

Mary-Ann Cateforis, Narrator

Anneliese Abbott, Interviewer

September 21, 2021

Location: Remote over Zoom

MC=Mary-Ann Cateforis

AA=Anneliese Abbott

AA: All right. This is September 21, 2021, and this is Anneliese Abbott interviewing—

MC: Mary-Ann Cateforis.

AA: So Mary-Ann, thank you so much for taking the time to interview today! So do you want to start with telling us a little about your background and how you got interested in organic gardening and some of the things you've done?

MC: Oh my goodness. It's a long list. I've been a nature lover all my life. My father grew up in Bloomington, Illinois, and his parents did not have much money, but they did have a house with a small backyard, and they always had a garden, which was very productive. And my father learned from them how to grow vegetables. His mother loved flowers and had a lovely little flower garden. And I still have some of her flowers, sixty years later, in my garden. My father also worked helping a neighbor lady with her flower garden. And he learned so much from her. So he had a lot to pass on to me. And I have a younger brother, two years younger. When I was four and my brother was two, my father had his first big garden. And it was about a half acre, and it was right next to our house.

Maybe my second or third earliest memories was with my grandma and my mother, we lived in an upstairs apartment. And there were steps that went up to the kitchen at the back of our apartment. And under those steps it was shady. And my grandmother and my mother and I were sitting there. I was four years old. Preparing beans to cook, breaking off the stem ends and the tail ends. Didn't know you could eat the tail ends. Anyway, I remember that. And I'm sure they were cooked with bacon a long time, those beans.

And that house burned, and we moved to another house, which also had a big garden next door in a vacant lot. So I grew up close to gardens and grasshoppers and caterpillars and flowers. And then we moved to the woods. My mother got tired of being responsible for all the neighbor children who came over to play. Their mothers didn't seem to care, but my mother felt responsible. And I think they just wanted to get away from the village. It was a nice little village, maybe 400 population. But we used to go for picnics in a county forest preserve about five miles from town. Weenie roasts we called them, of course. And one time we were [driving] down a road which went past the forest preserve. This was a forest that was about a mile across in each direction. Part of it was forest preserve; part of it was just woods. And this woods had been owned by farmers. It was five-acre woodlots. And it just happened, we were [driving] down the road, and we saw a sale sign, that this land was being subdivided. So my father and mother got

the money together and bought half of the five-acre woodlot, mostly oak trees, some maples, hickory, other things.

So that's where I did the rest of my growing up, from age eight to college. My brother and I were so blessed, so lucky to be in the middle of the woods back then when it was safe to be out. Mother didn't worry about us; we had our little dog with us. And she'd ring the school bell when it was time to come for dinner, supper. We tried to be as much like Indians as we could, to live an imaginary life. I played with turtles and frogs, raised caterpillars, and collected insects. I always collected rocks and shells. I had an insect collection, which I still have. A leaf collection I started in high school. That grew; I never stopped collecting leaves. Bird feathers. I had a pretty good-sized bird study [skin] collection, about 70 bird skins. My parents suggested donating that to a museum.

Anyway, I've just been a collector all my life. And house plants. Now that I have a house that's big enough to have a lot of plants, every place I can put a plant's got one. Indoors and outdoors. I just love growing things. I think I've always felt very close to nature. And that's the main thing I think that has brought me to organic agriculture and organic gardening.

You want to ask me another question? (5:58)

AA: So was that in Illinois, where your family was in the woods?

MC: Yes, this was in Illinois. We were, Peotone is the town that we lived in—well, we lived some other places first, but Peotone, Illinois. It's in Will County, which is the next county south from Cook County, where Chicago is. [the woods, Raccoon Grove, was in Monee township, a few miles north of Peotone.]

AA: I'm interested in hearing about, at some point you ended up, your husband was a student at the University of Wisconsin and you were involved with starting a community garden at Eagle Heights, which is the University of Wisconsin's apartment complex for graduate students with families. So I'm really interested in hearing more about that, whatever detail you want to tell about that.

MC: Well, backing up, I had gone to Carleton College for my BA in biology. My father was a teacher; I'm from a family of teachers and musicians. My father said, "Don't waste your time at Carleton on education courses. You can get those at any state college a lot cheaper." So it was just a straight biology major. Though I did plan to be a high school biology teacher. I was there a fifth year, also, working as a lab assistant at Carleton. And then the next year I went to Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin for my education courses. I had met Vasily the summer before, the winter before.

