

Voices of Dixon: Touffic Haddad

From the book
Voices of Dixon:
Oral Histories from the Embudo Valley
Interviews and Editing by Harvey Frauenglass
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Interviewed September 21, 2003

Growing Up In Toledo

I grew up in Toledo, Ohio. My dad's father had come over from what is Lebanon now, but was Syria then. Ohio had a big Lebanese population and I had lots of cousins and uncles and aunts. My mom's family was much smaller, but they were close. The brother and two sisters saw each other every weekend. They got together at each other's houses and played cards and talked and were very social. I mostly grew up with my mother's family.

My dad was sort of a black sheep in his family. He didn't go to church. That was the Syrian Orthodox Church with the pontiff in Constantinople, Pope Gregory, the last time I looked. My dad was a gambler and he was always in trouble. He would socialize with his family for weddings and funerals, but he didn't visit because he owed everybody. And a lot of that ethnic group were gamblers, and his cousins and brothers were always fighting with each other. But a

lot of them were business people, too. They had family businesses and were a fairly well-to-do middle class group.

My Mom's family didn't fit any description. My mother's mother was a minister in a spiritualist church. When she was young, she worked fairs as a reader. Her husband was a tattoo artist and together they did tattoos and readings. That was before I was born. When I was born she was still in business and she saw people at the house. She held seances and gave readings. Her specialty was finding lost objects or people. Women would come to her who had lost their wedding rings. Some had missing husbands. The husband went out for a ham sandwich. The sandwich came back, but the husband didn't. Is the person alive? They would want to know.

My grandmother lived with us, and that's how I grew up. My dad was in and out all the time. He worked as a shoe salesman and he was very good. But his gambling would overcome him. He would write bad checks and he would have to leave. Then he would use his talents in the shoe business and when he had enough money to pay off his debts, he would call the district attorney, who was a friend of his, and get him to intercede, pick up all the bad checks and pay them. And then my dad could come back and work again and we would live some kind of regular life for awhile.

The gambling went on all the time, but certain things would set him off. Relatives might be coming from out of state and he would want to show them a good time. But he might not have any money. Sometimes he would go out and make a fortune. More often, under that kind of pressure, he would get into what has come to be known as degenerative gambling. You gamble until you lose everything. You cannot win. My dad was the charismatic character. He made friends instantly. Everybody knew him. He was charming. But when he got into that kind of gambling, that's all there was. Everything else was secondary. Love meant nothing, family meant nothing, friends meant nothing. And it went on until he would wake up, which was when he hit the bottom. By that time he would have bad checks written, money borrowed, money stolen from the employer.

Gone again.

So I grew up mostly with my mom, my grandmother, and my mother's sister. I stayed a lot at my aunt's little place in the country and that's where I got my love for ditches, weeds, bugs, frogs, railroad trains, and stuff like that. I loved to go out chopping little paths through the weeds and catching snakes, feeding flies to spiders, playing in the ditches by the railroad tracks. I would entertain myself for days.

High School Days

I was a smart kid. I didn't study a lot, but schoolwork was not hard for me. I was always in trouble in school because I was a big yacker. I was clownish, I liked attention, so I was cutting up and having problems. When I got in high school, I had a chemistry professor who I loved. I named my son Brad after him, Mr. Bradford. I liked that guy so much and he really piqued my interest in chemistry. In Ohio they had state scholarship tests. They called them the Bowling Green tests because they were administered by Bowling Green College. All the seniors in the state take the same test on the same day. The top three in the school, in whatever subject, get to go to a regional competition and take another test. The top students there go to the state finals. I never got past the regional, but in my own school I was the top student in biology and chemistry. When I graduated they gave me the Bausch-Lomb Science Award for excellence in science. I had been elected to the National Honor Society in my junior year. But I wasn't like a straight A student; I wasn't a studier.

Then I got into college with people who were really smart. You weren't dealing with the hoi polloi out there. I went to a big high school, close to three thousand students, though my graduating class was around two hundred—a lot of attrition. I wasn't a good student; I wasn't particularly interested in most subjects—I just wanted to get good grades. Then when I got out of college and went to work, I met people who were really brilliant. I thought I didn't belong there. I felt

like a factory worker. I wasn't brilliant, I wasn't even particularly smart; I was maybe a little clever. I could read and memorize, but concepts were something else.

Life Before Dixon

I came here from California. I had been living in a commune associated with the Hearshire School in San Francisco. Before that I had been working for Shell Oil in Martinez, California as a chemist and I had a conflict that I didn't know what to do about. It was during the Vietnam War. To me the war was like murder and I was protesting on weekends and then, during the week, I was involved in sending ships off to Vietnam to support the war. But this was my living and I had a wife and two young kids whom I was providing a life for. There were deep divisions and I was very upset. Many of the people I worked with thought the war was a good thing. So finally, in 1967 or 1968, I dropped out of that life.

I had been at Shell for about two years. I had come from Detroit where I was working in electroplating. I was a field-electroplating chemist; I did trouble-shooting for a large organization, M&T Chemicals. They had customers all over the country and when there was a problem, I would fly out to try and help them with their processing, using our stuff. But I was very unhappy in Detroit. It was a very racist, low-brow town. Lots of problems, lots of murders. Even then in the Sixties your kids couldn't walk to school. You had to walk them because of the weirdo drive-by shootings. Right after we left Detroit the great race riots erupted, in Newark, Detroit, and Watts.

So I wanted to get out of Detroit. I had been reading in the papers about the hippies, the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, and the exciting things happening on the West Coast. I took off a couple of weeks from work and flew out to look for a job. At first I was looking for work in aerospace in southern California. Then I met a personnel guy who said that Shell in Martinez was looking for a chemist, and I was so thrilled to go up there in the Bay Area where

all the exciting things were happening.

