The Tennessee Progressive Activists Oral History Project

Dr. Martha Norkunas, Project Director

Lightly Edited Transcript

Interviewee: Elizabeth Barger

Interviewer: Darby Campbell

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Transcriber: Darby Campbell

Darby Campbell: Do I have your permission to record this interview for an oral history project?

Elizabeth Barger: You have my permission.

DC: Excellent. And that’s- (Elizabeth coughs) that’s about as formal as we’ll get.

EB: Okay.

DC: Are you originally from California?

EB: No, I was born in Missouri. My dad worked for airlines. He’d been with airplanes since they started.

DC: Okay.

EB: Yeah, he used to be a mechanic for a Barn Storming group. They’d go over and give people rides, had a wing walker, that kind of thing. In Kansas City, they were coming in for a landing and he fell out of the plane and broke his arm so he had to stay there and get a job. (laughs) He ended up, after several, there’s a mechanic and then he was one of the first employees at Braniff when they were doing the Navy mail. And I have a picture of me sitting on the counter when I was about – I bet I was two and a half maybe? I was cute. So I got to hand him a letter and it was in the paper.

DC: That’s adorable.

EB: Yeah, right. It was in Wichita. And I used to play in the lobby, in the Wichita lobby. And they had this big painting by, you know, they had the programs with-- People would do things for public service to make a little money. This was just after the Depression. Because I was born in [19]’36.

DC: Okay.

EB: So this was ’38. And then, anyway.

DC: What are the oldest family memories, even beyond just your memory? Like stories you heard your parents or grandparents or the oldest generation that you knew.

EB: Oh god, that would take hours. I had a family of storytellers and like my mother came from a family that was very wealthy in Greencastle. And her mother, Mary, [had] the kind of rat’s ass son. He abandoned her when my mother was just a baby. And then she died when my mother was about three and she was fostered out. My- her oldest sister went to the McClure’s, which was the poor side and my mother was given to the Cooks, which was the richer side. And that’s the General Cook that was nasty to the Indians back [then]. And that side was related to the Lee’s and the Lewis’s so I’m related to Meriwether, who is buried over here in Lewis County.

DC: Okay.

EB: And my- General Lee was my fourth cousin. Lighthorse Harry Lee was his Daddy. So of course we’d hear a lot of stories about that and-

DC: Can you think of one? Like do you remember being told a story? Good question.

EB: Well, that Meriwether Lewis was shot twice in the chest. And they’re trying to say that he committed suicide is just one of the funniest things I ever heard. Because he’s, you know, the Lewis- Lewis and Clark, he was a fairly stable man. He was not a suicidal person. And anyway. So he was killed out here. (Sounds of basketball in distant background) And I know. I use to live in Desens, Indiana, which is just where the Lewis and Clark expedition went out through Southern Indian. And there was a fort there. And that’s where they left to go into the western Lewis and Clark Expedition to Oregon. And I heard a lot of those stories.

DC: Do you remember who told you those stories? Great question.

EB: My uncle, who was a superior court judge in Indiana, John Neblack. But he was on my father’s side. And he used to teach school. And he rode a big old white mule around to different schools to teach in Indiana. And he got his lawyer degree and became a judge on a superior court. That’s about fifty years of story right there.

DC: This is your dad’s side of the family?

EB: Uh-huh, yeah and my father was born in Wheatland (?) Indiana, and his father was a – worked with the air- the railroads. And he was a telegrapher. A nd when my father graduated from high school he went out and worked various odd jobs and ended up as a pretty good mechanic and went into the airlines and he was quite a storyteller. He said when he was working for Continental before the Depression got really bad and they had a kind of bachelor’s quarters. And if somebody went asleep they put his hand in cold water to make him pee his pants. (both laugh)

DC: That sounds like military life.

EB: Yeah, it wasn’t military but- it was you know.

DC: Same kind of boys living together in close quarters.

EB: Same, yeah. Boys living in bachelor’s quarters. They were all pretty high-tech guys. My father read a lot. He was eventually-- When he went up to Indiana, we started a laundry. He got out of that and started teaching aeronautic electronics at the community college. It was funny, I was doing the gate here at The Farm and some guy came through and had on a t-shirt from my dad’s class. And I said, “Oh, did you study with (unclear as chair/recorder move- Austin maybe)?” And he said, “Yeah, oh boy he was hard!” (laughs) because his final was that you had to build a plane and fly it yourself.

DC: Oh wow!

EB: Yeah, so you build one of those little kits.

DC: That’s a way to get proficient.

EB: Yeah, and set up the electronics and everything. So, you know- you passed or failed. (laughs)

DC: Did you ever go up in planes?

EB: I flew a lot because when he worked for the airlines we flew everywhere.

And we’d get bumped occasionally when the flights filled up. I flew some of the very earliest DC1s and (vehicle drives by) and we lived in Wichita and then in Kansas.

We lived in the terminal building. They had apartments in there. So I would go up – it used to be so that you could go up to the terminal observation and anybody could go up there and you could watch the planes take off and land. It was great. I never got tired of it. I could tell: I knew if it was a TWA or Braniff or an Eastern Airline, you know when I was tiny. And I still remember that.

DC: How old were you when you lived there?

EB: Probably around two or three. And when we moved up to- the first time we moved to Kansas City after I was born- and after I moved around. We lived next to a doctor. I remember that- Dr. Rose. I was in love with Dr. Rose. I thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. And he’d go and I would say, “Goodbye Dr. Rose, bye, bye.” And so on, you know how children do. But I still remember him and I was about four then. I had a boyfriend named Roger who just didn’t like girls.

DC: (laughs)

EB: But I could keep up with him. So I got to hang out. (laughs)

DC: What were the terminal apartments like? Do you remember?

EB: I remember- my earliest memory must I think have gotten my first small pox shot. And I was still in a crib. And I remember my mom and dad making faces at me [motions as if holding an invisible rattle or toy]. And my dad was cutting strips of tape because you had to put the tape on the scar. I must have been crying, but I don’t remember being upset. Or maybe they were keeping me from being upset, because I was fascinated with what was happening. And I felt perfectly fine that I remember. I think they were doing all things that parents do to babies to keep them at a good-- (laughs) So I don’t think I was speaking- talking at that time but I understood exactly what was going on.

DC: Were you an only child?

EB: No. I was- my brother was four years younger. He was born in Chicago.   I think that’s where I got political. We use to play- we lived in this small working class area on Green Street in Chicago. And it was built around- the back room- it wasn’t an alley that ran through it- it was just all the backyards. And all the kids would play back there. And there was- I was four and the big boys were five. And my friend Timmy was a little younger and kind of shy. So we use to play cops and robbers and Timmy always had to be the robber and go to jail.

DC: (laughs)

EB: And I said, “That’s not fair! Timmy doesn’t’ need to go to jail every time. You guys got to be the robbers and go to jail. Timmy can be a cop.”  I was always a cop. I never was a robber. (both laugh) And they got real- you know- we had a real fight about it. I went in and told my mother, “The boys aren’t treating Timmy nice!” And she said, “What are you going to do about it?” I said, “Oh, mother’s not going to figure this one out.” So I [went] back out and she said she heard somebody screaming. And she looked out the window and I was sitting on one of the big boys bending his fingers back. And he was not liking it at all and he was screaming. Well, it didn’t matter if Timmy was screaming, but when her boy was screaming- the mama came out and broke it up. So my mother didn’t say anything. She just watched. And she took us all in and we all had hot chocolate. And I read stories to them. They all said, “You can’t read these.” And I said, “Of course I can read them.”

Because I could, I started reading when I was about three. And my mother was sick a lot when I was a little girl. So my mother had taught school and she had all of these first grade readers. I still remember this as clear as if it was just yesterday or even this morning. I was looking through it and here was the little 1920s girl with her hair in a bob and a bow and she was flying a kite. And it said by the kite, it said “kite” “k-i-t-e.” And I said, “Oh shit. I know what it means.” (laughs) And so I went through the whole book (wind noise) and memorized every one of those verbs. I started reading everything. I loved reading and I loved words and I still do. But- (traffic noise)

DC: Can you tell me more about that memory? You said that there was a day- do you remember the season, the room? Can you describe the room? This is a good question. You could also have asked her what she meant when she said this was when she got political.

EB: I was actually in her room, in their bed, because it was bigger than mine and the room was bigger. It was light and I could read and hang out. It was an apartment. I think this must have been before we moved to Chicago because the house- we moved to Chicago into a house. So I must have been about three when that happened and we were living in an apartment. But I don’t remember that much about it. I remember getting to learn to read.

DC: That moment? (both laugh)

EB: Oh yeah.

DC: What are some other early moments that stand out like that? Good.

EB: Well, when we lived in Chicago I use to go over to these friends and play tiddlywinks. They had a couple of older brothers that liked to tease. So there was this little sparrow out in the yard. I said, “Wow, I’d love to pet that sparrow!” They said, “Well if you put some salt on its tail you can.” So I put salt in my sweaty little hands and went out and they just cracked up because I was going to go pet me a sparrow. (both laugh) And I realized that I’d been put on. I haven’t forgiven them yet. (laughs again) Because they were laughing. They were laughing at me.

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DC: Were your parents political?

