LORNA BOURG: It's like our archives are everywhere.

ROBERT KORSTAD: Yeah, and we're trying to find them.

LB: And the body of knowledge is everywhere, which is a blessing, but if we don't somehow record it and then analyze from that, we're going to lose quite a bit.

ANNE BIZALION: Something you just said that interested me, among other things, but I'm just getting back from the Washington ( ) twentieth year celebration of Network. I don't know if you're familiar with Network. We were invited, one of the ( ) and myself, to make a presentation on the twentieth year. I'm bothered to see, it was kind of a consensus, but one of the speakers said that we are now a window of opportunity. You said it seemed possible in the '60s....

LB: More possible than now.

AB: But now it is possible, when it was not possible in the '60s. The window of opportunity, and we have that ( )

LB: We have that same exact thing that you made a note and I made a note at the same time. It's interesting. That the '60s were possible than now, and I think that they're just different. In some ways, some different kinds of things are possible now that never were in the '60s.

AB: And there is an expectancy, not only by people like us, but in the general public. We feel it from the bank. We feel it from businesses, from churches. An expectancy, let's do something. This world can't continue the way it goes.

LB: It's the impact of the global upon more and more
people's lives, this consciousness that's happening. And you can see it whether it's in food or in pesticides or in farmer policy or in the (    ) fast track agreements, in women's issues around the world. You certainly have a sense of we do truly touch each other's lives. I think in the '60s, what you had was the time of confrontation between an "us agenda" and a "them agenda." It's almost like pulling like back like a spaceship and looking at the big, blue marble, and you begin to see an "us" instead of a "them and an us." That there's a oneness of the earth, and we are going to have to, instead of confront so much, although there will still be plenty of need to do that, there's going to have to be collaborations and partnerships, and they're going to be unlikely partnerships and unlikely collaborations that were not ever possible, I don't think, in the '60s. You know, when the dogs are out, the black folks are marching, and the laws aren't even in place, and women are considered property, you must have some confrontation there. You have to establish a base, a principle, before you can have that partnership and collaborations. So the '60s did that, I believe, for us.

NEIL BOOTHBY: Do you have any concrete experience or examples here with your work where you get this unlikely coalition of banks and churches?

LB: Yeah, I think the whole experience at Four Corners grew out of--it has to be understood in the context of the plantations where you had a historical slave system which evolved into a quasi-slave system. And when Southern Mutual started in the late '60s, there were some very basic things that had to be addressed,
like rights under the Constitution. We had some volunteers that were arrested and thrown in jail for criminal trespass. So you had to go before a three-judge federal panel just to win the right of free association. Some very basic kinds of things. When folks joined some of our job training programs or adult basic education programs, they would go home, back to the plantation, in the evening and all of their things were in the yard or on the porch. They were evicted from their house and their job just for learning.

AB: Read and write!

LB: Read and write. So there are some very kinds of basic things that had to be done.

AB: That's in the late '70s.

LB: Farm workers being poisoned on the plantation. Farm workers have been historically seen as sort of a disposable people, like tin cans along the highway. Those were points that had to made. But when you really began with the displacement of the farm workers and the mechanization, we then began to see that farm workers were not here, they were now all out in the community. And those communities were no longer under the protection, if you will, of a plantation. They were sort of like fend for yourselves. Now, they're impacting our tax base, our food stamp demands, our health care system even more, and there is no patronage system like there was in the plantation. In the old days, there was a school and a hospital even on the plantation. That's not to say that was good, but there was certainly a safety net. Didn't work very well. It was quite
horrendous, and at what great price.

RK: Still it was there.

LB: But when that displacement took place because of the mechanization, there was nothing! Not even a paternalism that was in place. So everything came home. It began to impact a lot more places. The poorest of the poor were already so destitute.

What they suffered additionally, I think, was an additional psychological tunnel they had to go through, because so much of their life was in the hands of a grower. Their transportation to and from work, often, their food purchased at the company store, their medical care, where you'd get a permit slip from the plantation owner to go to a particular doctor. The bill was sent to the plantation owner.

AB: That's ten years ago.

RK: Is that right?

LB: Ten years ago. When we first started, people were paid at one whole plantation system just once a year. Everything was charged. So as they went along, they did, in fact, get deeper in debt. So some things have dramatically changed with that displacement of 98,000 people. That's women and children from the seventeen parishes in sugar cane.

AB: The mechanization.

