

SUMMARY OF FELLOWSHIP OF PREPARATIONARATION MAKERS INTERVIEW

WITH LAURA RICCARDI LYVERS

JANUARY 2019

PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY RESPONSES –

How long have you been making preparations?

I've been playing around with them since 1999, when I first started helping Steve Storch make Barrel Compost. But I feel I really started making preparations in 2001 when I went to my first JPI preparation making workshop.

Do you currently make the preparations as an individual, a group, or as part of an organization?

Mostly I make the preparations with a group of folks that I invite to an open-house style preparation making event. If no one shows, then I would make them as an individual, but there is always a bunch of folks that come.

I carry the responsibility of preparation making myself, and I do quite a bit of work with the preparations as an individual, including tapping out horns, digging up preparations and preparing them for storage, caring for preparations in storage, harvesting, drying and storing the preparation plants. I often gather manure by myself.

Please describe the location where you make the preparations (climate, soils, landscape).

Beautiful Kentucky soil. Criter-Silt Loam soil. 48-58" of rain/year. HOT summers and cold-ish winters; lovely springs and falls.

Which preparations do you make and on average how much of each?

500-507. Amounts vary, but as a trend I have been making less of everything. I used to make so much of each compost preparation plus horn preparations. I used to bury over 1.000 horns and lots of compost preparations. Now I only bury between 350-450 horns (in the last 3 years I've done 500 horns or less) for the BD#500.

I have so much horn silica from burying too many horns previous years, so now I just reactivate a previous year's 501 and put down around 25 or so horns. I also make new sometimes when I want to experiment with new silicas.

This year I put down just ten large sausages (1.25 pounds of chamomile blossoms); four medium/small dandelion pouches (1.5 pounds of blossoms); three skulls and a small pit of nettle.

I usually make three to five bladders of 502, but I didn't get to it this year. (First time I ever didn't make one of the preparations since I started making them!)

How do you obtain preparation making ingredients?

I grow and wildcraft the herbs. I have cows at the home farm, and also at the farm where I make the preparations -- Foxhollow Farm -- so we always have intestines, mesentery, skulls, and manure.

Deer are plentiful here and so are hunters, so we have plenty of bladders. (Thanks guys!). I get horns from Brian Wickert. (Thanks Brian!) I have bought giant crystals in the past, as well as sourcing local geodes to crush, and have bought random quartz crystals. I have also bought powdered silica of different kinds, such as potter's silica at different meshes and mica as an experiment. My preparation making buddy Dave gave me a bunch of powdered quartz.

Do you distribute the preparations to others?

I do, to folks that I am somehow connected with. I make preparations on and for Foxhollow Farm and also for Malibu Compost, Avena Botanicals (Maine), Elixir Farm (Missouri), Green Acres (where my buddy Dave is farming; he comes to help with preparation making and we trade preparations for his labor of love), and, depending on the year, up to twenty or so other farms, gardens and individuals. I have a self-serve preparation station at Foxhollow and people sometimes come by and get preparations. Sometimes people I don't know get preparations that way.

Do you sell preparations?

Yes, these are mostly sales. Folks who come help make preparations are welcome to take home what they need or come get them later.

What I charge depends on how much (bulk) quantity and/or what someone can afford. As much as \$9.75/unit of Preparation 500 and \$4/unit compost preparations. I do a large bulk discount for some folks that brings prices down to 60% of those unit prices (so 40% "off"). I give away a lot of preparations, too. I find that I don't want to charge friends of ours who are growing vegetables for a living who want to use the preparations, so I've given away lots of compost preparations and horn preparations this way, as well as just to folks who are interested in trying them. I also give them away to folks who are doing beautiful unpaid work with the land or trees or the elemental beings.

Who have been your primary mentors in learning how to make, store, and apply the preparations?

Hugh Courtney was my first true teacher. I am so grateful for this infusion. I got to live life as a preparation maker while living with Hugh at JPI. Precious years. I've learned from my own experience as much as anything on storage, but Hugh taught me the basics.

I refuse to call my husband a mentor! But he has influenced my preparation making and especially how to apply them to crops and pastures. Trial and error with experienced older farm guys (Steve Rutledge, John Smith and David Ragsdale, all former cattlemen at Foxhollow) mentored me in large scale field applications and stirs.

Would you be comfortable sharing contact information of other preparation makers in your area?

I think I know them all, but of course!

AUDIO INTERVIEW JANUARY 2019 –

This is Brian Wickert and Laura Riccardi on January 17, 2019. Pat Frazier is also on the call.

Good morning Laura.

Good morning!

