

Interview with Tom Averill

Interviewer: Unknown

n.d.

Q: Alright. So what community did you live in?

A: Well, like I told you over the phone, we had no real name. Basically, in 1971, after I graduated from KU with my English degree, I wanted to just get out of town. I wanted to live in the country, I thought; and so, I knew other people who lived in the country, and we scouted around and found a really old farm house. In 1970, it was already a 120 years old. It had been built in the 1850's by this doctor, who was not a carpenter. So it was real leaky and airy, and there was no running water, and there was no heat, but there was electricity. And, so, a guy that I was living with at the time, who sort of wandered into the English Department one day saying, "I'm a conscientious objector; I'm looking for work out in the Mid-west. You know any place I could crash for awhile?" And I just happened to be there and I said, "Hey, come over to my place." And, so, we talked and he seemed like a nice guy. So, when he decided that he was going to come out and do conscientious objection work, in a hospital in Topeka, he thought it would be great to live – I told him I was trying to find a place in the country and so he and I started out living in this place. And then a graduate student, who was a woman, found out that we were going to live out there and she wanted to do that. So, the three of us moved out to this old, old farmhouse, and just started living out there. Paid about a hundred bucks a month for the place. It was at the time when... You know Lawrence pretty well, I assume. We lived right on the south ridge about where the Clinton Dam is right now. And so, everything from the barn north on our place was condemned land. And everything down in the Wakaroose Valley, because they were still building the dam, was condemned. We had, we made real good friends with some communal people, who were living, I forget what the name of the... they called, they named their farm, ya' know. And that included Roger Martin, whose probably been interviewed for this project; and Burt Buckland. Has Burt Buckland been interviewed? 'Cause he and his wife, Sally, live about two blocks, on fifteenth street here. I'll give you their names when we're finished because they'd be great to talk to because they lived out on that.

Q: The Clinton Farm, is that what they called it?

A: Yeah, the Clinton Farm. Yeah. You know about the Clinton Farm (laughing)?

Q: Yeah, I do.

A: But... And they had built a sauna and we built a sauna and the way we got to know so many people, I think, is because of that sauna. We started having Sunday night sauna's and everybody who knew anybody else would say, "Ah, come on out, we'll go sauna at this place." Have you read that book *The Cows Are Freaky When They Look At You?* A kind of oral history of that time.

Q: Yeah, I read it.

A: Yeah, well, there's one episode in there, somebody – they changed a lot of the names, and all that, but one episode in there about killing chickens on Foxes farm, and my middle name is Fox. So it was sort of, that's not what we called it back then, but that was the code name in that book. Anyway, we used to have, our sauna would hold eight people and we'd have as many as three or four shifts, people taken turns in it on Sunday evening. People would come and they'd bring beer. We had one guy who was just a complete alcoholic, never went anywhere without at least a case of beer, ya' know, so he'd always show up with a case of beer and start drinking. And, people'd bring tea, or homemade bread, cookies, just food, ya' know; and occasionally people would bring, well, marijuana, of course, was pretty