LB: And the mechanization. Then there was, along with that, two other things that occurred. One was the boom and bust of the oil and gas industry. When it went bust, it made the labor pool even more of a surplus commodity, if you will. Then the second thing, I think, that had a lot of impact on the
displacement was the Environmental Protection Agency's requirements of small and rural communities and plantation owners to provide sewerage systems for those settlements on the plantation. And they said, not no, but, "Hell, no, I'm not going to spend all that money to put sewerage systems in, twenty miles from a town, for shacks, when I can condemn all those shacks, evict the people." Never mind, that I had made a lifelong commitment that as long you're living, you have a place to live contract. That was broken. But if I remove those shacks, I suddenly find I have beautiful development property with gorgeous oak trees that I can now sell for lots of money, and we can put these $250,000 houses on it.

RK: Plantation Acres.

AB: Yes, that's right.

RK: Is that happening around here?

LB: Oh, it's happened in the last ten years dramatically.

RK: I saw some of it coming up on the road.

LB: There were 25,000 farm workers in the late '60s.

AB: In the very late '60s.

LB: '69ish, '72ish, in that range. We know that because we documented it through some court cases. Now, the American Sugar Cane League says there's 9,000. We say there's 6,000. That's a dramatic displacement of farm workers and families.

AB: And when they say nine or six, it doesn't mean living on the plantation. Practically nobody lives on the plantation anymore. The plantations are practically gone. You don't see them.
LB: So now to bring this back home, about how the world is impacting, because I think that's what your question was, on two fronts, you have, from the farm workers, so much money in the world that has, in fact, been largely committed to the militarization and the policing of the world, and the corporate, capital build-up around all of that. And we have seen clearly what it has done in the Soviet Union, and that's just sort of like on a continuum here, with the United States being here. Our infrastructure has had serious impact from this. We're not lined up for bread four blocks long, but our bridges are crumbling, our roads are falling apart, our people are suffering, our educational system's in a wreck, the drug situation is a crisis. Whatever our definition of a family is, it's in a crisis. So there's some serious impacts from this militarization that took place, and this greed that went along with that kind of operation that is based upon competition and unrestrained capitalism and a sense of dominion and domination, as opposed to what I hope begins to emerge in the world, and certainly, I think, women have a particular emphasis on that, and that is the partnership model.

I think that is absolutely crucial. The condition of farmers, who find themselves on the pesticide treadmill, where more and more of their dollar is going for chemical input, for fertilizers and for pest control. And the prices just on one pesticide here in the cane fields was increased 33 percent in one year's period of time. The farmers are beginning to realize, my God, I'm spending tens of thousands of dollars, plus the interest on the operating loan to borrow for that, on chemical input. Plus,
we're getting a black eye as we have a million plus fish kill. Our cancer rates are soaring, and whether we're doing it or not, people think we are.

AB: And Mexico. . . .

LB: In Mexico, the fast track gap agreements are breathing down our throat. We're about to be traded off, while we've been protected all these years under, formerly, the old Sugar Act and the Farm Bill, or the import quotas. We're about to be traded off because that's something Third World countries can probably do better than us.

RK: Produce sugar.

LB: Produce sugar.

AB: ( ) sugar cane.

LB: And so, they're seeing that for every dollar I save on pesticides, I don't have to give any to the land owner, to the miller that mills the sugar, to produce the pesticides, to buy the fuel, or for the worker. Every dollar I save on that I begin to put in my pocket. So there's some unlikely coalitions now that are forming with our organization and the trade associations. First time, they began coming into our offices.

RK: Really?

AB: The farmers.

LB: The farmers, which is the American Sugar Cane League. So yes, there's some very specific, kind of unusual things that you begin to see. What has happened in the world has surely had some level of consciousness at the local level. And I believe, and I hope, that what you're seeing happening now in the politics
of elections is going to now filter back up with some sort of restructuring or at least different faces, and hopefully there will be some different agendas that might begin to be carved out. I don't know that part yet. We'll see whether that happens.

RK: That's another step away.

LB: See whether that emerges or not.

AB: It needs to come from the very, very grassroots and that's where it's happening. It's the only way it can happen. It cannot come from the top anymore. The top has lost credibility.

RK: I'll say [laughter].