And I started summer school in 1962 at Madison. So he was working on his master's at the time. And he finished his master's, and I did my coursework for teacher certification. My advisor at the time said, "You're never going to teach. You're going to get married and have children. Don't even bother to apply for a certificate." I had done all the work, had all the credits, but I didn't apply for my teaching certificate. You know what would happen to a professor nowadays if he said that? Anyway, he was right. I got married and had children.

So Vasily took a year off, and the first year we were married we were in Baltimore, Maryland. Then we came back and he started his PhD. And we moved to Eagle Heights in the summer of 1964. We had a two-month-old baby, David. And the next summer—well, early in

the year, I had joined the, I don't remember the name, it would have been a residents' council or something like that. We had meetings once a month to exchange information back and forth. And somebody had the idea of gardens. Nobody said organic because nobody knew what it was back then. So somehow I ended up writing a letter to the person who would have been in charge of making the decision of whether we could or could not have these gardens. And it ended up that we got the gardens that first year in 1965. And I have my garden plans from that year. That's how I know for sure it was 1965. And again, 1966 in the spring I wrote to my parents saying, "Well, I've got tomato seedlings and other seedlings on the dining room table," which is also a kitchen table and a desk. "We still don't know whether we will have gardens this year or not." But it turned out we did. And I think we probably had a garden the following year. Then that was our last year at Eagle Heights. (10:22)

AA: Now you sent me some scans of some of the correspondence and newsletters and things related to the garden. And I think it may have been, I don't remember if it was the 1965 or the 1966 one, said something about moving the garden to a different location. So was it in a different location the first year than it was afterwards, or was maybe I misreading that?

MC: I do not know. All I remember, Anneliese, is I think I wrote you about my little boy David following me to the garden. It was across the road that goes into Eagle Heights. I remember a road, big shrubs or trees. It would have been on the east side of the road. And there was an opening that we walked through to go to the gardens. So that's where they were when David was a toddler and followed me over there without me knowing. I really don't know where else they would have moved. I don't know that.

AA: Well, that's where they are now, and I probably go through that same opening when I walk there, because the building I live in is near—it's not the same one you lived in, but it's nearby. So is there anything you remember about any of the organization or structure of the gardens? I was looking at some of the newsletters and things you had, so I was just curious. And were they as large? I don't know exactly how many plots there are now, but there's several hundred, they go way up the hill. Were they like that then, or was it smaller to begin with?

MC: Oh, it was small. I have no idea how many, but it wasn't hundreds. But it was only Eagle Heights. Is this other people besides Eagle Heights residents?

AA: Yeah, now they have it opened up to the community also. And there's another garden by University Houses, which is further down the hill. So that's kind of separate.

MC: Cool, all right! Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah, it was just Eagle Heights residents at that time. So it was relatively small. One garden I remember, I don't think I've written you about this. Anyway, there was a gardener who was Oriental of some kind, I'm not sure where he was from. But his way of gardening was so entirely different from anything I had ever seen before. It was long, raised mounds of earth. And he planted on top of the mounds, and between the mounds there were irrigation ditches. And the soil was always moist, and there was never a weed anywhere. I wish I knew more about that. Because he obviously had had a garden someplace else where that's the way they did it.

AA: Yeah, there are a lot of internationals who still have plots like that. There's a Chinese guy with a plot near mine that looks exactly like you're describing. And he gets tons of vegetables out of it. He's a really good gardener; he's got one of the nicest-looking plots in the whole garden.

So thank you, is there anything else before we move on that you want to say about the Eagle Heights gardens? I know you had said something about how it was kind of hard to convince the university to let the residents grow gardens. Do you remember anything more about that?

MC: That's all I remember. I'm sorry, I just don't know the other details. We do, we're still tangentially in touch with one family that lived there the same time we did. And I've been thinking I might contact Debbie and Sam Kellams and see whether they had a garden and see whether they remember. They're gardeners now, so it's in their blood, too. I just don't know if they had a garden or not, but I can ask them. (14:57)

AA: Yeah, that would be great. And then the other thing we were talking about, at some point you ended up moving to Kentucky and got involved with a co-op and some things there. Do you want to talk more about that?

