

Interview with Morton Alexander

Interviewer: Deborah Altus

September 9, 1996

**Q:** So this is September 9th, and an interview with Morton. I'd love to hear about what brought you to Tolstoy Farm, and when you came.

**A:** Let's see, 1972 is when I moved there, but I guess for maybe 3 years or less before that, I visited there regularly. I was living in another community outside Seattle, called May Valley Co-op.

**Q:** Oh, yeah, I interviewed John Affolter.

**A:** And I lived in a home there, collective communal home owned by Elaine Davenport and some of her kids, and another couple, Jim and Sue Gore [?]. One day, Rico and his former wife, Pat, drove up on a motorcycle, and introduced themselves as being from Tolstoy Farm. And they were trying to visit communities. Maybe they saw May Valley in the Communities Magazine or something. So that's how we started to know about Tolstoy, and went there, and visited. And then I think Birdie [?], maybe, spent a summer or so with Andy. Birdie Davenport was one of Elaine's younger kids. And Jim and Sue Gore decided to move there. So I and Susie Davenport, Elaine's daughter, we'd go over to Tolstoy and help Jim and Sue build their house. And then eventually, I moved there. I brought lumber over that I had collected. It was kind of abandoned, prefabricated cedar logs. It was a set that was designed to make a two-car garage, and somebody had let it be scattered in the woods by kids. I collected it all, moved it over to the farm, and built my house out of it. It's called Panabow [?] lumber. I built it in the north 80 -- are you familiar with the --?

**Q:** Well, Piper [?] told me some about, that there's the 120 acres, and then the north 80.

**A:** Yeah. So I built up behind Evan [?] and Dena's [?] house, this is to form a verbal mat [?]. Even though I had, during those few years of visiting, befriended Evan and Dena, they didn't like the idea of somebody deciding to build right behind the hill near their place, but they got used to it. So that was in '72.

**Q:** Did you have to go through any membership process, or could you pretty much show up and start building your house?

**A:** I don't remember any formal membership -- well, yeah, I do remember there was some accepted practice, expectation, that people were supposed to go and talk to people who would be the neighbors of where they wanted to go, and kind of work it out. I worked it out with others, but Evan and Dena didn't settle on it, they just kind of had to deal with it. So after I was there, we kind of renewed the friendship that had existed before I moved in. And they wound up living in Spokane too, after some years. Dena still lives here, Evan lives over by Olympia. Maybe you should go visit Evan.

**Q:** I'm not going to be in Seattle long enough, unfortunately.

**A:** Oh, okay. And, so that was it. Ask me another question.

**Q:** Okay. When you moved to the farm, were people still taking meals together?

**A:** My acquaintance with the farm has mostly been of separate households. That's how I knew it when I visited there, and for most of the time, that's how it was. The only experience that I had with that -- well, first of all, when I moved there, it was after Jim and Sue Gore got established in their house, and I

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decided I wanted to be near them again. So when I was building my house, I was eating with them, while working on my site. But then after my house was up, there formed on its own a commune called the Woody Hill Co-op.

**Q:** I heard a little bit about that. It's based on B. F. Skinner's Walden Two?

**A:** Not at all. Well, maybe some people had that in mind. Not me. Are you referring to the name?

**Q:** Well I thought that's what he said.

**A:** Well, the name --

**Q:** --No, not the name, the way it was organized.

**A:** Skinnerian stuff?

**Q:** Yeah.

**A:** Punishment?

**Q:** Well, reinforcement, labor credits.

**A:** Maybe I'm not recalling -- there wasn't, that I remember, any formal structure of credits. Maybe there was. But I don't remember. But it was -- we were all expected to share work schedule. And maybe I'm not remembering it because the whole idea of Skinner turns me off, so. But there was a schedule that we took part in, of cooking, -- so that was in the clubhouse, there, at the north 80, is where we ate together, but it was separate households. We came together for meeting and eating, and working. And there was shared work on gardens. And there was some pooling of resources, economically. Of course, not completely. There are many other people who would remember it better than me, the formal, financial, or work arrangement. I think that's when we also started our junk business. Jeremiah and I had a junk business, which we probably inherited as our own partnership after the Woody Hill thing broke up. But that may have started during that, as an attempt to have a means of income making. Which -- I don't remember, if it did go on, how long inside the commune, but after the commune basically what we did is we had this truck, and we went around the area around Lincoln County, hauling hulks from farms or from the canyon, into Spokane to the squasher. And we also committed this great big sin, which I never forgive myself for, of having hauled away this old 1947 Chrysler that sits outside Piper's hogan. I still have the chrome that was inside. Our greed exceeded our historical appreciation. Because real old, heavy iron ... so, yeah, I keep killing myself for that.

