, out here in the country. Rural living is often -- the problem with someone who wants to move from the city to the country is, what are they going to do to earn a living there? That's taken care of here. So, does that come anywhere near answering what you were wondering?

Q: Sure. Do you feel that there might be other keys, like a certain governance process, or a leadership process?
A: Okay, yes. Something that I like about Twin Oaks, as opposed to East Wind is the style of government. The planner/manager government works very well, I think. I think it's wonderful. For a community this

size, it's the right government. If you have a guru, you're at the whims of the guru. And you might be led off into anything. And a consensus government works for a small community. That was how we governed ourselves at Russel's Mill, and Alpha Farm has a consensus government, you can do that when you have 10 or 20 members. The democracy at East Wind, to me, leaves people -- I'm satisfied with the results that East Wind gets from the operation of their government, but the day-to-day operation of the government is scary to me. The fact that policy, major policy decisions are made at a community meeting, based on the input of only the members who are there at the meeting. Or almost only. Most of the power, decisions, are made by the people who show up at the meeting. And there are a few -- when I was there, there were a few dominant people who just took the bull by the horns as far as running that community. It wasn't -- the decisions they were making seemed to be alright, but I just didn't care for the way they arrived at them, by doing that. And even though a paper might be posted for a week before the decision's made final, I felt like the power of decision making was all concentrated in an hour long meeting with 10 or 20 people there. Where here, at Twin Oaks, things are deliberately made to take a long time, which can be frustrating when it's something you're trying to get done, but it's also comforting to know, that you can go visit your family in California for a week and come back, and it won't be a different place when you get back. So as a person looking for the possibility of a long-term member ship, I liked the idea of Twin Oaks having a fairly slow-moving but very careful government. So I'm a big fan of planner/manager government, for a community of 100 members. Or larger. There'd be no upper limit on that type of government. But I don't think a consensus government would work well for a community as large as this, and the diversity of ideas it would have here too. We don't have a strong, central theme here.

Q: Yeah. That's one reason I've been surprised that a secular community would last this long without having a common vision, like a religion or something. Like maybe Shiloh had.
A: Part of the fun here is the diversity. It has us arguing about everything on the board over here, but we certainly do have enough, certain things that everybody agrees on here. Like nonviolence and about having a happy lifestyle that's an alternative to the outside, so we need to be careful to keep it -- it has to stay as good, or better, or none of us will want to be here. That's enough of a theme, I think. And the diversity makes for exciting conversation -- we're not all required to say the same thing about everything. We're allowed to have a lot of diversity of opinion, for a community.

Q: Just out of curiosity, do you know Joe Peterson, who lived at Shiloh? I think he was an elder.
A: No. Joe Peterson?

Q: Yeah, well it was such a huge community, I can see how it would be easy not to know someone. He's just someone I interviewed a month or two ago.
A: Do you know where he lived?

Q: I don't remember, but I was thinking it was in the Eugene area. But I think he travelled as well. But I'm pretty sure he was involved in the administration.
A: That could be more in the later days too. He was not one of the early people, or I would recognize his name. Because I knew -- well, I'm not sure I ever knew all of the elders, because there were quite a few

houses, even when I joined in '71. It was much bigger than Twin Oaks when I joined. But no, that name doesn't ring a bell. If he joined in '75, then we were growing at the time, and he could become an elder. There was a certain amount of circulation, where we would get to know people. There was movement of members between houses. And also of elders -- if someone was pastoring a certain house, and it just got to be too much for them, they would probably be transferred and do the same thing somewhere else for a change of scenery. I bump into members from time to time.

Q: Joe's the only other person I've interviewed from Shiloh.