



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH CYNTHIA THAYER

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

KEITH LUDDEN

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TRANSCRIBERS: KEITH LUDDEN AND LEIGH ANNE KEICHLINE

Keith Ludden: Let me start with some housekeeping kinds of things. Do you mind if I ask what year you were born?

Cynthia Thayer: I was born in 1944.

KL: 1944, in the middle of World War II.

CT: In the middle of World War II. My father was in the army, in the Canadian army, he had been in the war since '39 the army, the Canadian army, and so I was born in New York.

KL: He was in the Canadian army. Did you live in Canada at that time?

CT: No, I was born in New York. My mother was a New Yorker and my father was a Canadian, and I grew up in Nova Scotia and I'm a dual citizen.

KL: (Inaudible) So you're a dual citizen.

CT: I am.

KL: And you were born in New York.

CT: Yes, and my father didn't see me until I was three.

KL: Did he tell you a lot of stories about World War II?

CT: No, he only told me one story. I would ask him repeatedly and I know he had a lot of stories. He liberated a camp, he walked from Normandy to Paris. He had a lot of stories, but he never would talk about the war. He said he became a pacifist when he had to push the bodies away to wash his socks. So, yeah, he had stories.

KL: And you said you were born in New York. Do you mean New York City?

CT: Uh huh [affirmative].

KL: And what about your mother, she was...

CT: She was born actually in Vancouver, but moved to the states, and spent her youth, and well, from her early twenties until she was twenty-nine in New York City, so she was a real New Yorker, and she worked for Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue, and she was very beautiful, she was just a real hot shot New Yorker.

KL: OK, you say you were a New Yorker until you were a young woman then?

CT : No, I was—first grade we moved to Nova Scotia, and I lived there until I was married to my first husband and moved to Massachusetts.

KL: So you spent at least part of your childhood in Nova Scotia.

CT: Yeah, most of it, part I remember. It was a place called New Glasgow it's on Northumberland Strait, looking out at Prince Edward Island. My family's all still in Nova Scotia.

KL: You lived in a town?

CT: In a town, like Ellsworth.

KL: Can you kind of take me on a walk through the town a little bit?

CT: Well, we actually lived on a street named after my father's parents. It was Underwood Street, and I always thought that was embarrassing, because my name was Cindy Underwood, Underwood Street...It's like, Oh! We walked everywhere, there was no such thing as a school bus or anything, and we walked to school and walked to the forum, and went skating and walked. We walked everywhere. It's a small town. My father was an opera singer. He also taught music in choral societies, and private lessons for singers. So I was always surrounded by all kinds of music. My mother was a designer, and so I learned how to sew very early, so I had a very interesting upbringing.

KL: Your father was an opera singer.

CT: He was, yeah. He sang in Paris, and then New York, and then his parents died and that's why we went to Nova Scotia, and he taught voice there and actually produced some operas and did choral work, and...

KL: Why Nova Scotia?

CT: Well, that's where his parents lived, so we moved into the house that they had lived in and Nova Scotia's a very rich place for any of the arts. I think that was part of the reason we stayed there—music and art and theatre—way more going on up there than I see anywhere.

KL: You must have memories of him singing.

CT: Oh, yeah, I have an old scratchy little cassette that I play every once in a while of one of his songs. That's all I have left.

KL: And he directed some operas there?

CT: Yep.

KL: And your mother, she was a designer.

CT: She was a designer, she was one of the top couturiers of Canada. She did shows all around, like a high end. She didn't design for stores, or anything, she designed something for someone, or she had a show. I remember having the models walking up and down, and people sitting in the chairs, and the champagne, you know. And now here I am on a farm.

KL: Did you help your mother with the designs at all?

CT: No, but I learned to sew as a very small child. I think she said to me at one point, "You want clothes? Sew them." So I made my own clothes.

KL: What kind of clothes did you make?

CT: Oh, you know, whatever the kids were wearing—skirts and pants and shirts and coats.

KL: Tell me about your school in Nova Scotia.

CT: Well, I went to public school, of course. That's all there was. And you know the joke about, "Oh, I walked a mile to school when I was your age." Well, I went back home a few years ago and I clocked it, and when I was five years old I walked a mile to school, a mile home for lunch, a mile back to school and a mile home. That's four miles a day. That was my favorite part of school. The rest of it I didn't like too much.

KL: Uphill both ways. [laughter]

CT: I was not a great student, but you know, I was involved in theatre and music and that kind of thing. I was a runner. I played soccer, so I did a lot of things at school that I loved, and so I put up with the rest of it so I could do those things.

KL: You mentioned theatre. I think I read something about you being a playwright.

CT: I have written a play. We did my play, we produced my play, I directed it a couple of years ago. Now I'm in the process of directing *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, and that starts in two weeks, it opens.

KL: It opens where?

CT: In Winter Harbor at Hammond Hall.

KL: Is that the only play you've written?

CT: I didn't write that one. I've only written that—no, I've written a couple of plays, a couple of other short plays, and that one long play, and I'm also a novelist.

KL: What kind of themes do you usually use?

CT: Well, the one I wrote the play from, it was a horror thing, I guess. It was a scary thing about an old couple living in the woods in Maine, and people coming to the door. And then the first one was about a coming of age about a Passamaquoddy basket maker, and the second one was about a man who had been widowed by a fire, lost his wife and children and was a bagpiper, and lived kind of as a hermit in the woods. So they were all very different books.

KL: So, you lived in Nova Scotia until when?

CT: Until about 1961.

KL: 1961?

CT: 1962, and then I moved down, I was married to my first husband and I had a couple of kids and went through a divorce and went back to school and got my degree, and went to graduate school and got a Master's. And while I was in graduate school, I met my husband, that I'm

married to now, who is actually very nice. I've always been a real country hick. All my people in my family, they're lawyers, they're high power executives, city people. I have a brother in Toronto who heads up the artists' insurance arm of Canada. Anyway, they're very different from me, but I was always the kind of shit-kicker person, and I loved working in the dirt in the woods and I rode horses — so where was I going with that?

