

Interviewee: David Walker

Interviewer: James Meier

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UF295A

M: My name is James Meier and I am interviewing Daru Brahma Das and were you born in Florida?

W: No, I was born in Boston but I lived there less than a year so I don't call it home. I call Princeton, New Jersey home.

M: And when did you come to Gainesville?

W: I came to Gainesville in 1977 to come to attend school here.

M: Is your family still in the Boston area?

W: No. Actually we moved to Florida in 1975 or 1976 and that's why I ended up coming to school here. I had originally started in Philadelphia at Haverford College but when we moved to Florida it was cheaper to go to school in the state of Florida. So they've been in Florida ever since 1976.

M: In this area?

W: South Florida, more like Broward county.

M: What are your parents' names?

W: My father is Ian Walker and my mother is Lois Walker, although they got divorced about four years ago.

M: And what do they do as a profession?

W: My dad is in stock-brokerage, investment, and my mother is working with Sax Fifth Avenue in the accessories area.

M: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

W: I have one brother, fifteen months younger, and two sisters three years younger and seven years younger.

M: Are they in Florida too?

W: One sister is in Montana, the other sister is down in South Florida also and my brother is also down in South Florida.

M: So you said you got here in 1975, I think, to Florida anyway. How did you end up in Gainesville?

W: Because I was going to go to school at University of Florida. I did go for half a semester and then I dropped out. At first, I wasn't in this [the Hare Krishna Movement]. I joined another Christian group. I just really wanted to seek God, so I joined a few groups and went very quickly through them, fortunately, because I was very serious. Quickly, I found myself here and I've never left since. I threw myself into each group saying, 'God, you've led me to this group. Now reveal to me if this is actually [the path I should take to you] or not. And I saw that there was something good [in each group] but something was missing, and I kept moving to a few groups until I came here and I didn't see anything missing and I still haven't. [The only thing missing here is my] lack of purity because it's not easy to do.

M: What was lacking from the first Christian groups that you approached?

W: It was hard to find someone really following. I mean, the average person in the church may have their foibles but you expect that the leader at least should be a very Godly person, yet often they're meat-eaters, and they themselves don't seem to have the qualities of Christ. And I actually

wanted to follow Christ and I wanted to see where was someone like Christ, so I came to this movement and I saw Prabhupada [the founding spiritual master, Swami Prabhupada]. I did not see him personally but I studied his life and saw other people who had actually become very saintly people. You could see it in the character. It was pretty clear that they were living a renounced life, and you cannot be a sense gratifier and be God-realized. It just doesn't go together. So, that's what I was impressed by. The two things that made me join this were 1) the amount of knowledge and 2) the seriousness in the practice. That's what most attracted me, those two things. [We worship] the same God. [We] just [have] more knowledge of Him and a [more] serious practice, which is obviously needed if you want to attain something [valuable].

M: Well, how did you first get involved with the Hare Krishnas?

W: Interestingly enough, there was lunch out there in the Plaza, but I wasn't open-minded enough at that time because I was a meat-eater, and that really kind of clouds the consciousness, so you stay on the material platform, and I really couldn't see it. I said [to myself], who are these bald geeks? So I understand how a lot of people [feel] the same [way] about us. Anyhow I did not eat out there, and I never talked to them out there. But I can only say that I was a rare case. Most people kind of come gradually to our programs or eat with us and say, 'What are you doing?' and they finally come to programs and say, 'Maybe I should do

this.' But it so happened where the first time that I ever came to the property [a temple], I never left. It was that kind of situation because I was really in the mood of, as I said, 'You've led me to this, God, and I'm going to throw myself into it. [For example,] when I went to the Christian church, I was going everyday practically and really got into it. So when I came here, I also got into it, and then it was so much the truth that I just never left. So the first time I came, [I stayed]. It wasn't a gradual thing for me.

M: But what got you here in the first place? You say you had a closed mind and saw them as 'bald guys' on the Plaza.

W: Well that's an interesting story, I guess if you want to get into it.

M: Yes, by all means.

W: I was in that born-again Christian church where I was active and then I just realized, 'This is not it, [because I saw too much talk and not enough practical action], and the next day I had left [that church], but I still wanted God, and I was on campus and there was a guy in a robe and [he was] barefoot and had a beard and he was under a tree and he [was a member of what is called the Christ family. You don't hear about them anymore. He was sitting under a tree, and I was immediately attracted and I said to myself, 'Well,

here's someone who's living like Christ-renounced-and he's not just talking it.' He was talking about 'no killing, no sex and no materialism.' That was their 3 'keys to heaven.' And I said, 'This is more like what I'm inspired by-somebody who's trying to really live a renounced life.' So I was still in that mood of 'Maybe this is it, God. You've brought me to him.' And not only me. Another student and I were both sitting there listening to him and some other people were, and they all peeled away, but the other student and I were both so fascinated. And he was an intelligent guy and I was thinking, 'Wow, it's not just me that's being impressed. This guy actually is intelligent, and he thinks this is cool too. We both thought, 'Let's just do what he's doing.' We were both actually at the point of wanting to give up material life. So anyhow, we went back to this guy's house to pick up a sleeping bag and stuff and his brother [arrived and] said, 'What are you doing?!' And he said, 'Well we're kind of going to follow this guy,' and his brother and his brother's friend kind of grabbed him and deprogrammed him immediately and it was a pretty heavy scene. They didn't let him go, but I kept going with the guy and it wasn't long before I started having doubts. I only stayed with him a day or two and then by God's arrangement, there were other people in the group coming to this area because it was Christmastime and the Northern members were migrating from the North [to get out of the cold], so I got to see others in the group at their little camp, and I started having real

doubts because, despite the fact that they were vegetarians, they were into smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee and even smoking Marijuana, which I didn't do at all practically, so I was really having doubts. 'God, I don't think this is it, so please help me.' So what happened was that the next day, they had to get gas in their van and so everybody piled in and then we pulled up to a gas station and [there was] another guy [in the van] who had just joined who had been working at that same gas station, and they filled up and the gas station attendant said, 'How are you going to pay for this?' and [the guy who had just joined] said, 'I was just working here last week. Take it out of the money you owe me.' And the attendant said, 'No, we sent that money to your parents. We want some money.' And [his boss came out and] said, 'Well, who asked for the gas?' And [the attendant] pointed at two people, me and another guy-and I hadn't [actually] asked for the gas but I was in the mood, 'Well, take it as God's arrangement,' so I didn't protest when they called the police on us. So the police threw us in jail, in the Alachua County Detention Center. I was wearing one of those robes-[these people wore] literally a sheet-and they put me in solitary confinement and I remember, interestingly enough, that the door said-someone had scratched into it-Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, [in] real big [letters]. I didn't know what [it meant], so I just [scratched] in 'Praise God' because I was in that kind of mentality. Anyhow, after a few days, they could see that I

was not a nut and thus I was moved in with the general population. And I was just reading the Bible thinking, 'I'm on the right track. I'm seeking God, but I don't know what [the correct way to God] is yet. All I did was read the Bible-no TV or anything like that. Anyhow, one guy came upstairs and said, 'Hey, there's another guy in this cell down there and he's preaching this 'undefeatable' philosophy, and you should go down and talk to him. So I talked to him, and he was a guy who knew the Hare Krishna philosophy, but he was a street person and couldn't follow it, but he knew it. So I was attracted. I thought, 'Wow, this is pretty interesting,' but because he wasn't living it, he didn't impress me enough to completely agree with him. Anyhow, a few days later I left the jail. They just let me go for time served. I had called mom and dad and said, 'I'm not coming home; I know I'm on the right track. I'm not in the right group yet, but I know I am on the right track of serving God.' So I left the jail still barefoot and in a robe just coming down Waldo Road heading towards town, thinking, 'I do not know where to go, God. Help me out.' I [was getting right close] to 13th Street and University Avenue, right at Leonardo's and said, 'God, help me out, because when I get to the corner, I don't know what to do,' and just as I was there, at Leonardo's, a girl called out, 'Hey brother!' And I thought, 'Oh, here's a girl who appreciates that I am a saintly-type person.' So I went over to give her what little spiel I knew, and she said, 'Isn't

it wonderful how God's everywhere and in every atom?' And I thought, 'Wow, I never thought of that. I always thought God was way up there, but I never thought God was everywhere,' and I said, 'Well, what are you into?' because [I was thinking], 'Maybe God has led me to you.' And she said, 'I'm with the Guru Maharaja Jis,' and I had heard of it, and I thought that was a crazy thing, but I thought ['Hold on. You just prayed to God and here's this person with more knowledge than you,' so I went with her]. I spent two days of checking that out, and I was already having doubts on that too because they had [shown] a video of Guru Maharaja Jis on campus, and I was immediately not so impressed, but it was the best thing I had found yet. I had just rented an apartment for myself because I still had money in the bank from when I was a student. I had dropped out just two weeks ago and this was all happening like "bang-bang-bang," and so I'm walking out of the apartment and all of a sudden I see the guy who was in jail preaching the Hare Krishna philosophy and I said, 'Guess what I am into now? I'm with the Guru Maharaja Jis,' and he said, 'That is all bogus! Come with me tomorrow to the Hare Krishna feast. And so that's what happened. He brought me that next day, and I was already in the mood of, 'As I've tried with so many other groups, I will throw myself into this [and let God reveal Himself as to whether this is right or wrong], and I never left. [That guy] said, 'If you join, I will join too,' but he couldn't do it. I did end up staying, but he's considered

one of my gurus because he led me here, so I always think fondly of him because he led me on the path, even though he was a street person.

M: Do you still keep in touch with him?

W: No, I've seen him like once or twice in the past since I joined eighteen years ago. I ran into him after five years and I've never seen him since. I don't know where he is. He could be dead for all I know.

M: You said this was when?

W: I joined exactly on Christmas eve in 1977 when we walked on the temple grounds and there happened to be a feast that night and I prayed, 'God, you've given me the greatest Christmas present.'

M: I forgot to ask you one question. When were you born? How old were you at this time?

W: I was just about to turn twenty-one in two weeks. My birthday is January 7. Now I am thirty-nine.

M: And so you became an active member or were you just a congregationalist?

W: No, I moved right in, and I've been 'brain-washed' ever since, as they say.

M: What kind of activities did you get involved with?

W: Pretty quickly, I did what our major thing is-to go out and harass people and pester them for donations. I'm joking here.

M: I was just about to ask. I've never seen this.

W: You never have?

M: Asking for donations, no.

W: Well, we're famous [for it], like the 'Airplane' movie?

M: I have seen the 'Airplane,' but I've never actually witnessed [the collecting of donations] myself.

W: First of all, we don't really wear the robes out in the airport, so we're a little under cover, you might say, not because we're trying to trick anybody but just because people are so much on the material platform that if I came up to you with a robe and a shaved head, [who would stop?] Just like when I was a student, I would never talk to them. Similarly, many people would just want to say, 'Who is this weirdo?' and they wouldn't talk to you. So we just put a hat on and some clothes so that they can at least deal with us.

And, we're distributing books. We're not just selling flowers, like in the Airplane movie, [where the people] say, 'Hi, we're selling for the Church For Higher Consciousness. Would you like to give a donation?' I would go to the rest areas and distribute books to people coming from Canada at all of those rest areas on I-75 and I-95, and we did that for many years. I did it. I've done airports many years, and I did it for the first eight years that I was in the movement. That's all I did, pretty much. I did it in the New Orleans Airport and Miami Airport and Orlando Airport and then, after that, I took this [center] over about ten years ago. So I've been doing this now for ten years but I still go out every weekend and go to Busch Gardens and distribute books and on summer breaks I go out to the Disney World and

Wet-And-Wild and the people in the parking lots. I still do it, but I don't do it as much. I'm cooking most of the time, now.

M: So what do you do on these occasions when you go to Busch Gardens or wherever?

W: Well, I'm actually at the streetlight in front of Busch Gardens, which is city property. I'm not on Busch Gardens property. And I stop people at the streetlight and try to give them books on vegetarianism and reincarnation particularly, because I find that those are things that people can get into.

M: What kind of reactions do you generally get?

W: It's good. You learn how to deal with people. It's not like you are just a fanatic. 'Hey man, are you a vegetarian. Well, you idiot, why aren't you?!' It's not like that. You're just real friendly, like, 'Where are you from?' First, you try to be a friend and say, 'By the way, I'm a yogi teacher. Have you thought about reincarnation? Do you think it's a possibility or no way?' And they will say, 'I don't think so,' and I'll say, 'I don't mean you always come back. It's just that if you don't make heaven, you get another shot. I mean, God's a nice guy. He ain't gonna burn you in hell forever. And a lot of people say, 'Yeah, that makes sense.' [Then, I'll say] 'So, take a book. And we're doing a benefit. We feed people and we're spreading this knowledge, so can you help out?' And it's a lot of fun to deal with people. Anyhow, that's what I do.

M: So you did that for the first ten or seven or eight years?

W: Eight years, full time.

M: And so you said you took over this place in 1987?

W: 1986.

M: Do you have a formal title? I think I read that you are the president.

W: Yes, I am the president of this little center.

M: So, what kind of responsibility does that involve?