EB: No. Well, they were Republican. But my family was Republican. They’d been brought up Republican. It was Indiana, for heaven’s sakes. But they weren’t terribly – they weren’t terribly political. They were really glad to get through the Depression. And they didn’t hate Roosevelt. My Aunt Gretchen, who helped raise my mother, hated Roosevelt so much she gave me all his dimes. So I sold out. I was a cheap- (laughs) because I’d spend them. I didn’t mind. Actually, from what I read about him he seemed like a fairly decent person. But I was not terribly political. I remember, I didn’t like Nixon. I didn’t trust him. He gave me the creeps- him and Liberace. I didn’t like Liberace either. My folks didn’t not like Nixon, but they weren’t fond of him. They weren’t real political. I mean, my mother would have voted for Jerry Brown and even gave him money back in the day, but my father- he was pretty neutral about it.

But my surrounding cousins were terribly Republican and my brother grew up to be Republican-homophobic. I don’t know where he got all that. Maybe from my dad, because I use to dress- when, when David was about two I’d dress him up in beads and feathers and everything so he could play with us. My father saw him all dressed up like that and had a fit, so we could never do that again. I had the feeling that he might have carried that. But he wasn’t actively homophobic, he just wasn’t going to have his baby boy dressed up like a girl which I thought was fine. (laughs) He was more fun when he was all dressed up in beads and stuff.

DC: What were some of the values that you feel like your parents held very close in your home? (overlapping speech)

EB: I really felt that they were open to really looking at everything. They were very frank about when my mother was pregnant. But they didn’t talk about how it got in there. I had a friend named Mary Anne. And we would play dolls. And we would put our dolls in our panties and then we’d have babies. And then my mother came to me one day, kind of chagrinned, and she said, “Mary Anne’s mother says that she can’t come over and play with you anymore. As long as you’re playing babies like that.” (laughs) She said, “Some people just don’t let their kids even think that.” And I thought that was really strange. But then Mary Anne came back and we kept on playing babies, but she never told her mother. (laughs)

DC: That’s the story as old as time, right? (both laugh)

EB: Yeah, I think parents are really glad about some of the things that their kids don’t tell them. I think my mother was really pleased that I kept my mouth shut a lot. (laughs) And then anywhere- anytime we lived anywhere near- when I lived in Kansas City I use to ride a school bus. The buses would give you transfers anywhere in the city. So after school I would go to all the city parks. I went all over the Kansas City all by myself, this little kid, six, seven years old.

One time I’d taken some walnut shells. You know, walnut shells make beautiful little boats. So I took some with me because I knew about a park where there was a little creek. I could go down and float the boats.

So I was down there playing when all of the sudden I had this creepy feeling that somebody was watching me. So I thought I’ve got to be cool, because I don’t want to act like I’m aware. So I very casually picked my boats up and walked away in the other direction and then I left. But I know there was somebody, a creep, really close by. Kids- and I thought from that- kids really develop street smarts, if they get a chance to.

I think being able to do that, I learned- I got- I went through some really bad places in town and never got any kinds of hassles. At all, ever. Because I’d always act like I should be there. And I found, I got very good at crashing places. I could go anywhere, you’d just have to act like, “Of course I have to go in here. Of course, this is fine. I am going over to see these people over there. I’m bringing a horse in here for this,” whatever.

DC: What are some of the (Elizabeth laughs) places that you crashed?

EB: Stores that were having special events, that little girls probably wouldn’t be invited to. (Darby laughs) I use to rodeo and I’d get into all of the rodeos for nothing. Of course if I was contesting it, I had to put in the fee, but I never had to pay gate toll. Things like that.

DC: You mentioned the rodeo. Did you say- I was under the impression that your family was involved with horses? Or was it just you?

EB: Not really my family. It was just me. Like when we moved out into Vincennes, we bought a place and built a house.

DC: Where’s that?

EB: Vincennes, Indiana, it’s southern Indiana. And we moved out into a sort of country-suburban area. There were fields all around us. My best friend had a farm about a mile away and I use to walk over, hang out with. I was always crazy about horses.  (traffic noise) I was also- in the morning I would get up early and I would climb out my window, because I knew- I didn’t want to disturb my mother having her coffee. Because you did not disturb my mother when she was having her coffee. Then I’d just run. That’s why I always had to have short hair, because I’d come home with burs in my hair. (laughs) I went everywhere. I knew everything within miles of where we lived. I knew where all the creeks were and I use to go spy on the- There use to be fox cubs in one area, and ground hogs, you know, all kinds of different things. I never was around where there were much deer. Which is kind of interesting when I think about it, because there’s so much deer around here [Summertown, Tennessee].

I was kind of a wild child. I wasn’t too interested in social things. My mother was worried about that. When I got older and was a teenager she was really glad when I went out to parties. I could come home at any time and she never worried about me and she always was making sure that I had a fun time. And the thing was, that I really wasn’t into getting laid or drinking very much, although I had friends that drank a lot. And I knew how to drink. I drank whiskey because I really always liked whiskey. I still like whiskey.

DC: (laughs) Me too.

EB: But I never was- I very rarely got drunk. I’d get tipsy. But I always loved to dance. So I think you sweat it out. (Darby laughs) I know one time we went to a party- what we’d do- we’d go have these wild parties at this girl’s house and then we’d all make a big breakfast and we’d go to Mass. (laughs) And always somebody would get sick. (laughs) It was sort of like (unclear). I was always up and dancing while everybody else was asleep under the table drunk. So I got to where I would always just make breakfast and feed everybody before we’d go.

DC: How old were you at this time?

EB: I was probably sixteen, seventeen, at that age, eighteen. It was before I went to college and I did some of that after I went to college. The only time- the first time I got drunk was in college. And I was drinking wine and oh boy did I get sick. But I didn’t get unconscious, I just got really sick. Wine just doesn’t do it for me. (wind noise)

DC: I can do a glass of wine and then past that is just a headache.

EB: I mean, yeah. I can drink a little wine. Like with food, I like that. And I like a good wine. And I like to cook with wine. But I’m not a drinker really. Every once in a while I like a good Jameson 12-year, you know, or a Macallan. I never liked scotch until I had a Macallan. I think it is because it doesn’t have that smoky flavor. I don’t like the smoky scotch. But anyway, I could live without it. I could never have another drink again, ever again and it wouldn’t bother me. I know- I don’t know anybody in my father’s side who was a drunkard. And I know that my grandfather was probably that and heavy into dope. I think my grandfather was a real asshole. (laughs) He was a spoiled-

DC: Is this your mother’s-?

EB: Yeah. He was the spoiled younger brother who could do no wrong. And my aunt Elizabeth and Margaret went to Italy and lived there during the war. And my mother named me Elizabeth. And my Aunt Elizabeth, bless her soul said, “If you think you’re going to get any of my money calling her Elizabeth, you’re thinking wrong!” (laughs)

DC: She sounds like a nice lady.

EB: She wasn’t. (both laugh) But I liked her and I loved her letters. The letters she wrote- she was very articulate.

DC: What did she write about? Do you remember reading them?

EB: She wrote about the war. And they lived in- near one of the main bridges in Florence. She wrote about them bringing the young people into the square and shooting them. And that the Nazis came through their house looking for their treasures, but she said, “But we had it hidden pretty well.” But she was actually more sympathetic to the Nazis, than to the resistance. I mean- but probably that’s how she could get by with it too. (Affecting her Aunt’s voice again-) “You’re not going to- you know me!” That kind of thing, I’m sure. I never met her. I always thought I would like to go over to Florence and meet her, but I never made it. And I think if I’d really wanted to, I would have gone. (laughs)

DC: Do you have Italian heritage or was she just living there?

EB: She was just living there because she was into the culture. She was very much into the fashion of intellectual renaissance. I think that that was a lot of it. I don’t know, I didn’t know her that well. But you know, Italy- Florence and Florence was definitely a heavy part of arts and architecture. And I think that’s what drew her there, that she was into that kind of thing. (clears throat)

And then my Aunt Martha- I think was kind of a mousy, quiet. My Aunt Elizabeth ran her life and Martha depended on her. And she died and I think it clearly upset my Aunt Elizabeth. And she never came back to the country after she was- a lot of her letters were about Aunt Martha’s doctors (laughs) and what they said about her. So she was concerned. And I know she must have loved her, but- because she was very upset when she died. (traffic noise) But anyway, I don’t know her- just through her letters and from the general feeling of my mother’s family.

DC: Did you write a lot of letters?

EB: I have. I used to. And then when the internet came in, I stopped. And I have- I’ve lost everything in my travels. I still have too much junk. (laughs) I’ve left a trail.

DC: So, you said that you went to college. Where did you go to college? And when was that?

EB: Let’s see. I graduated from high school in [19]54, so I went to Hanover College in Indiana, which is a beautiful little college overlooking the Ohio River. Which is why I think I went there, because of how it looked. They called it “A small Christian college for small Christians.” (Darby laughs) Actually, the woman we were talking to is an alumni of Hanover. But after two years I went up to Ball State and went and graduated there in Muncie, Indiana. And then I started teaching in California. I got a job teaching English.

DC: What was your degree?

EB: I had a Bachelor’s of Science in Education with minors in Art, English, History, Chemistry, and something else- drama.

DC: Was there- What was the demographic like? Were there a lot of women? Was it completely white people-?

