

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Armeta: Yeah, when I heard it was '65 to '75, I thought, God, that was a I graduated from high school in '68. So. We didn't even move down here until '74, so that was just right at the end of the time period.

Q: Yeah, I knew you guys were kind of at the end of the time period but our time period is really very flexible.

A: Yeah.

Q: I mean, that's just the primary area of our interest but, like, just for example, at Sand Hill Farm, I interviewed a boy who was born in '81.

A: Oh, yeah?

Q: So, I mean, you know, I'm trying to touch anybody I can get hold of.

A: Well, that's interesting. Like, Tazio, I was telling him he would be interesting for him to come in, too, on his perspective because he grew up in a commune in his early years, outside of Champagne-Urbana and that was the group that lived here and he has some hard feelings about it, parts of it. So and that was just very early impressions.

Q: So, you're husband Steve was living in a communal household up there?

A: Yeah, we all were. Steve and I and his brother and several of the other early members here all lived in a dome that we built up there and, I guess, they built that in '71, '72, in that time. I guess, yeah, in the fall and winter of '71 and '72 and, then, I moved in in '72, I guess, in the fall of '72.

Q: To the dome house?

A: Mmm-hmm. Yeah, so.

Q: And how old was Tazio, then?

A: Well, he was just born in '71. So, he was just a year old. He was 11 months old when I moved in. I guess I moved in in October. His birthday's in November. So. And there was Steve and his wife and Tazio and Tazio's older sister and one other couple and a single man, who was it was pretty much an open marriage that Steve and his first wife had, so they she had relationships with other people and, eventually, encouraged him to, also, much to his dismay. How we got involved was by his first wife encouraging us to spend some time together so she didn't feel so bad being with other people and him not. So, he finally evolved a relationship and, during that time, there were other communal houses in town and farms in the area and we all got together, eventually. I guess it was in '73, maybe, we started having meetings, or the end of '72, started having meetings to talk about buying land as a group and started searching for land. I don't quite remember, specifically, how that all came about, except it was the Earth Works meeting sounds kind of like the mercantile you were talking about in Lawrence, Kansas, but it was an extended community that David Baker was in the Earth Works garage and Steve and I and several other people that were originally living here were in the restaurant and store that were in one building and there were other little shops around the University of Illinois campus that were of the similar mind and ...

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: Were they work collectives? Is that how they were set up?

A: Most of them, yeah, I guess.

Q: Were you a student?

A: I was until '72 and, then, I dropped out '68 to '72. I should have graduated in '72 but I didn't. I couldn't figure out what to do. I guess after changing major 4 times I just thought maybe it would be best just to hang out. I really wanted to go to medical school but I didn't I'd never known any female physicians, especially female physicians that had families and I really wanted to have a family. So, I just didn't think that that's something I could do and, so, I went to pharmacy school and didn't enjoy that at all because it wasn't what I really wanted to do count pills. So, I dropped out of that and floated around and, finally, ended up in the Earth Works community and really enjoyed the camaraderie and the lifestyle and the diet and my father was developing colon cancer at the time so it really spurred me on to become vegetarian.

Q: Would you have identified yourself as a hippie at that time?

A: I always kind of resented that term but, now, I use it jokingly and feel fine about it, I guess, but it still was it was too loaded of a term for me to really feel comfortable but I guess I even felt better about being called a flower child than a hippie.

Q: Okay.

A: I just for reasons that it didn't appeal that term.

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't know why I liked flower child. That was I didn't like it at first, I think, but, eventually, I figured, well, I guess I do like flowers a lot. I still do. I'm just picking out a floral pattern for the top of my, you know, the couch that we're reupholstering. So, I really like flowers flower designs and, you know, I'm sure that has, for me, has a lot to do with having done a fair amount of psychedelics during that time and really developing a different vision. That really had a big impact with me. I know Steve talks about that a lot, too, but he doesn't like flowers as much as I do. I think it definitely changed his vision of things, too.

Q: Was there much of an alternative scene going on in Champagne-Urbana at that time?

A: Yeah. I mean, I think it'd be interesting, now, to kind of if I could look at that time period and the people in that time period to see how many of us there really were but, of course, since I was immersed in the Earth Works community, that was like my whole life. Everybody I knew was involved there, especially when I dropped out of school. So, I didn't really have much to do or pay that much attention it seemed like to the rest of the world. It was just like the alternative community was my whole life and it seemed like there was a fair number of alternatively minded or evolving people, even a lot of people that were involved weren't so alternative minded, at first. I think we're just intellectuals like David was definitely an intellectual, didn't like a lot of the things in the alternative community, didn't wasn't involved so much in the drugs as far as I remember, in psychedelics didn't like the dances, the flower

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

childy sort of things that some of the rest of us did and didn't like the diet. He liked his meat and etc. But, over the years, he changed to some extent. But a lot of us just evolved alternative ways of thinking and doing things from being in contact with each other, I think. That was my impression.

