

Water Camp – Unabridged Transcript

On January 12, 2019, Western Friend conducted an interview with several members of the Quaker Oaks Farm (QOF) community. Located in the Central Valley of California, Quaker Oaks Farm is an environmental and cultural learning center supported by Visalia Friends Meeting. Since 2013, QOF has hosted five service-learning camps that have brought together youth and adults from Wukchumni, Mexican-American, and Quaker communities in the Valley and beyond.

The following transcript relays a conversation among two youth participants in the QOF camp: Eliza Angel and Duncan Lee, and six Friendly Adult Presences for the camp: Darlene Franco, Yaynicut Franco, Mary Lee, Steven Lee, Melissa Lovett-Adair, and Graciela Martinez Cavasos.

Western Friend: Let's start by having some of you tell how you became connected with Quaker Oaks Farm.

Steven Lee: This place is my Quakerism now. I was an environmental activist for many years, after I graduated high school. That's when I caught the bug for ecology and social justice. During that time, I worked on small organic farms in western North Carolina. I'm from that area. So all that kind of coalesced for me – ideas of land and land ethic and justice and environmental justice. I was also in Eastern religions major in my first stint at school. Later I went to graduate school at Penn State, and it was there, when my kids started at the Friends School in State College in kindergarten that I was introduced to Quakerism.

Melissa Lovett-Adair: I'm Melissa Lovett-Adair, and I'm the chairperson for the board of Quaker Oaks Farm. I am attending at Central Coast Friends in San Luis Obispo, but I grew up going to meeting here in Visalia, though not in this meeting house, because it wasn't built yet. When I was young, our meeting held worship in people's homes, initially. We would rotate around to different people's homes. I think that's all for right now.

Eliza Angel: I'm Eliza. I don't know if I'm a Quaker but I attend Quaker events. I like them. They're fun. But I don't know if I'm a Quaker. That's it.

Melissa: How many times did you go to camp?

Eliza: Like three or four times? The first camp I went to, we went to the beach. The second camp . . . Where did we go?

Melissa: To the mountains. It was just last year.

Eliza: Yeah. So it's gonna be my fourth this coming year.

Melissa: You can speak to what the experience of what camp is like. At some point.

Eliza: I will. Yeah.

Graciela Martinez Cavazos: I'm Graciela Martinez Cavazos. I recently adopted my mother's maiden name, as is the custom in Mexico. You carry your mother's last name last.

Anyway, I've not been a Quaker forever, but I've been around Quakers ever since I graduated from high school. Bard and Olga McAllister. I went to work for Bard when Self-Help Enterprises was coming together, supported by the AFSC. That was my first involvement with the Quakers.

I early on learned about civil unrest when I was working for the AFSC. They got a bunch of us to go and join the march in 1965 with Martin Luther King, Jr, from Selma to Montgomery. But then we were pulled back because James Reeb was beaten to death. James Reeb was a Unitarian Universalist minister. I will never forget James Reeb and four other pastors who got slaughtered during the march. But the AFSC pulled us out of the line. We never made it to the bridge.

My life revolved around Quakers. Bard introduced me to Cesar Chavez when my job with Self-Help Enterprises was coming to an end. Bard used to travel up and down the Central Valley. And he used to take me sometimes. And one time he took me to meet with Cesar Chavez, who was just getting ready to open up his first office, a donated house that became his office. And he had no workers. So I gave myself to being a volunteer for United Farm Workers for ten years. I went to different places, with different boycotts, and ultimately I wound up working at the legal department, helping the Dolores Huerta and the attorneys compose the ALRB – the California Agricultural Labor Relations Board.

Then in 1997, I got hired again by the AFSC. The Marshalls and the Lovetts were part of the AFSC committee. So I got reconnected with the Marshalls and the Lovetts, here in Visalia Meeting.

WF: So I want to do a time check. I think we have about 50 minutes.

Melissa: Yeah.

WF: So the areas I want to ask about are, first, just about the Quaker Oaks Farm camp in general. And since the theme of the next issue of *Western Friend* is "On Water," I want to uncover why you think should Quakers care about water, or maybe no much uncover, but

say why Quakers should remember that they do care about water, and that as Quakers they need to protect it. So I want to ask about camp. I want to ask about the camp's particular focus on land and water. And then I want to ask about the broader valley community, and how you hear your neighbors talking about those same questions around water and justice.

So, Eliza, this is kind of putting you on the spot, but you said you had stuff to say about camp. So I really would like to start there, if you don't mind – what camp was like, why you went, what you think about it, and why you keep going back. Is that OK to start with that?

Eliza: So, how I got started on camp, let me think. My cousin Gracie, she's older than me, she's eighteen already . . . when my family first came to California and we came to my grandma's house, Gracie was already going to camp. Oh, my grandma's house was just over there, right by the meetinghouse and the camp . . . Oh my gosh, there's so much to say.

OK, so then we moved here, we started coming to Visalia Meeting. I came to meeting a couple times, then I stopped, but I still kept going to camp every single year. So the first time I went to camp, when I first moved here, my cousin kept telling me "Let's go to camp together." She had already been going since she was little. So my first year, I heard was we were going to the beach. Oh my God. I love the beach. I love going everywhere. So I came to camp. We would set up the tents, do introduction, you know, fun stuff. And I met like so many people.

Oh my God, there's so much. OK. So my friend Andrew . . . Darlene Franco's grandson?

Melissa: I don't know. Cousin?