W: It's actually just trying to make people Krishna-conscious in the whole area, you could say in all of North Florida, or at least in Gainesville. I mean, of course, it's a great responsibility and I am hardly doing a fraction of what I should. I'm just concentrating on trying to do something at the University. Even then, I could do more over there. I mean, it's just an unlimited weight of what needs to be done, and how can I do it? But at least that is what I should be trying to do, is to spread Krishna-consciousness to all the people here. I always feel very unqualified. I mean, to be a qualified president, to be a real devotee is so great. I'm just trying to be a devotee, because it's just like any other endeavor, such as trying to be a better musician or tennis player. Once you've started doing it you realize, 'O my God! There's so much more to it.' For example, with tennis, sure I can go out there and hit it and play a little better than the average person but I now realize that I'm still nowhere, especially when I compare myself with college, and what to speak of professional,

players.' So when someone says, 'I'm real good at tennis,' or, 'I am a real good guitar player,' it's like I'm thinking [sarcastically], 'Oh yeah?!' In other words, anyone who's really any good, they think they're not so good. So similarly, anyone who thinks, 'Yeah, I'm a great devotee of God,' that really just proves they're not because the real devotees of God think, 'I'm not very devoted.' I certainly know that I'm far from the standard and I don't want to pose that I'm a good president or anything like that.

M: But why were you given the position? I mean, this is a fairly large mission and presumably you have some skills or some reason that they appointed you. Or was this seen as a golden opportunity that you were offered this position, or how did you happen into becoming president of this particular temple?

W: Well, I had been working under the guy who was president. Actually [to give a little history], I remember when I was three years in the movement, I wanted to open a center because, as we've all probably experienced, we all think we could do better than the person in charge. But I wanted to run a center and I remember my spiritual master said, 'Well, that's very nice.' He didn't say, 'You are too young. What do you think you are doing, you idiot?' He was very nice. He said, 'Oh that's nice. But do you know how to cook?' I said, 'No, not really.' 'Do you know how to give class?' I said, 'No, I haven't really done much of that either.' 'Do you

know how to keep books [do accounting]?' I said, 'No.' 'Do you know how to play the **mrdanga**, the drum?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Well, learn those things, and then you can become president [or open a center] because you have to be able to cook for the people, play those instruments and give classes, and you have to be able to keep the books. So I gradually started learning a little cooking under the guy I was with and I learned all these other things, and he moved on to something else and just turned the center over to me. I heard that Dennis Miller was saying recently that America has got its problems, but still it's the best in the world.

But we shouldn't be too proud because it's kind of like saying you're the Valedictorian of your summer school class. Big deal. You're the best of a bunch of idiots. In that way, maybe I'm Valedictorian of this temple, but it's just a summer school temple. I mean, you have to pick somebody to be in charge, and I may not be very qualified, but I may have been the best of whatever there is. That's how I certainly feel. I really feel the place would grow a lot better if somebody more sincere [were in charge]. Like when I have free moments, what am I doing? I'm out there playing racquetball. I could be going door-to-door, trying to make people more aware of what we're doing. I always feel very inadequate because there's so much to do because the world the world has 'gone to hell in a hand basket,' as they say, and all I do is sit here and watch T.V. I don't watch much, mind you, and I don't watch Beverly Hills 90210 and all of

that crap, just 20/20 or something like that or PBS, but even that. I could be doing better things. I always feel inadequate.

M: Do you ever foresee the day when you feel that you will be doing all that you can? Is that possible?

W: You'll always feel that you could do so much more, but at least, I could certainly do a lot better than that. T.V. or playing racquetball or going to a movie. These things are not really very beneficial to the world or even to oneself. For many people, they think, 'If I just did those things, I'd be in good shape. For example, some people go to the frisbee practices, and if they weren't, they would just be partying. So for them, it's the best thing they are doing, whereas for me, it's like one of the worst things I'm doing. You know, it just depends on what your standards are.

D: I'm a school teacher, so when I watch T.V. or movies, I think that I could be doing better things, but I'm at least in touch with what they are talking about, where they're coming from, the ones I'm trying to reach.

M: Please identify yourself.

D: I am **Dirk Drake**, another member of the oral history seminar. Can I just bump in? I have a question.

M: Sure, go ahead.

D: What is the religious or spiritual significance of being on the UF Plaza serving food, which I think is probably one of the most profound things you do? Is that a sacrament?

W: Yes, the idea is we're not just offering food to people. We are offering them prasadam. Prasadam means 'mercy of the Lord.' And so all the food we eat, we offer first to Krishna or God and thank Him for having given these foodstuffs and then ask him to please bless them so that anyone who eats them may become purified and come to appreciate His greatness and love Him more. So we offer the food every day before we serve it out, and people, whether they know it or not, are getting purified by eating it.

M: Now, they can get purified even without appreciating the significance of it?

W: Right. Just like we use the example, if I give medicine to a medical student or a child, the same benefit will be for both even if the child has no idea what's in the medicine or why it works whereas the medical student may understand. Similarly, people ask why we go and chant on the corner of the street. Whether they know it or not, just by hearing the Hare Krishnas chanting, it's purifying them. If you even see devotees dressed as Hare Krishna devotees in robes or saris, that is purifying, just to see that. Of course, the more you [do] all these things with knowledge, that is so much the better.

M: The food service has been going on for an awfully long time. It's kind of unique here, isn't it?

W: Since 1971. It was unique here for the longest time, in fact, just until about four years ago. We started a second one at UCLA, where we go out twice a week, and at FSU about

twice a week now. But other than that, this is the only campus maybe in the world that does it everyday, Monday through Friday.

M: But it was not always Monday through Friday, was it? Back in the 1970s and 1980s it was Monday through Thursday.

W: When I first started, it was Monday through Thursday, but before I took over, I think it was Monday through Friday. But when I took it over there was such a lack of man-power that I had to go out on Friday, Saturday and Sunday to do the book distribution in Orlando and Tampa and then when I finally started getting enough donations from people on the Plaza to cover the expenses, then I added Friday again.

M: I was reading that the average donations were considerably less than, say, about a quarter at that time?

W: Where did you read that?

M: There's a lot of articles in the Gainesville Sun and the Independent Florida Alligator. And the articles said you were getting crowds of about two and three hundred by the later 1970s. How many are you getting now in terms of people every day?

W: About 400 to 450. And it always tends to be that whatever you ask them, they give you half. If we ask for fifty cents, we average a quarter. Now we're asking for a dollar, and we average about fifty cents.

M: So that's your average take, about 200 dollars a day.

W: Yes, it's actually been less. The average is less than fifty cents on average.

M: I'm surprised to hear that because when I go there, I see most people putting in a single dollar bill.

W: Actually, I'm seeing when I come back here to count it that there are about 150 of the ones. Now, if you say 400 people are there, that means that the other 250 are giving a total of fifty dollars. That means they are averaging twenty cents. So really, there are many nice ones who give the one dollar, but the rest of them are not. I see so many pennies everyday. I've been recently getting somebody who has been regularly throwing in some chewed finger nails. That's a new one. I've had so many slips of little paper. They do it because it looks to others that they are throwing in something, but I find out it's just a piece of paper rather than a dollar bill.

M: Is that enough to cover your costs?

W: Yes, enough to keep it going but it's not really enough. I'm always struggling with a crummy vehicle [to transport it over to campus with] and I have pots which are kind of old and which are aluminum-I'd rather have stainless steel. It's enough to get by, but not enough to make a profit.

M: You have the single van then?

W: That's all I have here. Other vehicles are of people who rent rooms because we rent out rooms here. There are not just full time devotees living here. We don't have enough of us.

M: Is that one of your major sources of income, renting out the rooms to what, students?

W: It can be anyone, but sometimes there are some Indian professors or grad students that like to live with us, and a couple of them do now.

M: Would they be typically Hare Krishnas?

W: Not really. I mean, they're not so active. They're just kind of favorable. But then again, to 'be a Krishna' is a very broad thing. Just like being a Christian-some of them go every week, some of them just go on Easter and Christmas and they still consider themselves Christian. Or maybe don't even go at all. Maybe they drink beer, but they still consider themselves a Christian. They're not very good ones, but they're still Christians. In other words, there's what you should be as a Hare Krishna, and then there's what many end up being.

M: Do they come from Hindu culture generally?

W: Who?

M: The people renting?

W: No, we only have two of them out of nine available apartments. That's the most we've ever had at a time, two or three. So the rest of them are just students or friends who just are vegetarians and like living in this atmosphere. It's quieter.

M: How many devotees live here?

W: About four or five.

M: Do you have more living elsewhere in the community?

W: Yes, just down the road, seventeen miles in Alachua, there's like the biggest Hare Krishna community in America. It's a

farm property we have there, and thirty people live on the farm, and there is 250 people living in the area around the farm. They moved here because the land is cheap and the weather is nice and we've got one of the best schools in the country. It grew up like that in the last five years. Before that, it was just a small thing.

M: Is it bigger than New Vrindavan, West Virginia?

W: Yeah. The New Vrindavan community was off for many years. I don't know if you know it, but it was excommunicated because their leader was off and they followed him. Actually, in the past year, they have again become bonafide. But how did you know about New Vrindavan?

D: I went there.

W: You actually went there?

D: I got picked up and got a ride from a vanful of Krishnas and got shown pictures of New Vrindavan.

W: How long ago was this?

D: Summer of 1982.

W: [Wow.] Oh, I think probably then it might have still been in good standing in the movement.

D: They were wonderful people. I was very tempted to go but I had an agenda.

W: I think Los Angeles and New Vrindavan were the biggest then, but a lot of them moved over here, so Alachua is now the biggest community.

M: As president of this center what kind of connection do you have with the farm in Alachua?

W: We're completely financially independent. All of our centers are. It's interesting. It forces us to be not lazy and just say, 'O.K., Hare Krishna Central, we need some more money over here.' No, we have to support ourselves, and each center has to be like that. We have the same philosophy, [of course], but I'm busy here, and we have our own programs. They have their Sunday feast and we have our own one, too. Only when there is a huge festival like Krishna's birthday or another incarnation, then we will just shut down and we'll send everybody out to the farm. That's about the only time I have anything to do with the farm. They come in and chant once a week, on Friday.

M: You get your food from the farm too, don't you?

W: Not really, it's a farm property but it's not like everyone's out there just growing vegetables or something like that. Most of the people who live there are actually not farmers, and they're not going to become farmers. They just like to live in the country though. We have a few people growing a few vegetables, but certainly not enough to supply what I need. It is a desire, eventually, to be self-sufficient like that but we're not near there yet.

M: But at one time you did get most of your vegetables from [the] Alachua [farm]?

W: No, you may have read an article that said that, but no.

M: Maybe it was misinformation.

W: I have gotten vegetables from Alachua before, but it wasn't from there. It was actually a devotee who is on his own and

happens to be growing organic vegetables and he donates some sometimes, and we still sometimes get some from him. But the farm itself has never been a source of vegetables, frankly, for me. They have enough for them because it is a much smaller operation, to cook for the 30 people on the farm. But I'm cooking for so many people, 400 a day. so I need so many vegetables.

M: Is it self-sufficient, the farm?

W: No.

M: It doesn't pay its way? How do they make a go of it financially?

W: Like any other church. All the people who live around it, they're not full-time devotees. They have a job, so they should tithe, or give part of their salaries or something to the church. So that's how they get by, like any other church, eventually even this one won't have to run down to Tampa, but it's hard to get a congregation of students because they're gone in a few years.

M: Where do you generally get the food that you serve on the Plaza?

W: Well, I go down to Tampa. That's a double thing I do. That's why I go to Tampa [to buy my vegetables] to save money because I go directly and skip the middle-man here in Gainesville, and I also distribute books down there. So I do two things down there.

M: How often?

W: I go every weekend. I go every Friday. I like it though. I enjoy it. It's like a nice change of pace. I'm here for five days and then I go down for the weekend. Every week I go back and forth.

M: Do you get wholesale potatoes?

W: Yes. [From] Mexicans. They sell them on the street corners. Those are the cheapest. They pick them themselves and sell them. You really save a lot.

M: What do you serve? I suppose it is a different dish every day?

W: We serve lunch five days but there are three different dishes. Two of them we repeat twice. One is the spaghetti with veggie balls and then the other two are Indian-type dishes. One is basically a vegetable bean soup that we throw rice in to thicken it up so we can plop it on the plate. And then the other one is plain rice with vegetables like zucchini, squash and cabbage steamed with fried potatoes and then you throw a white sauce of flour and milk and spices on top of it. That's the most favorite lunch.

M: You do a wonderful job with your steamed vegetables. I could never get them anywhere as good as that. The zucchini really has a special taste.

W: To be honest, I don't think it's my steaming it, because, I mean, I just over-steam them. But what it is, is the spices of the sauce over it is what makes it so good. I don't think you're getting a dry zucchini by itself. It's because it's mixed with the spices that it tastes good.

M: And you have some kind of apple sauce that is sweet, what is that?

W: That's also a favorite. It is called halava, and it's cream of wheat, basically. It's not that we make cream of wheat, but it's the same ingredients you start with, and then you stir in butter and brown it and toast it and then you've got water and sugar in another pot and then you mix it all together and it's sweet.

M: How nutritious is this? I know it's vegetarian most importantly, but in terms of, like you mentioned butter, I mean, is it relatively low-fat or is it about average?

W: Not too much [low fat], [pointing to his own pleasingly plump figure]. I do make a vegan dish, though, for anyone who wants to be necessarily no-fat, and there are a lot of people who eat it. This [the extra weight on my body] is not just from eating Plaza food. We have feasts here at night, and I use lots of sour cream and cheese, and I just happen to be a fanatic. I'm a junk food Hare Krishna. So, again, this [my body] is not just from eating Plaza food. But anyhow, I won't tell you that it's light stuff unless you eat the vegan dish.

D: I like the vegan dish.

W: You do? You like the TVP [texturized vegetable protein] in it?