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prevalent at that time. We didn't really like, in our house, for people to do anything stronger than marijuana because people were, there were a lot of people and it was a small house, it was kind of hard to deal with people when they were on the edge of some things, ya' know. And, uh, usually we had a really pleasant time. A lot of people played music and we'd, people would show up about six-thirty on a Sunday night, get out the guitars, and we'd all sit around and start singing and light up the wood stove in the sauna and people would go in there. We built a... from the well, we'd have to carry in a bucket of, a big buckets of water into the sunken vat that we had out there. So, at fifty-five degree water, it was really cold. We'd do that in shifts and then people would just sort of, as they finished their saunas, they could dress and come on inside and so, ya' know, "Someone else go on in." Or, go on out; and this would last until ten or ten-thirty, usually not real late, it wasn't a... I was never a real hard party-er type, ya' know? I really enjoyed the relaxation of the sauna and, uh, at that time, I wasn't drinking very much, I was smoking a little bit of marijuana, mostly on the weekends. It wasn't a real crazy kind of atmosphere at our place. I know other place that were, like real, ya' know, sort of had reputations for people being, like, really wasted all the time or tripping on acid together or doing harder drugs or doing mushrooms or, ya' know, things like that. I was kind a conservative guy, which, for the time, ya' know. Now, people look at this and say, "You did all that stuff? That doesn't sound conservative." But in a way I was fairly conservative; you see, part of my impulse and I think in a lot of communes, there was, they were like these country communes and there were communes in town. I think they had a, my theory is that they were slightly different in what they were trying to do. I know those of us who ended up living out on the farm where I lived were really interested in gardening, raising animals, learning about what life, at a fairly subsistence level, was really like. It was more like, ah, just wanting to live differently from our middle class parents. Really. Most of the people that were in communes that I knew were pretty middle class kids. Ya' know, just tired of the suburbs. And when I was out there, I raised hundreds of chickens in the three years that I was out there. I raised two pigs; I owned a horse and rode a lot, taught myself who to ride a horse and rode a lot. I milked goats for awhile and drank goat's milk, ya' know. We went down into the condemned land and cut down oak trees and walnut trees and cut up all our own fire wood. We spent a lot of time just keeping ourselves going. We had a huge garden; I really learned how to garden, I'd always had a little garden but, ya' know, just... We'd have, like, this size office just, this would just be the green beans. I mean, we'd have enough green beans to last...(starts laughing)...for a couple of years, ya' know. And we just grew, we tried to grow as much food as we possibly could and can it all and freeze it all and bury it all, so that we didn't have to shop very much. We were vegetarians, for the most part, except for those pigs; but, ya' know, we were kind of experimenting with subsistence life-style. See, I was going to school the whole time; I had a, I ended up with a graduate teaching thing, so that, I was a graduate teaching assistant so I would teach two classes and I would take two classes every semester. So, during the three years I was out in the country, I was also going into the university three or four days a week. And showering down there, at their facilities and playing hand-ball, which I liked to do at the time, and ya' know, sort of living this double existence. But that's how I got where I was and I knew a lot of people who were doing a similar kind of thing. Not so much a social experiment as a, just trying to get a rural experience, a subsistence kind of experience.

Q: There was just three of you then living...?

A: Yeah. See, it was only, I think, later we had...later we had another person move in with us. There

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were only three bedrooms, basically. Really there were only two bedrooms; one was sort of an attic room that was very cold. You'd go up there to sleep and that was about all. And one was a little room off the kitchen, and then one was a porch, had no insulation at all. I slept out there under an electric blanket. You'd wake up in the morning and the water in the bowl where we washed our faces would be frozen, and it was like...(starts laughing). Was not always good for my lungs, but that was part of it. I had an electric blanket, so I was always warm enough. But, yeah, there was just the three of us at the time. I think the Clinton Farm had as many as seven or eight at any time. And there was another farm down the road from us that had at least five or six people.

Q: To what extent were the expenses shared? All of the expenses like the rent and such?

A: We shared, we pretty much shared everything. The, like, one time we had four people living in there and one of them left, and another person moved in. People knew about us because they visited us a lot. But always, when somebody, ya' know, we'd split the rent down the middle. We would kind of decide, ... each person maintained their own vehicle. We would decide what we wanted to eat and who would fix it and then we'd go grocery shopping, sometimes separately, sometimes together, but everybody split the grocery's right down the middle. Then, we didn't, like, try to keep three different departments in the refrigerator. I know people who've tried some of those things, like, "Don't you mess with my bean sprouts!" We basically shared similar appetites, none of us was particular, like ate a lot more than anybody else. I don't really remember a lot of conflicts about that. Then the other thing that we had to decide was who did what domestic chores. We would sort of split that up too, and every couple weeks or so, we'd sit down and if somebody...if I'd spent, if I worked five hours on a Saturday just chopping wood so that we'd be warm – had two different wood burning stoves in the house, kept us pretty darn warm, really, it was a nice kind of a heat to have. But if I'd spent that much time, I'd say, "I'm not doing dishes this week." Ya' know, this is ridiculous. We each did our own laundry, so that was,... Those kind of personal things you took care of, but anything that was sort of communal,... and, ah, but if somebody brought something in, like I decided I want some chicken, so I ordered through a mail-order catalog, ya' know, about fifty chickens and they all came, these little, "peep peep peep" things, just hatched, they ship them right when their hatched. So, I had to agree that those were my chickens and nobody else would have to mess with those chickens. So, if somebody brought something in like that, if you plant the garden, then it's your responsibility to take care of the garden. You can't just all of a sudden say, "Well, we did this together." See? Every once in a while there would be a little conflict about, ya' know, how much work am I doing, cause people had deadlines and school work. You know how it is; you get frustrated and you think, "Well, geez, I'm working awful hard here, what are you doing?" But we were lucky I think, because we didn't have any real big blow-ups. We also didn't have,... there was one woman living with two guys, but there wasn't any sexual tension there because, basically, we were all sort of attached to other people. We talked about that before; when this woman said, "I'd like to move in," we just sort of said, "Hey, we want this to be...", well, not a deal where people are sleeping with each other, just to make it easy. I know some communes where that became a really hot issue. We were kind of lucky that way. One time a guy, for about six months, a guy moved in and started having sex with the woman who was in the house, but it was sort of understood when he came in there that that might happen. She was leaving pretty soon anyway. It didn't cause much of a stir, one way or another. But basically, I'd say things got split pretty well, people were pretty generous with their time; like when