KL: Why do you think that is?

CT: I think just the way you're born, I think. I mean, there I was, the rest of them were all into the city life and there I was. And I always hated getting dressed up — this is about as dressed up as you'll ever see me and I can remember my mother coming down and saying, "Don't you think you should wear something a little bit nicer when you're in the garden?" [laughter] It's like, "Oh, I don't think so." So when we were in Massachusetts my husband was — he had finished graduate school and he was teaching and and we got married and the way we — I don't want to jump ahead of you, but the way we came up here is that his ex-wife — he had three children with her — said one day that she was moving to Maine, and I said, "Oh, my God, what will we do?" And then we said, "Well, why don't we do that?" It makes a lot more sense than living in Massachusetts.

KL: Now, who was moving to Maine?

CT: Bill's ex-wife, and she lives in Brooksville now, but her parents — she lives in her parents' old house. Her parents have died, but we came up and stayed with them and looked around for property and for some reason we decided we wanted to farm, and I wanted to learn how spin and weave. And so it was a very easy decision. We were living in an apartment and in the meantime we bought a house in the country, and it was built in 1715, so we restored it and made enough money to buy this place. And in the two years we lived there, we had — we bought a horse, we

got some chickens, we had a couple of pigs, we had two sheep, we had a couple of goats, we had gardens, so we just played at it to see if this was what we would like to do. And we loved it, so we came up here and looked at all kinds of property all around the coast mostly and bought this place and moved up and I quit my teaching job. I had been teaching.

KL: What were you teaching?

CT: English and theatre, high school, and Bill was teaching special ed, and he quit his job and up we came, and I took my teacher retirement money and bought weaving equipment and spinning equipment, and we got some more animals. We didn't know what we were doing, really. We made a lot of mistakes.

KL: What did your friends and family members say when you said, "We're moving to Maine"?

CT: Well, my mother, of course, said, "Oh, what a waste of your education!" and she thought it was absolutely the craziest thing she'd ever heard. She came to really love it here, though. She came in the summer, every summer for a month. And my friends, a lot of them, I think were feeling, "Wow, I'd love to do that, but I don't really have the guts." And some people thought we were a little bit crazy, but it's the best thing we ever did.

KL: What did you tell them?

CT: Well, we just said, "We're moving to Maine, we're getting out of Massachusetts, and we're going to be farmers," and people kind of looked at it, and fellow teachers were a little bit astonished. I knew a lot of professors at the college and they were a little surprised, I guess, but we did it.

KL: What year was that?

CT: 1976, so it's been forty-two years.

KL: That would be a year after Saigon fell.

CT: Yeah.

KL: Did that whole era of anti-war movement and civil rights movement and things like that, did that influence...

CT: Oh, of course, we were both involved in that. We went on marches, and we protested, and all the things that you do when you're anti-war and anti-government, which is still going on.

KL: Tell me more about that.

CT: Well, we — Bill probably was more involved in that. I was more involved in women's rights, I think at the time. Like, I burned my bra in the street in 1973, I think. That was the end of that. I was very involved in the women's movement, equality and that kind of thing. We were both very involved in the anti-war movement and the Vietnam, anti — protest marches about Vietnam and writing letters and going to speeches.

KL: You said that was the end of that. What did you mean?

CT: That was the end of the bra. [laughter]

KL: Oh, okay. [laughter] I thought something happened.

CT: No, no, no. And we were very involved in the music of the time, you know, the anti-war music, the folk music, Joan Baez, and all those people.

KL: I should have brought my instruments.

CT: What do you play?

KL: Yeah, a little bit.

CT: Well, you know Peter, Paul and Mary, of course, and we moved up here and I had Paul's wife in one of my writing classes, and I thought, "Wow, kinda cool."

KL: That's one of the people I'd love to meet.

CT: Paul Stookey?

KL: Yeah.

CT: Yeah, he's a very interesting guy. We met a lot of people when we came up. It seemed like we were instantly kind of thrown in to this already gelled community of farmers and musicians

and that kind of thing. Elicet Coleman we met early on. Helen and Scott Nearing, we knew. And the other farmers who came up here, Paul Birdsall and Molly Birdsall, I don't know if you know them, but Molly was my best friend. She died a number of years ago. Paul is now in his nineties and just had heart surgery and is doing very well.¹

KL: I'm hoping to get to talk to him. I've made a couple of phone calls...

CT: He won't answer the phone. He doesn't hear very well. But I can give you his son's name, number.

KL: I think I have that.

CT: That's the one to call. Andy. So we immediately became involved in MOFGA and started going to meetings and we joined the Hancock County chapter, which doesn't exist anymore, but we had monthly meetings with all the other people who came up in the '70's and it was a wonderful group, we learned an awful lot. We belonged to a goat club, just various things. And we learned about gardening and I grew up gardening with my father, we had a garden on our property, but it wasn't farming. It was a very different kind of thing.

KL: It sounds like you came fairly early — '75 you said it was.

CT: ...or '76. It was about in the middle of the migration I think.

KL: So could you see this wave building?

¹ Paul Birdsall died shortly after this interview was conducted.

CT: Yeah, we could before we even came up here. We got Mother Earth News and we were all the “toes-in-the-earth” kind of people. We weren’t — everybody called us hippies. I guess we were in a way. We could see the wave and at that time if you are an organic farmer, it was, you were way out there. Now it’s really the mainstream. Organic farmers are the ones who are making it, I think, and very well respected, but it took forty years. It’s taken a long time for organic farmers to become respected in the overall farming community.

KL: Where I grew up in Nebraska...

CT: Oh, the breadbasket.

KL: ...you’ve got corporate farming, you’ve got cornpickers that go twelve rows across, things like that.

CT: Right.

KL: Did you run up against any of that — that kind of attitude?