D: Is that the extra added protein in it?

W: Yes. Have you had it?

D: I have had it recently in the last couple of months. I'm just back in school for the first time in nine years.

W: Oh, because I hadn't seen you out there.

D: It's been a long time. Nine years. But I had a vegan feast at the Temple of the Universe and it was supposed to be top-flight, but I've not been a vegan for eight years.

W: Really, you're a vegan all the way?

D: I slip up occasionally. I'm not part of the vegan reich. I'm not as strict as my brother, Mick.

W: Did Mick get you into it first?

D: River Phoenix did actually.

W: No kidding, I met him in the plaza.

D: Yeah. I brought him out there for the first time. I turned him on to Krishna lunch.

W: Well the first time I met him, [and] I don't know if it was [his] first time or not, but he was with a lady from Teen Magazine and they were doing a story on him and he was out there. Maybe he'd already been out there with you another time. You weren't out there that time?

D: That was rather staged. He'd already been out there and he wanted to give them [the magazine people] some of the Gainesville flavor.

W: That's kind of getting off of the subject.

M: I'm kind of curious of one thing, why do you tend to congregate in university towns like Tallahassee or Gainesville?

W: Well, Prabhupada actually came to Gainesville and spoke on the Plaza of The Americas, so it is a holy place of pilgrimage. My spiritual master, who is his disciple, who's right here [pointing to a photo in the room] once said, 'There has never been and there will never be anything more important to happen to Gainesville than the fact that Prabhupada came here.'

M: When did he come?

W: Prabhupada, this holy person, came here and spoke in the Plaza of the Americas in 1971. The guy who started the Plaza lunch program and brought him was trying to go the Student Government to say, 'Give some money to bring him down,' and they said, 'No, we are not going to give money,' and he said, 'You fools! You're paying all this money to bring all sorts of other people who are fools and speaking useless things, and here's this saintly person and you're not going to give a little money to bring him here!' And they actually were shocked to be chastized like that and they ok'd it and they gave like 1,000 dollars or 2,000 dollars to fly him down here.

M: UF actually paid him?

W: That's my understanding. An honorarium was given to him. Anyhow, he had a T.V. interview on campus and some girl asked him, 'Why is it that there are so many young people in your movement?' as if that was somehow a bad quality of the movement. And Prabhupada would sometimes answer back with another question. 'Well, why is it the University is so full

of young people?' And she was so surprised at being put on the spot herself that she dropped her pencil and stammered, 'Well,....that's the time for education.' And so Prabhupada said, 'Yes, and that's the time for Krishna-consciousness, because actually young people are seeking, and we are giving education. It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks.' So this [college scene] is the best [place to spread this knowledge]. People are not set in their ways yet. They're still thinking, 'What am I going to do with my life?' and so it's a good place to go and you might get them before they get too contaminated, too materialistic. That's why my spiritual master said that if you go knocking door-to-door in a college town, people say, 'Oh, come on in.' But as soon as they get their degree and they get their big \$30,000 a year or something, if you knock on the door they say, 'Go away!' They change because they're not humble anymore. Having money and being in the middle class just changes them. But as college students, they're a little more humble-they're forced to be. They [sometimes] don't have a car, and they just have a cheap apartment. So they're humble, and they're easier to deal with.

M: So as a result of his visit the Plaza is holy ground?

W: Plus, of course, all the prasadam we are distributing there.

I've noticed, like at night when I walk through it, it's just something special here. That's because there is so much spiritual activity going on. Just like this house. It used to be a fraternity house, and when we bought the place there

were condoms stuck everywhere and beer cans everywhere. I wasn't here when we moved in, but it was a real dirty place. But now, when you come here to our temple room, you just feel that this is a very good atmosphere, because it's been spiritualized. Because of all that service in the Plaza of the Americas, it has got a little bit of an atmosphere to it, because it has been spiritualized. We use this nice example. If you take an iron rod and put it in fire and you keep it in there, it will become fire. You may say, 'No it's not fire,' but touch it and it will [act as fire]. So if you keep yourself in spiritual service [or use anything] in spiritual service then you can get spiritualized, and you can deal with people that are not spiritualized and can 'warm them up' or spiritualize them because you're in the fire. Anyhow, that's what we're trying to do with the whole world. We need to spiritualize the whole world, to engage it, in Krishna's service. Anyhow, I don't know how I got off on that. What was the question?

M: Just, why college towns? You find them more receptive. Is the Plaza something special for you? Does it have any significance in the sense that it is a place where you encounter a lot of the potential students that you are going to talk to and are coming into contact with the Krishna for the first time through the food service?

W: We don't think that we're going to get them all to join. We don't have any illusions like that. But if we can just get

them to appreciate what we're doing a little bit, that will purify their lives and make them become happier. For example, let's take Arnold Schwarzenegger. He's a big health nut, and he's in charge of the President's Council on Physical Fitness because he's convinced that kids should at least do some exercise because it's very good for them. But how many people are going to ever get as big as him? Very few. Similarly, we don't expect everyone to become a full-time monk, but at least we know that if you do something spiritual it'll do good for you. So we're trying to say, 'Become vegetarian. Try and chant God's name. If you add these to your life, your whole life will be better.' So we're just trying to spread knowledge out, whatever the students become. We've had many experiences, like this famous story where some devotees went to a bank in Dallas and they walked in wearing our robes and with their shaven heads and immediately some bank employee came up to them and said, 'Oh, welcome, welcome!' and the devotees said, 'We'd like to get a loan,' and he said, 'No problem, no problem.' And the devotees said, 'Well, we don't even have an account here,' and he said, 'Well, that is no problem.' 'Well, it's a big loan.' 'Well, that's no problem either.' So the devotees said, 'What's going on?' and the guy said, 'When I was a student at UF, you guys fed me, and I know you guys are good people.' So these kind of things happen. We know that they're not going to join us, but at least they'll be favorable and can maybe help us in some way in the future.

They'll know that we're not some weirdos and cultists or something like that.

M: Does that happen a lot in the community, in Gainesville? Do you get a very positive reaction when you're on the street?

W: I said Gainesville. In other towns they would probably say, hey Hare Krishnas and throw water balloons at us, but here it is like you say **Hare bol** which is a greeting which only somebody who knows Hare Krishnas would know. You probably know that.

M: I used it on my way up the stairs. What does it mean?

W: Bol means to chant and Hare is a name of God. Basically, it means chant the name of God. It is like in Spanish you would say Adios or Adieu in French when you say goodbye or hello, instead of some Howdy or see you later, you say something that reminds you of God. Vaya con Dios, they say in Spanish so it is a much more God-conscious way of greeting someone or saying goodbye to someone, you say Hare bol. It makes you think of God, that is why our names are changed to be so instead of saying Heather or Biff or some name which has no spiritual significance, just something that sounds sexy, instead to have a name that reminds you of God. That is why the Christians would name their kids David or Sarah or Rebecca, something from the Bible. This is religious cultures that name people. Anyhow, everything has a meaning. Nothing we do is without meaning.

M: How did you come by the name Daru Draha Das?

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W: Well, it is given at my spiritual initiation by my spiritual master. I do not pick it myself.

M: Who is your spiritual master?

W: His name is Hridayananda Das Goswami or Acharyadeva for short and he is one of the first disciples of \_\_\_\_\_. He came in 1969 and the \_\_\_\_\_ started in 1966, so he came three years after it started but he immediately did so much spreading and he opened up the whole South America. Before he went there, there was no temples and he was very empowered. Prabhupada's life work was translating \_\_\_\_\_ and he passed away before finishing it and everyone wondered what was going to happen to it. Well, he actually finished it because he is such a genius. In fact right now he is getting his PhD at Harvard and he is just finishing it up. He has gone through it quickly because he is really materially genius, he picks up languages in practically a month he can learn a language. He know like six or seven languages anyhow he is just a very intelligent person materially who speaks spiritually also. An amazing person.

M: Was he the man that brought Prabhupada to Gainesville?

W: Actually, he was one of them. he was the first temple president and he was here at that time.

M: That is not David Lieberman is it?

W: David Lieberman was a student at the time and he went to student government to get the money.

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M: But that is not another name for \_\_\_\_\_.

W: No that is not him but they were together there at the time.

M: Where is he now is he still in Gainesville?

W: David Leiderman? Actually he is a lawyer in Los Angeles and in fact we are having in the beginning of Summer A the millionth plate served in Central Plaza. It is going to be a big media thing and he is flying in for it, since he started the Plaza he is going to be here for that. So you might want to be out there for that. We will let you know if you want. I am not sure exactly when, I think it will be like the 12th of May.

M: Is he still an active devotee then?

W: Yes.

M: Is there a contradiction between being active and being professional?

W: No, not necessarily, but you could be the best Hare Krishna and not wear robes and have a full head of hair and be married and have a job, but it is rare. I mean, you can be a very good one, but it is not say external things are the answer but I am saying that it is really more difficult and he is not doing only legal work for us. If he was, I would say he is fully into it. But he also does other things too. It is just one of the things he does. At one time he was fully active so I would say that he is not what he was before but he still is a good member but he is not as full

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as he used to be. he used to run the temple in Gainesville and it was growing big.

M: This is the biggest temple in North America?

W: Not this one, of course, the Alachua farm community is.

M: I noticed when I saw some of the pictures that some of the temples or the centers are enormous castles in Europe and in India. I have not seen the Alachua center, but I take it that is not the case.

W: Well some of the buildings are big, but there is not os many people in them. Whereas her we have got maybe a smaller building, in fact we did just open a bigger temple, for years we just had a double-wide trailer that we built and that was our temple. But finally last August opened a real big temple. It is still small compared to some of those castles, but it is a temple building. Anyhow, those other buildings we still have them in Europe and so forth but there are not as many devotees in the whole area. There may be like fifty living in the temple, but not living around. Whereas here we have got maybe thirty living at the temple but like hundreds living around it.

M: Are most of them all students or have you recruited a lot of your devotees to come from among the student population from your activities on campus?

W: Not so many. There has been through the years a steady stream of them, a few coming at a time and maybe one or two

in a year maybe. But most of them come from other areas. But actually, we stay out there. We are like the Marines, we are looking for a few good souls. We are not looking for quantity as much as quality and it is hard when you are selling diamonds. I use this example, when you go to Walmart like \_\_\_\_\_ works and every morning when you get there there is a line of people waiting to get in. Now, if you were to go to Tiffany's Jeweler's or whatever you would probably get that many people the whole day because they are selling something more valuable. So we do not get so many because people are afraid because they know they are going to have to give up stuff. We do not want sheep followers, so we do not make a lot of students join and we do not get so many, it is rare. There are so many nice examples, I mean prison life. How many prisoners actually are trying to change their heart and get out. Most of them are just trying to get better settled or how to get a few more extra cigarettes, and just buy their time. So in this world, how many people actually try and get out here. Most people just try to get a better house, a better neighborhood. They just want a better place within the prison. So it is a rare person who wants to get out. So we never expect to get a lot of people who are truly fully into it and that is always going to be rare. Just like, Catholic priests, how many of them are priests and how many of them are the laypeople. I

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mean one percent become nuns or priests. Most of them are laymen. So very few of us will be the shaved-headed robed type. Most of them will be have your hair, have a job, but this is their religion. That is a major misconception I find that many people think, I had too. I thought all Hare Krishnas look like this. No, one percent of us do. Maybe the guy you live with is a closet Hare Krishna and you do not even know it.

M: Has the congregation grown quite a bit at least in the time that you have been president here?

W: The congregation in the world has. As for Gainesville itself, no because I am running it and I am lousy, frankly, I am being honest, I am not just being funny. I am a decent cook and I keep it going, but in terms of actually preaching and trying to get this knowledge out to people, I do not do what I should enough.

M: If that were true then why would you still be in charge? Is there someone who oversees your progress?

W: Well, there is supposed to be. I do not really get a lot of that. I mean America's first slogan, I think, was don't tread on me. It is something weird kind of like **Wesler's** question authority, it is like our whole mentality. It is not by chance we were born here. Anyhow, we are probably left with problems so powerful, but when he left he gave everyone a chance to give up all authority. I do not have

any faith in anybody else, I just have faith in \_\_\_\_\_. I fell apart for a while and that is natural in any religious movement when any great leader leaves but the rest of the world is still in good shape. It is going great in Russia and Europe and so forth but America was having a bit of a problem because many of those are slacking somewhat kind of like seeing the problem left and start playing. So it is hard to make devotees if we ourselves are weak and not so strong. We are not so fired up. So we are not making so many for that reason here. In other parts of the world, they are doing O.K. But we have that problem, it is our mentality. Also the advertising like you are the king at King Olds, the whole idea is your are the greatest looking girl and every man looks at you but there is one that is not, so take our perfume and even he will be forced to look at you. The whole thing is to puff you up as if you are the greatest thing and it is the advertising culture and some of us are very proud here and that is the problem with spirituality, you have got to be humble. So it is how to make people proud of the devotees, if they think there is a humble culture and they think we are humble then it is easier for them. Like when we go to third-world countries we usually get people because we have to first go the whole idea of love but you cannot preach first because these people are poor and starving, you have to give them some

food and make their material situation better and then talk about God. We do not find that the people that have everything materially are very God-conscious, in fact they are the most Agnostic and Atheist. So of the people that are suffering, they are actually the people who \_\_\_\_\_. It is a little hard in America, especially in Florida or California and Hawaii, because the weather is always nice and the whole point of the spiritual act is that you are preaching that this is a miserable world, there is birth, death and disease. We have got to get out of here. But they say what do you mean miserable, the weather is great here. If you preach in Canada or New York city where you have to worry about getting shot all the time or the weather is always cold, they will say yes, it is a miserable world, so put a happy end. I am freezing my butt off. The people can understand spiritual life, it is hard in Florida and Hawaii and California. We have trouble because people just cannot take it seriously because I am having a good time, why should I think this is miserable. especially the whole Western world where we have it a lot better off even like the diseases and every one put away in the old folks homes and everyone has got leprosy. You do not see leprosy here, maybe you will see them walking down the street, somebody with sores and you know what I mean. So if you do not serve Buddha, the famous story is that he climbed over the wall

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and he saw an old person, he saw a diseased person, he saw a dying person, he saw a birth and he said these things happen to everybody, well this is miserable, I have got to get off this world until it is sheltered from all of that he did not realize that. Similarly, we are all little Buddhas here in this country who do not realize that there is problems here and we need to wake up and get them over the wall and say this is a little place and they can start to go for enlightenment.