Eliza: Nephew? Something. I can't remember . . . So Andrew. I didn't even know he existed until I came here – and his school is literally around the corner from mine. So I thought that was pretty cool. And then all his other cousins were like, really close.

So every time we come to camp, we're always like a bunch of best friends that, I don't know, we just met and fell in love with each other, I guess. But not "fall in love" like in a relationship, you know. But I met all of them. I still talk to them every single time I come to camp. We act like we never missed a day of talking to each other.

Hmm. I met Melissa at my first camp, and I loved her. Still do! I met Melissa's parents, Bill and Beth. They're great. I met a whole bunch of people that I still talk to all the time.

Hmm . . . Camp is not boring. Honestly, it's not. Like as much as we do talk, it's pretty interesting. Like sometimes I'll zone out just listening, and it's all right. It's not like school, where they force you to pay attention. You know, at camp you can just sit there and zone out and still listen and it's like you get everything.

What else is there to talk about? The field trips are great. Oh my goodness. You will love those. They're fun. You always learned something. The first camp was about water, right? Water, beach trip?

Melissa: You know, I don't know if the beach trip was about water. I can't remember how it all fit together. Well, why don't you talk about the water? I mean, that trip we did go follow the water up to the mountains. And we went to the damn at the lake.

Eliza: That was great too. Oh my goodness.

Melissa: I can't remember. Did they do did grinding rock? . . . Yeah, the girls, Lily and Remy, I think, did the acorn grinding at the grinding stone.

Eliza: Yeah, so . . .

Melissa: I think the beach trip was the year before that.

Eliza: Yeah, it was. But that's where we went to learn about the rock, right?

Melissa: At Morro Bay?

Eliza: At Morro Bay Rock. Yeah, we learned about, like stuff that went on, why the rock is so important. . . . Melissa, I think you should talk about that. It's so much. It's like . . . So who is the one who was talking to us about it? It was Lalo?

Melissa: Lalo. And Fred Collins from the Northern Chumash, there . . .

Eliza: So they're telling us a story about how they pass through, I think? Pass through and what happened and . . .

Melissa: I think the part that I remember is that Morro Rock was like the place that you would go be the bridge to the other world for people who have died.

And actually, I was just reading in a book about Native American stories that said many different Native American tribes hold an idea of the Milky Way as being a place where souls are reflected back. And that when you die, you go to the mountaintop, wherever your local mountain top might be, the high spot, and that's your jumping-off point into the next world. But they talked about walking over a rainbow. From Morro Rock over a rainbow into the next world.

And the other part of that trip to the coast that was really moving was - we went to San Luis Obispo and visited the mission.

Eliza: Oh, yeah. Oh my goodness. Memory! It's like you get so much stuff, you forget what else there is. I totally forgot about that.

WF: What are you remembering now?

Eliza: Just, I don't know. Melissa should just keep going.

Melissa: Well, I'm remembering how meaningful it was, and how painful it was, for some of the Native American Elders to even be in the presence of the mission, because they felt like that was where their people had died, had been enslaved. Their story is such a different story from the docent's story. You know, the story that you hear when you go to the mission. So that juxtaposition between the docent telling this story – giving their "everything's loving" tour and "we took good care of our Indians" kind of thing – and the reality of the ancestors who actually were there . . . some of our Native Elders felt viscerally ill from just being in presence of the mission and that story, because of the trauma their families experienced.

Eliza: They would tell us how families were broken up, how people were taking their kids away and cutting their hair. Forcing them to cut their hair, learn English, forget about every thing they learned from their parents. It's sad; it's horrible. I could . . . It's just disgusting. We learned about that. And me not even being Wukchumni, or anything related to native . . .

WF: Are there many of the Wukchumni or other native peoples in the schools that you go to?

Eliza: I have, I have a friend who is Native American. She talks about it all the time, but I don't know what tribe she's from.

Graciela: When I was young, they looked so much like me, I never could tell who was Native American or Mexican.

WF: Right. Yeah. Makes sense as far as like the history goes . . . Could you talk about . . . Tell me the story, as much as you remember, about the field trip that went from the ocean up to the lake or the dam or whatever it was. And what that was about.

Melissa: It was right up here at Kaweah Lake. We started by looking at a big aerial map that showed how much of the valley used to be covered by Tulare Lake.

Eliza: And how much it's not now.

Melissa: And how it's not anymore.

WF: So there were two maps side by side?

Melissa: It was a projection. Yeah and then Steve you might jump in I can't remember everything that we did, but I remembered one really significant things to me was when we went up to the dam and we got to walk through the dam.

Eliza: Is was awesome.

Melissa: And then at the little visitor center up there, I walk in, and there's Darlene with some of the Wukchumni kids, looking at the "historic photos" on display there and saying, "Yeah, there's your Uncle Jojo and Aunti So-and-so." These are their ancestors, and they're talking about them. They're real people, and I just thought "Oh, wow." It really helped to cement from me how much we are on their land, you know. This is their ancestral land, and there are stories all around because of their experience.

Eliza: They tell you so many stories. There's not one that they repeat.

WF: The Wukchumni?

Eliza: Yeah, it's good.

WF: Like what kind of stories?

Eliza: Like, not bad stories. Well, what happened, like how they grew up basically. And how their families migrated. How they would travel through this place.

Melissa: The Kaweah Oaks Preserve?

Eliza: Just how they migrated. Yeah, a lot of cool stuff. Let's see. So our trip up to the mountains – it was pretty good. But maybe like a year before, during the summer, I went to the lake. So when we went during camp, I saw how much the water went down. You could see literally on the walls how the water was going down.

