

Interview with Charles and Khabira Gruber

Interviewer: Unknown

November 1, 1995

CG = Charles Gruber, KG = Khabira Gruber

**Q:** In what commune(s) did you live? Name (was it known by more than one?); location; dates active; purpose or ideology of the group; names of founders, leaders, and other notable persons. How did you get involved in communal living?

**KG:** I got involved because of a strong feeling of idealism about how I wanted to live and discontent or disillusionment about how I saw the world at the time. I was one of those news junkies who followed the Watergate affair, protested the war in Vietnam, was a feminist, and that's where I came from. Through a series of coincidences I met Sufis and got involved in meditations and Sufi dancing and seminars in San Francisco. I was totally intrigued by the unity of religious ideals, which is kind of a Sufi way of referring to things. It was definitely a view of seeing the universality of things rather than a separatist point of view. I'd been searching all my life checking out every religious group around. I had been raised in a Methodist background, gone to Unitarian churches, and then finally let go of all of it and had my own sense of what a religious experience was that didn't seem to match a lot of other people's. Then I started being involved with Sufi people and felt like it was my spiritual home. That way of looking at the universe matched my own experience. I was at a seminar in Oakland one day and the head of the Sufi Order came to town and I had never met him. His name was Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan. At the end of the seminar he started talking about his idea of forming a community. At the time we were talking about having it in North Carolina or someplace.

**CG:** He had gotten a vision, instructions from his father, who was the original founder of the Sufi Order and died in 1926, saying "Feed your murids", murids are disciples or students. And that's all he got, "Feed your murids." And he said to himself, "I certainly don't have enough money to feed all the murids, what does that mean?" It became clear to him that it meant to create a place of sustenance where we could feed ourselves and so he started talking about that.

**KG:** I think this was around 1973. The decision to do that was not any easy decision in terms of choices and family stuff. It wasn't a decision that I made lightly. A few months before when I had started meeting Sufis and attending seminars and meditation groups and classes, I was very skeptical of any organization that had a hierarchy. It concerned me that all the women I was meeting were very strong women but seemed to be subject to the hierarchy. So it wasn't like I met these Sufis and immediately said "This is for me," though this did happen to a certain degree. I was so attracted to it but at the same time had a real reserve about it. I kept asking questions about this and that. I wasn't comfortable that men did one kind of zikr and women did another kind of zikr. A lot of what I got in the very beginning was like "This is the way teacher said to do it," and that wasn't good enough for me. I decided finally that I would attend an inquirer's class at a Sufi commune in Nevada. It was Samuel Lewis' old house. The communal house was lived in by a bunch of his murids. He was very strong about women have this role and men have this role. He just saw them as very distinctive roles. So I go to this first inquirer's class and I'm going to get straight about all this.

**CG:** You're going to straighten them out.

**KG:** I'm going to ask the right questions and get the right answers to find out once and for all. I felt so attracted to the whole teaching but there was some part in me that was still so unclear. Also, I'm not really a joiner. So I'm sitting in this class in a circle and this gentleman is teaching the class, and everything he says makes sense. But I'm still asking my questions about women and this and that. The class went fairly well and I felt good about how the questions were answered. I started asking questions

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about the hierarchy and who was the teacher's teacher, and he told me he had some pictures and I could have one if I wanted. There was a picture of Hazrat Inayat Khan who was the father of Pir Vilayat Khan, who had formed the Sufi Order. It was his father who had brought Sufism to the West. I got up to leave the class and I picked up the picture, and I had what I would consider a religious experience. I looked at the man and I just started crying. I recognized as someone who I used to dream about when I was a little girl. I used to have these dreams when he would come to me in my dreams. This was between the ages of four and seven. During this period I felt like life was very difficult and I remember saying to this man in my dreams, "I want to go home." He would say "It's OK," and kept comforting me through this period. So here I am at this class, and I was 36 or 37, and I picked up this picture. Even talking about it makes me want to weep. It was an incredible experience. So I knew that this was my destiny and about this same time I heard about this commune. Coincidentally, the man who was teaching the inquirer's class ended up being the leader or administrator of the Abode. He was the one who was heading it up and I immediately felt a rapport with him. That's a long answer, but that's how I went to the Abode.

**CG:** I, myself, was planted in Lawrence, Kansas, smoking as much dope and being as hip as I could be. One could say that I was even more hip than necessary. The hippest archetype at that time was a VW mechanic so I became a VW mechanic. One day my first wife and I went over to some friends, and a new record album had come in the mail from the woman's old college roommate who is now known as "Amina". It was the first Sufi choir album. They put it on and I was totally blown away by the music. Khabira had also heard the same album.

**KG:** That was one of the coincidences that had happened. My boyfriend had picked up a hitchhiker who was wearing a Sufi pin and started telling my boyfriend about it. He was going back to his office and walked by his favorite record store. The guy inside said "I just got a record I think you'd like," and it was the same record. So he ran over to me and then I listened to it.

