

Abigail Porter, narrator

Anneliese Abbott, interviewer

March 20, 2024

AP = Abigail Porter

AA = Anneliese Abbott

AA: This is March 20, 2024, and this is Anneliese Abbott doing an oral history interview with

AP: Abigail Porter

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

AP: Well, thank you for your interest in doing this big project.

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

AP: I was born September 1954. I was born in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. My mother had traveled up from the family farm in Pennsylvania to Cape Cod, where my father had a truck farm in Barnstable. He was farming with horses. I guess now people don't even know what a truck farm is. He grew vegetables. And he was wrapping up that business. My mother had stayed in Pennsylvania, because she was taking care of her [ill] mother who had died earlier in the year.

So anyway, I was born during a hurricane on Cape Cod. I grew up and spent most of my growing up years on the family homestead, from when I was about ten, in Pennsylvania. It was a farm that had been in the family since the 1700s, an original land grant that had been passed down. It was from my grandmother's side of the family, and was passed through that lineage.

I probably should say more about my mother [Josephine Porter], since she's the person of interest to put things in context, because things changed a lot over the years. She was born in 1916 on the family farm, and that's where she passed later. My grandfather had bought the farm from my great-great grandmother's estate when she had died. My grandfather was a master mechanic. He had worked at the engine works and was so good they had sent him to New York City to work on locomotives. But he couldn't take the pressure. He got ulcers, he got malaria, and the doctors sent him back and said, "Go back to the country and live a quiet life." That was the point where he bought the farm. (3:00)

My mother grew up on [the family] dairy farm. They grew all of their own food, grain for the animals. Basically, it was an organic farm, before organic was given that name. They had a raw milk route in town, and I think did reasonably well, because they could grow everything they needed. For holidays, like for the Fourth of July, they would grow extra chickens [to sell for picnics].

My grandmother was in an unhappy marriage and insisted that her daughters go to college so that they would have choices. So my mother, after she graduated [from high school], she waited two years until her younger sister graduated, [and they went to college together]. My mother was one of five children, an older brother and older sister, she was the middle child, two

younger sisters. So anyways, she went to Blackburn College in Illinois, which sounds like a great college. The students, their money was tight, so this was a college where the tuition was very low, and the students worked [in the kitchen, housekeeping, laundry]. Engineering and trade students built the college, a lot of the college.

She came back after two years, and then she delivered milk to raise money. She had a town route. They had bottles with the name of the farm, Snyder's Dairy, printed on it. She was saving money to go back to college. In the meantime, her mother had become ill. She was originally diagnosed with cancer locally, and my mother sought out a nutritional doctor, Doctor Max Gerson, who was known for his treatment of cancer with raw juice, a lot of raw juices [Gerson Therapy]. He did further testing, and she didn't have cancer after all, but she did have cirrhosis, liver disease. Never drank a drop in her life. I think he also influenced my mother to want to become an osteopath. (6:02)

I'm not sure how my mother found out about biodynamics. It might have been, she might have been getting *Organic Gardening* magazine, because she was interested in health and nutrition, which is why she sought out Dr. Max Gerson. But anyways, she went to her first biodynamic conference in 1947. And it was there that she met her future husband, [who she married in 1953]. She had written a letter back to her sister and wrote, "I found it! The biodynamic method of farming and gardening. I have long been interested in health, which depends on healthy plants, animals, and soil life. I have been attending the Biodynamic Farmers and Gardeners Conference here at Spring Valley, New York." So that kind of changed her life direction, realizing that health depended on soil and the quality and nutrition. So she devoted her life to farming and to biodynamics. She started making the biodynamic preparations shortly after she came back from the conference.

And then, after my grandmother died, my father was going to come down and take over the farm, but there was conflict with my grandfather, we think. I don't know. My father was used to the sandy soil in Cape Cod and brought down a ripper, it has these long steel tines that go into the soil to break up plow pan. Not being used to the soils in Pennsylvania, I think he blew my grandfather's tractor out. It needed a lot more engine power. I mean, the farm was a beautiful farm, located in a fertile valley, with a stream running through the center of it. (8:59)

Two years later, my mother and my father were offered positions to work with biodynamics. Evelyn Spieden, who had been the secretary and treasurer of the Biodynamic Association for years, and she had actually started to make the preparations with Pfeiffer during the time at Kimberton, for the Association. In those days, the Biodynamic Association made preparations to provide for members. You had to be a member to buy the preparations, and later that expanded. But anyway, Evelyn Spieden had recently married Richard Gregg, who was a writer and social activist. He had lived with Gandhi in India, he had lived in India with Gandhi's family for years and was going back to teach, and Evelyn was going with him.

My mother took on the responsibility of secretary-treasurer for the association. My father was supposed to work on Pfeiffer's farm, which Evelyn had bought a piece of, five acres from the corner of Pfeiffer's farm, and built a house there. This was in Chester, New York. So at that point we moved to Chester. Something happened, my father didn't end up working on the farm, and I'm not sure if that was the time period where Pfeiffer was told by his doctors that he had to give up the farm, he was doing too much with all his other lecturing, or if that was the time he went to the hospital with tuberculosis. I'm not really sure of that timeline.

But anyway, we lived there for two years, until Evelyn came back. [There] was a [biodynamic] community [in the region near Pfeiffer's farm]. Across the street was Marjorie

Spock, she had a house there. She had kept the house, but during that time she had also moved to Long Island and had farmed there, and it was sprayed with DDT. That started the class action suit against the government [for contaminating her farm]. Pfeiffer testified in that trial, and a lot of that testimony related to content of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. (12:12)

So then, when Evelyn came back, of course she wanted her house back [but not the secretary/treasurer's job or preparations job]. And in the meantime, my father had found work at Wassaic State School, teaching [mentally and physically] handicapped children, adults, there weren't many children. [He taught music and they even had a marching band]. It was an interesting place, because there was a state hospital, a state school, and a jail, and the jail had a farm that provided milk for the hospital and the state school, which seems like a really healthy way to have those, the jail actually having a farm. That doesn't happen anymore.