EB: At Hanover it was about 99% white. Ball State there were black people. It was the first time- well actually when we moved into Vincennes we bought a house in town right on the border between black and white. And I used to play with the little black kids in the area. I had a really good friend. And I had another black friend that didn’t live in the black part of town. She lived in the white part of town. And her mother would never let us play in the house. And she told Linda, she said, “Don’t go into my house.” She said, “I can’t go into your house, my mom won’t let me.” But we never thought too much about it. We just played anyway. We didn’t care. We just played wherever.

DC: Looking back- do you have a different understanding of that situation and why she might have said that?

EB: Well, I do. Of course. I realize that it was dangerous. If anything had happened to me, or what did she know what we would do to her. You know, we were white people, and I was just a white kid. My mother and father were actually of some import in the white part of the community. So she was very cautious. I was sitting out on the porch with my mother and all the little black kids came out across the road and started to play, and my mother just, “Oh!” you know. And I said, “And miss hoighty-toighty goes out” (unclear) And she comes back and says, “You know, I was really wrong.” (laughs) But you know, you’re brought up in places where-- And they didn’t like the house, because across from us on the other side of the road was some white trash. Which my mother was upset when those kids came out. Which I never got tight with those kids, because they were pretty rough. And I was more interested- the black kids were interested in being athletic. Getting out and wailing and had great imaginations. (wind noise)

You know, I played with everybody in the area. Kids are like that- you just do. Except one time, when I was in junior high, my friend and I and a bunch of other kids, we went to a dance. And so the dance started and all the kids said, “Dance with him! Dance with him!” with my friend. And I was not into boys at all. And I just, I left. I just split. I said, “I’m not getting into this.” You know, and I know he must have felt that I did it because he was black. I did it because he was a boy! (Darby laughs) And I was not going to dance with a boy. And we never were friends again. It was shortly after that when I moved out of the area and we moved into the house in the country. And I’ve thought about that ever since. It’s just bugged me ever since. It was nothing personal, I was just not going to dance with any boy. I wouldn’t dance with the boys that were saying dance with him, you know? I was at the cooties stage. I was a late bloomer. (both laugh)

And I remember I use to wrestle a lot with kids, you know? And one time I was wrestling with this friend of mine and I was just starting to get tits. And he said, “Oh, I can’t wrestle with you anymore.” And I realized he’d felt my tits and I was so embarrassed. And I thought, “Goodness gracious that’s really a pain in the butt.” (laughs)

DC: I felt the same way, to be a girl.

EB: Yeah, I didn’t mind being a girl, but I just thought boys had a better deal. I still think so because it’s true. But I also understand that they suffer from this misogynistic patriarchy society. It’s a bitch for everybody. Although bitches are very nice, (both laugh) but I think it is very hard. I have a lot of sympathy for what men have to put up with, but then there’s some men that I don’t have as much sympathy for as others. The thing about white male privilege is just very hard on everybody. So anyway, there’s all of that. I’ve always felt that. Although, I never really articulated it until later. I felt that from when I was little. And then you know I thought, “What’s wrong with being a feminist?” you know?

I mean- and like I said, I was never going to get married. Because I wasn’t going to have anything that was less than what my folks had. And it looked to me that if you had less than what my folks had, that marriage wasn’t much fun. I didn’t see people being very happy. (wind noise) I knew that sometimes they were really mean to each other. Mostly guys being mean to their wives. People cheating on each other all the time. I mean, just why bother? You know, I think that eventually changed when I met my husband. Because I was with a guy and I wasn’t going to marry him. And then we got together and I just thought I don’t ever want to not be with him. You know? And I had never felt like that before. So then eventually we got married. But that’s another story.

DC: So you went from- you graduated college. Did you immediately go out to California to teach?

EB: Yeah, I got a job. We had people coming in to- it was a teacher’s school.

DC: Ball State was?

EB: At that time, Ball State had a well-known teachers’ college. So the guy came in and interviewed me and I could quote everything at him that he wanted to hear. So he said, “Okay, you’re hired!” Oh boy, being a teacher is a whole other thing. I’m not really a teacher.

DC: How long did you teach?

EB: I taught sophomore English.

DC: How long?

EB: I taught a year there, and then I retired. I went out and did other things. I rodeoed and I waited tables and I tended bar.

DC: Did you go out to California alone?

EB: Yeah.

DC: What was that like?

EB: Oh, fine. I never worried about having a traveling companion. I always did what I wanted to and a lot of things I wanted to do, not very many other people wanted to do (laughs) or had the time. I like being able to have my own time frame for things.

Like I flew out to California and landed and went to this little town called Coalinga with big wide streets and they were having dust storms and locusts. And I had- they put me in a motel until I could find some place to stay. And the wind would blow and everything would fill up with these crickets.

And then I finally found a place to stay. Behind a house- it was a little one room house- maybe about once and half as big as this gazebo, only square of course. It had a kitchen, a bathroom, and living room bedroom.

DC: So about forty feet across length?

EB: Yeah. Something like that. Yeah. It had a bed in one side and a living room on the other side and then a bathroom over here and a kitchen over there. And I loved it. It was just exactly what I (needed?). It was my own house. It was out, separate from the other house. I had- I could put in a little garden. Figured out it had a pomegranate. I was so amazed. I was like, “This is like eating jewelry!” (Darby laughs) Pomegranates are just such a trip. They’re not very comfortable to eat because the fruit is surrounding this big seed that’s not very good. So you get one and you get the skin off of it and bite into it and you’ve got to spit for about half the time that you’re eating it (laughs), but I didn’t mind.

DC: My kids love pomegranates.

EB: They’re just lovely! I’d always try to eat one in the morning before I went to school. I’d get up really early and grade all my papers and do all that. In fact, I was awake at 4:00 [am] when there was an earthquake. And it was- I think it was a 6 pointer [on the Richter scale]. Coalinga is pretty near a fault. It was amazing, because it started with this groaning noise that makes it sound like all the dead people in the world. “Ooooooh!!” and then it rattled and I thought, “Do I have time to get up and look out the window to see what it looks like? Oh, I don’t want to miss a thing.” (wind) It was dark, so I couldn’t just look out the window.

About a week later it was cold, so the house was closed up. I woke up in the middle of the night with a terrible headache and hardly able to move. So I rolled out of bed and crawled to the door and opened it, because I realized I was being gassed.

DC: (gasps) Oh!

EB: Yeah. When the earthquake had come it had broken the connection on the gas stove.

DC: Oh, my goodness.

EB: And I realized this was not a normal thing and when I tried to get up I was not able to get up. I could just roll over. And I fell out of the bed and crawled to the door and opened it and stuck my head out the door. So I had to call them and get the gas company to come fix my stove.

DC: Oh, my goodness. Did you have to go to the hospital or anything?

EB: No. No, I didn’t tell them I was in such dire straits. By the time they came, I was standing up and had everything opened.

DC: Goodness.

EB: I told them that I’d woken up with a headache and realized something was wrong. (laughs)

DC: That’s a frightening incident.

EB: Yeah. Well, one of the things about surviving is to pay attention. And anything that happens, you should really know what is going on. That’s always been [my] theory. You just can’t ask enough questions. Drives my husband crazy. He says, “You already know the answer!” I said, “Well, not all of the answer. I know some of it, but I want to know all of it.” (laughs)

DC: Sounds like you would be pretty good at what I’m doing. (both laugh) That’s good you keep your head on a swivel and ask questions. You get a broader view of the world.

EB: Yeah.

DC: So I’m curious how you went from- describe the transition from teaching, saying this isn’t right for me, and getting into bartending and the rodeo and waitressing.

EB: I bought a horse, first thing I did when I moved out there. There was a club, and I kept my horse at the club. And then I rode everybody else’s horses too. Because I’d been into Gymkhana[[1]](#footnote-1) when I was in high school.

DC: You’d been into what?

EB: Gymkhana, which is horse games.

DC: Oh, okay.

00:44:00

EB: Yeah, and, and how I got a horse was I was sitting on the porch of my friend that had the farm next to where we’d bought our house. This little pony went trotting down the road and she said, “I wonder whose pony that is.” And I said, “I don’t know but I am going to go catch him.” So I went and caught him. And took him over to my aunt and uncle’s farm about two miles away and put him up there. And then I was walking back and this guy stopped and said, “Somebody said that you saw a pony.” And I said, “Yeah.” And he said, “Well, that was Penny.” Said, “Did you catch him?” I said, “Yeah, he’s over at my aunt’s place.” So, I went over and I rode him back to where he was supposed to go. And said, “You can ride him anytime you want.” (laughs) Little did they know. (DC laughs) So I would ride him and that’s where I learned a lot to ride, because I would-

One time I was sitting in the pasture, just sitting bareback on him. This guy came along and he said, “You’re going to fall off. You’re going to fall off.” I fell right off. And I thought, “Wow! That’s far out. That somebody can talk me into doing something I know I wasn’t going to do.” (DC laughs) And, and so I noticed that one. I said, “You know you can make people do things just with your words. And you also have to be careful with what someone else is telling you.”