LB: Well, there are some serious things that are happening though, as this is taking place, and that is a sort of an outside of government government, and that is the money in the corporate kinds of structures that are making policies and doing deals and determining even military interventions, totally outside of any Congress that you might elect that might have more blacks or Hispanics or women in it. So to some extent, I was encouraged with the revelation of the high salaries of the CEO's and the outrage of the stockholders who might now begin to realize, I don't own stock just for investment. Maybe I need to take back the corporation. Until we begin to take back the corporations to some extent, and redirect even that well, I think the problem is going to be a quasi-government doing things that the government might have lost the power to do. So that bothers me a little. I don't know what's going to happen there yet.

NB: You're sort of talking back on the era of the '60s and
'70s, when the almost 100,000 people were displaced from the agri-economy to. . . .

LB: From plantations.

NB: Yeah, how did your project try to enable those people at that particular time, and then I'd like to come forward and just talk a little bit about, you mentioned, for example, the alliance with the trade associations, what is that doing? Is that an example of the grassroots leadership that you're sort of talking about? ( )

AB: What was the first question?

LB: One was how did we enable people in terms of the, how did we intervene or enable, or what did we do? How did we address that displacement?

NB: And what's going on now?

LB: And then the alliances now.

AB: I think the process of the twenty-three years of our own existence, plus the background we had before in the War on Poverty, that enabled us to understand the process as it was coming along, the analysis we made by a number of surveys, and very clearly in the very beginning in the '70s, we felt the need to understand this system. It was actually unknown to most people. Most people in the towns around here were absolutely unaware that there were still plantations. People on the plantations themselves were unaware that twenty miles away there were folks like them. They were so isolated and so locked in, their past and their present. So for us the first step, I think, was to understand and to evaluate the total situation.
LB: That was a new thing, to define it as a system. That had never been done. When we first started, there were only about 1,500 farm workers in all agricultural commodities in the state.

AB: (   )

LB: So said all the statistics that you could get your hands on.

RK: Is that right?

LB: We documented through a court case and through surveys of total populations on plantations, in sugar cane alone there were 22,000 sugar cane field workers in 1971.

RK: Who'd been just invisible people?

LB: They were women.

AB: Totally invisible.

LB: They were part-time. They were seasonal. The laws of the nation didn't even take, a lot of the funds and dollars that were available at the national level were not accessible because they didn't fit a definition of farm worker.

AB: The farm worker was a migrant by definition. So it wouldn't fit.

RK: That was the first big step, is just making this large part of the population visible.

AB: Yes, yes. And changing that particular definition of farm worker. It took us several years. [Laughter]

LB: And reinterpreting poverty from cases of individual misfortune to an economic, political, cultural, religious, celebratory system. And that's what we did.
AB: And so, a system that was not only a local system but a system that was a national and international system. By its nature sugar is a very specific kind of crop that's not the same thing as lettuce and tomatoes. So the system of sugar was, and in fact was so recognized by the Congress, by the Sugar Act, with quotas allowing sugar in and a very strict control.

LB: Wages and prices.

AB: And with annual hearings to define the prices of sugar as well as the wages of farm workers. So for us to gain this understanding of an international, global system, and to realize that in order to make some changes, we had to take the system in its entirety.

LB: That's very crucial.

AB: We could not solve the problem at the plantation level right here.

LB: A wholistic approach was absolutely essential.

AB: Our next step was to say, well, we have this system which we called plantationism, and we realized that it was the plantations in Africa, or within a completely different context, still at the same type of structure. Hawaii or South America, it was the same thing.

LB: Vertical oppression, horizontal violence, isolation, lack of definition of a system, service versus development concepts of approaching it.

AB: So our next step, at the same time as this understanding, was to say, it really doesn't matter where we start. The system is to be approached and pierced or touched
anywhere. It doesn't matter.

LB: Where you start is where the people wanted to start.

AB: That's right.

LB: It didn't matter, whatever they chose to do.

AB: Housing, health, community organizing or whatever.

RK: But you saw it as kind of wholistic and kind of circular?

AB: That's right.

LB: So if we did health, it wasn't just to do health. It was to respond to a need, and then to begin making connections. If it was housing, then so be it. It didn't matter.

AB: It really didn't matter.

LB: It only mattered to respond to the people, because that's where they were, and that's where they could then begin to learn a language of connection.

AB: I think the next thing for us, and I think it held us through the years, is to realize that you don't undo a system that has been here for centuries in six months or in two years.

LB: And you certainly don't do it in a twelve month by twelve month federal funding budget ( ). [Laughter]

RK: That's true.

