

Esalen's Resident Alien
Seymour Carter: Secular Skeptic in a Utopian Community

Interviewed by Ken Dychtwald
January 14, 2010

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A video recording of this interview was made at Esalen by Daniel Bianchetta.

Editor's note:

I adapted the following text from a raw transcript of the interview. My objective was to maintain the rough texture of contemporary spoken language, or what I would call "fractured syntax." I believe this is not altogether out of keeping with Seymour's ideas about the fractured nature of identity. However, my overriding purpose was to make sure that Seymour shines through all the language.

I think the reader will come away from this interview with a pretty good idea about the life and times of Seymour Carter. He is a unique person. His life was lived at the fulcrum of an era. Seymour and his cohorts liberated a whole generation in a way that ensured failure of the inevitable neo-conservative counter-attack. Their revolution may be over, but it need not be forgotten. It was the precursor of a new age that is just beginning.

To my mind we stand at the horizon of a new form of society. It will be built upon the scientific investigation of positive emotions and "high *jen*" culture. And it will be supported by new forms of psychotherapy combining mindfulness, neuroplasticity and attachment theory. The door to this kind of transformative work would have remained closed, but for iconoclasts like Seymour Carter.

John Callahan
April 1, 2010

Esalen's Resident Alien - Seymour Carter the Secular Skeptic

Seymour Carter:

I want to begin with a meditation. Let's just sit for a moment with our eyes closed.

Ken Dychtwald:

Okay.

Seymour Carter:

We're going to attend to our breathing and to our pulse rate....

[Pause]

Now I want you to tune in to your inner experience.

[Pause]

Now I want you to get ready to open your eyes...

Take a moment to make the transition from being inside to being outside.

[Pause]

Stay with attending to your breathing and your heart rate as we do this...

Contacting and withdrawing... It's all just coming and going...

This is part of my Gestalt game.

Ken:

Good. Now how are you feeling?

Seymour Carter:

I feel really good. I feel really up for this and intrigued.

I've left a lot of emptiness in preparation for this, so I feel well-engaged to start.

Ken:

Why do you think we're doing this interview?

Seymour Carter:

Why? Well, I'm doing this because a lot of my life has been passed here at Esalen, over the last 48 years, and that life has been unrecorded, because I'm not a writer. I have experienced certain unique philosophical, personal and community relationships

over almost 50 years, that are, in a sense, unique. Now I'm looking back at my life with the feeling that, "My God, what a rich and wonderful life I've had!"

My early life ambition was to be an artist, a painter. I have studied art for most of my life. As a child, I was only able to create art. I couldn't do linear things like mathematics. Grammar just escaped from me.

In any case, my earliest studies led to my being here. My earliest studies were art and the nature of interesting form. So, when I came here, to Esalen, I came after many, many years of preparation, ready for, I think, the kind of body-mind teachings that were here.

Ken:

One last question, before we get started, and then I'm going to do some straight interviewing.

Let's say this is many years from now, and there are people watching this interview who maybe never knew you...

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

By then, you and I will no longer be around.

Seymour Carter:

Or course.

Ken:

What do you hope they will feel or think or sense, as they have this experience of you?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I feel it will be as if they are watching an artist - someone like Toulouse Lautrec or Van Gogh.

They will be seeing someone who is a very, very embedded person - embedded in his own time, and on the leading edge of this culture's perception of what it is possible to be, as a human being.

Ken:

Good. All right. So, I'm going to start out interviewing you "Esalen style," and ask you a very straight-up, simple question.

The question is, "Who are you?"

Seymour Carter:

I am Ojo Pojoque,
 Eye of the Casino,
 Esalen's Resident Alien,
 A Secular Skeptic in a Utopian Community.
 I am a devotee of Surrealism, Irony,
 And the fractured Nature of Identity,
 A maverick Social Scientist,
 The last member of Esalen's Team of Therapists
 Who revolutionized Psychotherapy in the 1960s.

As a child, I was very interested in biology and the nature of identity. So, when I look back upon my life, at the ambitions I had as a child, and see where I am now, finishing the last third of my life, I feel I have accomplished what I really wanted to do.

I grew up surrounded by fundamentalist Christians in Washington State - in a little town called Opportunity, Washington, on the border of Northern Idaho. In that place I lived with the remnants of the original Native American people - a group of people who had been decimated by the racist American politics of that era.

It was *that* growing up - surrounded by different forms of identity, different ways of life - that interested me. Very early and at a very young age I began to be interested in the question of identity. What is a personality? Even as a young child, I was interested in what it is to be a personality.

As I said, I was very poor in school at linear types of learning. But I was a very gifted reader. I was very good at reading. I could read a lot of information. And I was good at art. So, I concentrated on that. I later found out that I was dyslexic, and I had right-left cognitive reversals.

By the time I came to Esalen, I had developed a whole history about studying identity - being interested in psychology, being interested in the lives of artists, and being interested in what was presented here at Esalen. That was Fritz Perls' teaching. It was very much a reiteration of the values and the themes of art, the study of art, and how to create art. I immediately felt I could dive into learning here. That was the water I wanted to swim in. So I came here at 24 or 25 years old.

Ken:

How old are you now?

Seymour Carter:

Seventy-three. When I look back at my very earliest questions...my earliest question as a child was, "What is life?" I was studying insects; I was watching nature a lot. I was also watching and looking at what people are about - not having much success with people, but being totally entranced with nature and insects. At an early age I started reading natural history accounts of life, of animal life, of bug life.

As I approach the end of my life, as I look back at 73 years, I realize that my earliest questions were, "What is life, what is personal identity, and what are people made up of?" I was confused by all the different ways of life, and that led me to psychology. Actually, it led me first to anthropology and then psychological anthropology. So, at the end of my life, there are these questions of "What is identity?" that I feel I know well. "What is life?" I feel I know the basic biological theories, by studying Darwin's writings, and by reading the evolutionary accounts of what makes up life.

I've taught myself to answer these life questions, that I've asked all my life. I've probably read somewhere between 2,000 to 3,000 books in my lifetime - deep books - books of literature and science. Now, at the end of my life, I can pretty much give a good account of what makes an identity, and how we are motivated as an identity - how we activate ourselves. The theories that I work with as a therapist have been fleshed out by a life-long study of these matters.

Ken:

Mind if I ask you a few questions?

Seymour Carter:

Go ahead...

Ken:

All right. If there were to be one word that the people here at Esalen would use to describe you - if there were just one word - what do you think that word would be, that other people would say about you?

Seymour Carter:

Provocateur.

Ken:

If I were to ask you the same question, what would be the one word you would use to label yourself?

Seymour Carter:

I would also say, "Provocateur."

Ken:

So, what is a provocateur's job?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I'm like a gadfly. I'm like someone who sees beyond the conventional - someone who's willing to challenge convention and accepted understanding. I'm a great provocateur with respect to local knowledge or common consent - or what is the latest dominant scientific theory - or the kind of philosophical game that's currently being promoted in the world at large. For example, I am critical of evolutionary psychology and critical choice theories.

Ken:

So, here you are at Esalen Institute, in a counterculture setting...in which you are counter to the culture which was countercultural to begin with.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

A culture where you've got nothing but individualists - where you think of yourself as the resident alien.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

Is that natural, or do you have to work at being that kind of provocateur?

Seymour Carter:

No, I've always been this way. First, in my early life I was very introverted, and embedded myself in my own psychological life by retreating into the woods, playing in the woods by myself.

Ken:

Did you have a different name as a young man?

Seymour Carter:

Oh yes. I changed my name at 20.

Ken:

So, this was 50-something years ago, when people weren't quite changing their names yet.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

You crafted a new name for yourself, "Seymour."

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

What did that mean to you...why did you pick that name versus Harvey or Dan?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I'll come into this. My grandmother was part Native American. Part of my early life was around Native Americans, and their psychological constructs of how an identity was formed made an impression on me. One construct was that in Indian culture one takes a new name, entering upon new life phases. At 14 you'd have a different name than you had as a child. So, when I was in art school my name was Gary, Gary Sohns. My mother named me after Gary Cooper.

Ken:

Really!

Seymour Carter:

I hated that name all of my life. You didn't know that?

Ken:

No.

Seymour Carter:

I hated that name. Anyway, one day I was signing one of my paintings *Gary*. I said to myself, "That's not a fucking artist's name." So, I started thinking of some names. I was reading about the lives of artists - how they took a name that was different than their birth name - and I came up with Seymour.

Ken:

Did it have any meaning for you at the time?

Seymour Carter:

Oh yes. It meant "see more."

Ken:

Really?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. It meant that this being, who was putting this painting out there, saw more than the others.

Ken:

And the Carter?

Seymour Carter:

I don't know where that came from. I think it came from a detective television program. There was some "Carter" in a detective show, I think, and I liked the way that sounded.

Ken:

Do you have another name now? Do you have an Indian name at this point in your life?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, yes.

Ken:

What would that be?

Seymour Carter:

For my last third of my life, I went on a vision quest. This was about six years ago.

Ken:

Tell me what a vision quest is for you. Do you meditate...do you hike?

Seymour Carter:

Well, what I was faced with was growing out of the sense of being Seymour Carter, and what that was about. As a child, I played a lot as an Indian. I played Indian most of my childhood; that was an identity I felt was great to have. So, I embedded in myself the Indian psychology; especially the vision quest idea - which is that at a period in life where you feel like you are a new identity you need to go into the woods, to be by yourself and put yourself through an ordeal, and come up with a new name that fits you.

Ken:

Does somebody hand it to you, for instance does somebody come down as the spirit guide, or does it pop into your own mind?

Seymour Carter:

Being a "poetic rationalist" I assumed it was my own responsibility.

Ken:

What is the new name?

Seymour Carter:

Ojo Pojoque. *[ed., pronounced Oho Pohokee]*

Ken:

Ojo Pojoque, which means?

Seymour Carter:

The Eye - Ojo means the eye in Spanish, in the dialect used where I was doing my vision quest. Pojoque is the name of a casino. So, the name means "the eye of the casino," which I feel is my role at Esalen. -- It has been to be the eye of the casino here, to see who's a liar, who's a fraud, who's cheating, and so on. In the magnificence of Esalen's truth-telling groups, one of my roles has been the proponent of unmasking what seems to be pretense.

Ken:

Say more about that - unmasking pretense.

Seymour Carter:

Well, from Fritz Perls to Will Schutz, the dynamic of psychotherapy has a lot to do with challenging ones, let's say, character defenses - one's pretending, rather than being authentic. So, my whole study, my whole interest in psychotherapy and psychology, has been with those pioneers whose theories have to do with authenticity, with the authenticity of the self - Carl Roger, Paul Tillich, all of these people. Fritz Perls, Will Schutz, all tell the truth. My role at Esalen has been about how to keep these traditions of truth-telling going in the group. In the early days we were somewhat rude and brusque about confronting people about their inauthenticities, their deceptions, their masks. Now, we're much more kind and gentle, but the same dynamic applies. We feel a person really can't fulfill their life unless they give up a lot of their pretense.

Ken:

So, you chose "eye of the casino." When you first mentioned it I thought to myself, eye of a storm, which is a very interesting place to be, because a storm is very turbulent but the eye is still. But that's not exactly the way you are...that's not the metaphor. It's more like "the eye of the scene in the casino." So it's seeing the game - seeing who's playing the game fairly and who's pretending. You feel like that's your position, that's your dance?

Seymour Carter:

Right, yes.

So, maybe this is a point to tell a story.

Ken:

Yes.

Seymour Carter:

I'll tell the story of how I got the name; how I made myself. So...about six or seven years ago, I was coming to a certain place in myself, and feeling like it was time to do another vision quest, and to find a new name for myself. I began researching places, and I landed upon Santa Fe, New Mexico. Why I did this reveals a little bit about my background. My family background, that leads me to say and live the way I do, is a kind of Indian psychology. My mother's mother was a French Indian woman who was kidnapped from her tribe when she was six years old or so, then taken 1,000 miles away to the Oklahoma Territory and put into Christian schools.

Part of my quest in life is to be that part. I'm only one-sixth Indian but I identify mostly with that part of myself. I don't identify with the Christian culture very much. Being surrounded by Christian missionaries as a child - I got tired of that. So, by going into a vision quest I'm doing something that I've done before - something that's quite established for me.

