

**Vermont Historical Society
Audio Log – Euan Bear Vermont 1970s Project Interview**

Client: Vermont Historical Society

Interviewer: Kate Blofson

Interviewee: Euan Bear and Mary Schwartz

Location: Bakersfield, Vermont

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Length: 01:00:53

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Collection: Vermont 1970s Counterculture Project

Time	Content	Keyword 1
START – 00:01:00	Euan introduces herself. She’s 63 and came to VT in 1977 to work with a collective [Redbird] of 8 women and 3 children who were building a house and planning a school and health clinic on land in Hinesburg.	Vermont, Hinesburg
00:01:00 – 00:05:30	<i>Where did you grow up?</i> Born in Concord, NH and grew up in Kittery Point, ME and Portsmouth, NH. Parents divorced when she was 8; one older brother and younger sister. Graduated from Portsmouth High School, went to Colby College in Maine, went to Colorado for a year after college and came back East and to Vermont via Seabrook. <i>What was it like growing up in ME and NH at that time?</i> New England rooted, has a hard time being far from the ocean. There was trauma growing up, but a sense of openness and exploration, “My life was not so planned”. Talks about growing up on a rural back road, and her country neighbors; “Nobody was pretentious and nobody had very much money...But I wouldn’t have said that we were poor.” No child support from her father, who died when she was 16. Her mother had to work at a time when it wasn’t the thing to do, but she absolutely had to. Debts for heating oil, eventually paid off – that her mother was allowed to run up these debts was indicative of the sense of community there. Talks about being somewhat of an outsider in high school.	New Hampshire and Maine; New England roots; high school; college; Seabrook Power Plant; country neighbors; parents; child support; heating oil

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00:05:30 – 00:13:30	<p><i>How did you come to Vermont?</i> Euan tells her coming out story, which is extended and complex. Moved back East with a lover; her lover’s Southern Baptist family found out that she was a lesbian, and they were not happy. She describes some of her lover’s family troubles at that time. They rented a duplex in a nearby town with a few other women, and they form an affinity group, “Dykes Against Nukes” (DAN), for the Clamshell Alliance, organizing against the Seabrook Power Plant, which was within 13 miles of her parents’ home. Issues around Seabrook that made it feel personal. Some people objected to DAN and said they were muddying the issues – not many people were out at the time. Other people defended them. They were arrested at a demonstration in 1977 along with 1400 people and detained at the National Guard Armory in Manchester with 700 others. They worked to keep cohesion and not bail out and plead guilty to the charges. Released after two weeks after a deal was struck. In 1979, there was an appeal and the pleas were vacated. At the time she was working as a tech at the UNH library, and her boss wanted to put a letter of reprimand in her file when she was arrested. She quit her job. With some of her housemates, she attended a women’s music festival in Boston where she heard about the Redbird Collective in Vermont and a lesbian custody battle they were raising money for, as well as the formation of the collective on land in Vermont. Euan and some of her housemates signed up to go to Vermont, and went in June of 1977.</p>	<p>Lesbianism, Dykes Against Nukes, Clamshell Alliance, Seabrook Power Plant, childhood home, 1977 demonstration, arrest, National Guard Armory, UNH library, women’s music festival, Redbird Collective</p>
00:13:30 - 00:22:00	<p><i>Can you tell me what you did that summer?</i> Describes the land in Hinesburg on the Lewis Creek, off Silver Street and Turkey Lane (which “has another name now that upscale folks have bought land and moved in.”) Talks about building on the land, carrying everything in along wooden walkways through a swampy meadow, building by hand – power tools were not allowed, as they believed it would disturb the wildlife. The women guests had a campsite apart from the collective members; they with a little bit of</p>	<p>Hinesburg, Lewis Creek, building projects, Moonsuckle, atlas stove, feminine spirituality, veganism, Upton’s Ice Cream Parlor, Burlington, Girl Scouts</p>