All right. First question is, *what was the doorway that led you to biodynamic agriculture?*

LRL: The doorway was a sort of a natural extension of what I had been always drawn to as a young adult. In my late teens and then definitely once I entered college -- actually when I was young, really young, like a kid -- I was very drawn to Native American culture, although it had never been presented to me. I cannot remember where I ever even saw it, just the basic kid references. I had a picture on my wall as a kid of probably something that should have never been photographed, but it was a scene in Taos, New Mexico of entering a lodge. I remember being so young I could not explain to my parents why I felt the way I did, and the questions I had could not be communicated. But, when I was a young adult, these things were very natural. As common as life going to school were metaphysical ideas and concepts. In my college years, I was drawn to studying metaphysics and Eastern spirituality. For me, biodynamics is a way to engage with the spiritual world that became all-encompassing.

BW: What years were you in college?

LRL: 1992 to 1997.

BW: Okay. That just gives a context of what was going on in the country and in the metaphysical world.

LRL: I had a very strong teacher who was an old family friend that surfaced in my life when I was in my first year of college. I had never known him before that. I was nineteen years old and I came home from college and I actually met him on a compost pile. He was consulting for a company called Long Island Compost and my mom said, "Oh, you have to meet my friend Jeff Frank. I just met him at a party, or re-met him, and he is into all the things you are into. He is an

environmentalist just like you.” My mom reduced everything to environmentalism which was adorable and fine. So, I met Jeff on a compost pile. That was just a relationship that was very unique in my life. He passed away a few years ago, but he had a school on Long Island. It was probably in its tenth year when I met him, so it was established in the way that he did things. He was mostly speaking to horticulturalists on Long Island, you know, landscapers, arborists, people working with the earth. It was never very formal, but he would teach people in two-day courses what was essentially a metaphysical, organic approach to horticulture, but he did not say the word metaphysical. I took the course right away. The last session in the two-day course, which he said was the culmination, the most significant thing that could be offered. It was on biodynamics. That was the very first time I heard about “ashing,” That was what the presentation was on. So, that was the first place I heard biodynamics and because it came from such a trusted family friend and my spiritual teacher at that time, I instantly embraced it.

BW: Was Steve Storch around at that time?

LRL: Yup.

BW: So. did he know Jeff Frank then?

Oh yeah, they are from the Hamptons. Steve, Florence Rewinsky, there is a whole little enclave of people out there in the Hamptons working organically, biodynamically, a pretty strong community, and Jeff Frank was a part of that. He was really at the center of it. He was really moving. There were several hundred people who completed the course and then continued to become what was called a “Green Gorilla” when you graduated his courses. It really kind of cemented the community in its work together out there. But yeah, Storch was a big part of my early life with biodynamics, too.

BW: Did the certificate say Green Gorilla?

LRL: There was no certificate, he just sort of waved a wand over you. But when you graduated you received this awesome green hat that had stitched on it in white, “Green Gorilla” and so that is how you identified each other in the world.

BW: All right, so you learned about biodynamics there. ***What was your next step then to get to biodynamics from there?***

LRL: That process with the school and Jeff trickled in over the years. I became a teacher there the next year, teaching human nutrition and relating it to what we were learning about how to tend to the earth naturally, organically. So, then, I was pretty included in a part of that inner world with these other teachers. I came out of college where I studied ecology and, after I graduated, I returned home and started a market garden with my best friend who had interned at a vegetable farm in Oregon that is very close to Wali’s farm. She had met biodynamics out in Oregon and we both wound up being back home at the same time. I came back to New York because my grandfather was dying, and I wanted to be with my family. I was in between things; I had graduated and expected to go on to study medicinal herbs. But I came home, and we started this market garden together and, naturally, I was going to do biodynamics right off the bat or

include that in my practice. That is when I met Steve Storch and I volunteered to go work with him once a week while I was growing the garden. I learned hands-on stuff and made barrel compost and stirred. I started making preparations with him and then I went to the Pfeiffer Center, with Gunther, to do the yearlong biodynamic training course. From there I went with Florence in 2001 down to JPI to do a preparation making workshop with Hugh. We went to the five-day fall workshop, and this was the real stepping into this world that I never left. I went to this workshop with Hugh and, at the end of the workshop, I asked him if he needed any help. I had one of those lifetime moments where you just say, “I didn’t really know what I was coming to but now that I am here I cannot leave.” and I asked Hugh, “Would you need any help here?” He said, “Yeah, I can give you a job, but I cannot pay you.” And I said, “That will do.” I came back down just a couple weeks later and lived at JPI for three and a half years. So that workshop was the toe in the water to the full submersion.

BW: That is wonderful. That is wonderful. So, what was the attraction to making preparations, *what brought you to making preparations?*

I saw that question in the pre-interview packet, and my immediate response is the only response that keeps coming to me over the days that I have thought about it. It is unexplainable because it was just the most natural thing. There was not even a big wow factor, it was so natural to me that this is what I am doing, this is what I am going to do, this is my world. Of course, it is the mystery and the intrigue of what we are really doing and working with, but even that came a little bit later. It was just this draw. At the Fall JPI workshop we slaughtered the cow. I had never been around a cow before, not a living cow, no cows in my life. So, the first cow I met we slaughtered and dismembered and used the parts. It was partly the draw to the animal, to see this animal in its natural state up at the barn and then to see it from the inside, the innards glowing outwardly, the beauty of removing the hide. I was so taken by this and it was all so beautiful to me. That was probably the most striking draw was to get to work with the animal in this way. Now that I am saying it out loud I realize that is kind of funny because from there I started actually working with animals, with cows. But that was my first meeting of the animal.