WF: Like as tall as you? Or as tall as a house? Or . . . ?

Eliza: I'm trying to think. So, OK. This is a pool and the walls, right? You know how when the water goes down, it leaves marks on the wall? It looks exactly like that. You can see the water going down, year after year after year to year, so much each year. But for that year, it looked like ten years. No water. So we saw that.

WF: How did that affect you, when you saw that?

Eliza: Like – Dang, we need some rain! Yeah.

What else? We went further up the mountain. We got into, like, waterfalls. But to get to the waterfall and the fast waters, we had to go down a trail. So we went down a trail, and it was

pretty cool, pretty awesome. And there was a whole bunch of other people visiting, too, not just us.

So we went to the water. We saw the marks on the rocks that were the places where they would make acorn mush. A whole bunch of holes, all over the rocks.

And there was . . . Was there rock painting?

Melissa: Yeah! We saw rock paintings.

Eliza: We saw rock paintings

Melissa: The Hospital Rock.

Eliza: Yeah, that was cool.

WF: What were the paintings? Could you tell what they were of?

Eliza: Not really. I couldn't tell unless someone would tell me. One of them was . . . Like was it fertility?

Melissa: Yeah. Last year we went to a very special place that not very many people get to go to. And they talked about the beginning. . .

There's a rock where there's these little holes, little divots, and they said that's where, when you become a woman, you go there the first year and you create your hole. And every year you go back for your women's ceremony. So how deep the hole is shows how many years you've been coming back because every year you make your hole little bit deeper.

When we visited that area, we were just with our community and Lalo and the other Native Americans. We went to the Eagles Cave, and they sang the Eagle Song, and we got to hear about how in the old days, they would come there. The people from The Eagle Clan would come there and prepare and do their dancing. And we saw a cave where the Bear People would be.

But that was last year. The paintings at Hospital Rock, we saw a couple years ago. Up there, the rock paintings are in a much more public, open place. I don't remember what they looked like particularly. I'm sure we had stories that went along with them, but it's a little blurry right now.

Eliza: Once you start, like, remembering or looking back more, you start remembering all of it, right?

Melissa: I think Hospital Rock is called that because it was sort of a healing place.

Eliza: Yeah. I think Lalo was telling us that some women would go there to pray for fertility.

Melissa: Maybe. Darlene can answer those questions.

[**Duncan and Mary Lee** enter the room, and everyone greets them. They join the circle.]

Melissa: So, Duncan was at camp on the year that we talked about water as well.

Eliza was just helping us to remember what that camp was like and what some of the lessons were that we learned, some of the conversations that we had about water and its significance, and why we went where we went.

[**Darlene Franco** enters the room, and another round of greetings ensues. She joins the circle.]

WF (to Duncan and Darlene): So, I've been doing the *Western Friend* magazine around themes and the next issue is going to be "On Water." I remember that you guys did one of the camps about water, so I thought, it'd be really great to try to put something together about what you learned or what you hope for from the camp. And I'm especially interested in the perspective from the point of view of actual campers.

So Duncan, you're on the spot. If you don't mind, if you're willing to be on the spot, to talk about how you got involved in the camp and . . . I mean you, have you gone to the camp?

Duncan: Just once.

WF: Just once. Do you think you'll ever go again?

Duncan: Yeah.

WF: OK. So why?

Duncan: Well my dad here is the farm manager, and so I live here.

Duncan's Dad: Sorry.

Duncan: Well, it was very um . . . Sorry, I just woke up recently. I stayed up late last night.

WF: You don't have to, like, speak in paragraphs or anything. Like, if you had to invite someone else to come to camp, what would you say to them about why they should do it?

Duncan: All right. Well for me, something that it did for me was that it put me little bit out of my comfort zone because I don't like going to places where I don't already know people. But I definitely made some new friends and I had a lot of experiences that I never had before. It was just really cool to get to meet all these people.

WF: And when you say the experiences . . . What kind of pops top of mind?

Duncan: Well. There are a lot of, like, the conversations we had. We got into groups in the evening, and we talked about stuff. That was pretty interesting. Also good was the service project, which was orchestrated by my father here.

Eliza: It was pretty fun. It was, like, the break of the day, just go.

WF: What did you guys do?

Duncan: We planted pollinator plants.

WF: So what's the point of pollinator plants?

Duncan: To attract the pollinators that wouldn't normally be here, because that helps us out a lot, with pollinating the plants, of course. And another thing is that the monarch butterflies are dying out. So having plants that they like around here helps them, because on their migration, they can stop here and rest and eat safely.

Melissa: And it does tie in with the water, too. Because a big part of the project was creating these areas where the soil is covered with native plants that are not so thirsty. And it was also about using drip irrigation. The kids learned how to lay the drip irrigation and establish native plants. In this environment, you have to learn how to live within your means. And our means, as far as water goes, are pretty skimpy.

And, you know, the need for careful irrigation tied into our talks about the dam as well, and how the dam has changed the flow of water and really the whole environment around here in a lot of ways. It prevents a lot of flooding. People around here know about the flooding, especially some of the old-timers. They remembers times when their property flooded. . . . But flood control also prevents necessary flooding and revitalization of the water table.

WF: When Eliza was talking before about some of the field trips to the sites with the paintings, and now when you're talking about the importance of pollinator plants, I'm really getting a sense of . . . I mean, you could read in a science book about that. Or you could read in a history book about that. But having the opportunity to really be in community with people like the Wukchumni who, I mean . . . I'm not exactly sure what the question is here. I mean, I don't know. What do you think about learning things from camp versus from school or whatever?