Then I, you know, then they found out that I was riding him miles away. “Somebody saw you in town on Penny! We don’t really want you riding him that far away.” (laughs) So then I had a horse trader friend named Clemdon that was also a friend of the family (wind noise). He lived with his two sisters in- out near Fritchton, Indiana. I use to go over there all of the time. And one time I went after- over there once just for, you know, a story I was- I was- after church in this really pretty yellow dress- summer dress with the full crinoline thing- that was the fifties. And I went over to see them and he was out in the pasture pond catching fish, so I climbed over the fence and sat and talked to him. And then he said, “Well, the sisters have got lunch. Want to eat?” And I said, “Oh, sure.” So I went over and they had a okra stew with onions, tomatoes, and okra. It was some of the best stuff I ever ate in my life. So I went home and I said to my mom, “Why don’t we ever have okra?!” And my mother just- my mother was always insisting that I eat everything. That, you know, that I not be- but she got green, says, “I can’t stand okra!” (laughs) Which was a revelation to me because my mother was very insistent that we not be picky about our food, but I still love it that way. I love okra in any form.

In fact, I got some today and I’m going to have it before I go to the party. [The farm community was having a pool party that evening at the local swimming hole.] Actually, the party is going to start at 4 [o’clock] and that is the kids swimming, then there’s going to be the teenage swimming, and then there’s going to be the adults thing. And I‘m not sure it’s going to be cold enough- it’s going to be warm enough for me to think about swimming. (DC laughs) I’m a Pisces, but I like my swimming time to be really hot. I don’t like cold water. (laughs)

DC: There’s been so much rain lately that the water got real cold.

EB: Yeah, yeah. We have a lovely swimming hole. I think I’ve been down there five or six times all summer.

DC: So, that’s how you got started riding, Then you bought a horse and kept it whenever-

EB: Well-

DC: -you moved to California?

EB: My friend Clem knew I wanted it so he brought this little mare he’d got from Jim Gypsy. She was a pacing mare.

DC: Is this in Indiana or California?

EB: Indiana.

DC: Okay.

EB: And I called her Tanda, which means honor. I was a campfire girl. And I had an old, funky bridle and a cavalry saddle. Which was maybe the most uncomfortable saddle you could ever do, and had a great big blanket. And she was skinny, skinny, skinny, and somebody had hit her with a pitchfork. So, I would get on her and I had to, like, fix the reins on the bridle because they were this old leather thing and they would break.

Are we running out of?

DC: Oh no! I just have to check every now and then to be sure that we are still recording. I don’t want to lose-

EB: Oh, good.

DC: It’s hard to see from over here.

EB: And I would ride everywhere to see what anybody knew about fixing horses. And I learned a whole lot of stuff that way. And she got fat. And I’ve got a lump on my arm- on my hand still. It’s down now- from pulling on her because she- she liked to go. We’d go fifty, 100 miles a day and she never got tired. That’s the kind of horses that those standard breds are. And she was just about right for me because I was ready to go too. And, and I had her for, let’s see, I had her for about ten years. So she must have been almost twenty. And then I went to school. And so this guy, he would take care of her. And I could tell that he really- he loved that old mare. And I really appreciated [it]. And my brother he said, “He says nasty things about you.” Well, I knew what he said- that I was just some rich girl, that you know, that didn’t really care. Which was not true. But I didn’t care about what he said about me. I cared what he said about her. And he was good to her. He was really good to her. So I gave him to me when I went to California. [EB misspoke- I think she meant to say, “I gave her to him when I went to California.”] I gave away- my brother couldn’t believe it. I said, “Yeah, but he really likes her and he will take care of her. Forever.” I mean sometimes you see people that are just- I mean, he loved her better than I did. And that was something, because I thought the- you know, I thought the sun rose and set on her butt.

DC: (laughs) What is it that you love about horses?

EB: What is it that I like about horses? They’re beautiful, just beautiful. And I like- I like their minds. Their minds are just so open. They’re not terribly smart, but they’re very telepathic. You know, like you can tell if a horse is acting silly, then there’s somebody silly doing it with them. You can get along with almost any horse, if you’re willing to figure out where they’re coming from. (wind) And you know, I really- I read- I- When I was in California, I had friends- this guy, the husband, Walter. He was a horse whisperer. He was amazing. He really taught me a lot about how to work a horse on the ground. And he had a horse that was his favorite horse, that every once in a while he’d let me ride. Which I realized was a real honor, but that horse never liked me. Never liked me. He would- there’s a thing that horses do called cross-cantering. And, and he would cross-canter with me and I knew he knew better. (DC laughs) And he would always do it when we were in a fix, like if I was falling down off a hill, you know? He would cross-canter on me to unset me from- and there was nothing I could do about it. You know, it was not my horse. And I was also in awe of him and his owner, so there was nothing I could do about it. I just had to hang loose and rattle. (laughs)

DC: (laughs) What an ornery horse!

EB: He wasn’t! He was a sweetie and he was very smart. He did everything right for Walt and most everybody else, but he did not like me. (both laugh) And when I wanted him to do something that was working- he did it right. (DC laughs) When he could- when he could catch me off and do something that would upset me he would do it every time. (laughs)

DC: And this, this was in California?

EB: Yeah.

DC: How did you end up affiliated with rodeos?

EB: Well because it was like in Indiana--it was horse shows and gymkhanas. Where you would do things like that. I would go sometimes and just ride other people’s horses, if they needed somebody to do it. You know, because there was always somebody that had a loose horse that you could do. And then you know, people knew I could ride. So, I would get people saying, “Oh, here! We got a diaper race. I’ve got some really special shoes that I think will fit you!” You know? Things like that. And-

DC: Can you tell me what a diaper race is?

EB: That’s where you run down through the- you get off your horse and put on a diaper, you pin it, and then you lead the horse back running real fast. You have to have the special shoes to run fast.

DC: Oh, that’s funny.

EB: Oh yeah, it was fun. The first time I did it my diaper pin broke and I was way out ahead of everybody and I quit. (DC laughs) And they said, “You quit! You were winning!” I’ll never forget that. So I never did that again. (laughs)

DC: You never did the race again or you never quit again?

EB: No, never quit again. (DC laughs) Not anything. It really taught me. I said, “When you’re doing it, do it clear to the end, and don’t stop in the middle.” Because that’s, that’s- I could have won. I would have won a ribbon. Big deal! Because it wasn’t for money. We were just doing it for the ribbons. (DC laughs) Most of it. And then afterwards, they might have ribbons left over. They’d say, “Well, you know, we’ll have a girls’ race. We’ll have a boys’ race.” You know? And somebody said, “I’ve got a picture of you running out in a cow pasture with bare feet.” I said, “Well, I can’t run in my boots!” (laughs)

DC: What other events did you do at rodeos?

EB: I learned to team rope. I had a little mare, the friend of mine had. And all you had to do to get, to get it done was to follow where she pointed her shoulder. I’d throw the rope down and I never missed. I missed my dally sometimes, but I always caught heel. And so I actually won the pot once doing that. And beat the state champions, at one of the little bush things. So, I won about $50 on that one. (laughs)

DC: So, about what year is it for this? You were like ‘58?

EB: Let’s see this was, must have been [19]61, 62? Somewhere around in there, because I went out there in ’58, ’59, then I went to Arizona, then I went to California and you know, I taught in Arizona. I taught substitute jobs.

56:15

DC: Okay.

EB: And I could have worked everyday, because I got along with the kids. I never got a problem with the kids, you know? And I taught Art and Chemistry and History mainly, and some English. You know, whatever they need as a substitute for. And it was mostly junior high and high school. And I also taught art in the junior college. During the time that I was rodeoing. I’d get up at 4 o’clock and feed the horses, then I’d go to school, then I’d come back and take care of the horses, board them, and work them. Then I’d go teach night classes.

DC: Wow. (both laugh) Did you sleep?

EB: Not a lot, I didn’t really sleep more than- And sometimes I wouldn’t sleep at all. Like when I was doing the first paper here. I was doing the- I would work three or four nights straight and not really sleep. I’d just sleep quick little power naps. I don’t do that anymore. But it was not a problem. I know one time I went to the doctor and I said, “You know, I’m really tired. And I think I need a shot because I have pernicious anemia.” And he said, “Well, tell me your schedule.” And I said, “Well.” “Well of course you’re tired!” (laughs) I said, “Yeah, but check my blood anyway.” Because I knew I had pernicious anemia from when I was a kid and I- my mother had it. So, I had to get shots. So I got a shot. You know, I still have to take the shots now, but I don’t stay up all night. (DC laughs) Generally. Sometimes, you know I can get by on four or five hours pretty easy. That’s actually what I had last night, but I like seven hours.

DC: Okay.

EB: Seven hours is good. Six hours is adequate, I do well on six hours, but last night I went to bed about 12:30. And I woke up at 5:30 and then I laid in bed until 6:30, but I should have gotten up because I was late to the thing this morning. (laughs) Yeah, wasn’t as together as I thought I was.

DC: So, how did you- when did you become affiliated with the group out in California that eventually came here?

EB: Well, I left Porterville. I bought- I had a Cadillac Oakey- a big Chevrolet to pull my horse trailer- so I sold it. And sold- gave away my horses and took my gear and bought a [circa 1961-1965] international pick-up and went up to San Francisco.

DC: For what?

EB: To go see what was going on in San Francisco.