CT: No, not a lot, because there isn’t that going on in this area. Where we are, I think we’re one of two farms in the whole peninsula right now, but at the time, there were small homesteads here and there, but no big farming conglomerations around us, but I know up in Aroostook of course, there are some different potato farmers and the blueberry farmers. We knew of a lot of people growing blueberries organically and they were getting laughed at quite a bit, I think.

KL: Here in Hancock county?

CT: Yeah. I remember the guy down the road. Bill went down there one day with the horses and he's friends with the fellow and he was very in tune with blueberry poisons that you have to use. Bill went down there one day and Charles took him out to his blueberry field and said, "Look at all these lovely blueberries," and then he bent over and he picked one and he said, "See, I can even eat it," and he ate one, and he said, "See, I'm fine." So it was kind of a funny thing to see that happen. I said to Bill, I said, "I think he's thinking about maybe whether, maybe it isn't fine, if he's spraying all that stuff on there." Now we know that a lot of that poison is very bad for you.

[There is an interruption here for an adjustment]

KL: So there wasn't a lot of resistance?

CT: No, there wasn't. We had a small farm stand. We had a few people come up, not very many, but every year it gradually grew. And then we got into goat production, we were selling goat milk and cheese, and that kind of thing. The locals, at first I think they thought, "Oh, more hippies moving in, they'll probably be gone soon," but we're very well respected in town. We've been involved in politics and the founding of Schoodic Arts for All. My husband's been a selectman for years, and we've been quite involved in the community, doing things so this whole thing about, Oh, yeah, you're always from away and people don't like you, we have not experienced that at all, I must say.

KL: So you were able to establish yourselves fairly quickly?

CT: I would say so, yeah. I mean, people would sometimes would kind of chuckle, but nobody was mean and nobody said, "What do you think you're doing?" That wasn't happening. We

weren't shut out and we were welcomed everywhere we went. Our kids went to public school here. I don't think we faced that "from away" thing that a lot of people talk about. I think it's when you're from away and you come in and you start telling people what you want to have changed, and we didn't do that, and that was the difference, I think.

KL: Why did you find — for lack of a better phrase — the alternative life style attractive?

CT: Oh, I've always been a rebel and I hate being told what to do and I just, this was something I wanted to experience. I wanted to become my own person and not have to do things because of what was expected of me in a certain way, and living in Massachusetts I always thought I was being judged. When we came up here, I said to Bill, "That's the nicest thing about being up here, people really don't judge you. They want to see somebody who comes up, who's kind and works hard. They don't care about the other stuff. They don't care about what your wear or how you look or how much money you have, that kind of thing. It doesn't matter. So I like that.

KL: What were you looking for most?

CT: I guess just being able to do what I wanted to do without feeling like I was doing the wrong thing.

KL: You said you looked around at various pieces of land for a while...

CT: We did. We looked at a lot of properties. In retrospect I'm really glad we chose this one, but at the time we really didn't know what we were looking for. And I said whatever we find is going to guide us into whatever we are going to do. Because we don't know what we want to do. So we looked at different — smaller farms, big farms, places further down the coast, and then we

saw this one, and I loved it because if you walk down the shore there's a pink granite shoreline and you have about a thousand feet of beach and rocks down there, and it's a beautiful property. But it was a little more than we wanted to spend; it was \$55,000. So when we went back, my brother Peter, who's in the picture up there, came up with Bill and I said to Peter, "Look, when you go up there, go down to the shore and then talk to Bill about how much you love the property and how much you think it's going to be the perfect place." So he did, and then we decided to buy it.

KL: Properties like this with shoreline are getting bought up all over the state by people with a lot of money. Have you ever felt that pressure?

CT: Oh, yes, yeah. We've had people approach us wanting to buy it. Years ago, and I'm not sure how long ago, but I think maybe twenty-six, twenty-seven years ago we put an easement on this property, and so the whole property has an easement that says it can never be subdivided. So instead of being worth a million dollars like Roxanne Quimby's next door, it's probably worth a quarter of that, I don't know. But it can never be subdivided; you can't build in certain areas; no more housing can be put up. It's a very strict covenant which we put on it and so that protects it from ever being bought and subdivided and built on.

KL: That's very important to you?

CT: It's important, yeah, because there aren't a lot of—as you say, so much shoreline is being gobbled up and put into lots and houses and fancy places and we didn't want to see that happen, especially to a farm, so we've ensured that that's not going to happen. We have a couple, a young couple here, who are living here with their two kids, they live down the driveway there, and when we croak, they are going to get the farm. We've become partners. We have an LLC and

every year they get a certain percentage of the farm and then it will go to them, and they'll continue farming.

KL: Tell me about the first crop you brought in.

CT: Well, there were a couple of funny stories in the beginning. As I say, we didn't know what we were doing. We brought a freezer from Massachusetts full of food from our garden and when we went to bring it in to the woodshed out here, the floor was so rotten that somebody's foot went right through the floor and the freezer fell over and it was kind of a nightmare. So we didn't have any food. We moved in the fall and so Bill said, "I think I'm going to get a hunting license." I said, "OK," so he got a hunting license, because we had nothing in the freezer except for we had a couple of chickens and some beans, and he went off the first morning of hunting season and it wasn't five minutes I heard a shot and he got a doe and brought the doe back and we cut it up and it went into the freezer. So that was sort of our first crop. We had a very small garden right out back here. When you drive up here, you can see a lot of open land, but when we moved here the only open land was a small plot here and a little tiny piece maybe 20 x 20 to the left of the barn. Everything else was brush, trees, forest. And so we cleared as much as we could out here and I remember growing carrots that hardly germinated and hardly grew at all. Everything was so acid. You add the lime to it, but it takes a while for it to assimilate into the soil. So our first garden was pretty bad, but we had enough to live on for that first year—not that very first year because we had nothing, but...

KL: So that first year you had...