**Q:** Now how did the Woody Hill Co-op get its name?

**A:** Oh, it was named after Woody Guthrie and Joe Hill. And if you were to go to the farm and go into the old schoolhouse upstairs, there's a mural on the floor, a floor painting. There's all these visions that people had, everybody painted their own little circle of what their own visions were. I painted one based on that, it's a kind of insignia thing. And the words "Woody Hill" were kind of connected with Guthrie, Joe, and had this rock terrace pictured in it. Because we dug a -- as many houses, they were dug into the hillside to establish a flat place, so there was a rock terrace for the digging, to make it flat. And then

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inside the building, which was mainly a building for the kitchen and a dining area, and a living room-esque type of meeting area, there was a rock wall, up against the hill, inside the building. Which was pretty nice, because the rocks were cleaned, and the lighter ones were put on the interior side of the wall, and then oiled so that their colors would show. And then in the ceiling of that, Ken -- you ever hear of Ken Miester [?] ? He's still there. He's a guy you should interview. He's been there longer than anybody. He did these little tapestries, and he put them on the ceiling with all these different astrological symbols, or other symbols, so that was the interior ceiling, covering the insulation. And it was the scene for many of the struggles that go on in communal life. People trying to deal with having shared their lot. Trying to get along with each other, just, probably, in all the communities that you're inquiring about, there's lots of tales of interpersonal conflicts and woes, and good things, this and that.

**Q:** How long did the Woody Hill Co-op last?

**A:** I think it was two years or less.

**Q:** And why did it stop?

**A:** Geez, this is such ancient history. Just people had their own lives, and their own directions. The nature of the place is kind of a transient community -- or back then, it was more transient than it became later. Later it became, as people established their own homesites and found some kind of vocations, it became more of a stable, longevity to families living there. And families raised kids, and this and that. So I think it was just the people saw the Woody Hill Co-op as an experiment to satisfy some desire to see what communal life would be like. And then people -- I know this sounds very simplistic, but they got tired of it, and wanted to do their own things. There was also a lot of -- I don't think it necessarily had to do with the Woody Hill group, but the whole farm, there was a lot of incestuousness. That causes conflict too. Jim Gore -- when his marriage was threatened and this and that, he labelled it "Tolstoy Fuck Farm," in his anger. So I think people wanted to return to their own lives.

**Q:** Did the larger group, not the Woody Hill group, but the larger Tolstoy Farm, did it have regular meetings when you were living there?

**A:** I think, I don't know if it was regular. Maybe it was crisis oriented meetings. And it contributed to my understanding of anarchism, as an attempt to resolve conflicts on a crisis basis -- if Tolstoy is an example of it, perhaps Piper would say it's not a good example of anarchism. I don't know, what did he say about that? Because I know he's a believer in it.

**Q:** I don't know that he really addressed that so much. I think he felt that it succeeded in some ways and failed in others.

**A:** Perhaps there were regularly scheduled annual meetings, as required by any corporation or something, but I don't have a sense of that kind of scheduling. I just remember meetings to deal with things, and conflicts, and that people were not very skilled in working out conflicts.

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**Q:** What were the things that people on the farm did together?

**A:** Well, for years, there was Sunday Fun Day. Have you heard of those? It's an occasion for potluck -- and people still do it there. They still have potlucks, but I never go to them, because I'm too busy. Since I only go there on weekends, I just want to take care of my own chores, and just sit and gaze. But what it was, was occasions for potlucks and volleyball, or maybe even jumping in Rico's pool or something like that.

**Q:** He had a pool?

**A:** Yeah, which he made out of ferrous cement, and which, he would impress people by diving into it, even though it was not very deep. But he knew just how to do it, because he designed it so that he could dive right in that spot in the middle and remain unscathed. But it was a pretty good pool for a lot of people to cool off from. And also he's a big gardener, he still is now, out in the Spokane Valley. His pool was next to the garden, and over a certain section of the garden where he grew tomatoes, and over the pool, was this lean-to of glass. So that made a nice protected area for the tomatoes, and also it warmed the pool area. It was a pretty nice place to hang out. And you could sit in the pool and pick strawberries, eat them, something like that. Or get tomatoes and eat them. But that's what people did together. Then there was cow co-op. An institution that lasted for a long time before and after my time. My time started in '72 and it still goes on to a certain extent that I go there every weekend, but when I stopped living here permanently and started living in town was about 8 years ago, when I got this job that I just completed recently. So the cow co-op was a big collective enterprise of people on the south end. On the north end, most of the people had goats. I had goats. I and my former wife, Diane, we did our garden, and alfalfa for the goats, goats and chickens, stuff like that. But on the south end, there was this big -- there still are these big fields, but now cow co-op is gone, and Stash and Ken have taken over a lot of that for vegetable produce, large scale. Not machine, though, just large scale by hand. But during the time the cow co-op, it controlled a lot of the pastures there for alfalfa. And it's really too bad that you're not talking to Rico, because he was behind a lot of the organization to that enterprise. And he's also kind of a central historical figure. A big believer in community, but incapable of living in community, because he's so judgmental of people all the time. But he'd always be attracting people, either through magazines, or correspondence, or something, to come live there. And then burned them out by judging them too much.

**Q:** Well do you know, does he work a regular job or anything? I'm just trying to figure out if he might have time in the morning or not.