DC: What was going on in San Francisco? (laughs)

EB: It was [19]’65. So it looked interesting to me. So I went up and I got a place in Berkley. Got a flat on the flats near the end. Got a roommate that was crazy, a crazy woman. And she got a little motor scooter. She worked and she didn’t have any place to put it, so she took me up to where she worked and then I drove her motor scooter back. She didn’t have any place to park it. (DC chuckles) I had never driven a motor cycle before. (laughs) And here I am in San Francisco in the hills. It was fun. (both laugh) But I realized that I didn’t really know how to ride this thing and here I was in city traffic in those hills. But it was great. (laughs) And so I , I , I, like I said, I talk to people and I get to know what’s going on. And I got mixed up in the psychedelic crew in Berkley. And then I went over to San Francisco and got a place in the – overlooking the hills. And I got pregnant. Because I had decided that I was never going to get married and I was thirty years old, and I may as well have a baby. Why not? You know, so I got pregnant. And then-

DC: What year did you get- what year was that?

EB: Let’s see, that was – let’s see. It must have been the winter of ’66 because he was born the July in ’67.

DC: Can you tell me about the in-between time- you got to San Francisco and you had your crazy roommate and (laughs) you got involved with the psychedelic movement?

EB: Well, then, well- I met a guy who was a dealer, almost immediately. And he put about four or five bails of marijuana in my closet. And so one time I went to a party shortly after that and I make this big spliff out of just regular paper. It was just [motions to show a comically large size] (DC laughs) a fatty. And went to the party and smoked a lot of dope and drank a lot of whatever we had to drink. I mean, I had everything. And I got so drunk. And so high. And I ended up at my house. I had built my bed- it was a loft almost. It was about this tall. [motions to show about 4-5 feet tall] and all my stuff underneath. You could climb up there. And this strange guy was in the house too. And I wouldn’t let him climb up on the bed, so he was drunk some place else. I woke up and I felt so bad I thought I was going to die. And then I was afraid I wouldn’t. You know, that way? (both laugh) You know I said, “I’m going to have to give up drinking or smoking.” So I gave up drinking. (both laugh)

DC: That one will make you feel worse.

EB: Yeah! Right. Oh, my god. I had never had a hangover. Not, I’ve had slight queasiness after a big party or something, and that time in college I didn’t have a hangover, I just felt sick. But I woke up, I was hung-over. I was sick. I was miserable. (DC laughs) I said, “Oh my goodness this is what people are complaining about!” I’ve never been there again. (DC laughs) No, no. Not ever.

DC: Didn’t want to go back? (laughs)

EB: No, that was awful. I can’t imagine anybody doing that to themselves when they knew how not to. So I never did that again. I’ve been drunk and I’ve been high, but I’ve never been hung-over again. (both laugh)

DC: What was that crew like? Just the general- the music, the-

EB: It was a mix of-

DC: parties, the

EB: It was like some of the really- you’ve heard of some of the guys I use to hang out with (background noise) at the golden toad [Occidental, CA?] I remember I got to sing-lead in for Taj Mahal. At the Steve- you know and, and do things like that. Gut and Buddha and all of those guys. I mean I ran around with a bunch of the old famous hippies. (DC laughs) And took acid with them. And ate- well the first time I had marijuana- in- eating I was at John Paul’s house. And I had a brownie or something. I think it was a chocolate cake. And I just got stoned. And I wandered off and somebody told me later, (background noise) “That girl doesn’t know anything and she is really out of her mind stoned. You better go find her. She’s going to get in trouble.”

So I was at- I was at some little site- store buying pink marshmallow (both laugh) cookies. Which I would never eat any other time, but they were really good. (both laugh) So, they took me home and said, “Don’t wander off like that. That is not smart.” (laughs) I said, “Okay!” (laughing)

DC: There’s worse kinds of trouble to get into. (both laugh) Oh my goodness.

EB: I knew Cassidy- when we were getting the bus family together to go on the caravan- we went to Cassidy’s ranch and dropped acid. I had a lovely time. It was so pretty and we were out in the middle of nowhere. And we just had the campfire for light. And one of our friends, he was supposed to- he worked and so he was supposed to- and he just walked in and found us. You know, it was just like he was on- he was on the wavelength (DC laughs) because nobody could have found us unless they had that. Because nobody looking for us would have ever found us. I mean we were way back in the canyons and we had gone up to an area that pretty loosely- there were no roads- no nothing. We just sort of made the road to go there. (DC chuckles) And we had a great time and we were really glad to see Joel when he came in. And that’s when we made the plans on how we do the bus family, which was the caravan, eventually.

DC: How did that come together? Do you mind talking more about that?

EB: Well, when I was living in the sunset district, I’d found- I had been living in Sausalito with a friend that was a nurse right after Liam was born. And I’d get up in the morning and nurse him and sit in the little- it was right across from the Gladhand Café, right on the bay. You know, I think now if you wanted to have an apartment there it would probably cost you $750 a month if it’s the cheap.[[2]](#footnote-2) Probably more than that. It was probably $75 a month for little railroad kind of apartment. You know, the front room and a little bay window, and the kitchen and a bathroom and a bedroom. And I’d sleep in the- I had the front room. My friend had the back room. That’s- it was lovely. I use to sit there and the sun- the water would come off the sun and make the patterns on the roof and I’d watch the shrimp boats go out and it was lovely. But we decided that it was starting to get tourist season and it was getting kind of loud down below because we were right on the main road. So we decided to move over to the city.

DC: Was this in Berkeley?

EB: No, it was in Sausalito.

DC: Okay, sorry.

EB: It’s okay. I get around. (laughs)

DC: No, no you’re fine. I’m just trying to keep track of where we are at.

EB: Right, so and then we went in and found this lovely little cottage that this Russian immigrant was our landlord. Mr. Klache [spelling?] and Mr. Klache he was so cool. And so we got this beautiful little house behind apartment houses and it was all surrounded by people’s backyards and gardens. And it had a little garden in the front. And it had little rose bushes all along this porch that ran across the front of it. And lilac bushes down on one side. And then you had to walk under in kind of a tunnel hall into it and then the backyards were all- we had a glassed-in back porch. And then a huge kitchen, and then a dining room that I made into my bedroom. And then the kitchen was as big as this place [probably 15’x15’]. It was huge.

And I’d gone to, went to some of the junk stores. And I found this gorgeous bakery oak, solid oak- what would you call it? A bar? A table? It ran the length of the room. And it was all of this beautiful working space. And then there was drawers and then there was one where the bread board pulls out-

DC: like a sideboard?

EB: I wish I could have brought it with me. It was magnificent. I think I paid $10 for it. You couldn’t buy it for $1,000 now.

DC: Did you -

EB: I had a – huh?

DC: I’m sorry. I was going to ask, was this before or after you had Liam?

EB: This was after. I had Liam, and then went out to Sausalito with my nurse friend. And, and, I had him at the general hospital. Because I was afraid since I was negative- I have an Rh negative. And I had a friend who lost her baby with that so I wanted to have him in the hospital, but I would have found a midwife.

DC: Was it normal, when and where you were, to go to a hospital? Or was it like your culture or subculture?

EB: It was my decision because I wanted to make sure that it was covered, because I wasn’t married and (traffic noise) I wasn’t even sure who the father was.

DC: Okay.

EB: So I wanted to make sure that if I had, if there was an Rh problem-

DC: Right.

EB: That we would be able to deal with it. Of course, the doctors knew about it. And I’d gone to the- they have birthing lessons at the hospital and I met some of the people.

So when I started- I’d been out playing baseball the day before. And that morning I woke up and blew my plug. “Oh! I’m going to have the baby! Finally!” You know. So I went and visited all of my friends who lived in third floor story places. (DC laughs) You know, I knew- I had friends that lived above the Grateful Dead and I went up there. I went up to my friends- everywhere that I had to walk up stairs so that the baby would really keep coming. And I went home and cleaned up. I lived in the back of the Blue Unicorn at the time.

Oh, that’s a story!

DC: Let’s hear it. (both laugh)

EB: They had a big closet on one end. So one of our friends was a black guy who was about 7 feet tall. And he rented that closet and he slept in that closet, but he- his- he was so big his feet stuck out the closet door. And we never worried about it, you know?

And then a teacher, with his, you know, partner lived in another room back there. So then from there- I had the baby and we went over to Sausalito. And I stayed with my nurse friend who very much started to get into SNCC. She would go out with her partners into the country practicing shooting and I’d tell her, “You guys are silly. You should practice shooting with silencers in the city, because every time you go out into the ranch country everybody knows you’re there! A bunch of black and white guys with a white girl shooting in their area?! They know what you ate for dinner. They know everything about you!” You know? I said, “I’m surprised you come back alive. You should stay in the city, because it is safer!” (laughs)

DC: Did they ever run into trouble?

EB: No.

DC: Or did you guys ever have trouble with the police?

EB: There’s a lot of other stories there. One of the guys that we knew, he was a big dealer. He got murdered and thrown off the cliffs at Rejas. (traffic sounds)

DC: Did you know who had done it or-

EB: No, but probably mafia. And I had a friend whose family was mafia. And he came and asked if he could stay at our house when the police came because they wanted to ask him. You know? So, here I am boiling a thousand peyote buttons on the stove and I had just taken a little bit of speed because I wondered what that was all about.

And the cops come to the door. So, I invited them in and sat them down and gave them tea, not peyote tea. (both laugh) And they didn’t want any food. And I had to keep it together. Which I did, but I was just sweating a lot. (laughs) I didn’t ever take speed after that. (DC laughs) For one, I could feel that it was effecting me, but for two, I didn’t let it happen. So if I am still in control, what am I going to take that stuff for? (DC laughs) It’s not good for me, I can tell. But- So, we had a nice time. They talked about my friend who was murdered and what they knew- that they would tell us- of course not much. But it was pleasant for about an hour and a half. Oh my god, I’ll never forget that. And- But that was just some of the things. You know? And it wasn’t, it wasn’t even you know sometimes you read stuff like that and it sounds kind of funky and yucky, but the house was clean, and the people were nice. Even the cops were nice. I mean I couldn’t complain; it was just an interesting experience. (both laugh)

DC: Oh, that’s so strange.

