



the free university today

INTERVIEW WITH THREE COORDINATORS PART II

Editor's note: this is the second installment of a two-part dialogue among three past and present Coordinators of the Midpeninsula Free University. Victor Lovell served the first half of 1968, Kim Woodard followed him for a six-month term, and Bob Cullenbine, first elected to the position this January, was recently reelected for a second term, running through December. The conversation took place with no interviewer present, only a tape recorder. They were asked to talk about the MFU, where it's been and where it's going.

BC: Back to this question about money and where money is going to come from. I think that the people eventually - the people who are doing the Community's work - like Executive Director and all the staff and whatever new positions get created as we have needs for them, are going to have to be supported by other people in the Community. And the question is - as you say - is "How can I..." well, where do you fit into that program? Well, it's obvious that if the interests were here now, you would be working for whatever you need now, and it would go up as you get a wife and kids or whatever, for the Community; and you would be paid for by someone like, say, John McCarthy, who already has given us money for things. But instead of for specific projects, he might give \$50 a month towards your salary. And there might be eight other people who are Free U members who would do the same thing, and that's where your salary would come from. Now, inasmuch as it hasn't happened at this point (I don't see it happening within the next few months, or six months.) what I intend to do is like to go to work - either making candles or doing whatever I'm doing - and make about \$25 or \$30 a month more than I need - and because of what I've been through (you know

most people can't do that because they get in the habit of spending every penny they make. And that may be part of the problem. You know, most of our members, even though they may be making \$12,000-\$15,000 a year - they don't have any left over because they just have really bad financial habits, but after what I've been through I've learned to live on much less than I need at different times.) I will just give this 30 bucks a month to the Free U and try to get other people to do it too...
...and I would say that in the short run, you'll either have to do that, or just continue to do what you're doing (which is, like, barely making it) until other people are doing that, and then take one of the jobs. And eventually you'll be able to do either one: take the job or keep working in the so-called straight world and giving some money. And you don't have to give up the Free U to have a straight job. That's another thing. You don't have to work more than 40 hours a week at your straight job to make a good living. You've got a lot of time left over that you can spend doing Free U things. Going to classes and teaching; doing political activities - whatever.

KW: Some people aren't going to be willing to do that on a mass scale, which is what is really required - sort of like the Mormons...very intensive...like the Mormons went through that whole persecution thing. They were driven all the way across the whole United States; they lived in the desert together for years and years and years and really learned how to cooperate, and, as a consequence, the Mormons still give a tremendous amount of their produce - their income - to their community activities, and until the Free University reaches a certain level of psychic intensity, certainly we're not going to have that kind of "pioneer" thing the Mormons did, but if we have a kind of inner pioneer thing, and we really do it as an organization, and we keep trying, and keep trying, and not stop, then maybe people will reach that level of community where they will be willing to put it in. I think it's a great idea to just go ahead and "do it", just as one individual, because that kind of generates the idea and the reality of it, and maybe other people will pick up on it, but we also have to think in terms of deepening our experience together and that means a lot of the people who have been with it...



Vic Lovell

VL: See, I'm interested in jobs created in the Free U, and I think if we had a good policy with course fees, and encouraged people who were doing good things to charge fees, and had a kick-back out of the fee into the central organization, to help support the staff, then we could have a lot more people earning a living, working in the Free U, either as course leaders or as staff members.

Where's the Store & the Print Shop? Are they making money, or losing money, or breaking even or...?

BC: Ohhh...the Store has been, like, almost breaking even. It's probably losing a little money, but it was shut down for darn near a month during the Winter Quarter and was shut down another week and a half during this quarter, but it's going to, I think, be all right. I'm just not real sure. The Print Shop is losing money, in the sense that it is costing us more money than we budget for it, so we have to come around and give it injections of money every once in a while to keep it going. But, in fact, printing the three Free You newsletters and the catalog per quarter, we're getting our printing done, probably 30% cheaper than we would if just did

n't have any print shop at all and had to spend all that money to a printer, so - for what we're getting out of it - we're saving the Free University a lot of money and we're providing jobs for three people (but we're still not paying them enough).

Another reason that I'm upset about the Free U (I guess I am) is what's happening in the world outside the Free U, and that's that things just seem to get more and more oppressive such as in Berkeley, Ronald Reagan, Nixon, and John Mitchell, the new Attorney General, and the busting of radical leaders, and new telephone taps, which have just gone in on Free U phones (they installed them yesterday), including mine; probably yours too.