CT: We had the deer and we had a few—we had some vegetables in that freezer that went through the floor [laughter] from the garden that we had in Massachusetts and that's kind of what we lived on. Then that first year gardening, one of my former students came up and helped us.

He was, I guess our first apprentice. I can't even remember what his name was. He wasn't very good; he was pretty lazy, but he was a little bit of help. And we put in our first garden and we had these ponies and one of them we brought up with us from Massachusetts, the one with mostly the white mane and tail. Then we got a couple other ones. I think that first year we might have had just that one pony, but we bought equipment and he did a spring tooth harrow back and forth, this little tiny four hundred pound pony. Then we acquired two more tiny ponies and that's what we had for implements. We didn't have a roto tiller, we didn't have a tractor, anything like that. Every year we carved out more land. We bought goats, more goats and put them down over there, where there's a lovely field. At the time it was just nothing. All this was overgrown

KL: So you started just with the garden?

CT: A small garden, we brought goats with us and sheep with us, two sheep, and the pony and the horse, and some chickens. Oh, I'll tell you a funny story about the chickens. We were in Massachusetts packing up and Bill said, "I think what I'm going to do is put the chickens in the cage and put them in the van the night before because then we'll be ready to go in the morning." That wasn't a terribly good idea because of course, the next morning we went out to go and the smell in the van was beyond what you'd ever want to experience. And we decided then and there that wasn't a good idea. But we did, we brought chickens, we brought a cat, we brought a horse, a pony, sheep, goats.

KL: How long did it take you to air out the van?

CT: Quite a while, I think. [laughter] Yeah, it was quite a move. His parents had died and mine had cleared out their house, so there was a lot of their stuff. And we had all these farming things. We had trailers for the animals. It was quite a scene, I'll tell you. That first year was freezing. It was not insulated at all. All we had were leaky wood stoves. We had no cured wood, no dried

wood. So we bought some — no, I know what we did. We wilted it, we wilted the wood. Bill cut some trees down. He knew how to use a chainsaw. And there were green trees, living trees. And if you leave the leaves on them, the leaves draw out the moisture. And they call it wilting. And so that's what we heated the house on the first year. But it wasn't very warm, I'll tell you.

KL: And that was a different house than this one?

CT: Nope, this house.

KL: And is that the original stove?

CT: No, the original stove was full of leaks.

KL: Full of leaks?

CT: Leaks. We got this one fairly early, though, on, I think, maybe a year after we moved. And we had a soapstone stove in there, which we got rid of after and got a more airtight stove.

KL: Even in the late '70s, a stove like that wouldn't have been that easy to find, would it have?

CT: Actually, there were quite a few. We got that at, I'm not sure exactly, Stoveworks or something. It had been refurbished. And we've had it for forty years.

KL: You cook on that?

CT: Oh yeah. I don't burn it in the summer unless it's cold, but Bill had a fire there this morning.

KL: My grandmother used to tell a story, when people would ask her, when the kids would ask her, how did know the stove was hot enough to bake bread?

CT: [laughter] You could tell!

KL: Her trick was throw a little bit flour in there and see if it turned brown.

CT: Well, yeah, I bake in there, I've made baked beans. I use the top. The top is very handy, because if you want it really cooking and boiling, it's here, and if you want it just warm, it's over there. It's very handy. It's really easier to cook on than the gas stove.

KL: You think it's easier?

CT: I think it's easier, because it's so, you just move the pot, instead of fiddling around and trying to turn it down, having the flame go out. You know. We learned how to do everything ourselves. We couldn't find farriers to shoe the horses, so Bill learned how to do it himself. We didn't know how to slaughter. We couldn't find somebody to do it. So we learned it ourselves. We learned how to give shots to the animals. We learned it from books, all these books, from talking to the old-timers, who would come over. There were a lot of old-timers who came over and were just fascinated with what we were doing. 'Cause here I was spinning wool, we were shearing the sheep and spinning the wool and making yarn and making clothes. They loved that. They'd come over and help.

KL: So, tell me about slaughtering.

CT: Well, the first one. The first time Bill slaughtered a chicken it was kind of funny. It wasn't really funny, ha-ha, but he cut the head off and of course the chicken was going all over the place. And Bill kept saying, "Oh no! Oh no! Oh no!" [laughter] And we learned how to do it. And we thought, "If we're going eat chicken, by God, we're going to kill it. And we're going to raise it. And we're going to see what it is that we're eating." And that was really important to us. And still, after forty-two years, I've hardly bought a vegetable. And we've never bought any meat. So we eat pretty much what we raise.

KL: You get very little from the grocery store.

CT: Well, we get you know sometimes rice. But we don't eat a lot of rice because have potatoes. Maybe we have coffee. He drinks coffee; I drink tea. I buy sugar, flour, you know, flour. So we buy things. But we don't vegetables, we don't buy fruit, and we don't buy meat. And for many, many years we didn't buy any dairy. But we don't have any dairy animals anymore.

KL: You had milk cows?

CT: We had goats, we had seven goats at one point, milking, and then we had cows for years. We had two cows. We made cheese, butter, yogurt, which we sold in the store. So we learned how to do that. I learned how to make cheese. I learned how to milk a cow.

[sound of door]

And this is Bill. Do you want to turn that off for a minute? Or do you want to keep going?

Bill: I can't stop.

CT: You can't stop?

Bill: No, I've got to unload this.

CT: Okay. Did it go okay?

Bill: Yeah.

CT: Okay. This is Keith Ludden

Bill: Hi.

KL: Hi.

CT: That's the Bill I've been talking about.

KL: Nice to meet you.

CT: Did it go okay?

Bill: Yep, it's just, it's a long ride.

CT: [replying] Long ride. [returning to interview] So, the reason he had to take the cattle to the slaughterhouse is because if we sell a package of beef, it has to be killed and packaged at a federally inspected slaughterhouse. We used to slaughter the beef ourselves, but then we started selling them in packages. So, if you wanted a pound of hamburger, you could get it at the store. But with the sheep and the pigs, we do it ourselves, and the chickens, turkeys.