**A:** I know where you can reach him at noon. He's probably asleep by now. I gave Andy his number earlier.

**Q:** Yeah, she called him, and his wife called back. At that point, I figured I wouldn't have time.

**A:** I'd say he would be available tomorrow, because basically what he does is he's a house husband. She is a nurse, and he takes care of the kids and the garden.

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**Q:** And he lives somewhere near here?

**A:** It's not near, it's like a drive on the freeway of about 20 minutes or so. And it's out in the valley, and - I mean, he is a really central character, and I would urge you -- are you staying some place tonight?

**Q:** I haven't decided yet. I was thinking of driving back towards Seattle.

**A:** So she called and reached Terry?

**Q:** While I was there, Rico's wife called, because Andy had called earlier and left a message on her machine, I guess. At that point, I didn't think I was going to stay, so I said, "Don't bother setting anything up."

**A:** Because I could call now. [tape interrupted] ... house that I built at the north 80 later became the second floor of the house that I have now. After I built it, then I me Diane, and she lived in it, then we bought part of Grandma's land.

**Q:** Piper's grandma?

**A:** Yeah. Grandma Green. So we bought the Turnley Place, off of that 300 or so acres of Grandma's place. The Turnley is 80, and it's adjacent to the south 160. What used to be south 120 later became the south 160, when the Arizona people came, and they bought 40 acres, and they eventually ceded that to the farm. So the Turnley Place, which is 80, was like between the south 160 and the rest of Grandma's land, although technically, it was part of Grandma's land, and that became our place, and we built a house on it. Built a day light basement. And we and Rico and Terry worked on the tile floor, much of which tile was scrounged from the Quarry Tile company dump in Spokane Valley. And Rico also did the masonry for the chimney, and he did the concrete floor and root cellar, and then there was a whole big truck come in to pour the whole underground vault behind the basement. And my old house became the second floor. Because since it was Panabowed, and pre-fab cedar log structure, we just took it apart, and numbered the logs. I had the original blue print to it from the first time I put it together, and then put it together as the second floor of where I now have my home. And then when we divorced, I bought her out on the land and the house, and then she and her new husband built another house -- we split up the land. She got 45 and I got 35, roughly. So that's how that happened. She's my neighbor now. Just for technical, historical record. So what were we talking about?

**Q:** I was asking you what everybody had done together, and you were giving me a series of things.

**A:** Okay. The cow co-op was a major enterprise, and people shared the milking, and the haying, and it was real big ritual, when they did their hay. It was all in bulk. It was only in the last years of it that they went to using a bailer, this and that. But for most of the time, it was cut by a mower, usually pulled by a tractor. But then left to dry there, and all the members and guests would let it dry and then pitch fork it onto a truck or a wagon, and store it in the cow barn. And the cow barn annex was interesting, in that it used to be a house called the Community House on the south side of the farm, across the road from the cow barn. But in some people's view, it was taken over by ne'er-do-wells, and it was kind of habitually taken over by ne'er-do-wells, one crew after another. So when there was a time when it was vacant, people took the floor out of it, and just stuffed it with hay. And that was the end of it as a residence. So

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things they did together, that, Sunday Fun Day. Maybe some neighbors got together for some kind of business enterprises, now and then. But --

**Q:** Like that junk business you had?

**A:** Oh yeah, hulk hauling. You'd have to ask somebody else about business enterprises between neighbors. The school was a big community enterprise in its day. It was a real school. As, significant of this era, of people trying to do alternative everything, so alternative schooling was included in that. And the schoolhouse was built in a couple stages, I gather, because when I got there, it was two stories. Rico had to do with those stages, and Piper. It provided a meeting place for the whole farm. And there used to be parents teaching various things to kids. After awhile, that was not able to be maintained, and, not only the teaching schedule wasn't able to be maintained, but the whole conformity with the law, toilet for a girl and toilet for a boy, in a place that was mainly just outhouses -- the whole thing got too much for them to handle, and also I think people, maybe Rico could tell you better, the evolution of the population was that fewer kids. But anyway, it evolved into a situation of the school not being used as a school anymore, and the kids going to school in Davenport. Also it had to do with the road being, instead of simply dirt, at a certain point, it got made into a more maintained, gravel county road. And that enabled a school bus to come down. And also it enabled a postal route to be established there. But not very easily, because it took me and a fellow there named Sean Flannery to circulate a postal petition to get the post office to extend the route down the canyon, because the postmaster in Davenport refused. Even though we had enough population to legally warrant it, the postmaster thought, since we were just hippies, why serve them?