LB: That was one of the things that we experienced, and we came to that decision prior to Reagan administration, which enabled it to go much faster, and that is our period of what we call our disentanglement from government funds. And that was a clear indication of government's inability, indeed, their very barriers, to development, to changing the system. It is very
much geared to service delivery, but not to structural change at
the core and at the bottom. We came out of (     ), and Sister
Anne was one of the very beginning people on the War on Poverty
in Louisiana. So we took very seriously the War on Poverty
concept. That meant, you get rid of it, but it was sort of a
Vietnam philosophy, I think we found out. [Laughter]

RK: Plow through.

LB: It wasn't really serious.

AB: And when you say that it was geared to solving the
individual problems, it was not even very effective, the
government programs, actually solving the problems of people.
But certainly it was not effective at all in terms of changing
the system. And it's still in place right now. It's not
terribly effective.

LB: One of our board members for years kept saying we need
to, we need to, and finally we made the policy as a board to
return the federal dollars that we had won over the years of
competition, and had been so cleanly audited, that the government
liked to give us money. It was comfortable for them because they
knew it would handled well. It was just, "What are you saying?"

They flew people down here three times, attorneys, program
officers. They didn't know what to do, because we got to the end
of the program. They sent us some more for a two month
extension, and we said no. We took the money and we wrote a
check and we sent it back. [Laughter] They didn't know what to
do with the check. We didn't know what to do with this.
[Laughter] (      )
NB: A public commission to study to figure out what to do with it.

AB: They went to their lawyers to find out. ( )

LB: So they flew here again, and they asked us, "Could we please take money?" And if we wouldn't take it, would we be a conduit for another non-profit to do the work, and we wouldn't have any worries. And we said, "Let me see if I understand this right. You want to give us all the money, and then we just pass it through to you, and you will never audit us, and you never have to worry about what we did with the money even if they embezzle it all." "Well, no, that's not exactly right." "So then you're saying we really would be responsible. So if we really would be responsible, that means we have kind of have to administer it again, and that's what we're saying we don't want to do. Don't give it to us again." [Laughter] "Just take the money and give it to them." And they went, "You're serious?" And we said, "Yes, we're serious." [Laughter]

NB: And that's because essentially you found it impossible, given the restrictions or whatever, the way that the money was given and the restrictions that were on that, to do the kind of work that you found was working?

LB: To do developmental, systemic change. That doesn't mean you can't sometimes use federal funds in a way that might be helpful. We're not opposed to federal funds. I mean, you need services. But for us, it took us two years after we disengaged from federal funds to free up our thinking to realize that we could just develop and sit down and be creative and plan.
Because we had been set into canned models and programs for so long.

AB: Besides, in terms of total development those programs are just not there for that.

NB: No, they're not. What was your funding alternative?

LB: Well, what we did, we went quite a long time without pay for one time [laughter]. We went from a staff of 40 to 60 to a much smaller staff. The '60s were clearly over. [Laughter] Things were different. It took a while. We went, actually, and we said how are other people in the community getting money to do things they wanted to do. What we saw was that there was charitable gaming, benefit bingo, going on all over the state. And two things bothered us, one, the churches tend to hold them in sort of church basement kinds of operations, among their own members or the poor. The second thing was there was a lot of actual thievery going on, where the lounge owners were putting millions and millions of dollars into their pocket, and there was no charity involved at all. They were just holding illegal bingos. So the first thing we did was go to the attorney general's office, and said, "If we do this, how do we do this right? What does the law say? What is the spirit of the law? What should we do?" So we got some education on that. Then we worked with the state police and the attorney general through another corporation, the Southern Research and Development Corporation, which is a 501(C) for lobbying group. That group took on the mission of establishing a law in the state of Louisiana to control charitable gains, and in a short period of
two years, in one fell swoop, from the passage of the law to the enforcement of the law, we probably transferred in this state about 150 million dollars from lounge owners' pockets to non-profit communities.

RK: Really! Good gosh!!

LB: Literally, literally. We also did something in our area that had not been done, and I don't know if it was in other parts of the state, but in our area the bingos were segregated. So we went into the bingo business. Our area was one of the most exclusive places that you could do this, and that was Evangeline Downs Racetrack Clubhouse with the carpet and the chandeliers. So we did that for a year.

RK: So you ran a bingo?