MC: Oh, my goodness. I have been spending a lot of time reading newsletters and newspaper articles. Well, we called them bulletins. I've learned so much that I had forgotten about this organization. We lived in an apartment the first year we were in Lexington, and we drove around looking for houses. And we found one in Gardenside, a section of the outer parts of Lexington. And it had a nice backyard with chain link fence around it. And our next-door neighbor, Lois Kuhlman, was an organic gardener. I'd never heard of organic gardening until we lived next-door to Lois. And she introduced me to *Organic Gardening* magazine, and *Prevention*. And it just opened up a whole new world to me. She took me around with her when she went for sewage sludge and cow manure at the stockyards and horse manure at the racetrack. Boy, that was neat, the racetrack. The only time I ever went to the racetrack. Another place we got rotted sawdust for the gardens.

Our house was built on what used to be bluegrass farms for horses. And on top of that, when they built the house, they dumped maybe 17 inches of clay. They called it builders' clay. So if you dug down deep enough, you could find soil, but essentially we were gardening in pure clay. So anything we added to it was much needed. Of course we had compost piles. And one day for Mother's Day, Vasily dug a trench about a foot wide and a foot deep and five or six feet long. That was his Mother's Day present for me, to plant corn in it.

We did have a really nice couple of grapevines on our fence. The grapes were wonderful. They just had a—okay, I was prejudiced. But our next-door neighbors had grapes, too, on an arbor. And our grapes tasted better because I gave them compost. They really did have a nicer bouquet. So that was the small garden we had in the backyard.

Anyway, I had been gardening and reading for several months. And then a neighbor down the street called a meeting, and I don't remember how many people there were, maybe a dozen or fewer. And she was concerned about food that wasn't good. And wanted to promote organic gardening. What she did was get us together. But she was not in a position to be a leader. So I just did it. I just said, okay, I'm going to keep this group together, and we're going to do what we can to find other people like us. And it was really the right place at the right time. It was

the university, and there were starting to be people who were really concerned about what was happening to our food supply. And there were books and articles. I read *Organic Gardening*, of course, and *Prevention*. And eventually I subscribed to *Acres U.S.A.*, *Mother Earth News*. Those were the main ones. We just learned so much from them, that was our education. And from each other. There were older gardeners doing this for a long time, and they taught us young folks. We were in our 30s.

And it wasn't too long before Susan Barlow joined the group. And oh my goodness, I wish you could know Susan. We've been a little bit in touch over the years, and I just talked to her recently. She's now registering voters in the Cleveland area. She's always cared about government and about the welfare of people. She was always so full of energy and ideas, and she was fearless. And she just went and talked to people, and she stirred things up. She went to Washington DC, she went to the FDA. She got speakers to come to our group. She was the president of the group. And she and I worked together on the newsletter. And I loved that relationship, because we complemented each other. She was the consumer person and I was the organic person. And the main quotation I remember from her was, "If you as a consumer have paid for something, then you have every right to expect to be satisfied. Don't be shy about asking for what you paid for, demanding for what you paid for." I was a polite little person, hadn't thought about it. But that has really shaped my life.

We started, I think, with—we got on our horse and rode off in all directions. We had organic garden plots, we got organized in 1971. We had garden plots that first year. And it was thirty-some families renting plots. And it grew to sixty-some families later on. We had those. The plots were \$7 a plot, and somewhere I have the dimensions. They were good-sized, 35 by 20 feet or something like that. And they were prepared for us. I didn't have a plot, I had another toddler at the time and a six-year-old boy.

Bringing in speakers, well-known speakers from all sorts of places. Not just gardening, but food safety and FDA. There was a pharmacologist and toxicologist from the University of Kentucky who spoke to us. Part of these lectures were in conjunction with the University of Kentucky, and part of them were just our own. We did most of our communication through a newsletter with we called the bulletin, BOCA Bulletin. We started out as the Food Action Committee. And that changed really quick to Bluegrass Organic Association. And then when Susan found us, we became the Bluegrass Organic and Consumers Association.

We had coffee chats, which was usually talks by all sorts of people. Our members and other people gave organic gardening lectures at the university, in conjunction with the free university on campus. That would have been the second year. So we had garden plots, lectures. The newsletter was really the way we kept together. And looking back through these newsletters, I am so pleased and so really impressed with what a grassroots group can do when they get their hands together. This was back when most women didn't have an extra job, or a job besides being a mother or wife. And people, not everybody could do it of course, but there were people who cared so much they volunteered. So we were able to do a lot of projects that had to be done by different people.

