Mac Mead, narrator

Anneliese Abbott, interviewer

April 2, 2024

MM = Mac Mead
AA = Anneliese Abbott

AA: This is April 2, 2024, and this is Anneliese Abbott doing an oral history interview with

MM: Mac Mead.

AA: So Mac, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today!

MM: Yeah. You want me to just go through the questions?

AA: Yeah, why don't you start and tell me a little about when and where you were born, and if you had any connection with agriculture when you were a child.

MM: I grew up in northern Connecticut, a small town called Suffield, which was a bedroom town, so to speak. We had lots of farms. It was very rural. It's the second-largest town in Connecticut area-wise, but at that point only 4,000 people. One-stoplight town. And many different kinds of farms: dairy, tobacco, most of them mainly sod farms. The Connecticut River Valley is a very rich valley. It goes right up through Connecticut into Massachusetts. It's called the Pioneer Valley. It used to be a very fertile lake in geologic history and has soil two to twenty feet deep. Most of the towns in that area had names with "field" in them—Springfield, Endfield, Westfield.

The town I grew up in was Suffield. A lot of farming. It was equidistant from Springfield, Massachusetts and Hartford, Connecticut, so a lot of professionals, so to speak, lived there. There was no industry at all in the town. It was essentially farming, and then residences for people who worked elsewhere. It's on kind of the west side of the Connecticut River Valley. We lived on a hill that overlooked and had a beautiful view of the valley. Down below us were different kinds of farms that people planted in tobacco, dairy, potatoes.

I had the fortune to be able to just play in those fields, in the woods and such, as a young kid. I'm the oldest of five kids. Each of us have a clear memory of our mother pointing her finger towards the door and saying, "Outside!" That was our haven, and probably her haven, from raising five kids. I just have a major memory of just being out in nature as a young person and loving that. And gradually, getting older—this was pre-round bales, there weren't even kick balers then. The farmer would bale his hay after the dew was off in the morning, so you would have a field littered with square bales, and his usual technique of picking them up was to call the neighboring parents and ask if any of your kids wanted a dollar an hour to pick up bales that afternoon. So that's what a lot of us did. That was a kind of sporadic job during haying season. So playing in the fields kind of metamorphosed into working in the fields, somewhat. (3:56)

I grew up having friends, farmers' kids. My father was not a farmer. But we always had a garden, and quite a few of my relatives were organic gardeners, had compost piles. One of my

earliest memories, actually, is turning over our garden. I was watching my father do that, it was spading work, in the spring. It wasn't a very big garden, probably like 30 by 30. So I grew up being around farming and gardening, actually organic gardening, we had a compost pile.

Then going to high school—in the town I grew up in, it happened to have a private school, boarding school, at which I was a day student. When I was seven, I left public school, which was mostly the local families, many of them farmers, farmers' kids, and all of a sudden I was going to this private school where it was more the kids of the professionally occupied families who were wealthy. So that was quite a dichotomy for me. The young people that were growing up on a farm, many of them, their goal was to get off the farm, get away from the farm. And then these young people who had no experience with any farming, wealthier families, and had all kinds of opportunities, so to speak, educationally—cultural, the arts.

During summers I still worked on some of the farms. When I was around 17, probably my junior year going into being a senior in high school, I worked on a tobacco farm. It sounds funny, but in northern Connecticut, the whole Connecticut River Valley, a lot of tobacco was grown. It was very rich soil. It had a humidity, a warmth that came off the Gulf Stream and went up through central Connecticut and created an ideal environment for tobacco. So that was a common crop in northern central Connecticut.

That summer was when I inwardly kind of committed towards becoming involved with farming, but not just with growing food, to also somehow bridge this gap between farm culture—which may of the young people were trying to get away from—bridging that with education and culture that I experienced in this private school that I went to, which was often people not involved with farming at all. Somehow to bring culture into the farm, which is a little bit what the word is—agri*culture*. That became kind of my theme. Then I thought, "How am I going to do that?" That kind of when to sleep in me a little. I went to college, studied psychology and art. I was also interested in just therapeutic work and towards education. So I studied psychology more towards educational psychology, developmental child psychology, the kind of courses you take to become a teacher.

That blended with doing, my mom was actually very artistic, she painted and wrote some poetry and stuff. As I mentioned, my dad was not a farmer, but he was an engineer, and he did a lot outside. I grew up doing lots of stuff outdoors, not just gardening and farming, but making things and building, very hands-on, talented father, having imbued us with a love of nature. (9:15)

I was in college at the height of the Vietnam War, from 1968 to '72. And during that time, a cousin of mine—that was back in the days of back-to-the-land, people started communes, spiritual ideas, all kinds of things in the late sixties, early seventies. That was the first time I was exposed to some spiritual ideas about karma and reincarnation. I'd grown up going to Sunday school and church, and that was good, but somehow didn't quite meet my needs. In school I was interested in science, but somehow the exposure to some spiritual ideas at that point—this would have been in my junior year, end of my junior year, beginning of my senior year in college—really sparked my interest.