I flew to Santa Fe where I had a friend. I rented a car, drove around the territory maybe 2,000 or 3,000 miles, and then landed in Bandolier National Park, which is one of the

places with the remains of a Pueblo village. It's on a plateau; a kind of high mountain desert in the Southwest. It was perfect for me. Here are the remains of an Indian culture that I could be imbued with.

I prepared the hike. I made a couple of journeys there to see what the territory was like, and walked maybe five miles into the Badlands. It was below Los Alamos. Los Alamos is visible at night from where I was. So, the conditions were good. I got permission to go into the park. I brought along a pack with me, and a walkman with African warrior music. I went into the park, and there was nature surrounding me. I walked with sticks at that time, as I do now. I had a headset on and I was listening to African warrior music....

Ken:

You were totally by yourself?

Seymour Carter:

...Totally by myself. And there were some other people who became part of the story.

As I am checking into the park, a group of wooly lesbians are getting ready to check into the park, too. They are showing me the greatest scorn. It's like, here are these burley lesbians, about six or eight of them, going into the park, and I'm a male, and they show all their hatred towards a male that they can. The way they act, they are really spreading around bad vibes, and they are all stocky, and they have wooly sweaters on, so I call them wooly lesbians.

Anyway, I take off on my trip....

Ken:

So, you've got your walking sticks and your headset.

Seymour Carter:

I've got my walking sticks, I've got my headset, I've got food for three days, I've got enough water to get to the next creek, which was eight hours away. I also brought along a little cooker and my cappuccino maker. You know - my espresso maker. I had a foam beater that I could use to beat water and milk powder into foam. That was a critical ingredient on the trip - to be able to have my espresso, my cappuccino, during the trip.

It would take me 36 hours to hike this loop from Bandolier to the Rio Grande, and then back up into Bandolier again. So I start, and go along, and I get maybe five miles into the hike when I stop, and I'm off the trail cooking a cappuccino. When I finish, I go back to the trail, and I notice that the wooly lesbians are going by. They pass me on the trail and go a little further. I think, that's great, and then I start up again.

On the map, there is something like a 500 foot drop, then a walk across a valley - then 500 feet going up, and then a walk six miles long. The landscape is broken like that.

Part of my trip is to be absolutely in tune with what I'm doing because I'm out there all alone. If anything happens to me, I'm dead. I couldn't break my leg; I couldn't fall, and then be without any kind of help, because there is no aid. So, I'm being very careful the whole time. I am walking with sticks. I've got my headset going with the Zulu warrior music. During this trip I'm stopping every two or three hours to drink some coffee, to get into the rhythm of putting myself into a kind of a trance, which I felt I needed to do. Pitching myself into an ordeal also throws me into a kind of psychological state of being where I'm very, very focused on myself. I'm also focused on the dangers, thinking, "Can I really do this?"

So, I get to the top of a rim formation, and I'm pausing to make my cappuccino, and I realize, "Oh, my God!" I left a bottle of water behind. I forgot to put another bottle of water in my pack. All I have for the next eight to ten hours is just about 4 ounces of water. "Holy Shit! What am I going to do now? I may have to turn back."

I'm sitting there pondering this. I'm on the edge of a cliff escarpment where I had to go down 1,000 feet, across about a quarter of a mile, and then up another 800 feet. As I'm sitting there - this cliff was covered with petroglyphs. Just really - really like the kind you love, Danny. *[ed., referring to Danny Bianchetta, who is making a video recording of this interview]* There are all these petroglyphs. I'm stunned. I've never seen so many petroglyphs in one place. I'm sitting there and thinking, "Well, what am I going to do?"

Suddenly I see this guy jump up on a rock, and then jump down like an ape. I say, "What the fuck is this?" It turns out that it's a guy who's leading an outback journey for drug addicts. He's got them out there camping in the mountains, and they're going on vision quests, themselves. I tell him my problem and then he gives me some water. So I say, "Okay! Now I've got some water."

Then I continue on my journey. I have enough water. I'm going along, and I'm chanting to myself, "What name's coming to me? What name's coming to me?" One of the names of a hot springs in the nearby area is Ojo Hot Springs. I thought, "That's a cool name. I like Ojo." The Dadaist in me likes this, because it's frontwards and backwards the same - ojo. It also means to see - it means sight. So it's a continuation of Seymour. It also means, in this dialect, "Watch out!" So, I'm going through all these name considerations. I'm clearly in a trance by now after about eight or ten hours. Ojo keeps coming into my mind. "Ojo, Ojo, Ojo... That's a good name." I could chant it, along with the music.

Then, I come down the last escarpment. It's almost night and I'm making it to...what was the name of this creek...Frijoles Creek, that runs into the Rio Grande. There's this campground. In the park, you have to be in campgrounds. As I'm coming into the campground...it's about 7:00 at night, it's after dinner, and I come upon these woolly lesbians. They're finished with dinner, and they're freaked out because they can't throw a string attached to a rock over a tree, to draw their food sack up, in order to protect it because of the bears there. Every night, you have to put your food up in a tree. Well, here are all of these very masculine lesbians, and none of them could throw the rock.

They see me, a man, coming down the path. They turn from “freeze out” into, “Oh, you’re a man - wonderful. Would you like to have something to eat? Have some coffee or something.” They need me to help. So, I say, “Sure, I’ll throw the rock over the tree limb.” It took me, like, 10 tries to throw it over the limb, but I finally did it, drew the sack up, and they were very happy about that. Then, I went and down the path a little further, to make my own encampment.

I get everything set up for my camp, I lay down, and for the next six hours all I could hear were bear in the thickets! I couldn’t go to sleep. I was scared shitless. It was like, “Oh my God, this is terrible - I can’t sleep.”

I waited ’till the next morning. I got up and I made my coffee - and then I made my way to a painted cave that was a really old, ancient place. When I got there, I did my rituals. I don’t believe in a deity, but I did my prayers. Then, I walked down to the Rio Grande. I was out of water, and I waded into the Rio Grande to get water. I had brought some iodine pills to put in my water. I discovered I had lost some of these pills. There I was, in a high-temperature desert, in really serious condition about water. I had a 10 hour climb back to the Bandolier Park headquarters. And I had only enough pills to treat one liter of water. I looked at the map. I’m an old outdoors person, so I’m pretty safe and careful outdoors. It’s becoming dark...I had to get back in the dark. I had a head lamp, so I could see in the dark. And because I didn’t have enough water, I had to march out in the dark.

It’s a 10 hour march. As I’m going up onto a plateau, a goddamn flash snow storm starts. And I’m starting to get hypothermia. I’m shivering and I’m exhausted. I had been going without sleep for something like 30 hours. So when I tried to rest I would quiver and shake, and I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t rest. My body temperature would drop too much. So, I kept going. I’m stumbling along - and I see the lights of Los Alamos in the night. Then I say, “Okay, I’m going to get through this - you’re my enemy.” Los Alamos - the atomic industry - the whole thing - the sickness of our culture is expressed in this. This gives meaning to my walk.

I start to march, trying to save my life, struggling against the lights of Los Alamos, and the atomic presence of Los Alamos. I just did that! I went through the night with about eight to ten hours of struggling. Finally, I got to where the escarpment goes back down to Bandolier. It’s this 800 foot escarpment, and I have to do it in the night. Every step has to be *so careful*, and I’m shivering and shaking.

I got back down, got into my car, and turned the heat on, and I just shivered for about two hours. Then, I got to a friend’s place, and got into the bathtub, and put a lot of hot water in with me. There in the hot water, I thought, “Boy, that’s the best vision quest I ever made. I really went through the whole thing, and put my life on the line.” As I’m coming down from the experience, I’m trying to think, “Ojo, Ojo, Ojo, what goes with Ojo?” Then I remembered that as I did the survey, before going to Bandolier Park, I went to the Pojoque Indian reservation/casino. There in the casino, I lost \$100 gambling. So, I thought, “Okay, I’m Ojo Pojoque. It sounds like, “Hokey Pokey.” I liked

that...Ojo Pojoque. And that's how I got my name - Ojo Pojoque. So, it comes together as "The Eye of the Casino."

Ken:

Have you remained friends with the wooly lesbians, or was that just for the rock throwing and meal exchange?

Seymour Carter:

That was it.

Ken:

That was it. All right, so I'm going to move you in a couple of directions here.

You are many things. One of those things is that you are a living part of Esalen. In my view (and I've got 40 years experience now, although not as many as you) is that Esalen is sort of like a floral garden, or a stew, or a mosaic, and there are many different ingredients.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

There's clearly a Seymour ingredient that's in the roots, that's in the soil, that's in the limbs, that's in the flowers of Esalen. There's no question that there is a Seymour ingredient to Esalen. Now, let me ask you to think back - because your memory is quite crystalline... When you think back to, let's say, the late 1960s or early '70s - a time when many current people were not here - maybe not even alive - what was Esalen like back then? How would you describe the way it looked, the way it felt - its people?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I can answer that, and then I can bring in a Fritz Perls story.

Ken:

Sure.

Seymour Carter:

In 1968, Esalen was the center of the cyclone of the youth rebellion. It was one of the central places, like Mecca for the Islamic culture. Esalen was a pilgrimage center for hundreds and thousands of youth interested in some sense of transcendence, breakthrough consciousness, LSD, the sexual revolution, encounter, being sensitive, finding your body, yoga - all of these things were at first filtered into the culture through Esalen. By 1966, '67 and '68, Esalen was making a world impact. At that time, many people came here looking for - and Esalen had - the golden elixir. We were exploring with all kinds of psychotherapy. The world's most important and pioneering minds in psychotherapy came here and taught us. So, we were like a convergence of cultural forces that never will occur again. It was very similar to the 1890s or 1920s in Paris,

where there was a cultural convergence of people, characters, and cultural themes - ways of being that all came together here and created this kind of incredible three-ring circus.

To illustrate, I'm going to tell you a story. It's my most practiced story. And it's one of the best Esalen stories. It's about Fritz Perls and the three-ring circus at Esalen.

One day in 1968, two helicopters landed at Esalen, in the field outside the room we are in right now, here in the Point House. That was just a field back then. Out of one of the helos came Ravi Shankar and the Maharishi [*ed., Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*]. I was part of the group of people who brought Ravi Shankar to San Francisco for a concert. So I recognized him as he got out. And the guy coming out of the helicopter behind him was the Maharishi. Now, for those who don't know this, the Maharishi was The Beatles guru, and probably the most prominent and well-known guru at that time. During those times gurus used to appear like mushrooms after a rain.

So there I am - sitting here watching it - with the whole crew at Esalen watching it, too. And out of the next helicopter came Ringo Starr and George Harrison. We thought, "Oh, wow. This is fucking amazing." I mean, there were a lot of people coming to look at us - to see what we were up to - but nothing like this!

Of course, at that time we were really cool... We're trying to pretend that we had seen everything. So, we're acting very gracious, like, "Oh, we've seen it all. We've seen movie stars." And so it goes... Jane Fonda was Dick Price's girlfriend in 1962, '63 and '64. But at the same time, we're totally excited. Like, "Oh my God, The Beatles are here! Holy Christ, the Maharishi is here! What could this mean?" But we're acting cool on the surface...like hip guys and hip girls.

Ravi Shankar and George Harrison went out on the lawn and started a sitar concert, and they gathered about 50 or 60 people around them. We're sitting around listening to sitar music - and it was really nice. Then, the music ends... There was a big rock at the end of the lawn at the time. The Maharishi had planted himself on top of this rock, and was all covered with flower leis. He had stacks up to his ears, of flower leis. They had probably come from Hawaii, or something like that. The Maharishi was sitting on this rock with a rug under him - very beatific looking and radiant. You know - this radiant nut-job - that was how he looked to me. Anyway...he has flowers all over him, and flowers all around him, and he's sitting up there on that stone. As the music ends, he begins to lecture to us about how love is everything. The answer to all life is to love everybody, according to the Maharishi. He was talking in a high pitched, strange voice. He just seemed about as awkward and as phony as anybody I had ever seen at Esalen. You know, I had seen many, many pitchmen - for this or that form of enlightenment - who came through Esalen, at that time.

But at this time, Fritz Perls was also about the most famous therapist in the world. He had a cameraman following him around Esalen, who was making a documentary about Fritz Perls at Esalen. So, about the time that the Maharishi is full into his pitch, and

we're all being really attentive, we see Fritz Perls appear at the end of the deck with a cameraman behind him. Fritz comes to the end of the deck, looks around, and puffs his cigarette (he smoked constantly - he claimed he never inhaled).