Q: Was the Earth Works community just this group of businesses or was that also what you called your dome house?

A: Well, the dome was intended to be a bakery from the start and it was. We did have a little home baker and that's actually why I got involved because I was working with another group of people who were planning to start a bakery and we kind of gave up our plan when the dome seemed to have it more together and more ready to come on-line with the bakery so I checked out the dome and decided to move in there instead of starting a baker and took my recipes and worked there. So, there were, you know, there were business and just communal households involved in the community, both I think that was your question wasn't it?

Q: Yeah, about what the Earth Works community was.

A: You know, alternative minded people were in businesses and in communal households. There were a number of communal households and individuals [unintelligible].

Q: So, what got you thinking about buying land in Tennessee? How did that all come about?

A: I think everybody just wanted to get out of well, we wanted to do something together. I think that was a lot of the spirit, then. We used to have dances and group gatherings and parties and picnics and just we're spending more and more time with different people in the community with a larger group and we just started feeling like we wanted to do a group, a larger group effort and there was a lot of information about other groups and, particularly, the Farm. In my view of things, that was what really sparked my interest in a group effort was reading about the Farm and Stephen Gaskin's efforts in preaching to and just things he talked about were really inspiring to me and to a few of the others of us but not everyone by any means. But, in general, because we were doing so many different things together and evolving a larger group head, so to speak, that we started talking amongst ourselves, I guess, about buying land together similar to what the Farm and other groups that we had heard about were doing and started having meetings and kept having meetings and the group changed and evolved and, finally, kind of scaled down when we actually found some land and decided to buy it but it was really a pretty big group. Harvey knows the numbers a little bit better about how many initially were involved but, then, I think there was only about 35 that actually ended up investing in the land at the end but there was quite a bit larger group initially. It was a really, you know, just a very high energy time. A lot of cohesive sorts of spirits going around.

Q: Did you have any idea of how you were going to support yourself when you moved down here?

A: No, none whatsoever. We moved down here with \$60 in our pockets, Steve and I and I had just gotten pregnant didn't realize it, I don't think really, until I got down here but we just knew we were going to make it some way and didn't even worry about it. It was a little bit of a shock when we moved down and I was pregnant, especially when Steve's wife had moved down here just a couple of months

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

before us with her boyfriend and we came we drove down into the Hollow here and it was Suzanne and her boyfriend and 2 kids just sitting in an open area with no tent or anything.

Q: Wow.

A: But I couldn't figure out what in the world they were doing. It was really shocking. They weren't campers like Steve and I were, you know. I grew up camping and so did Steve. So, we didn't really, you know we were going to get some plastic and make a makeshift tent and I, you know that didn't bother me at all. We camped under the stars many times with my parents up with my family of origin. So, I didn't worry about it and neither did Steve. We thought it was a great pioneering we were, you know, like pioneering and going to be the first, you know, group down here to pioneer the land. There's no structures at all here and we'll just do it and we were real into it but, with kids and Steve's wife and her boyfriend, kind of way about it just kind of hanging out in the open and not having it together at all was really pretty interesting but, anyway, we took care of them and ourselves, too, was the way it ended up being but [unintelligible].

Q: So, did you set up a tent? Is that how you lived at the beginning?

A: Yeah, we right down from right in front of where Anna and Tazio were staying down here there's a house across that little gully now but we built what was called the cook tent. It was just a pole frame and plastic tent and that was where Steve and I stayed and that was our tent and, then, we what did we we set up another tent somewhere else for Suzanne and her boyfriend and her kids. I can't even remember where. I guess up where they were at. We just helped them put up a little tent and, then, they were afraid of bears. So, they ended up moving down here right near us and we built them another little pole frame and plastic shed or we helped them build it and theirs fell apart very quickly but they just weren't as much a pioneer as we were.

Q: Are there any bears around here?

A: Apparently, there have been, historically, and, in fact, someone was just telling me today I went up to get this upholstery this couple that lives on the edge of Waynesboro and the guy said that they had had bears that were sent in from some state agency to try to repopulate the brown bear in this area of Tennessee and they documented that, as far as they knew, they all there were 4 bears and they all just moved out of the area. So, I don't know if there's just too much a population. Even though Wayne County's fairly sparsely populated, there's still maybe just too many people around perhaps for bears to co-exist. I don't know. But they left. But there used to be bears years ago but not it sounded like bears some nights. I remember, you know, Suzanne come running down the hill and jumping in bed with us: "There's bears out there!" There wasn't any bears and we didn't have any guns. We were vegetarians at the time. So, we didn't we figured it was, you know, it was probably deer or it could have been even possums, you know, just jumping through the woods or raccoons and there's foxes in the area. We certainly have our share of foxes but there's no bears.

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: So, how long did the tent stage last?