But the racism was the same. We were living in all-white Concord, in the East Bay, and the teachers in the schools were telling my daughter that the blacks in Oakland, the next city over, were seething and might explode and come out and kill them. I would talk to my daughter, who didn't want to go to school anyway, and tell her not to believe what she was hearing; it was not right. Then she said, "Why do you make me go there, then? If you're going to tell me not to believe them, why do you make me go there?" Well, that was the beginning of the end for me. I decided I had to do something different. If I wanted to keep my daughter, I had to take her out of the public school.

Our friends felt the same, about racism, about the war, and everything else in the society. We all quit our positions. I sold my house. And we got together in various vehicles and started caravanning up the coast. We visited communes in California, Oregon, and Washington. Then some of the group wanted to look for land even further north, up in the Feather River country in Canada. We were there in summer, and it was daylight at midnight. I didn't want to live in a country where it was daylight at midnight. So we drove across Canada and went down to visit my parents in Ohio, drove on back to San Francisco, got an apartment with some people and started looking for some place to put kids in school. There were some free schools there. We went to one and the director said, "Last year we had fifty kids. This year we have fifty signed up and another hundred on the waiting list. Everything is chaotic; it's really a mess." Then he said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Here's the waiting list. Get a hold of these people and start your own school. You're going to do as good as we're doing."

Starting a Free School

So we got hold of families on the waiting list and found that a lot of people had the same idea. We had a meeting on Church Street where several people with kids were living. We found there were

many people like us—they had quit their jobs or were still working but didn't like what they were doing. We decided we would get housing and live together and have our own shire school, after *The Hobbit*; that would be the center of the communal houses. We called ours the Hearthshire School, since our meeting was in the basement of Hearth Church. Not everyone wanted to do that, but that didn't matter because we didn't have any rules. We didn't know what we wanted to do; we were experimenting. People were taking a lot of LSD and there were a lot of far-out ideas and weird stuff going on.

At first we rented a building on Shotwell Street in San Francisco, but we were chased out because of fire regulations. We had several buildings over the years. Then we finally asked, "Why do we need a building? We could meet in Mission Dolores Park." So we considered the city our schoolroom. When it rained, we did other activities. We went out to various artists and craftspeople and hippies, communes and lawyers—anybody that would take us in, let us sit down and chat and watch what they did, see what was going on. We came to look at ourselves as the cradle-to-grave elementary school.

At the peak we may have had 120 students. We had a regular population and then people would come in, do some things, and then move on. People saw what we were doing, liked it, and came in because they wanted to teach, even if they didn't have kids. There were no salaries, no compensation. We had constant meetings and many different ideas, but we were always working things out. Welfare was a big help. A lot of women went on welfare and we pooled our checks to pay rents. Mothers with children got more money, whatever they needed. But some mothers kept their own checks and took care of their own kids. It was the kind of atmosphere where nobody was commanded to do anything. Everything was subject to be worked out on the spot, or never. Consensus was sort of the object, but whether any consensus was ever reached, I can't even remember, but sometimes it probably was. There was sort of tacit consensus; people were still arguing against an idea but they decided

to go along and see what would happen

What do you think your kids learned from this school?

I have a daughter who's going to be forty-one and a son who's going to be thirty-eight. They were six and three when they started in the Hearthshire School. Over the years I've gone through many changes in my thinking about the process, whether or not I ruined them by not giving them a "regular" life. My feeling at the time was I didn't want to send them to public school. I didn't want to mold them into a society where the mind-set was to follow instructions, no matter what: blindly go to war, blindly destroy the environment, and where the mind-set was greed, so that getting ahead was the whole purpose of life. What I wanted to teach was think for yourself. Learn some skills and then you can decide what you want to do. I'm still in contact with a lot of kids from that era and I don't know that my kids would have turned out any different if I had stayed as a chemist and raised them in the middle class. You get a certain amount of drug addicts, a certain amount of bums, a certain amount that will be brain scientists, or go work in Europe, or any of the things that have happened in that group.

Coming to New Mexico

Our group was given land in Corvallis, California and we set up a commune and school and I lived there with my wife and the kids for quite a while. But the strain of communal living and open marriage was leading to a split-up in our family. And I had been arrested a couple of times for possession of marijuana. In California, your first arrest is a misdemeanor. The second is called "possession with a prior" and it's a felony with a minimum sentence of one year upon conviction. The only reason I didn't go to jail after the second arrest was that I went to the arresting officer's house and pleaded with him. That was the kind of thing only a hippie would think of. I told him, "You're going to put me in jail and I have a wife and two kids.

You're going to force my wife on to welfare and leave my kids without a father to take care of them. Is that what society wants? And for what? I had a joint in my pocket. I wasn't hurting anybody."

Well, it came down to the last day of the trial, and the arresting officer was supposed to testify, but he didn't come. The judge and the prosecutor were fuming. They called everywhere, but they couldn't find him. So they had to dismiss the case. I never saw the officer again, but I think that he got into a lot of trouble over that. Anyway, that's one of the things that made me decide I was leaving California.

I knew a guy living in Ojo Sarco, Claude Hayward, so I decided to drive to New Mexico. This was in 1973. My daughter, then about eleven, came with me. My son, age eight, stayed with his mother. I was driving through Española and there were cars parked on the side of the road and guys were sitting on the hoods drinking. And there was another guy tying off and shooting heroin. I said to myself, "Boy, it doesn't look like there's a lot of police around here." You heard of people shooting each other and threatening each other with guns. But I thought I'd much rather deal with my neighbor who's yelling at me and holding a gun than deal with the police and be arrested and go to prison. I was scared of going to prison in California and here I felt safe.