We moved [to Dover Plains, NY], and my mother was sending out the publication, answering questions. She would set up at conferences, Natural Food and Farming conferences, representing the Biodynamic Association, selling books and preparations. She would take me out of school to go with her, from the time when I was five to seven. I went to the lectures, and we went to biodynamic conferences. The Fetzer Farm in New Hope, Pennsylvania, some of the early conferences were held there. The Natural Food and Farming conferences, I remember going to a lecture that a holistic dentist gave on reversing cavities. I had bad teeth, and so my mother wanted me to go to that. [Pfeiffer prescribed two homeopathic remedies for my teeth, likely cell salts].

Pfeiffer's lectures, when he gave his lectures, we would take trips to Spring Valley. My mother made preparations that went into the Pfeiffer products. We would visit Pfeiffer and his wife in their apartment, over the garage there. Margrit Selke, she's kind of an unsung hero. She almost by herself made the Pfeiffer products from the time Pfeiffer first developed them to well after his death, into her nineties, which was I think into the 1990s. We would visit the laboratory, where Pfeiffer's wife worked in the laboratory [she was another unsung hero]. People who worked on the publication, Heckels, Philbricks would come in. Peter Esher, who worked with Pfeiffer and made the Pfeiffer tree paste. Many of the people who had come moved to this country to escape Hitler. There had been a contingent earlier who had established the community at Threefold. Most of them were involved in the arts. (16:46)

AA: And then you said your mother eventually became the secretary of the Biodynamic Association?

AP: Yeah, in 1956 is when we moved to Spring Valley [Chester, NY], and she took over the secretary[-treasurer] job then and continued to hold that until '73, and was on the board for many years, too.

When we moved to Dover Plains, my father drove his horses [down from Massachusetts], and my parents bought a ten-acre piece of mostly woodland, with this old cabin on it that was falling apart, and they rented also some land. My father had chickens and kept the horses and made hay, in addition to his job teaching at the state school. To start out, we didn't have water or electricity, and my mother moved up the trailer that she had bought when they first got married so they could have a separate place down at the family farm. She moved that up, and then she had to get a job at the hospital. She worked in the state hospital as an aid to bring in money so they could get the place set up and pay the mortgage.

Then when I was eight years old, I went to the [Green Meadow] Waldorf School in Spring Valley that was just starting, and I lived with the Daniels. Ernst Daniel was one of the founding people who started the Biodynamic Association in this country, [he was] instrumental with Pfeiffer and some other people. I boarded there for two years. The Waldorf School was just starting, and third and fourth grade were together. I think the first year there were seven people in the class, and the next year there were ten or twelve. I have to say that my memories of being in the Waldorf School are very vivid, with the projects, what we did. In public school it's pretty much a blur. So there really is something different about Waldorf, the way it's taught, bringing in the arts and music and everything. (20:07)

AA: What were some of those projects that you remember?

AP: Norse myths was one of the blocks, because you had two-hour blocks in the morning. There was a story, and then we created our own workbooks where we made drawings and wrote out different writings that were on the board that we would copy right into our notebooks. We had recorder, we had eurhythmy, French. French was taught more like a game, where the teacher would say the name and we would go dust the l'tableau, or the chair, or whatever it was. The next year we had cross stitching, we made a belt with cross stitching. Woodworking, I made a mouse and a little box, pencil box, and then the next year we did carved wooden spoons and little bowls. Now it seems like parents don't allow their kids to use sharp tools, they're so afraid to let them have knives or anything. And when we finished our classes, we'd go on walks. Lots of times, because the classes were so small, we finished work early, and in the afternoon we would go skating on the pond. There was a play that all the students were in. The Hobbit? I think we put on a play of the Hobbit. I went to the Waldorf School in Kimberton when I was in eighth grade, and we did "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

So anyway, then when I was nine, which was '63—well, in the meantime, Pfeiffer died [on November 30, 1961]. And I remember the phone call. It seemed like the middle of the night, but it was probably 7:00 and dark. I was in bed and heard the phone ring, and my mother woke me up and let me know. It was actually one of the few times that I saw her cry. She was pretty stoic. She was really concerned, hearing her talk later, about what was going to happen to biodynamics, because he was really the driving force of bringing biodynamics out into the world into this country. There had been biodynamic farmers who had come earlier, but he had been consulting and giving lectures around the country. [My mother was very concerned and wondered who was going to do all the research, teach, and consult, and carry the momentum forward. Her concerns were well founded. Biodynamics languished for many years, probably until the wine industry brought notice to it by winning top awards for flavor. My mother helped keep biodynamics alive after Pfeiffer's passing by continuing to make and supply biodynamic preparations nationally as well as to the Pfeiffer Foundation for their Pfeiffer Compost Starter and Field Spray. That was one of her major contributions to biodynamics. The Pfeiffer Foundation through their for-profit arm, General Composting Corp was selling \$40,000 of Pfeiffer product to the United Arab Republic annually for a while]

[My father, Harris Porter, moved to Southern California and worked with Peter Dukich and Jack McAndrew teaching biodynamic composting. They were part of the early organic/biodynamic history.]