A: Well, for us, it was just pretty brief, I guess, because we came in April and, then, I think, by September, we had already built a pole frame cabin just slab shack. It was probably, you know, we worked on it probably for a couple months because we built it on top of the biggest hill here and, so, we had to carry all the wood and everything up this hill to build it and, so, it took us a little while. So, we stayed at the tent for a few months but, in the meantime, Steve's wife and her boyfriend left and went back up to Illinois and other people moved down. So, everyone, you know, started out pretty much with a tent. I think we were probably the quickest to build something. We were just, pretty much, I think, more gung-ho and more used to being outdoors than most of the other people were. We encouraged them to come down. I think we had already had the little shack. I guess it was by the end of the summer. So, it was really just maybe 3 months later we pretty much had our little cabin and it was just very rustic but we just intended to stay in a cabin for a while, while we got things together to build a house but, as it turned out, Tharrin (?) was born in December and February we had a house fire. A friend stayed up there and got a big fire going and we came home, came around the hill and it was a full moon and saw our house going up in flames right under the full moon. It was really pretty interesting. So, we had to build another cabin to stay in while we were building a house.

Q: And this is when you had a 2 month old baby?

A: This is when we had a I guess he was 3 months at the time.

Q: Wow. Did you have a home birth.

A: Yeah. Well, we went to the Farm.

Q: Oh.

A: We wanted to have a home birth but the Farm midwives didn't go out of the Farm at the time and we didn't know any other midwives in the area. So, we went to the Farm 3 weeks before Tharrin was born and he was born on the Farm. It was just a wonderful experience. That was kind of at the peak of the Farm as far as population and it was a real one of it was probably not the roughest winter they had, I don't think, because I think I remember a couple after that, just right after that, were pretty rough but there was very little to eat, I remember. There was just soy beans but there were a lot of greens and as long as there are greens in the winter I can do fine. I had a lot of cabbage and greens. So, we had greens in various forms and soy beans in various forms and wheat in various forms and that was, pretty much, our diet, then, but we were a little more affluent, though minimally more here. We had more variety than they did since they were more strictly communal at the time than we were and we still had some of our college affluence, I guess, which really wasn't affluent but, compared to the Farm, it was.

Q: What was the home birth experience like on the Farm?

A: Oh, it was just spectacular. I had already had one child, actually, when I was 19 and I was 24 at the time Tharrin was born. So, it had been 6 years between them but, anyway, I guess I had just turned 25, yeah, right before he was born but we were there for 3 weeks before he was born and had been seeing the midwives for the whole pregnancy, pretty much, ever since we moved here and really enjoyed going

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

to the Farm and knew in fact, a couple of the families that had originally intended to be with our group here ended up moving to the Farm. So, we had friends there to visit and it was always a fun thing to go to the Farm and shop at the Farm because they had a nice place to shop and get heavier grain milled and the dairy and stuff. It was kind of just getting going but it was always fun to go. They had it a lot more together than we did and, when we went there, anyway, for the 3 weeks before Tharrin was born, we just, pretty much, just hung out and spent a lot of time with each other after we'd been working really hard here. So, it was really, you know, just a great retreat for the 3 weeks before he was born and we both worked a little bit on the Farm but it was, pretty much, just what we felt like doing. So, we didn't over work and we spent a lot of time together and we ended up having just a 4 hour labor.

Q: Wow.

A: That was just it was I would be there's only one point that I would say that I had pain and I really attribute it a lot, looking back on it, to just the whole energy at the time at the Farm was just incredible because you'd as you even approached the Farm, you'd just start feeling this whole vortex and this a whole several levels increase in the energy field around you and everything just seemed so much more intense and vibrant and, so, it seemed like an easy atmosphere to really tune in on a very high energy occasion of birth and just have a very best experience. I don't think I've had as you know, I certainly didn't really, I don't think, have quite as wonderful an experience with my deliveries since then but each one of mine were great. So, I have no complaints but that was especially nice. Tharrin was 9 lbs. 9 ozs. So.

Q: Big baby.

A: He wasn't little, you know, but it was the easiest delivery I had. I was just so relaxed and we really did as the book Spiritual Midwifery describes, having psychedelic vision at the time you're in labor. It definitely was like that. So, it was not painful. It was just amazing, the whole 4 hours and just, at one point, I remember as his head was crowning at the very end, right before his head totally emerged, I had a little stinging sensation. I said, ow, and Kara, the midwife said, "don't complain." It was like, God, I mean, I haven't said anything the whole time but, "Ah, Ah," you know. Don't complain.

Q: Did you get to choose your midwife?

A: Uh-uh.

Q: No. It was just who was around when you went into labor.

A: Yeah, and I'm not a real fussy person, anyway, basically. A lot of people didn't like a lot of women coming from outside of the Farm and, even on the Farm, didn't like not being able to choose the midwife but I was just very flower childy. I figured the best I would end up with whoever was the best person to be with me at the time and it turned out to be the 2 women that I'd spent the most time with. So.

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: Wow. That's great.