KL: So the slaughtering is something What time of year do you do that?

CT: In the fall. Well, usually in the summer we do a batch of chickens. And then we'll do another in the fall. But then, we do sheep and pigs in the fall.

KL: Now, did you have to wait for it to get cool to do that?

CT: Yeah, you don't want to do it when it's hot and there's flies. We usually do it in end of October, early November. I learned a lot about gardening. I had had gardens as a child, and then even in Massachusetts, we had gardens. But I learned a lot about how to plant things and what soil conditions were needed, mostly from books, or talking to Frank Eggert who was an expert, or all those other MOFGA people that we were in touch with.

KL: It was Frank what?

CT: Frank Eggert, it was dean of the graduate school at UMO. He was a pomologist, expert in trees, knew everything about gardening that you'd possibly want to know.

KL: How was that last name spelled?

CT: E-G-G-E-R-T. Frank Eggert.

KL: I notice you're wearing a sweater, is that from wool you produced?

CT: Oh yep, grown here, dyed here, spun here, knit here. Yup.

KL: Now you use horses on the farm.

CT: We do. Let's see, let's see, let me see if I have any pictures of the horses. [looking in a book] Nope, not there. We do, we have three horses. Making a noise. [talking about sounds on the table] We have three horses that we use. Bill uses them almost every day. I thought we had a picture in here of them. Oh, there's a picture of them in a sled! But they do everything. They plow, yesterday we plowed some potato furrows with the team, and planted the potatoes. He does manure spreading; he grades the driveway; he hauls wood; he gives wagon rides. So, they're well used. And we also have two tractors. So we have three draft horses. One has kind of become the horse of our partner, I told you about earlier. And Bill uses the team. So we have three working horses trained.

KL: And you use some tractors?

CT: We have two tractors, because we do all of our own hay. And so he uses them mostly for hay. Baling and cutting, raking, baling.

KL: But you don't have cows anymore?

We don't have cows anymore but we have a couple of beef critters.

KL: A couple what?

CT: Beef critters. [laughter] Little calves that we raise up. So we've got two new calves in the barn, in the stall, they're about three weeks old, four weeks old. And then we have a couple from last year that are out in the pasture and then we have the one from last year that Bill just brought home in pieces. So we have a little bit of beef going on.

KL: When I looked at website one of the things that kind of caught me by surprise was flowers!

CT: Oh yeah, we've developed quite a market for flowers. I've done some weddings which are really fun to do and profitable. And I love doing that kind of thing. And then we just do straight bouquets. We sell a lot of bouquets at farmer's market and at the store. We have sweet peas, early June usually. And we have flowers right through the season until the end of September.

KL: What kind of flowers?

CT: Well, of course, sweet peas, and then all kinds of mixed flowers. Astors, calendula, delphiniums, nasturtiums, all kinds of flowers. Got any pictures of flowers?... maybe not. But you can see them on our website.

KL: Yeah, I saw some on the website. Tell me about the apprenticeship program. How did that work?

CT: Well, we've had almost, probably almost three hundred apprentices over the years. We get some of them from MOFGA. They have an apprentice program, which seems to be not as active as it was. We ran it for quite a while, Bill and I, we spread them out on the table, you know, the applications and match them up and put them in envelopes. 'Course now it's all electronic. But we've had all kinds of great apprentices over the years. And some with problems. We've had a some older apprentices. We've had a lot of apprentices go on to have their own farms in Maine and outside of the state. Right now we have a high school girl who came over just for a short period of time, but she thinks she might like to stay for the whole season. And then we have a young fellow who's twenty who's been with us for about six weeks, I think. So've had, we usually have three at a time; we've had four. And sometimes we've gone with just two. But a lot of them we're get now from word of mouth, and through the website, rather than MOFGA. We still apply to MOFGA, but this year there've been very few applicants. I don't know why.

KL: And the apprentices stay here on the farm?

CT: They do. They used to live in the house with us, and then we got, I don't know, involved in music and it was too difficult. We had no privacy, of course. But it didn't seem to bother us at the time. I think I wouldn't want to go back to having that going on. But we shared the meals and the housecleaning and we made some very very good friends. But now we have two apprentice houses and they live there and they cook for themselves. And, so they live here and we provide them with a stipend and food from the freezer, food that we grow. And so they learn a lot. It's quite an amazing experience for them.

KL: And what year did you start that?

CT: Well, that first year I mentioned we had that student who wasn't very good. But then the next year we had apprentices. And we've had them ever since.

KL: And what year was that?

CT: '78.

KL: When you first started out, what would a typical day be like?

CT: Well, it was a long day. We were up at 5:00, milking. When we came up we had the goats, then we had the cows. So we milked at 5:00, then came in and had some breakfast, then started the day, whether we were gardening or taking care of animals or whatever else we were doing.

[Bill walks in]

That looks like beef tenderloin! [laughter] I told him to get the best little cuts and bring them in.

We would do maybe some work in the house. Everything had to be fixed. The place was falling down, really. It hadn't been lived in, really, except as a summer property, in many years.

Painted, and then I worked on wool. I set up a weaving business. Bill worked with the horses. So we worked from about five in the morning until we milked again at five at night. And pretty much without stopping. Now they don't work as hard. [laughter] But we worked awful hard. And we dug all the post holes by hand, when we were first came here, with a post hole digger and shovels. And that was quite a chore, I'll tell you. Now we have a tractor with a drill you know that drills out the hole. But then we didn't have that equipment.

KL: And what would a typical day be like today?

CT: Well, I'm kind of stepping back and I'm doing other things. No, they still work hard. They do chores at 5:30. Then they work from about 8:00 until 4:00 with sometimes a couple hours for lunch. So it's not as kind of crazy as we did. I can remember falling into bed at night just covered with dirt, not even having time to take a shower and get the dirt off, you know. But things have changed.