EB: You’re right. I was amazed because peyote smells pretty strong when you’re cooking it. But I was also-

DC: Do you think they were aware?

EB: I’m not sure. I don’t know. Because I was cooking other things, so there were other smells, but I definitely put on some strong stew after they came in (DC laughs) that would have a lot of peppery smells. And I invited them to have some, but they didn’t want it. Thought it smelled great and we ate it afterwards, too. And it was really good. (laughs) Yeah.

1:16:00

DC: I’ve never actually done peyote. What was that experience like?

EB: Oh, peyote is lovely. It is a yoga. And uh-

DC: Did you say yoga?

EB: Yeah. It’s a, it’s, it’s a, you do it, even if you don’t know, you do it in ceremony. It’s a very holy kind of thing. It’s a, it’s not good to taste. It’s very bitter, nasty tasting. And the tea is- I’m trying to think of a tea that is like that- that you might have ever tasted, but it’s just bitter. It has a really deep under-flavor that I actually found attractive. But I would never say it tasted good.

DC: Right, you weren’t drinking it for the taste though. (laughs)

EB: No, well. I was drinking it for the spiritual trip that it gave me. And, and, I don’t know exactly how I ran into the people that were- the folks that were going and gathering it, but they always brought me dried and fresh. And we would hang out and then I know after the “human be-in” we had- we had a road chief and a ceremony up in Laguanitas. That, of course, lasted all night and it was lovely. And I always had peyote around me even when I came to The Farm. But then, I had a grandmother peyote plant. And she had babies and somebody came and stole it. Not the plant, just took the babies off. And it killed her.

DC: Oh, no!

EB: And I tried to keep her with me but she couldn’t take care of me, she left. I’ve never felt that connection since. But I had already not been into peyote. I had already reached that place where I was done anyhow. But I felt bad about that because I really loved that old mama. (traffic noises)

DC: This might be an odd question. Did you feel a synchronicity of when you had gotten done with peyote and then when that happened and that plant-

EB: No, I had the plant for a long time after that, I just- I was in- we were happy to be together. But I think that whoever came and stole her babies off her did it not- in a very careless manner. That’s how I felt. And then I kept the pot that she would [have] been in for a long time hoping she’d come back, but she never did.

DC: Have you ever felt connected in that way to other plants?

EB: I always do.

DC: Or just that one?

EB: Yeah. I always felt that way about everything. You know. And I- it’s a- I always feel the sacredness of all life. I feel that plants and animals- that everything. And I’ve realized that I always felt that. I think that everybody feels that, there’s just some people that don’t pay attention. And I think it is a whole lot of- I think it is a normal human thing to be connected that way. I think that is part of our godliness, is that we understand how connected we are to everything. But there’s a whole lot of people that just ignore it or fight against it or do terrible things, like the people that are doing the black snakes- the pipelines- which we don’t need. Just for the money. And I’m- I still don’t understand it. I try. Not too hard, but I try. I think, how could they do that? When they know in their deepest hearts that it’s wrong. Because I think people know when they are doing wrong.

DC: Do you think that feeling of connectivity is one of the driving forces behind the way that you’ve gotten involved with different groups?

1:21:14

EB: Oh, yeah. I’ve never felt a stranger. My father was like that, you know. I don’t believe in strangers. There’s people that when I meet them, I don’t want to see them again. There’s people that when I meet them that I’m extremely careful about. But that’s just because you have to. If you’re going to stay alive in this world you have to have some kind of paying attention.

DC: That thing you were talking about, keeping your head on a swivel and keeping your wits about you?

EB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You just have to. And sometimes you not-it’s not the best time but you better.

DC: So you talked about that you guys had talked about building the caravan. How did that come together? For you, personally? Was it just you and Liam and your nurse friend?

EB:(Makes a noise meaning no -mmm-mm)

DC: Who were you with? Who were you spending your time with at the time?

EB: Well, I was staying with a lot of the people at “Monday Night Class” and “Sunday morning Services” and my nurse friend, she didn’t come and she had gone more like the SNCC way. And I was not into guns even though I know how to shoot a gun and I know about what they were getting into and that’s why I didn’t I guess. But I wasn’t, I wasn’t into that at all. I would go to the park and I would take peyote tea. I would pass it around at some of the- there was always, you know, people hanging around at the park and everybody knew everybody. Sort of, but like I found out that I was called “The Peyote Princess” and I had no idea, I was not into, from that place. I thought, “Well that is really weird.” (DC laughs, both laugh)

DC: It had a nice alliteration, though.

EB: Yeah. Shit, man. I had peyote tea, for two years, you know? I’d bring a gallon or two to meetings and pass it around. Because it would get us off and we would feel pretty connected and groovy. It wasn’t like when you get into when you’re eating the peyote. You know, it can be heavy. But you know, I never got sick on peyote. And some people did, but I, I would just get royally high.

DC: Is the tea different than-

EB: Well teas is not quite as strong, you know? Eating it- it’s harder to eat it. Because it’s not good tasting at all. It’s nasty tasting stuff. Although, I never felt bad eating it. It was just, you know, you just did. That’s how you got through. (DC laughs) It was not something that I wanted particularly, because of eating something, it was just that way of connecting and getting through the taste, was part of the yoga that you went through to do it and to connect with the peyote.

DC: Mushrooms are a lot like that.

EB: But mushrooms aren’t hard to eat. Yeah.

DC: Texture things are weird for me personally.

EB: But that texture- the taste is not. The taste is actually kind of nice. You know, the texture- mushroom texture, I really like. (laughs) You know, but that’s what that is if that’s what you have to get through. yeah. And-

DC: So that kind of activity was, for you, mostly about feeling connected to the people around you? Or-

EB: No, it was mostly just getting high.

DC: (laughs)

EB: Yeah, I didn’t care if I connected or not.

DC: Fair enough.

EB: You know, I just wanted that high, and if somebody was there with me, it was lovely. You know, and a lot of times there were people there with me and it was lovely but I never particularly desired any of that. And I didn’t desire to be connected by the peyote people.

DC: Okay.

EB: And it was- I desired to be connected with marijuana. But I always was and I always- anytime I wanted a psychedelic, it’s always been there. When I haven’t wanted it, it’s not been there.

DC: Interesting.

EB: Well, I think that’s - I think that is all part of it. I think it is a really high spiritual trip. And you know, there’s some people that need it, but I sort of figured out- I don’t hardly smoke at all anymore. But I know how to get high. So I just try to stay stoned all the time. (chuckles) I don’t need to smoke it. I never liked to smoke. I prefer to eat it.

And I have been- I know- One time I went to a party and they had some brownies and they said, “There’s grass in this.” And I had before that- I had taken- I’d had a margarita. But I didn’t think about it. Because it had been a while before. And I wasn’t- I just like margaritas. I like tequila. So I drank a margarita, but I wasn’t looking to get drunk or anything. And I ate this one brownie. And it was a suckeroo. I mean, I was sitting there watching someone talk to me about some kind of project they wanted me to get involved in and I thought, “You know you’re really wasting your time because I am not there at all.” (both laugh) And I got so high that I did get sick. I had to go outside and barf over the edge of the cut. And I said, “You got to take me home, because I don’t think I can get home by myself. I’m discombobulated, totally.”

The next day I was so stoned it was lovely. (DC chuckles) I thought, “Man, this is stoned!” (both laugh) And I was stoned for about three days on that. Because it was, it was, it was very high. And then when I got to that place where it felt good I just stayed there, you know, because I liked it. (laughs) But it, it was like a- it was like a reminder, you know every once in awhile you need to get into the golden ruler. You know, “Oh, yeah, this is where it is like. This is what it is like. This is how-” that I said, I don’t want to do it how I got started because that was- that was not useful. It was fun and I was out of control. And it was kind of interesting to see that, but it wasn’t useful, except that it got me into the other place. But you know, I don’t like that place where I’m not learning anything, I’m just kind of out of it.

DC: I like that word useful.

EB: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: That’s an interesting way to talk about it.

EB: Yeah. It’s not that I ever sought that, which I think is interesting, you know. I think I was always a little psychedelic. I think that’s part of schizophrenia. I think I’m crazy as hell, but see I’m not afraid of it. And I think that is the difference between me and the people that end up in-

DC: Yeah.

EB: -in insane asylums. This is an insane asylum. (DC laughs) This is about as sane as it gets, you know. And it’s crazy out there. I mean, I cannot believe the insanity of what we agree to. You know, in wars and pollution and that kind of thing, it’s just. I think, “Now that’s insane.” I know I’m crazy. And compared to what this country and this society calls sane, I’m not there at all. Never have been. I’ve always been crazy.

One of the things I think that, you know, I’m alone a lot because I just don’t put up with bullshit. But I see the- you know, there’s people that say, “I have wires coming out of my head! Oh my god!” And I say, “Well, of course, you do. That’s your energy, you can see it.” You know? It’s just energy. I can see auras. “Oh! Everything!” You know, it’s just life energy. When I was little I would see the life energy around every blade of grass. And I’d say, “I’ve got to remember that.”