Susan had the idea for bread that was real bread. Real whole wheat bread. And she got a committee together and they shared recipes and came up with the best, least expensive, most nutritious that they could figure. And Susan went around to stores to see whether they would sell this. She went to bakeries to see whether they would bake it if they had a market for it. So we did a market survey and asked people how many loaves they would buy per week and where they would want to shop for it. And before long, it happened. And the bakery was selling a hundred

loaves a week. It was good bread. It was local whole wheat flour and some unbleached flour. And it was Kentucky flour, which is soft wheat. North Dakota would have been hard wheat. But we wanted it to be local. Local honey, when we could get it. Anyway, it was heavy. It was solid. Oh, it tasted so good. They also, this bakery made granola by our recipe and sold it. I don't know how long they kept going. Susan and I both left Lexington when our husbands got other jobs at the end of the '72-'73 school year.

Another thing was the Good Food Co-op, which started, as Susan reminded me, with BOCA. I remember going to one of our member's houses one night. It was dark already; it must have been winter. And we had gone together and bought big bags, like 25 pound bags of oatmeal and whole wheat flour, and I don't know what all else, probably raisins and things like that. And we brought our own paper bags. And we measured it out and weighed it and paid whatever our portion was. And that was the beginning of the co-op. And I think it was November of 1972 that the Good Food Co-op was incorporated. And it's a going concern now, they have a big store. Not downtown, but at the edge of town. I would love to go there sometime.

Oh, we had a lending library. We had a librarian who knew what she was doing about libraries. I think that's enough. (28:45)

AA: Yeah, thank you. That's all really cool. So were you involved really with much else after that, or just your own garden?

MC: When we moved up here, I joined our co-op in Potsdam [New York] immediately. It was my second home. They had organized just the year before we came, which would have been '72.

I did want to say something, now that I'm thinking about it, about how BOCA ended. It carried on without Susan and me, and we kept getting the newsletters. They kept on having the organic garden plots. And they got another [second] location [for the garden plots] on the other side of the city. But in 1977 the next-to-the-last newsletter said, "BOCA is struggling to survive. We have one officer and we need three more, president and so on. And the gardens are going strong." It was maybe 60 or 70 gardeners, and more plots than that.

But we were incorporated about a year after we formed. I had a dear friend who was in law school. And we never acknowledged this, she hadn't yet graduated, but she knew how to do the incorporation. So she did that for us. So we could be nonprofit and we could save money on bulk postage. So we had been incorporated as an educational organization. Educating ourselves and our community about the safety of food and about organic gardening. And we had done so much education over the years. We had an organic supplement to our newsletter. We had a hot dog supplement. And we just did so many things to teach people. My feeling is, they don't say this, but we're not an educational group anymore. We're just a gardening group, and we can't continue as BOCA if we're not doing what it says in our charter.

So that was the end of BOCA. They had some money in their treasury and they donated it to some likeminded organization in Lexington. It was sort of sad to see an organization go away. But Susan had said, "Organizations have a beginning, a growth period, and maybe a leveling off, a time when they thrive, a plateau. And then they decline and die." And I think we had done what we set out to do. The Good Food Co-op had been formed, we had done our education. People in those six years had learned a lot more than they knew before about organic gardening. And the gardens were going well. So it was time.

And then when I got up here I promised myself that I would never have another office. I would not be an officer at our co-op here. I did other things, but I wasn't going to hold office.

And I was very much involved. I washed jars. And I started our seed sales. We ordered seeds in bulk and members who wanted to earn work credit could do it at home by packaging seeds in smaller packages, weighing them out and so on. Very soon that became too big a job for me, and another lady, bless her heart, she took it over. My gardening guru. And she earned enough work credit to last the rest of her life. That was a huge job. That idea had come from the Good Food Co-op. We had ordered seeds together. I remember I had Swiss chard, somebody bought a pound of Swiss chard seeds, and we split them up. A friend and I got together and started community gardens up here near Potsdam. Those went away when the university needed the land for apartments.

I just mostly wanted to be in my own garden. I did a lot of teaching very, very informally. I grew plants and I gave them away and I just never could stop propagating plants. I feel a couple things. I was put on the earth to help people feel at home with their plants, to feel comfortable with their plants. And I also believe that when I give someone a plant, I'm giving that person a chance to learn a little bit more about what it means to be alive.

