

Interviewee: LORNA BLAINE HOWARD HALPER
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

Discussion outside of William McGee's Black Mountain Gallery in Pawling, New York is not transcribed. The exhibition of work at the gallery includes Ruth Asawa sculpture loaned by Lorna Halper. Conversation of Lorna Halper with local gentleman who put in bathroom in her house is not transcribed. Taping continues in car.

LBH: Ten years ago and I've only come to understand it now. But other people seeing the figure here—this is when Al was dying. I was grabbing [UNINTELLI PHRASE]. But you want to go outside.

MEH: We can do both.

LBH: I'm trying to consolidate things. This Oli stole. I've had a lot of things stolen—the black and white over there. The idea. It's the idea that they take. But the one thing they can't take is this figure, this spiral figure. My family have drawings.

MEH: I remember your spiral drawings from Black Mountain.

LBH: You do.

MEH: I think so. I think they were yours. Unless they were Joan Stack's, they must have been yours.

LBH They were mine if they were this figure.

MEH: I think so.

LBH Ray Johnson did not remember. Ray Johnson did not remember.

MEH: Above the mantel, is this your painting or is it Oli? It's yours.

LBH Yes. That's mine and that's certainly related to Oli and Albers. That's what that coloring is. This form on this painting back here is mine but that's the coloring that comes from Albers—related to Oli. That bother's a lot of gentlemen. They say it's the sexiest thing. They can't stand seeing that. I did lose a very good big painting.

MEH: How's that.

LBH It was sold to a mad woman—from an exhibition here, a retrospective that I did here in Pawling. Her husband was a photographer and he did some very good photographs of the whole thing. They weren't married but he was a wife beater. I didn't know that. She went mad for that painting. We rolled it up and put it in the car. She was going to pay a hundred dollars. Cisneros was having a fit because it was really a five thousand dollar painting. But she was so crazy about it. I think he made her throw it out on the way back to the city. I don't know what happened but she was so—she couldn't even get herself to send the hundred dollars. So, I called her and Cisneros said that's probably what happened.

So—I don't know.

The tempting things about these Albers-like is they're so livable with. They don't bother you. They don't bother you at all. They just sit quietly, but something else fires you to do more and that's I suppose what eats one to

pieces. But I would be so comfortable to go just quietly geometric.

Because it's all there. It's solid. It's done. Is that thing on?

These over here, are these recent works?

LBH: These are all in the last ten years.

MEH: Fairly recent.

LBH So you'll see in the studio—

MEH: —what you're doing now.

LBH They're all out of that.

MEH: You mean growing out of this.

LBH You see, you get a format like that one up there—chess. It's so comfortable. It just sits there.

MEH: What do you mean by comfortable? It's not threatening, it's not demanding—

LBH Right. It's quiet.

MEH: So, this is really your—

LBH It's just lacking something. The biggest thing I guess the Dostoevsky, the book, and why we keep trying. You wonder sometimes. But anyway—

[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: We're getting up at the same time.

LBH You know you wake up ahead of time when you know you gotta—

MEH: Right. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. OUTDOORS OUTSIDE OF WORKSHED.] Was Peter Nemenyi at Black Mountain when you were there?

LBH Yes. He was fascinating.

MEH: He still is.

LBH Absolutely. What is he doing?

MEH: I won't tell you now. It's a long story. That was a Ruth Asawa sculpture.
And this is your work beneath it. Really beautiful.

LBH [INSIDE STUDIO] I moved everything. The other guy was going to do something here, so I cleaned that all out. I go back again. It's just absurd.

MEH: This is just your year of getting your house in order, Lorna.

LBH Yeah.

MEH: What is your most recent work?

LBH My most recent work are these which I can show you out in the—

MEH: From the foundry.

LBH —no, that little shed up there. That's where I was last summer, up in that shed, while they were working here. The carpenter made a—they had to move the oil tank on account of the regulations that are being put in. You can't have an oil tank because it might leak.

MEH: Oil tank where?

LBH You have to put it on cement.

MEH: Can you have one underground?