VL: I gathered that. I tried to call you and I couldn't get you.

BC: Yeah. There were intercepts on a lot of phones yesterday. When they put in the new taps they fucked them up and the telephone company had to go around and fix them all. But it's just that that kind of stuff going on makes it look like even we were working well, there's really nothing we could do, and that's frustrating. It's like all these organizational things that you do, these sort of foundation things that you do in order to create better things at some time in the future - like working to create a community center and the work that would have to go into it to make it happen, or working to create any kind of thing - the payoff is that it won't work, if you ever get around to making it happen, or that you will be repressed before you ever get there. It's sort of a fatalistic thing: Well, why do it? Why try it?



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KW: One of the things that we should realize about this current wave of repression is that it's based strictly on the book. In other words, it won't be a wave of repression like in the '50's where you had people drawn up before committees and so on, and they actually stopped their activities or they were fired from their jobs - simply because they had been subpoenaed. We have gotten used to that kind of activity. We've gotten used to HUAC, and it's really not the weapon that it used to be. The weapon now is, if you've got an arrest record or if they can get you on some minor offense, then they'll do it. And that really hurts people who want to stay in straight jobs, and so on. My own line is to avoid arrest, at any cost. Arrest is the evil, because arrest is the criterion which will be used to single out people this time. Last time it was affiliation with organizations. This time it will be arrest record. And that's what I see developing as a pattern. It is certainly true in the McClellan subpoenas. I was not mentioned in that subpoena despite the fact that I was connected with the Free University and SCORE through the whole previous year, because I had not been arrested, or even charged with anything with regard to the A3M demonstrations - because I had stayed out of jail, in other words. And it seems to me that that's the crucial thing that we should watch our steps on and learn how to avoid.



Bob Cullenbine

VL: most of the people who might be involved in the Free U central organization this spring were involved in A3M, because that's where the action was, in spite of the fact that they had to risk arrest. A lot of the people did get arrested. And then Kim talked about how we were involved in A3M. Certain elements of style - like the wedding - were influenced by the Free U.

KW: Now, I bet if Robb were here and active in the A3M, we would have culled a lot more members, a lot more people - active people - out of them, interested in the ongoing activities of the Free U, because one of the frustrations of the people

in the A3M was that they had no organizational things ongoing. They were trying to build the A3M itself into an organization and that was kind of slipshod because it wasn't well designed. And people were really frustrated with each other because they hadn't had a long experience of making decisions together, and so on. And the Free U had a perfect opportunity to function there as a kind of reserve organization - a place to go when you're done sitting in in Encina or the Applied Electronics Lab. But we didn't pick up that chance; we missed the chance. There was nobody there who was applying himself almost entirely to that kind of activity.

BC: I think, also, that it's very possible that the Free University may have already done its thing, as an organization. And that we've done it and we've done it well, and that what we've now got is going to be what the Free University is going to be: lots of really groovy classes - we now have, in fact, free education. We really do have it. Anybody can teach anything he wants to; almost everybody knows it now, in this area. Or, at least we don't have to have any big publicity campaign to let them know it. Everybody will know it if we continue to do just what we are doing. And we'll continue to get people seeking various kinds of knowledge - seeking it in the Free U - and people who have it to share, doing it there. And we'll effectively provide leisure time with some kinds of meaningful choices of what to do with your leisure time, as opposed to before we existed. What people could do without a great deal of effort. We've made it easy to find these kinds of courses. And this may be it. And the other organizations, or the other things that occur (though we originally wanted the Free University to become a whole life-involved, political, social, and even religious thing) - maybe it's going to do what it's doing now, and that's about it. And its political activities and its activities beyond strictly the courses may melt away. And it may be some other organization that will come into creation to provide these other things. Like, the Communes may very well come as they are now: just people getting together and doing them. They may have no relationship to the Free U, except that the people in the commune may teach some courses or go to some.

KW: Though we're going back then to the mistake that we criticize in the earlier forms of social organization - that people segmented themselves, functionally. In other words, they chose functional lines as the boundaries of their personal relationships. And that's exactly what will happen again if what you say comes about. In other words, it may be that we have to integrate the Free University with other organizations like, say, the Observer and the Human Institute, and so on. Then find some common organization - a "Society of Man" or something like that, for this area, in which all of those things sort of fit together, and we do our thing. It's like, there used to be this kind of organization. There's a tradition of this kind of organization in the United States. The Masons are a good example of an organization that was of that nature. It was a "secret society" kind of thing. This also flourished in other countries.