So I did some volunteering here, plant sales with various charities. Volunteered at the middle school, just trying to get better foods into the cafeteria. The poor lady in charge of the cafeteria, Blanch Burlinkin, bless her heart, I was just a thorn in her side. And she was doing the best she could with government surplus food, and I was trying to get her to have fresh apples and fresh carrot sticks that the kids couldn't bend like they were rubber. They did make some little minor changes. They brought in the individual yogurt cartons and gave the kids little paper cups of peanuts. Which they wouldn't do now! And raisins. So we did a little bit.

Then I volunteered at the high school greenhouse. They got a new greenhouse thirty years ago. And that was a wonderful time. The greenhouse teacher—which, we just live a block from the high school, so it was perfect. The greenhouse teacher was a former dairy farmer. This is David Sipher. He had two sons, neither of whom wanted to be on the farm. And he had enough. He was still young. And he went back to school, had got his teacher's certificate. He went back to teaching agriculture and greenhouse. I just offered my services. I said, "I heard you have a greenhouse." And he said, "I've never grown a houseplant." We had a good time together. And I loved the kids. The farm kids. And this is related to what I want to say about education. The farm kids knew how to solve problems. They would figure out a way how to do something. The [village] kids had never been on a farm. To know how to use their hands and their heads together. They hadn't been taught, hadn't grown up that way.

And I believe children have to be introduced to nature in any way possible. If I were queen of the world, I would decree that every school child have a greenhouse class or two and be involved in a school garden. That there would be field trips. I once heard on the radio about a teacher, elementary teacher I assume, in the inner city of New York, who filled his classroom with plants and probably aquariums and birds. And the students loved being there. It was like an oasis for them. And it just touches my heart. I think, why shouldn't every classroom be like that? Why shouldn't we all be like that? We need to, Wendell Berry said, Wendell Berry, *the Wendell Berry*, was a member of our group in Lexington. He gave us a lecture. And it was mostly about an airport that somebody wanted to build. But he did say, "We do not need to urbanize rural people. We need to ruralize urban people."

I guess that's all I have to say about that. I'll think of something else. (38:49)

AA: Thank you. That's a really cool quote. Is there anything, you've mentioned a lot, and even just talking about Wendell Berry and the things that you've read. Is there anything else you want

to say about people or publications that influenced you, influenced your choice of organic gardening methods, things like that?

MC: I do want to mention my grade school, sixth grade teacher, Ersel Mohr was his name. I remember him in front of the class rubbing his hands together. He had big hands. And he said, “When you rub your hands together, little tiny flakes of skin rub off and they fall to the ground. And they turn into soil.” And that really impressed me. And the other thing he taught us, he tried to get us to imagine or visualize what it would be like if nothing ever rotted. Nothing. All the animals and plants that had ever been alive were still lying around not rotted. We had a compost pile at home, always. And when I lived in Eagle Heights, I remember agonizing over not being able to compost food scraps. What would happen to them if I flushed them down the toilet? What would happen to them if I put them in the trash? Those were the two choices I had. And neither was right. I agonized over it. It’s just part of me to worry about things like that, to care about stuff like that.

My brother and I have inherited a farm in 2004. Inherited 2005, inherited farmland which had been my maternal grandfather’s. This was in Illinois, in Edgar County Illinois and Parke County across the border in Indiana where part of my family’s from. The land in Indiana had been in our family, the Linebarger family, ever since 1822 when the Indians were driven off the land in that part of Indiana. At one point there was a reservation, and then they were driven off the reservation. Our ancestors came from North Carolina and bought a lot of land there. Some of it is owned by relatives, and some of it my brother and I own. And it’s being farmed by a man who lives close to that area. And it’s all commercial and conventional. There’s nothing I can do. Mention anything organic, and I hear silence. It’s pretty much the same in Illinois. We haven’t owned that land as long. [What was originally called the] Grand Prairie, in Illinois. [Interruption]

All I want to say is that I feel a little more stuck than my brother does. He’s more matter-of-fact about it than I am. I’m more emotion. We spend so much money on fertilizer, on anhydrous ammonia, lime, Roundup, and genetically modified seeds. And it just, I don’t know whether it makes me more heartsick or sick to my stomach what’s being done to the land. There’s a tile, part of the land is drained by tile. And I do know better ways of dealing with that water than sending it off and hoping you don’t have a dry spell and wish you had it back. I did subscribe to *Farm Journal* and *Progressive Farmer*. And I belong to Farm Bureau and I get their weekly *Farm Talk*.