There were numerous municipal composting operations, not only in this country, but in Japan and the Philippines and in Europe. He had consulted with numerous farmers. There was a

chicken farmer in Texas. The chickens weren't in cages yet, but they were in big chicken houses, and Pfeiffer had him spray the compost starter into the bedding in the chicken houses so that the droppings would actually start composting while the chickens were in there. They'd scratch them into the bedding, so it reduced the odor and the pathogens. There was a pretty big composting operation in Texas, too.

[Pfeiffer had collected samples of 75 of the most fertile soils in the world and analyzed them for their constituents and microlife. He cultured the micro-organisms and they became part of the formula for the compost starter and field spray. Originally, he had different formulations depending on what materials were to be composted. The current formulation is more of a generic one to be effective for the most common materials composted.]

About that same time, the early 50s, I believe, there was a pilot program in Oakland, California, where they were taking municipal waste and composting it with compost starter to get [finished] compost in, I think it was about three weeks. That could have been a real asset to all the farmers in that region, saving on costs and bringing nutrients to the farm rather than the chemical fertilizers. But there was already pressure against it, and there was arson and it burned down. Pretty much at the same time, there had been plans to have the pilot program in Long Island for New York City [garbage], and Pfeiffer was warned that if he went ahead with the project he'd end up in the East River with concrete blocks on his feet. So there were a lot of forces working against biodynamics and organics. That's something people don't really realize, the obstacles and the pushback there was. (26:41)

And even within the biodynamic community, there were people who were old-school biodynamic anthroposophic people who were really opposed to Pfeiffer developing the Pfeiffer compost starter and field spray. He realized that he had to be able to present biodynamics in a way that would be applicable to a larger scale, and also had to be presented in a way that would be accepted by more mainstream. So he presented in a very scientific way. [Pfeiffer met his audience where they were; he could just as easily speak in an understandable way to scientists, academics or farmers].

And some of these attitudes kind of continued, "Well, Steiner said that the biodynamic preparations should not be commercialized." Well, what did he mean by that? I'm thinking mass produced, where there's no human element. The Pfeiffer compost starter was virtually made by hand by Margrit Selke, so the human element was still definitely there [and continues to be at Josephine Porter Institute]. And there are Steiner people still, some old school and probably some younger people too, who felt that you had to be an anthroposophist to practice biodynamics. And that was really not Pfeiffer's approach at all, because he said, "It will work! It doesn't matter what your religious or philosophical beliefs are; it works. It works on the scientific level, you can see the results." So there's been that kind of pushback even within the biodynamic community. (28:47)

While we were still in Dover Plains, my mother got a lot of health magazines. She would get *Natural Food and Farming*, and also there were friends of hers in the DC area who had an organization, the Federation of Homemakers, which was kind of a consumer organization. They wanted to support Paul Keene, because his peanut butter had to be labeled as imitation peanut butter, because industry had set the standards and the formula. You see, all the way back then, industry had infiltrated the government and set that policy for their self-interest and profits.

So anyway, the Federation of Homemakers, this group of women, with Paul Keene's peanut butter and crackers, went to Congress and handed out peanut butter and crackers and said, "This is real peanut butter. It shouldn't be labeled imitation peanut butter." The [commercial]

formulation for peanut butter had sugar and cheap oils, cottonseed oil, palm oil, and they'd take out the good peanut oil and sold that separately. So the laws did get changed. Now I can't imagine people taking peanut butter and crackers into Congress; they probably wouldn't allow it.

During that time period, another little tidbit [relating to biodynamics] is, my mother had another friend. I can't remember her name; she was in the Baltimore area [and worked for the government]. She had made survival biscuits for Admiral Byrd's arctic trip. I can't remember if it was Antarctica or the North Pole, but the survival biscuits were made from [only] biodynamic wheat [possibly sprouted wheat flour] and [raw] honey. He took them in case of an emergency. And one time when we were visiting [in the 1970s], she gave us a can that hadn't been delivered and had them checked out for the vitality, and the vitality and nutrition was still like 80 percent of what it had been [originally]. The honey in combination with biodynamic wheat had such good keeping quality. (32:07)

Another backtracking a little bit, on my grandfather's farm, that did well until after the Second World War. At that time there was a lot of propaganda on how dangerous raw milk was, and increased regulations. He was forced to sell it to a processor. And that was kind of where a lot of things went downhill, because he had to produce more milk to get the same kind of income. And at the same time, it was harder to get help. There was all this hired help during the [Depression and] war years, and even hoboes would come by and work for a couple days for a place to stay. But after the war, a lot of able-bodied men went to urban areas to get better-paying jobs, so it was a challenge to get good help.

So anyway, in 1963, my mother moved back to the family farm. Her marriage had failed. I think she would make a budget, and then my father would go and buy a tractor, and that was a strain. So she went back to the family farm, and my grandfather was okay, but he was not that well. But in the meantime, my mother had gotten goats, because I had allergies, and we had traveled up to, Marjorie Spock [who] had moved to Maine, and we traveled up to Maine to get our first two goats from her. We carried the goats back in the back seat of a sedan [with the seat taken out].

We moved to Pennsylvania, back to the family farm. My mother had a few goats. We sold milk just to some retail customers. We had a garden, and even the first year there were people coming and going who would come to the farm. There was a woman that first summer who came from Sweden who wanted to come to this country, who had biodynamic connections. (35:27)

I guess I should backtrack a little more about Pfeiffer. He was really, to me, the photograph that you placed on the website really embodies my impression of him. He was kind, friendly, acknowledged children. I would sit on his lap as a child. He had two big poodles in the apartment. You might think that, being so young, I wouldn't have remembered things he said in the lecture, but we would travel from either Dover Plains to Spring Valley or about once a month down to Grandpa's farm [in PA]. In the fall, I was about four years old, I saw people burning their leaves. And I wanted my mother to stop and tell those people that they needed to be composting those leaves. They shouldn't be burning them. I already knew about composting when I was four.