LBH You can't have one above ground without cement under it or else off the number of things.

MEH: Can you have one underground?

LBH: No. You have to dig it up because it might leak.

MEH: That probably is true but that's a lot of—

LBH And the carpenter stayed in here. He built a little mansion for the oil tank. It's the best building on the place now. There's nothing in it but the oil tank. It's enough to drive you crazy.

MEH: The oil tank is housed more luxuriously—

LBH More luxuriously than anything else. So, these things I do in clay and the other side is high polish.

MEH: You do those in clay. In sections.

LBH You'll see—yeah, this group goes on. I mean, this is—there are two up in the shed that precede this.

MEH: These are gates. Did you say you are working on gates?

LBH Gates and fencing. It all started the way most things start, from something absurd.

MEH: Is this going to be—is this a single gate or is it part of two—a double gate? This is a single door—a single gate.

LBH Well, actually the gates would be the two that are up in the shed there. This is the next thing that would go on like a fence. It becomes—

MEH: You can do fencing.

LBH It's a story. This guy is just born. This is the female symbol. The male and the female are up there with the gates. Then he is leading a life and goes on and I have a lot of fun with where the hell, what kind of trouble he gets into.

MEH: Is this for a particular commission?

LBH This is a commission in my head.

MEH: In your head. Good.

LBH It started because my younger sister in California moved into a very fancy area called Pebble Beach, out in California. She said that you had fences around the places. I haven't seen her place. She and her husband hate fences. So, they didn't have a fence. They went away for a week or so and came back and there wasn't one piece of greenery left. They discovered that the reason was that deer came in. A lot of deer. So,—

MEH: For deer though, you've got to have—

LBH So when Charlotte, my sister, was here, I said, "Hey, I'll make you a nice fence for out there. So this started off as a fence to keep the deer out." But that's the way things start, for no particular reason.

MEH: Well, I told you that everybody is fencing their houses in in New York City. Maybe I'll have an opportunity for—

LBH Well, somebody wanted the, a cousin of Al's that are in the Jewish religion—and I also had thought before an altar, that the open work. Well, the Spanish do it—all kinds of crazy stuff.

MEH: Right. Before the high altar.

LBH All kinds of stuff. He was saying that he—could I do it—Let's cover them because that leaks down. It's funny how this kind of thing keeps us—
[INTERRUPTION IN TAPING. RESUMES OUTDOORS.]

MEH: A gorgeous day. For July.

LBH Yeah. We're lucky it isn't sweaty. There's a little bit of parsley here in case you want it.

MEH: For mosquitoes.

LBH For mosquitoes.

MEH: I'll rub it on my nose. It smells good. I'll eat it. How's that?

LBH [SPEAKING TO CAT] You seem to think Mary's alright.

MEH: Except I surprised her when I went to get my shoes.

LBH I preserve water because you never know. [AT WATER BARREL]

MEH: That's great. Exactly.

LBH You never know what—[POINTING TO CIRCLES ON SHED DOOR]
Pizza.

MEH: Pizza.

LBH Pizza whatever they are.

MEH: Do pizza's come on those? I've never seen them.

LBH Yeah. Some guy had a luncheonette and he was throwing them out. I
said, "Well, they're too good to throw out."

MEH: Right.

LBH: So—[INSIDE SHED] They were all over the place with their trucks and
stuff.

MEH: These are the first two gates.

LBH: Yeah. The first two. These will open. The plastic was just put there
because it was cold up here in November. I had the heaters on.

MEH: To block movement of air.

LBH: Yeah. It was warm back here. It's going to get more complicated. It's going
to get more—

MEH: This is a sketch for the gate project.

LBH: Just the idea. I did a lot of etchings. Then somebody bought them all.