Fritz would brook no rivalry at that time. Whoever showed up, Fritz would do something to make them look ridiculous, and to make himself stand out on top. He was "top dog" at Esalen, at that time. He was clearly the king baboon. Every so often he would come around; and those of us who lived here knew that we're going to hear Fritz Perls say something, to lay a fucking bomb on us and drop us into bed for two days of depression, because what he said was so heavy and so right on. (Actually, I thought the guy was sadist. I mean, at times, he was just cruel. But whatever he said later turned out to be good insights.)

So, here's Fritz, looking at this scene, and we know, like, "Oh my God! What's going to happen?" I'm sitting in the audience. And I know that Fritz can't stand any competition. Clearly he's going to do something. Here he was, the most famous therapists in the world. What he was most famous for was reading body language. I remember many of his interventions being very acute - like, "What are you doing with your hands." The person, then, is focused on their hands, and Fritz would say, "What are you doing with your hands? Identify with your hands and express who you are." Often, that would reveal that they were talking sweetly about their mother, but they're making a fist, indicating anger, which is a contradiction. ...This is important to the story.

Fritz comes down the stairs, and walks around the crowd with the cameraman following. Pretty soon he's got the audience split, like in a tennis match. The audience is watching him, and then they're going back to the Maharishi, then they're going to Fritz. Fritz is behind Maharishi - then he goes right over to him. The Maharishi's pitch starts to fall apart, and he starts speaking in a more and more high-pitched voice. Then he starts to stumble a little. He had a canned speech, so it was like he could probably suffer through almost anything. But he was really starting to squirm.

Understand that Fritz studied theater. One of his great things was to take a group of people, and completely provoke and dominate them by something he said. So what he did was - while our attention was all divided, and the Maharishi is sitting there freaking out at Fritz stealing his show - the Maharishi actually starts tearing flowers apart with his hands in his lap. Fritz notices this and says very dramatically, "Look at that fool, talking about love and kindness. Meanwhile he's tearing those flowers to pieces." The Maharishi becomes momentarily startled, but then goes back to his canned pitched. It was so cool to see the Maharishi so masterfully deflated. All of us on the Esalen team said, "Hooray for our side!"

Ken:

What does that reflect to you about that era or about Esalen?

Seymour Carter:

Fritz was king baboon in our community. He was someone who was probably one of the world's great provocateurs - one of its great minds. We had Gregory Bateson here, we had Carl Rogers, we had Will Schutz and Fritz. We had all kinds of big-name people, as well as non-name people who were incredibly gifted. I would liken us to what the Bauhaus period was to art and architecture in Germany, in the 1920s. At Esalen, we were like that to psychotherapy and the new philosophy of the 1960s.

Ken:

Can I press in on this a little bit?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Seymour, I'm going to ask you a general question, but also a personal question. Okay?

Seymour Carter:

Sure.

Ken:

We'll return to psychotherapy and uncovering human pretense in a moment. But the late 1960s and '70s was also a very peculiar window of time, because for a brief moment in history - only a brief moment in history - people felt liberated from fears of sexual disease. People felt the desire to know their bodies - to experience pleasure, to connect in ways that humans had always been worried about, or were unwilling to or unable to. So, it was a time of sexual appetites and sexual expression. Quite a lot of that took place in California, and a vortex of that was here - or so people think.

Seymour Carter:

Right, right.

Ken:

When you think back to that era - here's my two questions. What was the sexual vibe back then? Then number two... You were considered a raven haired, fire eating, dancing, sexually vibrant, charismatic character. So I imagine you had your fair share...your game was on. Right?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

So, there are two questions: What was the sexual scene then, honestly? What was it like to be in it?

Seymour Carter:

Well, that's a good question. I could tell a story afterwards.

Ken:

Yes, hold the story for a minute.

Seymour Carter:

It was like...as you say. It was a time when sexual boundaries, sexual limits, were relaxed. Esalen was kind of a breakthrough place. Those of us who were part of the resident community at that time were able to explore in ways that no one has since. It's deplorable to me - to have had that freedom, to explore my sexuality - and then to learn about the contemporary culture of sex, and how constrained it is, how limited young people are by having very few partners.

It was a time of explosion. I mean, literally, you could walk onto the property, and in the next moment you're down on the edge of the cliff having sex within 15 minutes. That happened to me a couple times. I lived in the north massage room. And the baths were open to sex - lots of sex.

Ken:

Was it out in the open, visible, or was it always off to the side?

Seymour Carter:

There were orgies in the baths, out in the open. That's another story. But to the question you're asking... Yes, there were orgies, there were group things, there was lots of exploration, of our bodies and our emotions.

Ken:

Was it exploitative? Was it someone taking advantage of someone else?

Seymour Carter:

No, no. That's what I want to get to. Although the freedoms were there, we were doing psychotherapy with each other all the time. We were engaged in group dynamics, maybe 20 hours a week. We were engaged with the questions about how we were doing life - what are the ethics of this, what are we learning about sensitivity and compassion. So, the sexual explorations that happened here at Esalen were quickly turned into an examination of sexuality. We also learned that we were terrible lovers. I mean, we had lots of sex, but we really weren't that good at it.

Ken:

Well, speak for yourself....

Let's focus on you, because you were in your glory in many ways. A young, vibrant man...

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

...A guy with a willingness to try things. What did you find out about your own sexuality during the free love era?

Seymour Carter:

Okay. Well, I can focus on me, but it was true of all of us.

Ken:

Fair enough.

Seymour Carter:

I and others, we turned to massage in order to learn about touching...to learn how to touch someone. Because our sexuality really was the normal 100 yard dash to orgasm that was common for males in our culture, which left the women frustrated. In our encounter groups, telling the truth about our lives, this came as feedback. ...Like, "Well, you're a terrible lover. You left me hanging, even though you were satisfied." So, that became the Esalen questioning - its truth telling groups. The encounter groups had a lot to do with examining where you failed to measure up, or to meet the other person humanely. This was Fritz's work - this was Will Schutz's work - this was a lot of people's work at that time.

The sexuality at Esalen in my circle, the inner circles, turned more toward this - as a basis for exploration. But because we might be sleeping with *madam X* and *madam Y*, and they're in the group, we were honor bound to tell what was going on. That led to all kinds of rivalries, and all kinds of issues about sexuality, and all kinds of emotions about it. So, the sexuality became part and parcel of that, and after a while of sleeping around, everyone started pairing up and finding a partner. We were finding good partners. That's been my career, too. I mean, at times I've had wonderful - what I call "sport fucking." But I really wanted the deep intimacy of relationship in sexuality, and the deepening of partnership. We did that, in time. I think that we all participated.... We all participated in how to make relationship work. That was our focus.

Let me go to one more thing. Also, what came about was a study of the body. We were then introduced to both the Fritz and the Reichian world of organismic theories. Reich's theory put great emphasis on having a whole body orgasm. That became our holy grail. Could we two, together, have a whole body orgasm? We practiced with crackpot exercises to accomplish this. We explored sexuality in many, many ways. But I would say that our sexuality was, in a way, honored by the examination of who we were as people. It still goes on today. There are still poly-amorous groups here at Esalen. There are still struggles about - do we remain monogamous or not? I think myself, and others that experimented, found that the greatest satisfaction came from a committed monogamous relationship. Ultimately, it didn't work to play around sexually.

Ken:

There was an ingredient to Esalen of nudity - that still remains - but more so back then.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

In the outside world, people make jokes about volleyball games at nudist colonies, or they imagine everybody walks around with erections. But here, Esalen had nudity....

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

There was nudity on the lawn, a lot of groups were done in the nude. The baths, of course, were "clothing optional," but people generally didn't wear anything other than their point of view.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

What was it like to be in a scene where nudity was common? If somebody were to ask, what was the point of it?

Seymour Carter:

My answer is going to surprise you.

My family were nudists. On my mother's side of the family, my grandfather was a blacksmith and then studied chiropractic. At that time, in the 1900s - at the turn of the century - following the reform movement from Germany, nude sunbathing - things like that - were natural, and my grandfather was a natural healer. My grandmother, his wife, was French and Indian, with a similar disposition. So, I grew up in a family of nudists. It was completely normal for me.

Ken:

But most of us, when we came down that driveway, it was different. I brought my mom and dad here to visit me, I think, in 1972. My parents are still alive now - but as straight as straight can humanly be. They had never been west of New Jersey. We were sitting in the Lodge. It was a cloudy day, and then the sun came out. All of a sudden, everybody on the lawn just took all their clothes off....

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

Well, my mom and dad, to this day, whenever they talk about Esalen, they tell that story, because to the average person nudity is unusual.

Seymour Carter:

Yes, absolutely.

Ken:

Separate from that, because it was a common thing for you, what role did it play for other people to step onto this property and get naked?

Seymour Carter:

Well, for me, when I see people at the baths with a bathing suit, I feel horrified. I think, "Why is this allowed at Esalen?" Why aren't they confronting their bodies as parts of themselves? Why are they taught that they should be ashamed about their genital? For me, it's a sign of the cultural ethos shifting from an open era to a very restrictive Puritanical era.

Ken:

So, for you the nudity was about that issue of authenticity?

Seymour Carter:

Owning your body....

Ken:

Owning your body; being who you are....

Seymour Carter:

Absolutely, absolutely.

Ken:

Did that jolt people, or was it comforting for people?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I'm sure that there were people who were completely jolted. The heritage is that their body is something to be ashamed of - to show to other people. That is still a jolting thing to Mexican-Americans or Arabic cultures. They don't do it. But for us here at Esalen - we were trying to form a kind of new Greek school of philosophy and athletics that included our bodies. Our body was something that we could not get away from. The anti-sexual, anti-body tradition of the Western European culture - we were fighting against that. We were definitely a counter-culture to that. As for enjoying our bodies, many of us were former athletes. We were like you. We were comfortable in our bodies. We thought everyone else would be, too, if they would only relax - let themselves do some sensory awareness, get massaged, and so on.

That worked for hundreds of thousands of people. But for thousands of people it didn't work.

Now, Esalen is at a place where it's clothing optional. I suppose I can accept that. But to me, I still feel it ruins the Greek picture I have in my mind. In Grecian times, people were nude. Also, I have lived in German culture, where nudity was very, very common in the 1970s, when I live in Munich, Germany. In the central downtown part, in the English Gardens, there would be over 1,000 people sunbathing nude in the summer. That lasted for about four or five summers in the 1970s. But it all passed away. When one studies history, one realizes there's may be a liberal era that's usually followed by a very restricted conservative era, and then there's a liberal era again.

Ken:

Responding to your recollection, as I'm listening to you, it's great to hear you describe an era that I remember similarly. It's interesting for me to listen to your descriptions, and match them to mine. We don't talk about these things very much, anymore. Mine are very similar to your recollections.

But your description of Esalen at the time, as a place of freedom, of liberation, of experimentation, of life examined - communicating, sharing, touching - seems glorious! Is that the way you think of the early years of Esalen - that it was glorious in all of those ways?

Seymour Carter:

Well, yes... I read history. For me, that was one of the goals of my early life, when I was 13, 14 or 15, reading about the Bohemian culture in Paris in the 1890s, when the breakthrough in modern art expressionism came about.

I feel that psychotherapy also is an expressive art. ...That here at Esalen we created an expressive form of psychotherapy.

Ken:

It seems that Esalen was in its richest glory, as you describe it, during that era.

Seymour Carter:

I want to say, "Yes." At that time Esalen was on the cresting wave of the era. I feel like in the 1890s in Paris, and also in the 1920s in Paris, there was a cultural convergence that Esalen shared, as a place of, as I said, a convergence of all of these cultural themes - consciousness, psychotherapy, authenticity, sexuality - a buoyant lifestyle. What is it to live a life that is about enjoyment rather than suffering? The Asian traditions of yoga and of meditation all get mixed in here. So I feel like that, yes, we founded and showed the potential, which even became known as "the human potential movement." We showed the potential of what's there - in us - in our potential, if we want to explore it.

Ken:

Would you say, over these last 50 years, that Esalen has ascended or descended from that point?

Seymour Carter:

There's no way Esalen can be the three-ring circus that we were then. We were the center of the culture's focus. We are not at the center of the culture's focus, anymore. And yet, I still get a thrill walking in the dining room, and hearing that buzz. To me, that is the criteria for Esalen working. If I go in that dining room, and there's that buzz at every table - if there are conversations going on that are rich and deep between two people - if I look over there, and there are three people deep in a conversation. For me, that's the essence of Esalen, and that still continues.