**CG:** So we listen to this record and it turns out that the woman who we were visiting, who was the roommate of Amina, got this record and a note that the very first Sufi camp was happening. These were Samuel Lewis' students. My wife's friend got really excited about going out to this camp and I was excited about my wife going because at the time I couldn't stand her. We had one of these approach/avoidance conflicts that went on for about ten years. So these three women got in an old Valiant and drive out there. Three weeks later my first wife (who was my girlfriend at the time) came back and I hardly recognized her. She had gone through a metamorphosis, from being a cranky, neurotic type person to being this flower. So a month later when the second Sufi camp was happening I went out there with her. We flew out to San Francisco and hitchhiked from Marin up to Healdsburg. My heart was completely blown away by it. I still have the taste of that first experience in my mouth. I had never been involved in spiritual practices, Sufi dancing, community, vegetarian meals, singing, making music, and I was just swept away by the whole thing. So I came back to Lawrence totally excited, totally changed, and we started leading Sufi dancing here and formed the Lawrence Sufi Center at the Ecumenical Christian Ministries building. It had so much power that within weeks we had 80, 90, or 100 people dancing once a week. Then I got notice that there was this thought of a community being formed. I'd been doing my business long enough and I had money saved. So I wrote to the

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administrative head of the Abode, Stephan Rekshaffen, and got obnoxious about when we're going to do it and when it's going to be.

**KG:** I remember Stephan saying to me at the meeting, "There's this guy named Charlie Gruber in Lawrence, Kansas, and one of you needs to volunteer to write to him." I said "I can do that," and I never did.

**CG:** So the planning went on and they were looking for land in North Carolina and all over the place, and finally they found some property in upstate New York, near Lebanon, New York. In April of 1975 I packed up my Bug. I went out there three weeks early and I arrived there before we had even bought the place and looked around at the Shaker village.

**KG:** The way that we heard of the land was that we had this land search committee going on. So people all over the United States that were in Sufi groups were planning on going. It was Wavy Gravy's wife, Johananan, who was friends with Peter Count. She had become involved with Sufis. Wavy Gravy told Peter about this group that was looking for some land to buy to form a community. That's how the land was found. It really didn't meet our requirements. We wanted to be in a warmer climate where we could grow lots of food. But we ended up in upstate New York on the north side of a mountain and the growing period was not very long.

**CG:** Fifteen or twenty minutes.

**KG:** We sometimes had snow in May and snow in October so it was a shorter growing period. So there were a lot of obstacles to be overcome. At one point we were negotiating for some tobacco land in North Carolina where we were going to renovate old tobacco sheds. Somehow one owner wouldn't sell which meant the deal wouldn't go. But there was a feeling when people walked the land that somehow or another it was right. Pir Vilayat felt like in a lot of ways the Shakers had similar things with the Sufis. One of them was reaching ecstasy through dance. The Shakers were very industrious, hardworking people and had a lot of inventions. Some of them were really intelligent people. The circular saw was invented by a Shaker woman who had reached a state of ecstasy through spinning. So that's how we found the land. So then people started arriving early like Charles from all over the United States and other countries. There were people that came from England and Germany. I got there June 18, 1975. Charles and the first group were there April before that. I think the official birth of the place was somewhere in May of that year. The core or original group of people were all disciples of Pir Vilayat Khan. But that didn't stay that way for over ten minutes. We immediately had people coming and wanting to live there and join. It was always an open policy. You didn't have to be a follower of his but you had to be willing to accept the fact that that's what most of the community was into, but that wasn't a requirement. So there was a very large and interesting mix of people. Before winter got there we had 100 adults and 25 children. People were arriving daily. It was outrageous. When we got there the buildings hadn't been used for years. It needed a completely new heating and plumbing system. The buildings were in terrible shape.

**Q:** Were these buildings that had originally been constructed by the Shakers?

**KG:** Yes. They had been abandoned for a lot of years. There were camps for city kids to come to the country and experience country life and it had been sublet to the camps in years past. But the buildings were original. We bought 435 acres.

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**CG:** It was approximately 400 in New York and 35 in Massachusetts.

**KG:** So we were around the state line. Down the road from us in either direction were Shaker villages. This had been a huge Shaker village.

**CG:** Their famous, round Hancock Shaker barn was just over the hill. If you know anything about the Shakers, as the Buddhists did, they took mindfulness as a precept. So when they built something they built it right. What was interesting was that there was probably twice as many buildings at one time. We're talking about buildings three, four or five stories high, all wood of course, all heated by wood stoves. When you heat by wood stoves, half of them burn down over the years and centuries. So we arrived there at this god forsaken, but beautiful place. The truth was that it wasn't god forsaken at all. The spirit was still there. We were really, really wet behind the ears. We had some very talented farmers and carpenters, but overall, we just really didn't know what we were getting into but we got into it anyway. We all paid \$500 or \$1000 for application to start purchase processes. Then a number of us made interest free loans. So when we got there we had to figure out how to support ourselves. It hadn't been quite thought out. We had talked about cottage industries a lot. A month after I got there there was a gas station on the Pittsfield, MA, side of the Massachusetts line and I made inquiries about renting it. It seemed like it was going to work. I remember coming into the dining hall one time and making an announcement that I was going to sign a lease for this building, what did everybody think? There was one lady who said, "Oh Burak (his name at the time), that sounds so wonderful, good luck and godspeed!" I rented this broken down garage and fixed it up and painted it up. The first or second day we started working on it to fix it up into a VW shop, Khabira and Khalila (Elva and Pamela) arrived at the Abode. Khabira had expressed some interest as working as a mechanic.