KL: A while back you talked about you started out with a small plot that was cleared and everything else was brush and forest. Tell me about clearing the land. That must have been a daunting job.

CT: It was a daunting job. I think I mentioned we put the goats down over there with the alders and they cleaned that right up. We cut brush and just kept cutting it and cutting it and plowing it as best we could with those little ponies. The first year we had the small plot. Then the next year we crept further back into the woods over there, and then we got another garden down there. Now we have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight — we have about eight gardens. And they're all fairly small just because of the conditions. I know this garden down here we call Marvin Garden, after Monopoly. But because the man who came and tilled it — before we had tractors, we hired somebody to till it because the horses just, the ponies, it was too hard for them. It was full of stumps. And so Marvin tilled it and so we call it Marvin Garden. Down there, down in the field, you didn't pass that part, but just beyond our driveway is several open fields and part of that is garden. And that was woods up until maybe six years ago. We were running out of hayfield and we had been haying at Roxanne Quimby's next door. And she said we could be haying for the next few years, so we put a lot of lime into it and then she changed her mind and put some ponies out there. So I said to Bill, "I don't think we're going to be able to use that land. Why don't we take a piece of that woods down there and have it clear-cut and take the money from the wood and pay somebody to till it." And so we did. And several people came up and said, "I can't believe what your neighbors are doing to that lovely woods property!"

They're clear-cutting it!" And we said, "Well, that's us. [laughter] We're doing that." So that was the only one that we did that way, in one fell swoop. They came; they cut the trees; they bundled them; took them away; paid us for the stumpage. Then we hired people to go in there with tractors, pull the stumps. And now it's a beautiful hayfield. That's where we grow our garlic and onions.

KL: That's where you grow what, I'm sorry?

CT: Garlic and onions.

KL: Garlic and onions, okay. So most of the gardens are either vegetables or flowers?

CT: Well, the flower garden is by the barn, just because it's pretty to look at. But everything else we rotate quite well.

KL: There was a fire at the barn.

CT: There was a fire at the barn.

KL: Tell me about that.

CT: Well, I had been away teaching writing at a workshop in northern Maine and came back and we had a young, or a middle-aged couple I guess they were, who came here to apprentice. And there was something a little bit off about them. And I think there was some kind of abuse going on, we were just speculating what was going on. And we went to bed that night, I think it was

May, the sixth or seventh of May, I think. And what we had done was when the chicks and the ducks came, he set it up. And Bill said, "Well, it sounded like he knew what he was doing." But I don't think he really did. And he set the lights too close, I think, for the chicks. We're not sure what happened. But we woke up in the middle of the night and Bill said, "I think the barn is on fire." And we looked out and it was really engulfed. And so we went out and the sheep — this was probably the worst part — there were a couple of sheep running around outside, burning with flames. And I tried to get them out. But I couldn't. I got burned, my face got burned, trying to open the gate to get them out. And Bill went back to get his beloved horses out. And he was lucky he wasn't killed, because he went to open the door, and just [makes sound of flames rushing, *vv-sh!*]. So that was just kind of a nightmare. And the next morning we were all sitting around the table trying to figure out what to do. And this woman came. We barely knew her; she had been a customer a few times. And she came in, she was crying, and she said, "I have something for you." She took an envelope out of her pocket, with five thousand dollars in cash in the envelope. So that was kind of a time where we said, "I guess we're meant to rebuild the barn." And it was still smoking out there. And some people you know, came forward and said, "I want to help." And they set up a kind of "GoFundMe" kind of situation with the bank. And we were given enough money to rebuild a post and beam barn and buy and replace the animals and all the equipment that we lost. And at first we were thinking, "Well, we'll build just a stick barn, temporarily, so we can get a couple animals and put them in there." But then as the community came forward, you know, they wanted to see an old post and beam like they used to see. And so that's what happened and now we have it. Sheep were given to us by a guy who raises them out on the island and we bought some horses down in Virginia. So, we're back in business, but it was an amazing outpouring of community. We had people up here, working, bringing their saws. We had people bringing food to eat, and fisherman hanging a bag of fish on the door. Local people. The school kids had made little jewelry, the little kids, and sold it to help. You know. So, it was pretty amazing. And then the only survivor was this chick, called Lucky. You might have seen his picture on the, well, I don't know if it's... no it's not in there. There was a mother hen with chicks in the barn and one of the chicks got out before the fire hit apparently. And so he was peeping around outside, little tiny thing going peep peep peep. And

he's still there, we call him Lucky and we brought him down to meet the school kids and he became a kind of pet of everybody's. And so that's kind of the symbol of the farm. And so that was amazing. That really showed us that we had made an imprint on this community for that to happen.

KL: Yeah, that's pretty amazing.

CT: It was pretty amazing, yeah.

KL: And what year was that?

CT: That was six years ago, so it would have been 2012. Yep.

KL: Now you said you did some clearing on the land.

CT: Oh, a lot of clearing.

KL: Yeah, yeah. How has the land changed? There's been clearing, and what else?

CT: Well, years ago when you came up there was a little tiny road with a grass center — you know how you see in the country? There was this house and the old barn and that's all. All the other buildings on the property we built from wood that Bill milled with a sawmill that he cut from the woods. And all the clearing we did pretty much ourselves except for that one piece that I told you where we sold the wood. But everything else pretty much we did. We cut some and

put some animals in there and plow it and till it and get the roots out and pick up rocks. Yeah. So we really kind of made the farm. It had been farm years ago, but —

KL: What do you think about when you look out your window now and see what it looks like now?

CT: Well, there's a big sense of pride in what we have accomplished. That's why we didn't want to have the farm just be sold to some rich person from New Jersey or California or wherever. We wanted to have it continue to be farmed if all this work had gone into creating this farm we didn't want have it just all collapse. So it's you know when you look out at, sometimes I'll think what it was like when we first moved. It's very, very different, although aspects are still the same, some of the aspects.