MEH: [REMARKS ABOUT CAT NOT TRANSCRIBED]

- LBH:** This is extraordinary. He takes weeks to adjust to anybody.
- MEH:** What absolute geometric—the Twentieth Century. To what extent is pure geometric abstraction satisfying and to what extent is it not?
- LBH:** Well, I find it very calm and lovely to live with and great when you're interacting with people and it's just quiet around. Well, what are we trying to do in painting? Steal a little bit from the world of writing, novelists, theater—maybe theater—which is probably good that I have to move everything all over the place for these carpenters and builders and re-doers because then I see all the past questions that I've been asking myself which is about all that I've been doing with painting.
- MEH:** Because you're pulling everything out.
- LBH:** There's just one question after another. Just question, question. Yeah. When they had to pull up the well. That's the stuff from the well.
- [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]
- MEH:** You to sit down in the hot seat.
- LBH:** Listen. My husband would—
- MEH:** Would he love it or would he hate it?
- LBH:** No, in Chicago he was on some television program to be interviewed. He absolutely froze. Just—I understood it. Is that thing on? No.
- MEH:** Yeah. Do you see a red light in there?
- LBH:** What is it catching?
- MEH:** You. We've been talking and I want us to talk a little bit about Black Mountain so that I have you on film talking about Black Mountain—
- LBH:** Okay. What do you want to know about?

MEH: How did you hear about the college?

LBH: I heard about it at Columbia University from a young man—this was back in '42—who was just going in the navy. Called up. I was at Columbia Art School. I went home and told my family that's where I want to go. This—Jack Mills was the guy's name. God knows what happened to him. He had never been there himself. I don't know how he'd heard about it. He'd read about it. Then it wasn't til 1945, as I told you before, that I persuaded my parents.

MEH: You were studying at Columbia Art School.

LBH: Well, I was supposed to be going to Barnard.

MEH: Well, Barnard would have been a degree program.

LBH: It was my freshman year at Barnard, and they finally called. From Barnard the freshman dean called up my parents and said, "We hope Lorna is getting better. It's been a long illness she's had." Because I'd never after the first month turned up at Barnard. The art school let me in, free and I'd go there at six in the morning and I'd come home after midnight. I'd never see my parents.

MEH: Your parents thought you were studying at Barnard.

LBH: They thought I was studying very, very hard. My first report from Barnard was excellent, "This is the most mature freshman we have." That's what she's been voted, and then she disappeared. So, this was late the next year, and I did go see the dean. I was order to see the dean, and the dean's name was Lorna also. Lorna McGuire. An extraordinary woman. She said, "You really want to go to art school." I said, "Yes." She said,

"Well, you certainly proved your point. We hate to miss you,"—she was very kind—"We hate to miss you, for you to leave Barnard, but I think you should do so. Go to the art school, and you can come back to Barnard and finish, get your degree, anytime up into your sixties." Which to me then—seventeen, eighteen I think I was then—seemed an eternity. Then Black Mountain. I stayed at Columbia. Then Fannie Hillsmith, as I told you, was going to Black Mountain. The reason my family did not want me to go to Black Mountain was they had heard such wild tales from John Evarts, my cousin who had been there—obviously—done a lot in music and everything. So that struggle was over. When Fannie was going—ah, chaperone. Maybe Barnard thought I was mature, but my family didn't. So, I went, and I never saw Fannie—I think maybe I saw her once when I was at Black Mountain because I got absorbed into everything else. Fannie—when I was a little kid—because she lived as a neighbor in New Hampshire, I took some art lessons from her when I was about eight, something like that. I always had been very, very shy. At Black Mountain I didn't eat in the dining hall with people.

MEH: Really.

LBH: There was a little table between the dining hall and the kitchen and two people could sit there. Usually, it was only one. Once in a while, Willie, Willie Joseph or somebody would eat. Cornelia Williams took me under her wing and so she let me eat there. People would come through to get their food and everything—back and forth—but this was a little dark space. I could eat and disappear. Breakfast and stuff like that I did very, very

early until Dick Burgess died. I guess that was it. It just flipped me out.

Then I would sleep late. Asawa used to wake me up.

MEH: Who was Dick Burgess?

LBH: He was an art student who seems to have had a big influence on my life—
from Minneapolis—that was at Columbia.

MEH: Is this the person to whom you have written a letter that was used in the
collage?