And that partially led to, I was a conscientious objector in 1972. I had a very low draft number—7. So back in those days, if you were a conscientious objector, you had the opportunity to find work instead of going into the Armed Service, you could find what they called "alternate service." And that led to finding a community in upstate New York, about two hours north of where I live now. It was called Camphill Village. And it was a community caring for special needs adults in a village setting. That was amazing. The community owned a small valley and

within that had a farm and craft shops—pottery, weavery, candle shop, book binding, several other craft shops. It was like an old-style village to provide purposeful work for adults with special needs. And many of the people who worked there lived there, so there would be houses with, say, six to eight special needs adults, and there would be a family and a younger person helping. That's what I did. I helped out. (12:30)

And this was a community that was based on the ideas of an individual named Rudolf Steiner. I'll go a little more into that, because he was basically the founder of biodynamic agriculture. But in this case, it was his ideas about curative education, curative therapeutic work. So the first day I went there—those with special needs were called "villagers," and the staff were called "coworkers." And one of the villagers came up to me and said, "They do a kind of farming here where the soil gets better every year."

Now, I grew up in the '50s and '60s. I was born in 1950, when there wasn't a distinction between organic and conventional agriculture, per se. Most of the fields around where I grew up were done, so to speak, conventionally—chemical fertilizer, insecticide, herbicide. I remember watching planes spraying the tobacco fields, I'm imagining possibly with DDT at that point in the mid-'50s. And most of the farms I worked for were just farms. That was the only distinction. What was important to me actually growing up was nature. Farming was part of caring for nature.

So when this young woman told me, "They do a kind of farming here in the Camphill Village where the soil gets better every year," that meant two things. That meant there are kinds of farming where the soil gets worse every year. And then there's another kind of farming where the soil gets better every year. That was a shock to me. I had never entertained—and now it's so out there and everybody has a distinction between organic and conventional and whatever. But the fact that there was a kind of farming, for me, which was harming nature, that was a big deal. (15:10)

I worked there for two years. I was not involved with it, but they had a farm, they had gardens, a dairy operation. A beautiful place. They were milking twelve to fourteen Jersey or Guernsey cows. All hand-milked by special needs adults. Different individuals had their own cow that they milked every morning and every evening. They were so proud of it. And it was beautiful. It was amazing. So the practices there were biodynamic, and we'll get more into that, which I didn't know much about then.

So I worked there for two years, and I actually helped in the book bindery. But then, in that process, I met individuals from another therapeutic community, which is actually where I live now. It's called the Fellowship Community. It's a not-for-profit foundation, which technically is the Rudolf Steiner Fellowship Foundation, but commonly called the Fellowship Community. It was started in 1966 by a group that—let me describe a little more now the location that I now live in, to explain what this Fellowship Community was about.

Maybe what I should do is actually describe a little bit of who Rudolf Steiner is. Rudolf Steiner lived in the late 1800s, early 1900s, died in 1925. He grew up in Austria, near Austria. He had a strong connection with nature. His father had been a gamekeeper in forest lands in lower Austria. He grew up with that. His father wasn't a farmer per se, but back in those days farming was just a part of life for everybody. So he grew up exposed to that.

But he had certain spiritual capacities, a certain natural clairvoyance, which he couldn't talk about much when he was young. As he grew older, he became very well-educated in the sciences of the time and received a doctorate. He was frequently asked—he was, in a way, a philosopher, scientist, educator who was very concerned about the health of the earth, of people.

He was frequently asked by—for example, educators would ask if he had any advice for the education of children. The fruit of that is what's now called Waldorf education, which is a worldwide movement that's called a progressive movement in education. Doctors approached him for advice about medicine. What he brought was enhancing what was already existing as far as education or medical work by bringing in other perspectives that perhaps brought about a more holistic approach, an artist's approach. People involved in religion approached him. (19:35)

In 1924, in the years leading up to that the farmers were approaching him, because they were already noticing a decline in the quality of soils. They were noticing a decline in the seed quality of crops, especially in the grains, where you would harvest wheat, for example, and use quite a bit of it for flour and food, but you save a certain amount and replant the next year. What used to maintain a crop for years, with just saving your own seed, gradually they were noticing a decline in the vitality of the plants. And also a decline in animal health. Things that you read about now, or that you hear about. It was already in the making. Chemical farming had already started. That's a whole history in itself, of course. But that was pretty active already in the 1920s.

So farmers asked him for advice, and he gave a series of lectures in an area that's now western Poland. A very rich farming area. Those lectures became, basically, the heart of what's called biodynamic agriculture. At the time, those lectures were called "Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture." So those lectures were taking the point of view that the earth needs healing, needs reinvigorated. Even more than just the farming methods using chemicals, what we now see as climate change, probably already things then were already having a negative influence on the environment, and chemical farming wasn't helping that.

But with the idea that just natural—so let's say organic farming, let's say it's mainly not using chemicals, and very good healthy practices—something more than that was needed, more than just organic, more than just natural. So he gave indications for several different combinations of herbal products made using the cycles of the year, winter and summer. I don't want to get into that whole thing, but he apparently had the ability to see which things in nature combined in certain ways could have certain healthful effects. There's certain sprays, especially for the soil, to help with humus development and the early growth of plants, germination, root development. Another spray especially to enhance the food quality of plants once they're up and growing. And then there's a series of biodynamic preparations that go in the compost pile to kind of just bring a more vital energy into it.