A: I mean, we were really fortunate, at the time, too, because most of the people that came from off the Farm had to stay with other families in just the most incredibly close quarters and just very depressing environments, I would say, looking at it now but, at the time, it wouldn't have mattered to me much but we ended up having a little, it was called the D-frame chalet, off to ourselves and it was probably one of the best the nicest buildings on the Farm and it was just every time we'd tell someone where we were staying, they'd say, "Well, how did you get to stay there? You're not supposed to be able to do that," and I'd say, well, we didn't ask for it. We just said give us what you have and they gave it to us. So, we really we had it was just a beautiful, warm place. It had big windows facing south. So, we got to lay in the sun with the baby for a week and a half, you know, after he was born. It was just really wonderful.

Q: That's great.

A: Quite a nice experience.

Q: Was it a bonding experience for you and Steve?

A: Yeah. Yeah, we seeing as how we got together while he was still married and got pregnant while he was still married to his first wife and we did end up getting a divorce just shortly before Tharrin was born, actually. It was like it was he really didn't have a chance we didn't have a chance to bond as a couple as much because we were living with his wife, you know, most of the time, either here or going up helping taking care of her and the kids and really didn't get to spend a lot of time with each other. So, yeah, it was really a bonding experience for us to spend that 3 weeks together before we had a baby and, then, immediately afterwards. [unintelligible] didn't really have time to bond as a family, I don't think, probably, until we left this community 3 years later but we didn't realize it until we moved to Nashville, after we'd been here for 3 years that we never really got to experience being as a couple, especially when we were first here in the early months and years. We just did everything together and, since we had just a couple vehicles with several families and several of us had new babies all at the same time and having to park our vehicles at the top of the hill, way out on the road, practically. See, we'd have to carry our babies and our laundry, us moms, up the hill and through the mud to get to the trucks even just to go in to do laundry and we didn't have any running water. So, we'd have to walk down to the creek to get water. I thought it was great because that's what I wanted to do. Not many of the other couples did, though, and that was really a challenge for everybody else and, I think, was one of the factors for a number of families that made it very difficult to consider staying but that's exactly what Steve and I wanted to do. We wanted to be pioneers and we had a great experience of it. We were good pioneers. We just didn't get the experience of being a good ...

Q: ... Xeroxing in your community center? Harvey said there were some documents there that might be interesting to have. So, I might not get going very early, unfortunately. So, why did you move to Nashville?

A: Well, the precipitating event was Steve getting in a head-on collision and totaling his truck and a TR-7 that we had to pay for with no insurance. Luckily, no one was injured at all, which was a total miracle. We've just always been extremely blessed with good luck and that was just one example but I had really

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

been wanting I always thought I wanted to have a family. That was one reason why I kind of dropped out of school because I couldn't figure out an occupation where I could work and be a mom, too that I thought I could do that I would like to do. So, I decided, well, I'll just be a mom, then. So, I looked for some, you know, likely person here and start a family, at some point and, so, that's what I was that was my be-a-mom era there for 3 years and I think I enjoyed it for about 6 months of that and really just wanted to go on with my career the 2 1/2 years after that, you know. I really enjoyed the first I really enjoyed my first pregnancy, or my pregnancy with Tharrin and having the baby and the first few months but, then, I started wanting to do something else and, I guess, Tharrin was actually a year and a couple months old I guess 14 months old before I started working as a midwife with a local physician or started training to become a midwife with a local physician and started which was kind of a dream before I even got married and had a family. So, that was really fulfilling and, yet, I wanted to you know, I was a lay midwife and with no credentials and no back-up. It was always a struggle finding physicians. I really wanted to work. I wanted to go on with some kind of training and get some kind of credentials to do some of the things I wanted to do and I'd tried to do independent study and it just, you know, I'm just the type of person that needs to be in a school situation to really get things done. I just didn't do as well working independently. So, I was really ready to leave and Steve getting in an accident was just the precipitating event that I could encourage Steve to let's move somewhere else and go to school for a while and, then, we can come back later. He really didn't want to leave, then, and, then, 12 years later, it was like pulling his teeth to get him to come back. We went round and round I had a whole reversal of attitudes over the 12 years we were gone but that was kind of the precipitating event was his accident and just being really broke and not seeing how we could build a house unless we could somehow have little better jobs or make a little more money, unless we wanted to take the rest of our lives to build a small house and, I guess not that we had any grand scheme for having a large house. This was even larger than we originally intended. We added on a lot but the original house plan was this basic size but just a little bit smaller. So, we made it a little bit bigger once we had better jobs and expanded out from it. We were ready to leave, I think, when we left well, we had to pay buy a new car for this other guy that Steve totaled and buy a car for ourselves because ours was totaled. So. It just entailed getting better jobs and that's been a problem here for everyone is finding employment that we can live in a rural area, of course. We just have a lot of community sense of pride.

Q: So, you left in '80? Is that about right?

A: No.