**KG:** Part of my background, my feminist stuff, was that when I was in California I had gotten so fed up having my Volkswagen worked on and the guy had misdiagnosed it and messed me up and made me angry because I knew so little about cars. I finally said, "I'm going to take a class in auto mechanics so I can tell if mechanics are shooting straight." So I had taken this class, a couple of them, and I had spent my summer vacation rebuilding my engine myself. During my two week vacation I had rebuilt my engine and it worked. It was so empowering. So when I heard the community would have equipment and cars it sounded great to me to work on cars.

**CG:** She and her daughter arrived there and I met her daughter, Khalila, down in the kitchen, and she said, "My mom and I just got in from California." They were totally wiped out from having travelled. So the first thing I said was "You better be able to work tomorrow, we've got a shop to paint." She started working there. I was living with another woman who also worked there in the office.

**KG:** We worked together for years before we ever got involved.

**CG:** I don't know that we really liked each other but we put up with each other. She was the abrasive by which I cleaned off my act, and I was the abrasive by which she cleaned off her act.

**KG:** People had just given up their homes and their possessions and it was an outrageous cultural shock. I felt like someone had just thrown me to the floor. It was like not having your own home, not being able to decide what was in your own space, all these people around, lining up to use the telephone, just the whole thing. I thought we were going to go there with all these like minded people and it would be just love, like it was at Sufi camp.

**CG:** Peace, love, and harmony, everything would be cool.

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**KG:** But it wasn't. We had family meetings every night. We had arguments about if there was going to be any meat cooked on the premises? Where were we going to cook it if it was cooked there?

**CG:** Why can't I bring my cats? Why can't I bring my dog? Who has got money? Who doesn't have money? Who needs money? What about medical care?

**KG:** Who's a slut? Who's doing their share? Who's working harder than the next person?

**CG:** What do you think you're doing playing music all day when I'm out there shoveling dirt?

**KG:** What got me was that I was overhauling engines in the shop and sweating like a pig and I would come home and there would be someone who had just spent the day picking blueberries on the hill. Everybody you have ever had a harm time with in your life, that person arrived there in short order. It was like everybody you ever had a problem with was there, someone that personified that person. It was a phenomena. I felt tested almost to the edge. It was shocking too because I came with all this idealism about everyone loving each other and having common goals, everyone knowing the right way to live, right? No, wrong. Both of us got very actively involved in running the place, took on major committee rolls, and hopped right in, thinking here was our chance to make a difference. We had this idealism that we were going to do this with consensus. We spent hour upon hour trying to reach consensus on things.

**CG:** The picture was that the personality is a mirror and we had 125 personalities show up there. Every one of them had rust on them. In order to get the rust off we rubbed against each other. There were some cracked mirrors and there was a lot rust dust. Things rearranged. Couples rearranged. Triples rearranged.

**KG:** And people started leaving, which was very disturbing.

**CG:** We sought to establish heaven and we found out we had earth.

**KG:** We found out we had the same thing we had on the outside but we were in charge. One guy said, "You have met the landlord and he is us." It was like, no more blaming the way the world was set up, you can create what you want to create and you have all these like minded people with likeminded goals, so do it. We found out it was hard. I remember taking the first guy that left to the airport, Laguardia in New York City, and I was really upset that someone would leave. After that people came and went, but it was like that first person leaving was almost a threat that maybe this wouldn't work.

**CG:** It was like a mutiny.

**KG:** It was an absolutely life changing experience. Even today when I think back on it today I realize that the experience continues. I'm still learning from it even though I haven't lived there in seventeen years. I feel like there are lessons that I learned there that are still renewing themselves.

**Q:** So the formal governing structure was by consensus? How did it work?

**KG:** When people first got there there were family meetings every night. I got there in June and it was every other night. Then we started having them once a week. This was everyone in the community but nothing was mandatory. There was nothing mandatory about anything. It was very much an open ended thing. We'd have agendas and would go really late into the night. We broke into committees almost from the beginning and we sought to look at other communities and how they worked. In fact, Peter Caddy came and visited us from Findhorn one time. We had a lot of interesting people come to visit us and talk to us and share their experiences. We had the works committee, the esoterics

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committee, the admissions committee, and the financial committee (a governing board made up of all the heads of these different committees that met separately to make major decisions). One of the things we spent a lot of time doing is deciding how to make it equitable for people to live in the community.

**CG:** How to deal with people that show up with a lot of money and others who don't have a penny to their name.

**KG:** The way we set up committees and the government of the place wasn't changing every day but it had a flow to it. We started off with one money system where you would record your hours, how much karma yoga each family would do. It was like two chores a week for everyone in addition to your job. This meant cooking dinner, cleaning up after dinner, working in the garden. People also had their jobs. People were paid so much an hour to do their jobs. In the beginning it was like a nickel an hour. It started off one way and through the years changed many times. It wasn't like we changed it every month but we would decide to do it one way, do it that way for a while, then see where it caused inadequacies in certain areas. One thing that happened was that a lot of people started businesses like Charles did. There were different concentrations and cottage industries. We ended up building a bakery. Two of three people that had been into wood stoves developed a wood stove business in a local town. We were always looking for better ways to meet the needs of everybody. We had some people that tried to start a computer business that lost money from the start. We had the garage which was always a money maker for the community. We had an insulation service. We had a sowing concentration where a lot of the stay home mothers would sow. We had a lot of arts and crafts, a bookstore, a catalog for mail order. Of course there was the whole farm thing and renovations of buildings, which took a lot of people. We started a school from the beginning. It started off a pre school through third or fourth grade. It seemed like the kids that came there were all fairly young. Then there were several families, including me with my daughter, who went to the local school. The school, called Mountain Road School, was actually attended by half Abode children and half from the outside community. There were people in the local community that immediately wanted their kids to go there. There was a high level of educated people who came to form the Abode. There were medical doctors, teachers, business people, engineers, computer people, and psychologists. People that had almost every kind of background. We had a lot of professional people, an interesting mix across the way. What people brought to the community and how they wanted to earn their living varied enormously. There were people who worked in the businesses, people that worked in the community, and people who worked in the outside world and brought money in that way. The community is still going and the way it is basically now is that people work outside the community. There are very few businesses there now. All the cottage industries folded through the years. (We even had a restaurant and soda fountain for some time.) Some of the businesses lasted for many, many years and some where short lived.