Biodynamics, bio is life, dynamics is the force or energy. It's the energy and forces part that's probably a little bit unique to biodynamics. The bio, life part is very much a part of organics. But the idea that there's certain forces involved with plant growth that you don't just see, you can't quite measure, forces that are just a part of nature, and how do you enhance those? How do you in a drought, for example, have a spray that will particularly help the root growth and ability to take up moisture in the plants, to enhance that? Or if you have a wet year, how do you bring an element that helps with the taking up of light, the photosynthetic possibilities that are so important for nutrient elements? There's a whole sequence, and that's what biodynamics is all about. It's the enhancement of organic agriculture. It counts on all the bases of good farming practices. Those lectures that Rudolf Steiner gave in the 1920s are so good farming practices. And we'll go a little more into that. (24:46)

Anyways, these lectures were given in 1924. Farmers then began developing this first in Europe. But already in 1926, from this location where I'm at—this is Spring Valley, New York, southern New York. The New Jersey border is one mile from here. We're only about 35 miles from New York City, very close. This is a very unusual location, actually. I've done a lot of

research about this location. I think it's an important thing, actually, for farmers to do, just looking at the history. The geological history, the cultural history, going way back thousands of years, studying the type of people who were here. What's the geology of here? What's the climate of here?

I mean, New York is kind of known as the melting pot of countries. It's actually a melting pot of ecoregions. There's five different ecoregions that meet here, with this metropolitan area. You don't usually think of it in relation to farming, but it's kind of like the hub out of which those spokes—down along the coast, and then to the south, to the southwest, to the west, to the northwest, to the north—of ecoregions that come in. We're at the southern edge of the northern climate, the New England that I grew up in. We're at the northern edge of the southern climate. We're at the eastern edge of things coming even out of the Ozarks, Missouri. So we have an incredible mix of trees here, and birds, and good soil.

The glaciers ended just near here. So there's all kinds of rocks and soil. We're in Rockland County. Full of rocks. We have stone walls around all our fields. I encourage people to look into your history and see. So it's an amazing spot agriculturally. We're not far from the ocean, so things are tempered a bit. We have a pretty long growing season. Quite a bit of humidity. A fair amount of rainfall. Incredible mix of climate, birds, as I was saying, nature, all kinds of plants. (27:45)

In this location, a couple young women went over in 1926 to learn how to do biodynamics in Europe. They came back in 1927, and someone recently told us here that where we're farming—back then, in the 1920s, the place was called the Threefold Farm—that this location now is the oldest biodynamically stewarded and cultivated land in the North American continent. I've been here a long time. I've been here almost 50 years, and I didn't quite realize that. There's a long history here of biodynamic agriculture.

The farm then was called the Threefold Farm. They got cows, raised vegetables, they had a conference center. They started a Waldorf school. Many of the works that came out of the indications by Rudolf Steiner. In the 1970s there was a dairy going here, the Threefold Dairy. They had a milk route, they were selling raw milk and milking 20 cows or so. Then in the early '70s New York State started enforcing raw milk laws. So the dairy ended. It had to shut down. They didn't have the wherewithal financially or the interest in pasteurizing milk.

Meanwhile, in 1966, the Fellowship Community—so in this location, many people were living and working in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s. Gradually, some people were getting older, and so there was a thought to start an elder care community. That happened in 1966 and it was called the Fellowship Community, and it was started by a couple. The husband was a doctor, Dr. Paul Scharff, and his wife Ann Scharff. They had a very wealthy donor, Nancy Laughlin, who had been a foundling left on a church step in upstate New York. She'd been adopted by a wealthy banker and his wife. She was always so grateful for having been brought up, and she inherited quite a bit of wealth, so she donated the original monies to start this elder care facility, with the condition that it would also be a center for children. Take care of the elderly and take care of children.

The doctor who started the place, his wife actually was a teacher, and he grew up with a lot of the same people. So that was part of the impulse for the Fellowship Community, it was going to be a lively place with kids around, families. It just happened that Dr. Scharff—and I'm going to focus in on this a little, because he and his wife were my main mentors in not just farming, but life. This community is a very full community. It's got care of human beings, care of

the land, care of the social classes. A lot of the staff that work at the Fellowship have lived here and raised families here. That gets into a whole ball of wax, life and community. (32:20)

So these two individuals, Dr. Scharff and his wife, have been very important in my life and in my family's life. Dr. Scharff grew up in Ohio. His mother was a doctor, which was very rare. She grew up on a farm, grew up working horses. So here his mom's a doctor, and he has a special needs brother. His father was an engineer who worked for US Steel, in a steel plant on the edge of Lake Erie. They had a farm as well. And it just happened that—there's an individual I haven't mentioned yet, called Dr. Pfeiffer. He was an individual who worked with Rudolf Steiner, when Rudolf Steiner gave these lectures about biodynamic farming. This was a fellow from Germany who then took these indications about biodynamic agriculture and helped bring them to areas in Europe and then to the United States. And he was probably the foremost individual in the history of biodynamic agriculture in the United States.

So Dr. Pfeiffer moved to this country in the late '30s. There's a whole history that you and I have talked about with Pfeiffer and Rodale in Pennsylvania. Pfeiffer founded the Bio-Dynamic Association, and he would consult and travel across Wessing. He would stay at the Scharff's family house in Ohio when Dr. Scharff was a young teenager. So Dr. Scharff got to know Dr. Pfeiffer. When Dr. Scharff was young, Dr. Pfeiffer taught him biodynamics, so he learned that as a teenager and applied that to the farm he was living on.