China has a long tradition of secret societies in which whole villages were integrated with other villages, and so on. People were integrated across incredibly diverse boundaries into one organization. The organization, in many cases, was for self-defense or something of that nature. But we have no need for self-defense (or at least, only a minor one) if we're white middle-class people. But we have much more need for re-integration, and if we can get a kind of organization which is really based on that principle, or draw in the Free University so that it includes that principle, or as leaders of the Free University attempt to deepen the integration among ourselves, which I think is probably the key. If we can do any of those things, then, perhaps, it would get another kind of impetus. The Free University has gone through that wave motion before. You know, we've felt that we were sort of sliding off-- "well, maybe we've done our thing now"--it often comes at the end of the quarter that we feel that way, and then we pick up again the next time.

BC: You know, I felt that in coming over here today that it was almost a luxury to have--oh, you know, we were going to get together and talk for an hour or two. I've found that I don't know what to do anymore when I'm not working; doing some kind of organizational work for the Free U or teaching a class or going to a thing that is a class or - it's always going to meetings or printing (I do a lot of printing). I don't know what to do when I'm not doing these things any more.

VL: Yeah, I know what you mean. It really has been, through the last couple of years, my whole life --for me, it has really been a whole way of life. The division was that it would become that, at least semi-permanently, for at least some substantial number of people. Now, I don't know how that's going to happen.

KW: But have you put yourself together with the other people for whom that has become a reality --a way of life?

VL: Like there is a thing--I sometimes wish--I wish, you know, I had time to drop in and see you, or you. Either of you, more times than I do. Somehow, that is not programmed into this whole way of life.

KW: But maybe we don't have to drop in on each other; we should have some time when we all get together, you know, and do our thing together. And we used to have that, and it worked very well. But we dropped it. I don't know why it died. It's like we tried and tried and tried and tried. I tried, personally, to keep that confrontation going, and I don't know why it died. I think that one of the reasons was that oftentimes, even again at the confrontation, we would have some people who had been with the organization a long time who considered other things more important than that, and they didn't have the sense of obligation to all show up. They figured, "Oh, he'll lead it this week; he'll take care of it this week. We don't have to all worry about coming."

But I'll bet that if you got the three of us, plus five or six other people to really commit themselves - not to teach any courses Thursday night - maybe even to cut out some other things on the other nights of the week that were just one more encounter group (that anybody could do anyhow). Maybe we should draw people in from other groups too; maybe we ought to get Chung to come every week, even if we have to move it to another night. Get him to come; get some of the people from the Observer to come; get other people - Roxy - to come up. Anybody, like you said once in some kind of thing I read, that the encounter group leaders have got to have some special kind of encounter for themselves, and yet we've never come down with that. I think when we start having that, that's when other people are going to start really coming in, really moving in and participating.



Kim Woodard

VL: If everything we'd started to do we'd finished, we wouldn't be in this kind of strange hiatus that we're in now. The first thing was that we didn't pull the Community Center off. Given all the forces arrayed against us and the available energy we had, we just couldn't do it. And we didn't keep trying. And why didn't we keep trying? Well, the next thing that happened was the bombers, and so for four months all the exterior energy was being used up simply defending ourselves.

KW: But that was a time when a lot of other people were drawn to that energy too. It's like when you move a business in, and you're going to move another business in next to it, the combination of the two businesses is much stronger than if they were a block apart. And if you have one form of energy, another form of energy --energetic activities going on, and they are together, in one organization or in one place, like a confrontation every week--whatever. Then the intensity of that experience is going to be much greater the greater number of people you have.

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VL: But a lot of people got together and got involved behind that whole "watch" thing. But there were two things wrong: (1) it was defensive instead of offensive; it didn't involve any expansion, it was simply protecting what we had; and (2) it was clandestine, so that it took people out of the central organization of the Free U since it had to be clandestine and the Free U operates openly. All of a sudden you created a closed cadre, which is supposed to be entirely against our politics, but necessity dictated otherwise.

KW: Isn't that sort of the story of the Free U? The Free U individual too - like never carrying through on something they get started. It's like Robb is in India now. People don't get married and really stick with it. People don't carry through a job until it really gets finished.

VL: Communes don't last.

KW: But we get this crazy kind of psychic thing in our heads that something's gone wrong - in the middle - and we don't carry it through until it's really done. I don't know why that happens but it's true.