LBH: Right. It's followed me all of my life that the biggest things that are going to
really knock me out, people keep it a secret from me. I don't know why
that is. My mother knew that Dick was dying. I didn't know.

MEH: What was he dying of?

LBH: Cancer. He went home to Minneapolis.

MEH: He was very young, your age.

LBH: He was twenty-nine. Yes. He was a bit older. I just—it seems to be my
reaction. I just go frozen. I couldn't wake up in the mornings. Since Asawa
lived in the same attic at Black Mountain and my bed was right by the
door, I said, "Dear, will you wake me up in the mornings. I just don't wake
up." She'd wake me up and I was bang—out again. She was quite a girl. I
didn't know Asawa when she had become politically conscious or
whatever she became or I didn't know that side of her. That was after I
had left.

MEH: At Black Mountain she wasn't involved in politics.

LBH: No, but then she was, wasn't she?

MEH: At Black Mountain?

LBH: Then she was student moderator or all kinds of stuff as I recall afterward hearing. Isn't that right?

MEH: Briefly. Briefly, she was student moderator.

LBH: Then when Tasker and I got married and lived up—what did they call it up there—that government housing? Last Chance. I remember when she got involved with her Albert Lanier and came up for advice—what was it all about? And is it really all so beautiful and all this kind of stuff? It was really—I mean it was such little innocence.

MEH: You were kids. You were just—

LBH: We were just kids. Right.

MEH: What was your reaction? First, how did you get to Black Mountain? Did you drive down, take a train?

LBH: No. I was put through that same embarrassing thing. Everybody was in the coach, and I was forced to be in the first class or whatever you call it—the parlor car or whatever. Then I heard about Black Mountain there in the dining car from some—I guess he was a Southern business man or something. He asked me where I was going. I said, "Black Mountain." "Ooooh, I hear that's a nudist colony, Communist. What are you doing going there?" and all that kind of thing. But it was kind of embarrassing being in the—well, that's happened all of my life because that's my background. So then Vera Baker Williams—they'd all be in the coach and then I'd get the razzmatazz when I'd come say hello. I was much too shy. I didn't know how to handle it. Then you sort of just crawl in your hole because you don't know what to do.

MEH: Do you think this was resented—the fact that you were riding first class?

LBH: Yeah, yeah. Sure. They just didn't think that was part of it. Eventually, you just get used to it. It's not your fault. There's nothing you can do with it. You can just give so much stuff away because very often when you give stuff away, it gets you into an awful lot of trouble. I think I sort of [UNINTELLI PHRASE]. But Ted Dreier—now he was sort of the same background in a way—and Tasker I thought was. My family didn't think so. My family didn't think so, but I thought so.

MEH: How would you describe that background?

LBH: Privileged, I guess. I mean, when I go back to Long Island where we spent our winters and see the house that we grew up in, which you just take for granted. It's now been expanded because it's such a wealthy area now, it struck me—I just couldn't believe it was such a mansion. At boarding school my roommate had it much worse. Hers was a mansion of mansions that she grew up in. Jane Stilwell. Whenever she was alone in the house and the doorbell rang and she went, then somebody would asks something, she would say, "Oh, I don't know. I'm the cook's daughter." So, it was that. If your makeup is such that you can use it all, terrific. But if your makeup is different, you're a shy soul, you go the other way. You really hide out. Which—I was the only one in the family that took to drawing. I was always told, "Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do that. The others can't do it. You're making a problem.

MEH: In your family, what was your—were you oldest, youngest, middle?

LBH: Next to the youngest out of five. Two boys. Three girls.

MEH: So, how did you adjust at Black Mountain to suddenly being in this very primitive environment?

LBH: I loved it. We had that. I mean, this is from the type of background. I mean, in New Hampshire, we were primitive. There was a cabin up toward the mountain in Mt. Monadnock. No plumbing, no nothing. I find it very friendly. I like it. The adjustment at Black Mountain was so many people on top of you all the time. So I did take off up in the woods for a couple of weeks at a time.

MEH: Would you camp out, sleep in the woods?