Dr. Scharff then was becoming a doctor, he had to do his residency, and he picked to do it in New York City, because at that time Dr. Pfeiffer had moved from Pennsylvania to New York and was living here at Spring Valley and had set up a laboratory called the Biochemical Research Laboratory, which was a commercial laboratory for both farmers and doctors. He did all kinds of tests—soil tests and quality tests for seeds, and also blood tests and such for doctors. A commercial laboratory. So Dr. Scharff and his wife chose to live here in Spring Valley, and he would do his medical residency in the hospital in New York City. (35:42)

When he arrived in 1959—Dr. Scharff and his wife arrived here in 1959—that's right as the beginning of thoughts about an elder care community were arising. So Dr. Scharff was asked if he would be interested in helping start this elder care community. The same year that he agreed to do that, Dr. Pfeiffer actually died, 1961. Dr. Scharff was Dr. Pfeiffer's medical doctor, caring for him. There's a long history with the biodynamics, both in medical and agricultural work here in this location. Dr. Pfeiffer did both medical and agricultural work, and also Dr. Scharff was a medical doctor, both internal medicine and psychiatric, but also a farmer at heart.

So the Fellowship Community started in 1966, and from the get-go had gardens to provide quality food for the main dining room for the elder care, first one building and then they built another building. I came in 1975, so the community had been going for 9 years, and already there were gardens. There were about three-quarters of an acre of biodynamic gardens, all done really well. Raised beds and compost piles. It just happened that many of the individuals who had worked with Dr. Pfeiffer for most of their life in biodynamic farming retired to this Fellowship Community.

I could mention some names. A woman who worked in the lab, ran the laboratory, actually, named Erica Sabarth, retired to the Fellowship Community the year before I arrived here. I had the opportunity to work with her. We had an experimental garden, we did trials with relation to raised beds, with companion planting, with using a planting calendar, experiments. We actually, Pfeiffer had helped develop a special breed of wheat that he bred from a wild strain of wheat from the Long Botanical Gardens in Italy. He started that in the 1920s and was breeding it as a biodynamic wheat. He increased the protein content and such. Erica—Pfeiffer had died in

’61, she had kept those seeds going, and so in our experimental garden we kept breeding this Pfeiffer wheat. That was another thing we did together. So I had the opportunity to work with her one afternoon a week for four or five years, until she died, actually. (39:20)

Another woman named Evelyn Speiden-Gregg was a woman who worked with Dr. Pfeiffer making the biodynamic preparations for about 20 years. She actually worked with Gandhi, she and her husband worked with Gandhi in India. And she taught me how to make the biodynamic preparations. Another woman named Dicky Newburg was a gardener who had worked with Pfeiffer for decades in biodynamic work. She was a mentor for me in the garden. Her husband Howard Newburg taught me how to apply some of the biodynamic sprays and did tractor work. An individual named Peter Escher who was connected with biodynamic orcharding lived and died here at the Fellowship Community.

Most of these individuals that I’ve mentioned—actually, all of them so far—retired to the Fellowship Community and actually passed away. I’ll just throw in, a big part of living in an elder care community where you get to know lots of people for a while in life, and then they actually cross over, they pass away. If you entertain the ideas of reincarnation, they haven’t left. They’re just transitioned. They’re continuing their journey, and they’re on the other side, but they’re still active. So most of these mentors of mine, I still kind of feel their presence. They’re still around. That’s special.

Dr. Pfeiffer’s wife, Adelheid, lived almost thirty years after he died and was an elder. She herself was farming, so she would walk our fields, check us out. She was another mentor. Another fellow who was a butcher most of his life retired here. I learned how to slaughter animals and process them. And then Ann Scharff, Dr. Scharff’s wife, she actually grew up in China. Her parents were American. Her father helped start an experimental agricultural station in China. He himself studied at Colorado University and Cornell, had a doctorate in agriculture. And he helped start an experimental station, I’m talking in the 1930s, that is now the largest agricultural university in China and has his picture in the entrance as one of the founding fathers. So Ann Scharff grew up with a deep heritage in agriculture, as did her husband, Dr. Scharff. No wonder this elder care community is permeated with agriculture.

Just to throw out a sidenote, my father was born in China to American parents. And it just happened that his family, my father’s family and Dr. Scharff’s family were best friends. Funny coincidence. So they used to play together on the beach in the Bay of China, my father and Dr. Scharff, the founder of this Fellowship. I found that fascinating. (43:45)

Now, let’s get back to the agricultural aspect of biodynamics. The heart of biodynamics—yes, there are different preparations that are used, and the planting calendar, and different people hear different things, and it all seems a little woo-woo. But the heart of it is actually what has been called the agricultural individuality of a farm. Every farm is unique. It has its physical location, but it has the locale that it’s in, the people who developed it. It should be looked at as an organic whole. Almost like how each human being is a whole organism. Such that what’s most important, in the perspective of biodynamic agriculture, is to have as much as you need for the farm or garden from the farm.

So let’s look at fertility. Fertility, especially in organic agriculture, is going to come from organic materials. Cover crops, compost materials, or whatever supplements you want to bring. But I say the heart of real fertility is manure from animals. Well, in nature, the animals of a given location transform the plant life that they’re eating, be it ants in the woods or other, let’s say, non-farm animals. In any locale, you’re going to have a given animal life that is consuming the plant life, changing it into manures or things that are actually going to vitalize the fertility of that

area. They're going to preserve the life in that locality. So in a farm, you actually change the way you do it. You cut down the trees of the forest or whatever. So your animals are basically your domestic animals, your chickens or sheep or cows or horses, whatever.