And another time, just to give an idea of how Pfeiffer was, I was about three. We were at a conference at Fetzer's Farm, and I was bored and kind of twitching around in my chair and tapping my foot, and my mother was trying to contain me. And Pfeiffer came back, picked me up, put me in the front of the room, stood me on the table, and started asking me about what was the importance of earthworms. I don't even remember, I think I was kind of shocked, I don't remember what I said, but I was quiet for the rest of the lecture, that's for sure!

[Back to the farm in Pennsylvania]. My mother continued to be the secretary. Lots of times she was up until 1:00 answering letters, and then got up to milk the goats. And then sometimes my grandfather's hired help didn't show up to milk the cows in the morning, so she would be out milking the cows. And she had a large garden and grew most of the grains [for the animals] to be ground at the mill. (38:40)

I helped on the farm, unloading hundreds of bales of hay into the elevator, driving the tractor, helping with the garden, milking goats. But when I graduated from high school, I wanted to get as far away from the farm as I could. I went to art school in Philadelphia and became a jeweler.

But during about that time, my mother had asked for a raise from the Biodynamic Association to help pay my college expenses. The Biodynamic Association basically said they didn't have the money, and they ended up splitting up that job between three or four volunteers, to get the magazine taken care of, membership, selling books, and all that. Either they didn't have somebody to do the preparations, or my mother felt really strongly that she wanted to continue doing them. She kind of felt it was her destiny, it was part of her life's work to do that.

Anyway, after that, it was a private enterprise on her part. The preparation making was no longer under the auspices of the Biodynamic Association. Since she needed to make more money, she decided to expand the goat herd. She went to the Farm Bureau to get a low-interest Farm Bureau credit loan, and she couldn't get the loan because she did not use chemicals. So you see already, the chemical industry had infiltrated the USDA and was influencing how they treated farmers. She did get a loan from a local bank and extended her herd and wholesaled quite a bit of the milk through Pure Goat Products, which was about a hundred miles away. She had somebody take the milk there. She was doing that until she cut back the herd and only sold to local people. She was licensed to sell raw milk by the state as long as it was still on the farm. The certification to sell raw milk off-farm would have involved a whole new milking parlor and a whole lot more regulations, so she didn't go that route. (42:19)

After my grandfather couldn't farm anymore, he rented the barn and part of the farm to somebody, [but] that didn't work out. After my grandfather died, my mother also raised replacement heifers in addition to goats. We had to milk 60 goats at one time, and about 100 with all the young ones. Made cheese. And she was always trying to find some extra income. She tried to raise the earthworms, which didn't work out. One time when I came home from college she was doing what we call microgreens now. This was in the '70s, we called them "seedlings." We made a little label for the packaging, ["Tender Seedling Salad Greens"]. It was sunflowers, buckwheat, and radish. She soaked the seeds in biodynamic preparations, the one that stimulates germination, before she put them out in flats. She sold those to a health food store, actually to a food distributor, wholesale. She raised mung bean sprouts by the five-gallon bucket for, the health food store [that] also had another business where they set up booths at festivals, and they sold vegetarian eggrolls. I was amazed; I had made sprouts in a jar, and they got all curly, but making them in the five-gallon buckets and not disturbing them, you could get those three, four-inch long mung bean sprouts like you see in Chinese restaurants. She had bees also, collected honey. Chickens, she sold eggs. She sold some chickens privately, some beef privately.

But when I went to college, four people came. Actually, I missed all the fun on the farm when I went away to college. It was the back-to-the-earth movement, the '70s, so there were students from Antioch College and Goddard College that came on work study for half a year or a year. There were four people there, two girls, a guy from Texas, a woman from Goddard. And then later, there were several others during that time. I'm sure it was much more lively and fun

with all those people there. A couple of them went on to become Waldorf school teachers. One started a Waldorf-Montessori school, a couple went on to become farmers. I don't know what all the others went for.

Where am I? What's next, here? (46:48)

AA: Let's see, you were in college?

AP: Yeah, I was in college from '72 to '76, Philadelphia College of Arts, which later became University of the Arts. I just found I liked working three-dimensionally better. I had taken a jewelry course in the summer between high school and college in Mexico, I went to Instituto Allende in San Miguel, an art college there, for the summer. And then deciding, [in college] I loved glass blowing, I liked working three-dimensionally better, but I thought, sculpture is not much of an income possibility, so kind of by default I went to jewelry making. It seemed more manageable and easier to set up. I mean, I loved glass blowing, but setting up a whole kilns and everything, that would have been hard.

So after I graduated, my mother was ill. I really felt that I needed to go back to the farm and help her, and her helper that had been living there that I thought was going to stay left. So I came back, and actually one of the first things I ended up doing was riding on the combine, tying off bags of oats or wheat and dropping them down the chute. I think that was one of the worst jobs. It was like 90 degrees, 80 percent humidity, and the dust was so itchy. (48:44)

Then she had, there was a trailer where my grandfather's hired help had lived. A couple moved in, helping her out on the farm later that year, and stayed several years. And I went on, I got a job with a jeweler, and then started my own business and did retail shows, starting out with the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen. Did retail shows and then expanded to other retail shows. I think the farthest I went was to Massachusetts for the shows. A couple times in Florida, but mostly it was centered around New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington DC. At one point I did also the trade shows, I sold to about a hundred galleries nationwide. I had people doing some piecework for me. I couldn't do all the work myself.