BW: That is an incredible thing to say, the first cow I met we slaughtered and dismembered, and it was the most important experience of my life up to that point.

LRL: Yeah, and not realizing until this very moment that that was the beginning of my work with cows which are really the center of my life. I revolve my life around my little dairy herd and working with my pastures and those at Foxhollow Farm, for their cows.

BW: That is wonderful. So, *how has your preparation making changed over the years, what insights have you come to as your preparation making has evolved?*

I was completely under the tutelage of Hugh Courtney -- I love that word, and whenever I think of him and this experience that is how I say it -- for those three and a half years. During that time there was no personal exploration with how to make the preparations. I was shown how to make the preparations and then I made them that way for JPI, for those years. When I left JPI and began making preparations on my own, I never considered, for years, doing it differently or looking at it differently, with one exception: I never liked that we would “screen” the horn

manure through a ¼” screen as a final step after harvesting the 500. And that is something I changed as soon as I started making my own. But mostly, I just did what I was taught, and the preparations were beautiful. I would not have changed anything out of a desire for different results. It is just that after several years of making the preparations the way I was taught, I started having my own thinking around it. It was a very strong influence, as you might imagine, living and working with Hugh for those years and it took several -- maybe four years or more -- before I started looking at it a little bit differently. There are little tiny nuances that I do out of my own self, out of my own way, but primarily I still do it the same way I was taught. There are a few variations, especially how I store the 500, and, now I am working with the oak bark preparation a little bit differently, but all the foundational stuff is the same as what I learned from Hugh. I began my own discovery process around the forces at play and the spiritual influences behind nature, and that was what opened up for me after several years after my training, more than technique. It is my relationship with the cycle of the year and the inquiry into spiritual forces and beings revealed in preparation making that has “evolved.”

BW: What were your insights into the storage of 500?

LRL: There are a couple of things with the horn manure. The first thing with the horn manure is the grazing cow. I studied grassland ecology in college and my work today is around pastures and grazing. Once I got to Foxhollow, which was a few years after leaving JPI, the center of my work became doing the biodynamic practices for this grass-fed beef farm. As a starting point, this would be a distinction of my own work, my own insights. How things have changed in my preparation making is that the manure matters tremendously to me. In the past when I worked at JPI, we had the cows and they were manure cows. They were not beef cows, they were not dairy cows, their purpose was to create manure so we could make 500 and to give us the organs for the preparations. There was no emphasis or focus or knowledge on grazing, so they were just out there in the fields. We would switch them from one side of the farm to the other once a year and there was no management with the grass.

It was a relatively poor forage situation and, speaking with a consultant in her field, she said, “You know, if these cows exist for manure, I do not necessarily suggest that you spend a lot of money and time to increase the productivity or the health of the pastures.” I do not see this as a criticism of the situation, it was just a reality.

The huge change in my work was that I wanted to collect the best manure from the healthiest cows from the best grass system I could engage with, and so that became the foundation of my preparation work. The same with the animal organs that I would utilize once a year from the herd. That is a big difference, and, to this day, I really like the timing of the preparation making around when the weather and the grasses themselves have made that shift from summer into autumn. I am looking for the peak moment in autumn when the animals are grazing to collect the manure. Then I do other things too. There are even certain fields I feel very strongly about on the farm and I prefer that the herd that I am collecting from be in one of those fields over others. I often have done some kind of spray, particularly a silica spray on the grass within, you know, a couple of weeks of making the horn manure and other preparations. I like having the cows to consume the grass that has recently had silica applied to it from the fall application. There is a lot of emphasis on the front end before actually collecting the manure. That is a big change for me.

BW: So, what would be the fall things you are looking for in the best grass, just a couple of things that you would look for? Help me decide if I am walking with you, what the best grass would look like and what are the considerations.

LRL: That the field itself is a strong field, meaning that there is good coverage with forages and less weeds, less true weeds. A lot of those plants that a layperson would call a weed I would definitely consider a forb, a beneficial forage for the animal. So, I should not even say just grass, but that the field is demonstrating health in its diversity and in the ground coverage, and the stage of the grass. In Kentucky, in the summer, we have our warm season grasses that dominate which are wonderful. Johnson grass, crabgrass are my two favorites. Then, come autumn, there is the shift back to the cool season grasses, so I usually wait until the end of October to do my preparation making -- mid to end of October when those cool season grasses have not only come back and established but have good growth on them. I am not looking for a certain height of the grass, but we would not turn animals back into a field that has not properly reestablished itself. So, say, if it is primarily fescue and orchard grass and clover in the field, the grasses are a couple of feet high -- a foot and a half high or two and a half feet high. It does not matter as long as they properly reestablish and have nice blades of grass for that animal to come through and happily devour.