But in general, plants in a given location are bringing up what's needed for them. The roots are bringing up minerals from the depths and bringing it up to the surface, and the plants are growing. They in a way are healers, supporting the health of an area. Animals that are then grazing and consuming those plants take it to another level of fertility. The cow would be the archetypal genius of transforming fodder, plant life, into a fertility source. The perspective in biodynamics is that the animals—especially the cow, but pretty much any of the domestic animals—have the genius to give to the location where they're living and eating in their manure, to transform that into what's needed right there at that location.

That's kind of the heart of biodynamics, actually. The other things you can read about, different things in the compost pile, preparations, sprays for the soil or for the plants or for fungus—those are all enhancements. But the basic farm organism picture in a way is like the old farm, the classic farm, diverse farm. Orchards, perhaps, animals grazing, vegetable production, a mixed, diversified farm. But biodynamics is also taking the perspective of, that's the ideal, but actually the earth has been weakened, the environment, by chemical farming or whatever, so it needs vitalizing forces to be more active. But the farm organism, the farm individuality, is the heart of biodynamic agriculture. (48:34)

I've had the opportunity here to—when I came, there was, like I said, three-quarters of an acre of vegetable gardens, all done really well, and great teachers providing high-quality food. But we had to haul in manures. This Rockland County that we're in is very close to New York City. We now have the only cows in the county, this county. So that gives you a little picture. In earlier years, this was one of the most productive agricultural counties. But as the suburbs developed outside the city, there was not a lot of wisdom in preserving farmland.

When I first came, we had to take a dump truck and go to dairy farms an hour away to get cow manure, bring it back, and compost it. Get horse manure to mix with that, and put the biodynamic preparations in. At first we had no farm animals. And then gradually we got chickens, sheep—I'm talking over several years. In 1997, I started at the Fellowship Community in 1975, so what's that, 25 years later, we buy the neighbor's farm. The only animals they had were horses, but it was a commercial vegetable and orchard operations. A greenhouse as well, for bedding plant production. It was just 33 acres, and we bought another 5 acres, so 38 acres. But mostly farmland. Twelve acres of apples.

At this point now, in the 1990s, the Fellowship Community had grown quite a bit, had more members, a bigger dining room. So we were growing 10 to 12 acres of vegetables and had 12 acres of apples. My wife and I started a 4-H group, and there were at one point 40 staff children at the Fellowship Community. So it was a hopping place, a lot of young families with kids, very lively. My wife and I are very fortunate to have brought up our family in a community setting. Most of the kids participated in all the activities—farming, gardening, cooking, mowing lawns, painting the buildings. A lot of skills developed. We loved the fact that you can raise your family here. So we started a 4-H group, we had about 20 kids in that, doing projects. And at first we got horses, and my wife said, we'll see if that goes well. We were riding, and we got a draft horse and started doing some draft work. We still didn't have cows. I'm talking late 1990s. (52:24)

So my wife and I took some of our 4-Hers down to a biodynamic dairy in Pennsylvania, Kimberton, Pennsylvania—it was called Seven Stars Farm—and talked to the farmer and his

wife and begged, if they ever had a young heifer or two, would they consider selling it to us. They were Jerseys, a really nice herd. And a couple months later, I was upstairs, my wife was downstairs, the phone rang. You could hear her pick up the phone, and all of a sudden, she's whooping and hollering. And I knew right away what that phone call was. It was the farm telling us, "Yep, we've got a young heifer."

At this point, bringing this young heifer to our farm here in Spring Valley, New York, this was the only bovine animal in the whole county. So what do we do? We drive it home in the back of our pickup with a cap on it. A big reception at the barn, all the kids in the area. The calf had been born in the winter in Pennsylvania, and had not been out yet. This was March, mid-March. The next morning we let it outside of its stall. The calf was about four months old then. A lot of fresh grass around. And what's this calf do? It starts eating the soil outside its stall. It's not eating any grass. It just started eating some of the loose soil. And one of our helpers drives up with a tractor right near where we were, and the calf goes over and starts licking some of the dirt on the tires of the tractor. It's a wet day. We're getting a little concerned. The calf's been in the barn all winter, hasn't been outside yet. But gradually, after half an hour, starts eating a little bit of grass.

What I realized later was, this animal was taking our soil into her biology. She was getting ready to help, from that point on, help transform whatever it is on our farm to her biology, which is partly made up of our farm's biology, in her gut, to bring manure to the best and highest quality for our location. And that may sound far-fetched, but I strongly believe it, because gradually we got more cows in and pretty soon had our own—between horses and cows—had enough compost to put the fields that I had been working for already almost 30 years, 25 to 30 years, growing locations of vegetables. We applied our compost to our fields in the fall, for the next year, so it had a chance to work in through cover crops to build into the soil.