Q: No. It was earlier than that?

A: We left in '76.

Q: Oh, '76. So, you'd been here about ...

A: In '77. I guess it was '77.

Q: You'd been here about 3 years?

A: Three years.

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: And, then, what did you do in Nashville?

A: Then, I worked in a natural foods restaurant there and 60 hours a week and went to school part-time to finish my Bachelor's degree, thinking I'd just, at least, get that done, not knowing what I was going to do and I kept midwifing on the side and meeting with midwives in the area other direct entry midwives and a nurse midwife friend of mine and decided that we all kept saying we can't find any physicians to back us up and I said, by God, I am going to go back to school because that's what I've always wanted to do is to go to medical school and I don't know how or where but, you know, but I'm just going to go toward that. So, in Nashville, there's a predominantly black medical school that was just my style because I'd just never been the real intense collegiate type. I never was willing to put in the effort to get straight A's to be able to get into higher powered medical schools. I just figured B+ with an average amount of effort is the most I'm going to do and, so, I, you know, didn't have the grade point average to really get in a lot of the schools that were available but [unintelligible] was right there in Nashville and it was just the perfect place for me to go to. Alternative ...

Q: What's it called?

A: Maharry(?).

Q: Maharry.

A: But it's a predominantly it's remained black or the first black medical school in the United States predominantly black medical school and, it's of course, there you have a quota of white students and I was real glad to help fill that quota. So, I applied and got into school shortly after I finished my Bachelor's degree and went through 4 years of medical school and 5 years of residency at the same institution while Steve started a construction company with another guy from here who ended up moving up to Nashville with his wife and, then, they split apart and did 2 different companies and Steve worked feverishly at construction and I worked feverishly at medical school and we all kind of climaxed after 12 years and figured I figured we were ready to move back here because I wanted to work in a rural area and Steve, reluctantly, came along. But it's funny, when we first moved up to Nashville, he said, "We have got to go back to the farm every weekend." I said, we'll see. We never we went if we came back one weekend a month, it was doing good but we came back and we kept we actually started this house in the summer of '80, right before I started medical school, and stashed enough money from construction projects that we could frame up the house and put the outside siding on and roof and, then, over the years, we gradually finished the inside of it. So, it's been a 15 year project and still going strong not going strong still going. We certainly don't put much effort into working on it right now but we've got a lot of other things we're doing. So.

Q: What was your residency in?

A: Family and preventative medicine but I [unintelligible] residency. It's the only family medicine program in Nashville. So, I mean, the whole thing was just ideal, you know, that there was a school there that I could get into didn't have to move anywhere to do it and that had a residency program that was just exactly what the kind of thing that I wanted to do that I didn't have to move to do that. I should have certainly gone elsewhere for my residency by all standards but Steve wasn't about to move and I

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

wasn't about to move away from the family and go to residency somewhere else. So, we just happily stayed put and we were really fortunate to have 3 months after we moved up to Nashville, we one of the folks at the restaurant that I was working in it was called "Laughing Man" decided they couldn't keep this house that they were renting. It was an old mansion on 8 acres of land. So, we rented that for 10 years in Nashville and remodeled it. It was like \$110 a month for this incredible it was right on the outskirts of right on the edge of Nashville. We had a jogging path in the back and a sweat and a teepee and it was just a beautiful, big, old house. So, we had the best of almost country living there in Nashville, which is a beautiful city, all things considered, I think, to have so many there's just a lot of trees, a lot of parks, a lot of good yards, a lot of spaciousness, even, in the city. [unintelligible] a great big city to live in. I was pretty frightened about it, at first. We were talking about that last night, though. Some of the folks from the Farm, when they moved up there, thought, "Oh, God, the big city. It's going to be the death of us within a matter of months," but Nashville's a great big city to live in.

Q: So, why did you come back here?

A: It's just I've always wanted to live in the country and to raise the kids in the country. You know, 12 years of living of raising them in the city but, I mean, I [unintelligible] family to raise here, I guess. It was just my mother had always said she grew up on a farm and I always I grew up in a city and she'd always said, you know, her idea was to move back to the country and she never made it and, I guess, I just kind of picked up that vision kind of from her and Steve and his family always kind of lived in a rural setting on the outskirts of small towns. So, he wanted to live in a rural setting, too, and certainly didn't want to live in a big city. I just lived in Nashville, you know, during the period of time that I was in medical school and residency, basically, and, for that purpose alone was the main reason why I was there and we'd always intended, since we had this land and this house, you know. We started in fact, that was one reason Steve wanted to build start the house in 1980 before I started medical school because he said, at least, if we have that, then we'll have to move back here. You know, he's afraid that we'd get so caught up in my projects there that we'd never move back. So, that was kind of his reason to get the house going and I thought it was a great idea but, I guess, too, that all the people that we were involved with in the Earth Works that eventually came down here and that we worked with even during the 3 years we lived there and we kept coming back was like our family, you know. It was in some ways, I was closer to people here than I was with my own family and, really, over the years, just recently the last few years, I've gotten closer with my brothers and sisters, too, but, these friends, we're closer more than a lot of than certainly my brothers and sisters and I were for many years. So, we've just kept in touch like we were family and felt like this was the place we were going to live and we never really seriously thought of living anywhere else and knew we didn't want to keep living in Nashville. So, we just always assumed we'd move back here and kind of had our different agendas. Like I said, Steve didn't think he was quite ready to move down when I felt like I was but that just was always my plan, go to medical school and residency, wherever that would be and, then, I was going to move back here and, before we had left, we had all talked about having, you know, what kind of project or home industry we could have here that we could all take part in that would be kind of a big thing like having a health spa like we have down the road from us here, now, because I always wanted to be involved in, you know, either be a naturopath or a chiropractor or something at the time and I was going to be one of the practitioners and the other