Then in '83—well, actually, '81 my mother went into the hospital once, and went in there again in '83. It was kind of horrible. The way the system is set up, they had to keep justifying keeping her in the hospital. So they would do tests that weren't necessary at all, that were really kind of wearing her out. And at one point, one of the doctors wanted to do a biopsy, liver biopsy, and another doctor said that would probably kill her. And I ended up calling the first doctor's office and telling him that he needed to stop abusing my mother. But that's the way it was. It's not about taking care of people. It's about the money.

So anyway, the heart doctor came in one day, and I said, "She's going home. Monday she's getting out of here." She passed four days after she got out of the hospital. I don't know how she did it, she somehow found the Steiner Christian Community priest, she had him come up and give her last rites on Friday when she was at the hospital. Saturday there was a board meeting, a Biodynamic Association board meeting. Somehow she got the number, called when they were having the meeting, put her last two cents' worth in, and she told them that they should really focus on doing the scientific research to back up biodynamics. And then Monday she was coming home. I was going in at 11:00 to check her out, I was getting a room ready, because her sister was coming in from Michigan. My mother shows up in the ambulance at 10:30. I mean, she had checked herself out of the hospital, somehow arranged for the ambulance to get her home before I could even leave the house to pick her up.

And then at the house she was surrounded by family. The sister from Florida came in, the sister from Michigan, people who had worked on the farm. When she woke up, she was in a coma, and everyone gathered around, and she passed later that morning, surrounded by friends and family. Because I traveled so much, I always was afraid that she would die when I wasn't there. But she was so cooperative, so considerate. I mean, she waited until I was looking at her. I could just see the color leave, her spirit leave. That was all pretty amazing. (53:49)

I tried to sell the farm through biodynamic and organic channels. The situation was, I rented the farm to a local farmer, and then they retired, and the situation came that because of the tax situation, if the farm wasn't being farmed, it would lose its reduced tax status. So I realized that I couldn't keep it. I didn't want to sell it to a developer. I sold part of the farm through the farmland protection program. Previous to that, I had helped, there was a farm down the road that the old woman who owned it died, and it was sold to a developer. Putting in the roads, he said that he was digging through five feet of topsoil. And that just was so crushing. It really makes me almost ill to see really fertile farmland being turned into development. Land that will not be farmed again.

And so it was in Pennsylvania, this program, agricultural security areas. So when I heard about that, I worked with the township to get it, I think you had to have 500 acres to create an agricultural security zone. And if you're in that zone, your land was protected, it couldn't be taken by eminent domain, and it protected farmers' rights and all that. But you also needed to be in an agricultural security area if you were going to sell the development rights or any of the land into the farmland protection program. Pennsylvania had quite a bit of money set out for that. And also, the Nature Conservancy had discovered that there was some kind of endangered turtle along the creek that ran through the property, and so they were interested in conserving that piece, too. So I worked on, I got most of the signatures for the land for the agricultural security area in our township, and then worked later on on the open space comprehensive plan that the township and two other municipalities were putting together. The commissioner who was also working on that wanted open space for recreation. So I got some friends, and we would go to [the public input] meetings and really try to insist that it be preserved as real open space and farmland and not covered with concrete for recreation. That was one of my projects then.

Because of my mother's influence and all the books she had around about [nutrition and health and one on] fluoride, [*Fluoride the Aging Factor: How to Recognize and Avoid the Devastating Effects of Fluoride* by John Yiamouyiannis affected my activism]. When our representative sponsored a bill to mandate the fluoridation of the whole state of Pennsylvania, I wrote letters to the editor and contacted and found the copies of some of my mother's book, or magazines, [and located] the Army researcher, who had worked on research in the 1940s. He was pretty old, but I got in touch with him and got his contact to the legislative office. And the results of their studies in the '40s was that fluoride was way too toxic to put into drinking water. But that's industry again, it was a toxic byproduct from aluminum and fertilizer industry, and if they had to pay to get rid of this toxic byproduct, it would have cost them too much money. So they convinced the government to put it into the water supply, through getting scientists to prove that it would be good. I remember my mother talking about it in the early '60s, how the sugar industry had hired Fred Stare at Harvard to prove, to do a study to prove that white sugar was good for you. I mean, that's how it's been for decades. (59:26)

So what next?

AA: So what got you back into the gardening and biodynamics?

AP: Well, I mean, I always used some of the preparations on my own. But when I moved to West Virginia, there were a lot of friends in the craft circuit who had moved down here, and when I sold the farm, I was looking for another place, and there was an arts community, Berkeley Springs West Virginia Arts Community. There's a homeopathic manufacturer, there were a lot of alternative healers here. So I moved here, and I had a garden the first year. I planted a hundred perennials, put in a hundred asparagus, and planted things, not realizing how poor the soil was. I grew up in a fertile valley, my mother put compost out once every three years. Well, this was like shale, it had been scraped off by the glaciers. Planting these trees and bushes, I had to use a pickaxe to get through. My potatoes were the size of my thumbnail because of a drought that year. I just had no idea. Looking back, I would have just put everything in cover crops the first three years and tried to get, it would have been better for me to scrape off some topsoil from my mother's garden and bring it down here to get a head start, because it was pretty hard to get good manure.

So I started using the preparations, and I would visit Hugh's. When my mother was in the hospital, I asked her, "Well, who's going to continue the preparation work?" And she said she thought Hough Courtney would. And he had been coming up, he had met her at a biodynamic conference where somebody had piped up and said, "Why is it being kept so secret, how to make the preparations?" My mother was there and said, "It's no secret; come to the farm and [I'll teach you how to] make them." Hugh was the only one that followed through and came to the farm for seven years, mostly in the fall, but sometimes in the spring. He consulted with her and started making the preparations. Anyways, when I asked her, I said, "Do you think Hugh will continue it?" And she said, "Yeah." He agreed to do that. I don't think he knew what he was getting into.