The Local Drug Culture

When I first came, I lived in Chamisal. What surprised me was the use of heroin. In dealing with the free school we saw a lot of junkies, kids who were basically parentless because their parents were on another trip and didn't have much time for the kids. So we took in a lot of those kids and worked with them. But here, there was so much heroin up and down the road from Ojo Sarco to Dixon. More than I had ever seen in San Francisco, and it was all so open, like the Wild West. There was a big contingent from Topanga Canyon in California, Charles Manson-types. There was a woman

who had gone to prison with Manson. You could tell they were there because all of their names are carved on the vigas. In Topanga Canyon these guys all took LSD and became gurus for a while. Then they got to northern New Mexico where heroin was so plentiful and it became a big junkie scene. Eventually they were having helicopter drops in Apodaca, right across the river from where I was living. That was nasty. There was so much thieving, so many break-ins and stealing. I remember that every time Goat Patty left the house, the junkies would break in and rip everything off. We were protected in Cañoncito because we lived in a compound. But if you were living alone, those guys would wait in the hills and watch. Every time you went to the Post Office they would come down and rip off your stuff and go sell it over in Velarde. I remember they stole Sandy Brown's weaving loom and it was sitting

there in Velarde; right on the highway.

Some local guys were involved in the heroin scene too. There was a house right on the highway in Dixon where you could buy heroin. There was a guy who had been busted running heroin to the white-collar addicts in Los Alamos. At first I used to go there. They were smoking marijuana and selling some speed and you could hang out and meet the local guys. But eventually it just became heroin and it wasn't my trip and I didn't like the atmosphere. The young guys were getting totally into the heroin scene. There was a group in town, including Tomás and Amos Atencio, who hated what was going on there. They felt these people were stealing the Chicano culture, taking the best of the young people and turning them into addicts. La Academia was very much against what was going on in the heroin scene. They were threatening the pushers. There were shootings and car burnings. La Academia sort of saved the hippies because we had been fair game for the heroin addicts and traffickers. We were not armed, for the most part. We were fairly non-violent, so we were marks to be stolen from at every opportunity.

All this heroin stuff took place a little later. But when I first got

here, I was living in my truck, with my daughter, traveling around, meeting people, stopping for a few days here and there and helping out. We stayed up in Chamisal with Paz Lopez and his wife. All their kids had gone to California and they were happy to have someone pick apples and work around the farm. And I was interested in the land.

I also used to come down to the Chilton's in Cañoncito; the "Chilton Hilton". Roger Chilton was a music guy and people came there to play music, for three days, five days, seven days. Roger would pick up every hitch-hiker he would see and bring them home and they would stay for however long.

Roger was originally from California. He had come to New Mexico to live in a commune in Placitas. Then they were moving to New York where he got a job cooking for the Paragon, a famous macrobiotic restaurant. On the way they stopped in Española and met a guy who asked if they wanted to buy some land in Dixon. They took his name and phone number and went on to New York. After six months they found they had saved a thousand dollars. So they called the guy back and asked if he still had the land for sale. He said yes, and Roger said, "Okay, we're going to come out and buy it." So they bought this land. Then Jane, who had lived with the Chiltons in San Francisco, came here and bought the house in front of theirs. Janet was living in the other house in the compound with her three children. I was living in my truck and traveling around in those days and Janet was on my route; I would chop firewood and do other things for her, stay a couple of days, hang out with the Chiltons, and then go somewhere else.

"The space ships are landing!"

Janet's house had only one room, eight by sixteen, and she was living there with her three kids. The entire furnishings were a rug, a wood cook stove, and a laundry basket. They slept on the floor on mats, and then rolled them up during the day. And Janet knew a lot of people and had a lot of company. People would come by all the

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time and spend the night. We all had to go to bed at the same time. We would roll out the mats and everybody would be there like cord wood laying the short way across the room. But it worked, you know; it worked. Those were the times of great comings and goings. The hippies were traveling and visiting. Everybody knew everybody else from somewhere and we would visit each other and share whatever we had. It was fun times.

Janet was a remarkable woman. One night while I was visiting there this couple came to visit and decided to stay over. But they didn't want to sleep in that room with so many people, so they said, "We'll take our sleeping bags and go down and sleep in the orchard." Then about one o'clock in the morning they came running into the room, breathless, "The space ships, the space ships! They're coming right over the hill and they're landing in the orchard!"

I said to myself, "Well, I don't know about this; I've got to see this."

Janet said, "Oh. Well, I'll get up, and I'll put on water for tea." (Laughs) So she got up and did put on water for tea and I went with Bruce and Helaine crawling through the grass down to the orchard. It was dark, there was no moon, but you could see the outline of the hills across the river behind Apodaca. So we're lying there and all of a sudden I saw this light coming over the hills above Apodaca, coming down, really close. They really were seeing something. Then another one, and another one. And all of a sudden I got it: it was fireflies. You know if you look at the perspective, it could seem the lights were coming over the hills across the river. But in reality the lights were right there in the orchard, flying around and landing just a few feet in front of us. So we all went back up to the house and drank tea. No aliens that night.

Li Po

Janet's house is right on the acequia and she had wanted me to build fence around the house to protect the kids, especially her youngest, Li Po, who was one year old and starting to walk, or rather

run as fast as he could in whatever direction he was headed. I didn't want to build a fence. It was in the fall and I told her that the ditch would only be running another month and we could keep the baby safe for that long. Well, one day Janet was taking antibiotics and wasn't feeling good and said she had to lie down. She left Aaron, her older boy, and me in charge of watching Li. Pretty soon Li was missing and everybody started looking for him. Some went to the road. Some went to the river. I just jumped in the ditch and followed it. I found him, stuck under the bridge at Padbergs', face down in the water. I knew he was dead, but I threw him up on the bridge and started giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. There were two guys picking apples in the orchard. They came over to see what was going on. They immediately stopped what they were doing, got their truck, picked me up and drove us to the Embudo Presbyterian Hospital (which now is the clinic.) There was a Nicaraguan doctor at the hospital and he and the nurses did all kinds of things to bring the baby around, like cutting the jugular vein and injecting sodium carbonate. I went in the other room and just prayed that they wouldn't succeed, because it would have been very bad.

Then the guys went back to Dixon and brought Janet to the hospital. Here were we in the room with the dead baby. I said to Janet, "What would you like me to do with the child?" By that I meant what kind of funeral arrangements would she like me to make.

She said, "I'd like to take him home."

So I went to talk to the doctor and said, "The mother is here and she'd like to take the baby home."