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those chickens would get ready to eat, ya' know, everybody would help each other figure out how to kill a chicken, how to get the feathers off, how to gut it, ya' know, how to preserve it. All those kind of things. There were some things that we all worked on together. We'd say, alright, okay, we're going to weed the garden today or we're going to pick beans today or we're going to pull out vegetables today or we're going to..., ya' know. So it worked okay.

Q: Um, what kind of books and literature were you reading at the time? As like an influence?

A: Well, I was probably reading, most of the stuff, that I had to read for graduate school. Like I said, one of the other people was a graduate student in English, so she had a lot of required reading to do. That's mostly the sort of classic stuff, ya' know. The other guy that was with us was a poet who'd already had a small chapbook of poems published. He was probably the most eclectic reader of us, reading a lot of different things. He was sort of the most into reading about the kind of experience we were having. He was much more aware of the traditions, of, like, Beat poetry, moving into some of the Beat writers like Kerouac, and Ginsberg, and Gary Snyder, who's a California environmental poet who was going back to the land himself, at that time. He even came out and visited our farm once when he was in Lawrence because of the connections this poet friend of mine had with other poets around the country. Paul, Paul Kahn, is his name; he's now in a,... runs a graphic design company in Providence, Rhode Island. He used to work at Harvard(?) then at Brown, doing computer system stuff. Still writing some poetry. But, Paul was the most connected put in terms of reading Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and some of the other environmental poets of the time. We were probably...and I read a lot of that stuff too, ya' know. Everybody had to read Walden, in those days, by Thoreau. It was sort of the standard text book for those who would get away from so called civilization. And, so, we were aware of all those traditions, in part because of our schooling – we were required to read that in graduate school. And then some of the contemporary people, like Gary Snyder, we were introduced to at the same time.

Q: Why do you think so many people flock to community?

A: I think it was a rejection of the nuclear family, kind of fifties suburban, um... I think that after World War II, well, most of those people were what we call Baby Boomers now, and after World War II, with the creation of the suburbs and really the creation of the corporate mentality in the United States. The corporate mentality being that corporation was the most important thing and you could be moved, since it was a national corporation and not just a local thing, you could be moved anywhere at anytime and it didn't matter. I think, for a lot of us at that time, it did matter. Lots of people that I knew had just moved and moved and moved, and they were wanting something. Whether it was to get attached to a place or whether it was to kind of have a family, with similar values. That wasn't going after money, the two cars in the garage, and the materialism that... And see, the Viet Nam War, at the time, was seen as a corporate war. The people who are making money off of that war and who wanted that war were the corporations. We sort of figured that out pretty early on, that the only people who were getting anything out of this were the people who had business interests in Viet Nam and in South-east Asia, and the Defense Companies who were making a hell of a lot of money to supply that war. Just like a lot of those people who would of been in those communes would of been against the Viet Nam war, I think they were also in those communes as sort of a rejection of the very culture that thrived on that war, that were making money off of that war. Like, let's just drop out of this. But it, ...ya' know, that old

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saying about tune in drop out, I forget how it goes now, but...I always think of it more positive than to be a drop out, to be a dud, someone who couldn't make it, or what ever. We were trying to make something different, in a way, or experiment with something different, and I think the irony is that we ended up living a lot more like our grandparents and great-grandparents. At least for a while.

Q: Did you have any type of predisposition, do you think, towards community? Did your parents? Were they involved in any types of communities?