**Q:** Where did you have to pick up your mail, then?

**A:** We had to go all the way to the top of the canyon, near Zymat's [?] place, which is some wheat farmer up on top, where there was one box. Route 3, Box 72, or something, or Box 70, I think. And everybody's mail came to there, and whoever came through there, usually on the route from Spokane, it was accessible from Davenport too, but more directly if you're coming from Spokane. People would go by there, empty the mail box, take it down to the tax shed, which was a rickety -- somebody finally straightened it up, literally, it was always a leaning structure -- and just sort of piled it up on a shelf outside the tax shed, and you'd have to look through that, or through the mud around the tax shed for your mail. In the tax shed, there was a lot of clothing dumped, for people to go through rank piles of recycled clothing. So things people did together. The school. There were projects, like on the 80, people had to work together to maintain the water system. The north 80 is a much dryer place, water-wise. It's just a real hard situation for water there. I guess before my time, Piper established a big, rickety steel tank up there, that leaked all the time. And then there was -- it was tapped into some source uphill, and the pipe would always spring leaks from not being buried deep enough, and everybody be constantly digging in winter to fix leaks, with your hands freezing. And so the maintenance of that, that was something people did together. Probably there were individual livestock agreements, maybe partnerships between individual households, and maybe some garden things. But most of the livestock and garden stuff was household based, personal. And what else did people do together? They fought and argued. Also they had good times, they partied a lot. Oh, drinking home brew. Smoking dope. The

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social hospitality rituals were big. And the whole thing with home brew was a cult in itself. Stash, who still lives there, but thankfully has given up alcohol, was reputed as not only the brew master for the farm, but he had state-wide renown, of being an excellent brewer. And everybody brewed their own beer. Even I did that. It's kind of a hospitality schtick ritual, the decanting of the beer. A lot of hanging out, playing cards in winter, at night.

**Q:** Were you there during the second bust, or was that before?

**A:** I was there for the great bust of '72. Is that the second one?

**Q:** Yeah, I think their first one was in '66 or something.

**A:** Yeah, I arrived in '72. And I arrived the day of the big fire on the south side of the farm.

**Q:** When the farmhouse burned down?

**A:** No, not the Hart [?] House, that was before my time. But there was a big fire along the hillside. It started from Jamie Sule [?], the son of some doctor in Herrington [?], he was down there in his father's Cadillac, and they needed to jump start it, and the spark got in the carburetor, and just the whole chunk of it went on fire. It was a very heroic thing to see people fighting the fire. A very big thing to imprint on your mind, to be in the midst of woods burning up and people just scratching away with their hands or shovels or rags to try and contain it.

**Q:** Especially on your first day.

**A:** Yeah, well it was the first day I had formally moved there, or maybe the day after or before, but it was something like that. And it was the first time I had been to the south side of the farm. I remember -- oh right, it wasn't that I had moved there. I had moved there a few days before, and I and Jim Gore and some others were working up in the wheat fields for a farmer, you know, employment. We were restringing a barbed wire fence, a very hot day, where you'd sit under the truck or next to a phone pole for shade and rest. And we saw smoke in the canyon, and piled into Jim's truck. He sped down the road, saying, "I've always wanted to go down this road at 70 miles an hour!" It was steeper than it is now, because a certain year the county changed the grade. Just before you get to the top of the canyon, it was very much steeper, the road going towards the Davenport way. It was pretty impressive, I was very impressed with everybody's behavior. So some days after that I gave little medals that I had cut out of paper. Then, we kind of worked our way up the side canyon, scratching and shoveling, and finally some farmer or somebody was working down with a tractor, we met in the woods at night, and that finally made the line to contain it. The other thing that's interesting about that was when it first started, and somebody had to go to Grandma's house to make the call, because that's where the phone was. The fire engine came from Davenport, but it couldn't get across the creek to where the fire was. But there were a lot of straight people from Davenport who had heard about it, and were cruising through the canyon and just sort of laughing and gawking at the hippies, some of whom were not very fully clad. Which perhaps kept people from wanting to help. But I don't know, just lots of social prejudice, a lot of hostility between Davenport and the farm, because of the '60's, and intolerance toward the whole hippie thing, feeling threatened by drugs in their area, which was basically marijuana. And then also there was the