Eliza: It's boring in school.

Duncan: Yeah. Certainly. I think yeah, camp is much more exciting, interesting. And it probably sticks with you more because of that. You remember it better.

Eliza: Yeah, like you've seen it with your own eyes. You didn't see it in a picture in a book.

Duncan: Yeah.

Graciela: Mary, have you by chance taken a picture of our billboard

WF: Not yet, no.

Graciela: All right. "Water is life." In three languages.

WF: OK. Where is that?

Graciela Martinez Ca: Steven can guide you to it.

WF: That sounds good. I'll go after we're done here...

So what is you sense of the place that Quaker Oaks Farm has in the bigger community? Or the things that you've learned from camp, how are they relevant to . . . kind of the bigger community, like the Central Valley, or California, or . . . ?

Duncan: Well, I think this is a really cool place because in the Valley, there's nothing that, I mean, there is not very much sustainable farming going on, stuff like that. There's the Oaks Preserve right next to us, but there isn't very much else. So I think this is an interesting place for a lot of people who come here. And it has a lot of historical significance, too. With the Wukchumni Village right here, and . . . And Bill Lovett, who yeah, who made this into a place where people can come and gather and just see the land and the significance of sustainability and the other history that happened here.

WF: What's your take on that?

Eliza: Let me think.

WF: Do you ever think about camp when you're out in your life, the rest of your year?

Eliza: Sometimes. Me and my cousin, a lot of times when we talk about something, we're like, "Hey, do you remember that one time at camp?" Yeah, so we do that all the time. Or Joseph does this, he texts me, "Are you going to camp this year?" My friends at camp, they're still my friends for the rest of the year, not just at camp. We stay in touch. Yeah, we follow each other on social media.

WF: I'm still wondering what it felt like, seeing those rock paintings and that kind of . . .

Eliza: It was cool. When they would sing, you felt shivers in your body. Like I don't know if it was just cold, but – just kidding! But yeah, it was pretty cool.

WF: What was going on, do you remember, in your head, when you were feeling those shivers?

Eliza: Well, OK. So was it last year? Well yeah, so we went in the cave. So we would go, so we'd have to climb up. So we went in the cave. Some of us would go further into the cave, like into a little crack, and we would just lie there like, on the stones. And you would look up and there were paintings. I forgot what those paintings were...

Melissa: That was the eagle. Eagle Cave.

Eliza: Yeah. So the painting above was the eagle, and there are some on the side of the wall.

So some of us girls – me, my cousin, Ari – just some of us girls would be in the crack, and then mostly everyone was down here singing. And we would just hear, like, Lalo singing plus the echo of him, too. So, I don't know. It was like, pretty cool. It's pretty cool. Like it's something you have to look at or go to, to understand why it's so cool.

WF: Yeah, that's hard to put in words, I think.

Graciela: Emotions are sometimes hard to describe.

WF: Yeah. Yeah... I'm really interested, Darlene, in your feelings about being with this new camp, that's now not-so-new, and with Quaker Oaks Farm, which is an entity that is existing for a purpose a bigger purpose in the world. And I've got, maybe it's a romantic notion. Or maybe it's true. But my sense of the gift of the Wukchumni is, you know, kind of timeless. I don't know how long the history of the Wukchumni is in this particular location on earth goes, but for the camp and Quaker Oaks Farm to have a connection to that history... I'm almost thinking like an anchor, you know, going down to the center of the earth or something. I don't know. I mean, what would you say about the location of the camp and Quaker Oaks Farm in the social history of this land, and everything that's gone on, and now here's this point of possibility...

Darlene: Yeah. I mean, there's a lot to say. As far as the land here, it's unique that we are able to be here. I don't know if you're real familiar with the history, but you know, we're not federally recognized so we don't have a land base.

WF: When you say "we"...

Darlene: Our tribe. The Wachumni. Even though we are recognized by the State of California, we are not recognized by the federal government as a tribe.

However, my family has been allotted land in Fresno County, which used to be Tulare County, in the Drum Valley area, where my grandfather lived. And so technically, we have roll numbers, which means we are recognized by the federal government as individuals. Anyway, it's just, it's really confusing.

But as far as us living here in Visalia and having a place to have ceremonies . . . We really didn't have a place to have ceremonies anymore, other than our own homes, parks, places like that.

My mother was born at Cutler Ranch, which is along the St. Johns River. It was kind of like a little rancheria. The family lived there, and a lot of native people lived there. My oldest son was born in '84, and while I was pregnant with him, the Lovett family had just acquired this land, and they were starting to farm it. My mom had built a home with Self-Help Enterprises, so she had a relationship with Bill already through that. My sister worked in childcare, the county childcare, so she had a relationship with Beth. And then I went to school with Melissa. So our families are all intertwined. So my mom came out here and asked Bill if we could have a ceremony in the back part of the property, along the creek area. So that's how the relationship started, pretty much. So we started having our sweat lodge ceremonies there.

But before, right after I had my first son, right after I had Lahosai, we decided to have the naming ceremony. Well, it was all still kind of wild. We decided to have the naming ceremony for him, but that hadn't been done in fifty years. Or more. Probably more than that. But it was my mother, the maternal mom, who named him. So we gathered at Cutler Park . . .

WF: Who remembered how to do that if?

Darlene: My mom. Because my mom had that done; she was named that way. I wasn't. And so with Lahosai, we did his.