M: Well, you must be doing something right because we have got the largest number of Krishnas in Alachua county and that is a fairly pleasant place.

W: We are doing something, it could be a lot better though. I mean it is not due to our campus program that is the biggest thing in America, that has no connection. It is basically because of the school that that is big out there.

M: How many people are in that school?

W: I do not know.

M: But it is not a seminary in the way that some religions have. It is not starting a new generation of Krishna leaders, is it?

W: No. Actually, my spiritual master, that is why he went back to get a PhD, is so that he could start a university. He is actually going to be starting at the University of California at Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union is

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giving us a building and we are going to start giving out degrees in our philosophy to people. But right now when I say school, it is just an elementary school and a high school, because no one wants to send their kids to public schools, everyone knows they are so crazy and everyone wants to send their kids to parochial schools and so we got our own schools, we do not want our kids mixed with all these drugs and promiscuous sex.

M: You have a very negative opinion of education. You referred to your time at UF. You were only there one semester and you got away from the brainwashing that went on there?

W: No I did not say that.

M: What did you say, that you were being brainwashed?

W: I kept talking about myself and jumping back about the Hare Krishna being brainwashed.

M: I thought you were referring to the kind of education?

W: Well, I did not say anything about that and all I would have to say, if you want to ask, is that there is brainwashing going on. You take a Sociology course, they teach you religion or just man trying to find meaning to his life creates God. And that is what it is, God's just man-made. That is what they teach over there and people think that is why i should not be in a religion because it is really all man-made and so much stuff is being taught as fact when it is really theory and it is kind of subtle brainwashing. It

is like if you are an envious person and you see that everyone is envious because you are envious and you see it in others and people will say, well you are brainwashing me and that is because they are brainwashed. People get PhDs in advertising and business in how to figure out how to get people to buy things on T.V. and in advertisements. We are not very good at brainwashing, we are not getting many people to do what we want, but they are very good at that, they are the real brainwashers.

M: Your earlier reference was to joke that the Krishnas brainwash.

W: Yes, so I got brainwashed and I have been washed ever since.

I am not saying that the university is bad it is just that we do not have anything wrong with Science itself, I mean it is nicely created planes or how to use a \_\_\_\_\_ or something. These things are bonafide, but when they say well we have created so many things now we also are going to tell you about the cause and creation. There is no objective bounds, that is not the only thing. Their whole thing is that in Science we could show it, religion they just have faith. Well then show me the big bang, they do not show that. They have changed the rules in I guess in that kind of stuff. It goes along with the evidence, it is plausible. A lot of things are plausible and God is plausible too. They do not show these things. Do you

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follow what I am saying? I am jumping a few steps here, but I am just saying that people kind of buy at **lock, stop and barrel** the whole thing. Practically everyone believes that we come from apes and we do not really believe that. I mean God could have made it that way. Some people try to say I believe that there was a God, but he just happened to make through evolution. He could have, but that is not what the scriptures say. Our scriptures are a little more detailed. He just did not do it that way. We think they were men all along.

M: I have a question.

W: You want to get to the Prabhupada part or we can get to that later, but you could do your question now.

M: Prabhupada in Gainesville on the Plaza?

W: Just who he is. I do not know if that was important to you.

M: Yes, it is important.

W: Do you want to ask your question first?

M: No, I think it should come later actually. Prabhupada comes first.

W: So ask whatever you want about Prabhupada or what you think should be asked, and I will answer.

M: As I understand, he was a \_\_\_\_\_ scholar and he brought Krishna-consciousness to the United States and Europe in the 1960s and came to Gainesville in the early 1970s and spoke in Florida but you were not here when he was?

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W: No. Basically, he was a scholar and he came from a line of disciple succession where he had his spiritual master, who then had his spiritual master, and that is why he had potency, he was not just some guy who studied the \_\_\_\_\_ and decided well I am just going to teach it. He presented a pure, unchanged message to the entire world. Anyhow, he came to America first, his spiritual master told him way back in the 1920s when he was like twenty himself, because he was born in 1896, that is why this year is his centennial celebration, so many people are Prabhupada-conscious. He was told to spread Krishna-consciousness in the West and so he had a family and he could not do it for many years, but finally in 1965, he came to the West and started in New York and then he went around the world in the next twelve years before he passed away, about sixteen times. He went everywhere, Russia, just so many places and spread it. Was there anything else?

M: He spent a day speaking here?

W: He was only here for like a day or a day and a half. A real quick thing. It was amazing because there was no Gainesville Airport at that time, so he had to fly into Atlanta and switch and go to Jacksonville and then he had to drive all the way here and so the first thing he said when he talked to the students, he said, it is so nice to see so many young people taking \_\_\_\_\_ in this very remote

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corner of the world. To him it was very remote, but the people living here it is like those T-shirts which I love that says all the streets of Gainesville and then it says the Pacific ocean, like this is the whole world. Anyhow, it is just interesting that even my spiritual master said he was shocked because this is a major college town, you are a big college, and he was saying that it was a remote corner of the world. Because it really was, there was not even an airport at that time.

M: He had a question and answer period on the Plaza?

W: Yes, and then also spoke on the campus T.V. program and then had a program here at the house. Not this house, of course, at that time. Then he practiced throughout the next day. It was really like one day practically.

M: Were you serving on the Plaza?

W: I think they started shortly after that, I cannot be definite but I am pretty sure that was the understanding that it did not happen until after that, later that year. As you can see right here on the wall, Prabhupada wrote in a letter in 1971 right before he came here. It says do something wonderful there in Gainesville, wonderful means simply chant loudly and receive the Prasadam, it is not very difficult, it is very easy, simply if you do it enthusiastically and sincerely, then success will be there.

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M: He did not himself establish this center? he did establish most of the centers?

W: Not really, he often sent people out. He said why don't you open a center here or there and then he would go to enliven the people there, that was why he travelled around the world, constantly enliven the people who were dissenters, but he did not open that many personally.

M: It was then his suggestion that Prasadam was initiated?

W: Yes.

M: How do you view your place on the Plaza with respect with the people who are proclaiming different images, do you think they are making a worthwhile contribution to people's spiritual consciousness?

W: I often feel that it just makes us look so much better. That is there contribution.

M: Is that true of all of them or do you see some virtue or merit?

W: Some virtue, but unfortunately there is more probably not because they actually reinforce the stereotypes of fanatics, that religious people are just fanatics and think, we are right and everyone else is going to hell. That is why people do not want to be in a religion, when a real religious person is not like that. They will see the good in any other religion. There is a little bit of good, but a lot of bad so it is not so good. You know how they say, you

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can drop a little poison. It looks good, but that little poison is the whole thing. Anyhow, they poisoned and got very little benefit.

M: It is not so much the faith that they profess to uphold. Aren't Christians fairly tolerant of....

W: Well Christ's teachings are great, it is just that these people follow it and that is the problem and they are such bad representatives, I mean I myself that is the problem. It is just so hard to be a real representative because everyone is looking for a fault that they just see. Look at **Jimmy Swaggart** and all of these guys and you will see that even the so-called believers, they cannot do it any how, this is why I am not religious. To be right in representing God, you have got to be so that people cannot find fault in you, otherwise it gives them reason to say, that is why I am not religious at all. So it is tough that is why I always feel like God, this is tough, I have this weight and people look at me and say jerk, Hare Krishna.

M: Are you friends with any of the people that have been there a longer time, at least on a personal level, at least, do you interact with them?

W: ??????

M: No, I mean any of the religious preachers on the Plaza, or do you just avoid them as best you can?

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W: First of all these new guys the Purple **Cubs?**, they in the first year, they were never out here before. The other one is \_\_\_\_\_ and at one time he was doing his thing and finally after years I just went out and decided to say something and immediately everyone in the crowd just crowded right around and it is just that this is what we want to hear and they just like circled right around us, they had been all spaced out. I was not worried because he is not rational and I do not remember what I said, it was just one quick thing that I said in this fun and very open-minded way and I said I am not going to get anywhere with this guy, so I just got out of it again. Maybe I should, even though he is not rational, just for the benefit of the others trying to do something, maybe I should. It is my failing, I should try. Because I sometimes see that they have got circles around these guys, so there must be a little bit of interest to here, it is not just for entertainment and laughing at this guy. I do not want to just get up and start, myself, doing that everyday. I have got a little reading and I advertise if you would like to hear. But they do not want the real thing, you see. I am reading and I have got a sign that says, would you like to listen?, but they do not do that. Nobody is hardly coming to our side, we will keep it up there but it is not like it drawing a lot of people. We thought, before the sign was up that maybe they do not know

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that they are invited to come in that it is not just a clique of you guys and they are not supposed to come. So we put the sign up thinking that maybe we could get more people to come, but it is not really happening. We get a few more, but not many. Once in a while we get some, but someone not that serious and not wanting real knowledge, they just like to have a laugh and laugh at these guys and sort of listen to somebody else make fun of them.

M: But the students will come down and sit with you and listen.

W: Some, mostly it is a group of people who already are very favorable, like devotees who happen to be going to school or there is a few every once in a while, it is not like a regular that we have new people coming, we honestly do not.

M: But you also have gatherings here on Wednesday nights?

W: It is on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, but again, they are sparsely attended. In college towns where we have been before and did not do food distribution for whatever reason, sometimes they do not allow us to do it. Fortunately this happened so far ago in 1971 when it was still the hippie days and it was a cool thing. When we tried to start it in the 1980s, when it was more conservative, some schools said no, we do not want you there. Anyhow, in other towns where they have like cooking classes or a Yoga club on campus, because that is the only way that they can get Hare Krishna food and they like it, so they come to that but they can get

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the food out there and not have to hear any philosophy so they do not come to our programs here so much. If we would cut out the lunch and have only programs here, we would probably get a lot of people who really were here just for the food but they would sit through the program just to get the food. I do not mind it, I like it this way. I would rather keep people who are here for the program, to be here for the program, they are not really just waiting for the food to come. I cannot stand that.

M: Do you usually serve food on the Wednesday, Friday and Sundays?

W: As always.

M: What else goes on? Is there dancing too?

W: Usually I do a sit-down chanting with \_\_\_\_\_ and so forth, But some nights, if I am not there, they do chanting and dancing. We always do some kind of chanting first and then a class in the \_\_\_\_\_, a verse and then we serve out a feast, questions and answers are in the class. It is a hour-and-a-half program basically. You should come and see the program some time.

M: Do you usually have the same core of regulars?

W: Basically, but we always get somebody who comes but not as many as we would like. Then again, how many people want to buy the diamonds, so it is always like that. It has always been like that.

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M: On Friday afternoons, you are always on the corner of University and 13th. What is the purpose of that, the chanting and music? Is there an addressed purpose for such or why is it a tradition?

W: I was interviewed for a national public radio thing, it was actually Florida public radio and I just got the tape back in the mail and I will say what I said in that. A lot of us have seen Monty Python and The Holy **Grail**. They have a scene in there where the guys have lined up these monster \_\_\_\_\_ hooded and they are chanting and they have got their bibles in front of their hands and they smack their faces and they go on mumble again and they smack their faces. This is kind of like Monty Python is always mocking religions and that is what people think it is, you pray all day and you are shrouded and dark and you are hurting yourself, so that actually real spiritual life is very joyful and blissful. That is why we go out there to show people that it is a very blissful thing to praise God, it is not that we are just sitting in church all day praying and waiting for death to come or something like that. Also, there was that song in the 1960s "Dancing In The Streets," and if you go in the cities and the streets of America, the only ones dancing in the streets is a Hare Krishna. The average person is just moping around because we are actually enjoying life. So we do it to show that spiritual life is

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joyful and also, as I said, you get the chanting out just to purify those that hear it. They get benefits. If they see us dancing they get benefits. it is the way for self-realization to save. Even the Bible says, you should chant the Lord's name from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun. You should use drums and cymbals, it says, which I do not see any Christians using those things, nor do they chant God's name. It is not just a Hare Krishna thing, every religious scripture says you should chant God's name, it is the way of this age and so we are doing it.

M: I was reading in the holy names of God that is a very important aspect, this whole idea of chanting. Just in the act of chanting God's name, whichever of his millions of names you choose to chant, one can purify oneself and get closer to Hare Krishna consciousness.

W: To God.

M: To God-consciousness.

W: Yes, because God is his name. Just like the famous "Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner," "water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink." You could chant water all you want and it still remains dry because water is different from the substance water. But in the absolute world, a Christian is not different from his name. We do not realize that, but it is God, it is not just referring to God, it is God amazingly enough. So it is very purifying.

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M: Some of think it is the Christian concept too. The idea that God is the word and beginning with the words.