LB: We leased that hall after the races, hauled up 10,000 cards and equipment while the people were going out of the races. We would dress all up, and we'd (laughter) in the clubhouse. And that's what we did. Then the clubhouse was sold. The racetrack was sold to some good ol' boys from Texas, who didn't want to have any more community things there except the races. So we no longer had a place to do this. So we went out on a search, and we were hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt because of the federal programs. The federal programs never pay you enough money to run the programs the way they need to be run, so you start incurring debt. So we found a building that had been sort of abandoned. It was originally a fancy restaurant, a steak restaurant, and then it was a dance hall, and then it was abandoned. But it was right next to Evangeline Downs.
[Laughter] The roof was falling in. It was, well, we're used to renovating stuff. We went to twenty-two banks before we found one that just loved the idea [laughter] of this non-profit doing this. And we convinced them with the program we put together, that they should lend us $190,000. So they did. We went in and we renovated it, and Ms. Foundation gave us $10,000 because the bank wouldn't give us the money to do some things. And we started. Well, in one year's time we paid off a second mortgage. We paid off a third source of some money that had come from a religious community. I negotiated with the Franciscan Sisters, and 11%, $180,000 mortgage, to transfer it from the bank, which was 16%, to this community which was getting about 8%. They made money, and we made money, and the bank loved it all the way because they got all their money back.

AB: That was in the early '80s when the interest rates were high.

LB: So we now own the place, and we gave them first mortgage. The corporation took out employee insurance of Helen and my life, because four and a half days a week we would work on farm worker issues and agricultural-rural issues, and on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday until midnight we would go and I would call bingo and Helen would call bingo. [Laughter] Back and forth and clean toilets. That's how we made money to do the work, and housing is very expensive work.

AB: And it was not just any kind of bingo either.

LB: Oh, it was first class bingo [laughter]. It had carpet on the floor and chandeliers. That's how we renovated.
RK: Wow!

AB: And fully integrated.

LB: It was a recreational type bingo, so we were very successful at that. But then we began seeing some kinds of things that were very interesting. This story isn't known too much. I guess I can say it now. It's kind of interesting.

Edwin Edwards, we wanted to go and see how do they do gaming, especially bingo, or anything else, because keno was allowed under our state. No one was doing keno. How do they do that in Las Vegas? I didn't know, where do you go in Las Vegas to do that? I had no concept. Do you just walk in and say, "Can you show me how to do all this?" [Laughter] Governor Edwin Edwards was a frequent visitor, as you may know, of Las Vegas. We have a history that goes way back. He was very instrumental in our being fired from the poverty program, which is another story that we can tell you. So we went to him, and he said, "Yes." He picked up the phone and he called a guy in Vegas. The two of us went, and there was champagne and flowers and we had first-class service. We were shown all of this gaming mechanism, of how to do this. But also, we got another interesting thing. This guy that ran this casino was something like out of one of these Godfather movies, sort of. It was a very interesting experience, I must tell you. And he said, "Louisiana, Edwin Edwards, we're going to get it there, you know. We're going to get gambling there, and the way we're going to do that is on the back of the charities. We already have it planned. We know how we're going to do that." So that sort of stayed in our minds. "We want you
to succeed. That's why we agreed to show you these operations."

Of course, it's like way over our heads. We just thought we were being, you know. . . . Well, it fit their agenda. He was probably delighted when we asked him. So we came back and we began watching. I got a call from the man who's now the mayor of New Orleans, who was in the legislature at that time, at my home two or three times, because Southern Research had hired a lobbyist to block legalized gambling in this state and we were successful for two years in a row. The New Orleans delegation was very, very furious at us, because they wanted televised bingo. They wanted a casino in New Orleans, and they wanted the video poker machines. Our lobbyist was just excellent. She had put together a coalition. She works for the other side now [laughter]. That's how good she was. So we were able to block it for two years, and then when the mayor got elected, Mayor ( ), we saw the handwriting on the wall. Edwards was coming back in. They began to try to put a law in that would create an overall gaming commission, and they would tax the existing bingos, because that was the only legalized gambling really, an enormous amount of money to fund this commission at $64,000-type jobs. Originally, charities could do bingo in order to do what the state did not have the money to do.

We became so successful, 150 million dollars is now going into non-profits, right, and instead of the kickbacks going to sheriffs' offices through the lounge owners, that the state then decided progressively more and more to extract from those charities through fees and taxes the funding of the state
government, which was in a crisis because of the oil and gas problem. So that was the pulling back of those dollars, and then the wanting to legalize gambling with the charity bingos paying that bill. So we said, "We want to get out of this." So we sold the winner's circle to another non-profit who didn't want to get out of it. So they became the non-profit owner and they leased it to about nine other non-profits, battered women shelters and so on, where they operate the bingo. We then began to have to have to deal with, where do we get our funds from. We began making relationships with congregations throughout the country, some of which we already had.