LBH: Slept in the woods and cooked. I had a couple of parties up there. I had social moments. Steaks. Had a lot of fun making the path with little painted pebbles. "Come for breakfast at 6:00." Asawa came. Willie came. Oli. Molly Gregory.

MEH: Who was your group of friends at Black Mountain? Who were the students you felt closest to?

LBH: Ellie Smith. Lukey Swift. Oli. Ray Johnson for a while. Which was the same with a lot of us that we didn't become what he wanted us to become towards him. Molly Gregory. It was really just a very little niche. What did they call us—what is that fancy raincoat? I can't think of the name right this minute. Anyway there's a very expensive raincoat and it turned out that each one of us owned it. That's what our family bought it for us. Aquascutum, which was very expensive for that time. Feininger—I spent quite some time and saw him after Black Mountain.

MEH: He was there the first summer you were there.

LBH: Yes.

MEH: What was he like?

LBH: He was sweet. He was so sweet. When you see that face of his. And his wife was just right for him because she was a bulldog. She protected him. Boy, did she protect him, and he needed it because he really was—he was so nice to us. I think Elaine Urbain got to know him very, very well.

MEH: Was he actually teaching?

LBH: He taught. I don't know if I took his class. I think I was too shy. I knew his work before I came to Black Mountain, and I think I didn't dare go into his class. Albers work I didn't know at all. I'd never heard of the guy before I came. Bolotowsky was hopeless.

MEH: Was Albers there when you came to Black Mountain?

LBH: Yes. He was very much there. And Anni and Ted and Bobbie Dreier. They were very kind, kind people.

MEH: What was Albers's class like? How would you describe it?

LBH: How would I describe it? He was very much the controller, the actor, the instigator—everything—and he wasn't going to take anything that went against what he thought was going on. He would get you excited. He'd pull the work out of you. He'd get you to do the work, and get you excited about everything that people brought in on the floor and everything. But he accused me of something absolutely out of line and he would take no—if you're accused, you're accused. There was some color study, and I think it was gradation of things. I made stripes and put the little piece of paper on, different color that showed how it changed by what situation it was in. It

must have come out just like somebody else had done years ago at the Bauhaus. He said, "You took that from the Bauhaus book in the library." I said, "I haven't even put a foot in the library." I was scared to go in the library. I always got mixed up with the card file and everything. I said, "No, I haven't seen that." He said, "Nrrr, nrrr, nrrr, nrrr [NODS HEAD IN NEGATIVE MOTION]." But he wouldn't take reason. He thought it was—I guess it was so close. I never did see the other thing, whatever it was.

MEH: Did that affect your relationship with him?

LBH: No. I mean, look at all the people he was handling. And look at where he came from, all the problems already inside himself. Jiminy [PH] Christmas. No, but you're shy so it puts you in—a little scared. So, I think I had no way of persuading him otherwise. So, I worked very hard at doing things right in his class. Then I really overdid that. There was one big study I did. It was that umbrella problem he gave. I remember working all night on it, making a big impressive—a really nice one—missing the point. I missed the curve that changed. So here was this big wrong thing. He said, "Somebody is trying to please the teacher."

MEH: And he was right.

LBH: And he was right.

MEH: How did he organize his class? Was it lecture? Was it critique?

LBH: Well, it was assignment. Then you'd bring—the next class you'd bring—
Well, you know this.

MEH: You worked in your study.

LBH: You worked in your study which was heavenly. And lay it all out. Then he would what they call critiques today or whatever. He was very open and he'd ask, "What do you think of this to the class." The people that could speak spoke, which wasn't everybody. Then he'd demonstrate some principle or something and probably give an assignment taking off from that. It was very organized. I mean, I'm talking really of design class and color class. They were separated. This separation I've found a problem all my life. This is not a helpful thing to do.

MEH: Separate design and color.

LBH: Separate all these elements. I remember saying to my mother when I was back. She said, "Why is this kind of rigid?" and there was a rigidity about it. But it's up to the student how you use it. I don't blame Albers. It was a very good way. So, you want to see the bones and the muscle. Well, you're going to separate. Drawing class was very free. Painting class was really minimal, as I recall it.