W: Right, and "**hallowed** be thy name" means holy is thy name. Why is it holy, because it is God. Why is the Bible holy, because it is actually very much directly representing God. You should not really put a Bible on the ground or \_\_\_\_\_. These are the sacred things that are directly related to God.

M: Why the name Krishna? Does it have a special significance?

W: For example, you have a first name, a last name, a middle name, you have probably some nicknames. If you ever heard somebody say, hey you, you would answer to that. There is many names that even we, who are very limited people, have many names. Well, to speak of God there is unlimited names and some are more personal, like if I said, excuse me, Mr. So-And-So, you would respond, but if I knew your nickname that your girlfriend calls you like, Pookie or whatever. But the point is that if I knew that and you heard me say that you would say, this guy knows me more intimately. So, if you say God, that is the Supreme Being, but He has a name. You could say Mr.President, but he has a name, Bill, Mr.Clinton that is more personal and whatever Hillary calls him would be even more personal. So Christians are very personal with God. It means you denounce an understanding of God's own activity, his own spiritual world and many

people do not know that. What is God doing? Is he just sitting on a throne, judging O.K. heaven, heaven, hell, hell as they walk up. That is how they picture him in cartoons.

he is not just sitting, he is enjoying in his own world.

He has got his own world and he is having a great time.

Krishna is a more intimate name of God. It is actually interestingly stated that if you chant one name of **Rama**, that is more than if you were to chant **Vishnu** 1,000 times.

If you chant Krishna, then you would have to chant Rama three times to get the same potency as you would of one Krishna. To speak of other names like Jehovah and all, you would have to chant 10,000 of them to equal one Krishna.

M: Like twenty Hail Marys, two \_\_\_\_\_?

W: Yes. Anyhow, I do not know if it is clear, I do not want to run on and on or else we will waste time.

M: Do you take time everyday to chant the name of Krishna or other names?

W: Yes.

M: That is a daily routine?

W: In the initiation we promise four things to avoid which are no meat, fish or eggs, no intoxication of gambling and no illicit sex and positively to chant sixteen rounds of our beads everyday, which is about two hours a day.

M: Is that broken-up?

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W: For me, it certainly is. Many people do not , but with my schedule the way it is I do it that way.

M: When you say, no illicit sex, what constitutes illicit?

W: In marriage and only for the sake of procreation, anything else is illicit sex. The Catholics even say the same thing, not many of them follow it, but that is what they are supposed to. Every religion really is saying like that, it is just who is following it. No religion says you should be intoxicated or gamble or be a killer. So really, this is not just Hare Krishna, if you think about it, every saint said he followed these principals to really get anything spiritually. Just be honest, if you cannot, then you are not that spiritual.

M: In your experience, are Krishnas more devout in following that precept of celibacy outside of marriage?

W: That is the toughest of them. it is not wishing that we could go back to Burger King, that is easy to give up, but the sex is the toughest because we have replacements. For meat, fish or eggs, we have Prasadam, so that is no problem.

When we have the intoxication one, we chant Hare Krishna and you get the same insights you see when you get high. You say, wow I had not thought of that. When you chant God's name, you get more insights than you would by getting high, so you can replace that. The gambling does not need to be replaced because many people do not have a problem

with that, frankly, that is also an easy one to give up.

Some people go through Gambler's Anonymous and they know it is hard, but if you never got into it, it is not a problem.

So sex, what do you replace it with? Well, we used to have sex with anybody, now we just have orgies among ourselves and so we still get sex, just spiritual sex. So, it is a little tougher. Anyhow, that is a tough one and many people have had problems because many of us, like you and me, have grown up twenty years with bad training. We were not born in this religion, so I am not saying that, I was not the promiscuous type, but they had so many partners, it was hard for them to ever get settled down, even though they become Hare Krishnas. Anyhow, we are still having problems with divorces and stuff like that which will probably take a few generations to get that out. I would say that in proportion, we are doing definitely better in terms of all these things than the average society. I have got to go.

(Interview will be continued the following week)

M: This is Jim Meier, it is the eight of April, we are picking up from last Thursday, and continuing the second part of our interview with Daru at the Center For Krishna-consciousness.

W: The Hare Krishna center is the International Society For Krishna-consciousness.

M: Also present is Dirk Drake. Last week we discussed about how the community perceives you and that you get a lot of

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positive feedback from people on the street and what not. How about in terms of your relations with University of Florida Police, I know there has been some sort of wrangling with health authorities in the past too, what kind of relations have you enjoyed at least in the last ten years that you have been president of the Hare Krishnas?

W: The stuff that happened was before I came on the scene and there has been no problem since then, in fact they did a T.V. interview. As I was telling, I think last time, about the Jacksonville station checking on if we were doing like a Waco down in Gainesville or something. They interviewed, the police, **Angie Tiffen**, you know we have all seen her name and she is on the video saying the Hare Krishna are part of the UF scene and when it is 12:00 and they are not there, everyone is saying where are those Krishnas? because everyone expects them. So she was basically saying, they are part of the program and also we were \_\_\_\_\_ that big thing with **Danny Rollins** in that big thing with the Gainesville murders and so forth, the policemen were doing extra duty and we were serving them out, so I guess that might have helped make them favorable plus, it so happens that when that one of the UPD's policemen is actually a son of one of our devotees, so I think we are pretty well liked over there. I mean whenever I see one on campus, we have friends on the police force. Anyhow, as for the University

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itself, it is funny, we do not check in every year and see, it is just like assumed that we are there.

M: So you have never even been subjected to harassment either from the police or from University authorities?

W: Not at all.

M: No one has ever approached you and said, you cannot do this or that?

W: No. I have heard behind the scene that there is one of these like anti-God groups and Atheist groups on campus that are trying to do something, but I guess they have not been able to but I would not be surprised that something should happen at any time. There are a lot of envious people out there, but nothing has happened yet. But I think it would be a revolt if they tried to kick us off because we are just part of the program here.

M: As well, they have to find a way to feed 300 to 400 people alternatively, especially as inexpensively as you offer Krishna food.

W: Yes.

D: Local fast food merchants have not complained that you are cutting their business?

W: Yes, I have noticed that there was one time when I had been sick for one day and could not go and someone from a restaurant called me the next day and said \_\_\_\_\_, because we sure were busy today. You

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have to let us know if we are going to be prepared again like that. It was funny. That was just one restaurant. I guess, some of these vending machine guys are kind of out some money and some of these other groups that have to pay for spots are a little envious. I think \_\_\_\_\_ said I think back in the 1970s that somebody tried to say that it was unhealthy and something about the cord and the judge said leave them alone, they are having a pic-nic and that was thrown out of court.

M: Yes, I think they contested the grounds for having the right to serve on University property. The judge ruled, I think, that it was a Constitutional right to practice your religion because it was not a commercial transaction since you are only asking for donations and that it was just Prasadam was part of your creed. So he found in favor of the Krishnas and said that to restrict their food service would, in fact, be a restriction on their right to practice their religion.

Because that occurred to me when I first came on the campus, too, that the University would be potentially liable for any kind of complaints or lawsuits for anyone falling sick as a result, presumably, of eating the food. Because I thought they would be ultimately responsible for what goes on, on their property.

W: I, personally, pay the insurance and part of the insurance I pay is in case anything happens over there with our food.

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That is what I pay every year, it is insurance in case anything happens, then we are liable, not the University.

M: Really, so you have specific insurance to cover the event of anyone getting sick or dying and they cannot claim against you.

W: Yes.

M: How much is that, is that expensive?

W: I pay about 2,500 dollars for the whole year, that includes the building and that. How much of it is for that, I do not know. I do not know if that sounds like a big figure or not. It was set out by a devotee and I took it over and it has increased gradually over the years with inflation, but I do not know how much it is.

M: What 2,500 dollars for this building?

W: Yes, and the food distribution. All together is like 2,500 dollars for the years, something like that. I hope that is reasonable.

M: It is not very expensive.

W: For me it is a chunk.

M: I guess a simple question is, people and authorities tend to leave you alone, you have never had any kinds of confrontation, similarly standing on the streets on Friday afternoons at the corner?

W: Yes, no problems.

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M: I understand that one time health officials, this is going back to the 1970s primarily and I think early 1980s, they were calling to question the right to serve food on the Plaza. I guess that has all been decided in the courts previously.

W: Yes, we were getting really checked, I do not know why that changed, but we were getting very regularly checked for years, just health inspectors and then it went down to just a check once a year. Even then, I have not had one in a year or two. I do not know why it changed actually. But we had to follow all the standards. Basically, we have not lowered the standards since we are not getting checked, it is the same standards. Basically we do not have so much problems, mostly it is a problem of \_\_\_\_\_, cutting borders with \_\_\_\_\_ decaying and so many things like that. That is the real things I have more problems with. We do not have any problems really.

M: Do you ever get feedback on people getting sick?

W; Actually, it is funny, I never get that.

M: Personally, I have encountered a number of times people say, oh, you eat that stuff and I said yeah. Invariably, the people that say that have never tried it themselves, because maybe it does not look quite like a burger or a hot dog, but it has never upset my stomach any.

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W: On that same video of the Jacksonville thing, they were interviewing students and one of them said, it actually tastes better than it looks and some other girl who was black and never ate said I do not know, that food it looks funny. So, I guess it does not look sometimes so attractive, but it tastes a lot better than it looks anyhow. It looks like goulash or the crusty's imitation gruel.

M: I heard one of **Jed's** evangelists say that you guys put mind-control drugs in there to bring the children away from the Christian God and \_\_\_\_\_ to keep your sex drive down and he was preaching that on the Plaza.

W: it is funny you mention that because just today, some guy who was kind of helping me said that he got some questions about the \_\_\_\_\_ and we wondered where was this coming from? Well it probably comes from Jed. I have never seen \_\_\_\_\_ in my life. It is an herb that does what, it kills sex drive, or something like that?

M: Yes, they use it to make gun powder.

W: What can I say. We had better change our drug there or brainwashing because it ain't working, we are not getting that many.

D: I have a question on that, Jim was asking about confrontations. Have you ever had any of the evangelists get very aggressive or any of these de-programming, anti-cult groups come and disrupt the services on the Plaza?

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W: Surprisingly no. There was one story where Jed was saying, these people are going to hell and then the Hare Krishnas are going to hell, and immediately everyone went, Boo! They did not say Boo, when they said the other guys were going to hell, but when they said that. When they try to do anything to other people, they say get the heck out of here. It is funny, I have seen this many times, people who have been always real nice to me and real humble and help unload and stuff and when Jed comes out, these same people who have always shown a very meek side to me are out there (bickering) and I never knew this person had this side to them. But obviously it shows that they have so much respect for us, I never knew they were like that.

M: Jed is part of the \_\_\_\_\_. He has got to be defeating his purpose. Does he have some pretty nasty things to say about the Krishnas or are you the subject of some verbal abuse from the preachers there?

W: I am sure. I kind of hear it out of my side, do not eat their food off of their Pagan Gods and so many things they will say, but what are you going to do? Get up and beat them up.

M: Meanwhile they will probably come later and eat the food anyway?

W: They will not do that. Actually, there was one Christian guy out there and he would eat it some times, but he is not

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out there anymore. He may come back, I do not know why he is not.

M: Is that **Ronald McDonald**?

W: I do not know what the name is.

M: Ron. he used to carry a sign with starving children on it.

W: No, I do not know that guy. Anyhow it was Louie something-or-other, he was a Christian guy. He would eat sometimes and he was kind of nice.

M: I had another question about **Govindas**, was that a Krishna restaurant?

W: Yes.

M: Related with this temple?

W: No, it was a person who was a devotee and it was a for-profit thing, trying to be, but not really making a big profit but it was not linked to the Hare Krishna, it was their restaurant and they tried to do it according to our principles at least. Like not eating meat, fish or eggs but it was not making it, it was going way down. It was a tough location and it was expensive. Someday it will eventually happen, I am sure, but it did not last too long.

M: Many temples around the United States do have restaurants?

W: I do not know about many, there are several. Not as many as we would like, but yes. Many of them are right in the building, like L.A. Yes, we have some.

M: I think I was in one in New York in 1985.

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W: We used to have a restaurant in New York in Times Square.  
In 1985?

M: I went to a restaurant where I was being served by devotees.

W: It was not a Sunday feast, it was actually a restaurant,  
right?

M: Yes, I think so. In the Village, somewhere near eighth  
street or something like that. My memory may have been  
altered.

W: Your consciousness was altered with.

M: I know some guys who used to be in the **Cro-Mags** and they  
were gravitating Krishna \_\_\_\_\_.

W: Yes, I saw this article recently about a guy that was a punk  
rocker.

M: **Hurley**? Was his name Hurley?

W: I do not know which one it was but he had some bad logic,  
but he was not active now. These guys are all in a  
movement.

M: There was a wave of punk rockers in the late 1980s that got  
into Krishna-consciousness on one level or another.

W: There is more of it now with this new, I do not know what  
they call, I forget. Anyhow, we have several bands.

M: Shelter?

W: Yes, you know about those.

M: I talked to some of them on the phone occasionally and see  
them.

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W: The Shelter guys or followers?

M: Followers, and there is another band whose name I cannot think of.

W: **Wanaway?**

M: Yes, they were here last Fall.

W: You went?

M: To the utility house, yes. Good show.

W: I cannot get into that kind of stuff. I have seen it, but I am an old man, about 39 or something, whatever I am. I just was a Barry Manilow kind of guy. I was not a heavy rocker.

M: Is there any other temples or large communities in Florida?