**Q:** Did the group seek self sufficiency through its cottage industries and endeavors?

**CG:** We bought a lot of our food. We weren't totally self sufficient. We did without a lot of stuff too. We used to have jokes about the top ten reasons for coming to the Abode and the top ten reasons for leaving. Real butter was something that was unheard of. We didn't buy things like real butter, that was considered a luxury. We had good cooks and some cooks were better than others. Some people that

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managed the kitchen were just wonderful and others were just awful. A lot of people bought their own snacks and food. One of the buildings had a small kitchen and it ended up being the meat eaters kitchen. The main kitchen was vegetarian. There were a lot of jokes about someone asking some little kid at the school what religion they were, thinking they would say Sufi, but they said "I'm a non dairy!" We had people that didn't eat dairy. We had all these dietary things. We finally accommodated everybody. We did do without a lot of stuff. We had a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables and a lot of beans and rice. They were extremely healthy meals. But the luxuries, the things you get used to when you have your own kitchen, we didn't have. Some people would eat out. You didn't have to eat there. You could eat in your own room. Within this community there was a lot of freedom to make choices. There was no mandatory anything. When I was single there I pretty much ate out of the kitchen, out of the dining room. It was the same dining room the Shakers had eaten in before us. There were two separate entrances because they had a separated society, males and females. Sometimes when the winters were long and people were feeling discontent, there were really innovative and creative people who would do things like plan soirees or parties. They would take money from their own pockets to do something fancy for people, like a party atmosphere. There would be butter on every table or fresh ground coffee.

**Q:** What was the schedule of meals? Were they only served once?

**KG:** The meals were scheduled three per day at certain times. On the weekends, on Sundays for instance, we would have brunch and a late afternoon dinner. A lot of it would depend on who was in charge of the kitchen. We used to joke and say that some people managed the kitchen and we all felt well fed and others would do it with the same budget and there would be a lot of complaints. There were people that were extremely creative with food and how it was served. We had a counter and the food was set out. I never ran the kitchen and I was never the main cook for the day, but I did my share of being one of the backup people. It would be set out at a certain time of the day and the bell would ring. We had a system that was there from times past to sterilize things. It was a conveyor belt that went through hot baths to sterilize the dishes. We were real concerned about an outbreak of things like hepatitis. An illness can wipe a community out. There was a lot of variety about how things were done through the years depending on who was in charge. That was true in terms of all the committees. Charles was, at one point, in charge of the work committee. That meant if you needed help at the garden or the farm you would get a hold of Charles and say you needed three or four extra workers on the farm that week. The guy that ran the farm was from Nebraska and he's now a state senator in Albany, NY. Sometimes on the weekend, since the land hadn't been worked in so long, everybody would meet and go down and work on the farm for an hour. That would be every adult family member. When we put the tomatoes in the first year everybody was down putting them in that morning.

One of the other things that happened was that people wanted to start building their own houses. I was one of the first people that built their own houses. Some of the houses that were built looked very fancy, like something you would see in suburbia, and others weren't. Some were very innovated log cabins and houses in the round. I built a 12' x 16' house on stilts down by a stream with a shed roof, a loft, and a wood burning stove. It was a very primitive, cozy cabin. I was one of those who wanted to build a house and at the time probably thought I would stay forever.

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**Q:** What other kinds of living arrangements were there? Were there nuclear family households, or large group households?