AB: We had (                  ).

LB: Which we didn't have, except for Ms. Foundation, much of a track record in, and Bill Bondurant and Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation was the next one, and they were extremely helpful to us, and sort of sent the word and the contacts began growing and working. But there were a lot of sacrifices. The acceptance of the Farmers Home Administration brick and mortar money was just recent. This is only our second year handling that. And that was because we determined to take it for brick and mortar only. We can pay an electrician and a plumber and buy lumber, because the program has a weight that is larger than that. And that is a supplement to buy the kinds of things that you can't buy from foundations. So you can make a fair amount of progress. So the government money truly is a servant to getting something else that's larger done. And the housing that we do in Four Corners is really the visible sign of the rebuilding of
rural communities, and it's the model. We now have a second community called Sorrel, which has a self-help association, and just two weeks ago Ashton, a third community, has begun attending meetings to create one. So what we're doing is putting together the pieces now in a partnership with the self-help associations and with the larger community, which has every bit as much responsibility as the other partners in this, for what has happened and for the solution. Southern Mutual does not have the responsibility to fix all of this or to bring about economic equity by ourselves. And certainly the people on the plantations who've been displaced don't have that sole responsibility. So we then took a trip to visit the president of the local bank with an idea, and that was to create a small, twenty thousand dollar model.

AB: Yes, it was to create a small model of $20,000 loan, that they would administer. We didn't want to be in the banking business.

RK: Right. You'd been in the bingo business. That was enough.

AB: So they would administer the $20,000, and we were going to offer them, with some of the dollars we could raise ourselves as the back-up, at 1% for five years. And at the end of the conversation, the president of the bank said, "So do I understand you? You want us to put $20,000 at 1% for five years?" And we said, "Yes."

LB: We turned to each other and said, "Yeah (         ) [Laughter] And service the loans at no charge. [Laughter] And
charge no application fees. So that is what happened. And it was so successful. Well, he actually said, "Don't thank me."

AB: Yes, I was thanking him for doing this, and he said, "Don't thank me. I thank you." Because it gives us the opportunity to do what we're supposed to be doing in the first place.

LB: And he was right, community reinvestment, the bailout of the savings and loans. Even though his bank is one of the top 100 banks in the country and had not had all of the debacle, all of the banks and all of savings and loans, generally speaking, there have been exceptions, probably South Shore in Chicago would be one, had gotten away from their mission, which was building our communities and our neighborhoods, especially around shelter and small businesses.

RK: This whole restructuring of banking has been a terrible blow to that, because it's taking money out of these communities by centralization.

LB: ( ) He was responsible for making that true. I cannot tell you what an impact, what an important piece of work he did there. I've never met him, but we're trying to make it work now in the community. It was so successful, this $20,000 model, that the bank asked us, "Can you design one much bigger? And we would be willing to put up the money." So we did. We designed a quarter of a million dollars, that the bank would put up a quarter of a million dollars, that we would write a proposal that would allow the Dallas Federal Home Loan Banking System to fund the interest differential, the spread that they
would lose between the 11%, at that time, that they would normally charge and the 1% that they would charge a rural, self-help association. The only way to access it is to be a member of a self-help association. That was a leveraging key that sort of blew the bankers' minds. It got an enormous commitment, because what I'm seeing is that in the non-poor, the non-minority community, there are a number of people who believe certain things aren't right, and who have had to do battle with their peers about, "No, all poor folks ain't lazy. No, no, no."

But they didn't have any real life, hands-on ways of giving them examples, but they just knew it was a matter of justice, but they didn't know first-hand. So what we were was a bridge. We were a bridge to that community, to the Four Corners community. So Four Corners has provided an enormous service of education and of access for that community to them. And that's been a mutual benefit. And that's what our organization... .

AB: Larry ( ), the president of the bank, said it very clearly as late as last week when he said to somebody else who was visiting with him, "Southern Mutual provided, we were looking for a way to serve the community."

LB: "We had no idea how to do this."

AB: "We didn't know that community."

LB: "We should have known them."

AB: "But we didn't."


AB: And we provided that vehicle. That's what he said to
somebody who was visiting with him last week.

RK: That's interesting.