That is the other thing, to see the contentment of the animal as they are grazing through the field compared to having to search and pick, take a few bites, then walk and take a few bites. To me the latter is not a "content" grazing situation. When they put their head down and they are grazing, and they just never stop grazing. They are content, they are finding what they need with every step they take. Those are some of the things that I look for. You can just look out onto a field -- it is not like a scientific kind of equation, but just observing the contentment of the animal, which also shows itself in the manure. I will see sometimes there are animals that have runnier manure, there can be naturally looser manure at that time of year if the growth is lush. The grasses have sweetened, they are established cool season grasses with good regrowth on them, but the manures might be on the looser side, maybe when there is a tremendous amount of clover like there was last year, just an enormous clover population, which is wonderful, but it does produce a looser manure. Then I feed a little bit of hay for a couple of days before collecting to just physically stiffen it up and help balance the gut of the animal before collecting manure there.

The main thing is that the horn manure that I dig in the spring, I do not use until the following year, so I am keeping it in storage for an entire year. I let the manure stay in storage for an extra year, because I found that it produces this incredibly beautiful, rich consistency after being stored. For me, it really felt the most finished after an entire year in storage. When I make the 500, I am putting compost preparations into a few horns in the pit as a gesture, and I think of it as a release of those forces in the process of the horn manure being made. This is the fourth year I believe I have done this. It has the compost preparations in the pit within seven horns. Then, when I tap them out, I tap them into their crocks and then each crock becomes like a compost pile that gets "prepped" right away with all the compost preparations. Then they get a follow up preparation application within a few months. No turning, I do not turn it, I just reinsert the preparations. So, it is really not until the spring of the following year -- maybe just ten months. We are now using this finished 500 that has this incredible richness, this darkness, and it literally

reduces by half in volume. I literally lose half of my preparation yield, but I believe that we can then use smaller concentrations and that is what we are starting to do in the field sprays.

The other thing that I have been doing is that I have been “sweating” the horns when I take them out of the ground. This is something that Matias [Baker] shared with me. I would sometimes dig my horns and be unsatisfied with the results, it would be a mixed kind of bag. Every year it was different -- there could be 20% that were not finished or even up to 30 or 40%, meaning they still had some amount of green. If I have a horn that I dig up that is totally green, I do not bother with it, I just compost it. When I dig up a horn that has traces of green or still has an unfinished smell, what I was taught to do at JPI is to rebury them, but it is not realistic in my work to do that now. So, Matias shared with me an alchemical process of sweating, something to bring it to the next level or to finish it. I take all of the horns out of the pit in one day, then I bring them back to my home where I have my own little workshop. I have them in crates inside black plastic bags and it is May, so it’s balmy here, moist and warm. I usually leave them for at least a few days and sometimes a few weeks, and then I start tapping them out. What I find is that I am thrilled at the uniformity and the result of the preparation, whereas when I am digging them out of the pit I am like, “This is all right, oh this one is nice, this one is all right.” As I continue to tap out, it stretches over time and sometimes it will be another two weeks before the last 50 are tapped out. I find that they get increasingly more beautiful looking, like the ideal of how we have been taught to look at the formation of molds, of the colors on the horn, the inside, the whites that come up -- all of the classic images from a horn that is working well. Those things show up much more dramatically the longer I “sweat” the horns. I do not know if there is an upper limit to that -- I do not let it linger on and on -- but I would say, even up to a month after digging the horns it just keeps getting better, the look of the horn and the moisture content and the feel of it, what we identify as that humus-ey kind of smell of the horn manure. So, those are some specifics with the horn manure that I have come upon from my own work.

BW: Now, when you say they are more beautiful, are the reds and the pinks and the yellows and then the white fungus, all of that is just more alive after being sweated, is that what you are referring to?

LRL: Yes, well that is on the horn itself.

BW: Right, on the outside...

LRL: Yes. Although, I do not get many reds, I get the pinks and the yellows and the whites. Then the horn manure itself is beautiful. It is the visual and the feel and even the smell register as perfectly transformed or beautifully transformed 500. But it is all sensorial. I have not done any testing to correlate my senses with what might be reality.

BW: So, the sweating, you just dig them out, put them in an outbuilding, put them in crates, put them in plastic bags and just let them sit for a few days to a couple of weeks before you start to tap them out. And you find that that really helps them finish and then also the outside continues to develop.

LRL: The horn shows so much vitality at that point.

BW: Do you do all the cow horns, or just the ones that are not finished?

LRL: I do them all this way, so I do not even sort them anymore. That is part of what I had to avoid doing because it is just not practical to sort them. For me to rebury them, to go through them. I did that for years, I would sort them and the ones that were not totally finished or that I was not happy with, I would put them back in the ground. I lost so much preparation that way so that I stopped doing that.