A: My parents are very sociable and although they were never involved in a commune, as such, they... well, my father was in the military and that's a communal system, in some ways. It's a very hierarchical communal system, but... he was in World War II and, ya' know,... or just lived with a bunch of guys on a boat, that was his, his thing... and I think he really enjoyed that in many ways. My parents were very young and very poor when they got married, then my father went to medical school. They got together with other med students and then residents, ya' know, all the time. I don't see very many pictures of them when their out with other people, from those early days. They do everything together because it's cheaper, ya' know, to do everything together. I don't know if that predisposed me but I was used to being around a lot of people. I have never lived by myself. I have three brothers and a sister. When I went to college, I had a room-mate. When I chose to move out of the dorm in my sophomore year, I moved to a little house in town with three other guys. Then moved out to the farm. Then I got married. I just... I've never wanted to. So, yeah, that may have predisposed me towards... coming from, not a huge family, but, ya' know, four of us siblings. And then whenever we'd, in my family, whenever there's, ah, ya' know, fourth of July, or Christmas, or Thanksgiving, or, ya' know, there's always a huge crowd somewhere. So, I'm used to that, yeah. Some people were probably predisposed to live communally because they were used to that and wanted to continue it. Some of them wanted it that had never had it. Every one of use wanted a pseudo-family that would understand us and to live with them.

Q: So any type of religious interests or ...

A: I would say, not in ours, no. We almost never discussed religion. I was raised in a liberal Christian congregational church. Paul Kahn, who lived with me, the poet, was Jewish, came out of a Jewish tradition; and Mary Halarine(?), who lived there, the three of us, I couldn't even tell you what her, sort of what church she'd been raised in. We didn't have much discussion of spiritual things, we talked politics a lot, and we were all interested in literature and language and poetry and... I'd say we had our best discussions about cultural things rather than religious or spiritual things.

Q: Is there...were all the decisions made consensus decisions?

A: Anything important, yeah. Yeah, we would have occasional times that we would say, "We need to talk." and sometimes it was a simple as we need to make a menu for next week, or we need to get our calendars straight about who's going to be around 'cause I'm leaving and somebody needs to feed the chickens. So sometimes it would be real simple like that and then, sometimes it would be something bigger, like somebody wanted somebody else to move in, or some thing like that. Yeah, then we would just hammer it out and talk about it together and come up with a sort of majority rules type thing.

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Q: Were there any hassles over zoning or sanitation or anything like that?

A: No,... In a way, our place was so primitive, ya' know, that like on sanitation or ... Our place was so small that we had to keep it clean, and each of us were associated with, like Mary and I with the University and Paul with the hospital, like, that we did a lot of our bathing and things like that elsewhere. Ya' know? So we never really got into each other about that kind of... Is that what your talking about? Are you talking about public zoning and public sanitation or people hassling us...

Q: Yeah, neighbors hassling you.

A: Well, we lived so far out in the country that we didn't have too much trouble, ya' know. The sanitation people won't; we had an out house. Nothing more primitive than that. So, we didn't have any trouble with people complaining. ... with people thinking about our trash or whatever. I think the only time, a couple of times, our landlord came out and got pissed off at us because he either thought we weren't keeping the place up well enough or, ya' know, our chickens were running all over the place, but mostly he didn't care. There was one time that we had planned, ...ah-mm, this is a little bit, goes back... When I sort of brushed off your question about the spirituality or the religion, I think I was thinking sort of like, religion, religious. We did that... Paul was studying Native American stuff a lot and we did have a sense of our sauna as a place where, it wasn't just for bathing or whatever, but it was sort of a cleansing thing, and we did have some rituals about, ya' know, some chants that we did and things like that. So, one day, we decided to have sort of a ritual day where people would literally fast in the sauna all day; think about who they were and what they were doing. We invited a fairly select group to come out for this day. Well, it meant that there were six or eight naked people running around most of the day, between the porch and the sauna; and that was the day the land lord happened to, or decided to bring his wife out to pick some walnuts off of this back acreage. So, he got in there and we didn't see him get in there and so all of a sudden, we see this truck coming out of, at about two in the afternoon, coming out of this place. We're standing there, not, we're not like, we just not quite with it because, we haven't been drinking and he haven't been smoking any, we just basically been fasting all day and losing a lot of, ya' know, drinking water. And we're just sort of standing there and it was like, "Oh yeah, I know who that is, that's my landlord." So he caught(?) us and read us the riot act and said he didn't want a bunch of naked people out there and "What in the hell are you doing?" We put in context, told him directly that his is what we were doing, and, ya' know. I went over and talked with him the next evening. He was ready to kick us off of the place, and I just said, "Hey, ya' know, we're from different generations," telling him how,... what did he think was going on and told him what was going on and let's just agree to, ya' know... But it was unfortunate that he didn't tell us that he was going to be out that day; it was unfortunate that, ya' know, that that was the day, but, ah... he had never heard any other complaints about us from anybody, so he finally just backed down. So, it was only, we had a few little things like that. Then, the other hassles we had was that we had all that condemned land down there and I owned a horse and a couple of other people I knew boarded horses back in there and we just let them run back in there. We had kind of run the fence line in a certain area and we knew that it was pretty stable, but occasionally my horse would jump the fence and we go all over out in the country, chasing down this darn horse. People complained about that a couple of times, that I couldn't control my horse. Which was true, I couldn't. He was a little stallion and I finally had to guild him to calm him down. I wasn't going to use him for breeding anyway. So...(laughs, inaudible). So every once in a while we would have