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	<p>irony called it “Moonsuckle”, some of the women were focused on feminine spirituality, although “others of us weren’t...and laughed.” Some paid money in to volunteer. All food was provided – vegan fare, no meat on the land because the “animals would sense dead meat...Our sensitivities seem exaggerated now, but at the time it was very important.” Talks about the food: rice, beans, vegetables, tofu, sometimes cheese as a concession, almost no sugar. Tells a story about going to the ice cream parlor in Burlington, Upton’s; she got a chocolate shake for the ride back and remembers the sugar high that hit her “after being so pure for weeks”. Returns to describing the building and process in detail, an 8 (or 10, says her sweetie) barn style building with mortise and tenon joints and big heavy supports and beams, “There were no right angles, really”. Refers to Joyce Cheney’s land book. A lot of work, and “if you spoiled it, God help you.” Better at camping and cooking over a fire than building, because of her experience in the Girl Scouts, and she came to be in charge of cooking. She got people to help her build an altar fireplace after the workday, which she describes in detail – they laughed at her until it was done and they realized how much easier it was. Describes the meals she made – they all lost weight, with the lack of sugar and working really hard “It was like bootcamp in some ways.”</p>	
<p>00: 22: 00 – 00: 27: 45</p>	<p><i>Can you talk more about the philosophy/way of thinking of the Redbird Collective? Visions and Goals? A sense of men screwing up the earth, and we need to let it heal. Refers to feminist theory – women connected to the earth in a way that men are not. Where did ideas or inspiration for that come from? Essays about feminism and ecology in the 70s and 80s. “Where does any philosophy come from? It’s a zeitgeist, it’s in the air.” There was also the women’s music festival in Michigan, which was also part of that first summer, because they all went to raise funds for the lesbian custody case. Euan’s wife [Mary Schwartz] talks about seeing a</i></p>	<p>Feminist theory, feminism and ecology, Michigan Women’s Music Festival, Goddard, Susan [Braunmiller], Vietnam, Agent Orange</p>

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	<p>feminist lecture at Goddard. Context: post-Vietnam, but not by a lot; agent orange stories and injuries. Emotional as she remembers some of the stories and images – “and that’s what the US government was doing to the earth and people, and of course people that cared said” they weren’t going to do that. Wildlife is a reminder that we haven’t screwed up entirely.</p>	
<p>00: 27: 45 – 00: 38: 15</p>	<p><i>People caring...</i>Euan talks about the culture those days, Dads who went to work and went to WWII and returned with an emotional numbness-a lot of people said, “I’m never going to be like that.” It’s a luxury and a necessity to care about the earth and your corner of it and not muck it up. <i>Emotional absenteeism, 50s and 60s as a time of prosperity and security.</i> It took so long for women to have a place in the economy outside of service and social work jobs – those were the options. With Redbird, there was a class analysis – some were working class, lower/middle class – all were separated from our families, and didn’t have those resources to draw on [gets emotional again]. Close observation of privilege in society and in the collective and its guests. Class and attendant opportunities were a big part of that – worrying about money and resources. “Tongue in cheek” class analysis about where you kept your kitchen garbage, in or out. “Ours was out – we were lower middle class.” <i>Did class differences cause conflict in the collective?</i> There was discussion. Also about “lookism” and how people were treated based on their appearance – facial hair, weight, other attributes. It was more about raising awareness. Talks in detail about the process of “self crit” – a holdover from Chinese Maoist Communism [Mary interjects] – part of the meeting is devoted to process, “and we processed a lot” about feelings, value, and emotions. “Boy, it was thorough, and sometimes, pretty hurtful.” Not what broke up the collective, but difficult. Reactions to this processing among guests: “You need to be easier on yourselves...and some of those women were women with a lot of privilege.” <i>What was important about that process?</i> Global application of</p>	<p>World War II, emotional absenteeism, environmental stewardship, feminism, privilege, class, lookism, self crit, Maoist Communism, lesbians</p>