For the first time, in a particular field that I had been working for 25 years, I put this home-grown ingredient compost, biodynamic compost, in the fall. This was near where we grew leeks, onions, early chard, and beets and carrots. I'd grown them there before over 25 years. But the quality that came of those vegetables from that home-sourced manure was the biggest single difference I had ever seen in the enhancement of quality of any other ingredient I could say. It took me 25 to 30 years to truly see the truth of this farm organism picture of the strange difference it makes. The more you can get what's needed for your place from your place, the more local the better, especially the manures. Because I had all these fantastic teachers in biodynamics, and they were making sure we did everything deluxe, but we didn't have our own manures. So to me, that actually simplified the view of biodynamics, really to basically the old-style farm, but which needs help, needs other enhancement than just manure. (58:22)

So in 1996, the same organization that had started in the 1920s started an educational center for biodynamic farming called the Pfeiffer Center. For most of my life, I had worked for the Rudolf Steiner Fellowship Foundation, the Fellowship Community. But then I was asked for another not-for-profit, an adjoining neighbor that had been more connected with the Waldorf school movement and such, they had started the Pfeiffer Center in 1996. That was led by an individual named Gunther Hauk, who started this program. And he was retiring, so this was 2006. I was asked if I would take on the directorship at the Pfeiffer Center from him and work with him in his final year, 2006, and take on as the program director starting in 2007. And I agreed to do that. So I worked with Gunther for a year.

That same year, an individual named Megan Durney came as an intern. We generally had four or five interns each year. And she was one of them. So in 2007 I became the director of this Pfeiffer Center. I was no longer the main farmer, my wife and I were no longer the main farm

family at the Fellowship Community. I should mention that in the early days of the Fellowship Community, pretty much anyone working there did bits of everything, from administrative work to gardening to nursing to maintenance. So when I came, I actually did almost equal amounts of nursing care and gardening. But the tendency kept going, "Why don't you help more in the gardens?" So gradually, slowly, working in this community focused on elder care, I got married [to Ellen] and raised a family, and our family then was kind of leading the farm, helping them hold the farm. It's now become a 40-acre farm, about 30 acres devoted to pasture and hay for the grazing animals. We've got horses, milking six to eight Jersey cows. Nine acres are available for vegetable production. The orchard we cut back on, there were twelve acres, but it was a really old orchard, so most of that now is pastures.

My wife [Ellen] and I stopped being the main farm family at the Fellowship Community when I took on helping with this biodynamic education center in 2007. The biodynamic education center, the Pfeiffer Center, has courses for adults and for children, and it has interns. The focus has been learning organic agriculture, biodynamic agriculture. A course that is still going, that started in 1996, is a year-long course that has part-time training in biodynamic agriculture. That's open to the public, people pay tuition. It takes place over 13 different days, but it's one weekend a month, from September to June. It covers most of the different aspects of agriculture—vegetable production, large animal care, small animal husbandry, orcharding. We have guest speakers who come to lead some of the days. I do most of the teaching, and also Megan, who I mentioned.

Megan came in 2006 as an intern and never wanted to leave. So she has become a main staff person. Actually, the Fellowship Community—which has had a biodynamic farm since it started in 1966—is the adjoining neighbor of the Pfeiffer Center. And in 2018, the Pfeiffer Center and the farming part of the Fellowship Community combined. The Pfeiffer Center is part of a not-for-profit foundation, and the Fellowship Community is part of its own not-for-profit foundation. So this farm is now called, since 2018, the Threefold Community Farm. It's a collaboration of two not-for-profit foundations, one focused more on education and one more focused on elder care. It's involved having two not-for-profit foundations collaborate, but both have biodynamic agriculture as part of their bylaws from the beginning. (1:05:11)

So now my wife and I live at the Fellowship Community as now, not staff people, but as older members, so to speak. And I am the main mentor of the Threefold Community Farm starting, which is being led by Megan Durney, who I mentioned to you, and her partner, Kim Vaughn. Kim runs the dairy now, and Megan oversees the vegetable production. I'm the main mentor of this project, and we're actually trying to hire now a third main farmer to help lead that team. We have extensive programs now, which is part of the Pfeiffer Center per se, of adult education, and extensive children's programs with the local Waldorf school, but now also with public school classes and different groups—Girl Scouts, church groups, and such. We have one person who leads all the children's education programs, and we may need to hire a second person to help do all that. There's a lot going on there with the children's programs. We're still doing this adult training course, part-time, year-long course. It's now in its 27th year, about to start its 28th year.

So that's a good part of the history. Personally, there's a lot of individuals who have devoted their life to biodynamic farming and passed away here in this valley. I've had the opportunity actually to know and work with them. There's a long history here. I somehow feel like history helps carry the future. Not that you just determine the future out of the past, but it

grows out of the past, like a plant grows out of the soil. It's like a real fertility here. And hopefully that will go into the future. (1:08:03)

Some of your questions, Anneliese, were on the connection of organic and biodynamic. I'm trying to reflect on that. What's interesting is that biodynamic agriculture really came out of Europe. And Pfeiffer moved here in the late '30s, early '40s, first to Pennsylvania. You're talking World War II times. Other individuals came over, the Camphill Village that I mentioned, that started in 1961. So that had a biodynamic farm. There are now several Camphill Villages, working with special needs adults and having farms. But they're not out selling commercial stuff on the market so much. They have beautiful little farms in therapeutic communities, but people don't hear about them. Many of the founders of these communities were coming over from Europe and were not part of the American culture at first. Even when I grew up in the '50s and '60s, we still had this anti-German influence that I just felt as a young person growing up in the US. But here you have this European-inspired movement of biodynamic agriculture, just coming in kind of quiet, in a way, as organic farming per se, Rodale, was beginning.