So we are stuck. And I have signed the stewardship agreement with Syngenta saying that I will not save seeds from this crop. I think it’s soybeans. I will not sell them, I will not plant them next year, I will not sell them to anyone else, I will not give them away. I just, I know that there has to be a better way. And I don’t see it happening unless the government gets involved. More involved than it is. They do give us some lip service I think. But I said it back when I was in BOCA, I said, if the government—and any research institution—spent as much time and money and energy on organic gardening as they do on conventional gardening or farming, things would be different. You’ve probably heard of Palmer amaranth, have you?

AA: Yes.

MC: And what a scourge it is for farmers, and how worried they are. There was an article in the *New York Times* three or four weeks ago in the Sunday magazine telling how it really is unconquerable. And it is a good crop, of course, or used to be and still could be. I look at palmer

amaranth as a blessing in disguise because perhaps farmers will take it seriously and realize that things do have to change. But they're just so hooked into the way of doing things, the machines, oh my goodness. The mountains of debt farmers go into to buy this gargantuan machinery. And then the expenses of planting. And then you've got insurance, taxes. We do make money off of the farms. But I'm not sure that we would make any less if we didn't have all those conventional expenses.

So for me it's a spiritual thing. You can tell that. My mother was Methodist, my father was Christian Scientist. I grew up Protestant. My husband's Orthodox. But then along the way I got involved with Berkeley Psychic Institute and the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. And I read a lot of books from Perelandra in Virginia, Machaelle Wright's Center for Nature Research. Findhorn Garden. All those things have shaped my way of looking at humans' relationship to the earth. When we first came to Lexington I was an organic gardener already—to Potsdam, I mean. I promised the garden that I would not waste anything, any plant material. I would compost it. And that meant leaving quack grass roots out on our asphalt driveway to dry to a crisp before I composted them. It was not pretty, it was work, it was messy. But it was my promise to the garden. And then when I read the Findhorn book and read about Perelandra, I also decided not to kill anything in the animal realm, no insects or anything like that. Are you familiar with Perelandra?

AA: I've only heard the word as the name of a novel by C. S. Lewis. So this must be named after that. But otherwise I'm not familiar with it.

MC: I don't know the novel. I've heard that connection, too. Machaelle Wright is the founder of this organization. Her first book was *Behaving As If the God in All Life Mattered*. It's a fascinating, short, easy read. She teaches us how she gardens in harmony with nature spirits like they did at Findhorn. So I wanted nature spirits in my garden. I left a part of the garden that I didn't go in, it was just for the nature spirits. Because I don't kill anything there. I believe this is the reason—the garden is a peaceful place. It's mostly wild. There are fruit bushes and wildflowers and grapevines. Part of the prairie from Illinois I brought out here. There's a little space for vegetables. Not much; a few tomatoes and a few greens. I have peonies that belonged to both of my grandmothers, and one of them goes way back to Kentucky to the 1820s maybe. It's just, it means so much to me. I just love it so much. And that's partly why it just hurts so much when things are done differently. (52:10)

AA: Thank you very much for sharing all that. I think you covered pretty much what I wanted to ask about philosophies, unless there's something you want to add about any personal perspective you have on the connection between organic agriculture and the broader historical and cultural context, other movements, if there's anything you want to add there.

MC: Everything is connected to everything—Barry Commoner said that. You can't throw anything away. There's another, he had three principles. There's no such thing as a free lunch. I see lawns that have been manicured, and I think, "How boring. How much food could be grown on that land." I do believe that, I don't believe that our commercial way of gardening is the only way that we can feed the world, just by mining the soil and taking more and more out of it. I think that's a line we're being fed by the chemical companies. There was a book, *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, and I don't know who wrote it, but it was about China.

AA: F. H. King, right here at the University of Wisconsin, wrote it.

MC: Oh, no kidding?

AA: Yeah. Back in 1910 or 1911, somewhere around there.

MC: Oh my goodness, what was the author again?

AA: F. H. King. He was a soil scientist here. There's a building on campus named after him, actually.