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

people were going to do other things and Debbie was going to be an herbalist and we were all going to work together to and Steve and the other guys were going to build little cabins. We were going to have a retreat setting here and we'd all do different things and it would be, you know, a way we could all make money. So, we'd always kind of thought along those lines and it seems like that dream is a little bit distant, now, because we're pretty divergent and I'm the only one whose really come back with that type of view but I'm enjoying it. I've always wanted to be I've always thought that I wanted to be a rural family doctor. So, I'm just living up to some kind of pre-programmed vision of myself and childhood, really, I feel like, and it just kind of meshed with the community goals and my ideal to have the kids grow up in a country. I was the oldest of 10 children, too, and I've always been in big groups and, you know, in family, primarily, for the first 18 years of my life but, so, it felt real comfortable to me to get involved in communal households even before I got involved with the Earth Works. I was always living in households with 3 or more other people, anyway, and this just seemed like an exciting extension that, you know, to live with a larger group and have larger goals and bigger plans, you know, and, so, it's always been a real comfortable, enjoyable atmosphere to be in a community and more than comfortable and enjoyable just totally purposeful, I guess, to me just a whole, wholesome experience all the way around.

Q: Have you been able to support midwives in your work?

A: Well, I have a midwife that I'm working with that we just hired at the hospital. She's a nurse midwife. I haven't really supported direct entry midwives at all, no. In fact, when we moved back, Micah was born here just a few months after we moved back, 5 1/2 years ago.

Q: Did you have another home birth?

A: Yeah, and Ina May and ...

Q: Pamela?

A: ... Pamela came here for the delivery.

Q: Wow.

A: So, it was kind of like ...

Q: That's wonderful.

A: ... an about face because I just remember begging them when I was pregnant with Tharrin, won't you come to our house. I really want a home delivery and they said that "We just don't do that. I'm sorry. You'll have to come here and that's all there is to it." I remember begging them to let me train to be a midwife with them and they said, "You'll have to come and live here," and I said but I can't, you know, I have my community. I can come, you know, for births and come for clinic day but they wouldn't let me do that. They said, "We just don't do that kind of thing."

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: So, you made plans with the Farm for them to come be your midwives for Micah's ...?

A: Yeah. We moved back when I was several months pregnant. We'd been in Jamaica after I finished residency. We'd moved there and were going to live there for a couple years before we moved back here and ended up getting pregnant. So, we decided to move back here sooner but I was about 5 months pregnant when we started going to the Farm and they just said right away, "Sure, we'll come to the house for the delivery." So, I was thrilled. At any rate, after he was born, one of the physicians in town because I had been talking to the physicians about in the community about setting up a practice here before we even moved back before I finished residency and, then, when I got pregnant, I really am going to keep working in Nashville so I can just work a couple of days a week and be home with the baby for a couple of years, at least. It ended up being 5 years but they the physician, in fact, that I'm working with and I still haven't talked to him about it. I've been working with him for 15 months now and I haven't brought this up but he called the Health Department after Micah was born at home and they knew that I was going to have a home delivery and said, "You know, we have this physician in our community who's going to start doing home deliveries and we really feel like she's a threat." This is the physician I'm working with now.

Q: Wow.