What's interesting is that Pfeiffer apparently, though he was German and worked here in the US just after World War II, was very respected. He somehow talked the language of farmers, and they appreciated that. Pfeiffer was also, another part of the history aside from the organic movement and Rodale, was that he was part of the NFA, Natural Food Associates. I'm pretty sure Pfeiffer was active in that. He taught nutrition, another aspect of it, he taught it at Dickinson University. And the Natural Food Associates was very big on nutrition and food quality. I think that the Natural Food Associates somehow metamorphosed into becoming what we would know now as *Acres* magazine. I could be wrong. I think Pfeiffer was involved in the days when it was the Natural Food Associates. *Acres* magazine used to publish a lot of Pfeiffer's articles in the early days. Not just about biodynamics, but about nutrition and different things.

So you have this European form of agriculture, especially in the '50s and '60s, that was just kind of kept quiet. And you learn some unusual things in biodynamics, different things that came out of spiritual perceptions that Rudolf Steiner had, that weren't so much talked about back then. It was probably held a little more quietly, privately. That's just some of what I know. I think even some people, I think in the early days, experienced biodynamic practitioners as being perhaps a little haughty, a little bit, "This is the best, what you're doing isn't as good," something like that. I hope, I think a lot of those barriers have been broken down more and more. And personally, I think people are more open to ideas about spiritual things. Not everyone is, but my experience is that younger people now are more open, and hopefully more of us can work together. (1:12:54)

One interesting thing about the history of biodynamics is also the Rachel Carson story, the book *Silent Spring* that she wrote, that was so significant back in the day. It's not as currently in the culture, so to speak. But in the 1950s, when she was working on material towards that book, the late '50s, there's a couple—Polly Richards and Marjorie Spock. Marjorie Spock is actually the sister of Dr. Spock, the child pediatrician, who had a small farm in Long Island, and DDT was then getting sprayed everywhere. They actually sued the US government about the damage that was done by that, to animal health and such. And Rachel Carson was very aware of their work and Dr. Pfeiffer. She was in touch with them and Dr. Pfeiffer as this court case unfolded. Now, they ended up losing that court case. But it was a significant statement. I read just recently that Polly and Marjorie asked Rachel not to mention their names in her book, but that they were in touch. And Pfeiffer was quite aware of the trial that was going on. So it's

another connection that has, it was very significant beyond farming, the whole care of the planet, the book *Silent Spring*. (1:14:55)

You had a question about the relation of organic and biodynamic to the environmental movement. Obviously that's related. All these controversies with cows, for example, all that methane, that they're a horrible thing for planet earth, which I would say is the opposite of what, especially, biodynamics. They're totally the heart of health and for the planet. If you have a healthy farm, you need to have some animals on it. That means that you can't just grow crops for food for people. Part of your farm has to be food for your animals. So that means perennial pastures, grasses. That's fixing carbon, especially with good rotational grazing practices. So if the biodynamic picture of the farm organism is true, that you need to have animals as part of your farm, be it an orchard or a market vegetable operation, that means a lot of your land needs to be in perennial pasture, which is very healthy for the earth, however you want to look at carbon sequestration or whatever. It's a very holistic approach.

I personally don't get so involved with other bigger-picture political movements, environmental movements. I personally feel to have a growing farm has been more of a challenge these days, especially financially and such. I think to have a growing farm, where people come to see the results, is the best educational tool you can have. That's been my focus, a little more local. (1:17:35)

You had a question about relations with land grant universities, of biodynamic and organic. I'm not so familiar with that. I've been to workshops at some place like Penn State, which is the Pennsylvania land grant university, and as far as I can tell, organic seems to be more and more moving into some of these programs, which is great. There seems to be more and more support for research for cover crops, for organic this or organic that. I haven't been so involved with it. You have the cooperative extension agency, which in this county is a little more geared toward landscaping and lawn care since there's not much farming going on in this county. I've hosted workshops for the Master Gardeners, for the cooperative extension. We used to bring our sheep and chickens to some of their fairs. But I, per se, don't have a lot to do with the land grant universities. But obviously, it's a big important venue, to encourage more and more research and education towards organic and biodynamic.

I actually, I'd like to go on record as being a big supporter of any farm—I'm kind of changing the subject here—conventional or organic or biodynamic, whatever, anyone being a farmer these days is a hero, from my point of view. Most of the farms I grew up on were conventional farms. Important people that I worked with and loved. They loved what they were doing. I've been to a CAFO dairy with a thousand cows who aren't getting out on pasture. They're being milked three times a day. And the farmer there says, "You know, I had no other choice. Either I'd go work for the hardware store, or if I wanted to stay with the cows, I had to do this to survive. I love cows." I met a similar guy at a chicken place with hundreds of thousands of birds. We got baby chicks one year. He said, "You're got to love your birds. You've got to love chickens." I've met vegetable growers the same. They love whatever it is.

I'm often trying to advise, so many new farmers in organic don't have the background in farming, really. But it's wonderful they're getting into it. It's fantastic. But to condemn people who are using other methods as bad people just point blank, is ridiculous. There's been bad people everywhere. And I often try just to encourage them that, maybe they're using different farming methods, but don't take that as a moral judgement. I've learned a lot of skills from conventional farmers who have it in their palms much more than we do, us newbies. (1:21:44)

A trend that I see in farming is that more and more it should be valued for the public benefit of a farm. So we are an oasis there. We've got the only dairy in the county. We're surrounded by suburbs. After September 11, which was right nearby here—we're in a county where a lot of the firefighters lived who died on September 11. It was a shock for the whole globe, September 11, but it just shook everyone here deep in the bones, that disaster. And at that point, we had our public pick-your-own orchard, and people would come to the farm and say, "I feel safe here." Similar with COVID. All of a sudden people would come walking, we have a lot of trails through the woods, a nice dirt road that goes through our property here, parts of it spread out. People can just walk in the outdoors.