Because, you know, I don’t see it all the time, because I forget to pay attention. But you can, if you need to. And you should always remember that everything is so alive that is alive. And even like the stuff that’s inanimate- there’s rocks that just do things to you. You know? You’re around an area and you can feel it. If you’re paying any kind of attention, this is a holy place. But, almost every place is a holy place. (laughs) There’s just some places that people forgotten to be respectful. Anyway.

DC: No! You’re great. It’s wonderful. Those are really beautiful beliefs. What- Do you feel like that kind of desire for a holy place, that’s kind of set apart is why you came here? Why Tennessee? What motivated you at that time?

EB: Well, when the first caravan went around, I missed that one. Because we had gotten a bunch of buses together and this guy he said he’d sell- so seven of us said, “Oh, we’ll buy that bus and we will use that bus because it’s really a nice bus.” So we went to pick it up two days before the caravan was supposed to leave and the guys said, “I don’t think I’m going to sell it.” So we were afoot. So we rented a house in- on Carl Street and when the caravan came back, that’s when I met my husband. But I was with another guy. And said well, we’re going to go back east. Because when we were out, we thought, “Well, we want to get away from Berkeley and the political stuff because every time there’s a hundred people out in Berkley getting tear-gassed- that’s what anybody is paying attention to and we’ve got two thousand people over here talking about how the world works and nobody cares. So, we want to be in a place where we are centrally located, where there’s media, and where we can get the word out.” So, Tennessee seemed like a good place. The land was cheap.

We actually went to Arkansas first. And we were at this- I got eaten up by mosquitoes. Oh my god. Thought I was going to get carried off. And we were at this state park and they weren’t letting black people in to come and see us. So we got the word, “Stow and go. They’re not letting black people in to see us.” So we left there.

Then we came up to Kentucky. Some guy was going to give us a farm. And it was lovely. It had a artesian well. It was almost big around- it was beautiful. It was the most beautiful, clear, down to the depths- really beautiful blue water with the bubbles coming up. But we found out that we were in the middle of an inheritance fight. And we said, “Oh, we are not going to take this away from the family! What are you talking about?!” So we left there.

Then we went to Cheatham county, which is interesting. They had 1,000 acres that they’d sell us. So we went to the 1,000 acre and walked around on it. And I said, “This doesn’t look like 1,000 acres to me.” But I didn’t say anything. This looks more like 3-400 acres. It’s not that big of a farm. I bet it’s not even a quarter section. But then they found out, because they went out and- So we drove out of there.

And then we were out down in Percy Priest Park, which was really nice. And, and a couple of the land use committee were out looking for land. And they went to buy strings for a guitar, one of the guys there at the old Taylor place over here said, “Oh well, you can go park over there if you want to. And maybe we will sell it to you, because we are selling the land.”

And so we all went over there and the neighbors closed the road, so we had to make a road into it. Had to cut it through and swamps. So there were a couple places where we had about twenty guys on either side. You’d drive your bus down into the swamp where everybody would lift up the bus and push it up the hill. And my old bus was the kind that if it had the right kind of tires it would have gone up a 90-degree angle. It was, it was solid. And it just went through easy. It was no problem. (DC laughs) So we parked over there, down in this field down by the creek. And chose some spots on that.

And then this land came out for sale. And it was really reasonable. And they were ready to sell. There was no things. So we bought this thousand acres. We just paid cash for it because we had enough money between us all to just buy it.

This- we set up a- this head of the roads we’d have square dances up here. And then we bought the other thousand acres about a year later. 1,100 acres next to it from Grady Walker. And we paid twice as much. We paid $75 an acre for this place and $150 for the other one- which was still a real deal. (both laugh)

The thing here is that the land here is not that good. It’s okay for pasture and trees. It’s a wind-blown loss (?) over hard-pan. (traffic noise) So the topsoil is pretty thin and we’ve had to build it up, but it would take centuries to build it up right. But some of those things we grow-we’ve got some pretty good garden spots, but it’s not a normally thing where you could do that. We learned a lot about it. I know we had 40-acre bushel- 40 bushels an acre corn and wheat and I said, “You know, that’s pretty bad!” (laughs) You know, in Indiana you were puny if you were getting 150 bushels. (laughs) But-

So, we did that, but we found it was cheaper to buy it- to buy organic stuff than for us raising it here on this bad land. So we started doing that and soybeans. Even, even soybeans don’t do that well here.

DC: Yeah, there’s a bit of a learning curve to farming as well.

EB: Oh, really. Really. And you know, we’ve really got a good bunch of blueberries, but we really need to have more attention to them, but we raise enough to be able to give them to everybody. Everything they can eat blueberries in. Sell them to the neighbors. But I was looking at that and I just thought, “Oh golly, I’m just not strong enough anymore to do what needs to be done out here. But this needs some serious clean up work.” (laughs)

DC: I’m going to go back a little bit.

EB: Okay.

DC: Can you tell me about living, like, what it was like in— transient on the caravan? Like, were you camping? Were you living in a bus with- you said seven other people? What was that like?

EB: It was really fun. I had- we had put in a kitchen and a little gas stove, like the one that had given me the trouble before, but it was a lovely little stove. And we used a- buckets and we dumped them- for toilets. And wherever we stopped used the toilets. We used the buckets as little as possible.

DC: Yeah.

EB: And we had a teeny a little California wood stove for heat in the bus, and there was no heat because it was a bus. So when the driver would be driving and we went up across the mountains and it would be cold. You know, you’d have blankets all around you and a Coleman stove, you know, with somebody watching it so you didn’t catch on fire and things like that to keep you warm. And you wear a lot of clothes when you’re not in that area. You know, and we didn’t have a fire in the little stove when we were running, because that would have been stupid. And didn’t have the propane on in the- in the- but actually lived- it was comfortable. Let’s see, we had ten people on the bus regularly and then we would have hitchhikers. And at night we’d pull the platforms out across the aisles and they’d sleep underneath. And then there was a back platform and there were five of us sleeping on that. And- and the front platform I think there were four or five. (birdsong) So we usually had twelve people on the bus.

DC: Did everyone get along pretty well? I mean, that’s close quarters.

EB: Yeah, actually. You know, I don’t remember any serious fights. We just talked about whatever we were talking about and stayed high. And it was fun as I remember. And we’d- we’d like get into circles and vibe. And one time we were doing that and I had my present husband was one of our hitchhikers occasionally and I always liked it when he came on. I never wanted him to go off. And so we had one of those circles and it was like electricity between us. And so that’s when I kicked the other guy off the bus (DC laughs) and kept Joe. And he felt it too. (traffic noise) I mean, it was obvious. And so-

DC: Was Liam with you as well?

EB: Yeah, he was three.

DC: What was it like having a small child?

EB: It was fine. He was not a problem really. He was a good kid. He was very high energy, took a lot of work. And to keep him clean- I had a great big bread bowl and that’s what I’d wash him in everyday. (DC laughs) And when it would rain, we’d all run out and get suds and hope it would rain long enough (DC laughs) so we could rinse.

DC: Did you ever miss? Did it-

EB: Oh yeah! (DC laughs) And then we would have to get water and pour it over us, you know. We were always ready for that. (DC laughs) But it was so much better to have the rain do it. And- the first thing we did was we built a community shower at the head of the roads. Put down- what is it? Anyway- we put down the wooden platforms, you know, what is that called? That they put crates and stuff on when you’re shipping?

DC: Oh, yeah.

EB: It’s just slipped my mind. But anyway.

DC: Pallets.

EB: We put pallets down. And put some hoses up over a thing and closed it off. And we all took showers in that and boy- was that a luxury. (DC laughs) Oh my god. It was so nice. Then some folks figured out how to do solar showers and sometimes we’d even get to have warm showers.

DC: Oooo.

EB: But by then we’d started to move into our areas. We’d put our bus over by where- well you haven’t been here enough. So it wasn’t too far down there. And they took the motor and the platform off the bus and the tires out and turned it into a lumber truck because it was just such a sturdy old bus. It ran for- I don’t know- ten years like that.

And we just had the shell and our floor. And we carpeted it, the whole thing. So, it [had a] sort of insulation, but not too much. But in the summer, under the shade with all the windows open, it wasn’t bad. (traffic noise)

That’s where I had Jethro, in the bus.

DC: What year was that? (traffic noise)

EB: That was ‘72. That was a year after we got here.

DC: And that was with your husband- your now husband?

EB: Yeah, Joe.

DC: It’s Joel?

EB: Joe.

DC: Joe.

EB: I never thought I’d marry a Joe. Good grief. (both laugh) Joseph. And we had a calico cat that we tossed out and she’d stomp up on the roof of the bus while I was having the baby. (EB imitates loud cat yowling, laughs) Joe was just. And he-

I learned a lot then because I was sitting leaned up against him and he had his arms around me. He was rubbing my legs and he rubbed my leg wrong. And it pissed me off. And then it started to hurt! I said, “Oh, being pissed off, it hurts!” So I said, “I can’t be pissed off.” So, I learned that one. (laughs) And so- it didn’t take as long as- like it had taken three days to do Liam. It took about six or seven hours to do Jethro and he was nine lbs. He was a nice big healthy baby. I like these big healthy babies. (DC laughs)

And then I Shelley at another place. We’d been living in a tent. And then we’d made an addition to the tent out of plastic and put styrofoam in it and called it the plastic bag. (DC laughs) But I got pneumonia. So I went and moved into a house and-

DC: You got it while you were pregnant or while-

EB: Before I had the baby- but when it was time they moved me into a house- because it was- and they were putting up a phone there. And I was in having the baby and this guy was taking hours and pounding and putting up the phone. And finally the midwife said, “You know, you’re into the juice. You don’t need to be here.” And kicked him out. It was so- and the light in the room just (makes a motion and noise) far out. Because I didn’t mind him being in there but he wasn’t bothering me, I didn’t think. But it was definitely, it was definitely taking off all of the energy- and wasting it because he was not able to get the phone in and it should have taken a minute.