Just to say part of my situation is that where I am making preparations at Foxhollow Farm is 1.5 hours from the farm I live on. I make the preparations for Foxhollow and I make them for a few other folks, too. That is my little business. But I do not live at Foxhollow anymore, and at the home farm I have cows and gardens and I find it is impossible to be there to monitor the reburied pit properly. In the first years of living away from my horn pit, I reburied the unfinished horns and even with my best efforts I would lose a sometimes-significant quantity of final preparation because the ground had dried out too much in between visits, and the 500 would be dry as a cracker. The soil can be like that here in Kentucky, going from spring to late spring. And I definitely want to get them out of the ground before summer, before the cosmic forces has shifted into what we experience as summer. Now, if the pit was in my backyard, maybe I would still bury the unfinished horns back into the ground, but now that I have gone through this process, I find the results are just striking, Yes, I am really happy with this process.

BW: You said you lose half of the volume in storage, could you go back and clarify that a little bit.

LRL: Yeah, it condenses. It might also just be a factor of time. One thing I do not do with the preparations is that I do not fluff them, I do not screen them. I never liked that. It felt like I was putting it through a negative frequency of some kind by putting it through a metal screen. I might add a little bit of water very infrequently to the compost preparations, but I essentially do not fluff or remoisten my preparations as a general practice. So, over that ten months from the time the 500 comes out in May until the time we first use it the next March or April, it has literally reduced in the crocks from coming above the upper lip to almost halfway down in the crock. So, it has really condensed. These are twenty-gallon crocks that I use, and they are handmade. One of the owners is a potter and had a massive kiln so he could make these huge crocks for me for the 500.

BW: You mentioned that you put the compost preparations in six cow horns that you put in your pit?

LRL: I used to put a little bit of silica in but now I just do the compost preparations and put it in the horns. We stuff all the horns and then, somewhere towards the end, we take six horns and put in a little bit of the fresh manure. Then, horn number one, I will put in a few teaspoons of the yarrow preparation and then I will put a little more manure, then I will put a few teaspoons of yarrow and then I will finish it with manure. I do the second horn this way with the chamomile preparation, and all of the compost preparations like that through valerian. Then they are buried in the pit with the rest of the horns.

BW: Are they marked?

LRL: They are marked so that when we go to bury the horns in the pit we can place these compost prepped horns throughout the pit.

BW: So, when you do these compost pile “preparationed” cow horns, you put manure in, put several teaspoons of the compost preparation, then put more manure in, then put more teaspoons of preparation in...

LRL: Yeah. So, in the end there is that layering, probably eight to ten units of each of the compost preparations in each of those six horns. And then you put the manure, so you have three layers.

BW: You have a bottom layer of manure, compost preparation, manure, compost preparation, manure. That is your method of stuffing the cow horn with just one compost preparation, then you do that six times for each of the compost preparations?

LRL: Yes, so there is a total of six of those horns in the pit of say 400 to 500 horns. There is a yarrow horn, a chamomile horn, a dandelion horn, etcetera.

BW: That was wonderful detail, you gave me a wonderful picture. Go back to the oak bark you mentioned, that something has changed through the years with the way you do your **oak bark**.

LRL: The thing that I am doing differently is that I am simply leaving the oak bark in the skull in the boggy ground for two years. Two years ago was the first year I did not go back and get my skulls out and it was literally just a mistake. I kept meaning to do it and this is the first time that has ever happened with any of the preparations. I am not a slacker when it comes to preparation making but this is also the luxury of having so much material. I have made a lot of compost preparations for years and we only use very little, but I keep stockpiling. If I had needed it, I probably would have made sure I went and got it, but I did not and at a certain point I just said, “Well, it does not feel right to dig it up now in the middle of summer.” I had the luxury to do that. I left it as an experiment and I was jumping up and down when I dug it out of the ground, and we cracked the skull open. I could not believe how transformed looking and how “soily” it was. Still the oak bark consistency, but just much more darkened and broken down. It was clearly still oak bark preparation but there was another thing that was really striking: there was no smell at all. Usually when I undo the skulls there is -- even though we do take care to get all of the brain matter out and we take off a lot of the flesh off the skull -- there is always a little bit of a putrid, smell, even if it is just a whiff. This just smelled earthy, or like leaf mold. I was so excited about that, I thought, “I will do this every year now.”

The other thing we do, I do not know if everybody does this, but when I was at JPI, we extracted the oak bark through the hole that we put it into in the skull, through where the spine meets the skull. When I married my husband he said, “Why are you doing that? It takes forever.” He showed me that you can just split the skull properly with an ax and it just opens in two perfect halves. The oak bark does not fly all over the place, it is just like sitting right there in this little

ball. I personally do not do it, I have him do it because he is precise with the ax. But I would just pass that on as, if you are decent with an ax, it is the easiest way to get your oak bark out.