Ken:

You paint a picture - and I can see it - of Esalen being not simply one thing, but the convergence of many things, and also at an unusual moment in history.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

But if I were to ask you, "What is the essence of Esalen?"...and if somebody took that away, then it wouldn't be Esalen anymore - what is that?

Seymour Carter:

I don't agree with the essentialist nature of your question...but to give you an answer, I think it's this...

...That people are in deep communication with each other, in dyads or triads or in groups. ...That they are telling the truth to each other. *I feel touched saying this.* It's really this.... As long truth is being told, as long as people feel free to do that, one on one - the group dynamic may be a bit difficult - but at least one on one, then the depth of true communication is still possible - and that, to my mind, is the essence of Esalen. What we teach here - truth telling - I think has gone deep into the culture.

And I look at Esalen as a 500 year project, not a 50 year project.

Ken:

I'm delighted and surprised by your answer. Delighted but also surprised. I would have thought you might have said, "...Without the free sexuality, without the wild center of cultural attention, without the movie stars coming, Esalen has lost its glow." But you feel that those things are not the real essence of what matters for the long haul.

Seymour Carter:

Right, right, right.

Ken:

Why did I think you would say something more like, "Esalen has been on the decline"...?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I do have some opinions about the management of Esalen, and the problems that we have had - going from 100 members to now 300 - and losing the kind of close relationship that face to face interaction brings.

Ken:

Let's hold off on the management discussion...which we will get to.

Seymour Carter:

Okay.

Ken:

But in your mind, the essence of Esalen is the environment in which people can...

Seymour Carter:

Tell the truth.

Ken:

...Tell the truth...and connection.

Seymour Carter:

Yes, and connection.

Ken:

You still feel that, here?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, very much. I mean it's still very much here. It's like we had all of these dramatic types of interaction - the group dynamics - like, take off your clothes in 15 minutes, lie on the floor, then fight with your rival in the group. All of these things were necessary, perhaps, in breaking free. But what we really have come to, in a sense, is that we're able to listen to whispers. We're able to listen to people's whispers. We've tuned ourselves to be very conscious of what they are saying. They're saying this - but underneath this - what are they saying? What do they want to tell me? This kind of sense, let's say, of the whisperer coming to the community of Esalen, and being taught - in all these different ways that we have - about what it is this person is really whispering and not able to say with full volume. Can we bring that out? Can we show them that there's a way they can speak their whispers, and speak them with full volume and full heart? That's what I think this really is - the essence of Esalen.

Ken:

Okay... I'm going to ask you one more question on this subject.

Seymour Carter:

Sure.

Ken:

Okay... So, here's a question that people don't ask of the old timers. We love to tell the stories - you love to tell the stories of the good old times, the funny stories, the sexual escapades, the breakthrough groups. But was there a dark side to that era? Was there not always good stuff taking place inside of people and on this property? Would you reflect on the dark side of that so-called great era?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, yes. That touches me too, because in diving into these realms, with acid, with psychotherapy, with the opinion that if you tell the truth and nothing but the truth everything will come out all right. I think we were like the French revolutionaries who were too insistent upon the truth. Bringing the truth to certain people, too early, cracked them. We had several suicides. Two or three people, very close to me, committed suicide. I think, from that era of confrontation - the examination we were forcing on people that they weren't ready for - I feel that, yes, we had many, many failures in that sense. We did not get away without some really serious stuff happening. We did back off, then. I changed from "you tell the truth all the time" to "you tell the truth that you want to tell now." Tell what you feel safe in sharing with us right now. Keep to yourself what you don't feel like sharing at this time. This allows a range of expression.

Ken:

Were there any groups in particular...

Seymour Carter:

The LSD groups... I mean, My God! ...The simultaneous breakthrough in consciousness - the opening that gave everyone living in the stereotyped cliché world, and suddenly the gates of everything opened up. That will go down in history as the time of people realizing that there's a lot more to subjectivity than we thought. There's even a lot more than what the religious traditions talk about.

Ken:

But is there a dark side to having people do that...?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

...under minimum controls and minimum follow-up afterwards.

Seymour Carter:

Absolutely... Absolutely... I think what we learned was - that it needed to be in the proper setting. This is also what Leary and Alpert and Metzner put together in the very

beginning. Even though Leary said, "Take it all the time,"...he also said that setting is very important - and that's what we did here, too.

Like with fire... Fire can be extremely dangerous. Many people are burned and devastated and destroyed by fire. But fire is also a warming element. I think our consciousness also has a warming element. To enter into our heavens and hells - takes good guidance. It takes setting....

I think that is what Dick's project was about [*ed., Dick Price*]. Michael's project [*ed., Michael Murphy*] was about exploring all the different facets of consciousness, and alternative consciousnesses. But Dick wanted, based on his experience, a community of healers who could heal others. Our culture is focused on a merely one-on-one doctor/patient relationship. But we need a community therapy setting. That's what we tried to provide here. Although we did incredible experiments! ...I can tell you about the kind of experimental setting that I think takes care of some of this....

And yes, there are great dangers. Part of what I can say that I respect Nancy Lunney for, is trimming away those kinds of things. The people who were her advisors helped her do this. Some of the dangerous practices have been trimmed away. At one time, we accepted almost anything dangerous. Now, we've found out about where we went too far - just like the French Revolution went too far.

Ken:

So... When you come down that hill now, what do you feel? [*ed., entrance to Esalen*]

Seymour Carter:

I feel all kinds of different things. It depends. But I still feel a thrill. I feel I'm entering into a place where I get charisma - I give charisma - and I take some vibe from it. It's like when I go to North Beach, I get vibes from that. When I walk in Chinatown on the North Beach boundary, I feel the charisma of the place. When I go into the City Lights Bookstore in North Beach - same there. It's like my life as a high tech nomad - woven between Esalen, Berkeley and San Francisco.

...I do get tired of the place. Sometimes I call it a strip mine. I'm going down the hill and I'm going into the strip mine. Everybody's stripped! I wander around for four or five days, and then I go back up to the city. I can only take Esalen for four or five days.

Ken:

Really?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Because?

Seymour Carter:

Because I feel like I'm confronted with myself in a very deep way. I've got so much drama going on here, of all kinds. It's my village, it's my community, and it's not my culture anymore. My culture is the European culture of the Bohemian artist.

I spent part of my time in Europe. I'm an urbane personality. I need good books, I need lectures, I need drama, I need what the density of civilization is about.

...[returning after a break]...

Seymour Carter:

So, Ken, how are you doing with this interview? We've been meeting each other here for some 40 years, and we've never met at this level. I'm just touched, and I'm really enjoying it. I'm wondering how you're doing.

Ken:

So... In Tibet some of the monks have been trained to use their vocal cords as though they have two or three or four or five sets of vocal cords....

Seymour Carter:

Sure.

Ken:

...When they chant, there are literally four or five voices coming out at the same time. So, I sit here listening to you, and frankly, I'm trying to open myself to learning from you. ...That's one voice. Another part of me is matching my recollections to yours. Another part of me is wanting to show proper respect to you, which I think is a primary theme for me being here. Therefore, I am wanting this to be something you want it to be. ...Then, a part of me is evaluating it every second as we go. You're wondering how I evaluate it?

Seymour Carter:

No I'm not.

Ken:

Okay... So, how am I doing? ...I'd say I'm doing great. I always enjoy our times bullshitting or story telling, or just eating in the Lodge and looking around. But I've been inclined to get pieces of you as patchwork.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

What I'm seeing more now is that there is an overarching architecture to, kind of, the *whole shebang*. I'm not even saying whether I agree or disagree with it. But I see how all the pieces sort of have a gravitational space within your architecture. I'm finding that fantastic.

...Let's keep rolling. I don't want this to be about me.

Seymour Carter:

Okay, yes. I just wanted to add you in to help us proceed.

Ken:

Thank you, thank you. I'm very much into this...in this role. All right, you ready?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

So, truth be told, you're like the rebel here. You're the rebel guy. There have been other rebels, but they get thrown out and nobody ever sees them again and we can't remember their name. But you're a rebel that keeps coming back. So, why that role?

Seymour Carter:

Well, when I was 19 I joined the International Workers of the World. ...The Wobblies organization. I grew up identifying with the working class, and working with early unionism where I grew up. There was a lot of agitation and I identified with that - the rebel voice - at an early age. I then went to San Francisco. I lived a life of contrary-ism. I've always been out of the mainstream with anything I've been in.

Ken:

You like that role? You like that place?

Seymour Carter:

Let me say that I grew up surrounded by Christian missionaries. I grew up surrounded by fragments of the Native American culture. I was always an outsider. I always looked at it something like an anthropologist would; as someone who might be the son of an anthropologist, living in all these cultures. I had that anthropological view. These are ways of life - these are positions on the spectrum of humanity that don't have any universality, actually. Indians are different than white people, and so on. Now, at Esalen I'm in the same role. I'm surrounded by all kinds of disparate sects of ideas and ideologies. In the 48 years I've been here, every week there's a new ideology. I have my own position in this, which is that of a secular skeptic. I don't believe in deities or souls or things like that. I'm a very clear...

Ken:

Yet, you said earlier, on your vision quest, that you were praying. To whom? To what?

Seymour Carter:

I don't pray to anybody. I pray to my sense of a rhythm that puts me in a trance state. Like, if I go to a Brazilian healing ceremony, I'll enter into the singing ritual. But I don't need a deity or any notion of a transcendent domain to find value in it. It's like a psychological trance state...

Ken:

...Got it...

Seymour Carter:

...It's a poetic frame. Yes, these are things I've studied very deeply. What are the alternate realities? Also, being a social outsider is another way to answer that. Another way to answer, quickly, is that there is too much acceptance of everything here. I feel, in a way, that I'm in a community of people who constantly say, "Open your mind to things," and their minds have dropped out in the process. Their critical thinking is lost. I feel I perform a role here at Esalen of critical thought, like Gregory Bateson did.

Ken:

I don't know anybody who would say of Gregory Bateson, that he was a pain in the ass. But I've got to believe that there have been some people who have said that about you.

Seymour Carter:

Well, they have.

Ken:

So, what's the buzz for being a pain in the ass? I mean what's the satisfaction in that?

Seymour Carter:

Let me say, in answer to the question, that I'm protected by the ghost of Dick Price. I don't know why I'm continually here, or how they've allowed me to be here. In cultural studies we say that there are always contentions about who's going to have the master narrative. Part of my being here is about the master narrative.

Ken:

Say more about that. What does that mean to you?

Seymour Carter:

Just what you said earlier - that I'm an expression of some of the deeper values here, and I hold on to them. I represent them as a model to the people. Part of that role is questioning power - speaking truth to power. I think that also rests my very early initiations in the Civil Rights Movement - being part of the Berkeley Rebellion - and learning the ideology of, let's say, the modern Marxist critique - which can be really brought to bear in this place, here, which is full of a kind of romantic *woo-woo* in terms

of consciousness. It's here in the healing traditions. So, in a sense, there are always crackpot healing methods coming down the pipe all the time at Esalen and, somehow, Esalen gets the 20% best of the alternative healing methods.

My job here is to critique the crackpots - to critique the charlatans. My part here is to challenge the power of ideologies...like *The Secret Way*, or something like that.

Ken:

Do you ever cross comfort zones with people here when you play that role?

Seymour Carter:

Oh, for sure. For sure!

Ken:

Do you like crossing the comfort zone? Do you feel stimulated when you shake it up?

Seymour Carter:

Absolutely. I consider myself an adversarial - what does the DSM call it - a chronically adversarial personality disorder.

Ken:

Chronically adversarial personality disorder.

Seymour Carter:

That's a term in the DSM. It fits me, in a way. ...Because, in a sense, I'm an educated provocateur. I'm not someone who's just slashing and knocking around for reasons of personal narcissism. I'm speaking for a cultural tradition - critical thought. I'm speaking for the cultural tradition of "wait a minute."

We decided, long ago when founding this place, that we weren't going to be authoritarian. Many of us had read and were influenced by "The Roots of Totalitarianism" by Hanna Arendt. All of us who founded this place had grown up suffering from authoritarianism.