KL: How have you changed?

CT: Well, I've rheumatoid arthritis, which kind of puts a damper on my physical activity! [laughter] And I'm quite a bit older than I was. I don't have the energy. But I think I have still the same spirit that I had. And I've just kind of shifted a little bit. I said when this new couple came I said "I want to back off and do some little bit of retiring." So I've been spending a lot of time working on this play and doing some other things. When I first came up here I wasn't doing any writing. That was a whole new thing that came because I got the arthritis and I couldn't weave anymore. I had quite a big weaving business. I did a lot shows all up and down New York and Boston and sold my weaving. But I couldn't do that anymore. So I thought, well I'll try writing and it became successful which was a miracle. Now I think I'm kind of ready to back off a little bit. I'm still very involved in the farm. We have meetings with him twice a week and I still do things. Like I do a lot of the business on the computer. We have a little "Airbnb" right behind the store, which I kind of manage. And that's been really successful. We

make a lot more money on that than on carrots, I'll tell you. I'm still kind of the head honcho in the commercial kitchen where we do jams and jellies and make things to sell in the store. So as I say, I'm still very involved, I'm just not working five to five outside.

KL: Tell me a little bit about the weaving.

CT: Well, I really wanted to weave. I've always been interested in skills that are kind of old-timey skills, like how to start a fire. I know how to do a bow-drill. I know how to do that. It's like, it makes me feel good to know that. So, I wanted to learn how to weave, so I bought a loom, I hired a teacher, I bought a bunch of stuff, and I just started weaving. And my first stuff was kind of primitive-looking but I got more sophisticated and I ended up weaving material that was patterned, it was kind of intricate, high-end. I made coats, jackets, things like that, suits. And I did shows. I built myself — with Bill's help, he helped me. We built show things, that, shelves, hangers and things that you would take to do a craft show. So I did a lot of high-end craft shows in Boston, New York, up and down the coast. And it was quite successful actually and I did most of that in the winter.

KL: What is it that you like about weaving?

CT: I like the solitude and I like the, what is the word for not boring but — repetitiveness! I liked that over and over and over and over and over and doing the same thing. 'Cause it kind of just allowed me to just think about things. I still would like to do it. Now I spin. I'm a little bit of a crazed spinner; I have fourteen spinning wheels. So I like fiber. I've always been a knitter since I was five. And so I like playing with fiber and making things. I like making anything. Cooking. I love cooking too. So anything that I can make from something makes me happy.

KL: Did your mother teach you how to knit?

CT: No, actually my great-aunt who lived next door. She had rheumatoid arthritis. But in those days they didn't have any drugs. So she had been in a wheelchair at fifty-five — forty-five! And she lived to be a hundred and three. So she had nothing to do all day but sit in this chair and knit. So I used to go over and she was right next door and she taught me how to knit and crochet when I was very young. I made all kinds of stuff. I was always knitting, always, well, here, I'm always fiddling, you know. I have to fiddle with something. So that fit in great with my life. [laughter] So, I was sad to give up the weaving. I still have a loom upstairs, but I can't really deal with it with arthritis.

KL: It hurts your hands?

CT: Well, it's just, you know, you have to get down on the floor, you have to tie things up, I couldn't do that kind of thing. And lugging equipment to shows. Couldn't do that.

KL: What's the farm like in the winter?

CT: Oh, that's my favorite season! I love the winter. It's warmer than it was, because we insulated and we now have, we just put in a heat pump, which is kind of exciting. And a couple of years ago, my husband had a heart attack. And I said, "You know, we're heating this whole house just with wood that you cut and split. I think we need to put in a furnace." So we have a few of these little heaters which we hardly use, but they're there in case he can't do it. He loves to cut wood; he loves to split wood. He splits and cuts all of our wood by hand. And so the winters, he works in the woods with the horses. And I did weave, and then I was writing. That was my big writing push, and I would write from eight to four everyday. And this year I didn't do so much writing, but I was working on my spinning wheels and working on spinning and, I don't know, I took a little time and read a couple of books. But, I love the winter.

KL: And I want to go back to the play you said you wrote.

CT: Oh, that, a couple of years ago? That one?

KL: That's being produced, you said?

CT: No, that, I did that two years ago. That was based on my book *A Brief Lunacy* which was a thriller. This play that I'm doing now is based on a book written a few years ago by a British author. It was a best-seller about an autistic fifteen year old. And so that's the one I'm directing now. But I've always been involved in theater in some aspect or another.

KL: What attracted you to the theater?

CT: Oh, I don't know. I've always been involved. My father did a lot of directing. I said he did the opera and I was in a couple of operas. Also he did theater directing and I would tag along. And then in junior high and high school I did theater; I acted and did sets. And then when I went to college I majored in English literature but with a minor in theater. And so I taught theater down there. And then when we moved up here —

KL: Down there meaning Massachusetts?

CT: Yeah, mm-hmm. Yeah. And I did theater down there, and then when we moved up here and when I started Schoodic Arts for All, we started a theater program. And we've been doing that for, I don't know, almost twenty years I guess, the theater program. And we do readings and full productions; I've directed a lot of them. I've acted in a few of them, but it's getting harder and

harder to remember lines. So, I'm backing off from that. But I've done tech and I've done lights and sets and sound. And so I love any aspect of the theater.

KL: Yeah, there's something about getting out in front of that audience, isn't it?

CT: It's, you know, it's magic. We had, last night, we had someone from The Ellsworth American come for the first time. They had a little bit of an audience, my cast. Boy, that just made them come right alive. That one person, sitting there. It was amazing to watch.

KL: So, do you think you accomplished what you wanted to accomplish?

CT: Oh, we've accomplished way more than I ever dreamed we would, I think. I'm not sure what I expected. I think we just thought we'd come up here and have gardens and live the simple life and [laughter] and do a little spinning. But no, we've accomplished and worked harder than I ever thought we would.