LB: So now we have in place, because we hope to turn it over twice, a half million dollar revolving loan, 1% loan fund for housing to self-help associations. And that's working very well. We got to thinking, if this is do-able with a bank and a poor community, to rebuild it, why isn't this also do-able with farmers, to help drive sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture being defined as it must be profitable, or [laughter] they won't stay into it. It must be in harmony with the environment. It must involve the whole community. So with that definition, we determined that a lot of agricultural policy is really set by the banks because I won't lend you money as a farmer unless you show me a successful chemical program that you're going to implement that is the state of the art, the latest chemicals. So we called first Iberia Savings Bank because we had this partnership with them. They said, "We don't make that many ag loans, but it's a good idea. Why don't you call Ernest Free of the New Iberia Bank. He might be interested. They make a lot more loans in agriculture." So we did. We got an appointment, and we spent several hours, Helen Bent and I. And he was captivated.

AB: The guy is a farmer himself.

LB: He was captivated because we brought a farmer with us, three thousand acre sugar cane farmer who liked the idea, too. Of course, why wouldn't he? He was captivated. We began to talk about diversity and building sustainable rural communities and
agricultural policy and the concept that if we can certify a farmer as a sustainable agricultural farmer, and we'll make a definition of that, then would you be willing to lend at, let's say, a percentage lower than the preferential interest rate, and he said yes. And half of that savings on that operational loan would go into the pocket of the farmer. The other half of those dollars would go into a sustainable agricultural trust fund that cutting edge farmers who want to try something new could access either on a loan or a grant basis to do the next thing. For example, one of the farmers wants to reduce his spray rig band from 36", which is the traditional land-grant taught way of spraying to an 18" band of spraying that will more precisely, through some sensors that you could put on this rig, place those pesticides where they need to go. And you would cut in half almost, right away, your pesticide bill. That's thousands and thousands of dollars. And he, not the land grant college, but the farmer in the field, once he understood and didn't fight the concept of sustainable agriculture and realized he had a self-interest in it, his mind is exploding with ideas. An unlikely partner. Why? Because if he doesn't spray so much pesticides then the whole town of Gros Tech doesn't have to go to the hospital, the little fishing village of Kneit Point doesn't lose their fish, and the people out at Four Corners don't lose their gardens and their shrubbery and their children don't get sprayed. So it's unlikely partnerships on common agendas. Now, there are going to be some places where we're not going to have the same. So each must know who you are.
RK: Have to be honest.

LB: Have to be honest, plus communicating. You must label the differences and say, "Here's where we can work together. We clearly have a different perspective on this, but we can still be civil and pursue whatever we need to," and maybe, who knows, that thing will converge as it goes. But you work on the common ground areas.

RK: What about new crops and diversity?

LB: We're working on that. That's happening now.

RK: And things with farmers' markets and grocery stores.

LB: There's a new crop for this area called (      ), which is fairly well known, I think, in African countries, but it's only been worked on by hand. It's a fibrous crop that has kind of two parts to it. The inner part is sort of a balsa wood, cork type that can do lots of interesting things, and the exterior part of the plant is very fibrous. It looks something like corn or sugar cane when it's growing. It can be used in paper. One of the interesting things it can be used for is the absorption of oil spills. If you go up in a helicopter and you drop this and it impacts, it's a natural fiber. It has the capacity to soak oil and not water. You can gather it, harvest it, and drain that oil and recycle that. But it does about thirty or forty things.

And so far, they've been able to grow hundreds of acres, and now this year, they're going to grow near a thousand acres without any pesticides. A very, very hardy plant. We don't know the long term, but that's what it is.

AB: Using the same machines.
LB: Using the same machines with very little adaptation as the sugar cane machine.

RK: Really.

LB: So you've got some thinking there. Now, we had as a state government, the state wanted to bring in a company from Mexico to initiate a new foundry in Louisiana, so that there could be job development, but it was also that sort of a cross border agreement. This is certainly not to speak against cross border agreements or Mexican trade agreements. But in doing that, there was a very clear potential of putting out a local foundry that had been in business for generations. Secondly, where are the dollars for the kind of development of the (   ) to make sure that the noise and the dust abatement is taken care of, it's a safe place for workers, the wages are decent, and that there's the research it needs to make this happen, and that we can put this in, and there can be some diversity in our agriculture. Where are the dollars? We have 150 million dollar boondoggle. It's a gasohol plant sitting out on acreage. That was (             ), part of his kingdom, and when he didn't get his arms payments, he began to crumble. This was one of things that crumbled. Well, it's right here in New Iberia.

AB: It has never operated one day.