**KG:** That was another committee that I served on, the housing committee. There was a lot of arguing when we first arrived about who got what spots. Some of the places seemed no bigger than closets in a way. I lived in several different rooms in two different buildings before I built my own home. The first one was above the bakery. All the houses or dormitories had names. The building that I was in was three or four stories at least. The bottom floor on one half of it was the bakery. On the other side was a communal restroom and laundry room. The next two floors were housing rooms. The Shakers used to build chairs. They were celibate. They would not even talk directly between men and women. The men did the chairs in the building next to ours and they put the chairs out on the walkway. The building that I lived in was where the Shaker women would go out on to the walkway, get the chairs, and cane the bottoms of them. Some of the buildings had sinks in them. You got what was there. We didn't personally renovate any of the living space except for heating, plumbing, bathrooms, things that made our life functional. The individual rooms were left up to the individual. How you got your room was based on the size of your family. The biggest families got the biggest living spaces. Everybody pretty much had their own room. My daughter Khalila and I lived together for a little bit and then I started living with a boyfriend. She decided to live up in the attic of this same building. Up in the attic was where three or four single people lived. That was before we insulated that particular part of the building and we used to kid her about waking up with snow drifting onto her bed. You could see through the boards in the building in the beginning. It was very rustic. Some people lived very simple lifestyles. One woman lived in a tent on a hill. She was a real self sufficient woman who had lived in a tepee before she came there. But most people found some living space. It took people a while to find a place. After a while a lot of people put their own money into "feathering their nest" and making nicer spaces. When I first got there in June there were a lot of empty rooms because people were still arriving every day. You'd walk around and see what was available. A lot of it was based on size of families and family needs. Some would take some huge room and turn it into a couple of rooms with sleeping areas for kids. I had a hard time living with people. I would never do a community again. For me, it seemed like there was no way to feel like I was completely alone at times. One of the things that happened to me was that I had a little meditation altar set up and above it I had a picture of a famous chapel. The photo was very inspiring. I kept it there because it inspired me. I came home from work one day and the picture was gone. I was really upset. So I asked around to a couple of people in the building. There were no locks on the doors and I had closed my door. I knew that sometimes people used my room. I was so aggravated. I would come home and my shampoo would be gone, or my scissors. So I wrote this kind of harsh note and posted it on my door asking to be told if something is borrowed. The picture was taken to be used for some brochure. When I came back that night my note was gone and in place of it was another note that said, "Dear Khabira, I borrowed your note, Love Anastas." I began to notice that community living was not something I wanted to do forever. I had to kind of wrestle with that. When I went there I went with all this idealism that I was going to change the world, find the ideal community, and show people the right way to do things. I was almost slammed with the reality that it was not as easy I as I thought it was going to be. It was much, much harder. At some point I just accepted the fact



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that this was an extremely rich experience but I felt good about leaving. But that was a process, it didn't happen overnight. It happened over four and one half years, just short of five years. As a matter of fact, at one point I left and came back. Charles and I both left, that's how we ended up getting together. He and I both left saying we've had enough. He, in the meantime, had married but the woman had moved away. I had decided to leave. We ended up in the same area. I was getting to go back out to California and he was getting ready to go on a teaching tour. I had been kind of sick and he was going to help me mail my stuff to California. I sold him my house and I was on my way to California. He gave me a ride as far as Kansas because this was where I was originally from, not Lawrence, but Kansas. My family was originally from Salina. I was hitchhiking and he was giving me a ride, and the rest "is history", so they say. We ended up getting married and I went back there and lived in the house I sold him. We lived back there together for a year or a year and one half.

**Q:** How was the Sufi ideology of the Abode practiced? What were the rituals and ceremonies?

**KG:** The main body of the Abode was formed by Sufi leaders and students of Sufism. There were Sufi practices going on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly. But there was always an open policy about what your spiritual beliefs were. You didn't have to be the student of any teacher to live there. The issues that often arose around it were whether you were following more than one teacher or not, not which teacher you were following. We had people there who were following Hari Das and Ram Das and different people like that who came and lived there for a period of time. In the admissions committee, of course the spiritual leanings might be asked about or discussed. It was something people always asked about. There was always a group of people, a fringe element, who wanted it to be exclusively Sufi. The sentiment from Pir Vilayat was to never miss the opportunity to meet god in all his/her forms.

**CG:** Like any other tree in the forest, there were many branches. There were those who talked about a need for a greater Sufi influence on the community or a lesser. There were those who advocated a particular branch of Sufism. Our lineage comes through our teacher. Pir Vilayat was our teacher. Hazrat Inayat was his father and Pir Vilayat's teacher. Most people claim the mystics for their own so the Sufis have shown a preponderance in Islam but it's not an Arab trip. Someone ask Samuel Lewis, "What should I do if someone comes up and asks if I'm a Moslem?" He suggested you say, "No, but I'm not exceeded in my love for Allah, but keep your hand on the hilt of your knife," something like that.

The Christians have their mystics, and the Jews have their Cabala and their mystics, and the Hindus do, and the Zoroastrians do. The mystic aspect of that tends to be oriented towards some Sufi like or Sufi predominate activity or lineage or history. So we got a funnel at our place that held aloft the ideals of the Sufi message, which were love, harmony, and beauty. We tried to not separate man and god into man and god, but to include man in god and see the divinity in everyone and the humanity in god. Those merge together. The Sufi ideal has always served as a map. It's the map but it's not the territory.

**Q:** What did Sufi practice entail for those that did participate?

**KG:** It changed through the years, of course. There were always prayers three times a day, early morning, noon, and evening prayers. A bell always rang. There was a bell already in the belfry from the Shakers. It always rang five minutes before prayers. We used to get in arguments at the shop about whether we were going to race home for prayers or finish that car's brake job. On Sunday morning, we

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had something called universal worship service. Several times a week there would be different kinds of classes for students. It was based on a hierarchy thing, around what your initiation was in the order. So if you were first through fourth rank you might go to one class, or fourth through sixth rank. These were all papers that were read to students written by Hazrat Inayat Khan back in the 20s. There was a whole catalog of these papers that were considered more or less secretive, though that's not really true. They sit around at people's homes and people share them occasionally. But they were kind of unpublished esoteric papers addressing different issues. We often sponsored other teachers and seminars and brought people in to spend a weekend there and do a seminar. We also did retreats regularly. We had a retreat concentration. Pir Vilayat believed in going off and making retreats so many times of the year. No one was forced to or anything but you had the opportunity of doing that there. Some of us were trained as retreat leaders while we were there.