So the aspect of public benefit of a farm, which is hard to value financially, but we're actually—we have a Community Supported Agriculture, we have a small one, and you mentioned you're doing one with your mom. We have just 40 shares, 45 shares. There's a concept another farm has started, it's a little like CSA, but it's Community Supported Land Stewardship, where people contribute. They're not going to get any food, but they're contributing that the farm can exist. I think that's an important concept going forward, even to value that and perhaps use it. We've done a bit of fundraising in our work, our programs and our product that sells to meet our financial needs. More and more we're trying to run our fundraising efforts. (1:24:29)

You asked about certification. We're a pretty small operation, but very diverse. Lots of different crops. We looked into being certified, and it's just too much work for us. We are so local, anyone who knows our name, we barely sell anything more than a mile away. There's a local food co-op, there's a café. Most of our product actually goes to the elder care facility. We actually do a certain amount of food processing, freezing, canning, root cellar storage. But we don't need to be certified for people to value, to trust us. They see our name, Threefold Community Farm, or the Pfeiffer Center or Fellowship, and that's good enough. I've looked into certification, but actually decided not to go that route. We're open if we ever need to do that in the future. So I really can't say much about perspectives on certification. (1:25:49)

You mentioned just aspects of BD or organic history to preserve for the future. I think it's really important to have the story out there, to have all different perspectives, and I think I mentioned earlier, just to use the past as a basis towards the future. Not to determine the future, but it's good to know the heritage, honor that, respect that, be able to have creative ideas going into the future. I find that helpful. Even day-to-day. I keep a journal each day on the farm, I track also what's happening with nature outside, what's blooming here, when do the lilacs bloom, when do we see this bird and that bird come. That's just an example, perhaps, of the tracking that's going on, to record it. I can look back over the years and say, "Oh, this year isn't as horrible as I thought." The whole aspect of journaling, it's like a little mini aspect of recording the bigger history. (1:27:19)

You asked thoughts or any other ideas. I would say an enormous concern I have is climate change. That's like the elephant in the room. I'm 73, towards the end of this time around, but I'm working with young people in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and these young people coming down the pike after that. What's it going to be like for our animals or our plants? We're in the Northeast, so we're a little bit cooler, and you're in Michigan. I imagine that's not so bad, the warming, so to speak. But I can see that we've shifted since I've been here, we've shifted one hardiness zones. You know, the hardiness zones, the lower the number, the colder. We were 5 when I came. We're 6 now. The winter temperature used to go below zero frequently here. Usually just single digits below zero. But now it's rare we go to single digits above zero. I've

seen that here. I know what it's like when we get a really hot period in the summer where you don't want your cows out, you don't want your workers out. (1:29:29)

So for me, biodynamics actually is the most efficient, in terms of quality, growing quality food, creating quality soil, being the best. I'm not trying to be arrogant, but it's got a wisdom in it that's the most healthful thing for the soil and the plants. I think we're going to need the best healthful things for the future. Food production—I mean, you can talk about air pollution, water pollution, whatever. It's hard not to imagine that food production is going to be the most critical thing in the decades to come, which depends on the air and the water and the temperature. And so hopefully, maybe through challenging what that's going to bring about, there can be coworking, people working together that might not otherwise work together. So whether it's organic or biodynamic or permaculture or you name it, there can be collaboration. Collaboration more and more seems to be an important word. (1:31:16)

You asked about the relation of farming, thoughts about farming in relation to philosophical thoughts or religious or spiritual ideas. Obviously the social side is so important for farms, to cohort with helpful social ideas. I do think spiritual paths are important. Finding meaning, a deeper meaning, whatever it is, through art and music culture, to be able to maintain one's humanity in challenging times. For me, it's been more of a spiritual science. That's a funny word, spiritual science. To many it would be an oxymoron, spiritual science. I've always liked science, but actually a higher view of the spirit, that's what's really underlying the physical reality we have. So there's a truth, there is a reality there. It's not measurable, like in a lot of sciences, but it's a truth. I think it's important to access. And it's done so individually by different people.

For me, that's an important part. That's what keeps me going. I am excited about biodynamics because it has some spiritual inspirations behind it, thoughts that inspire me, about the soil, about plants. Actually, I've kind of ended up—especially when I came into the Fellowship Community—doing what I had hoped when I was 17, to kind of bridge culture and education with farming, to raise up farming so that it isn't just drudge. So I feel privileged to have the opportunity to live mostly where I'm living right now, in the Fellowship Community, work with the educational center and the garden.

Yeah, I've found it helpful, your project in the history of organic and biodynamic, the farmer interviews. It's always neat to reflect a little on what I've been doing and what's going on out in the world.

AA: Yeah, thank you so much for all that! That was all really interesting. Is there anything else you want to share before I end the recording?

MM: No, I just hope—I think there's a lot of great young people out there now into this, and hopefully the old can help support the young to have an inspiring future. (1:35:19).