A: So, I kind of infiltrated in a clinic that I'd never thought I'd work at but always felt like it was someone he was someone I wanted to have on my side because he's like the main political figure in the medical community in Waynesboro and he just he talked to the wrong person at the Health Department. He talked to the Medical Director at the Health Department who was an ex-Maharrian or who was a Maharry graduate along with me and I knew him real well and he called me up the same day and said: "What is this I hear about you going to be doing home deliveries?" And I said it's all bull scare, you know. It's not really going to happen and, in fact, you know, I admitted that I was I had done a couple home deliveries with friends of mine, you know, but I wasn't going to start a home birth practice. I really wanted to do something a little more mainstream to, you know, to reach out because I know people in this community don't do home deliveries, you know, but alternative families do some of us, not everybody and I would help them with a home delivery. In fact, I did. In the last 5 years, I've helped several families or a few. I just, you know, that's for my friends and friends of friends and that isn't what I came here to do and I don't need to do it, actually, because, actually, the Farm midwives have such a broad area of outreach now. I feel really thankful that they're where they are and they're willing to come to people's homes because they can do home deliveries. Even in this area, they're willing to come out to people's homes. So, I don't have to feel like I'm turning my back to the home birth industry or home birth movement by not doing that right now. But it's just, politically, I couldn't do what I'm I couldn't be part of the medical community if I did something like that. I would be ostracized and I'd have to do something away from them and I'm just not I tend to want to be more cohesive than that. I'd rather, you know, join forces and gradually incorporate some of you know, since there's not if there was a large group of us willing to do something alternative right now, I could see doing that, you know. If we had Debbie, the herbalist, and different ones of us here now and we set up an alternative, functioning system of some sort, then I could do that. I could set up a clinic and we could have a couple midwives and we could go out and do home deliveries but we don't have that. So, if I'm going to make a living,

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

then what I need to do is to be part of the medical community here and I like that concept, too. I just I feel like if we're going to live in Waynesboro, we ought to be able to co-exist with Waynesboro community and not be at odds with folks as much as possible. So. And I'm still looking for ways to introduce alternatives. Being totally submerged in mainstream, right now, and have been, since I've been in medical school [unintelligible], I've gone from using a lot of alternative, almost entirely alternative therapies before I started medical school, to not knowing how to use very many alternatives at all. So, I really would like to work with other practitioners eventually, but I trust, anyway, that it will happen some how and some time along the line here. So, we'll see.

Q: How is life different at Dunmire Hollow compared to when you first came?

A: When we moved back, you mean?

Q: Yeah. You were gone 12 years and, so, I imagine things have changed quite a bit while you were gone.

A: Yeah. Well, one of the biggest changes was, I think, just more definition, I guess, to the community, more definition to what it would take to be part of the community and more even though we've always had I would say it was just getting things down on paper and getting things down more up front. We always kind of knew what we thought was how we wanted to do things but just, among ourselves, when other people came in from outside of community and joined us, they could never quite figure out what we expected of them and we weren't always able to cohesively describe to them what was expected and, so, it was really difficult incorporating new people. In fact, it was impossible, basically. Everyone ended up leaving at some point and time. So, when we moved back, there was a couple, a family who were just kind of at odds in the community, and we kind of highlighted that more when we moved back. We really we supported them, our neighbors they lived right down the hill where Tazio and Anna now live and, yet, we demanded more of them, too, at the same time because we had just gotten our community bylaws and social agreement kind of down pat. We started saying, you know, this is what we say we're going to do. So, we need to do this and Steve and I just tend to be more confronting types than other people in the community were and Steve's sister, who has recently passed away, was like that, too. So, she was the main person that was confronting this one family before we were back and, when we moved back here, we kind of all got together and, unfortunately, were not able to help this couple and this family work it out to be part of the community and worked, instead, to encourage them to move on and that really took up a lot of focus as far as the community when we first moved back, working with this one family and enacting our written bylaws, which was something we hadn't done before that family. So, we moved in kind of at a critical time and was pretty different than what it had been because it was really just pretty much a free love, very open, did everything together community when we left and we came back and things had really changed a lot but we had been in contact with the community regularly over the years. So, we weren't alien to any of what went on. In fact, we were integrally involved with the whole community process over the years so that, you know, we were very well aware of what was going on and were part of the changes and the increased definitions. So, it really it felt good to me. It was not Steve had a very rough time and it'd be interesting to hear what he would have to say about it, coming back, but I just felt like, God, this is something I've been planning for years. I

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

can't believe it took me 12 years to get back here. It was just like an incredible eye opener to be back and our house was not finished. So, that was it was a struggle to get and I was working in Nashville 3 days a week and I just had a new baby and ...

Q: Wow.

A: ... it was amazing.

Q: And Adanta (?) was pretty young, too, right?

A: She was 7 years old when we moved back.

Q: Okay. So, you had your hands full.

A: Yeah. Four kids here and Tazio, Sr., in high school getting ready to go off to college and we boy, we had our run-ins that were just really intense that year but it was just that there were so many things going on, you know. He has a lot of resentments that he's been gradually, I hope, resolving. As I keep trying to tell him, you know, it wasn't that I hated you or just thought everything you were doing was so terrible. It was just that there was so much going on and I was extremely stressed and I didn't have a lot of patience for your changes at the time. So, but we had our run-ins, at first, but it was good being back and it was extremely challenging but life here always had been and I would have to say, now, it's challenging but it just feels so, you know, fulfilling in a lot of ways like dreams come true for us, you know.

Q: Wow.