**CG:** Some of us, because we had universal worship services, were trained as ministers. We would have a cherag at the point of ordination. The position of cherag. So both Khabira and I are ordained ministers. In the 70s sometime I came here to Lawrence to be with some friends and perform a wedding. I took my ordination letter to the Douglas County clerk and he put it on file. That made me legal to perform weddings and sign wedding licenses. So I've done lots and lots of weddings because I think it's the highest form of theater there is. And I bury people too, but that's just a sideline.

**KG:** Pir Vilayat was all over the world travelling and giving seminars, but occasionally he was there. We would do something called darsan and he would also see you individually for interviews and things. We had a healing circle that met on Sundays. The leader of the healing circle was part of a separate, special order of healers within the Sufi order. There was not that much Sufi dancing that went on there. It was occasional, but it wasn't a regular thing. There was kind of an interesting split in the Sufi order during the time that we lived there. Hazrat Inayat was the one that brought the Sufism to the West and then you had his so Pir Vilayat, who was the head of us. The other well known Sufi teacher in the West was Samuel Lewis. He had quite a following of murids in San Francisco. He died in 1968 or 1969. He said of said that you should look to Pir Vilayat for guidance. But a lot of people never felt comfortable with that. So within the movement there was a certain amount of people who didn't ever accept Pir Vilayat as their teacher. Most of the time it wasn't talked about real openly. It would surface at times over certain issues. One was based around Sufi dancing. Pir Vilayat thought it was an interesting form. He was into the Whirling Dervishes. Pir Vilayat is a very proper, maybe a little bit on the prim side.

**CG:** He stands out in a crowd. He has an Oxford accent and he is highly educated. But he's not British.

**KG:** I can't speak for him, but I think when he came to America to see what kind of legacy his father had left, he was pretty shocked by the California hippies. He also saw it as a seed and loosened up and loved everybody. He always related from his heart. So at the Abode there wasn't a lot of the Samuel Lewis, hippy dippy, dancing all the time image. It was kind of played down. I was initiated into Sufism by a man who was leaving Pir Vilayat and was going to head up his own Sufi order. To be proper, if you've taken initiation from one person you shouldn't be following another. So I had to choose. It was like a divorce in the family. It was very upsetting. There was an esoteric committee. And if you wanted to do something in the community that was of a spiritual nature you went to the esoteric committee and asked. You said what your needs were or what you would like to see. You could go there if you had a

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complaint apart from the regular weekly meetings. A lot of us, before we came to the Abode, took time in the morning and evening to say prayers and meditate. When we got to the Abode, and were working such long, hard hours, it seemed like we didn't get much spiritual practice.

**CG:** But of course, the whole thing was spiritual practice.

**KG:** We talked a lot about what is spiritual practice. Is it doing karma yoga in the kitchen? We had a lot of wrestling with what was spiritual practice and how could you get as high cleaning toilets as you could sitting in the meditation hall for half an hour? No one ever decided how it worked.

**CG:** Most people opted for the meditation hall instead of the toilets, but no one figured out how it worked. That's not really true. We found that as people lived there longer they tended to spend less time in meditation worship. But people who would come in from the outside for a week would be totally into the whole spiritual thing. They would see the Abode as this place of retreat and intense heart work. We'd see it as a place where we lived and worked really hard, and occasionally got to go into town and get a burger.

**KG:** It was a lot like real life. It put me through an amazing spiritual process. The Sufis always had this big thing about wedding the material to the spiritual and the spiritual with the material. I felt like before I went to live at the Abode I had my foot heavy into the material world. Then the pendulum sort of went in the other way and I went heavy into the spiritual world, doing a lot of retreats and all of that. When we left the Abode I felt that a lot of my work was to be in the world as a Sufi saint, but not of the world, wedding the spiritual with the material where they are harmonious. We had a lot of celebrations while we lived there. We built a camp up on the hill. We built retreat huts and a whole camp with a kitchen and store. We rented tents the first year and every year we would add another building. Although, we left shortly into that. Every year there would be Sufi camps with the concentration being bringing teachers of other groups. We would draw people like Ram Das. We had a lot of travelling Indian musicians. A lot of Turkish players and things like that would be travelling through. A lot of interesting doctors from Boston would come and do things on health. Elizabeth Kubler Ross was friends with the whole crowd.

**CG:** People in the 70s wanted to hear the message. People throughout history have wanted to hear the message. The message comes in many different forms. There was an intense planetary, or at least Western, American thirst for the meaning of all this in the 70s. There were zillions of forays into the resources of the world to find out what the answer was. It took some strange forms. The message took strange forms. The messengers took even stranger forms. And the listeners took some real strange forms. Some of them took forms you couldn't recognize. So the ideal was to treat everyone as a seeker after god.

**KG:** Part of what I consider to be the spiritual process was staying at home and having all these wonderful spiritual beings, who were human also, coming into our home. For instance, Hari Das Baba, who hadn't spoken for forty years or something, came there teaching us how to play "dodo" on the lawn of the Abode. Here's this spiritual Indian master who hadn't spoken a word for forty years on our lawn. Then Pir Vilayat decided to do this cosmic mass celebration in New York City. My daughter Khalila was sixteen and I let her go into New York City. We had this cosmic mass celebration at St. John the Divine. Some really high moments came out of that whole situation. Whether it was taking a retreat on a hill,

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going to evening prayers, or sitting with Pir Vilayat, there was always something. There were always people there to talk to about stuff. There were always classes going on and teachers coming in. There was a lot of spiritual work that went on.