The doctor said, "There it is." I couldn't believe it. In California you'd have to sign papers and you still probably would never be able to get custody of the body yourself without going through some legal channel.

Well, we picked the body up and took it home in the pickup truck. The little community in Cañoncito came together and we went out and dug a grave in the back yard, wrapped him in a clean sheet, and buried him. The baby's father, who was living with another woman

in Colorado, came down for the funeral.

Then Janet couldn't stay in the house any more. She blamed herself for the baby's death. He was buried under her window and she said she heard him calling her at night. The baby's father and his girl friend invited Janet to come up and stay with them. It was still those days when people could do that. She asked me if I would like to stay in her house. Winter was coming on. I had no place to stay, so I said sure, I would do it. So Janet went up to Colorado to live with them. That was in 1973.

Making Adobes In Dixon

Roger came up and started teaching me about adobes. "If you're going to live in this place, you better put up a parapet." So I started making adobe bricks. I remember my daughter was helping me. She was eleven. I laid a plank against the wall up to the roof. I went up on the roof and she put the adobe brick in a bread pan. I let down a rope, she tied it around the bread pan, and I pulled it up the plank. Then while I was up there mudding the adobe into the parapet she would put another brick in the bread pan. I said to myself, "Is this great? I can dig a little hole, put in some water, put in some straw, stomp on it, and build a house!" I was thrilled. I wouldn't even have to go to the store to buy something. It was like I was in some other world. Whoever thought of this great thing. This was like a great technical advance. (Laughs)

You see, I was never a construction guy. I didn't know how to saw wood. But I could stamp my feet in the straw and mud and then take a shovel and throw the mix into the mold. Then stacking the bricks was like building with blocks, Tinker Toys.

Then I learned how to go around and get other materials. I would see buildings that were falling down and I would ask the people if I could have the materials if I would take down the building for them. I would get window frames and bricks and chicken wire with plaster hanging on it, and I would take it all home and use it to build up the

place. And I had this 1960 GMC truck that had been part of the San Francisco Examiner newspaper fleet. I had no money to fix it when it would breakdown. But there were a lot of old Chevy trucks around here, so I would just walk until I could find the part I needed on a truck abandoned along the road or a wrecked truck in somebody's yard. Then I would go up to the house and ask. "You know, I really need a brake drum for my truck. Do you think I could take a drum off that wrecked truck in your yard?"

The guy would say, "Sure, bro, take it away." And that was how I drove around for years, getting parts and fixing the truck. Then that all stopped when the Hickmans had their truck-smashing business in Alcalde and started hauling away the junked cars and trucks for scrap steel. That must have been in the early 1980s when the price of metal went way up. For me that was the end of the great stash of old parts.

"Mrs. Trujillo didn't like hippies."

So the death of that baby was what got me to Cañoncito. It started as just a temporary thing, but Janet never really came back. She moved from Colorado to New Buffalo, got a new guy and had another baby. I had no money except for some unemployment insurance I was still getting from when I had worked in California. So I went down to Española to apply for food stamps. Mrs. Trujillo was the food stamp coordinator. She did not like hippies and she did not like giving food stamps to hippies, but she did not mind at all giving them to the young Chicano guys. Well, I was hanging with some young Chicanos and we would all go down together to get our stamps. They couldn't even remember the phony names they were using to get their food stamps, so Mrs. Trujillo would have to prompt them to use the right name. (Laughs) But then when it came my turn, it was "How much money did you earn last month?"

"None."

"Well, how could you live if you didn't earn any money?"

So I started making up stories about earning a little money. But in fact I did do some odd jobs—fencing, wiring, plastering, and I made

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a few bucks, but not much. What I told, though, was that when people broke down on the highway, I would fix their cars and they would pay me. But they didn't live around here, so she couldn't check up on me.

There was a woman living around here whose taken name was Raspberry. She married a guy named Michael Pear. She went down to the office to get food stamps and gave her name, Raspberry Pear. That was too much for Mrs. Trujillo. "I know that's not your name! You're just trying to cheat!"

My real name is not Touffic. It is Jeffrey Mitchell Touffic Haddad. Touffic was my father's father's brother. My grandfather was long dead, but his brother Touffic lived there in Toledo where we lived and he was very nice to my mother, who was not Arabic. My mother loved this kind man so much that she wanted to name me after him. So that's how I got Touffic as a middle name. I was known as Jeff all my life and I wouldn't tell anyone my name was Touffic because I got laughed at in school. When I was a young kid the teacher would ask you to give your full name and I would say "Jeffrey Mitchell Touffic Haddad" and the kids would call me toothpick, toothache, toothless, and it just went on and on for the rest of the year. I got to be very guarded about my name; I never would let anyone know it. I graduated from high school in Toledo and went to University of Toledo as Jeff Haddad. Then Jeff Haddad left Ohio and worked in Michigan. In California everyone knew me as Jeff Haddad. That's on my Social Security card, my credit cards, and my driver's license. Then one night I was sitting around with a young woman in San Francisco just before we left and I told her what my name was. I was stoned, and I told her in confidence. Her name was Midnight. She was someone who had been to New Mexico, one of the hippies who went back to California to get wealth to bring back to New Mexico. I made her promise never to tell anyone, or even mention it. But she couldn't wait to tell everyone! "That's a nice name," she said.

When I came out to New Mexico, I was broken-hearted over

splitting up with my wife. I felt she was my partner for life. I believed in that kind of relationship, and here it was gone. Then came the name. I didn't want to be Jeff Haddad anymore and I didn't have to be. So I started telling everybody my name was Touffic. Midnight had already told people; the name was out of the bag. I was a little hesitant at first because it was an odd-sounding name. *Is it Arabic?* Yes, but in Arabic it's not spelled that way. I have two cousins with the name and everyone calls them Tewfy, for Tewfiq. But when my mother was in hospital and the nurse asked her how to spell the name, not being Arabic she didn't have a clue. So she spelled it Touffic. In Arabic it's pronounced more like Toó-fick. But I answer to whatever. And people spell it however they spell it. I never correct anybody. I do a lot of business with the Forest Service and I have to leave my name for a call back. "Tell him Touffic Haddad called."