So, part of my critique has been that I've suffered from the various authoritarian models, throughout the successive management teams here. I've let them come and go. I'm not really here to fight management. I'm here to do my teaching.

Ken:

Let's stay on the issue of how you are, in your view, a truth-teller and a provocateur and a defender of a particular Esalen tradition. How would you characterize these last 50 years in terms of your dance with management?

Seymour Carter:

Oh God... How are we going to summarize that?

Ken:

Yes. If you could put that into one sentence to start, and then we'll drill down into it a little further, obviously.

Seymour Carter:

Well, what's David Schiffman's term for it? *Something* mischief?

Ken:

Sweet mischief.

Seymour Carter:

I feel I am very much...as I say - that I'm Esalen's alien. I'm also a lover of surrealism, of irony, and the fractured nature of identity. Part of my dance is to show how very different I am from five minutes before, or from one day to the next. There are ways that I'm a fractured personality. That was seen as a pathology in my youth. Now I find it's important, because we are now discovering that all personality is multiple.

Ken:

So, you've had friction with management....

Seymour Carter:

Well, let me go back to that question.

Ken:

Yes.

Seymour Carter:

As for that friction, I feel that I engage in a lot of sweet mischief about management. I have not ever gone on strike with management. I have never called for a strike here, which is something I exposed myself to in the 1960s, in Berkeley and at San Francisco State... All of these things are part of my identity as a social being.

I feel that the focus of American psychotherapy is on the individual. I'm a social psychologist. I believe that we also have to be political beings. Part of my role here at Esalen is to show what it is like to be a political being in a democracy - as Esalen's loyal opposition. That's how I see my role here. I don't think I could or would want to resign from being the loyal opposition.

Ken:

Do you every feel you have misbehaved? Sweet mischief is a charming way to describe behavior. But there can also be mean-spirited mischief. There can also be misguided mischief. Do you ever feel that you have wandered in that direction; that you've done something that would make you say, "Wow, that was probably the wrong thing to do"?

Seymour Carter:

Personally? ...Sure... Who hasn't in fifty years? But with management? NO!

Ken:

Never?

Seymour Carter:

No. I may have transgressed against values of the community. Some personal transgression that I feel, in retrospect, may have been wrong. I can feel that...

But in terms of malicious mischief, or by creating some inappropriate situation? No. So I disagree with people who might think differently about my occasional difficulties with management.

Ken:

How do you think people feel here, today - the new generation who were not here 30 or 40 years ago? How do you think they look upon you? What do you think they make of you? What do you think they see your role to be?

Seymour Carter:

I hope it's varied. But I think, also, that 90% of them are very happy I'm here!

Ken:

Because?

Seymour Carter:

Because I represent certain values. I stand for those values that come out of the 1960s. I think I'm seen here, by the community, as the best of the '60s. I feel that's what Esalen is about, too. It's the best of the '60s. I think I give inspiration to a loyal opposition.

Right now, I would say that authoritarianism has been brought to bear upon the community, which has caused polarization of the community. We are in a critical place now, I would say. There have been strenuous "upstairs, downstairs" designs imposed upon the place. There are caste systems being applied that I do not think are part of Esalen's philosophy.

I think, as I said, that I see Esalen as a 500 year project. I see, probably, in a couple of years, people are going to realize that, "Okay, we've got the management economically in order, but this hierarchal system is destroying the little centers of initiative that the different departments had." ...Like in a Japanese factory. The Japanese factory workers are given responsibilities. Those responsibilities have been taken away from the factions that once ran Esalen. Maybe it's necessary, right now. I'm not sure about that. But I would like to see authority given back to the community - devolved back to a more communal structure. I am concerned that bottom-line bureaucratic determinism will take over Esalen.

Ken:

But there are members of the community who have been here for 30 years, who have raised families here, and this is their lifetime home. There are other members of the community that just rolled in last Tuesday. Does everybody get equal weight, in your view, in deciding Esalen's future?

Seymour Carter:

The newest person on the block can see things that the old people can't see. From my perspective as a systems theorist, the newest person's view is relevant to the whole, in terms of what they can tell us that we're not seeing. Whether that voice then translates into a vote of citizenship, I don't know...

I am very occupied with what it means to be a citizen on an island, which is relevant to Esalen. It's very similar to the problem of guest workers in Berlin, Germany, who emigrated from Spain or Italy in the 1970s, and then had no citizen's rights. In a way, this is what has happened here, I think, because this is a family estate - a family controlled property. They couldn't afford to have a politically independent village grow up here. So, it's devolved into this odd kind of thing - it's a half feudal system. But it's also a group of people who have grown up in a democracy. My role, I feel, is to try to promote the idea of, "Let's have as much democracy as we can," remembering that we're on a feudal estate.

Ken:

So, I'll ask you a provocative question. Why is it that you're the person in that role? Why not let that role fall onto other people, who've got decades in front of them. You've held on to that role now for half-a-century.

Seymour Carter:

Yes... Well, I can't step back. I'm a historical figure. ...I'm trying to step back. And I'm also finding that as I step back, my voice, that once dominated, allows other people to step up...like Will Schutz used to do. He could have taken center stage all the time, but of all the teachers I studied with here, he was the one that was able to step back and not be the narcissistic focal point. He was able to let the new blood take the foreground. So, I'm feeling that now.

I feel like, "Wow." Michael Murphy's son is coming up. Matt in the kitchen is coming up. Cordell is also. There's a whole group of people who may be better for the role, as you say. Maybe I should retire for a year or so. ...Let's see what happens.

Ken:

I'm just asking. I'm not saying you should. I'm just saying that you've held yourself in a position and, by definition almost, if you're the provocateur then you're the king baboon in that zone.

Seymour Carter:

Right. That's what I'm concerned about. I'm concerned about dominating that position.

Ken:

So, let's be fanciful for a second.

Seymour Carter:

Okay.

Ken:

Let's imagine, rather than being the anti-authoritarian - as in, "I'm going to speak the truth, and rebel against management and hierarchy and caste and class." ...Let's say we put you in charge of Esalen. What would you do different? How would you help this place fulfill its destiny?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I would begin to teach the difference between a pyramid power structure, as opposed to localization and communal systems theory. How would I go about that? I would bring back Dick Price's son, David, and with Michael Murphy's son, Mac, I would form a working alliance for the future. I'd set this up, and for the next three or four years we'd bring in someone like Adam Wolpert - a genius with experience in community decision making. ...Bring someone like him into the management team, and give him power to help us develop the kind of deeply democratic communications system that he uses in his work at the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, north of Petaluma.

Ken:

Nice.

Seymour Carter:

I am concerned about the technocratic mentalities that are here. I would make sure that in the future those jobs would always be held by people who were literate in our traditions - the existentialist-humanist founding philosophy. I would make sure that they knew the literature, and that they have been exposed to our traditions. Right now, I'm afraid that we're being managed by a group of people who are merely technocratic mentalities. The danger is that they really don't know what they're organizing or managing. Period! That's enough to say about management.

Ken:

All right. So, if you were in that role and down the hill comes Seymour Carter, what would you do with him?

Seymour Carter:

I'd bring him right in. I'd say, "Come on in, to central headquarters." That's what I was with Dick. While Dick was alive I was part of the core. I was, with Dick, the Human Resources Director. I was very busy, and still am, and feel that I functioned as what they now call the Human Resources Director here.

So, in 1966, '67, '68 and '69, Dick and I went on walks, almost every morning, up into the canyon...not saying much, but once in awhile dropping things - telling each other what books we were reading. It turned out we were reading the same kinds of things, like Karen Horney's book, "The Neurotic Personality of Our Time," and Carl Rogers' books. We were learning about Reich, and working with each other constantly.

I was with the founders...as you say. I am part of the founding DNA here, in the sense that I've been both at the center, in terms of guiding this place, and also off center, which has been true since Dick's death in 1985. I think they're crazy to marginalize me, like they're doing.

Ken:

What is being lost by marginalizing you?

Seymour Carter:

First of all, I'm one of the most skilled teachers here. They're denying the community the benefit of my teaching. This has drawn protest from the community of people here at Esalen. I'll show you a letter that was written by the community - a beautiful letter about my contributions, signed by over 100 people, saying that they are being denied the best teacher in the place, because of some silly pissing contest with management.

Ken:

Do you mind if I play the devil's advocate for a second?

Seymour Carter:

Go ahead.

Ken:

In your own tapestry - there's kindness, there's thoughtfulness, there's wisdom - but there's also meanness sometimes. You do have a strength that can somehow maim.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

Not often... I think that as you've matured, it is less of you.

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

But it's still... I don't know, maybe that's your Synanon history. Do you feel any responsibility for having injured or wounded or maimed any of the managers here with your dissatisfaction with them?

Seymour Carter:

No.

Ken:

None at all?

Seymour Carter:

None. I'll answer it this way... I feel that I have been subjected to bureaucratic bullying by them, starting seven years ago, when I was suspended because someone claimed they saw me smoking a joint at a New Year's Eve party. The suspension came about because of an unsigned poison pen letter. I feel that the suspension shocked me so much - it put me so back. Later, under the stress of this, I had a heart attack, and because of the suspension I lived in poverty. I still live in poverty! I was in very bad condition, and no one ever apologized to me for that. I really was driven into the condition, which I am still in five years later, of living in my car. No one has apologized to me for the marginalization. So I feel they deserved a scorching diatribe. In another era, it would have been a dueling matter, because my honor was hurt deeply by trumped up charges. They tried to get rid of me based on a completely innocent breach of mine, and trumped up charges. I feel like they slapped me very hard, in a way that was completely out of line.

They say I damaged Esalen. I would never do that. They confuse themselves with Esalen. I say, "I wasn't damaging Esalen. I was protecting Esalen."

Ken:

Okay. Let me ask. Are you okay with me?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, this is good.

Ken:

I'm getting under the skin a little bit...?

Seymour Carter:

...Getting into the fire here.

Ken:

Okay. This is not the whole thing. We don't want to spend a lot of time on this. Right? I got it. So, we're going to back away...because I've got other questions I want to get to.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

You've mentioned several times that you believe yourself to be a historical figure.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

I believe you are. Legendary! But I've also been to Williamsburg, Virginia, which is a historical town. The people dress up there like it's the 18th century, with the shoes, and the horses, and they wear hats the same as they did. But then, they go home and put on their normal clothes, and drive in their Ford vans, and so on. So it's acting - as though they're a historical figure, but it's just sort of a Disney-esque thing. How much of being a historical figure, in your spirit, is about showing up and representing the 1960s, versus being anchored in the '60s but still being a present, current force today?

Seymour Carter:

I don't think there's any distinction. I feel the values that I am promoting are not hippie values. They're Western Civilization values. They're Grecian values. They're deep values, in our culture, of really intense endeavors of sustained intelligence, focused on something - that is to explore some part of the world, some facet of how the world goes together. I feel that's what my values are, in essence. The costumes that I wear, and I love to wear costumes, are something I can use to dress up or down. I lived in Europe part of my life. ...Part of my life I spent living in a middle class world of urban culture. I can dance on several different sets. I'm not just limited to speaking hippie. I speak fluent German, I teach philosophy and psychotherapy in German. I feel the weave of my self...

Ken:

I was with one of our German-speaking team members about a month ago who told me that when you speak German it's with a gentle, thoughtful choice of words. There's a Seymour in German that she thought was quite captivating.

Seymour Carter:

That's true. I'm a different person in the German language. I am more thoughtful, more reflective. But that's not a new part of me - to me. Remember I've been studying Charlotte Selver's sensory awareness work for forty years.

Ken:

I'm going to get to Charlotte and your teachers, after this one question.

History looks at figures - you, me, Danny B. - and reflects upon them, and says, "That was a triumphant arc." Other times, people say, "Historical figure - tragic arc." What's your mix?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. Oh, heroic for sure, for sure. I mean I'm finishing out now. This is my 70th year on skis. My parents put me on skis when I was three-years-old. I've skied seven days this year. I felt like going full out....

I felt my life was over six years ago, after that heart attack. I was very angry about being rescued from what I thought was a good death.

Ken:

You were by the side of the road, and Ronnie found you.

Seymour Carter:

Yes. I don't want to tell this story right now....

Ken:

Okay, but let me ask you this question. Is the arc an arc that was, "He was a historic figure, what a tragedy," or "Historic figure, what a triumph." You came back that it was heroic, that was your choice of words.

Seymour Carter:

...A triumph.