**CG:** Spiritual work, as you've probably figured out, is an inside and outside job. It was hopeless to look at anyone else to find out what spiritual work was because how could you tell? By the way they dress? By the way they talk? By their demeanor? One of the main lessons for me was that you stopped trying to figure out who's spiritual or not, to not play top dog/bottom dog spirituality with someone when you meet them because that's a real bush league attitude.

**KG:** A lot of people did come to the Abode hoping for enlightenment. We were hoping that one day during the middle of prayers the top of our head would open and we would understand everything. There were a lot of high hopes for enlightenment.

**CG:** It was a directed hope. We were monks on the path to the top of the mountain. I don't know what we thought we were going to do. You might be working on your outer spiritual garb, praying, meditating, travelling around, but in the meantime you're miserable. The same work is going on inside that is based on the intention on the outside. What we saw was half the work and it was tumultuous between people. People were rubbing the rust off everyone else's mirrors and people were reflecting each other's weirdness as well as beauty. The inner work that was going on was, I think, the real product of that period, the real harvest of what was sown during those years. Most of us are still alive and have gone on to raise families. We've changed jobs and changed husbands and changed paths but I'd be willing to bet that the ideals that were established there haven't changed much and the people still feel a connection to those ideals. We thought the connection was going to be on the outside but I think it was on the inside.

**Q:** What was the relationship between sexual expression and the community? What sexual rules and attitudes and practices were present?

**KG:** Shortly after I moved there, someone came around looking for people to go over and be interviewed by an Albany radio station. Since I was there I got picked, more or less. I went over there and one of the first callers was a man wanting to know if we believed in "free sex"? I remember us just hee hawing at this guy trying to be polite. One of the most popular things when people would hear "community" those days was the misconception that everybody was sleeping with everybody else, or that there was some kind of sexual conspiracy to undermine the morals of the family. One of the other misconceptions was that we were members of some cult.

**CG:** Which we were.

**KG:** Well, what's a cult?

**CG:** A cult is a group of individuals who don't belong to your church. That's Tim's quote.

**KG:** I know that we decided before we went there that we were going to pay our taxes and not take advantage of the religious tax status. We didn't want to frighten the townspeople. The town that we were close to was a very small village.

**CG:** On the question of sexual expression, I had an experience when an insurance looking to insure the Abode. I was talking to him and he asked, "Is there a lot of free love going on around there?" And I said, "No, it's tremendously expensive, you wouldn't want any of it." That was a lot of peoples vision of

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communes. Everybody fucked everybody else and whatever else happened didn't matter. There was a tendency for people to couple up at the Abode. There was also a tendency for people to uncouple at the Abode. It was fertile ground for coupling and uncoupling because it was kind of an experiment in the works. I don't think it was taken really lightly. I went with one woman and came home with another. But then there were some interesting other combinations besides coupling up. So one evening at the Abode, the person Khabira was coupled up with said, "I think it's time we talk about triangles." Then someone said, "That sounds like a good idea, I've always been interested in Pythagoras." There were some loosely defined boundaries. People just tried to let people be who they were. I think people who came into the community was it as a great chance to get laid.

**KG:** I think among some of the men. I don't think that was the women's thing. I think women were looking for their soul-mates and I thought men were looking for their soul-mates too.

**CG:** The men were looking for women who would be their first love and the women were looking for men who would be their last one. We also had a lot of people come through there that had mixed sexual motives. When I say mixed I mean that they weren't intending to seduce people but it was a place to do so seducing and be tempted and seduced.

**KG:** When I lived there I had been out in the world and had lived a material life. I thought moving to there was the most celibate thing I had ever done in my life. There were probably as many situations as there was in the real world.

**CG:** But in the real world people don't talk about it. It doesn't get discussed. In the real world? Perhaps in the surreal world is more fitting.

**KG:** Look at it this way, I think one of the most sexual or attractive times in a person's life is when they get turned on to their spiritual nature. I think it's a very juicy, magnetic thing. When someone is blossoming spiritually, something does awaken in them that starts dripping off of them and attracting people of the opposite sex. I think that happens. I think people would come to the Abode, living a life of quiet desperation on the outside, come to a three day camp or retreat, get real turned on or electrified by it, go back to New York City, quit their job, move to the Abode, do a retreat and come out of there looking reborn. Then six guys, all of a sudden, would become alert because there is something very juicy about sexual energy. Each level of awakening creates a magnetism that people of the opposite sex, as well as the same sex, are drawn to. What we choose to do with that energy can be interesting because some people would see it as a chance to get connected up with another person and some people would use it to create some whole new concentration at the Abode. Or all of a sudden they might have this awakening that they were with the wrong person. That there was something about their life that was completely abhorrent and they had the courage to make the change now. As far as misconceptions by the outside community, it was obvious that with communes they were looking for sex and cults. I know that members of my family and other families were worried that their kids were being brainwashed by some spiritual teacher and it was going to ruin the rest of their life, or something like that. So I think that there was a misconception, particularly about our teacher, that he was a power monger or someone who wanted to have control, as in a cult kind of thing. Or there was another misconception that we were all bums and freeloaders. But we paid our taxes. We voted people into offices. We attended community meeting. We had people that volunteered for the volunteer fire station.