KL: It was harder than you thought?

CT: Well, we pushed ourselves, 'cause we kept seeing more things we could do, and it kept getting more and more exciting and so yeah. It was a lot. We did a lot more than I think we ever expected. I never would have thought that we would have this major farm going. But it's been very gradual, you know. Now we have a very busy store. We have a CSA, community supported agriculture program. We sell to a local restaurant. We have a lot of business.

KL: Tell me a little about the community supported agriculture.

CT: Well, that's where you, we have different several plans. But you pay a certain amount of money in the spring and then you receive food all season. And you get a discount on the vegetables, for paying up front. And that works really well. It's kind of a new thing, the last ten years. And people are very excited about it. They feel like they're part of the farm. They come to the farm and they look around and they see what we're doing. We have a big dinner in the fall. And we have a very successful program where we ask our members if they'd like to donate to a struggling family. And we have four or five families who get free produce all season because of that. So that's really nice to think about it.

KL: So it's kind of twist on eclectic.

CT: Yeah, at first we went into the food stamp program. So we were selling, giving food for food stamps. But the government made it so difficult and so bureaucratic, we thought, "We can do better than this." So we canned it. I said I don't want to do business with you anymore. I said if anybody comes to the store and they have food stamps, I'll give them the food. It takes less time and it's much more satisfying. And then we developed this CSA program, where we really are helping families who kind of have never experienced fresh produce. We had a cancer patient last year who was feeling better and never had nice fresh food like that before. We have another woman who had two children and comes up here all the time and says, "I can't believe my kids are eating spinach!" and this and that. So it's really heartening to see that happen. But the government doesn't make it easy. They wanted us to go to Bangor for all these classes and do this and do that and I said, "What are you talking about? No, I'm not doing that." So.

KL: Well, we've been at it for about an hour here, a little more. Is there anything that I'm overlooking that you want to tell me about?

CT: Um, hm, I have to think about that. Probably. [laughter] Probably there is. Well, when I look around I don't see a lot of the people who were there when we came up. A lot of them have died. Many have quit because it's too hard, and gone back. But we still have friends like Paul Birdsall and the Volkhausens, those people are still farming. And we look around and we see all these young farmers coming up that apprenticed here. And they've got their own farms going. And you know, you look in the MOFGA paper and they're on the cover. We used to be on the cover. [laughter] But it's really, it makes you feel good, that you've taught someone how to do something and they've liked it and they're taking the reins.

KL: So.... I lost my train of thought here. So, you feel like you've accomplished what you set out to?

CT: Oh yeah, I think we've accomplished a lot. Just in the presenting to the community this farm with all the stuff available. We have school kids come up here every year, several times, and all the kids who live, who went to the local school have been here, in the last thirty years. Every year, we have them come. And so sometimes the adults will come and say, "I remember when we came here, you know, when I was in first grade." So, we're introducing kids to a way of life and to where their food comes from. I do a lot of dyeing of fabric from my garden. Oh, our newest thing is we're making flax and making linen. And so that's been pretty amazing. That's kind of developed over the last two years or so. So I guess we're still not finished creating things and doing new things.

KL: Some of the people who came up to find a different kind of life didn't make it?

CT: I know quite a few who just bailed and went back to their corporate jobs, because you don't have the amenities, a lot of times, there's really no money in it. I mean, you've got to make money from somewhere to support the family — the farm. That's what my weaving and my

writing did. Bill cut wood. Folks that are here, he's a musician, so he works out. I mean, people pay so little for their food. They don't really support what they're getting. But because of government subsidies and everything else the price of food is artificially lowered and people expect that they can get cheap food. We have the cheapest food in the world in this country, by far, as far as the percentage of what someone's pay is. I think it's like 16% or 17%. In European countries and Asia, it's more like 30%, 25%, 30%, 35% of their pay goes for their food. And, I don't know, I'm getting on a political rant here, I think [laughter] probably, but yeah, to support this place, we can't do it on just selling vegetables.

KL: So you do a lot of the other things. It does seem kind of a diverse operation.

CT: Yeah, oh, it's very diverse. And that's what attracts young people. They want to see, they want to learn a whole bunch of things. But it probably isn't as financially rewarding as if we just grew, you know, two or three crops. But we grow, we do everything here, pretty much, except for dairy, now, we don't. But you know we make jams, we make jams and jellies and pesto and we have, we have this mail-order catalogue. I'll give you one of those to take. We have this little brochure that talks about what we do. You can have that.

KL: Yeah, this one's open already, so [indistinguishable].

CT: Yeah. And this has gotten very big. We started this almost thirty years ago. And it's grown and grown and grown. We hire several people from the community. And we s— we make wreaths and sell them and others things: garlic swags and and jams and jellies and pancake mix. So it's very diverse. We do a lot of different things.

KL: Well, you've been very generous with your time. I appreciate that.

CT: Oh, well, yeah, that's fun. It'll be fun to look it up and see what else you do there.

KL: Yeah, it'll be a little while. I've got a few irons in the fire right now.

CT: Have you got some other people who came up in the '70s?

KL: Ah, no, I've got a list of people, of references that people have given me. Nancy Berkowitz at the Good Life Center mentioned several people to me. And also a gentleman from MOFGA whose name escapes me at the moment. I've got a few names. I'm just starting to kind of try to get things rolling. One thing I'm thinking of maybe is to do something with you and then use that as kind of a pilot to show funders what kind of stuff we do and how useful it can be.

CT: Mm-hm.

KL: It's a little tough to get people to fund oral history sometimes.

CT: Well, the arts are taking a beating anyway.

KL: Yeah, yeah. The arts and humanities both.

CT: Yeah.

KL: So, I'm going to go ahead and turn this off.

—END OF INTERVIEW—

Final typing and review of transcript by Leigh Anne Keichline 7/30/18