Ken:

Then you slid to the side, and were using the example of yourself as an avid skier.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

But do you believe your life, and your role as a provocateur, and your role as the resident alien, and as psychotherapist and philosopher, and adventurer of the human experience... How much of it is tragedy - how much of it is triumph?

Seymour Carter:

Oh my God! Well, do we have eight hours?

Ken:

Just give me a...

Seymour Carter:

...I mean, that's such a deep question to answer. Of course, I've had tragedy and triumph throughout my life, from my earliest memories.

Ken:

Which way do you think it will ultimately tip, at the end of your days?

Seymour Carter:

How would we know?

Ken:

Where do you think you are, if you were to add it up now? More in the triumph category, or tragedy?

Seymour Carter:

Normally I don't use those categories in summing up my life. I've had a rich life - a life that's been like six men's lives. When I had that heart attack, I felt very clearly I could go anytime. It really doesn't matter. I'm not resistant to dying. That reflects back to the many acid trips - the LSD experiences probably in this room with Dick...going deep into the death/life - life/death phases that happen very rapidly in LSD experience. So, when I was faced with my real death, I felt like a skier who had been there before. I was quite comfortable with it. And now, I am rebounding. I don't want to die right now. I'm having a good time. But there are also anguishes.

There are periods that are dark shadows in my life. My relationship with my children is not good - and with my grandchildren is not good. I have 8 to 13 great grandchildren that I don't know at all. So, there's a lot of sadness. I have a brother who committed a murder early in his life, and is living in a self-imposed atonement. There are parts of my family's story that are trailer trash tragedy - alcoholism, murder, conspiracy to murder, drugs, poverty, prostitution. ...Just really horrid shit.

Ken:

On the triumph side, what would you say is the source of your resilience? Is it your intelligence? Is it your *joie de vivre*? What is it about you that keeps lifting you up?

Seymour Carter:

I don't know. I always find a resilience. I've thrown myself into the ordeal in life, and I have been found by fate with really up-against-the-wall things. It's a combination of resilience... I'm very clever. I found ways out of really tight spots throughout my life. There could be more to say about this, like the time I taught myself to walk on fire and ended up four days later, after a megalomaniacal breakthrough of walking on fire, in a padded cell in a San Francisco jail, having gone from omnipotence to imprisonment. That's another story. But I would say it's the resilience that I was born with. I'm a mixture of Swedish, German, French, Irish, and Native American. I have a very, very powerful, strong physique. My cousins are all that way too. We're incredibly physically strong.

Ken:

Are you ready for another question? So...you are a teacher. You're teaching me. You've taught many people over the years. Who were your two most important teachers? And who was your most important teacher here at Esalen?

Seymour Carter:

I would like to refer to a teacher I had at age 14 - and then Esalen.

Ken:

Okay.

Seymour Carter:

At 14 I was heading in the direction of delinquency. Then I was moved into an intellectual life. I was taken into a special class in my junior high, and was taught by Jerry Naimy who was a Lebanese Christian. I just caught fire, in my mind, with his attention. He taught psychology and sociology. So at 14, my mind was put on fire by the literature of personality. I could read it because I'm an autodidact.

It's very hard for me to decide between several teachers. Again I'm resisting the essentialist nature of your question.

Ken:

Several is okay.

Seymour Carter:

I would say what comes, right now, as you ask, is Will Schutz, first.

Ken:

Really?

Seymour Carter:

Of all these teachers that I had, who were prominent pioneers - exemplars - Will Schutz taught in a tradition that cultivated a new generation. Of all the teachers at Esalen who were so fucking high profile - elbowing everyone else out - Will could step back and let his students shine. That's what he did. He prepared us... He gave us an opportunity to take on responsibility. ...And because of that, we did it.

Ken:

That's true. He did that with me.

Seymour Carter:

I thought, "How wonderful, that he can let his students shine."

Ken:

Who else beside Will?

Seymour Carter:

Then I would say next comes Fritz and Charlotte Selver.

Ken:

On a par in your mind? ...Very different people.

Seymour Carter:

...On a par. That is my tradition. That's what I'm teaching now - a continuation of what I learned from Fritz and Charlotte. So, on my left hand is Gestalt - emotional work. The principles of Charlotte Selver's work are on the other hand. My right hand is sensory awareness and presence. The link is presence - being present in the here and now. Those teachings are about how to be present - which is a lifelong study, as the Buddhists know.

Then, the other major teaching is about Dick and I. ...Unpacking the Buddhist tradition, and our walks together - in our meditation, in our talks. ...How do we link Buddhism with the body schools - the Zen schools, the Soto Zen schools - to our traditions here? What will that be like? What will it look like?

So I would say - Jerry Naimy, Will, Fritz and Charlotte, and Dick - if I had to choose five. ...And the Buddhist tradition.

Ken:

Can I slide in one more question about this?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Many of the examples you have given - people who might be the leadership council here - teachers that have influenced you, people you've been drawn to - have been men. Your story tips more towards men than towards women. Could that be said about Esalen, in terms of leadership and power? Or is that more the way you hold it?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I can't answer these questions in less than an hour!

...To answer your question about Esalen and power... One of the most important changes in my life was Feminism. Its impact on me was astonishing. I am an intellect, who looks at ideologies. And the impact of feminism on my life and on the life of males in our culture has been astonishing. Have you read Don Johnson's books?

Ken:

The Protean Body?

Seymour Carter:

...And his other books. He talks about the position of the feminist - attacking and challenging the patriarchal dominance. This is something I'm deeply aware of. One of my major teachers was Charlotte Selver. The person I studied most with was Charlotte. As a child, I played with the girls as well as the boys. I feel myself to be ambi-sexual - not gendered in that way. My mind is feminine as much as masculine. To the question of, "Is there a predominance, at Esalen, of male figures in the last 50 years?" The

answer is, “No.” I don’t think so. I think the community here has been heavily impacted by the feminist perspective. Of course, Nancy Lunney has been in charge for a long time. So there has been a feminist view here. Feminism came here in the 1970s and upended everybody’s outlook. I could tell a story. I’m remembering a night....

So...this is one night while John Heider and I had a group marriage with Ann Heider and my wife Betsy at the time. We were set up by Dick Price to have the Pfeiffer Beach House. We had this beautiful farmhouse. John and I would come over here to work. Then, everyday we’d go home. The girls would cook the meal, wash up, and John and I would talk philosophy after dinner at the table. The women had a big kitchen where they would do all the cooking, and we were so happy with this. One night, we’re sitting there after dinner - and Betsy and Ann started *throwing plates on the floor!* They cleared the fucking shelves by busting plates. “We’re not doing this anymore,” they said. “We’re not doing this for you anymore. From now on, *you* cook! From now on, *you* wash up! This is the end of it for you guys.” John and I were saying, “What? What do you mean this is the end for us?” ...And it was the end! In that way Feminism came to Esalen.

Ken:

At this point, I want to share a reflection with you. The reflection I want to share is one of my favorite science fiction stories. I won’t get the name of it right, but hopefully I’ll get the essence of the story. In the story, it’s into the future, and they have created a time machine, which they make available for recreation. The way it works is, you can pay a certain amount of money, and you and other people can go back to some ancient time in history. But the rule of it is, you can’t touch anything, because then you might impact something, which going forward to present could alter things. So, these people take a trip back. This one adventurer is so fascinated that he walks away from the device, and by accident steps on a butterfly and kills it. He doesn’t tell anybody, because he doesn’t want to get fined or anything. Then they all get back in the time machine, and they move forward to the present. They get to the present time, they open the door, and the future is exactly as it was before they left, except there is no color! By having killed that butterfly, a billion years earlier, it removed the whole evolution of color....

Seymour Carter:

Let me digest that image for a second. Okay, go on.

Ken:

So, I believe that if you were to remove Seymour Carter from Esalen’s history, some important part of the fabric would not be here. It’s in everything. It’s part of the genetic ingredient. It’s in the way the trees are shaped. It’s in the way people talk. It’s in peoples’ dress. It’s in the way people think, feel and function, and in the way Esalen is identified. You are a piece of that, going forward in time. It would probably be too much to handle if you were the predominant genetic code. But to remove Seymour from Esalen would be to diminish Esalen in meaningful ways.

I want you to know that Esalen, to me, is the most wonderful of wonderful places. Even if I don't come here - the thought of it - the culture, the nature - its purpose - whether it fulfills that purpose or not - in trying to fulfill that purpose it keeps me alive and sane, and helps me fulfill my destiny. So, I want to thank you for contributing the 'you' to this place, which has allowed me to be me. Does that make any sense at all?

Seymour Carter:

I love it. I mean that's what I think, too. My major companions here have been - well, there have been a couple of girlfriends - and Dick Price, and John Heider, and Chris Price. I think that's what we were up to, although we didn't know we were getting there. But shortly after those helicopters landed on the lawn, and things like that, we started to get a sense of being able to say, "That's one of the things that I want to feel I've done for people - is to give them a sense of the promise of themselves - and the tools to open themselves up to life." Have you seen the new book by Jung - the *Liber Novus*?

Ken:

I've heard about it.

Seymour Carter:

Well, it was published last year. I'm not a Jungian or a Freudian, because I don't believe in foundational theories. But I do think that Jung opened up a certain sensibility, especially with his creative unconscious.... Whether there's an archetypal unconscious or not, the point is that he gave us the tools of the creative unconscious. We learned, here at Esalen, how to use those tools. We used interventions that worked like the snap of a finger - and we could bring someone into the domain of their creative unconscious.

So, that's what I think we were building on...along with ideas about the multiple personalities that are in us - the protean multiples. At the beginning of my career the dominant theory was a layer cake theory of personality. The idea was that somehow - under the civilized, under the local, under the personal, is an essential kernel of the self - and if you found that, you would be yourself. I don't believe that anymore. I believe we are mutually contending scripts that are often in contradiction. We are compromise forms with inner conflicts that are often irresolvable.

There's no such thing as a unified self, in the same sense that there is a unified experience in Gestalt theory - as when a need is met - like taking a breath or drinking a glass of water or taking a piss when we need to, and there's some sense of fulfillment. Then the next moment we're off balance with something that needs to be attended to. It's like this.... There's a cycle of minuses appearing - then a response from the self comes about and gives a plus to that minus - and then there's another homeostatic equilibrium that needs to be established.

Ken:

All right. Because we only have a little while left, and we've had a lot of very complex and fascinating reflections, I'm going to drill through a number of things quickly.

Seymour Carter:

Okay.

Ken:

I understand and respect that, for you, the idea of simple answers that are just one word - there's something wrong about that idea. But I'm still going to try to drill through a lot of things quickly.

Seymour Carter:

Okay.

Ken:

So, we're going to wander through the decades. I want you just to riff for 30 seconds or less, or a minute, with whatever pops into your mind, here at Esalen, from the 1960s.

Seymour Carter:

Long hair, warm heartedness, the baths, the pool and the ocean, Danny B. *(Actually, I don't think you've been here that long, Danny. ...But you're a stalwart of this place.)*

Ken:

Stay with it...just a couple of riff words. ...The 1970s - put me into the '70s. What do you recall from the '70s? What words come to your mind?

Seymour Carter:

I left here. I felt Esalen collapsed at that time. I felt it was into kind of a decline. Fritz had left by 1970, and he died shortly afterwards. We didn't have a dominating paradigm. So into that situation rushed a bunch of charlatans promoting messianic cult visions - like Oscar Ichazo, Rajneesh and Swami Muktananda. That's when I got discouraged with Esalen.

I think that's when Julian Silverman came in as general manager. I felt like I had been exposed to incredibly revolutionary times for 10 years. And I needed to back away. So I began to consider going to Europe - as a quieter place to digest all this.

Ken:

So, the 1970s...give me some words for Esalen in the '70s.

Seymour Carter:

You see, the thing is I mostly lived in Germany as an "Esalen missionary" from 1973 to '83. I came back after years in Europe, and then we went into the 80s.

Ken:

What words come to your mind for Esalen in the 1980s?

Seymour Carter:

Well, let me go back to 1971.

Ken:

Okay.