So I went down to the workshops at his place, and I was buying the preparations. I went to the Fellowship of Preparation Makers conference that was at his place, and then way up in Canada, to that one. I had written up a little summary and thank-you for the conference, for Hugh. And he asked me at that point, that was 2010 or '11. It might have been '11, because I went to the conference. It was the year of Fukushima in Japan. (1:03:50)

AA: That was 2011.

AP: '11. Okay. So that was, 2010 I had gone to a conference at his place, workshops, and in 2011 to a Canadian one. And then he, I guess he liked my writing, he asked me to start writing for *Applied Biodynamics*, which was the publication of the Josephine Porter Institute. After Hugh agreed to continue the preparation work, he founded in '85 the Josephine Porter Institute as a nonprofit to honor the 28 years my mother had devoted to making the preparations and as a place to continue the work and also to research and education. That was '85 that he founded the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics.

So I started writing, and then others asked me to be on the board. I wrote for the publication for ten years. And interviewing people, which was a lot of fun because I learned so much from all the people that I interviewed. I was on the board for five years. Then after ten years writing, I decided that was long enough. It needed some new blood. (1:05:22)

AA: What is your perspective on the connection between organic and biodynamic farming?

AP: I think that a lot of the things that organic has developed into actually came from biodynamics, or arose simultaneously. Most of the principles that are used in organic were previously used in biodynamics. And biodynamics had the first certification program, [Demeter], in 1928, international certification for regenerative agriculture. So I think that, through Pfeiffer's work, because he presented the scientific aspects, soil science, to a much broader audience, I think a lot of those principles were picked up. A lot of the people who studied with Alan Chadwick in California, they went on to become biodynamic farmers.

I think that a lot of the things Steiner originally talked about, from trace minerals to improving the fertility of the soil, composting, all were eventually proven scientifically and became part of what we now know as organic. I think there's kind of a disconnect, just because people don't understand the scientific reasons that the preparations are used, specifically the plant materials in combination with the animal materials, which increase the potency. There's all sorts of hormones and microorganisms and everything in these different organs that are used. I think originally, when Steiner gave these indications, people were still eating organ meat. Using all the different parts of the animal was part of farm life. It wasn't the disconnect with nature that there is right now.

And I think it became, organic didn't want to be connected with the woo-woo weirdness of biodynamics, because I think the scientific aspect of it wasn't stressed enough. Well yeah, you have the cow horn, and there's an increase in different kinds of fungi and bacteria that really help the process. Now there's a big thing with EM, essential microorganism or something. Well, all those are created in the process of composting and making the preparations. It's the way for farmers to be able to do that on the farm without buying inputs. I think organic eventually will get to the point where they operate more like biodynamics, as an enclosed organism that provides the fertility and nutrition on site, because it is the most sustainable method of farming, in my opinion.

And that was kind of the goal, to do that as much as possible, which lowers your cost of inputs. If you're growing the fertility, you're working with the energy that's on the farm, the materials that are on the farm, the whole concept of nutrition, that it's better to eat food grown in your own bioregion and latitude, that is more in resonance with your own energy because it is grown in that area where you live. So I think producing this fertility on site is more beneficial to the farm than bringing in outside inputs from all over the world.

I think Rodale wanted to disconnect from the woo-woo of biodynamics. I mean, organic way back then was more fringe, much more fringe than what biodynamic is today. Biodynamics, especially with the notoriety it's gotten in the wine industry, has almost become trendy in certain circles. So I think more and more of the principles of biodynamics will be incorporated into organic, just because it's more of a closed-loop system, it's more sustainable. You hear about, farmers can't get any fertilizer, the fertilizer costs are up. Well, if they transitioned to organic and biodynamic, they wouldn't have the supply chain issue and cost. (1:12:40)

AA: What's your perspective on the relationship between biodynamic or organic farming and environmentalism, or the back-to-the-land movement, or any other social or political movements?

AP: I think there's more increasing awareness among consumers that the food really isn't that good, and that we're destroying—I mean, what brought it to a lot of people's attention was that it was killing beneficial insects, and butterflies, and birds as a result of chemical use. I think

they're closely intertwined, because at one time I read something where people complained about the cost of organic food, but if you included all the hidden costs of chemical agriculture, from the destruction of soil, the contamination of the soil, the water supply—I mean, 80 to 90 percent of the ammonia that's put on commercial farms is either volatilized or runs off, with problems for streams. The chemicals that kill bees and other insects and get into the water supply and damage the wildlife in water.

So anyways, the cost of the environmental damage to water, air, and soil. There's the loss of topsoil. One article I read said that the biggest costly export of America was the loss of topsoil down through the Mississippi. There's that cost. There is the cost of health to farm workers, by using chemicals. There is the health costs of people eating food that doesn't have high nutrition and that is contaminated with Roundup and all sorts of other chemicals. I wish I could say it didn't, but if you incorporated all of the hidden costs in chemically raised food, the cost would be at least three times higher than organic. If you monetized all those costs.

Yeah, I think it's a real concern. One article I read said that in some areas of the country, 75 percent of the rain has Roundup in it. That's affecting huge swaths of the country. That's one of my feelings, that I think biodynamics, [the preparations] need to be used more frequently than was originally given out 75 years ago, that you really need to apply, at least the one prep, the Barrel Compost, monthly, to counter the pollution that's coming in from the rain. Who knows what's coming in from the contrails and the chemtrails and whatever else is being done to the atmosphere with the weather modification programs, creating rain in one part of the country or the other, which affects the whole world in the end.