W: There is a small center in Tampa, very small. Tallahassee is a better, bigger size, kind of like this. In Miami, we have kind of a big center there in Coconut Grove. So those are the only ones in Florida.

M: Do you keep in touch with them much?

W: Not really. In fact I am going to Tallahassee this weekend. they have their Springtime Tallahassee. It is kind of like our homecoming day parade for them and we are going to take these deities in a cart and cart it down. We do that now in our homecoming parade here. Anyhow, I am going up this weekend for that.

M: It is not structured or organized such that there is conventions or formal times for get-togethers?

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W: Not really except that, as a matter of fact, again in a month from now, in May 15, there is the national North American, actually we hope Canada and Mexico with a couple of temple presidents and leaders are all meeting here in Alachua, right down the street actually and it has happened twice in a row. Next year it will probably be somewhere else. Anyhow, that is once a year that the temple presidents go and meet and it is going to be here.

M: You mentioned last time that, I think you described yourself, relatively speaking any way as a material person.

In what way are you supposed to be non-material and is there a certain program of life that you are supposed to follow that maybe you do not adhere to as closely as you should?

W: Is that something to do with \_\_\_\_\_?

M: Indirectly.

W: Well, like I said before, watching T.V., seeing movies, frivolous sports.

M: Well can't you argue that they lead to well-being and joy and is there a logical inconsistency with obtaining Krishna-consciousness?

W: In a way there is. I remember this movie, The Big Show. There was a statement in the conversation where you cannot go another minute. He says rationalization is more important than sex. The guy said no, and he said, have you

ever gone a week without rationalizing? You can go a week without sex, so we are always rationalizing in our minds that the activities we are doing are somehow good. So I am not going to be a fool and rationalize that sports is good because it keeps me healthy so I can keep serving Krishna. I mean that is what we always want to do, but actually it is dangerous. I play frisbee and I could bust my shoulder or my knees out. The best exercise is actually an aerobic walk. In an aerobic walk you can chant Hare Krishna at the same time. But it is very hard when I am playing racquetball or tennis or frisbee to chant Hare Krishna. I am not thinking of Krishna, I am actually in danger. I can stop the Plaza for a month or two if I bust my knee again. Let's be honest, I should get exercise, no doubt, but you can do it the way you can also think of Krishna. So we are not against exercise, we are against frivolous exercise. So it is the same as movies, ultimately, most T.V. movies are a vast wasteland, so let's be real, most of it is not so edifying. It is just because we want to be titillated and enjoy something.

M: Is that the \_\_\_\_\_ in any conventional sense it is in?

W: Yes, in a sense. It is like if, for example, you date a girl or are married to a girl, then if you say I spend most of my time with you, but I like to still go out with other girls. That is not chaste. if you really love somebody

then you do not need to go to other people to get your jollies too. So if you really love God, in reality God is not just one little thing that there is so any others, God is everything. So why can't you just get enough pleasure just \_\_\_\_\_ of God. You do not really believe that but it is hard for us because we are so conditioned otherwise but it its not that I have to, well, I am not getting enough pleasure from Krishna so I have got to go and play frisbee because there is a higher pleasure I am missing. It is not that way, it is just foolishness. I have been that too, I cannot speak for everyone else. We still think we are missing something, that is our foolishness. God is the source of all pleasure. Whatever pleasure there is, God put it there. If you like a cheesecake, God put the pleasure in cheesecake, or in sex or whatever you like, so if you directly link with God, not just enjoying some energy of God, then wouldn't it be greater? It is logical and that is why I am seeing, frankly, that by giving more of my time, I am certainly at least getting more pleasure than I was before I was doing this. I was not born this. Still, I want to hold back, but I am still attached with this Krishna, I do not want to give it up.

M: Have you evolved a great deal in the time that you have been here at least, in the ten odd years. Have you seen yourself

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grow in this respect that it is easier to resist these kinds of temptations or just in a spiritual sense?

W: Yes, I used to play more frisbee and I have seen that I have to do a lot of work here to make this place go and in the beginning it was like, well why am I working so hard and look at this guy, he is sleeping all day? You just have to get over that and just think what, do I think he is getting away with something? Do I think he is enjoying while I am suffering? No, Krishna is giving him so much pleasure that if he was awake or asleep Krishna would give him this much pleasure. If you surrender to Krishna, you get more pleasure. I have gone way beyond that point of like worrying that I am working harder than him and this is not fair. No, I am getting the reaction, I am feeling it. I have got to enlighten the people who are sleeping. I have more people I know who are very reluctant among \_\_\_\_\_. Anyhow, I have actually taken on a lot more wait as the years go on. I could go more, but I have seen that as I do it, my life is getting better.

M: Have you evolved a great deal in the time that you've been here at least, in the ten odd years? Have you seen yourself grow in this respect that it's easier to resist these kinds of temptations?

W: Yes, I used to play more frisbee. And I have to do a lot of work here to make this place go and in the beginning [I often thought], 'Well, why am I working so hard and look at this guy, he's sleeping all day?' But I had to get over that by thinking, 'Wait a minute! Do I think he's getting away with something? Do I think he's enjoying while I'm suffering?' No! If he wants to [try to] cheat [Krishna] and just sleep, then Krishna will give him only a little bit of pleasure. And if you surrender

to Krishna, you get more pleasure. I've gone way beyond that point of worrying, 'I'm working harder than him. This isn't fair.' No, I'm getting the reaction [for surrendering more]. I'm feeling it. I've got a better life than the people who are sleeping. Anyhow, I've actually taken on a lot more responsibility and workload as the years go on. [Of course] I could [take on even] more, but I've seen that as I do it, my life is getting better.

M: What's your role with respect to other people here? Do you have any kind of authority role as such?

W: Well, it's supposed to be. I don't ask every day, did you chant your rounds today? There's even one guy living here who has a problem with cigarette smoking. He still has a problem with that, but he's very humble about it. He's taking some medication, and he's trying to give it up, but it's not like I'm going to kick him out. He's basically a very nice person and does a lot of service. But even if somebody did go to McDonald's and eat a burger, I'm not going to ask everyone, 'Did anybody eat a burger today?' Even if I saw him over there, I'm not going to excommunicate him. Krishna is going to give him a reaction. I just basically try to see that people are pretty well engaged as much as possible. I could engage people more, but I kind of know where people are at and I try to keep them happy [and try not to be] a slave-driver.

M: Is the Plaza Prasadam the primary edification of this temple?

W: Yes, I'd have to say it is.

M: Is it the only [food distribution program] in North America?

W: No, I was saying [the other day] at FSU, they do two days a week and at UCLA they do two days a week. But many temples have what they call Food For Life, which is a program to distribute food to real needy people. For example, we go out to the St. Francis House one day a week ourselves, on Saturdays. So many temples have that [although they don't usually do it] five days a week.

M: Do you know why your other centers don't provide five-day service at other large universities? You would think that UCLA would support such a program...

W: Well, they should, but the problem is that at UCLA they didn't allow it. They only very reluctantly said, 'We'll let you have two days.' Again that program started later. This one started back in the hippies days (I was saying this last time) so the mood was a lot different, but now it's a little more conservative and people are like, 'Alright. I guess we'll allow you to do one day or two days. Also, frankly, it's a lot of work. If I stop doing this, it might continue, but only one day a week or two. It really is a lot of work and it's hard to find somebody who's willing to work that

hard. So we should be having them in every town in America. In every college we should have a program, but people are lazy this age. Even Hare Krishnas, most of us are more lazy than we should be.

M: Does that take up a large part of your time, working in the kitchen? I think you had mentioned that when you were sick, they didn't serve food that day?

W: Yes, it was just one day. Frankly, in all the ten years, it was [probably] the only one day I've missed.

M: But if you are sick tomorrow, they're not going to be serving food in the Plaza?

W: Most days I just go in there and sneeze in the food anyhow, you know. [Laughter.] I always remember that Mad Magazine had a section called 'Don't you hate...' [And one time it concluded with] 'people who go to work even when sick' and it showed some guy is sneezing into the soup. I just loved that drawing. That's the way I am. Not that bad, of course, but I many times forced myself to do it even when I'm not feeling that great. I feel I'd rather do my work. I've never had anyone say they got sick from it because if that ever happened, I'd never have done that again. But again, I have never had anyone say, not ever, that they got sick on that food.

M: Some people react to the spices because they're not used to it. They are not cultured for it...

W: But most people who eat with us, even when I over spice it, they say, 'It was spicy today, but it was good.' They never say, 'Man, I couldn't even eat it.' That rarely, rarely ever happens. People who tend to eat with us are already into spicy stuff. Anyhow, what were you just asking me?

M: Do you see expanding your role in any sense? With the university or the community at large or on the Plaza?

W: Well, at some college campuses the professors regularly have the devotees come in and speak at their classes. Because I'm so lame, I haven't developed those relationships yet. I've never [spoken to] a class on campus here, and I should be doing it with high schools locally, too. I should actually have [an arrangement with teachers to come in and speak to a class whenever] they get to the Hindu section. I should be doing that, but that's my foolishness. I haven't. We do dorm programs. The RAs [Resident Assistants] have a People Awareness Week and we're usually called in to the dorms that week. For example, they have the gays come in and so many other groups come in and we come in, too, and make them aware of the different kinds of people around campus. That's really

nice, but we need to do that in classrooms and in high schools. There are some devotees on the farm who are doing [a program at] Santa Fe [Community College] now. They go out and do lunch one day a week and they're out there with a book table at least twice a week.

M: They're doing lunch on a regular basis, too?

W: Yes, at least once a week and they're really selling out. Again, I think they're too busy to do it more days. It's not that they don't want to or are too lazy, but they have too many other things to do. They run the girl's school. They are the teachers at our girl's school actually.

M: Do you have any personal connections with anyone in the religion department or Indian Philosophy?

W: Not really. Again, it's a lacking on my part.

M: Your presence there ought to generate some interest among people in those fields.

W: Yes, it should. Some of those people have met my spiritual master [such as Dr. Sheldon] Eisenberg. They're already favorable. They've come out to our farm to have dinners with him and discussions, but I haven't really followed up [on those contacts]. Of course, I don't feel at all like on his [my spiritual master's] level. He's such an expert. He's such a scholar and what can I do with these guys? I don't even have a college degree. I mean I can deal with them in philosophy a bit, but I really feel out of water a little bit with these guys.

D: You're more of a street-level leader? I know Dr. Thursby in the religion department.

W: Yes, he's another one who met my spiritual master.

D: He lived in India. He was a Vedic scholar for many years, and I had a History of India class with him, which is where I learned a lot of Hinduism.

W: That's the type of class I should speak in.

D: He's very sympathetic. He spoke of you favorably a number of times and encouraged everyone in class to eat Krishna lunch before they came to class so that they would be digesting the food of what we were studying.

W: Hey, I have got to go talk to him.

D: He's a neat guy.

W: Yes, everyone says he's a great teacher.

M: Who is Sheldon Eisenberg?

W: He's a professor, I do not know what he teaches either. I'm not so sure. Either philosophy or psychology or religion, one of the three. There's Vasudha Narayana. She's an Indian professor. She eats out there, but even in her case, I've never really talked with her either.

M: Is there some sort of injunction to devotees to become more intellectually familiar with Vedic literature or to grow in an intellectual as well as a spiritual way?

W: Yes. It's not necessary; I mean there are many stories that teach that you don't need to become a Vedic scholar [to become a pure devotee of Krishna], but it certainly helps. You're encouraged to read the books. We are not supposed to just have on our shelves like [every Christian] has got a Bible but many never read it. So we should read our books and become 'more fixed' in the knowledge ourselves.

M: I'm only vaguely familiar with the idea of reincarnation and attaining a higher state of existence and spirituality in this terrestrial existence and then being reincarnated in another form. I mean, do you subscribe to views of that kind?

W: Definitely.

M: So it's sort of incumbent upon you to become as perfect and as spiritual as possible so that you will attain a higher form?

W: The idea is to ultimately get out of the cycle of birth and death.

M: Altogether?

W: Yes, it's not that you just keep coming back for ever and ever, but you keep coming back until you are pure enough to get out of here. So we're trying to do that. But that doesn't mean necessarily that you have to learn all the Vedas before you can get out or have to be able to quote so many verses or know Sanskrit. If you just love God with your whole heart and soul-in other words, you're serving because if you love, you will do something. Then you could go back to the spiritual world even if you don't know the Vedas. If you're just a

simple person who has a simple devotion to God, then you could go and get out of the cycle of birth and death.

M: Do you have any knowledge of previous existence?

W: Personally, no. Devotees are generally not too interested in it. Frankly, we're having enough trouble giving up our attachment to the identity we've formed in this life, to what I was before; 'I'm an American, I'm a sports guy,' or whatever you were. What to speak of if you had 300 lives you knew about. You'd want to constantly read about it. 'This is where I was in the 1600s and this is what I was in 1200s.' We have enough trouble giving up one false ego, what to speak of the 3 million we've had. So we're not so interested in that. We use the example, if you're sick from a disease, then you could really research, 'Did I get it in a bathroom or did I get it when I was at that party?' [but] who cares? You've got a disease. Now, let's get rid of it. This body is a disease, so we don't really care, 'What was I in my last life that gave me this body?' Let's just get rid of this. But if someone needs to do that just to be more convinced that there was a past life, then they can go out to Cassadega and go talk to some spiritualists and they'll tell you who you were in your past life and to prove that they're not lying, they'll tell you a lot of things that happened in this life which will shock you to prove that they're [competent].