The same thing with the puberty ceremony – my Grandma had one; my mom had a little bit of one; I didn't have one. But when my daughter became of age, we started to bring that back. So it's kind of like taking a reverse.

But anyway, we had the naming ceremony for Lahosai and his cousin Monique. And so Lahosai didn't have a name for two weeks. He just didn't. We just call him Baby Boy until my mom found the name, or came up with the name, or dreamed the name. So we had that ceremony there at Cutler Park. It's just a public county park, but it was near where my mother was born. And so after that, when he was six weeks old or so, that's when we built our first sweat lodge here.

So ever since then, since '84, we've had the sweat lodge here. So we've just had that relationship here in the land. Back then, it was very woody. There were a lot of oaks, a lot of green. I mean, I remember walking back there and it was nothing but sagebrush. We had to kind of clear the trail, just to even walk through and to build our sweat lodge. So we've seen, over the years, how the water has diminished. Our water has been sent in different directions and not allowed to come down the creek there and recharge the ground, you know. We've seen how that's just affected the land over the years, since '84. When Lahosai was a little and learning to walk, we went back there and there were still a lot of animals. I mean, you could see them all over, you know, a lot of wildlife. I mean, he was chasing a skunk, because he thought it was a cat. But you know, a lot of wildlife was just around, and that was their home too. Now everything is pretty much dried up. If you walk back there now, it's all changed with the lack of water.

So this has been a place that we've raised our kids. We've come here for ceremony, we've been out here. So this is what they know. Some of our teenagers, like Andrew, who's a junior this year . . . He goes, I don't forget we're talking about, but he was at that door, and he goes, "I grew up out there." I go, "You didn't grow up out there." But he goes, "No, I grew up out there. That's all I know." That's all they know as far as our spiritual place. A lot of kids go to church or they go to Friendship House or whatever. This is where our kids come. I mean, they go other places, too, but this is their home, their place where they come. Where they come, and they pick the elderberry to make their clap sticks. Where they come and they pick their sage if they're going to use it for ceremony. So this is where they come, and this is their home.

But to me, it's different because I didn't grow up out here. I didn't learn how to walk out here like my kids did, you know, and so that's a different perspective to get from the young

WF: Yeah.

Darlene: But it's our home now, and so we are part of bringing the camp here. So the first camp was kind of like a work camp, which you know, when we talked about it, is kind of like something that the Quakers did – a work camp. We called it a service-learning camp. And then it evolved into something where we were teaching each other. We taught Wukchumni culture and we learned about Quaker values, and we see how they really intertwine. Everything is so close together. . .

WF: Could you talk about the Wukchumni values and Quaker values and eco-justice? Where do those all come together?

Darlene: I don't even know where you can differentiate taking care of the earth and taking care of the land. We're trying to keep things as natural as possible without using a lot of

things from the outside, like pesticides or whatever. But we're just taking care of the earth and the land, and letting it be as natural as possible.

So, you know, like Bill always used to say, he felt like the land owned him. Like he didn't own the land. And that's like a concept with our people, that the land is here to take care of us and we're here to take care of the land. We have always been told that we are the caretakers of the land where we live. So if I were to go to live in the Philippines – that's where my dad's from – then wherever I live, I need to take care of that land and become in rhythm with the land.

Eliza: Which one of your sons has deer paws?

Darlene: Cornish.

Eliza: Yeah, your son Cornish had told us that. So he has deer paws, right. He told us when you walk on land, walk softly like a deer, don't mess anything up, walk on it with respect. Yeah, that's pretty cool.

Darlene: Yeah, keep things clean.

Eliza: Leave 'em how you found them. Or even better.

Darlene: So that's, you know, the values just were so similar – Wachumni and Quaker – and as you know, we've talked and we've learned from each other. It just coincides. So, let me see. Where was I going?

So anyway, it's been it's been important to the youth to learn from each other. We have our Wukchumni kids, we have the Quaker kids, and we've had a lot of native kids from the urban area in Fresno. Kids who are from different tribes, but they're still native kids. So we've all kind of learned from each other.

And the adults that we have teaching are all different, too. We have a Wukchumni, we have Quakers from all over California that come and share their wisdom. And then we have Steve and Mary who live here, who share their experiences here on the land and conducting everything that goes on. Our kids are learning. Like, they didn't know how to set up irrigation.

You know, I've always said that our people didn't really farm the land. They didn't say, "OK, here we're going to grow a row of corn." Well, some people did. But here we didn't say, "OK. Here we're going to grow some sage." Or "Here we're going to grow our elderberry." It just grew, and we took care of it where it was growing. And we may have moved it, you know, guided it or whatever, pruned it, so it would grow. But we didn't plant. We didn't farm. We

basically let the earth take care of us, and we took care of the earth. So that's gotten a little bit different now because, you know, I have garden boxes, and now we tell plants, "We want you to grow here!" So times have changed.

But you know, our kids make offerings. They thank the strawberry for being here. I thank it for feeding me, and I pray for the strawberry to come back next year and all the years. So, times evolve. We used to just go pick the wild strawberries, the wild blueberries, blackberries, things like that. Yeah, so things have changed.

WF: What do you think about the message of this to the broader community, to the Valley, to California, the country?

Darlene: Of the people coming together?

WF: For learning, and like . . .

Darlene: I just think it's so valuable to learn from each other. We as native people see so much cultural appropriation, so many stereotypes. By teaching our neighbors, teaching the people that we grew up around, helping them have a different understanding, not only will they learn, but they can teach other people, too. And we have some great kids come to this camp, you know, from all over California. So what they learn I'm sure they're teaching in their areas.