"You'll have to spell that," the person says. So I spell it out, every letter. Actually, even when I was Jeff Haddad, I had to spell out Haddad, H-a-d-d-a-d.

Living In the Compound

I lived in Janet's house about two years. Jane was living next door with Anthony Kaluta, the father of her son, Moe. They were big fighters. I would come home late at night and I would walk by their bedroom window, which was right on the driveway, and they would still be up fighting, at two o'clock in the morning. One day Anthony came to me and said, "Touffic, I'm going to leave. I'm going to Ojo Sarco and move in with Mal. It's not working out with Jane. But Jane doesn't have a car or any way to get around. I would feel better about leaving if I knew that she could get to the store. Do you think that you could help her out?"

I said, "Sure. I'm here and that's what I'm doing anyway." I used to go to town with Jane and Marta (Roger's wife) a lot. Roger had a truck but he was always off doing something else, so I was the guy who went to the store a lot with the women and the kids. I liked the

kids. Jane used to say I was like the camp director. I'd make a big game with them down in our fields, like pick the bean beetles off the beans. And a night, after we spent a day picking bean beetles, I'd take them to the drive-in movie, or go bowling, or something like that. And I would make these board games, the kind I had when I was a kid. Only we didn't have any, so I would make them out of plywood. I still have Parcheesi, that's the only one that's left. All the kids decorated the board and we used to sit and play Parcheesi.

Jane really was liking me and wanting me to move in with her. But I liked living in my little, dingy house, which was Janet's eight by sixteen room. I had added a chair. It was really dark and like a cave. There was just one window. I was very depressed. I used to stay in bed, sometimes three or four days at a time. Jane and Marta would come by and bring me soup and open up the door. I was pissing in a jug and I wouldn't go empty it. They would try to air the place out and get me back into life. I was busy being a tragic figure. My wife was gone. I would sit there with a deck of tarot cards and go through them. I was like the nine of swords where the guy is laying in bed and the swords are up above him. This was my karma. I felt tragic. I was thirty-three or thirty-four. And I was loving it. There was something about being tragic that was very addictive. I was smoking a lot of marijuana and taking psychedelic drugs. (I never got into the opiates or pills, downers or uppers, speed, or any of that stuff. I liked the psychedelics a lot—mescaline, PCP, LSD, all that mind-expanding stuff. But I've given up thinking that any problems ever get solved in those "advanced states of consciousness." I'm mostly pretty straight these days. I can hardly believe it.)

Anyway, Jane was wanting me to move in with her. She had Moe, who was four. My daughter, who was twelve, had left me and gone to live with her mother. She and her husband had bought a fishing boat in San Francisco. But they found it was too cold for them to fish there, so they were moving to Florida. When they came through Dixon, Debbie decided to go with them and be a fisher and Brad, my son, decided to stay with me and be a mountain guy. Who knows

how it happened, but they ended up staying for about five or six months in a school bus trying to get things together. We were all still friends. (Even today, Dee and I are still great friends, never mind broken hearts and our differences. We had always loved each other even though we were not all that great living with each other. When Jane died, Dee came to live in my house and lived there for two years. My girlfriends thought it was odd. But we hadn't been married for twenty-five years. She had been married. And I had been with Jane for twenty-two years. It just happened that Dee had just gotten divorced and Jane had died and I had this big house so Dee moved in and we comforted each other.)

Anyway, Jane wanted me to move in. I would stay with her, but I still kept my stuff in the other house. That was my new take on relationship: everybody keep things square and on their own. But then Janet's life changed. She married Carl who also had two children and then together they had Rosa, so five children altogether. Carl was a farmer, a disciple of Rudolf Steiner and his principles of Bio-Dynamic farming. They were living in New Buffalo and he got tired of fighting the commune over how farming should be done. Meanwhile, Janet had five acres here that was not being farmed, so they decided to move back and farm here. For a while all six of us lived together in the house, though I was still traveling around visiting friends and also spending a lot of time at Jane's when I was here. Carl said more than once that it would be easier for them if I moved my stuff out. I said that Janet had told me I could stay as long as I wanted to. He agreed, but it was still difficult. Finally I gave in, gathered my stuff, and formally moved in with Jane.

Into the Tree-Planting Business

Aside from odd jobs, there just was not much work in the Dixon area, even less than now when there is building. I'm not a building person, though I can do some things. But I hate to do it for money because I'm so slow. Well, in 1978 a bunch of us were in the forest on a firewood run up near La Joya and we met a man and his wife

who were thinning trees. We started talking with them and they asked, "What do you guys do for a living?"

We said, "We don't do anything. We wish we could make a damn living."

They said, "You live right here in the forest. There's all kinds of work in the forest." So they turned us on to government contracts. It turned out that they had been members of the Hoedads. This was a worker-owned cooperative based in Oregon which turned into a multi-million-dollar business. Eventually the government forced them to break up into splinter groups based on some law limiting the size of co-ops. I think the government did not like worker co-ops because cooperatives didn't own anything and didn't pay taxes. The organization was named hoedad after a tool used for planting trees. It's hoe or mattock on one end and a 14-or 16-inch blade on the other end. You use the hoe end to scalp the sod and then you used the long end to make a 12-inch hole to set a bare root tree and then stamp it down and step on to the next spot.

The guy was Dave Plotsky, who's now a lawyer in Albuquerque and still a friend of mine. He ran afoul of the Hoedads when the organization was getting pressure to take on workman's compensation and this insurance and that insurance. To him that was like buying into corporate America, so he and his wife split and moved to New Mexico. They got a place in Ponderosa. Well, they knew how to get government contracts from the Forest Service. We had never heard of government contracts. He was a smart guy, knew the laws, very astute. We all loved him; we would have gone to work for him in a minute. But he didn't want that. He wanted us to make it a worker-owned cooperative, a worker-owned business where the workers decided everything. The organization took a small amount off the top and then everybody worked out how they wanted to pay everybody for their efforts.