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those little things with the neighbors, but we were treated very nicely by the farm people around that area because they could see that we were gardening a lot and they could see that we were raising animals and they could see, ...well, we weren't noisy neighbors, staying up late, or driving around throwing cans and bottles out, or doing the things that piss people off in the country. I remember on time even, I went out to watch the Dunkard, oh, they're kind of this German Baptist sect, who rented all the land around our farmhouse from our landlord, and they put wheat on it. And I remember going out just to watch them harvest the wheat and I was just standing by the fence, kind of watching the whole process to get a sense of what it was like. They were doing it with big combines and all that; and they came over to talk and I asked them about the wheat and they asked if I wanted some and I said sure – we were actually grinding our own wheat into flour with a hand machine at the time. They gave us a fifty-five pound bag, like what chicken feed would come in, which is about this tall and about this big around. They just filled it; it was enough wheat for a year of baking, ya' know. So, those people were really tolerant of us and very friendly with us and we too were respectful of them, of course, and that made a difference.

Q: Did you ever have any big parties or anything?

A: Besides the Sunday night things... maybe a couple of times, had big parties and people laying out in their cars in the middle of the night, ya' know, too wasted to drive home, but... mostly, we weren't out there to do that, ya' know, those big, kinda', huge party things. I went to a few of those in town. There was one commune that lived in this old stone house back up where some of the fraternity and sororities are, off of Louisiana street. I don't know if any of you have talked to any of the people who lived... It was a big old stone house, kinda' behind, ... oh, anyway, up, ya' know, right when, there's fraternity and sorority row, right along in there; ya' know, between seventeenth and eighteenth, something like, ... round in there. Or between sixteenth and seventeenth, I don't know. But, I can remember, we would have an annual party where we would wait for all of the middle class college kids, we would wait for that week when they were all leaving and we'd go to these huge apartment complexes in Lawrence and we'd go through the dumpsters. These people would have thrown away, just incredible amounts of food that was still, ya' know, they had just thrown it away that day. There would be, like, frozen chickens that were not in the least thawed yet, and those little spice tins that everybody buys at the first of the year and never uses, ya' know, and frozen vegetable and, just, ya' know, boxes of pancake mix and so on. Once a year we'd go around and do that and then we'd make this huge, like big stew, with all this frozen meat, hamburger and chicken and corn and peas, and all these things we'd find; we'd spice it up. It was all made from, ya' know, ...

Q: Dumpster diving...

A: Well, yeah. (starts laughing) It was all made from that stuff. At the time, we were pretty self-righteous about that, we were like, "God, why can't these people just give this stuff away to somebody?" Not just throw it all out. You'd find a family pack of pork chops that still had the frost on it, ya' know. (long pause then starts to chuckle again)

Q: It's still the same, we do the same things now.

A: Do ya'? Well, there you go. I didn't know the tradition continues. That's great...

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Q: We found a mounted deer head that was like a ten point buck, found it in the trash can. That was the biggest thing I think we found.

A: (laughing) Yep.

Q: What are the best and the worst things that you can remember?