WF: If I said that people had a misunderstanding that you helped unravel for them, what would be an example of that?

Darlene: Hmm. I don't know.

Steven (to Duncan): During your time in the camp, did something been unraveled for you in that sense? Misconceptions, or something about people?

WF (to Steven): Or for you maybe?

Steven: Yeah, I don't know. Misconception – I wouldn't say that. I certainly have enjoyed learning about the place, the natural history of the place, and the people of the place. Earlier we were talking about land ethic, and that's sort of the center driver of what we do here. I feel as an entity, that's a really important part of what we do as Quaker Oaks Farm. And you sort of hit on it – the Wukchumni and the native perspective is the anchor of that land ethic, because they're the original inhabitants.

And so drawing from that, within a bigger picture, is very important. I'm very driven by place-based ethics and land ethics and how we take care of the land and the people on it, and how we put ourselves into the world coming from that. A "position of the land" ethic.

Darlene knows we're here as caretakers. But we're only here in a section of time, right? We've inherited this place, and we're going to give it over at some point. So we have to maintain that land ethic, and do the best we can with the resources that we have and the understanding that we have. And we have to try to pull understanding from long ago, about how the land was taken care of and *not* taken care of, and moving it into a direction that's more conducive to what it was hundreds of years ago, like Darlene was saying.

Ultimately, it would be nice not to have to till the land, nice to allow the land to do what it does – the plants and the animals and the soil and all that. It would be nice to be nurturing it to allow it to become itself to full realization. We're trying to move in that direction, move that needle. So future caretakers can understand more about moving it back toward that direction.

Mary Lee: Which is the importance of the youth. If they're learning and invested in the land, then they will continue to care-take the land.

I wanted to say something about awareness, instead of changing misconceptions. What I've noticed is building awareness and how that ripples out. Sometimes when I'm driving through town, I'll see something like . . . I went up I went to Exeter the other day, and on the side of a building, there was a picture of a Native American on a horse, and then there's a piece of fruit, which made me think, "You know, if I was a Native American, and that was my cultural identity, what would I think about that?" You know, how would I feel about that? So now, for me, I seem to notice more things that make me think, "Oh, that really bothers me," or "That doesn't seem right . . ." But it's like Darlene said, it's so embedded in our culture. So I've been trying to speak up when I see somebody doing something, not in a negative way, but just to build awareness for other people, too. For example, there's a whole thing about sage right now. There's a lot of sage that's being marketed . . .

WF: You used the expression "cultural misappropriation" or "cultural appropriation."

Darlene: A lot of people use sage for medicine. A lot of people. It's kind of, I don't know, new age. A lot of people . . .

WF: Yeah, smudging.

Darlene: Yeah, smudging. And you know, the way I was taught is that when you use medicine like that, you're supposed to be in a good state of mind when you're gathering. Make your offerings and you gather it in the good way, so that when it's used as a medicine, it will help heal.

My husband and I were picking sage one time in Santa Barbara County. We went out there with some friends who had taken us to one of their gathering spots, and we'd seen truck coming out from the place. There were these big old garbage bags in the back of the truck,

and we looked, and it was sage – yeah, and roots. Everything just pulled out, the whole plants.

We stopped and we talked to him. He was going to go sell it. And you know, we tried to talk sense into him. But of course it didn't go anywhere. That's what people do when they're selling like that. I mean, I was down in LA in the Garment District, where everything's cheaper. And they had these big old bundles of sage that they were selling, and I was like in shock. I tried to get them to take it out, but they wouldn't. Their attitude was, "I got it. I'm selling it. I need to make money. And it's not against the law." But it's against moral ethics.

So like Graciela is always asking me for sage, and I'll give her a sage because she uses it in a right way. But we shouldn't buy it, because you never know where it came from, who gathered it, how they gathered it, what they were thinking when they gathered it.

WF: I wouldn't think about that...

Darlene: Yeah, so well, just getting back to what you asked me about something that we may have taught, or maybe realization had come... One of the things at the camp is that everybody is equal. We don't know if somebody is rich or financially poor or whatever, because all the kids are equal and they're friends. They just do the same things together, and there's no, I guess, competition. Like you go to a regular school, and there's statuses. I think that one of the good things about camp is that the people that come, the Quaker kids that come, and the adults, are all pretty humble. Pretty humble and down-to-earth. But I think one of the realizations that some of them didn't have before is that they had white privilege. They didn't know because they live in a world that is humble with everybody. But getting to know some of our campers and what they're going through, it helped them see that they had white privilege. And so I think that that's one example of realization and growth – to realize that, yeah, white privilege is there.

WF: You don't know what you don't know.

Darlene: You don't know. So I think that was kind of like pretty eye-opening. But then also, like going to some of the sites and feeling what you're feeling there. Some people, some of our kids have never felt that before.

This past year, we went to Rocky Hill. A lot of our sacred paintings are there, sacred caves are there, the Eagle Caves that I was telling about before. There are also some doctoring caves there, which people are going to feel a lot if they go there. So it took me awhile to agree to take people up there. Not that I didn't trust people, but it's like, it's very sacred to me, very close to my heart. I don't just take people up there. Although you can buy a reservation for a camp where they'll take you through all the caves, you know, because we don't own them. But some people can go up there that aren't...

WF: It's a private experience.