BW: That is interesting because people talk about reusing cow skulls. Up here Steven is really good with an ax and so from the beginning we always just cracked the skulls open. I wonder about other people, though, that talk about reusing skulls. I think a difference from what other people do as far as extracting out of that little hole you put it in.

Any other changes you have made with other preparations through the years?

LRL: Not really. I would be open to exploration with the peritoneum and mesentery parts, but I have not done anything different there. I would like to learn some more about the different sections of the small intestine. I just go through the intestines and the parts that look like what I recognize as the best parts to make the chamomile with is where I cut them out, but I think there is maybe more. But everything else is pretty standard -- I mean standard from how I learned it.

The only other difference is that I grow all the herbs myself. I do not buy anything anymore, and I find a huge difference in that with the **chamomile**. It is like night and day. I did a side-by-side comparison for a couple of years, and I hope I never have to buy chamomile again. I was getting the chamomile from what I know as the better sources. I would look at them side by side before I put the chamomile into the intestine and I would notice the smell and the brightness of my homegrown chamomile. You would hardly know they were the same plant. Then, after they were put through the intestine and I extracted them, the difference was really significant visually. This is all sensorial -- visual, smell and touch. I recognize that is a limited exploration, but there was a huge difference on the finished end as well. The homegrown chamomile was much darker and much more transformed every time. The coarseness of the bought, bulk chamomile was evident even after going through the intestine.

BW: So, I am going to summarize. What you said is that when you use your homegrown and high-quality chamomile that you purchased, visually and smell-wise there was night and day difference before you even started to put them in the intestine. And once they came out of the intestines, the homegrown are just darker, more finished, no plant parts. So, your experience has been that growing it on your own farm has really changed the quality of your chamomile?

Good, good. All right. What are the biggest challenges you face as a preparation maker and which preparation is the greatest challenge for you?

LRL: I have to say that I feel like I am a spoiled preparation maker. It is as if life has made this very easy for me. I do not have the classic challenges of getting parts of an animal each year, these are all just built into my life. The bladders, I am just gifted with. I have several hunter friends and they are so great about saving me bladders. We take a beef for ourselves here at the home farm every year or every other year, and Foxhollow raises grass fed beef, which is where I usually get my bovine parts. Also, I am a gardener and a layperson herbalist, so it is very enjoyable for me to grow and harvest and dry herbs. I have no challenges in that way and my work is very, very supported all around. It is cherished by the owner of the farm, Janey Newton

up at Foxhollow, so I have been helped all along in every possible way -- a building, a wonderful workshop, an amazing root cellar, just all of these things.

A personal challenge I sometimes come up against is how to balance the sacred with the social. Sometimes I want to make the preparations in my own sacred space, in my own little world. But it seems what is being asked of me in my life is that I create a space for people to come and help and experience the preparation making. And it is always such a joy-filled gathering that at the end of the event, I cannot imagine it any other way. It seems a blessing to have others to give their care and wonder. Then as the next year approaches, I have this pull to create my little altar space and sit alone for a few days, putting manure in horns and herbs in their sheaths and being quite awake to the sounds around me and the thoughts that may come. So that is an interesting “challenge” I have noticed.

The only preparation I have a hard time with is the **stinging nettle**. What happens most years, regardless of all of the things I try, is that it just disappears. It does not matter if I bury it at Foxhollow or here at home or in the garden, as compared to a field that does not receive any fertility, it just disappears. It does not matter if it is in a tile or in a screen or directly to the earth or with peat moss around it or with a sack around it -- a fiber sack, you know, like a coffee sack. So, I have a significant supply of preparations except for the stinging nettle. I have, like, seven gallons of high-quality dandelion (and several more gallons of lesser quality dandelion preparation that I keep just to watch in storage) and probably have a gallon of stinging nettle at this point, maybe a gallon and a half.

BW: Have you ever put it in a, like a cement block pit? You know what little pavers are, inch and a half by sixteen inches? Build the wall of that, leave the bottom open, and put the preparation. Then put some bricks over the top and bury that under six inches of soil.

LRL: Have you done it?

BW: Marjory out in Oregon, that is how they do it. And that is how we did it this year because we had similar experiences of not always being able to find the stinging nettle. Then, when we dig it up, the pavers are on top and at the bottom we go down until we hit ground. Next year when we dig it up, we will see how it worked.

The next question is *how has your work with preparations changed your perspective on life?*

That could be a book. I imagine that people like ourselves who have a deep relationship with this work, it becomes part of our yearly cycle, just like putting up hay and putting seeds in the greenhouse to start plants. It is such a deep part of my rhythm of life that, for me, it is like the working reference point for everything that I am pursuing in my understanding of biodynamics. Anything that I continuously discover, uncover, wrestle with in my studies and in what I receive about alchemy or spiritual science from any discipline -- I bring many things back to the preparations in my thought process. I'll think, “How does that work with the preparations and what the preparations are bringing to the farm individuality? How is that related to the elements that we are working with when we make the preparations? Then, how is that on the other end

when they are applied and working through the farm? Into us as humans as we consume the food produced? How does that relate to what I am learning right now?