Seymour Carter:

Because that was a time when Dick and I, with Al Drucker, Hector Prestera and Sharon Wheeler did what we called the "Rolf monster." I think it was there that we took our expertise most deeply into our work with consciousness. ...Combining LSD with three-day marathons in this room. I think we were in this room or the next unit. We would start Friday night by dropping acid, and then go through until Sunday, every six hours dropping more acid, and going through our horrors and our heavens. We learned at that time, when someone got stuck in a fear state, they were stopping their breathing and they were also locking up their diaphragm - locking up their body so there was no movement. We already had been fooling around with LSD for six or eight years, but we learned that with Rolfing and massage and Gestalt - we learned how to work ourselves through it.

So, let's imagine someone like you taking acid. You go into a fear state. And we see you go into that fear state...

Ken:

You're also on acid?

Seymour Carter:

We're also on acid. We would drop 1,000 mics every eight hours or something like that - whatever it was, to carry us through. So, we would recognize this fear state immediately, and we would cluster around you and begin to cuddle you, and have you work through it, by having you talk to your fear state. Then we would do massage, get you in touch with your body, and begin to mold your energy, and move your energy through the fear state. The initial process is going into it - not avoiding anything that comes. We learned the security of that. Just go into it. You might go into dying. But you don't die. What happens next? You go into the state of saying, "Oh God, I'm choking. I can't breathe." But can you actually take a breath? ...Because the fear state is stabilized by the fear of taking a deep breath. We learned that if we coached people through the taking of a deep breath, and with a bit of massage, they would then break through to another level. The energy would come through that allowed them to face their fear. The fight or flight response was actually a mobilization of energy, and we had to provide some target for it.

Ken:

Was it mobilizing or immobilizing?

Seymour Carter:

It was immobilizing because they were unable to enter into the excitement stage.

Ken:

Right...I got you.

Seymour Carter:

So, we got them into kicking, screaming...all of that.

Ken:

So those sessions - that group...you called it the "Rolf monster?"

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Was that experience a highlight for you?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. ...Of the late 1960s, and early '70s. I think we did it for a couple of years. The exercise got so intense that, after a couple years, I said, "I can't do this anymore. Too much of me is exposed." I was missing digestion time - private time. That was about the time I began to feel that I had to get out of here...get out of California. I had been in a revolution every week between 1962 and 1972. I had to change my beliefs every week, because of new ideologies coming down the pipe.

Ken:

Sure.

Seymour Carter:

I thought, "Fuck man, I'm falling apart from too much information."

Ken:

So you went to Europe.

Seymour Carter:

Then I went to Europe. It took me five years to recover.

Ken:

Take me to the 1980s now. What comes to your mind, just some words - the 80s, Esalen, and you.

Seymour Carter:

In 1983 I came back. Dick and I picked up our relationship and began hiking a lot. I remember hiking a lot with Dick, and being really pleased to be back. We would hike two or three days a week up in the canyon. Starting at 6:00 in the morning, we would go up there. If I wanted to work he'd work with me or he'd want to work. There was quite a lot of silence, or working and sitting.

Then the 1980s is about Dick's death, of course, in 1985. He was killed by a falling rock. With that falling rock; his death shattered the equilibrium in a way that we are still recovering from.

Ken:

We're going to come back to Dick. The Nineties, what were the 90s about, for you and Esalen?

Seymour Carter:

Esalen...let me think for a minute. Well, this runs into my love affair with Clarie - in the late 80s. My life was spent between London, German, and here. Part of it was with a very passionate affair that was completely catastrophic. I was devastated emotionally. I moved to Berlin, and lived in Berlin in '92. That was the time when something happened here that I wasn't party to. It was when the baths got wiped out, and then got rebuilt. You see, some of those times, in the '70s, I didn't participate in - so I don't know very much about. Overarching everything was Dick and Chris Price's commitment to establishing their form of reflective meditation and Gestalt. When I came back in 1983, I felt, "Boy, it's really established here. Everybody knows the code. Everybody is on the trip."

...Then Dick died.

Ken:

And then there would be the 1990s... What role have the baths played in your history with Esalen? What role do you think they played in Esalen's history?

Seymour Carter:

Well, they were here before us, they were here during us, and they'll be here long after us. I feel like they are the master narrative at Esalen. They really anchor everything as a kind of primal, basic thing. "Let's get our clothes off, let's feel the water. What does it do to us to be with the water and the ocean?" I've been around the world and visited many hot springs. There is very rarely anything...I don't think there's anything like this. So, I'm extremely proud of the baths. I miss the old baths. But I'm really proud of the new baths, as someone who knows world architecture. They have the domes of Mediterranean/Arabic architecture. It's like being in the kind of Middle Ages domed structure that I just love in Europe.

Ken:

What is your favorite spot in the baths?

Seymour Carter:

It's the replica of the old square tub.

Ken:

The first one in?

Seymour Carter:

...First one in. Where I can sit... Also it's because that bath, in the old baths, was where we would rest ourselves during the LSD trips - in fact almost all the LSD trips. God, I've spent many an hour rolling in the water. Kind of working like an otter; spinning

myself around in the water. Rolling and catching my breath, and then going back under the water. ...Just playing porpoise. ...When Dick was in his manic flight, one time he thought he was a blue porpoise, and he hung out at the baths a lot.

Ken:

There were the old baths - then the temporary baths up on the hill - and then the new baths. What did you like about each?

Seymour Carter:

I liked the baths up on the hill because they were under the trees. But I never got used to them, really. I felt deprived because of the old baths not being there.

Ken:

Many people thought they were quite delightful. They thought, "How wonderful is this?" I would always have to say, "Wow." I thought they pulled it off, but I always felt deprived as well. How did you relate to the new baths being rebuilt, relative to the old baths that were lost? Some people thought they were an abomination; other people thought it was the most amazing thing they'd ever seen or felt. Where did you come out?

Seymour Carter:

I think it's the greatest thing we've ever seen. I'm an artist. I'm someone steeped in architectural knowledge. I felt, "My God, we really got it right. We really hooked it in." That reminds me of a story. You asked earlier about the dark things at Esalen. This is a story about what can happen... Some of the greatest things at Esalen have a shadow side that isn't picked up on, or hasn't been picked up on.

As the new baths were being finished and coming to completion - they weren't quite opened yet. There was a barrier fence that restricted access to the baths. It was just a month or so before they were opened, and a group of young men from Santa Cruz came down here. ...Three men, young boys, who wanted to celebrate the birthday of one of them by dropping acid at Esalen, which, of course, is an archetypal experience throughout the West Coast. These boys wanted to do that. ...This story is about, in some sense, the human sacrifice that birthed the new baths. These boys came down here, and were tripping on acid. You know how, with acid, your perspective gets distorted. They climbed over the fence, and I imagine that one of them, in a burst of glory, looked out over the edge, where the roof of the new baths is. On acid, he hallucinated the ocean as if it were right there, up close. He imagined that if he ran and jumped off the roof of the baths, he would land in the ocean. Instead, he jumped off and landed short of the ocean, on the rocks - mortally injuring himself. He screamed the whole night away, for many hours, long before an ambulance could come for him.

Ken:

Did he die?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, he died on the rocks.

Ken:

...Last question on the baths... When you're at the baths, what is it that stirs you there? Is it the morning? Is it the night when the stars are out? Is it the afternoon when the seminarians come down? ...Because, for me, the baths are very different every hour of the day.

Seymour Carter:

Yes, they're different every hour of the day. I hardly go at night anymore. My libido isn't in it. I used to lurk in the baths like a crocodile with my eyes just above the water.

Ken:

Did you live at the baths at some point?

Seymour Carter:

Yes I lived in the baths for about a year. That was the most active sexual time in my life.

Ken:

But did you have a time of the day when the baths are most special to you?

Seymour Carter:

Now...it's early morning, at dawn. I like dawn a lot. I like late afternoon when I can get in one of the porcelain tubs and take a nap, and do a fetal curve. I curl up in the baths and kind of go to sleep; suck my thumb and stuff. It's really sweet. Sometimes, I like to be there when the stars carpet the sky at night.

Ken:

Last night was like that.

Seymour Carter:

You were there.... Yes, the stars were bright last night.

Ken:

I left at around 11:00... The moon still wasn't up, so it was pitch black with raging stars.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

...A couple more questions.

Seymour Carter:

Sure.

Ken:

The human potential movement has been criticized by many people for an over-emphasis on self and personal growth. ...Not enough concern for the well-being of the body politic, not enough concern for society, and not enough concern for the world at large. Where do you come out on that?

Seymour Carter:

Well, I think there's a resurgence of cultural Puritanism. ...The inner is seen as a feared state - emotions are feared. And I think that there has crept into the human potential movement a great deal of narcissism - no doubt. ...In posturing and pretense and nonsense. But I think we made a major move in the history of Western Civilization by prizing subjectivity, and saying that you're not a complete person unless you really do have depth in your subjectivity.

Forget about American culture. We're talking about 2,000 years of what it is to be a person. We're talking about Esalen representing some of the oldest things - from Grecian culture, from Asian culture, and so on. What is it, to really inhabit the self? Well, this was completely unknown to Western European culture. They were oriented outside. They were oriented towards a third person narrative. There was no "I" in their rhetoric. There were very few statements that were about "I" without it being a historical role or role playing.

I feel like now we are in a historically conservative, anti-subjective era. We've been teased as being touchy-feely. But what does that say about a body unfriendly culture or an emotion unfriendly culture? What we showed to our culture in the 1960s was that people live constantly filled with emotions, and yet they repress them. But there is no way to escape them. Well, that is very threatening to a lot of people. They dismissed us with those kinds of criticisms. I agree, it got over-done. For sure, it got over-done. I mean, I lived in Marin County; I was in and out of Marin County - which just made me gag with what was happening there. It was a satire of the '60s.

Ken:

What I've had to contend with is that I learned to focus on myself, my feelings, my body state, my thoughts. And yet, when I left Esalen and got married, all of a sudden I found that if I was too much on the "me," the "I." I wasn't distributing my attention, to be aware of my wife and how to be a good mate for her, a good partner, a good lover. Then with children, I found that I had to distribute attention even more. As my parents have grown old and sick I had to distribute it even more, and also with my work and my company. There are people who I know here at Esalen who are just focused on themselves, and have never been able to get anything done, or see the world through their partner's or others eyes. Isn't that still a real issue, with the focus on the self? ...That the narcissism can become your bubble?

Seymour Carter:

For sure, for sure. But that could be true of a Buddhist, as well. That could be true of a yogi in India.

Ken:

Yes it could...

Seymour Carter:

The methods of self reflection are very important, whether they come from the East or the West. The inhabiting of the presence in yourself, in full subjectivity, means you're there for the world.

Ken:

Okay.

Seymour Carter:

It isn't about you. It's about what the world is asking of you. This is Charlotte Selver's major teaching. Although you're getting very sensitive, it also means that the world is asking something of you. What is it that it's asking of you? The narcissistic encapsulation of, "Oh, my fingers tingle," and so on - that isn't it. There is also a civic and social engagement part of it. Training yourself in a skill is a part of it.

Ken:

I'm going to ask you a tricky question. It may be hard for you to do, but I'm going to ask you to do it anyhow. Your story about Fritz had layer upon layer upon layer of meaning. I'm wondering if there's any story you could tell me about Dick Price. He was such a legendary figure here. You may have known him as well, if not better, than anybody who ever lived.

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Is there anything you could tell me about Dick that would give me or other people an understanding of who this man was?

Seymour Carter:

That's very hard.

Ken:

Because?

Seymour Carter:

Because he was so low profile.

Ken:

Is there a story you could tell me about him that you recall?

Seymour Carter:

Well, when I first came here in 1962, I knew Dick was here, but I didn't see him much. There was this pretty girl wandering around. Someone said, "Oh, that's Dick Price's girlfriend. That's Jane Fonda." I said, "Oh? I've seen her in films. She looks kind of scrawny to me. She looks more 'ripe' in the films." So, I later got to know Dick. I felt his openness to me. I was very wild and maniacal at that time.

Ken:

Were you bearded back then?

Seymour Carter:

Bearded - long hair - everything. I had been sent down here by a mutual friend, because he couldn't handle me. I was babbling night and day at him. That was Patrick Cassidy who was one of the original Gurdjieffian influences on this place.

Ken:

Right.

Seymour Carter:

He was a very close friend of Dick's. I guess what I would say is that myself, Roland Hall, Dick, and Patrick Cassidy were the early '60s team that was interested in consciousness, LSD experimentation, Gurdjieffian thought, Buddhism, and yoga. Dick was the first person we ever met who did yoga. I would see Dick on the road, running, and I would see him at the baths doing yoga.