A: Well, I think the best things I remember are how much I learned about animals and about the natural world when I was out there, ya' know. Enough to, ya' know, keep those experiences as some of the best in my life-time in terms of just really being close something new, ya' know, new experience and then I think also those times when we'd have the big Sunday night kinds of gatherings that were, most often, just really pleasant times. People were really nice and the music was just...we had some really good musicians that would come out and play and it was like being in a...and jam sessions, and everybody singing along, and, ya' know, going out... Just the simple things really; just the stars, like, from out there are really incredible, ya' know, like they are in the mountains. I go to the mountains every year and I feel the same way when I'm there, just like, "Hey." No telephone, nobodies going to bother me, just go out and sit at night, listen to the river and look at the stars. It was a real nice thing for me at that time, I really learned from that experience. I think that's the best part of it. I think the worst part of it was just the hard work of it, how I chose to live. It would get really cold and it would get really muddy and wet and my horse would run away, and, ya' know, it just seemed like I don't have time to deal with all this crap, ya' know, I don't have time to cut wood or deal with all that. I think for me now, God, so many years ago, it seems. Twenty, twenty-five years ago that I moved out there and I couldn't, even those worse things I sort of consider a, ya' know, it past into the blurry world of nostalgia, so it's pretty immediate. I was, I think I was lucky during that time, when, like I said, I was a pretty conservative person, ya' know, in terms of not, not pushing too many limits and because of that I didn't have to deal with some of the more tragic things that happened during that time. I think there were a lot of people who went out of control. I know out at the Clinton Farm, one of the young women who lived out there end up really quite disturbed, ended up at the state hospital. It was all just a little too chaotic for her brain, ya' know, what was going on. Jamie Grow, whose a person you'll probably hear about at some point, was, lived out at Clinton Farm for a while and, sort of, he lived around a lot of different place. He evidently ended up getting murder by a couple of people down in Arkansas. He was hitchhiking one time and, sort of, nobody knows, ya' know. He was this kid, just come out of high school, a really brilliant kid, he got pretty fried on acid; he was a nice guy but he was pretty much, well, the term spaced out does describe some people and it described Jamie. A wonderful person but, umm... In some ways, ya' know, I was sad about Jamie. I knew him and really liked him and I thought he had gone a little bit too far over that edge, for my tastes, ya' know, I wouldn't want to. But, though I,...I knew situations like that but didn't really experience them in our house, much. I feel lucky, ya' know, for that. I think some people went through some real hell during that time in terms of other people flipping out or them flipping out for a while, and really having trouble getting back and feeling centered in what they were doing. I was luck too in that my parents were very supportive. I think they thought, "What the hell is he doing?" But, at the same time, they'd come out and visit and, ya' know, sit there, in very rustic circumstances and were very loving a supportive through it all. I think that helped not to feel real divided from everybody else and not real paranoid. There were a lot of really crazy things going on during that time; some people got killed on campus, one kid was killed on campus in 1970 and there was a curfew in Lawrence,

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and there was a black kid who got shot by the police during that time. Ya' know, some people were really right next to that and it was pretty hard to be next to that. Some of those worse times, I think probably the worst time I had... Okay, I think probably the worst time I had was towards the end. The sauna parties started getting a little too big, a little out of control. People would come and they weren't people who I would have ever invited or who my house mates would have ever invited, and there would be people coming in, sort of tougher people than we were used too – less like hippies and more like bikers, ya' know. I remember going into the sauna one time, this was my own sauna, went into the sauna one time and this big beefy guy with this big beer gut just sitting there and he says, "Get out of here, there's no room in here." And I said, "Well, I think I can squeeze in up here." And he says, "I said, get the fuck out of here." So, I climbed up and sat in there and he was getting huffy. So I said, "What's yer name?" He told me his name; and I said, "Well, I'm Tom, I'm the one who built this." Well, he sort of started backing off at that point. Another guy once threatened to pull a knife on somebody else who was getting into the sauna before he could, ya' know. And, ya' know, that was a little...so, it was at that point that we said, okay, no more, invitation only, and sort of scaled it again to that because things could grow pretty fast by word of mouth during that time. So, I mean, that's a bad memory. There was another time when the sauna actually burnt. The stove pipe going out, we had covered it in asbestos but it had worked it's way a little bit lose and so the stove pipe was actually against the wood. It started smoking and I was in it at the time and I said to people, "Hey, it's smoking and we have got to do something about this." And they were like, "Aw, it's just a little, don't worry about it." I said, "No, this is serious, we need to do something." And people were just sitting in there and they would not budge and I thought this is crazy, these people are, ya' know, some of them were a little bit doped up, and I said this is crazy. They wouldn't move, so finally just went and got a bucket of water and put the fire out, but this is it. Later I tore the wall out a little bit and sure enough, it was just charred. It was ready go, the whole thing would of burned down, but we got there in time, so we got a bunch of people with buckets and just soaked the whole thing. Then we re-did the stove pipe and got it going again. But, ya' know, those couple of memories are what, of things getting a little too much out of control, I guess, would be my worst ones. Though, now they just seem funny.