MC: Wow. So you know what he said. The earth can support us if we do it right. It's the environment. Somebody said, we shouldn't talk about saving the planet, because that's too big for people to get their heads around. It's our environment, it's our survival, each of us. And I really believe that we need to bring children close to this. Raising monarch butterflies. My grandchildren raised monarch butterflies. And they helped their mother with their garden. And they have it certified, or anyway, it has a plaque that says, "This is a nature preserve." It meets the requirements, is it National Wildlife Foundation? There's some group that offers this certification. And you pay \$20 or something, and you fill out their form. And I don't think anybody checks, but they just assume that you're telling the truth. Then you've got the real thing. I think that is just so wonderful. I'm not going to do it in our garden; I don't bother. (55:34)

AA: I'm curious if there's anything you want to share, I know you weren't directly involved in it, but your opinions on organic certification and USDA certification, and watching that happen, any views you have on that.

MC: I was thinking about that. Of course we got involved, Susan and I, in BOCA before there was any certification or even thought of certification. It was so much simpler back then. I do have to say it's nice to see that little round sticker on things I buy that are organic, the USDA has certified them. But it's like any other rule that you make, rule or law or whatever. People are going to try to get around it, that's just the way human beings are, some of us. Then you have to amend it or change it or add to it or subtract from it. And it just gets more and more complicated. We definitely need it, I know. But why does it have to be thousands of pages—I don't know how many pages it is, but why does it have to be so complicated? People can be just plain cussed sometimes, I guess.

We have a farmers' market here in town. And we have a farm stand that we go to. And you take the farmer's word for it. Because they don't want to pay for the certification. And that's okay. It works for us. I did find among my papers, and I didn't read it, but I can send you a copy, *Organic Gardening* many years ago, back then, was trying to get something going about certification. And I have no idea whether anything happened from that, or not. This was just a preliminary form they had. (58:00)

AA: I'm also curious if there's anything you want to share. I know you said a little about the University of Kentucky, and then of course you were gardening when you were at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Anything you want to say about your perspective on the relationship

between organic/sustainable agriculture and the academic institutions, especially the land grant universities, and how that's changed over time.

MC: I think it was 1971. I have a little slip of paper from the University of Kentucky cooperative extension. I had either called or written them to ask for information on organic gardening. And they wrote back and said, "We're sorry, we do not have anything on organic gardening." So I learned very quickly not to ask them. Because that was not what they were doing. However, the second year of BOCA, some of us got the idea of asking—well, it was one of our members who was a PhD and was there for postdoctoral studies, in botany or agriculture or something. And he got together with one of his professors, and they decided, let's try an organic garden demonstration plot on campus. This would have been the Horticulture Department. And they did, they found a place to do it and plowed it up and planted it. I had put in my notes, I went to visit the place before it was planted. And they said there was a gravelly place down the middle. And we said, "Oh, we can plant herbs there." It did get started. It came from somebody within the university. But a little bit broader perspective maybe.

I really don't know what's happening now in universities. But doggone it, they'd better get on it. I just know that I didn't ever ask them anything about organic gardening after that. And finally in the last maybe 20 years or so, I started to see it in newspaper columns. I always read newspaper columns about gardening because I learn so much from them. And they speak more and more about composting and using natural methods.

And wildflower gardens. Oh my goodness. I had a dear, dear friend [Nancy Edblom] who wrote a book, she and a dear friend of hers [Anne Johnson] wrote a book about the native flora of our St. Lawrence County, which is a huge county up here at the top of New York State. And she sort of introduced me to wildflowers. I had grown up with wildflowers in the woods, and I had a wildflower garden. But I just became more and more aware of the importance of native plants and pollinators. And my goodness, we used to worry about bugs getting our plants.

But when I started thinking like *Perelandra*, it happened that Japanese beetles had found Potsdam. And when I saw one of the first ones on one of my roses, I picked it up. It was a female. Picked her up. And I said, "You know, you and I have something in common. We both love roses." And I put her back on the rose. And that's the way I feel about it. And especially now when insect populations are just plummeting, I'm so thrilled to see a leaf that has a leaf miner trace in it or that's been nibbled. I have a holy basil [Tulsi] plant in a pot outside the door, and every day bumblebees come to it, and it's just—not many flowers, but they come. And I'm just thrilled to see them.

It's all connected. The environment, organic gardening, and farming. And not using plastics, for goodness sake. Not buying things you don't need. Just trying to live close to the earth. Learning from the Native Americans. Oh my goodness, we have squandered the chance to live a much, much better life because of the way we've treated them.