We started out getting tree-planting contracts. We went to Colorado, then to Arizona. And a lot of men got into it with us because it was great work planting trees. Then we got into thinning.

Thinning is what made my knuckles what they are today. You hold a chainsaw out in front of you and go rrrrrr---it's especially bad for little guys like me. Then I got into donkeys and did trail building and trail maintenance. As I got older and my hands got especially bad, I could not really do that pounding work involved in trail building, thinning, and tree planting any more, and that's when I got into the forest inventory, which is mostly what I'm doing now. My legs are still good.

Our Cooperative

We had a cooperative. Dave was the president, his wife Pat was the treasurer, and there was a secretary, and a bidding coordinator. Bidding is a big part of this business. Over time everybody got to work in the various offices. I was the president for two years. When I became the president, I learned that I had skills I had forgotten all about. I knew how to be in business. I knew how to talk to people at middle management levels. I was a smart guy. I knew mathematics and I knew how to play the bidding game and keep track of who was doing what. It was a fun game-thing, though it was also nerve-racking because you were dealing with money and people's livelihoods.

I fit right into the cooperative mind-set because I had lived communally for so many years, in San Francisco and in Dixon. I had learned how to work within leaderless situations and how to work with groups of people. And I had learned the difference between ideas and action. Good ideas are crap if you are only trying to get other people to do them and you don't have the power to get other people on your bandwagon. So I had that understanding of group dynamics and the ability to get people to do things together. And I knew how to make money; under my administration we did more business than ever before. But after a few years I burned out. The effort was way too intense for me. It was far from making me hungry for power; I just wanted to get out of there. That was in 1988, the tenth anniversary of the co-op, the year I quit being president. I

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stayed with the co-op a few more years, but I wasn't happy with way things were going. When I made a proposal for change, it was rejected by the members for being "elitist." That's when I got out and went into business for myself.

"We were like migrant workers."

We were mostly Anglos. We had quite a few Hispanics from around here who came out with us, but none of them stuck it out. Maybe it was a different kind of organization than what they were used to? I don't know. It was also a family activity for us. Jane and I went out in the woods for the summer with Brad and Moe. And the kids worked, too. They would go up and down the line carrying water to the workers. Marta went out as a teacher. She traveled in the spring with the co-op and did school for all the kids. I have a wonderful photo of Jane and I in the forest by Tres Piedras. We have our tree-planting bags and I'm carrying hoedads. We were really like migrant workers, traveling with the work and bringing our families with us. We'd start in southern New Mexico where the forests opened up to planting first. Then we'd go into northern New Mexico, then into Colorado. We also worked in Arizona. We'd be ending up in Colorado in the "never-summer" mountains in August, when the snow was just melting. Then it would snow again in September.

We had giant Army tents that we lived in. You could cook for yourselves or you could pay some of the wives who ran a cooking concession. You could also pay somebody to stay at home and watch the kids, or you could pay Marta to have school with them all day. At the height of our operation there were forty or fifty people working, not counting kids. Dixon people, besides us and the Chiltons, included Monte Parker and Paula Seaton. A lot of people from Ojo Sarco, Llano, La Joya and other places in the area were involved. We also had people from Placitas, near Albuquerque, and Ponderosa, in the Jemez. You could live anywhere and do this work, but the largest contingent

was from here. Roger would drive a white school bus with Marta and their six kids. You know, the scene reminded me of Okies traveling in a caravan.

One day we were outside of Quemado on our way to the Magnus Mountains. But we got there too late to go into the mountains that night. Well, I was the crew representative on that job, so I went into town to a local store and I said, "I've got twenty-five or thirty vehicles out here and about sixty people. We're tree planters and we're going into the mountains, but we don't want to go in tonight. Is there a field around here where we could camp?"

The guy said, "I used to have an RV camp right there. There's no services, anymore."

"We don't really need any services."

"Well, just pull right in. You're welcome."

We were a pretty scruffy bunch, old trucks, and beards, the great unwashed minions. But the Hispanics down there in southern New Mexico were good to us. They treated us like people. And of course we bought a couple of hundred dollars of supplies from him the next day.

We traveled all over and sometimes planted trees in other areas as "guest planters." We planted in Oregon. And we would meet planters in other areas and have them come to New Mexico to plant with us. There was a community of forest workers; we knew each other, we were friends. At the same time, it's a competitive business; we're bidding against each other for the same work. But we all pretty much had down what we were doing. In your own area, you can bid cheaper. Contracts are very stringent. If they hold you to the letter, you'll probably lose money. But around here you knew that this guy was only going to make you do this, so you could bid the job cheaper. If you're from out of state, you don't know that and you have to think that maybe he'd make you do all that was said. It's like scalping. That's what they call removing the sod away from the place you're going to plant the tree. The rule is you have to take away a twelve, eighteen, or twenty-four inch square of sod down to

mineral soil. I don't know if you've ever tried, but for a little guy like me it was pretty exhausting to rip away that sod. The roots are right down there fighting you. It's a losing battle. I could probably do one twenty-four inch scalp in an hour. But you can do small squares all day long. So after a while the squares get smaller and then they come out to inspect, and the guys inspecting also get tired and they want those trees in the ground.

What I learned, though, in going back over areas that we've planted, was that the work was okay. We used to win the same job year after year. We planted the Little Eldon Ranger District in Arizona for about six years in a row. The same place. You go plant the trees, and they die. You go plant the trees, they die. Because it is so dry, planting takes place when the snow is still on the ground, and melting. That's the moisture that's going to nourish those trees. That's all you can count on. If it doesn't rain or snow after that, the trees are only going to have what you plant them in.