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	our critique of society to ourselves. Society discriminated against lesbians – personal stories about discrimination in housing and jobs. They talked about the sources of that privilege and not bringing it into the collective (appearance, class). Not being hypocrites.	
00: 38: 30 – 00: 44: 20	<i>Can you tell me about radical lesbian feminism? Or processing as an additional layer of work for the collective, which was already engaged in significant work.</i> There were bookstores, land collectives, music festivals, not all solely identified as lesbian. Some were radical to the point of separatism – giving resources only to women, and as much as possible not having men in your life. Redbird women had two sons and a daughter (the child in question in the custody case – the husband sued for sole custody, based on the collective childrearing arrangement with lesbians). They weren’t separatists. Talks about the Michigan Women’s Music Festival, a separatist land space, a source of great controversy in its 40 year existence. Choosing to place energy and trust in women, who understand what it’s like to be a woman in the world – exclude men until they prove themselves trustworthy. Radical feminism was about “not using the tools of the master to deconstruct the master’s house”, women’s strength, and improving the lot of women. [Mary adds: something about reclaiming power, strength, knowledge, identity]. Euan choosing her last name in 1977 as a part of preparation for going to Seabrook (“part of claiming power and identity”), and how women would reject their patriarchal last names.	Radical lesbian feminism, Redbird Collective, child custody battle, Michigan Women’s Music Festival, lesbian separatism, radical feminism, Seabrook
00: 44: 20 – 00: 51: 30	<i>Work around abuse and supporting women?</i> Before she came into contact with Redbird, they were instrumental in founding Women Against Rape and Women’s House of Transition in Burlington (now Women Helping Battered Women). 70s context -no one was helping victims of rape and abuse at the time, men weren’t held accountable, and there were no laws about domestic abuse. Feminism came into that vacuum of services,	Redbird Collective, Women Against Rape, Women’s House of Transition, Burlington, Women Helping Battered Women, domestic abuse, feminism,

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	<p>“We’re not doing this anymore. We’re not going to let this happen. Redbird was a part of that.” Describes the hotlines set up for women in crisis. Redbird opened a house – a shelter – for abused women in Burlington. Tries to recall the street. Women Against Rape had shared phone answering, and Euan went as a driver for rescue. Offered basic services to women, and describes the kind of support they offered in emergency rooms and on the street. “We’re talking about basic respect”. Talks about writing a front page news story for the Vanguard Press about caring for the victim, and listening to harrowing stories, even after the Redbird era. Feminists said that rape is a crime of power about making women afraid– sex is the weapon. Tells a story of a Burlington police officer who tried to place blame on women, and a resulting protest at the police department. Women Against Rape is now Hope Works, and there’s more support now, and trainings at the Police Academy about understanding rape. Talks about how society has shifted the way it thinks about rape.</p>	<p>Vanguard Press, Burlington Police Department, Hope Works</p>
<p>00:51:30 – 00:55:15</p>	<p><i>Other legacies of the Redbird Collective?</i> Personally, a certain level of media analysis about social issues and who has the power in certain situations. Talks about how Redbird women were the first ones that she told about being sexually abused as a child, and they believed and supported her, helped her to understand emotional difficulties she was having. “It’s not only that they made this big societal contribution but they helped <i>me</i> too.” Changes the subject and talks about how Redbird influenced her food choices, and the Onion River Co-op. The ORC came into a vacuum as far as purchasing health foods. There was only Organum, a store run by members of the Sikh religion at the time – Organum and the Co-op were the places to get protein as a vegetarian and a vegan.</p>	<p>Media literacy, Redbird Collective, childhood trauma, sexual abuse, Onion River Co-op, Organum, Sikh, food choices, veganism</p>
<p>00:55:15 – 00:56:15</p>	<p><i>Were you involved in the early buying clubs?</i> Every lesbian household she lived in in the Old North End was a member of the co-op, in the era when</p>	<p>Co-ops, Old North End, food choices</p>

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	they broke down orders into individual packets and contributed to its operation: Talks about consumer consciousness in food choices. “A responsible and community-connected way to be a food consumer.” Talks about consumer consciousness in food choices.	
00:56:15 – 01:00:53	<i>How long were you affiliated with Redbird?</i> Redbird broke up in 1979, so a couple of years. Individual members stayed for varying lengths of time in Burlington; talks about the dispersal of members around the country, some of whom she’s still in contact with, a few still around Burlington. <i>It sounds like they were almost like family.</i> For her, “a lot of connecting with Redbird was about looking for a family I could trust, and they provided a lot of support.” Joyce Cheney talks about being a family in her book. <i>Support on multiple levels, from intensely personal to the political. Emotional work, and also community projects. Can you reflect on the Redbird’s work ethic?</i> You have to work hard when you are trying to feed and clothe 11 people, and do political work, you have to work all the time. It was difficult. They got a grant to open a woodworking or car repair shop to train women in nontraditional occupations. Some worked as carpenters. Winters were for making money, summers were for building the house. Ironically, the house was finished by a barn builder who brought in his power tools and got it finished. “It was tough.” Talks about building the house. [Mary: Even though the collective broke up in 1979, they didn’t disperse right away, and continued to work on other projects, they were influential in the community.] Euan closes with a reminder that this account is a perspective of one woman.	Redbird Collective, Burlington, Joyce Cheney, occupations, house building