LB: It was government backed, so the taxpayers paid 150 million dollars, taxpayer money, never operated a single, solitary day, and it still lights up at night like the New York skyline. It's unbelievable. 150 million dollars, do you know what we could do in sustainable agriculture and rebuilding rural
AB: In micro economy development.

LB: With 150 million dollars. You could establish a trust fund and just use the interest off of it to do a lot more.

NB: I was just curious because at one point you sort of began talking how the economy is changed and production bases are going abroad, and the military budget and how that's really made a shambles out of infrastructure and the domestic agenda here, etc., and these new partnerships. Is it the globalization of the economy that is making bankers and others feel more urgently called to get into community work or is it only through personal relationships?

LB: I think it's neither of those. I think it's the law that was passed, the Community Reinvestment Act. It says you get gold stars. As a matter of fact, they haven't even got all the kinks out of this things. The Community Reinvestment Act, when they get elected on that, you get gold stars for making these loans, high risk loans. The auditors give you a black eye for making high risk loans. Does that make any sense? Folk didn't talk to each other. That's typical. So what was unique about this banker was he said, "We have a problem here. But we're not going to let it stop us. We going to figure a way to go around it and make it work anyway." And it was that sheer creativity and determination to make it work that made it work. The relationships came and developed from that, and I guess you could say if you're looking at this in terms of a time span, the '60s and the passage of legislation and that confrontation and that
laying that foundation is absolutely essential. If women are still regarded as poverty, how in the hell are we going to be peers. You do have to have some laws in place here. But after the laws are in place, there is an awful lot of work to be done.

RK: It takes a long time.

LB: And we're in that next phase, I think.

RK: You were speaking a little while ago of building, not just houses in these areas, but also building community. I know in a lot of the articles I read, you talk about that. We were just in Mississippi, in the Delta, last week, talking with people who, I think, are very despairing, in as sense, of their areas, particularly, and this is in the black community there, that in these rural areas, these old cotton areas, that this sense of community that people had, because of out migration, because of lack of jobs, drug use, and stuff like that, this sense of community that people had even in very hard times has been lost. And that's something that they're very upset about figuring out how to do, or how to correct, or how to deal with that. I wondered maybe if you could just elaborate on what you mean by building community, because I think it's a lesson that we need to talk about it, or to transmit to others.

AB: We did not even speak of rebuilding community, we speak of building community. Because traditionally on the plantations, people have been set against one another in order to maintain the status quo. So yes, they've been living side by side, working side by side, but not really communicating and having community together.
LB: Well, I think they certainly did communicate, but there were so many forces of oppression and divisiveness that there was always an attempt to break that down.

AB: Yes, and definitely an attempt, if you were the good guy, your house would be fixed. So be the good guy if you want your windows to be changed.

LB: The grading of the skin colors. If you have one skin color, you might be considered for this type of job, as opposed to this type of job, historically from the plantations.

AB: So we now are in need to really build a community of people who can work together, who can see together the future of their own community. We think this is very essential to rebuilding the whole rural society. And also, not only between the people themselves at the grassroots level, but if we want to rebuild our society, to build our society, because we're still under a colonial system, if you want to build a society, that society is not only the farm workers or the former farm workers and their families, but also the banks, small businesses, the farmers.

LB: The churches.

AB: This is the society, and if we begin to establish those partnerships between those, it's not only for the flow of money. This is a good thing, but it's not the key. The thing is to get all those folks to communicate and to establish a new system in which it's a win-win situation.

LB: A different process of relating.

AB: Where we all have something to gain from this house
LB: How many prisons can you build?

RK: [Laughter] (                   )

LB: How much taxes do you want to pay to maintain them? And that's where it's at almost right now. You're going to pay me now, or you're going to pay me later. And it's come to a crunch.

RK: Well, it's so much more expensive to put people in prison than it is just to. . . .

NB: One number country in the world, per capita, of people incarcerated.

LB: We're got a state of the art prison right here, that just failed the half cent sales tax.

AB: Two weeks ago.

LB: And it's closing down. It built a prison. Now, follow this prioritizing and reasoning. It built a prison that could house between 70 and 120 of our local prisoners. This is a state of the art prison, with computers, and I must give a lot of credit to the sheriff, because there's a lot in the prison that's rehabilitative. So it is a state of the art in many ways. To house hundreds of prisoners that we would import and people would pay us to house. Why would we ever want to do that? What is this mentality that says bigger is better. Why wouldn't we want just to have a good, safe prison that's the size of the one we need, and have the community begin to rehabilitate those that are possible to rehabilitate. . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A