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**CG:** Many years later the Abode went through a severe financial crisis and said to the city, "We don't want to pay our taxes." The city got really upset but finally agreed.

**Q:** What was the relationship between psychedelics and the community? Were drugs used? What drugs? How often? By most residents, or only some?

**CG:** Drugs were not allowed on the Abode grounds. That was one of the rules that was frequently broken. There were people there who smoked dope regularly, sometimes irregularly. The appearance, or disappearance or psychedelics was very occasional. It was no part of the community because we knew if drugs were found there it would lose its standing completely.

**KG:** Pir Vilayat was very paranoid. He did not want drugs on the land. He did not want to have our efforts wasted. When the split happened with the Sam Lewis thing that was one of the main issues. Pir Vilayat felt that a lot the Sam Lewis people were these old, dope-smoking hippies and that you had to choose. You either chose him or you chose to be an old dope-smoking hippie. At that point he just said, if you do drugs I don't approve of it but it's your business, but you're not going to do it on the land where it could cause some reputations. He was very concerned about his visa because he was not a citizen. His visa could be revoked if there were any problems. It was maybe 1977 or so when the split happened and that's when he said absolutely no drugs at all. But there was some sneaking. I know of several occasions when there was some sneaking around. But basically, I think most people couldn't afford drugs or didn't have connections. They had moved there to get away from their habits or whatever. Most of the times when I saw it was when a group of murids would go into a city for some event. They would be at a Sufi communal house in San Francisco or Boston or New York, and someone would pull out a joint. It was kind of like being on vacation. I don't think there was a lot of psychedelics. It was mostly just weed. I was one of the one's that broke the contraband law. I had been away and gotten some love drug that was going around in San Francisco. I had come back with a couple of these in my pocket. I thought I'd just mention this to the first person I saw who I thought would enjoy it. There were three or four of us women in the back of one of those buildings and we took this love drug. I figured if I did there were others who from time to time did as well. It was very secretive. But it wasn't common knowledge and most of the people that lived there would have been horrified if they found out I had done that.

**CG:** I was horrified she didn't offer me any.

**Q:** Other than the misconceptions you mentioned previously, what were the relations with the surrounding culture like?

**CG:** Basically no one ever gave us any trouble. We were a real curiosity. The community was used to Shakers. So when they saw that the Shaker buildings were being used again, that was perceived generally as a real positive thing. When they saw this bunch of weirdos and it was the mid 70s, they just said, "Well what do you expect from those youngsters?"

**KG:** We were written about a lot. They would say that we were inheriting the Shaker tradition, this was their prime theory at the time. Everyone played up the angle of a new age community on Shaker foundations. Shaker women actually came and visited us. They were really interested in meeting us and seeing what we were doing. They spent a whole day there and they were just tickled. In a lot of the

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newspaper and magazine articles you actually get the flavor of people and their different emphases for why they came there or what they were doing there.

**Q:** When and why did you decide to leave?

**KG:** We left the Abode and arrived in Lawrence on November 4, 1978. There were a number of reasons why we left. We were together as a couple when we left. I think we found that we were much more into being a couple and having our own place.

**CG:** We had come and done what we needed to do. It was time to take all this studying we had been doing and apply it to the outside world. It felt just fine. It wasn't like we hated it and had to leave or loved it and had to stay. It just felt like it was time for something different.

**KG:** Charles had started to do some seminars around the country. He was coming back to Lawrence to do a seminar. He called me up from Lawrence and said he had been offered a job and found a place to live. Things had fallen into place and we took it as a sign that we were supposed to go. It wasn't with any big fanfare. It was just time to do something different. My mom was getting older and it was time to be closer to where she was. It was a bunch of little stuff. We've been back a few times and every time we still come away just elated, raised spiritually. I never want to go back there and live but every time we go back there we get really renewed.

**CG:** It's really sacred ground there so leaving it wasn't wrenching and going back is a joyous thing. We're an original family. We'll always know people there.

**KG:** Our reputation precedes us.

**CG:** Today the community has really changed. They have gone through times of terrific struggle. They have opened up some of the land for people who didn't want to live communally to build homes. Khabira and I lived in a house that she had build and some others built some nice houses as well. It went from a completely communal thing to the idea of mixing the communal with the private on the sacred ground to be able to afford to survive.

**KG:** They changed their way of dealing with the money. They have less volunteer work and people pay a higher rate to live there. They pay the equivalent of monthly rent. It's more or a supportive community and less involved in day to day stuff. It has gone through some evolution and I think that is why it has survived. I think the reason a lot of communities fail is because they are too rigid. They want to keep it small and it gets too dictatorial. Then people get factioned off of that and leave.

**Q:** Do you consider the commune, and your participation in it, a success or a failure? Does the experience inform your daily life today?

**CG:** Every day of my life. That's the center post of my being. It's said that Sufism is the mother, so how often do you think about your mom? I think about my mom almost every day. I experience my mom in Sufism every day. It is really ingrained in me. The outer practice isn't there. I don't do my meditations except when I do do them or attend services.

**KG:** It's much more of a private thing. When we first came here we got back into doing Sufism things in the community. We came here with the blessings of Pir Vilayat and we led classes and had a healing circle and led Sufi dancing. We had universal worship here at our house. For a number of years Charles and I carried on with this house as a Sufi center and still led a kind of public life. It was kind of a

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gradual transition. We still got up on Sunday morning and conducted universal worship in this house or Danforth Chapel or wherever.