VL: Spring came and everything went to A3M, which didn't really get carried through either. But this is really understandable in all three cases: the Community Center, the Bombers and the A3M. We were really up against a hell of a lot. Maybe more than we are powerful enough to take on right now.

KW: Maybe there's a deeper thing, which is, the truth is that we are anarchists at heart. That is, there's a very fundamental disbelief in marriage, or there's a very fundamental disbelief in organized work that goes all the way through the Free U and has from the very start. And it's that kind of disbelief that was generated by the lousy marriages of our parents, by the lousy organizations that we were faced with as we grew up - organizations that were dedicated to producing all similar men, organizations that were dedicated to producing war, marriages that were dedicated to producing nothing but more material objects. We got really soured on the institutions themselves and on the activities, instead of seeing that it was the values, direction of those activities that was fucked

up. Well, we have unscrewed, we have straightened out our values. All our heads are going in the same place: all of us want peace, all of us want equality, all of us want freedom, right? So our heads are in a good place, and they are all together, but we never carry through on things because we're still threatened by the ghost of those past experiences.

VL: Well, going from those values to create new institutions is a pretty big thing.

KW: But we've done a beautiful job. We have a structure in the Free University that is probably the most intricate, balanced democratic process, on a small scale, that you could get. It's very open to new members, and so on. It has very few problems with equality. So there's a value that has been realized in our organization. But it's almost like we're scared to realize that we're there and we've done something good.

VL: So what do we do next? Whenever you ask that question, in progressive circles, you're in trouble. Big put down: "He's trying to figure out what to do next."

KW: But we decided at the beginning of the thing what we were going to do next. The next thing we were going to do is start to live together, and that looks pretty clear that it's going to be it.


VL: Except I've been hearing that for ten years. Like there's Cully with suburban house and his wife and his kids. How's he going to live together?

BC: I'm not going to live together.

VL: He's not going to live together.

KW: Your wife wouldn't do it?


BC: No. I'll live in that house, right next to all my friends' houses. I was talking with Bob Albrecht, two or three weeks ago about a commune, and about what kind of a commune I could live in - like really consistent with where I have my head - and what would be very real to me would be something like where I'm living right now. Like it's a fairly cheap house. It's a small house, but it's got all the room we need, with some additions because we have another baby, but basically it's all there. It's got a private little yard where kids can play. It's



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on a cul-de-sac so that there's not things running through it, and as far as the house is concerned, I wouldn't want a lot less than that. I wouldn't want hardly anything less than that. The only thing I would like is to have all the neighbors be like Free U people. Have all the neighbors share - I don't care what their jobs were or whether they had jobs - just kind of share the same kinds of feelings that most of the people in the Free U have - the values you were talking about. I'd like to live in close proximity to people like that; it would be great. Again there's an economic problem. I got help getting that house, and it would be a long time before turning over those houses in the neighborhood, one by one, new people could come in - people that we're friends with. And it's not very likely that more than two families in that whole neighborhood that are already there would become friendly and begin to share the same kinds of values that Carole and I have.

BC: Okay. Well, see that doesn't bother me - to be a liberal.

KW: See, what difference does it make - that's really ridiculous - whether he's a liberal or a radical or whatever the hell he is, as long as his head is down on those values and he's working for them. It really doesn't make any difference.

BC: But the material answer to my commune is that what in fact we do is that we get 160 acres up on Page Mill and we get financial backing, and we get together with a bunch of people that have the economic wherewithal to be able to pay \$200 a month for where you're going to live, one way or another. And we build our own fucking commune. We go up there and file a subdivision map with the State and actually build a subdivision that is a low-income - keep it down to houses as simple as, say, the one I live in now. And there's even a lot simpler ones you can build now a lot cheaper that have as much footage - and just bring in the people you want, that's all. Bring in people who are members of the Free U or members of your commune or you vote who to have in. Just having the money doesn't get you in. The commune owns this property - whatever it is - the Free U owns it or the commune, and they have a council that's elected and - or they run it the way the Free U runs it. Just run your own little community that way and have a school there too.

VL: I think we're just setting up a private club.

Legal Referrals

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BC: Yeah. A private club, but as soon as there's enough people that want to join that can't fit in there - for one thing, I don't think that people would want to get in there. You know, people wouldn't want to live there that are, like, straight people. They would think that's pretty freaky: encounter groups once a week, classes, kids running around the neighborhood nude. You know one thing: in that neighborhood kids could run around the streets nude! And the adults too if they wanted to.