Q: Why did you finally decide to leave?

A: Basically, I got married. I met a woman in, or, about eleven months before I moved, no, I guess, well, yeah. I was dating a woman that I knew from under graduate that I sort of re-kindled a relationship with. She and I got more and more serious and at that time, there were three of us living out at the house. One of them moved away, and the other guy got really interested in dancing and he was doing a lot of dancing. He was in the dance department at KU. He decided that he would like to move in. Umm, could you stop that for a second? But, now where were we? Let's see... Umm, oh yeah – so the dancer was living out there and, well, like, my wife, she had an apartment in town. But she was spending a lot of time out at the farm. He had a room out at the farm but he was spending a lot of time in town. So they just decided to switch, he took her apartment and she moved out. We got married, ya' know, some time fairly soon after that and then she and I lived in that farm house for about four or five months, just the two of us together. Then we, she wanted to be a little closer to town and she wanted running water and, at that point, I did too. Sort of a, just a natural curve, ya' know, I learned what I could and I also had learned that I could live that way and I could live on very little money, but it takes all of your time to do

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that. I had done that real hard for three years and I was sort of ready to move back into town and a little more money (start laughing a little), ya' know, get back into the Capitalistic economy, so I didn't have to work so hard and I could focus a little more on my writing. We lived in Lawrence, well, really in another farmhouse, but not so far out of town, together for about a year. Then I went to the University of Iowa and got another graduate degree. Ya' know, sort of, that was the end of it, those three years.

Q: How do you think your life has been affected by it, by that experience?

A: Well, I think pretty profoundly. I think that those, during those years I learned to really like where I came from, Kansas, and to have a real respect for, ya' know, the people who are, who live in the rural places, and, ah, people who do things in traditional ways. Although I had, I think up until then, I didn't really know much about the work it took to do things and I didn't really know much about traditional practices, things that have been around for a long time, in terms of dealing with horses and animals and the weather and nature, and, ya' know, digging post holes and all this kind of stuff. Ya' know, I've spent a lot of years since then sort of turning my literary focus on Kansas. I write mostly about Kansas and about, not really about urban people, but about small town people, about rural people. I mean, I think that's mainly my sort of lifestyle interest and I had an interest in gardening before but, ya' know, but I really... and cooking before, but I really got deeply immersed in all that during those years. And I still, ya' know, garden and cook and do a lot of things for myself.

Q: Do you live in the country now?

A: No, nos. I live in town. My wife prefers it. Every once in a while we talk about, oh, how we'll move out. I have a friend who has forty acres pretty close by and we go out there and garden some, and we've built some things and done some work out there. I still like that an awful lot. But, no. I think too is that, the other effect that it's had on me is making me more tolerant of people, ya' know. I don't have much... at least I like to feel like I don't have a lot of intolerance. I've seen a lot of different people go through a lot of different things and, ya' know, when you live, well, we weren't exactly a commune but, ya' know, we were surrounded by a sort of, a bunch of us who were out there. All friends and knew each other. Ya' know, we learned to share a lot and we had an understanding of each other. We'd pick up hitch hikers, young people like ourselves. I picked up a hitch hiker once, and he was on his way to some place back east and I picked him up on highway 40 between Topeka and Lawrence. I asked him if he, ya' know, it was mid-afternoon, I said, "Hey, I'm going into Lawrence but if you want to crash somewhere for the night, ya' know, have a nice meal, take a sauna, whatever, come on out with us." And he came and, ya' know, we just trusted him, just... it was interesting to see what would turn out. That sort of chance, the chancement, the chanciness of that time was sort of the going, that little phase of going with the flow. You can learn a lot from doing that. There's about as much, I always, maybe I'm just getting old, but I don't feel that there's quite as much opportunity to do that. The world, everything seems a little more up tight, constricted. Sexually it's more up tight, it has to be cause of AIDS and some of the venereal things. So, ya' know, think of it as a time when people were pretty open and not in a negative way but in a positive way.

Q: Well, I can't think of anything else. Except, do you have a chapter from your book?

A: Yeah, let me give you, this is...