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great bust of '72, which is a great story too. Rico has a great story about how he escaped from the bust, in some earlier year. Because they had arrested a bunch of people, and had them kind of, for some reason, they had them lined up outside the courthouse, and left them, because they went to have a conference or something, and Rico said to his comrades there, "I don't know about you, if anybody want's to go with me, but I'm getting out of here." He just left, hid in the bushes until it got dark, and then walked back to the canyon. But in '72, when I moved there, I was sleeping in a tent up at my house site, and I was eating with the Gores. One morning I was walking down towards their place for breakfast, when I saw this cop car coming up the steep hill to the north 80, it's bubble flashing. Which really was a very considerate thing to do. And I don't know if that's how it was meant. But I came running into Jim's house, and I said this and that, and he said, "Yeah, I know. You got any dope?" I had some joints with me in my wallet. So I took it out, and Jim wanted to throw the whole wallet into the cook stove. But I restrained him. A bunch of lids went up in smoke, just as the cop was politely knocking on the door. So that was nice. He came in, very formally asking, "Can I look in this cabinet?" This and that. But there were others who were not very polite. They had camped out overnight. It was like a big adventure for all of them. And they had people from different counties come. They had all kinds of uniforms there that day. They camped out with horses, overnight, above where people were living. They went to the south end first, although we didn't know, we didn't have any system to know, we didn't have phones. And those that went to the south end -- see, the fellow Ken that I mentioned, Ken Miester, ... he still does as his pattern has always been, he gardens. He hardly ever goes to town. And he -- I don't know if he still does, but in those days he most of the time went naked in the summer. And so when they got there, to his place, the story goes, I didn't see it, that they, some of the more brutal ones, these young farm kids who were deputies, and wanted to be adventurous, they were telling them to get out of the house, this and that. And Ken, from his old civil disobedience background, he just lay down. And even though he was passively resisting, some jerks were holding a gun over him. And then the local sheriff at that time, the Lincoln County sheriff, named Clarence Coley [?], just told this other kid from some other county to stop acting like a jerk. So when they came to the north 80, what they did was they rounded up everybody, got them out of their houses, and herded them down to the dome of the schoolhouse. And told them all to present ID. Of course, people barely wore clothes, let alone to have wallets inside. And I didn't even want to deal with that, so I had read -- I guess what I was doing was thinking about what I had read in Malcom X's autobiography, whom I had once met, but that was a different story. Where he talks about running from the police, and then countering them, and just approaching them, and asking directions or something. So I didn't to be identified or anything, so I wandered out onto the balcony of the schoolhouse, and started schmoozing with these cops, saying, "Gee, this is quite an effort, looks like an all-star game, all these different uniforms here." They were boasting, "Yeah, we've got Game and Wildlife, and we have firemen," anybody who could get a uniform came down there. I schmoozed with them, and I schmoozed my way down the steps and out of there. Then, that was followed by what we call "The Trail of the Tolstoy Ten." Because a number of people who were arrested then, when their time came to have their trail in the Davenport courthouse, it was held in the basement courthouse, and it was quite claustrophobic in there, with all these hippies that were very angry and rebellious. And the judge, Jack Buck, the justice of peace, was very nervous at this scene. Because there was Brent, who usually also went naked, but for this special occasion, he had some clothes on, but he was a real big,



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cocky type of fellow with long, blond hair. And there were little babies peeing on the floor. It was really a scene there. There was a lawyer from here, he was a pretty successful lawyer, his name was Pat Stylee [?]. He said, "I don't want to represent you, this is just too much. I can't handle this." So he just gave up on them. What happened was, the judge called for order. And they refused to give it. And Brent gave the finger to the judge, and the judge said to the deputies to clear the courtroom. So a big fight broke out, and there was a lot of pulling hair and pulling buttons between the hippies and the police. And, you know, that was that. And then a bunch of them went to jail. And then I remember after some of them were in the jail, there was this scene down below, behind the courthouse. The jail is now a new building across the street, but it used to be upstairs was the jail. And the hippies were throwing up candy bars to their comrades up in jail. And somebody called Clarence and said, "Things are getting out of hand up in the jail." So he drove up from where he resided, this was at night. I remember being there. It was at night. I don't know why I was there. I remember it was on my birthday, September 13. And he drove around, and then some of the girls from our community jumped on the hood of his car. There were residences around the courthouse. And people, citizens of Davenport, looking at this. And I remember Rory [?], and some other young girl, jumping on the hood of his car, saying something like, "Oh, Clarence, you're so groovy, you promised us that we could grow dope and you wouldn't bust us, but then you changed your mind! Why'd you do that?" Which is a reference to, that he had done that. I wasn't there, but I was told that he came down and had a meeting with people in the farm, saying, "It's okay with me if you grow dope, as long as you don't sell it in Lincoln County." And I don't know if someone sold it in Lincoln County, or if there were pressures on him to not have made that thing, but anyway, that happened. The other thing, I know what it was -- the thing that really started the fight going during that trial was there was this chaos going on, so the judge, Buck, said, "Why don't we just have the defendants and the lawyer go into my chambers and forget about all these people in the courtroom?" So they did, but there were still people left in the courtroom. And there was one woman who called herself Sierra Lone Pine, a lesbian woman. She always wore this knife, very macho type of person. She sauntered up to the judge's chair, and sat in it, and put her booted feet on his desk, and leaned back. There were these two flags, there was the Washington State flag, and the American flag. And she very casually jerked down the American flag and took out her knife and started slashing it up. That's when the fight started. That's when the farm boy deputies couldn't tolerate it. They just flipped out. And then the Davenport Times front page had a picture of this slashed up American flag on it. Which, in retrospect, I think was totally politically correct. I totally approve of the whole thing, because that's the way I feel about it.