D: I'm skeptical of some of them. They use indicators. I've only talked with a few and I've heard that there are people who can sit in the other room from you and tell you things about yourself and I personally believe it's entirely possible, but I'm still skeptical about it. I think a lot of the "spiritualists" are operators.

W: Yes. Did you see that thing on 20/20?

D: About Cassadega?

W: No, about the guy who tried to find fault in Uri Geller. The Tonight Show had Uri Geller, who bends spoons [by psychic power] on with this other guy who kind of tries to expose these as hoaxes, and Uri Geller never came back to the Tonight Show because this guy [tried to expose him on national TV]. Anyhow, this guy himself [had been a mystical] kind of guy and he kind of turned around and wants to expose all of these mystics. Still, astrology, what you see in the newspapers is junk. I mean I saw on the same show, they were saying that they did an experiment [with] all of these students. [First the students were asked what astrological sign they were. Then they were given a paper which told them what kind of person they were according to that sign.] All the students thought, 'Wow, this sounds [just] like me.' Then [the testers] said, 'Now pass the papers to the guy behind you,' and when everyone read it, they realized, 'Hey, that was the

same thing that I just read.' So that's the kind of stuff you read in the newspaper. Everything you read makes you think, 'Yeah. That sounds like me!' But real astrology is much more scientific. There's really something to it. The stars can tell you when you were born and what you were and what you're going to be. Now you're probably skeptical, and you're saying, 'Well I don't...

D: Well a lot of the past life interpretations, I think are just like you described, the newspaper astrology. They hit a common denominator that every one can relate to and confirm and be positive about, which validates it in people's minds on the surface, but I'm skeptical. There's got to be something more. I haven't looked into it, so I'm not criticizing it wholesale but...

W: A lot of scientists go into [the idea of reincarnation] skeptical about it and then they meet some lady who says, 'In my last life, my name was Mina, and I had these kids named [so and so]. They were these ages and the house I lived in looked like this,' and then they go thousands of miles away, and there the kids are now, older, but corresponding exactly to the ages they would have been when she was in her last life. The house looks exactly like she described it, and even these scientists who were very skeptical before are now thinking, 'Wow, this is getting close to empirical knowledge.'

D: Yes, there is the fascinating case of a village in California. People were having common memories of a village in Virginia during the 1860s during the Confederacy. It was a farming community in the 1970s in California coming up with details that were researched that fit almost identically to a small farming community in Virginia in the 1860s, the assumption being that some kind of memory came through. These people were not directly descended from the Virginians.

W: Nor could they have possibly read about them either.

M: Yes, there's no way that they could've read about them because the knowledge was in local records and archives in Virginia. It wasn't in books or history classes in California and that's quite amazing. I can't dispute that. I don't know where it comes from or how to explain it. And those are interesting things. Those are things that I found in history studies that made me listen to a lot of the other teachings that were along those lines. But I can't say, personally, how or what. It's hard to explain. On the Plaza, do you have a lot of questions about the teachings about past lives, reincarnation, vegetarianism. What are the most common questions someone would ask?

W: What is in this food? How do you make this?

D: It is about the food.

W: People are not, unfortunately, very seeking, very interested in philosophy. They're mostly dull people. I don't mean just Gainesville or UF, I mean everywhere people are dull. They're not seeking. It's very rare that anyone asks anything deep, frankly. It's very rare, unfortunately.

M: That's a source of regret on your part?

W: Of course, because human life is a rare thing. We don't realize it. I mean, we think, 'Oh, there's over-population,' but we [ought to stop and] think, how many bugs are there? How many flies? How many trees? How many grasses? How many cats? Dogs? I mean, when we think about how many humans there are, there are very few of them, and what are we distinguished by? Our big brain. And for what do we use that big brain? Just to figure out how to have better sex, how to have better animal life. Animals eat. They sleep. They have sex, and they defend. We've used our big brains to make bigger bombs, how to have a better sex life-make better water beds-and how to eat more fancy in restaurants. We're misusing this big brain which is meant to question, 'What is the purpose of life? Where do I come from?' Animals don't do that. So it's a real waste. We use the example. Imagine you go to elementary school and work real hard and get straight As and then you go to college and get straight As. You get to grad school and get straight As. You get in a PhD program and then you just start farting around and just getting drunk away, taking drugs. A friend looking on would say, 'Come on, you've [gotten to such a high level] and you're just blowing it!' [Similarly] we've come to this point in human life, and it's a rare chance to get out of the cycle of birth and death. A cat can't get out. I can't speak to the cat about the purpose of life, or a dog, or so many creatures. Only people can understand that, and they're wasting it. They're just living like cats and dogs. It's a real shame that they're ruining their chance to get out. They're going to go back in the cycle, not just as another human, but down. If you just live like an animal, then if that's what you want, then [God says] 'Here, take an animal body. You've got a human brain that's saying, 'Come on, you idiot. What are you doing wasting your time just having sex all the time?' [That human brain] is bothering you? O.K., I'll give you a body where you don't have a brain that bothers you about that.' That's what God says. So it's a real shame.

M: As a devotee, what are you doing to break out of that cycle of birth and death?

W: What am I doing? Well, I'm trying to perfect my own life and then help others too. 'Physician heal thyself.' One thing we say, our 4 principles: no meat, fish or eggs, no gambling, no intoxication, and no illicit sex. That's not even advanced spiritual life. That's just being a human being. People think, 'Wow, that's really

amazing, [to give up those things].’ But no, when you do that, then you’re a human being. Now we can start to talk about advancing. So, I’m trying to come to the human platform and help make others human, gradually. [We use the example] that the souls in this world are like sparks that have fallen away from the fire, and we’re trying to get them back in the fire so they can become part of the flame again, and we’re fanning them. So every soul is like a spark that is gradually dwindling and we’re trying to fan it with a little knowledge and a little Prasadam and get it glowing again. Does that answer your question?

M: Is your ultimate aim to break the cycle? Are you striving to go beyond the cycle?

W: Well, that’s in the beginning stage. It’s described that when you’re really advanced, you don’t even care if you have to come back again, because you get to the point where [you understand that] heaven without Krishna is hell, and hell with Krishna is heaven. So no matter where you go, if you’re actually serving Krishna, it’s heavenly. It doesn’t matter. But in the beginning, because you’re not in that consciousness yet, you’re thinking, ‘God, help me get out of this world. I’m seeing it’s a pretty crazy place. I need to get out. I want to get more pure.’ Do you follow? At the beginning, the conscious attitude is like, ‘I’m serving God because I want to go to heaven.’ That’s still business. It’s still not pure. ‘If you let me go to heaven, God, I’ll serve you.’ But in the higher stages, [one thinks] ‘Even if I don’t go to heaven, I still love you. I want to serve you.’ That’s the platform of pure love, not even business at all. So that’s what I’m aiming for, not just to break the cycle of birth and death, but to get to the point of pure love, where I’m thinking, ‘No matter what, I just want to serve you, Krishna.’ Actually, that’s what got me [to join this movement]. I mean, I am a little older so my favorite songs before I joined were "You've Got A Friend," by James Taylor and "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," by Diana Ross. These were my two favorites because the idea in those songs was that, ‘No matter what, I’m there for you and no matter what, I’ll always be there to love you.’ We’re all hankering [for this kind of loving relationship], and there are so many songs like that. I know Whitney Houston is singing this song "I Will Always Love You". These songs are big sellers because we all want to love unconditionally, [to feel and have others feel toward us], ‘No matter what, I love you,’ but we know that in this world it’s not that way. A girl might love me, [but I always have to worry thinking] ‘But if I got in a car wreck and I became quadriplegic, would she still love me? If I lost my money, would she still love me?’ Because nobody’s really like that, nobody really loves you unconditionally. But God does, and you can love God that way. That’s what’s so nice. For example, when we first fall in love, we say, ‘I’ll love you forever; we’re going to get married.’ But then she burned you or you burned her or whoever it was that first burned you, and you never said that again. You never say, ‘Oh, it’s just you and me forever.’ You’re always holding back because you don’t want to get burnt like that again. But we want to give unconditionally, everything we’ve got, and you can

only do it with God. God is the most beautiful, anyhow, and He's not going to cheat you.

M: So you're rather disappointed, for the most part, that the people you meet on the Plaza don't really engage you on a spiritual level. They're only interested in what's in the food or whatever?

W: Yes, a little bit. It would be nice to have a higher level discussion. We're planting seeds as we say.

M: But you do have discussions out there with a few people. I've seen you with a circle of people.

W: Yes, sometimes it gets to be [a circle] so that's what keeps me enlivened, because I used to just serve out lunches and anybody could do that. I was thinking, 'Is there something more I can do without being like a Jed and having to [shout out], 'Hey folks, here's the Bhagavad-Gita, and it say...' I didn't want to do that. So I was thinking, 'Well, what can I do in a nice way where people can listen to us. And I didn't want to read the Bhagavad-Gita because it's so philosophical. So I read the biography of Prabhupada because it was something that I found very attractive, so I started doing that and people started coming around one day and it has grown. It's real nice.

M: What do you see as your future here, both within the community and on the Plaza. Do you see yourself doing this for some years to come? Do you have any schemes for the future?

W: Not much. I've said many times that I could see myself doing this for many, many years. I'm not hankering thinking, 'Boy, I wish I could do something else.' I really enjoy doing it. As for whether I'm thinking, 'We need bigger buildings and [let's expand in this or that way],' unfortunately, I'm very lacking in that. I have no vision. But I don't think I have to have a lot of vision. I think if I keep doing these simple things, things will grow. I mean Prabhupada, for all his life, just stuck to the basics of his spiritual master's instruction that, 'If you ever get money, print books,' and he did that, and he chanted and he gave prasadam out and [the whole movement just grew from that]. And I'm even seeing that doing a little thing like this [plaza lunch program], it is kind of growing. Basically, I think I'll stick to the basic things, maybe we'll get a bigger building sometime, if we need it. Right now we don't even have it full of devotees, so that's all in the future too. I'd just like to communicate more like having more programs at the high schools and the universities in classroom engagements. That would be very nice. Beyond that, I don't know.

M: What is a full-load of devotees at this temple?

W: What would be?

M: Yes, what would be?

W: As I said, we've got about eleven rooms in the building, and we could have more than one in every room.

M: There are four right now?

W: Approximately, and even all of them are not full-time devotees.

M: Has it been fuller in the years past?

W: When I joined in Gainesville, of course, Prabhupada had just left the planet, and I joined in another building where the Waldorf School is, [on Depot Avenue], by P.K.Yonge, and there was about forty devotees full-time, actually at that time. But when Prabhupada left it was a big shock and so many people left, so we ended up getting smaller in buildings. Anyhow, it's back on an upswing.

M: After where the Waldorf School is, wasn't the temple over here by the UF Press?

W: That was right before this [house], but we've had several after the Depot Ave. property and before that even.

M: O.K.

W: We've always had something. Actually, we had the farm and that building [on Depot Ave.]. Then when we closed that building down, everyone went out to the farm. Then a few years later, we opened up the little center back in town again. Maybe a year or two, not much though, like a year later. So for a year there was like nothing in town, I think.

M: People would come to the Plaza from the farm?

W: Yes.

M: You would commute?

W: Yes. Is this stuff useful for this project?

D: Yes, Oral History is anything that anyone says that's relevant to the topic and our topic is Prasadam on the Plaza basically.

M: I put it in the context of what you're doing, in a way.

D: Your personal views, your philosophy, your analysis and your psychology or whatever is involved or even anecdotal stuff about somebody who knocked over your tables, anything like that is very useful. So whoever can go to the UF archives and get a real personal picture of what you've been doing out there. I want to ask you about Prasadam, does it require a certain type of food or a certain type of chanting? Are there spiritual guidelines for what you do on the Plaza that you must follow every time you set up the tables? Are there strictures- I know no meat, fish or eggs?

W: I could make Japanese food or Italian. It doesn't have to be Indian or anything like that, but before we bring it out, it has to be prepared with some strictures. For example, we don't dip our finger in the sauce to see if I've spiced it right or does it taste O.K. That's why we have to be conscious when we're making it, not spaced out. You offer it to Krishna on the altar, on special plates, first. You put a little bit of each preparation [on the plate] and then you say, 'Thank you very much for having given us these foodstuffs to prepare and the [intelligence with which] to make them and we hope you take them and enjoy them. And then after you give them [the deities] a little time to eat-for example, if I give you a plate of food, I don't just put it there and then immediately take it away-so I give Them a little time to eat and then before I take it away I say, 'I hope you enjoyed it and I hope you've blessed this food now [so] that everyone who now takes it may become purified by taking it and may be more appreciative so that people will say, 'Wow, this Krishna food is so wonderful,' and they'll get more attracted to coming closer to Krishna. So that's basically the process I do and then I merge the food from the offering plate back in the big, big pots and then the food is considered Prasadam, because it has been offered first to Krishna and now it's His mercy. Did that answer your question somewhat?

M: Yes, that is kind of the ritual and the spirituality before it goes to the Plaza. And you're not to consume anything, you don't even dip your finger in?

W: Not before it has been offered. The person cooking it should be someone who is second initiated. First initiation is [for] someone who for a year has been following the principles and chanting, and a second initiate has been doing it for another year and they've become more purified and therefore their consciousness is more elevated, so that's another [stricture].

M: A first initiate and a second initiate?

W: Yes. A second initiate is a brahman.

M: That's the higher level?

W: Yes, it's priest-like. They can go on the altar and dress the deities, and a first initiate would not be allowed to do that. Also you shouldn't cook without second initiation. Sometimes it happens because there's no brahman around, but it's a good standard [we try to keep].