BW: It is your touchstone almost is what you described.

LRL: Yeah, I am grateful. It is like this is my artistic medium. How I metabolize what I am learning is a lot of times through the preparations.

BW: New preparation makers, because you have had a long journey getting to here, ***what advice would you offer to new preparation makers starting out?***

LRL: Just to not imagine that you get it. Remain in that receiving mode constantly, receiving what insights can come and not think that you get it.

BW: So, you are saying there is not an end, there is not a test to become a good preparation maker. It is more of a journey and you learn along the way.

LRL: That is a great summary, because to think that you know something, or you get it after making the preparations a few years is very limiting because it is a continual process. It is about a humbleness, that we know so little, and this can be a doorway, an open question throughout our lives.

BW: ***What social relationships have you developed as a preparation maker?***

LRL: Through biodynamics is where most of my deep friendships and relationships have come. But, when I think about the preparations I realize how from the very beginning -- my first moment -- I linked in with people of my destiny. Some of the closest people in my life I met through the preparations, my husband for one!. And I realize that I get to meet very interesting individuals through my preparation making event each year because it has an open gesture to it each time. There are always individuals that wind up showing up that I would have never met out in the world, who I would not have known any other way, and they are very striking to me even if I never see them again. I realized just the other day that there is a collection of people who have become my deep friends. It feels very meaningful to me that I would not know these people any other way other than we made preparations together.

BW: You are talking about destiny relationships that come through the preparation making and how it opens doors for other people to come to you because you are making preparations. You never would have met them if you had not been doing preparations, but it allows this point of contact that would be made without the preparation making.

Can you talk about how much preparations you have in storage? Just go down all the preparations.

LRL: They are in two different root cellars and I do not have a stock sheet here, but I am going to guess Another thing I do as much as possible is keep different years separate and then I have to combine them because I run out of room.

BW: How big are your root cellars?

LRL: The one here at home that I share with my husband is packed with preparations because we keep our preparations separate. He makes his here on the farm and I make mine up at Foxhollow and his are only used for this fam. It is kind of a closed system, and so is Foxhollow in that way.

The one here is narrow and it is probably seven-foot-wide and fifteen foot deep. We have got them in boxes and then stacked and in half-barrels. The one at Foxhollow is very big, it is, probably 20 x 40.

BW: I asked that because, with all the different farms I have been on, I have seen so many different types of storage. It is important for people to understand that, at Foxhollow, you have specifically planned for this storage so you would have plenty of room.

LRL: Yes, we utilized existing stone walls from an old structure at Foxhollow, but we created the roof which is poured concrete slabs with a whole lot of wool insulation inside of it. I used wool from my friend's BD farm that they had just collected, so garbage bags and garbage bags full of wool. I thought it was so cool to put an energetic insulation in the roof. I actually put quite a bit of preparations in there, too and then the soil on top and then I planted bulbs. Here at home it is just an old homestead's root cellar from 80 years ago, so it is tight.

BW: So, inventory.

LRL: I have significantly reduced my production in the past few years, by half or more. So, I probably have 30 gallons from last year's **500**. Then from previous years, probably a total of maybe 30 more gallons.

Each of the compost preparations are different in terms of volume. The **chamomile** is also one that reduces quite a bit once I have it in storage. It keeps disappearing on me in storage, so I don't have as much chamomile. I would say I have maybe a total of three and a half gallons, maybe four gallons at the most of chamomile. Probably more like three. I am not counting batches that I don't like for some reason or another. One thing that happens with the chamomile is that after a few years in storage, a batch can turn very light colored and change texture. My friend Matias said it has happened to him, too, and he says, "it goes blond". I don't use that, but I keep it in case I can learn more about it in the future.

The **dandelion** I have a lot of, and so like around seven gallons of beautiful looking dandelion preparation or more. The **nettle** I have very little of, probably a gallon and a half like I said. **Yarrow**, probably four gallons of yarrow that I really like. Then I have these separate half-gallon crocks or gallon crocks where I do not like how it looks, so I keep it separate and I do not use it, I just look at it and watch it.

I have some in that category of everything except for stinging nettle. I do not have any stinging nettle that I do not like, but I have chamomile and yarrow that I do not like how it looks. I have dandelion that is dried out and it just came out dry and stayed dry. I actually do not use that, but I keep it so that someday I can learn something from it.

I like all of my **oak bark** and I probably have four gallons of that. I have probably a gallon and a half of **valerian** at this point. I have not been making as much and I have been using it up.

I have made much less of everything in the last few years. I really stopped enjoying the process of making preparations for storage. It is not very fulfilling. I want the preparations to be used, I do not want to just keep making them to stockpile them for some day that they are needed. Now I really enjoy making small batches of preparations. For seven years I had been in large-scale production mode and I just wanted to make the most of all the preparations all the time, and that has changed.