**Q:** But it didn't endear yourselves to you locals, did it?

**A:** Fuck them. But I mean, after time passed, and the locals saw that their kids were even worse than -- got into more trouble than the so-called hippies ever got into, and the hippies started working, employment, mixing with the larger community and everything, it kind of straightened out. Everybody started growing long hair anyway, and you couldn't tell the good guys from the bad guys, because all these long haired gangsters we had to deal with. So, that was a catalyst, the flag. And then, of course, that's contrasted -- I have a clipping which I have hanging in my house in Davenport, years later, front page of the Davenport Times, had a picture of me, and my friend Roger Barr [?], who was the Methodist

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minister in Davenport. We became close friends, and we started what we called The Lincoln County Martin Luther King Society, because it was the year that they first made a national holiday out of that. And Roger and I decided that we should draw up some leaflets, and go in the January cold, outside the post office, and leaflet people as to why we think this is a good idea. Because we knew that Davenport needed that message. And so we did that, and this time the same postmaster, who years earlier had refused to extend the postal route down in the canyon until our petition to headquarters in Spokane forced him to hire somebody and extend postal service, this time he asked Roger and I if we wanted to come in and get warm while we were doing that. But we wanted to be outside and leaflet. But it was a nice editorial in the local paper about "better to remember King than Butler." You know, the Nazi's in Idaho, the Aryan Nations. So that's kind of a contrast. The other thing, living at the farm, that I remember personally, was that there was often a general disdain for political interest. Because I've always been very political. And it was often either an enlightened disdain, which would be displayed by somebody like Piper, because he comes from an anarchist point of view, or just a stupid disdain. But I always have been political. Now, Rico, he, a number of times, was chair of the Lincoln County Democrats, because, it's a Republican county, nobody wanted to do it anyway. And now, I'm a member of the Spokane Human Rights Commission. What I've done as a job for the last 8 years is organize low income people into legislative efficacy and public speaking. I was the Eastern Washington coordinator of a nonprofit named Fair Budget Action Campaign, which is the main advocate on welfare issues in Washington state. I just lost that job because they ran out of money. And now, it looks very likely that my next job, I predict that in the next week or so they'll say yes, that they want me to be an organizer for the Teamsters, in Yakima [?]. That's the direction I'd like to go anyway. Who they're trying to organize is the fruit packing houses there. And it's largely Hispanic. So those are -- like I'd rather tell you some of the more quality memories of the farm, in a quality -- rather than the infrastructure memories.

**Q:** That's fine. Could I ask you a favor first?

**A:** ... occasionally were readings.

**Q:** Oh yeah, Andy mentioned that, you had literary nights or something.

**A:** People would read stories or poems or original things. Everybody thought I was pretty weird, because I read from Krusjev [?] and stuff like that. And then everybody tried to teach whatever they felt they could contribute in the school. And I remember what I did, was I read to the kids from this book, and I read the whole book to them, eventually, called Black Slave Narratives. A very simple, just first person history.

**Q:** One of our questions is how did you get along with the neighbors, but we kind of already talked about that. What about membership, if there was a membership policy, I guess you talked about that. I know it was supposed to be kind of an anarchist community. Did you have any rules?

**A:** God knows. Rules. Well, did you ask Piper about that?

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**Q:** I think I did.

**A:** Well the other thing I wanted to tell you, Piper, even though he had an enlightened disdain of political stuff, I attribute to him one of the really significant things in my life was, at one point he gave me this book, it was like a fat newspaper quality pamphlet. Like this size, but maybe that thick, and it was about Guatemala, about the war going on in there. And he said, "Don't you know there's a war going on down in Central America?" I'd never thought of it that way. And anyway, I read that book, and got together with some other people in Spokane, and we started what became Spokane CASA -- Central American Solidarity Association. It achieved lots of stuff. So I kind of attribute to Piper the spark that created that. And one of the people that worked with me in that is now the most progressive in our state. She's been in the House of Representatives, Lisa Brown. Now she's running for state Senate. She lives over near Andy somewhere. For all his anarchism, he's caused a lot of good things to happen. I guess my -- being at Tolstoy, kind of confirmed the negative assessment for me of anarchism, although Piper might say, "That's not true anarchism." But I'm definitely a statist. I'm just your average socialist, that's all.

**Q:** Did people ever read or discuss Tolstoy?

**A:** Not that I'm aware of. I think everybody used to ask, "Who the hell is Tolstoy?" And got some standard answer that he was some Russian author that Piper admired because of his Christian pacifism, and he gave his land away. That's all most people understand about it, other than those who might've read his books. I'm not one that can read that big of a book. And I kind of am concerned about Piper, because he seems to be continually unsuccessful in personal relationships. I haven't seen him for years. I used to enjoy seeing him annually at the Corn Dance -- that's another thing people do together. Do you know about that?

**Q:** Yeah, people have mentioned that to me.

**A:** This year I didn't make it out there. But last year, when I went, He wasn't there, which was like a first, I thought. For me, the highlight of it was when he jumped through the fire. Now, of course, kids are constantly jumping through the fire, so it's no big deal. Except to their mothers.

**Q:** So that was Piper's big ritual, to see you jump through the fire?

**A:** Yeah, once he got revved up enough. What else? This is my technique of interviewing, I just did this during the interview in Wanache [?], with the Teamsters the other day, I just sort of rambled, and then I stopped and said, "Ask me another question."