M: Are there higher initiates beyond brahman?

W: Yes, there's sannyasa, which is the renounced order of life. So beyond brahman, the only next [level] would be if you are sannyasi, which means someone who takes the order of celibacy for the rest of their life. So that's another initiation ceremony. It generally happens at the age of fifty or after, generally.

M: What is your status?

W: I'm a brahman. I'm trying to be a real brahman, and I will probably take sannyasa. I don't think I'm going to get married. I could. I'm at the stage where I could go either way [get married or choose renunciation] but I'm such an old fogey that I doubt I'm going to do it, because I don't want to have kids this late and there's not much use in getting married if you're not going to have any kids. What, is my wife going to cook for me? I know how to cook. I don't know what I need a wife for. Krishna is more beautiful than any woman. I am probably going to take sannyasa, but probably not until I'm about fifty years old at the earliest.

M: Is that considered a higher stage than being married?

W: Yes, because it takes so much energy and time to actually work and make money so you're not as directly focused on serving God. You can't do it as much, whereas sannyasi is a full-time preacher. They don't have all of that encumbrance. They're free to do much more preaching and they do it, generally. And if they don't do it, then they fall down and get married. It's a big fall down, because they were given so much respect. It's called a vantashi, or one who eats vomit. Imagine vomiting and then going back and picking it up and eating it. So you've vomited this family life, and then you go back and go for it again. It's a very big embarrassment and disgrace.

D: I had more questions about the food. Having a Catholic background, of course, we're told that the minute the priest holds up the bread and breaks the bread, the body of Christ is now inhabiting the bread and the blood of Christ is in the wine, and you're familiar with all of that theology?

W: I was brought up Catholic.

M: Are there similar spiritualities behind Prasadam? You said it's to show Krishna in a favorable light and to extend Krishna's love to people. Is there anything when people consume the food that they are beyond this positive light they've seen of your movement, are they getting anything out of that? I remember Dr. Thursby saying once that at the temples in India that he had studied at, when they threw the food away, they considered even the amoeba or the bacteria that consumed the food to be getting blessed.

W: Right.

M: Even when the food was rotting, it was being consumed by the microorganisms, and that was part of the offering and that was part of the religion. So when people eat this food, how is that interpreted along those lines?

W: I thought I had touched on this already, but the idea is that whether they know it or not they're getting blessed and it's purifying them. Just like, even if a Catholic child receives Holy Communion-I think they give it at almost any age. It wasn't like it only happened when you were twelve that you could receive it, was it?

D: Yes, you had to go through Confirmation.

W: Even still, as we know, we got confirmed, we were still spaced out ten-year-olds or twelve-year-olds. We didn't really know what it was all about. But certainly [even a child] feels that by taking that, [he's] getting some spiritual advancement. So similarly [people on the Plaza] are making some [spiritual] advancement by eating food that's blessed by God.

D: There is no meat, fish or eggs in it.

W: Yes. Actually, many times people say, 'I try to make it like you do, but it just doesn't taste the same.' We say, 'It's because you didn't offer it to Krishna. You've got to get Krishna's saliva in there.' Actually, it's a fact. If you offer it to Krishna it will taste [better]. It's amazing, you put it on the plate on the altar and the little bit that's in the bowl [on the plate] has a little different taste than that from the big pot, amazingly enough. You can try it. It just tastes a little special. It's called Maha Prasadam. It's not just Prasadam. It's Maha Prasadam because it is from the plate that was offered to the Lord.

M: That Maha is mixed into the rest?

W: Or sometimes I'll just put it all on my plate and I'll eat all the Maha. It's not that it has to be mixed in. Because you've got to transfer it to wash the [deity] plate. So you may put it all on one paper plate and say, 'Here, you take the Maha,' or you can give a little bit to each of the people. There's all sorts of things you can do. It's not like it has to be mixed in the big pot or the rest of [what's in the big pot] is not Prasadam. It's still Prasadam. Does that answer most of your questions?

D: Yes, I think so.

M: Any anecdotal stories about the Plaza or radical Bill or the preachers, or the 'Rainbow People' that are out there? It's such a cacophony some times.

W: It sure is. I can just think of one funny one. [Before I took over the program], they had this guy cooking one day, and he didn't know how to cook and it was supposed to be spaghetti. Anyhow, he boiled the noodles too much. They were like mush, and then he just threw a can of tomato [paste and added water] without spicing it at all. One devotee showed up on the Plaza just as it was being unloaded and he said, 'Oh, great, I want some.' He immediately made a plate for himself before everything was set up, and he started taking it, and he went, 'This stuff is shit!!' He said, 'Get it out of here!!' So they were starting to take the pots away, and all the students were going, 'No! No! We want it, we want it anyhow.' It was just funny that they had so much faith that they just wanted our food no matter what it was like.

D: That's good.

W: For example, if you go to McDonald's, they have standards, and you [can] go anywhere in the country or in the world and it's going to be the same taste. So, I feel that I try and make it so that they know when they come up that it's going to be good. So, I had somebody else cooking it when I went to India [once for a month], and when I came back, the students said, 'Boy, it wasn't the same.' They couldn't count on it being the same kind of quality. So I take pride a little bit in trying to do it right. I try not to think, 'Just get it out there,' but I try to make it tasty. Actually, one guy was going to FSU in the Summer and going here and he said, 'Man, their food up there ain't nearly as good as here.' It makes you feel good.

M: Have you sampled it yourself?

W: What, the stuff up there?

M: At FSU.

W: Yes, I knew he would say that. I've had some of the stuff there because I know they guy who cooks up there, and I know that he's not as good a cook.

D: You should give him a workshop or something.

W: Well, [the student who made this comment] said that dealing with the manager [of that program] up there was like dealing with a manager of Denny's and I actually knew what he was talking about, because the guy [running that program] is a little bit more in the mood of watching [to make sure] everybody give a donation. And I just never could get into that mood. I wouldn't want to have someone watching me like a hawk and watching me, thinking, 'Are you giving?' I've sometimes threatened [by handing out papers saying], 'Hey look, folks. I need a little more donations. I could actually sit someone there and say, if you give a quarter, you get a quarter's worth, I don't want to do that. I'd like to have it [based on] love and trust.' And I've put a letter like that a couple of times, and it actually helped to wake people up to realize that we needed their help. But I don't want to have someone watching them. Anyhow, so his mood up there isn't quite so nice.

M: I can remember as an under-grad, about 1983, when donations became more and more solicited. It used to just be a bowl and there was nothing said, and sometimes there wasn't even a sign, and then it became more and more apparent...I remember a tall, black devotee, telling the crowd, 'You're just not going to get this food if you don't come up with the money,' and it made perfect sense. I guess what everyone assumed, or at least my friends, is that you had some big global organization that had trust accounts and it was just paying for all of this stuff.

W: Right, that's exactly what I say in my letter. 'We're not funded by ISKCON Central. We depend on you guys.' Many people don't realize it. It's not that we're getting all government donated food either. Even on the days when we used to get more government donated food, that still was only for a few things. It's always been that none of my vegetables have ever been donated, nor any of my sugar, nor any of my lemon juice. And I think a lot of the people who eat out there don't know that. One devotee once told me that someone asked him, 'How do you guys do this?' He said, 'Well, I was just in my room sleeping and all of a sudden I heard a big bang and I looked out in the truck and there was all of this cooked food sitting in pots, so I decided to bring it on out here.

M: ISKCON Central focuses on the literature and the art work. Is that what they do with their resources?

- W: There is no 'ISKCON Central.' That's my point. Each center is independent. There is an ISKCON BBT, the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, that publishes the books which we all use, and that has to be centralized. What was the question exactly?
- M: You answered my question. You had referred to ISKCON Central and I wondered if they were just putting out the books, if that was their focus. So, apparently, there are different cells of Krishna-consciousness that produce different things. For example, you do Prasadam here and that is your primary edification at this temple, on the Plaza, and somewhere else they're publishing books and are at work....
- W: Yes, even right at our farm they produce a magazine for America and the English-speaking countries.
- M: Back to Godhead is produced in Alachua?
- W: Yes.
- M: Oh, I didn't know that.
- W: I mean there is a central organization, ISKCON, but still it doesn't fund anybody. ISKCON is managed by a group of senior members who get together once a year in India and make sure that all the temples maintain the same standards everywhere.
- D: Keeping the standard of Krishna-consciousness?
- W: Trying to.
- D: That makes sense.
- M: Do you feel the need for a more controlling, central authority like most churches have in place. Do you think that, that would make the Krishna movement more effective, or do you think it would give you more strength if only from a financial point of view, if not spiritual as well?
- W: I don't think that centralizing financial authority more would be so beneficial, but we probably need to become better managers. For example, we've started going to these consulting firms to learn how to better manage our movement. We need to do that better. There's a standard thing people say: 'I'm not into organized religions.' So we say, 'Well, you'll love us, then, because we're real disorganized.'

We need to become more organized just in terms of getting everything mobilized but not in terms of having central funding. As I thought I said before, it's good that we don't have central funding because it forces each center to actually work. No temple can just be lazy, depending on some central funding and saying, 'We need this or we need that.'

M: You do your service to survive?

W: Do we do our service to survive?

M: Yes, it sounds like it.

W: Actually, if one does the real basic programs of trying to distribute Prasadam and books and chanting, everything comes. Frankly, we're not just barely getting by. I'm seeing that Krishna's reciprocating because I actually have a little money in the bank, because I have been doing this steadily. In the beginning I was struggling for a while, but that was Krishna's test. Even Prabhupada was struggling for many years to get anything going, but when Krishna saw how sincere he was, then He gave him everything, such as palaces and money, but he didn't keep any for himself. He would just use it to open another big center or something. I would say, frankly, if we keep going like this, it's going to grow. Krishna is already sending enough. It's not just like in the old days, just barely paying the bills. More than money, I actually need people to help me with some good ideas so that I could say O.K., 'I've got some money, let's do that.'

M: Is the temple tax-exempt?

W: Yes.

D: Were there any other anecdotes that come to mind from your days spent on the Plaza in the sunshine and the rain.

M: If they occur to you, jot them down because we could add them later. Do you still have the carving of the man with the cow's head chopping off the head of the cow with the man's head. Is that still brought out onto the Plaza?

W: No.

M: The cow had a human head, and the man had the cow's head, I believe, and he was about to butcher the cow. It was a Krishna statuette.

W: Showing reincarnation. If you kill an animal in this life, you will be the animal in your next life and he will be killing you.

M: And there was another beautiful one with the embryo growing into old age.

W: Yes, that one I do have. Maybe I should take it out to the Plaza more often. We take it for granted. I've been thinking, 'If we take it out there, then everybody has seen it and it's a trouble to take it out there.' I mean, we've already got a full van, so I hesitate to throw in another big thing like that. That's why I don't do it. I've had people whose service was to sit at the book table and to answer questions, but I haven't had anybody qualified enough to do that recently. If I did, then that would be something to take out. Now, the cow display, I think I gave it to some other temple to use, and so I don't have that anymore. Did you like that at all?

M: Oh man, I know that generated a lot of conversation when I was an under-grad in the mid-1980s. Your artwork, your book covers, the glowing deities-this is not the kind of stuff your average American kid sees when they come here from the suburbs to go to college. And those statues, what are they are called.

W: We call them diaramas.

M: Yes, the diaramas. They were serving your purpose without the spoken word.

W: Some people complained that it is pretty heavy. Maybe it was, but I think it's a pretty good preaching point.

M: I agree with you. We would have our plates with Krishna food as undergraduates sitting on the Plaza, talking about what we had just seen on your table. What that meant, who was brave enough to ask you guys what that meant or where it was coming from. I had seen Krishnas in London as a kid, but I hadn't been exposed to Hinduism nor had most of my colleagues, middle American college students, which is why you're there. So I thought that, that did a lot to get people thinking, get people interested. I think I took that history of India class with Dr. Thursby because of my Krishna lunches more than anything. I was actually interested in what went on besides Rudyard Kipling's version of India.

W: Is his name Eugene Thursby?

M: Eugene Thursby, that is it. He was a religion and history department professor, but he taught History of India before colonization because most of it was, aside from the incursions of the Moguls and the Muslims, most of it was Vedic studies that he was very familiar with, various levels of the Veda and the Buddha coming, so it was practically a religion class. A lot of that is what was going on the subcontinent before the British showed up and made their way with it.

W: It's funny, I don't hear anyone ever mention his name anymore. I don't even know if he's over there anymore.

M: I saw him on the streets recently. He may be retired, but I know he's a practicing vegetarian and he talked about various restaurants in town that had this dish or that dish, and he knew some of the East Indian restaurant owners in town, and he encouraged our whole class to go eat your food. It was an interesting class. He spent a long time in India, in the 1960s and 1970s. He was a renowned Vedic scholar. I don't know what his particular practice was or anything like that but he was very pro-Krishna-consciousness, which I thought was neat because most professors will make deriding comments about how Krishnas are freaks.

W: One teacher of an economics class did an interview with me about us and made a video and tried to show that not everything was motivated for money. I don't know if you ever saw this. I don't even know which class it was exactly. I'm pretty sure it was listed as an economics class. First, he starts out with Madonna singing 'I'm a Material Girl' in the background and then he says, 'But some people aren't after just material things, and then he showed scenes of the Plaza lunch program and of him interviewing me.

M: Oh, this was a video?

W: Yes, and he still shows it. I still meet students who tell me they just saw it in their class. It was made around five or six years ago, and he still shows it every year to the class, so that's neat.

M: That's great.