BW: So, you did production making and now want to make them in your sacred area. Would that be an accurate description of what I have heard?

LRL: The desire to make preparations in my own sacred space by myself has not happened, that is not what I am being called to do. It is a desire, and I feel that strongly, but I do not do it, I make preparations with other people. I hold open workshops. The one place where I do get to be by myself with the preparations is tapping out horns. Plus, I grow the herbs and collect the flowers, and often I collect the manure by myself. The actual preparation making is done with other people. It is all just reduced in volume even though it still is a bunch of people. I am now just making the amount of preparations that makes sense to me, instead of making them to store them.

BW: The next question is, *would collegial sharing with other preparation makers be of interest to you beyond this interview* and if so how can we help develop these relationships? You are already doing that with the Fellowship of the Preparation Makers. It is just kind of a redundant question.

LRL: And my other relations with friends that are preparation makers, too. I am rich in colleagues.

BW: *Do you have a vision for the future of preparations use in North America?*

I do not have a vision for preparation use. I used to have a strong vision with the same motto as JPI – inspired by a quote from Steiner in the *Agriculture* lectures, may the earth be healed and so all of these preparations need to go out onto as much land as possible. It has really changed in me to not hold a certain vision. I feel so strongly that the preparations are for people that feel drawn to working in this way. I hope that that continues to grow, of course, but I do not feel strong about just having preparations applied to land. It is not to say that that is wrong, or I am against it, but I do not feel so enthused about it. I feel enthused about people coming through their awareness and their consciousness to working in this way out of love and that that is what enthuses me as a vision.

The other thing I have begun to wonder -- not for myself necessarily, I feel content within what biodynamics has to offer me as a lifetime exploration through the preparations -- but I wonder what else is part of the whole picture of how we work with the earth in this way, of bringing these new impulses, this evolving consciousness, this coevolution with human and earth into the

future. I wonder what else there is that people feel naturally drawn to that is like the preparation work. That is a recent question that comes up for me, a sort of expanded picture of what else is there for humanity in addition to the preparations. For me it is understanding the preparations so to be able to communicate about what we are doing when we work with them, this is what we are striving for. What else can be worked with out of other traditions or practices to move into this evolving spiritual consciousness? This vision has come up for me recently.

BW: What I am hearing you say is that the preparations are your vehicle for your spiritual path in this lifetime, and you are also wondering what other things in the world would give this striving to other people? You have evolved to this point that it is a much larger connection to the whole process of life and living.

LRL: It is a real question and wonderment. What we are doing with the preparations and biodynamics, how can this work for others with their spiritual practice and relationship to the earth and the unmanifested? Instead of it just being that I have to bring this particular way of working with these particular processes and substances into another person's world, I wonder what it can look like through different ways of seeking.

BW: Pretty amazing picture, good. So, ***what could be done to help the understanding and the use or the importance of preparations more accessible to the people not in biodynamics?***

LRL: I think this last question is what is beginning to live in me really strongly. The reason it feels so strong to me is that, almost my entire adult life, I have been asking the last question you just asked -- what can we do to get these preparations to the world, how can we get more farmers, more gardeners, more people to use them, and I always felt limited in that. I have this natural feeling of limitation in that pursuit. In the way that I answered the last question feels very expansive, like there is no limit.

Therefore, it is through our own deepening of understanding of what we are really doing, what we are really working with, so that it can be translated into other forms, other ways of expression that then bring this impulse into a different picture for others so they can understand it because it is their own. Then we understand it more and are more deeply able to relate.

BW: Their own trip so to speak, their own journey. Inherently linked with their own culture and their own traditions.

LRL: One of the things that always comes up for me is that there are so few people working with the earth anymore for growing food. Farming is more materialized, more mechanized and materialized. I feel like I am so fortunate to be able to work with biodynamics and preparations and that other people do not have that opportunity. How would we be able to give them the opportunity to have these same experiences we get have? That is where my question becomes, how can we help other people not connected to land or farms have this opportunity? That is probably the thing I think about every day, because that is the link that is rapidly disappearing and has largely disappeared already, is the opportunity for the human being to work with the earth. The opportunity is almost gone. I look around and if you want to get into farming it is like, "Good luck." What an uphill battle. It is a vow of poverty for many people, to be able to do this

work with the earth. So, it is not that easy to promote. For me, this is the issue: At this point in time of being humans on earth, it is economically impossible to get into farming for a living and to work with the earth. It is not just farming, but to work with the earth in any way that is not mere extraction. So, a huge cultural, economic question. What are we, how do we want to be as humans on this earth? Are we willing to give up what looks like luxury and what looks like comfort, having things delivered at your whim? We are choosing without realizing that we are choosing this distancing from the earth. The real barrier that exists in real time is that people are not working with the earth and they do not even know it is an opportunity because it is not an opportunity in a lot of ways.