So yeah, I think it is, there's a big connection with how food is raised and the environment. Everything is connected, everything. (1:17:05)

AA: So what's your perspective on the relationship between the land grant universities and biodynamic or organic farming?

AP: Well, most of the research for decades has been on chemical agriculture, because that's where the funding is. Chemical companies have the funding to go to the universities to do the research. And so that's where the research is being done. I think that's, in addition to the pushback from the chemical industry, the lack of funding for research in organic and biodynamic has been one of the things that has really held the growth back, because the research isn't being done. If the research doesn't show up quite the way chemical companies want it to, they don't get the funding. I remember reading an article in *Acreas* years ago, when I first found out about genetically modified food. There was a researcher in Scotland who determined that genetically modified potatoes does something that increases [the thickness of] the gut lining and causes health problems. [When he published his research], he was fired from his position, and the trade organization for genetically modified food gave huge amounts of money to this university in Scotland.

And I think because of that funding, and because the USDA has promoted the chemicals, get big or [get out], get bigger tractors, get more in debt. For decades that's been the way it is. A [researcher, Don Huber, PhD, previously from University of Idaho and Purdue University Department of Botany & Plant Pathology, found a connection between glyphosate and soil, plant, animal, and human health]. He went to the USDA in Iowa and they basically said, "If it's about Roundup or Monsanto, we don't want to hear it," because they were getting funding.

Now, I mean, there are like little pockets in universities where more [organic] research is being done. I'm not really aware of what's going on. But it needs to be a lot more. I think the big change is going to be consumer driven, because that's what's actually been a big force in more of the industrial companies going to organic, is consumer demand. So things will shift more when more of the population is educated about how toxic conventional agriculture is on so many levels. If they can see that their health, it's going to save them money in the long run even if they pay more originally for food. I don't know. Did that answer your question? (1:21:10)

AA: Yeah, it did. And then, if you were to summarize your philosophy of biodynamic farming, what would that be?

AP: Well, to me, it is the most sustainable form of agriculture that I know of. That's not to say that there aren't other forms that are just as sustainable. I would say that it really looks at the interconnection of everything. You can't do really one thing without affecting so many other things. And it incorporates an acknowledgement of the unseen forces, the unseen energy in nature, and that's really what you're working with in the preparations. When I give workshops in biodynamics, I avoid using the word "spiritual." I mean, spiritual is what Steiner used, but so many people have preconceived ideas of what spiritual is depending on their experiences and background, and it's frequently very different than mine. I say, "unseen energy," and it's working with the unseen energy, and it's working with nature to enhance the processes, working with the natural processes in nature to augment them, which heals.

For me, biodynamics is actually—I mean, biodynamics can be practiced in many different ways, from a purely scientific, materialistic way where you use the compost starter, the compost field spray, the field spray, or the preparations, and it works. You will have an effect. I think when you use them long enough, it actually changes you, you start paying attention to the changes that are happening. Just using the Pfeiffer [Compost Starter] preparations on the compost pile, you smell the difference. You smell the difference, the smell of the soil changes [too].

To me, it's a spiritual practice also, because you are connecting more with the life forces and the processes. You're becoming more observant, connecting with nature. Is what I'm doing actively enhancing the natural process? Is it pro-life? Is it enhancing life? Or is it destructive to life? And most of conventional agriculture is destructive to life. If you want to put it in a religious context, you can say you're working with the divine if you're promoting life, and if you're destroying life, it could be perceived as evil or satanic even. I guess that would be putting it in a religious context, but I consider myself more spiritual than religious, I guess. (1:25:40)

AA: Is there any person or publication that strongly influenced your philosophies?

AP: I think the strongest influence was my mother—and my father. And the self-education, my father had gone out to California, hitchhiked out and studied all of Luther Burbank's work [archived at a university in California]. My mother was always, she didn't take me to the doctor, it was all home remedies and herbs. [In addition to the ancestral home remedy knowledge, one of her reference books was *Back to Eden* by Jethro Kloss.] That's the way she worked with the animals. She didn't know anything about goats, but her bible was Juliette de Bairacli Levy's, *Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable*. [Levy] was an herbalist and also a veterinarian. [And my mother was an activist in her own way and her activism influenced me...she was on the board of

the PA Raw Milk Producers, a member of the National Health Federation, and served as legislative chair and master of the local Grange.]

I was brought up questioning the government, questioning the medical system, questioning. That had a big influence on my life. My father joined the Navy as a conscientious objector to play in the band, and it didn't end up well for him. He was at Pearl Harbor. I think he was always kind of bitter, because as it turns out, the President knew that they were going to bomb Pearl Harbor, but they didn't warn the Navy so they could be prepared and protect themselves, and most of them were still sleeping. There was always that questioning, which actually goes back to Steiner, who even said, "Don't blindly believe me [or anyone]. Do your own research. Do your own investigation, and come to your own knowing."

So I think being brought up with that, being surrounded by books on nutrition, and also her colleagues. Doing what you felt strongly about for the benefit of the earth, for the health of humanity. Margrit Selke, Pfeiffer, my mother. There were others who, no matter what, no matter what the hardship, they were so committed to it, despite being called witches or despite being made fun of or despite all of those things. I'm really grateful that I was kind of brought up outside of the mainstream conventional, because it gave me the strength to not just blindly accept what the authorities say to do.