I think I've pretty much said what I wanted to say. (1:03:31)

AA: Thank you. Is there anything you would like to say, your perspective on the past and current trends in organic agriculture, anything you think is especially important to preserve about the history? Especially since you've been involved since the '70s, so seeing how things have changed, any important lessons you draw from all that?

MC: You know, the funny thing is that things that were being said back then are still being said. As Wendell Berry said, we need to ruralize urban people. We were concerned about hot dogs. It was not just BOCA, it was Ralph Nader, and it was newspaper articles, and Beatrice Trum Hunter. Beatrice Trum Hunter came and talked to us. She was, she actually had supper at my house. That was exciting. Susan got her to, she came because Susan had sent her a bunch of our newsletters. And she liked our newsletters, so she made room in her schedule to come talk with us. I have an autographed copy of her book *Consumer Beware*.

How things have changed. I think if you read a book like that nowadays, you would still find some of the same concerns. Except that there's so much more in the chemical arsenal. Bayer and Monsanto and Syngenta, all those—and I'm sure there are others—on whom farmers depend for their livelihood, are stewing up chemicals that we don't have any idea. Neonicotinoids, killing the insects, lepidopterans especially. And the government just sort of sits back and says, "Well, the chemical companies told us it's okay, so we don't have anything to worry about." That goes back to 1971 or before.

I felt, besides the exhilaration of being involved in this group, I felt it was subversive in a way. When I was writing a check to Rodale Publishing Company or Natural Foods Company or wherever I was buying something natural from, I wondered whether anybody was looking at my checkbook. Because Richard Nixon was president at that time, and he had an enemies list. And I just didn't feel quite safe. And I think Susan could tell you stories about things that the FDA wasn't telling us.

Oh, there was a wonderful lecture, I don't know whether I can find it. There was a paragraph I wanted to read to you. Here we are. This won't take real long. This was Dr. Mark Luckens, on March 25, 1971. He was a University of Kentucky professor of pharmacology and toxicology. He addressed a group of 27 of us on the subject of food additives. "Rather than strictly on farm ecology, he presented a broad but specific overview of chemicals in our lives and how they affect us. He places the blame for chemicalized food and polluted environment no more on producers than on consumers, who are ignorant of or unconcerned about the cost-benefit ratio of inventions. Processed food and many of the marvels of modern technology are for our convenience, speed, comfort, and leisure—or, in other words, because we're lazy. Are we willing to use more muscle power to run our civilization and have fewer people carrying on learning?" I'm not sure I agree with that dichotomy. But back to what he says. "Most of the side effects of technology are never seen or foreseen. The effects of DDT weren't known for 20 years, and it may take hundreds of years before we know the effects of other chemicals. Dr. Luckens doesn't give our civilization too many years if we don't reassess our values and goals." That's from our newsletter.

I guess I could close with that. (1:09:15)

AA: All right. Do you still feel that way, or do you feel a little more hopeful on the outlook today?

MC: I'm not sure. Actually, I have a good friend who reads deeply and thinks deeply about all these things. He has a nursery. Bill MacKentley is his name. He's a few years younger than I am. He says he doesn't think humans are going to be around that much longer. I think I'm more optimistic than that. But the world is certainly changing. And I feel sorry for the children who are growing up now who don't have the freedom from worry and the relatively clean environment that I grew up in. The safety, the carefree times. That's just plain sad. And then I

see children raising butterflies. And I have worked some with college kids, too. For a year or so I volunteered at a university, Potsdam College [part of the State University of New York]. And the kids that I was working with had had sustainable gardening and farming classes. And that was their field. There were a few of them. And they were so super special. I'm still in touch with one of the girls. They cared so much. They were so enthusiastic. And we're putting a lot on their shoulders. We've got to give them some help. If they can keep from getting jaded when they get older, we'll be in better shape.

AA: So then did you want to end with that?

MC: I do think if the children can be taught, can be brought into contact with nature firsthand, get their hands dirty for goodness sake, play in the mud, pick up bugs, grow their own food at school. They have to have, you're not going to protect something that you don't know, something you don't love. And you're not going to love something if you don't know it. So education is always just so important.

AA: So do you want to wrap it up with that, then?

MC: I think so. Get the children back into nature.

AA: All right. Well thank you, that is really great. Thank you. (1:13:01)