**Q:** That's fine. I'm curious what you feel has been the best part of living at Tolstoy Farm for you?

**A:** It's been the fluke of fortune for me to have established my home there. I mean, the other home, this is Page's home, that one there is my home. I'm grateful to Piper for having provided this free land that was the location for me to first get established, before Diane and I bought our own land there. But I think it was a great gift that he gave a place for people to live. And even though, in a sense, I'm paying the price for having dropped out, not got my degree -- I eventually did go back to school in Eastern Washington University, finished the bachelor. But having been put off track by this whole alternative-ish

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stuff that was before even Tolstoy, even just living at May Valley was a certain extent dropping out partially before totally dropping out by coming to Eastern Washington. And with having lost my job, I really am seeing what it means, the lack of a masters degree, and being -- I will be 51, Friday, and it's very hard to deal with that. Not being able to find work very easily, and not really seeing why or how to go back to school. But, on the other hand, because of the route that landed me in the canyon, to me, personally, that's a big solace for me, to go there and sit on my lawn and stare at the same canyon that I've been staring at for 25 years, and not get tired of it. That's a great gift. I am grateful to Piper for that. Even though I'm living on land that was not part of the farm, was purchased gradually Diane and me. So I feel it more of a personal thing, as a gift. And it kind of weighs against the vocational flop. But then of course, the unusual route that my work has taken has given me satisfaction, I'm that renown radical in town. I just put together a list of references for this teamster jobs, and there are a lot of different really nifty people, and right at the bottom of the list are the governor and the mayor, because they are personal acquaintances who know my work, and would say, "Oh yeah, he's great." And perhaps this alternative-ish route has some value that way. Even though there's not that much monetary value in it. One has to look at the positive. So, are you also asking in a sense of the community and the canyon too, what good it did them?

**Q:** It's up to you how you answer the question.

**A:** The beauty, the peace of the canyon. Because right now I'm not really involved in community-ish stuff, although I do have reliable friendship there, which I appreciate. My former wife and her husband. Our good neighbors and Connie and Pete. That's where my dog, Nora, stays. Every weekend when I go home, I pick Nora up, and she stays with me. Then I drop her off back at Connie and Pete's. And then tomorrow I'm going to be working on my house with Corky, who is the carpenter who originally directed our construction of it. Repair to the overhand. So, there's a few stable relationships, although, if I lived there, those relationships would be closer. As clocking in the hours together.

**Q:** Why did you end up leaving the farm?

**A:** Well, I got this job, as Eastern Washington coordinator of Fair Budget. So I moved into town, lived in an apartment house that was and still is managed by Bob Rogers, who was from the farm. When he lived at the farm, he lived in this beautiful gingerbread type of cabin, with these leaded windows, and skinny peak logs, in a nice private little side canyon. Bob, when I stayed in his apartment house, we would, as we did at the farm, spend long hours intellectualizing and stuff like that. So that's how I came to be here. And there's a whole collection of ex-farm folk here. But they don't really have that much to do with each other. Well, Andy and us hang out, and I am collaborating with Rico in certain political campaigns, and that's about it for the townies I associate with from the farm. But it's kind of -- I'm glad that you're making me recall this and give it out, and I'm sure that there's so much that's not coming out here. But when I've said to Connie a lot, Connie and Pete and her kids, and her daughter Cassara just had a wedding down in the canyon. I remember when all these kids were born. I just say, "Connie and I grew up together." Even though we weren't children, but being at the farm is like growing up, it's during your growing up days, even though you're in your 20's or whatever. Fondness, attachment. I'm sure you can imagine where you were as you were forming yourself.

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**Q:** What about the flip side? What has been the downside of being part of Tolstoy?

**A:** Well, I'm sure -- I do hear distantly that people still do have conflicts over this or that, which is the nature of what it is to share resources. And they work it out, somehow, either by ignoring each other, or by talking to each other. I don't think anything comes to blows anymore like it did in the old days. And I think there's certain people who come there with an unconstructive attitude, and become a nuisance or a burden to others. Just like in any community. Except it's in a microcosm -- it's much more intense. I can recall to you conflicts over road access, conflicts over water, conflicts over jerks shooting their guns off around here. And others can talk to you about child molestation, or alcoholism, whatever. But these are not really distinctive to the farm, it's just the way everybody is, anywhere. But things are more intense when you're isolated in a canyon together. Speaking of that canyon thing, it's very beautiful, in the snow, in a full moon, just being able to go out there and see the sky at night. And also, there's so many animals. You name it, I've seen it. I used to keep bees for a long time. But then a bear beat the shit out of them, and I had had my second back operation around the same time, so I thought, "I'll lay off the bees," because it's a lot of lifting and stuff. And also I found that being in town, I really didn't have the time to maintain that and to process it. Even though I stopped keeping the bees years ago, I still have all this honey. All you've got to do is melt it down, and it's honey. I've seen bears, I've seen an immature bald eagle on my lawn, pecking at the grass stuck to my lawn mower. And I've seen a bobcat on my lawn, and it's more common to have deer -- like Page and I were sitting on my lawn reading, and these three deer just grazed by, even though we were sitting there. Snakes. And I have fruit trees that take up a lot of my time when I go there, to maintain the drip irrigation. My time is taken up by mowing my lawn, watering, tending to the trees, and not getting around to cleaning up the mess in the house. And there's all this repair that needs to be done in the house, which is very hard to achieve on a low budget, and no time. So there's those things.