And there were a bunch of books in the early years that influenced me. That also relates to agriculture and how I approached agriculture or gardening. *The Secret Life of Plants*, Tompkins and Bird. I vividly remember Cleve Baxter's work. He was the inventor of the lie detector, and on a whim he had hooked up the lie detector to a plant. He was eating his lunch, and he was going to do something else with the plant, and then there was a spider or a bug crawling across the desk. And he went to hit the spider, but before he hit it, just when the thought occurred to him, there was a response on the lie detector. The plant had responded to his intention. Over the years, I related it to other things, that our thought, our intention affects all life around us.

There was a book on biological transmutations, [*Biological Transmutations*, by L. Kervran], where silica can transmute into calcium. Steiner related to, in healthy plants and in healthy humans, if they have the right nutrients, they can actually make other things that they need and transmute them. Wilhelm Reich's work and orgone energy and how that related to the energy that Pfeiffer and Steiner were talking about, and how that relates to homeopathy, and [entomologist] Philip Callahan's work at the University of Texas, who figured out that, when plants are in stress, they emit a frequency that's picked up by specific insect antennae, and then the insects go to that stressed plant. It's kind of Nature's way of getting rid of the disease. So that goes back to Pfeiffer and the importance of the soil, so that your plants are healthy, they don't become easily stressed.

So yeah, all of those, I integrated with biodynamics and with gardening. It gave me a broader understanding of how things work. I actually had an epiphany while I was in college. There was something in Steiner's work where he said, "Good and evil come from the same source," and I said, "How could that be?" I went to a Methodist church, went to a school [where there were no gray areas, it] was black and white, good and evil. And then I was taking an Asian art history course, and in Asian art, the religious or spiritual aspects are there, and energy is, good and evil are two sides of the same coin. Energy can be used for good, or it can be used for evil, but the energy [itself] is neutral. Just like money is neutral, but it can be used for good or evil.

So because that outside discipline helped me understand Steiner, from that point I really explored other disciplines, how can they help me understand? How can homeopathy, how can

Wilhelm Reich's work, how can quantum physics, how can science, how can homeopathy help me understand what Steiner was saying? Because his language really has to be translated into a more contemporary form to be understood. (1:33:31)

AA: So what are your views on the current USDA organic certification standards?

AP: I think the history of how the certification came about really needs to be brought back to, what were the original standards? And the improvement of the soil was one of them. I don't think hydroponics should have been included in organic. They should have had their own certification: this is chemical-free, or whatever, because it doesn't really fit. And there are other things, I haven't really kept up with all of the changes, but the sense is that they have been compromised by the larger industries who have gone to organic, who want it easier. I think the Real Organic group, I know a bunch of farmers around here, there's another certification, Naturally Raised certification, which has the standards as strict or stricter than the original USDA standards. So people went to that because it was lower cost, it was peer to peer. I mean, we have Demeter—really, Demeter and the biodynamic standards are really the gold standard for certification, in my opinion.

I buy organic food at the supermarket. It is not, I don't feel that it is that great of quality. I think we need to go back to more regional farms, regional and local farms where people actually know the farmer and they can go to the farm, they know how the food is being raised. I think that's, in the long run, it won't be the final solution because you can't grow certain things here. There's got to be some kind of certification for import and export, transporting across state lines. But the food is fresher if you can buy it locally. How much nutrition is lost, being shipped halfway around the world?

I think it's a shame that they have been compromised. It would be interesting to talk to some of the people who started the Oregon Tilth, the original standards which organic were based on, and see how they feel. I don't know all the details. I know there's been several changes of the organic standards that people are really not happy with at all. (1:36:56)

AA: So what do you think are the most important aspects of biodynamic and organic history to preserve and to pass on to future generations?

AP: Well, I think there's knowledge. How did this come about? There's so many things I wish I had asked my mother that are lost now, that I didn't ask her before she died. I think that's a mistake, we don't find out from the elders. One of the big ones is the ancestral knowledge of health, taking care of your health and medicine, is lost for many families. I think what worked, what didn't work, so that we don't have to keep inventing the wheel, and we can build on what worked in various situations and incorporate more knowledge as we go along. I don't think people realize the struggles of the early organic movement and how much pressure there was to kind of squash it, how much ridicule. A lot of people really fought to keep things going until it could grow, both organic and biodynamic.

How did this happen? What was the motivation for this, and what were things that were being done that we could continue doing? I think there's, even in the early USDA books, somebody told me that the USDA in the '20s was recommending sprouting grain for animals in the wintertime. I mean, there's probably lots of little nuggets of information from the early practitioners, things that worked and things they did, that need to be preserved. I mean, it's too

bad that somebody wasn't doing what you're doing twenty years ago, because unfortunately a lot of the original people are no longer with us. (1:39:54)

AA: Is there anything else you want to share before we end the recording?

AP: I'm optimistic about the future, that people will really start paying more attention to how much of a difference it makes for both the earth and for all living things on the earth how food is grown, how we treat the earth. There really needs to be a connection taught. Children need to have that connection with nature, so they learn to love it and take care of it. Hopefully both organic and biodynamic will grow so that people will become healthier. At one point Pfeiffer had asked Steiner, he said, [something to the effect that people are working with you, but they're not incorporating your recommendations and developing spiritually. And Steiner said, "This is a problem of nutrition. Nutrition as it is today does not supply the strength necessary for manifesting the spirit in physical life. A bridge can no longer be built from thinking to will and action. Food plants no longer contain the forces people need for this" (Agriculture Course, preface, p.7, Adams translation)] The food no longer provides the vitality and nutrition to develop thinking ability and will forces in humans, which is needed for spiritual development. I think it's a really critical factor that the food and environment and the health of the earth, that we take care of them. I thank you for doing your part in really getting the history of how all of this developed to where we are now.

AA: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview.

AP: You're welcome. (1:42:14)