They've tried many techniques. They've tried fall planting and planting during the summer monsoon, but spring planting in the snow seemed to work best. And that part was the thrill for me. You go to the mountains at a time when no sane person would ever go there. This is the time of the spring storms. You're up in the mountains and these magnificent storms come in and drop eighteen inches of snow. You wake up, roll over, look out the window of your camper, smoke a joint, and say "Thank God I'm here and not working today." And then you go out and play music, gather wood and build fires, socialize, walk around the mountains. It's so thrilling being in the mountains in a big spring storm. And it could be scary. But being there to plant trees, it just seemed like part of the job, and it wasn't scary. And you're with a bunch of people. Of course, you're always stuck and pushing trucks, but you get a lot of days off. You learn all the bars of Flagstaff and Winslow.

Have you gone back to places in the Southwest where the trees survived?

Yes, by Coyote, where I used to do wood runs a lot. I planted a lot

over there. But regeneration in the Southwest is very, very low. Now I've done work in Idaho, mostly inventorying, which includes aging trees. You find big, even-aged mature forests. But it may be only forty-five years old! Here, in a forest that's forty-five years old, the trees may be only twenty-five feet high or maybe some forty feet high. Around Coyote the mature forest of ponderosas may be three hundred years old. Trees do not grow around here the way they do in Idaho. The forests here do not quickly regenerate themselves. But to me the forests around here are the most beautiful. I love working in these marginal forests. You can see through these forests; you're not hacking your way through brush all day long. Here the shrub plants are all low, mostly thorny like knickinick, Fendlersy, and oatsis. Plus there's a lot of pumice, especially in the Jemez, and no mud, no matter how wet it gets.

Making a Living In the Forest

You might say that our finding Dave and Pat thinning trees in the forest when we were making a wood run was luck. But I think it was more than luck. It was meant to be. There were so many guys around here, and women, too, but mostly guys, who were strong and willing to work, but had no work. And what did we need? I went out and made three or four thousand a year; that took care of the expenses for my family. We were living cheap and we had food stamps. But Jane hated all that, the food stamps and welfare. I said this was our entitlement; this was the law of the land. It wasn't cheating. All the years I worked I had paid my taxes. But she never liked it. When her son Moe was six, she said that was it; we were not doing this welfare and food stamps any more. I was fussing. "This is crazy. We can use this money. It's ours." But she did not want to do it, so I went along with her, even though it was against my better judgment. And of course it worked out just fine. And she was probably right. I don't know where I'm at with that.

We found other ways to get by. Her dad died and her mom was quite well-off and she gave Jane some money to fix up the house.

Before that we had enough money live, but we didn't have money to fix up anything. So we used that money and I was very good at scrounging materials—and I believed in that. Use what's out there instead of going out and buying more.

Coming To Terms With the Community

For me the community of Dixon was the Anglo community. These were the people I knew. I'm not much of a Spanish speaker and I was shy around the old folks. The young ones were inclined to take advantage of us as hippies. Other people had different experiences, but where we were living was known as "the hippie compound."

Most of the Chicanos in town would call me "Roger." They couldn't tell me and Roger Chilton apart. You know, all those bearded hippies looked alike to them. Roger, you understand, was a very popular guy. He drove around in his truck and he knew everybody in town. He knew all the young Spanish guys. I didn't really know anybody but a couple of neighbors. But guys I didn't know would drive down into the parking lot and blow the horn until you came out of the house. Where I came from, this was a no-no; it was considered rude. But around here, I found out it was common practice for two reasons. First, if the husband wasn't home and only the wife was home, it was considered very bad manners for a man to get out of his car and go to the house. So you blow the horn, and if the husband is not there, the wife would come out and say "He's not here," and you would just leave. The second reason was dogs. People often had mean dogs so it wasn't a good idea to get out of your car. So locally, blowing the horn was acceptable; that was the custom.

So I would go out and the guy would roll down the window and say, "Hey bro, you got something for the head?" And if you said no, he would say, "Oh, you lying hippie! We know you guys are sitting here stoned all over the place and you won't share with us." (Laughter) And if you said yes, you were liable to have all the guys hanging out in your house and drinking all your beer.

And that was the thing that got me. None of those guys ever came and said, "Hey, we got some beer here. Let's sit down and drink some beer together. And have you got any pot?" It was always what do you have? And we want, we want. And when you said no, that would turn into a fight right away. A lot of anger came out. They would feel like you were slighting them because they were Chicanos, they were not your bro. After a while I got to see that saying no was not the best approach. So when somebody would show up in the yard, the first thing I would do was to lean on the window and say, "I'm glad to see you guys! You guys got any beer? You got anything?"

"Oh no, bro. This is our last one. We only got one left. We'll see you."

A few people that you would meet who were actually semi-friendly might come by to have a beer with you. But these were like low-rider guys just cruising and looking to get stoned. They had none of what I would consider to be manners. I would never go to someone's house and drive in unless I knew the people. But to these guys we were just hippies, and they didn't care.

Now Jane was the opposite. She loved the local people and local culture. She would say, "What do they do in their house? What do they eat? I want to go in and meet them." She was very curious about people while I was just trying to live my own life. I had plenty of people to deal with; I wasn't needing anything socially. And I was shy. Even today I get sort of tongue-tied in conversation. I've tried to pick up Spanish. When I started going to Mexico, I picked up a few things, but it doesn't help me around here. I can't understand a thing people are saying.

The Garage Experience

As a young man I never knew anything about a car except where to put in the gas. But when I started being a hippie in San Francisco, I didn't have any money to send my car to the shop. We had all these old cars that were always breaking down when you wanted to go

somewhere. I will always remember the first time I saw a guy take the head off an engine. I started praying. I thought if the inside of the engine saw the light of day, that would ruin it. Eventually I learned how to do some things on cars and since coming to New Mexico I've become pretty good at keeping a machine together. But I'm not really a mechanic; I'm what's known as "a wrench." I might not be able to figure out what's wrong, but if somebody says it needs this and it needs that, I can start taking it apart.

Well, Mick from England is a mechanic and he came to live next door to me. I was working on cars around the compound, and one day Mick was saying "If we only had a little shop..."