KW: Maybe the only answer is to forget the living thing and just start going to marathons together and really do that intensively and keep doing it.

VL: We've done that for a year.

BC: Well, I don't care--

KW: Well, let's keep doing it. We haven't done that many, man.



BC: A marathon is like shooting speed. Like I get a real terrific hit for a week off of one. And then I'm paying back that energy for the next two or three weeks after that.

KW: But it's not to get your consciousness in a certain place, or it's not to get--maybe it is to get your consciousness in a certain place--but it's not to get some state of mind, like that "speedy" state of mind or an acid state of mind that's going to stay with you for a long time. It's rather something that you realize about what you're doing and what you need to do, that goes on in that marathon. And once that happens with a person, that information stays with him. He carries it around with him and he becomes an agent - kind of a new active agent - in the community, instead of just a passive person. And what we've got to do is just produce as many of those people as possible.

VL: I have to admit I still don't know how to work through those values. I don't know whether to take to the streets and start throwing things or do more encounter groups or meditate and drop acid...get married and settle down or, or what. I still don't know.

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KW: We have to learn how to cooperate together and how to act together. The trouble is that we all feel that our individual visions have got to take us in a direction poles apart from somebody else - from everybody else's vision - because they're actually working for the same goals that we are. Our techniques, or our approach to our value thing is probably a little different. Like I'd probably be inclined to place primary value on the maintenance of sort of survival-of-the-species as my kind of thing. And your thing is probably closer to equality as the basic human value. But I dig yours too, and you dig mine, right? And so we really do have a basis for cooperation. There's no reason why we shouldn't work together,

VL: That's awfully abstract. I mean, day by day, I continually have to defend the Free University. I defend it to straight people, liberals. I have to defend it to movement, and I have to defend it to human potential scene, the pure encounter people...the mystics, everyone who's on his trip. Somehow I always wind up defending what we're doing, what we have done. This will get us all there; these other things won't.

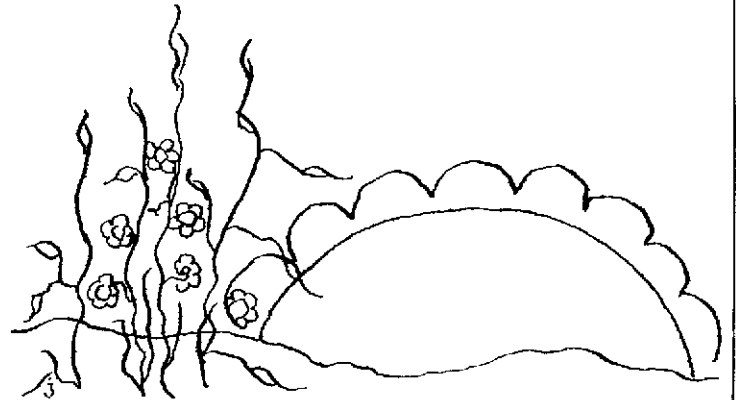
KW: But how much do we support each other in the activities that we're doing? How much support goes on in those Coordinating Committee meetings? And how much is it just sort of tooth-and-nail? Fight it out, fight it out, fight it out. It's just like the damn left has always been. Just incapable of even cooperating, one man with another.
I keep telling you, it's not a matter of going to San Gregorio or Fresno or anywhere else. It's a matter of going down the street. Like Judy and I got tired of going and seeing people because we went to see people time and time and time and time and time and time and time again. We've gone around and seen everybody. I used to do the same damn thing when I was coordinator - just running from door to door to door to door. We spent a tremendous amount of time seeing very few people the same way. And we could do the same kind of thing and share our experiences much more intensively if we had a group of people to do it with who were really dedicated to meeting and being together. But this doesn't exist.

whenever

I think of you,
it's close-ups,
grass and sunlight,
fragments of faces, fade-outs,
and strange turns of focus--

dark, a deep swimming
in kelp and eelgrass,
hair catching the edges of caves,
the dark sparked with tiny fish,
bright sheets of them.

It's the surface
of a summer lake,
hitting a cold spot,
emptiness,
the space where you're not.



in my head

snakes whip their tails,
fingers snapping.
My mind leaps back.

Defended
in prisms and mirrors,
I live obliquely,
at angles to myself.
I make a virtue of confusion,
use it;

my mind spins
pinwheels.
They split the dark
and stick.

love poem

Our smiles click,
links in a chain,
exact.
We chafe to please
and catch--
guilt's teeth.

We inhabit the knots
of a long rope.

karen marmon

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