Darlene: Yeah. So when I finally said, "yeah" – and I asked elders and they said "yeah" – it's a good thing, because we need to teach young people, like these guys here. Because then they will know the respect; they will feel it. And if they do take anybody else up there, they're going to express that this is a very special place. This is not just a place to come look at rock paintings. So that's why it's important to teach these young people, who are going to hopefully teach other people how to be respectful at these places.

So this last year of camp, in 2018, we focused on the earth. So we were doing the planting, and we took them to the rock paintings. The year before that, in 2017, we were focusing on the water and the drought and the effects that it had out here on this land, but also the effects in the valley. So we talked about Tulare Lake. We taught them about Tulare Lake.

Tulare Lake is not there anymore. And the reason is that, with the dams, the river's water just doesn't go there anymore. Everything is dammed up and moved for farming, pretty much all for farming. So we took them up to the dam. We got to go underneath the dam. They got to see how it works and what's going on. So, you know, we talked a lot about the water in this Valley. And so you don't hear that in school.

WF: Is there something specific? I'm sure there is something specific. What would you say about the, you know, caring for the land, the land caring for us. That sort of relationship that we need to get back to in terms of water. Caring for water, water caring for us. Is there a particular angle on water that . . . ?

Darlene: Well, for instance, Tulare Lake – people lived there. People lived on the lake. That was where they fished. That's where they gathered the tules. That's where, you know, things that were there aren't there anymore. There is a song that I shared at the camp that we call the Tulare Lake song. But it's not a old old, old song. It's an old song, but not ancient. Because it's talking about: Where is the lake? Where am I going to live now?

WF: Oh, wow.

Darlene: So it's a really sad song, but it's very touching. But that's what the people started to sing, because lake wasn't there anymore. And yeah, it would always sometimes come and go, depending on the water, but then it was no longer there at all. And so that's just very emotional when you talk about the people who lived there, the people who fished there. And now nothing. So that's one thing that affects us.

Of course, when we teach the kids we talked about the four elements of life – the earth, the fire, the air, and the water – we teach that if we didn't have any one of those things, we wouldn't be able to exist. So water is very important. Water is life. We wouldn't be able to sustain without water.

Steven: I just want to interject here that all four of those elements, when you look at this place and this time, now, they're being assaulted tremendously. And this part of the country and the world is probably one of the epicenters of degradation of all four of those elements. And so there's an imperative on us here to teach or express the importance of those and how to maintain those or how to keep those viable . . .

WF: Say more about this being an epicenter of the destruction.

Steven: Well, if you take water . . . Obviously in California we have a drought cycle, which is native to the natural environment. But if you dam the water, there's this power structure that doesn't allow the natural cycles. Then, you know, the onslaught of industrial agriculture is a major problem for water – nitrates being leached, nutrients, other things being leached into the water, pesticides, herbicides, other industrial chemicals that they use in agriculture. And they work together – the chemicals and the power structure. The power structure says who has, who buys, who owns the water, gives them a false sense of ownership. That sense of ownership allows them to pollute it if they feel like it.

And that sense of ownership applies to the other elements as well. I mean, talk about the land and the soil. And if you look at our air – we are in one of the worst air quality districts in the United States. Major effects on humans. They just came out with a study about developmental problems linked with air quality.

WF: Is this because of the spraying of pesticides?

Steven: You also have dust, and the way that air travel flows through the Valley. The Valley is sort of like a basket. and we're at the end of that basket. So we sort of get hit with all of the stacking of pollutants coming down. Carbon emissions and stuff like that.

You know, there are a lot of environmental justice groups here, and that's because there is an extreme need here. And while we're not necessarily an environmental justice organization, I think we're a wonderful bridge of that. Because we're not only saying, "No, this is wrong" – which a lot of the environmental justice groups are saying, and rightfully so – but we're also on the side with that positive message, right? We're like, "Yeah, this isn't a proper way to utilize these elements or to abuse these elements. Here's another way. Let's look at these in the more positive light." The question is: How can we do something in a right way? How can we be part of them and be within that system wholeheartedly, and try to get them to work with us as opposed to against us.

Melissa: So that's where the workshops Steve is doing here are so important. Steve did an incredible workshop, with demonstrations, about how you can grow without pesticides, which was very well attended.

WF: Yeah, and Darlene talking about not planting in rows . . .

Steven: Ultimately, that is our hope, right? Ultimately, our hope is to utilize the agriculture, but go more into a way that is a food forest and a way that is more natural. And it still may be in rows. But do you have to till the soil all the time? No. Can you have more permanent plantings around? Yeah. You know by not having a sterile palette, by having something that's more of a natural palette on the land, then you're sort of moving in that direction. You're sort of moving in the direction of allowing, habitat for many different animals, whether they're insect animals, whether they're in vertebrates, whether they're soil inhabitants, whether they're fauna . . .

WF: Maybe someday skunks . . .

Steven: There are skunks here, still.

WF: I wanted to ask the younger people, because some of the what the Wukchumni have been sharing with the camp and with us has been their kind of religious outlook . . . Maybe this is an unfair question, but I wonder if you've had some sense, with songs or with a sweat or whatever, some sense of connection with native religion . . .

Duncan: Well, we went to their spring ceremony one year. And it was the only one I've ever attended. Well, I don't know. How am I going to word this? . . .

Eliza: I can talk first. So when we went to the ceremony, there was a certain way you had to walk in. You had to turn in a circle, was it left?

Melissa: To go backwards, counterclockwise. Going back in time.