A: Especially now Steve's finally getting back to work. He stayed home with the kids a lot while I went off to work and he thought that was something he wanted to do and, then, he could finally take a break and go fishing more and he did and it was kind of like me wanting to be a housewife. I was a housewife and, gee, it wasn't as rewarding as I thought it was going to be and, so, he finally, 5 years later, after being here, has realized he really wants to keep up his construction and, you know, and go fishing some but just going out fishing everyday just didn't quite cut it. So, part of his fulfillment has involved getting back to work in construction more and may involve other things, too, I think. I'd always dreamed we'd always talked about him being kind of the manager of this joint health effort, if whatever sort he may end up evolving. I hesitate even defining it because I don't think there's any way to define it. I don't really want to define it until we have a group that's here and, then, together we'll define something just like the birth center. In fact, one reason why we moved back here why I moved back to kind of work in this area again, after working in Nashville for 5 years was because the state was offering a \$100,000 grant as well as the potential for \$2-300,000 more to start a birth center with a midwife and it took us my first, almost 9 months, I guess, before we got a midwife. So, everybody kept saying, "Well, why aren't we going to do something to get the birth center started." And I said when we get a midwife, we'll be able to talk about getting a birth center started and it's the same type of thing here. Until we get people that are willing to do some kind of joint venture, we can't really talk about what kind of venture it's going to be and, who knows. We'll see.

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: As a final question, a lot of the back to the land communities from the late '60s to early '70s didn't last. Why do you think Dunmire Hollow has? What's the glue that keeps it together?

A: It's just the people that are here, you know, like Harvey and David and plugging away while so many of the rest of us were off, you know, carousing around and just people sticking with it, sticking with the dream and I know it wasn't easy for David. He, I think, once we came back, he finally he'd been threatening to leave so many times but he just didn't I don't think it seemed like he didn't have anything better to do but he really didn't want to just be here being a hermit off by himself, exactly, although he does like being a hermit. But, once we were here, at least someone else was holding down the fort that he felt like he could go off and, so, he's left. I don't know if Harvey or Barbara will ever leave but Barbara talks about it but, you know, Harvey's really one of the fortresses of the community and, certainly, is a big influence in carrying on but I feel like we have been, too. I certainly feel like everything I've done since I was in the Earth Works community has been towards this end and it's just been a gradual progression and it's just exactly what I've wanted to do and I think it's the same, pretty much, for Steve and we'll still evolve and change and do other things I'm sure, too, but I'm really doing exactly what I want to do and I like being with groups of people. I like, at least, having some amount of idealism in what I'm doing. So, I'm not just doing a mainstream thing and, yet, I like being somewhat involved with the mainstream. So, I'm integrating, you know, things. That appeals to me and Steve's really a pioneering, integrative type, too, I would say. So, we've always been a good couple to do pioneering efforts and to work with mainstream. He does really well going out in Nashville and drumming up business and working things out with customers and he's always when we first moved here, he was like Steve was like the person that everybody knew from the Hollow because he got out in community and talked to people with his long hair and beard and mustache and wire-rimmed glasses and, even though he was an obvious hippie, everyone really liked him and they everybody still remembers him when he moved back and he's been getting loads of jobs here. He just recently said he was going to start working back in Waynesboro. He, finally, decided that he could live with that. He was done hiding out and going fishing and he's done all kinds of jobs in Waynesboro. So.

Q: Great.

A: He's stuck with his dream and he's always wanted to do this, since we've been together, anyway. I don't know. He was the third of 11 children. So, he's always been in a large family but his experience was different than mine. He was always trying to escape the large family. He has a certain amount of dissonance with community goals and projects. He's always the one that's bush hogging other people's plantings down because he doesn't bother to let anybody know that he's going to bush hog that day and ask them where they planted things. He doesn't care because he figures he should just be able to do whatever he wants to do, you know, but he's got some dissonance with community life and, at the same time, he's got some of the same goals and interests. [unintelligible] he's like a composting commode but, now, he takes everyone into the bathroom and talks it up. So, you know, he likes to do idealistic things, too, and I think has some of the same fulfillment in the community because of that. We're not just doing the same as everybody else. We're doing something different with some more idealistic goals than just co-existing in community. I mean, in society. Anyway. I'm happy to be here. That's all.

Interview with Nancy Armeta

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

October 19, 1995

Q: Great.

A: It really is a dream come true, you know.

Q: Wow.

A: Other than improving on our house and another dream is having our kids live here and we have one son that's committed to staying here. Tazio and Anna are going to go off to school [unintelligible]. I'd love to see them come back and Anna's talking about going into nursing and, then, a nurse practitioner training and I said, well, it'd be great to have you come back [unintelligible].

Q: Fit her into your plans.

A: Yeah. It would be neat to work, you know, with family members and Steve's sister, Linda was, before she died, was talking about working on projects with us and we'd always been we had started off as midwives together and we'd always planned to work together and, so, I guess, unfortunate that she had other goals in her life, unbeknownst to her but [unintelligible] here we are. I guess that's about the most I can say about it, now.

Q: Thank you.