DC: What year was that? That you had Shelley?

EB: ‘76. And then-

DC: So there were, like, already established midwifery-

EB: Oh, yeah. The midwifes got started on the first caravan area around.

DC: Oh, okay.

EB: They’d had babies born on- coming again on this one. And Ida May lost a baby in Nebraska.

DC: Was that a miscarriage or after?

EB: He was born premature, but he died right after he was born. But I’d heard her in my mind when he died. That was- it was so hard. And I said that, “Oh, the baby died.” And Joe said, “It was premature.” You know, guys just don’t understand. Even as sweet as they are, some of them- they just don’t understand. I didn’t insist, you know. I just knew he wasn’t connected that way.

But that was a real- that part- My friend Susan and I had decided we were going to fast for three days, just a spiritual fast, and then we got into North Platt and we hit a blizzard. (background noise) I mean it was a real blizzard. You didn’t move. The snow was- in the place that we parked- it was clear up over the tops of the buses tires. It was huge. So- Oh, the townspeople said, “Oh this whole caravan of people are out there and no food!” So they all brought like these big pots of potato soup and cans of food (motions to show commercial sized cans) this big, gave them to everybody. I mean, we ate on that food for months afterwards. (both laugh) And it was so sweet. So I walked in and there is Susan eating french toast. I said, “Oh shit, I’m not going to fast.” (both laugh) I was so pissed at her, but then I started eating too. I love potato soup! (both laugh) And it was good! What-Whoever was making it was some kind of good cooks.

1:49:29

DC: So, you talked about- that’s an interesting, because you- two of the places you referenced: one, the people were very accommodating and they came out to take care of you, and in another place, you were talking about in Arkansas when there were issues where they wouldn’t let black people in-

EB: Right.

DC: What were some of your other experiences, like, whenever you guys would stop to, like- how were the communities around you react?

EB: Well, it was interesting because we’d- every time we’d go across a state line, you know, the cops would be there. Then they’d let us go through. Generally, people would be nervous sometimes. I know one time a friend of mine had come onto our bus, he was young, trying to decide whether he was going to come on the caravan or whether he was going to stay with this group that did some kind of emotional venting. And he said, “I’m coming with you guys. They tore my shirt.” (laughs) And he always wore- he was dark and he had a dark beard. I think he was about eighteen. He was really young and he wore really dark clothes. I use to tease- I said, “John, I’m going to get you in a pair of red pants someday.” He said, “Yeah, in your dreams.”

You know, so- We got lost. And we were up in this muddy little town and John said, “Oh there’s somebody. I’ll go ask them where we are.” He jumps out and there was this girl and she saw him and she ran like mad! She goes, “Aaaahhh!!!” (laughs) He says, “Oh, I guess I am dressed a little dark.” (both laugh) I said, “You scared that poor little girl to death.” (laughs) But we found out where we were and finally got on the right track.

But- Coming across- coming across the bridge into Marron, Marron County- Marin- that’s what it is. We had some hitchhikers and they broke our front bed down. And so we had to stop and fix it before- so, we were behind the caravan when we went over Donner’s Pass. It was nine degrees below zero. (laughs) And I was still with the other guy. And we camped there and it was cold. Then we went on down and everybody else was down in Las Vegas washing their buses. (laughs) And going swimming!

So, then when we got to Wyoming, by that time I’d kicked what’s-his-face off. So, we’d stopped in- Steven’s bus broke down and so we were out in Meridian, you know? And the wind was blowing fierce. And I said- When we had come up from San Francisco- when Susan and I had seen seven rainbows on the way up. And we said, “Well, this must be the rainbow bus.” So I said, “Well, I’m going to paint the bus now while we are not going any place.” So- turned the bus so that the wind was blowing against one side and I was on the lead side. Joe would hold the string and it was so cold that I could mix the paint real thin. And put it on there and it froze quickly to it and didn’t drip. So I put on this big rainbow about this thick. And then we turned the bus around (DC laughs) and I did the other side.

Then we had to go in and get groceries- so, we stopped and got groceries at this little place and we started to pay and the guy said, “That woman back there paid for your groceries.” I said, “Oh, that’s really sweet.” So I went to talk to her and it turns out that she and her husband had a KOA. And she said, “Just be real quiet. My husband won’t like it very much, but you can come and park there and have a shower.” And so, we did and we got our first real shower in a long time. You know? It was lovely, with hot water and everything. (laughs)

And then we parked down in a bunch of little trees. I mean, and it was my birthday so Susan had made me a cake. So I was- this was lovely. We had such a lovely time and we stayed in touch with that woman for months. (laughs) -for months afterwards. Years actually, and she was so sweet. You know, to let a bunch of hippies come and camp on her KOA- for free.

DC: How did you guys keep in touch when you’d gotten separated, like you talked about your bus had to lay back- how did you keep in touch with the caravan to know where they’d gone?

EB: Well, we just knew that they were heading in that direction and then we’d ask people if they’d seen it. It was obvious what it was. You know, you don’t see a bunch of - of long haired hippies in painted buses going down the road without noticing. (both laugh) So we caught up with them pretty fast actually.

DC: Okay.

EB: And like I said, I never had any trouble with my bus. We often were the people that went around and got other buses started. Because it was just one of those old Internationals. It was like a real old mule. Just never breaks down, always goes. It was never fast. We couldn’t keep up with the front, but we kept up. (laughs)

DC: Sounds like a good bus.

EB: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DC: Do you remember any of the other- you called your bus the rainbow bus. Do you remember any of the other ones or if they had themes or-?

EB: Yeah, well there was another rainbow bus. It was blue with a little rainbow. And that was one of our midwives’ bus. They’re still here, Pamela and Leslie. And Pamela says, “How come you’re getting a rainbow bus too?” And I said, “Because we saw seven rainbows, it was obvious.” You know? I said, “Mine’s different. It’s a white bus with a rainbow, while yours is a blue bus with a little rainbow.” So- she said, “Okay, that’s fine.” (both laugh) I said, “I wasn’t copying you.” I was just- it was just what we had to do and I trimmed the- the bus was trimmed in purple. So it was white with purple trim and a big rainbow down the side- it was obvious. It was the rainbow bus.

DC: How many other people- you had talked about there was the first caravan and then the second- and then they came back-

EB: Yeah.

DC: How many people were you traveling with at any given time, do you know?

EB: I think we had a little under 400, maybe a little over 300 people when we landed out there. And that stayed pretty much until we got up to about 500 and then it sort of ballooned. We went up to about 2,000 people and that was way too many. It was not easy to integrate. We were trampling on the land. It was hard to find blackberries and stuff. And it was hard on the mushrooms because there were a lot of mushrooms. I know when we first camped out at the old- when we set up our outhouse at the old Taylor place, where we first landed, I’d walk down to the outhouse and when I’d come out- there’d be mushrooms growing all along the path and I’d collect them. They were big boletus mushrooms. Really juicy. I mean, portabella has got nothing on these. And if you don’t catch them quick, the bugs will get them really fast. But it was like everyday. I’d go down, and there wouldn’t be any mushrooms, I’d come back and there’d be all these mushrooms. And sometimes I’d come down and the mushrooms would already be up- so I would pick them then, because I knew. And we ate high on the mushroom stem there for a while. We had mushrooms for breakfast everyday.

DC: Did you guys do a lot of foraging?

EB: Oh, yeah.

DC: Do you still do that?

EB: Not as much. I use to do a lot of foraging. I use to go out and I would gather the greens. We never- we never- we never suffered from greens.

(motions to swat away insect) Get away.

We, we had this thing called wheat berry winter, where people were just, you know, boiling the wheat, but we had a hand-mill. So we never- Joe didn’t like wheat berries. I didn’t mind them, but I really preferred pancakes better. And, and we would grind up the wheat and then when we had buckwheat, which I love and you know, buckwheat has an oil in it. So I could make buckwheat pancakes without a lot of oil. And if I had the, the griddle seasoned we’d have buckwheat pancakes. Oh, man. I love buckwheat. I never got tired of it. But everybody said, “Oh no, we’ve got some wheat flour.” I don’t care. I want buckwheat. (laughs) Just ornery every time.

What time is it anyway?

DC: It is 4:35. And we are just at the two-hour mark, so if you want to.

EB: I think I’d better quit because if I’m going to go to the party-

DC: Same. (laughs)

EB: And if you’re going to get to your party, I think we are done. (laughs)

DC: Yeah, this is a good place to wrap up. You guys just arrived to the farm.

EB: Yeah.

1. Gymkhana is an equestrian event consisting of speed pattern racing and timed games for riders on horses. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In 2017, the cheapest studio apartments in Sausalito Bay rent for about $2,000 a month. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)