To sum up very quickly - Dick was very far-sighted, but also had been induced to see things in a certain way because of his horrid treatment by the medical psychiatric profession. They treated him with over 50 shock treatments. The disaster that caused for him gave him the drive to create Esalen as a healing place, with very skilled healers at these healing waters. He was very conscious of recreating something that was in the Grecian tradition. He was deeply steeped in anthropology, psychology, and a sense human compassion. His wrenching experiences opened incredible compassion in him.

So, what he did was something like what Meher Baba did in the 1960s. He heard about Meher Baba collecting all the craziest nutty yogis in one place in India. Well, that's what Dick did here. Dick and Michael, both, gave refuge to the craziest characters in the '60s. Eventually they over-did their stay. At some point, Dick asked them to leave or found a way to help them leave. If they wouldn't leave, he'd wrestle them...

Ken:

I wrestled Dick once. He was fiercely strong and quick.

Seymour Carter:

Yes, he was fiercely strong and quick, and I've seen him a couple of times literally throw people out. This reminds me of my favorite Dick story, or at least one of them.

Ken:

Please...

Seymour Carter:

Leary and Alpert had been kicked out of Harvard. They came here in 1962 looking for a place of refuge. So, Dick gave them refuge; but they didn't take it. Later, in about '67, Alpert came back from India as Baba Ram Das. Of course, Dick invited him to come and be a teacher and resident. Ram Das was in residence giving Darshan talks every morning. My friend Patrick said, "He's sitting closest to the stove and never chopping wood," which was the character of this man. He was from a very privileged background, and he could talk a mile a minute. He'd talk your arm and leg off.

Ken:

Alpert?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. He was brilliant and eloquent at times. He was always talking. In fact, I met him during a messianic tour in Seattle, in like 1958, where he was talking about LSD. He was telling exactly the same story here, as when he was back there - only this time it was couched as a guru - "The way to find yourself is through a guru, not LSD."

So, he's talking about how his equilibrium had stabilized during his studies with his guru. He began to feel that nothing could disturb him. *Nothing could disturb him!* Several Darshan talks were about how much in stable equilibrium he was. He did not feel that he needed any protective mechanisms. Well, he knows all the literature of psychology. He's a doctor of psychology, after all. He's a very eloquent person. So I remember him sitting there one day with Dick. Dick went over to the side of the house - it was at Jan Brewer's Gorda Ranch. Dick went up to Ram Das and grabbed his necklace of Mala prayer beads and squeezed tight enough to really get his attention. Dick started looking fiercely down at Ram Das. And Ram Das was like this...saying, "Oh my God, get off me. What the fuck is going on." Dick stood up and said, "Look, how you *do* defend yourself. Get off this bullshit." I felt the same way. I've always felt that way about many of the people who came here. Ram Das was like many people who came here, and still come here, and who are teachers in the world. But there's a distinction I make... There are teachers in the world who can report and give you a data dump, like what's-his-name, Eckert Tolle?

Ken:

Right, Eckhart Tolle...

Seymour Carter:

...People who are very glib and can record and repeat all the wisdom of the world, but they don't live it. At the same time, there are teachers who really live their wisdom. I feel that Ram Das, and many of the people here, are like that. They are glib personalities - and they are superficial personalities. They have found a way to "talk" and not "do." They sit closest to the stove and never chop wood. But they tell you all

about how to chop wood, and how they know all the distinctions of chopping wood. Perhaps they do, intellectually. But the purpose of Esalen is not about that. It's about having the healers - but not only the healers. It's having a sense of your own presence, and what it is to really be here nonverbally.

Can you allow yourself to inhabit your life nonverbally?

Ken:

Thank you. That's a great image.

Here's a little bit of a twisted question. We chatted about this earlier. How would the elder Seymour Carter - you today - if the elder Seymour Carter had the opportunity to step into the life of the young Seymour Carter and whisper some advice in his ear, what advice would that be?

Seymour Carter:

Let me see... I don't know a quick response... Well, what comes up is, "Seymour, you should have stayed with that rich wife." ...I had five wives, you know...

Ken:

You've had five wives?

Seymour Carter:

Yes.

Ken:

Which was the rich one?

Seymour Carter:

The fourth one.

Ken:

The fourth was the rich one?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. She was an heiress of a Philadelphia fortune.

Ken:

All right. So, I'm going to ask you another question.

Seymour Carter:

Okay.

Ken:

If the young Seymour Carter, let's say at 25, could be in this room listening to you now, what would he think of who you are and what you're saying?

Seymour Carter:

If I go back to myself between 20 and 30...those were really difficult years.

Ken:

...But if you could see who you have become...

Seymour Carter:

I would say, "Gee, I'm really glad you became what you became - because the seeds were there, but you doubted it."

Ken:

Good. Thank you. I've only got two or three more, so we're almost to the end.

Seymour Carter:

Okay. I'm only good for two or three...

Ken:

Over your half-century, or thereabouts, at Esalen, I wonder if you could tell me who are the two or three most important people to have come here; separate from Fritz and Will and Dick. Who are the two or three or four most important people to have come out of here?

Seymour Carter:

Well, you're one of the most important people to come out of here, in my mind.

Ken:

Thank you.

Seymour Carter:

Gregory Bateson...to your first question - Gregory Bateson, Richard Feynman, Charlotte Selver and John Heider. I named Charlotte earlier, though...

Ken:

...Fair enough... So, those are the people who, for you, are the most important...

Seymour Carter:

...of those who have come out of here... *You* certainly have....

Ken:

Thank you.

Seymour Carter:

...I have been very thrilled and happy with your career, because I feel you've kept our values and you've kept your interest here. I really admire you, and feel like, "Okay." For me, you're our most stellar graduate.

...Whose career came out of here? Well, we could say Joseph Campbell's career came alive just after his siege here. He spent 20 years here, on and off. So, these people have had an enormous impact on the culture, along with Joseph Campbell's work.

Ken:

Ida Rolf?

Seymour Carter:

Ida was a crackpot. To me Ida doesn't stand in the first rank, at all.

Ken:

Really?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. Her theory is so bogus. Her theories are nonsense, but the method is quite wonderful. You can move in with deep tissue...I would call it deep tissue work. But I feel most of her theories are nonsense.

Ken:

Yes... So, are there other people who found their way here and then entered into the world that you can point your finger towards?

Seymour Carter:

I can't think of someone, other than yourself.

Ken:

Well, I'm not here fishing for compliments. But thank you.

Danny:

Were you moved by Stan Grof?

Seymour Carter:

No, not at all. His theories are completely off the map.

Ken:

Where would you put Gabrielle Roth and her whole school?

Seymour Carter:

Yes, that's a good point. I feel like she represented something, with her Five Movements work, of a synthesis with Gestalt. I never did go to one of her classes, but I've followed her career. I feel like, yes, she's one of the great success stories. But you have to understand that I'm not a transcendentalist. I don't believe in spiritual realms and the Grofian rebirth nonsense. I mean, Jesus! I could go through any page of that stuff, and just say, "Come on... This is off the map."

Ken:

Where would you put John Lilly? ...Because he never gets talked about here. But I actually thought that John, bizarre as he was, had some great conceptual frameworks.

Seymour Carter:

Well, that's about our LSD work...

Ken:

You worked with John?

Seymour Carter:

Yes. That's kind of where our LSD stuff really took off - when John came here in, I think, 1966 or '67. We started being serious about LSD. So, he stimulated Dick, me, John Heider, and others of us to say, "Let's take a look at this." Although, it started before he came. We rented the farm house at Sycamore Canyon for John Heider, myself, Ann Heider and Betsy. Then on weekends, Lilly and Dick and John Brewer, or other people would be there, and we'd drop acid out there.

Ken:

Where would you put the whole Arica thing - which sort of disassembled the Big Sur thing for a while, as people went off to Chile.

Seymour Carter:

Yes. Dick claimed that what happened with Arica was - they really emptied our bench. Around 50 people went down there. People were, and still are, willing to sell their soul to the devil for the promise of enlightenment. I feel Arica was another bogus trip. I can say more about it. I went there, to Chile, to check it out. I was there... I met the man...

Ken:

Oscar Ichazo... Is that his name?

Seymour Carter:

Oscar Ichazo. I felt it was like a Nazi boot camp, in a way. It reminded me of a kind of brainwashing system that was something I was familiar with from Synanon - from what I read about brainwashing. You have to understand this about both Dick and me... One of the reasons I'm here is that Dick and I were guru busters. We were authoritarian systems busters. One of the things that was most important about us being here at Esalen, with our reputation, was that we automatically gave the imprimatur to many systems, whether they were okay or not. So, what I feel our mission was - as twins back then - was to be guru busters. We did a lot of checking out and then reporting on systems. As for the Arica system - I went to Chile for four months, came back, and said, "No, Dick, the tools are good but it's distorted by a megalomaniacal personality. So then, Dick went to Arica in New York in 1971. I was there, too, studying Aikido and Charlottes work. That's when Dick walked out on Arica.

Ken:

I'm going to wind up with my last question or two. In the Arthurian legends, a lot of attention is placed on the dashing Knights of the Round Table. But there are these wizards off to the side. ...The Elders. They're a little more grizzled and a little more outrageous, and maybe a little mad at times. Which bunch do you feel affinity towards?

Seymour Carter:

All the mad wizards, for sure, for sure. That's self-evident.

Ken:

So, how is it that Esalen could better embrace elders like yourself?

Seymour Carter:

They need to make room for us. They really need to make room for us! There needs to be a clear establishment of elders at Esalen in order to maintain the tradition. I'm not the only one. Brita's here, Debora's here, Danny's here. ...The important thing to remember about myself and Dick is that we didn't believe in authorities. We didn't believe that pyramid power structures were the best form of social organization. Dick had the notion that no one should be able to "capture the flag" at Esalen. This came out of the feeling that dogmas get us into trouble. Right now, the dogma that has captured the flag at Esalen is bureaucracy. Esalen should turn away from power, toward education. That's why we are here. That's what the elders can do for Esalen.

Ken:

But there might be people who were here at Esalen before, who consider themselves elders. I'm going to defend myself a little bit. I've always felt that there was the tribe who stayed at Esalen and the tribe who left. And yet I feel very much a part of the Esalen tribe.

Seymour Carter:

Right. I do too.

Ken:

But I don't live here. I haven't lived the life that Danny has. This has been his home for his entire life. For Debra, Rita, Peggy...this is it!

Seymour Carter:

Right.

Ken:

So, how does Esalen define its elders? Is it just anybody who was here in the late '60s and early '70s? Is it somebody who put in tenure? Is it somebody who was in the catalog? There are people here whose work was wonderful, who have been thrown out and have never come back. How would Esalen ever determine who the elders are?

Seymour Carter:

I don't know yet. I'm certainly in the first circle. Debra is there, Vicki is there, Brita is there in that first circle. They came in '66 and '67.

Ken:

All right.

Seymour Carter:

You don't have white hair...but you should be in there too.

Ken:

I *do* still have hair. I'm quite delighted with my hair, actually.

All right, here's my last question, then we're going to end as we began. So... Let's imagine that it's 100 years from now. You're dead, I'm dead. Although Danny still may be around! Unfortunately, the way people get remembered, way in the past, is just with a sentence or two. So, how is it that you'd like your life and your legacy to be remembered by Esalen people in the future? Seymour Carter, he was....

Seymour Carter:

Well, my grandfather's name was TJ Stevens. Thomas Jefferson Stevens. I'd like to be remembered as the Esalen Thomas Jefferson.

Ken:

Explain that to me.

Seymour Carter:

Thomas Jefferson was a multi-talented person. He was a polymath. Thomas Jefferson was one of the people who helped establish democracy and parliamentary government in this culture. He was someone who brought the civilization of France to this culture. He was someone who, like myself, was a messenger between Europe and America. I was very much something like that in my life. As I get older, I have consciously focused on the principles of cooperation that are possible through democracy.

Ken:

Okay, I'm going to ask you to take a look at this and refresh your mind...for the last question. If we could bring Danny around...I'm going to ask you to just share this one, with all of us looking right into the camera.

So, we're going to end as we began. I'm going to just simply ask you...

Seymour Carter, The Esalen Thomas Jefferson...

Seymour Carter, Ojo Pojoque, The Eye of the Casino...

So who are you?

Seymour Carter:

I'm Esalen's resident alien. A secular skeptic in a utopian community.

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