**Q:** Would you say that Tolstoy Farm is still an intentional community?

**A:** That's a good question. You mean like, earlier there were intentional -- that's a good question. I have often said to people that it's more of a neighborhood now than a community. It's lost a lot of its purposeful community activity. But maybe you're asking the wrong person, because I don't go to the potlucks, other people. So maybe I'm just giving you too personal a perspective on that. I have heard from people about the struggles that go on, the meetings of the north 80 about this or that. There's one guy at the north 80 who, Chris Ostrander [?], who for the last five years was growing organic produce from my field, which he leased from me for a dollar a year or so, and that also gave me pleasure, to see all this produce in my field, and he'd haul it off to Spokane to sell. He's very hard to get along with, I hear from his neighbors up at the 80. And then there's a whole other world of people who do art there, like Gary Golden [?] and his wife Linda are painters, poets. They kind of are off in their own little world. So I don't know. One might -- different perspectives. One perspective might see the same people who do nothing but do their art, and find some welfare scheme or whatever to enable them to not work and do that. But from a different perspective, like mine, I think it's great. Who cares? Especially since I've spent the last 8 years defending welfare to people. Now we've just lost the battle. Because it's bipartisan consensus to eliminate poor people, starve them out. So there's still all kinds of different perspectives that people can have in their own households. But I think there is concern, as usual, about malingerers,

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and immaturely antisocial types. But there's a new type of antisocial behavior in the canyon -- some kind of jerky militia guy, he bought a place halfway up towards the top and shoots off his canyon now and then . He has some American flag laying up against his hovel. I think that's common also, all over the country, things like that are increasing, where there's these antisocial types who love to be in the woods and do their antisocial things. But now there's this right-wing political bent to it. So again, I say that's not distinctive to our community, it's part of society in general. Another thing that was interesting was we used to go to the lake -- have you heard about the lake?

**Q:** Yeah, I think Andy was saying in the summers, people would go swimming almost every day.

**A:** Yeah, we'd be naked and private. Then, the god damned farmers started building weekend and summer homes there. The canyon has a creek in it that empties into the Spokane River. The river goes west from downtown here, meanders around, comes past the mouth of the creek of the canyon, and then it passes that place and eventually joins with the Columbia at Fort Spokane. And so that was our place. And it's public shoreline, but it was private, because there was nobody else there. Then these homes started sprouting up there, most of which I think are still not year-round homes for people. But what they did is they violated the shoreline. It's public assess. They changed the county road so that it went up into their private subdivision, and dead ended there. The county road used to dead end down by the shore. So now, it's not, maybe people still go there, but it's not a place that I want to go to anymore. There's controversy about it, in the newspaper, Davenport Times and the Spokane paper, there's all this stuff about the Lake Roosevelt Homeowners' Association doesn't like all this government regulation. And the government regulation really involves a number of things, including the rangers telling these people to get their fucking docks off the public shoreline. And the ranger who did that got fired. Our local Republican congressman, who defeated Tom Foley, supported the firing of this guy. It's like people would have to either cross these people's front yards to go to a farther place along the river to swim, or, it's just not a nice place anymore. So it lacks a place to go swimming now, like it used to have. I guess that's part of the whole scene, interacting with the Davenport-ites . And then that blends into the whole scene over what's going on in the state and the nation over land use. One of the things that I've started is this new organization called Spokane Progressive Alliance, that is a coalition of environmental, labor, human rights, human services, and education. So I've been becoming more aware of these issues on the whole. And if you don't mind, I can give you a resume so that you can get a flavor of what I've been into, and I'll dig up one of my essays.

**Q:** Thank you. We like to collect stuff like that.

**A:** The combination of the cartoon and the essay is put together for handout purposes, propaganda purposes. I give legislative updates and stuff to Headstart parents and stuff like that, so I prepare materials to hand out.

**Q:** Is there a food co-op in Spokane?

**A:** There was. Now there's Lorien's, which is not a co-op. In fact, Bob Herman, who runs Lorien's used to work at the old food co-op.

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**Q:** But it went out of business?

**A:** I think -- I know it did, but I don't think there is a food co-op here now. There is a food co-op in Callville [?]. It's up in the north corner of the state, well, not the corner, Newport is in the corner, but it's about 2 hours north of Spokane. And it's a big hippie community up there, mixed in with a big redneck community. I have a friend up there who was the first hippie ever to have land in that area. And when I used to, when Susie and I, from May Valley, used to come on our trips to visit Jim and Sue Gore here, we'd also go visit Martin, who was building his house up in Callville at that time. That was in 1970 or '71 or something. He experienced lots of harassment, stuff like that.

**Q:** But other hippies followed him there?

**A:** Yeah, they followed. Where there's land, people just go and get it. But he was the first one with long hair to be there. His name is Martin Usick [?]. And he and I have been friends since we met in Seattle, when I was a student, and later a drop-out...