Eliza: Yeah, and they would smudge you with sage, so you could only walk one way in the circle and only exit one way. So we went in, and we all sat along the circle. And that's when the dancers came out. They danced. I'm not sure what happened after that. Although Wukchumni family members were there. Everybody was pretty cool. What else did we do?

Duncan: They did the naming ceremony, right?

Eliza: And for who?

Darlene: Babies. I'm not sure which ones. We have them all the time.

WF: How did that affect you?

Duncan: Something that I've really thought was interesting is how they go to a traditional church a lot, but they also still come out to the land and do those ceremonies. And that really was interesting to me – how they just did that, both together and bridge.

Darlene: Yeah, that's true, because we do have a lot of families who practice Catholicism. We use both, the best of both. My grandmother, for instance, was raised very traditionally, but then over the years, she was just a very sharing person, and she would talk to anybody. Anybody who came to her door, missionaries, whatever, she was friends with them. "Come on in!" or "Come out to my garden!" She would talk to them, would go to their church with them. She went to all the churches around where she lived. So she just knew everybody and anybody. She was always willing to share. She knew how to take the best from all the worlds.

Our young kids, they go to catechism and then they come out here and participate in the ceremonies. This is their way, too. So they know how, just like you said, how to bridge the different cultures.

And I'm very happy to hear Eliza talk about the protocols of the ceremonies, because that's very important. You don't always remember on your first time. So the more you come out, the more it's going to become ingrained. This is the way you do things. Or you can ask, because all of our kids know them, or the adults. The same thing with the protocols at Rocky Hill. We took them to make the offering at the greeting rock, so there were a lot of protocols that the young kids were exposed to, that maybe they never had the opportunity before.

WF: What is the importance of those? What is the importance of the protocols?

Darlene: It's just being respectful. Being respectful and letting the spirits of the land know we're here and why we're here.

WF: Respect seems to be like a lynchpin in all of this.

Darlene: Yeah. It is in our ways. I also find that with the Quakers. Being respectful of each other and the land and everything. The water. So that's one of the things that just makes it very easy to work together.

Melissa: A couple of things have evolved over the course of camp that I think reflect that. There is for me, personally, the very deep, powerful, very moving experience that I have had in the sweat ceremony of feeling connected with earth and with all. And really, my first time in the sweat in 2013 transformed my idea of who I was here and why I was here on the land and what was important about the land. It was a transformative experience for me and continues to be very moving to me. Anytime I hear the songs, I often cry. They just move me incredibly deeply, so there's that deep space.

But also every morning at the camp, we gather around the campfire, and we sing a prayer, and we invite the young people to offer their prayers. And we do the little offering, and we respect our elders and invite our elders to go eat first. Those are some of the kinds of

traditions that the Wukchimni have taught us Quakers, which are very simple to integrate into your life and create a sense of "Let's start off in a good way." And I know lots of Quakers do a little meditation first thing in the morning, but this is sort of a communal way of beginning the day in a good way. And then at the end of the day, usually we end with a campfire activity as well.

The other thing I wanted to say with regard to water is again on a very simple, individual level. The first year of camp, we became aware that some of the kids, especially the kids from Fresno, didn't feel like it was safe to drink the water. They wouldn't drink the tap water. They were asking us to buy these plastic bottles of water. We wanted them to be well and healthy, but it made me sick to think about buying those plastic bottles of water. So during the water camp, we every kid got a water bottle, and they got to decorate it, and we taught them about why to use a reusable water bottle instead of a single-use water bottle. We learned to ask where our water comes from. Well, this water here comes from the ground, the well, and we've tested it, and it's safe, and you can drink this water. It tastes different than your Fresno water, because it doesn't have the chlorine and all that other stuff in it. I don't know that we convinced everybody. We had a heck of a time keeping track of those dang water bottles. But we don't buy single-use water bottles for camp anymore. And every year kids gets a water bottle. And we're working on ways to make straps on them, or other things, so they're easier to keep track of.

Eliza: Some kids were trying like braiding strings and then wrapping them... I think Lily was braiding her string.

Melissa: So, you know, that's just a very simple thing, but if they carry that home for the rest of their lives, if they share that with their friends, then we eliminate a few of the millions of plastic water bottles that are polluting our world. Hallelujah, you know,

WF: So, any last thoughts?

Darlene: Well, one thing, when you're asking Steven about the four elements, one thing that we're going to be talking about this year is fire. And you know, with all the fires in California, I wouldn't be surprised if it happens here. Hopefully it doesn't. But because there is no ground water here like it used to be, if a fire were to go through here, there's a lot of dry stuff to burn. And the old ways that we used to follow were to have controlled fires, controlled burns. There's a lot of overgrowth now. That's why the fires are just going crazy. But you know, the earth needs to cleanse. I remember my grandma, when we would go out and pick basket materials. She would burn areas, or she would prune areas, or sometimes, even if it was just Caltrans coming through and cutting everything down, she was so excited to go out there, because she goes, "Oh, they're going to come up so straight and strong!" And you know, the fire is so sacred and the fire is so cleansing. And it's not . . .

I know it was a lot of devastation with a lot of the fires, but you have to look at what comes after the fire.

So anyway, that's terrible when you look at it, that we haven't been allowed to burn. There hasn't been enough fire. And so what Melissa was talking about, the fire in the morning, the fire at night, it's very sacred to have the fire there for everybody to go make offerings at any time of the day. It's there. So fire's very important too.

[Long pause.]

WF: Well, thank you, everyone.

Melissa: Especially thank you to Eliza and Duncan, for being willing to speak out and represent your co-campers.