I thought of the old Martinez garage downtown. When I first moved here he did all kind of repairs. I said, "I bet we could rent that building. You could be the mechanic and you could say what to do." Then we got Jay Jesse involved in it. So we rented the place from J.B. Martinez. We bought a bunch of tools. We took on a nut and went into business. It was hugely successful. There was more work than we could ever get to. There was nobody else working on cars. People were taking their cars to Española. And Mick had the knowledge to work on modern cars. I could only work on older cars, because I don't understand fuel injection and those hose systems.

Then I found out that if you have a business like a garage, you have to be down there working six days a week. You have to get up everyday and go to work. In the wintertime you have to lie on cold concrete with oil dripping in your face, and be freezing. And Mick has arthritis and he couldn't lie on the concrete unless we had one of those big kerosene heaters. Well, I couldn't be in the building breathing those fumes when that thing was on. So I would work outside under the portal. It was better for me to freeze than to breath that stuff.

And then there are no parts around here. Every time you needed a part you would have to drive to Española. And you would do everything you could to make sure it was right. You would sit there with the guy and look through his computer, look through his book,

make sure you had the right number. Then you bring it here and the part is not right. So you gotta go back. And when it's the right part and you put it on the person's car and the part is just crap. So the customer says, "It's your job to redo it. Johnny's Auto Parts will give you a new part and won't charge you anything." So now you're doing the job twice for the same money.

We were charging thirty-five bucks an hour. That was pretty cheap for auto mechanics these days. We were using the Chilton manual to estimate the time. It says to replace a water pump it takes 1.1 hours. That was 1.1 times 35 for the job. But we were slow. Maybe it takes you three hours. Now the big garages make money on the Chilton. It might say a job will take four hours and they do it in one hour and charge for four. But our equipment was such that it would always take us longer to do anything.

Mick and I never got along that well in business. He felt we were in a small town so we had to do anything people asked for. My philosophy was that we should only do those things that we could make some money on. Let's not do a transmission change on a customer's brand new Ford Explorer that you need special tools for and you have to send the thing to Albuquerque for special work. Let's not do that just because maybe we can. It turned out that it was a mess. We could, but instead of taking eight hours as the book says, it would take twenty-eight hours because we didn't have the special tool. And then there were weird things like the clutch reservoir for the hydraulic clutch being molded on to the throw-out bearing. You don't know that stuff in advance. It's not like a normal car. To change the transmission, you have to redo the whole clutch because all the parts for the clutch get thrown out with the throw-out bearing.

So I said let's stick with stuff like tune-ups, tire-fixing, oil-changing—stuff that we can do and just turn them over. If people have strange projects, let them take them somewhere else where they have more resources. But Mick could do everything and he wanted to. Then everything would take a long time and you couldn't charge for all that time. And there were three of us to pay, and the rent.

While Mick and I worked on the cars, Jay Jesse had to be on the road all the time to get the parts. He also ran the office and did the books.

Meanwhile, my hands were not making it, holding cold wrenches and cold nuts and bolts. You know, I like working on cars. But doing it like that six days a week was more than what I wanted to do in life. We started in March of '96 with a year lease. And then my dad, who was living with us, died in November. I missed two or three weeks of work. I was just getting back into it when Jane died on New Year's Eve. After that I just couldn't go back to work. Mick and Jay Jesse stayed on until March and then closed. I never went back. They divided up the tools. Whatever money I had in them, I just forfeited. That was my only attempt, other than forestry, to go into business.

Forestry In the Electronic Age

In forestry there's no overhead. You just have a bunch of set tools. Now, doing inventorying, we're in the electronic age. Keeping up is challenging and exciting. Just recently I had Jonathan (Kingson) write me a program to get rid of pencil and paper in the field. All our contracts require data entry so now I've got everybody carrying palm pilots, which have all the forms. You write the data on the palm pilot, then bring it home, put it in the cradle. Hot sync, "rrrnn", and it's in the computer. Before this entering the data was time-consuming and made you a basket case. You wanted to do it as fast as possible, and you made lots of mistakes. Not only is this way faster, but you're doing a better job.

The Future in Dixon

I don't think seeing into the future is my penchant. I'm scared about the future. The suffering, murder, and inhumanity scares me to death. I feel sheltered and protected here in Dixon. As much as it has changed, Dixon has successfully resisted change compared to Taos. There's way more wealth in Dixon than when I moved here. But as the village gets wealthier and more people have come in, the services

have decreased. There's no gas station here anymore, when there used to be two. And there's not even any store. We went from a great general store to a small convenience store to nothing. The hair salon couldn't make it. Restaurants and cafes open and close. For some reason, the services diminish as the needs and the wealth increase. That gives me hope that Dixon isn't becoming Aspen or something like that, with fancy galleries and restaurants and shops. But it's inconvenient not to have gasoline.

A Caring Community

When Jane died, that funeral, with so many people, changed my whole way of thinking about this village. After dealing with people for twenty-five years, you get sort of jaded. You think this person is full of bull, and that person doesn't do it, and everything they do is a bunch of crap. But that day I came to feel that it was my attitude; I was the one who was having a problem, not the village.

I'm devastated. My wife dropped dead in front of me at midnight on New Year's Eve, out of apparent good health. That year, after twenty years of being together, Jane and I had just reached a turning point. We actually became wedded in heart and soul. We had worked through our scraps and fights and infidelities and whatever else we had been through and now, all of a sudden, we were together. It was so smooth. It was a milestone in my life. I had thought that marriage was a struggle, and then you die. But this union was beyond struggle. I felt united, merged with Jane. And all of a sudden, in the midst of this radical change, boom! Partner gone.

Jane was popular with the Hispanic people, too. And all those people came by, brought food, brought flowers, helped out, made the arrangements, fixed things. The amount of love that came in through the door of our house was overwhelming. And it was sustaining in my darkest moment of depression. I still remained depressed for about three years afterwards. But I had seen the love, I had something to work with, because of that funeral and the people who came by. People sang and danced, and I could see the amount of love

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in this village. That people really cared about each other. I don't know why I had a crummy attitude before. But this love here was revealed to me in a blinding moment of light. Ever since then I approach the people in this valley with love. It's here. It changed my life. It made me a believer.