MEH: Drawing you did in class.

LBH: Yes. From student models. But really that wasn't—at least to me what was different and strong was the color and design. The drawing was really no different from any other that I'd been to and the painting was really less. I thought that was minimal. That was all—so what else do you what to know?

MEH: So, when he left to go on sabbatical.

LBH: Yes, he went on sabbatical.

MEH: And Bolotowsky came in.

LBH: And Bolotowsky came in. It was—was he between wives or what. I don't know. He was just—as if he had a hundred hands. He was all over you. I mean you could—don't know what went on at that time [nighttime?].

MEH: Albers wasn't?

LBH: Albers wasn't.

MEH: I hear from some women that Albers—

LBH: Albers liked his schnapps. [UNINTELLI PHRASE] schnapps [UNINTELLI PHRASE] He loved it and when I'd come back, he'd expect me to have a suitcase full of whiskey. He'd have me up in his—where he did his work. He was working on his little color studies on blotting paper up in his place with schnapps and talk and that was nice.

MEH: Bolotowsky was not—

LBH: Then we'd—

MEH: I interrupted you.

LBH: Bolotowsky. I really—I liked Bolotowsky. I thought he was very funny.

MEH: Did you take his class?

LBH: Yes. Then what happened? I don't know. I get the chronology mixed up. Marriage. Coming back and forth. Then I had an eye operation at one point and that's where correspondence with other students took place. I don't know. I really didn't understand Bolotowsky at all. But I knew he was a male. That's all I knew. And a nuisance. There was another guy. Who was—

MEH: What other classes did you take?

LBH: Max Dehn. There's a little sculpture of Max Dehn in there I did some years ago. Artists—Mathematics for Artists which was great. That was pure poetry. I took with Ted Dreier calculus. He knew so much. He was over above us most of the time, I think. He was very, very difficult, but he was patient. But he couldn't get it through to me, and I can't remember the other guys. There was one guy coming in who thought I understood—coming in before class. "Let's see what you did?" What was his name? Dick Spahn. Nice guy. Well, I've forgotten his name. I really never did get it—calculus. I got the general idea. Really, I was much better with Max Dehn.

MEH: This was geometry.

LBH: Trigonometry and calculus. Are you a mathematician?

MEH: Not really. I was really good at math and I really loved math but I never pursued it beyond high school.

LBH: I was terrific at math until I hit calculus. Then it went—now I sort of have a nice idea of measuring things that you just quite never get there which is kind of a metaphor for life really.

MEH: Did you take woodworking with Molly Gregory?

LBH: A little bit.

MEH: What was Molly Gregory like?

LBH: She was wonderful. She was very kind to people. I was not much of a woodworker. I mean, my idea is just about that thing there [REFERRING TO WINDOW]. Wait til the carpenter sees that. But it stopped the rain from coming in and the glass coming down. But I made some of those bowls

and things like that. I was good at sweeping. I could sweep the shop. I could make it look very neat. That's about it.

MEH: What about Anni? Did you take weaving?

LBH: No I didn't. I didn't have any interest whatsoever in weaving. Matière—talk of weaving. That seemed to be weaving to me and that was with Albers. Funny I didn't mention that.

MEH: Can you expand more on the matière?

LBH: Well, that's just what it did to us—expanded us—and showed the usefulness of everything. That again can be a stumbling block. That can be a stumbling block. That's like that window again. Yes. You can use anything for anything and change it. Another use for everything. Oh, you got tape and sticks and stuff. Oh, well. I'll do something else with it. That can carry you off over the rainbow practically sometimes. And I use it a lot. Still do it. Drove my husband crazy.

MEH: What do you think was the real purpose of matière?

LBH: To me it was texture and visual tricks, really. Albers was a lot of visual tricks. Marsden Hartley said it's the most important thing in painting: "Do you know your tricks?" I've read that over the years and years and years and I haven't quite got it yet. Because I think it is something more than tricks.

[INTERVIEW INTERRUPTS. FILMING CONTINUES AT ARGOS FOUNDRY WHICH CASTS HALPER'S SCULPTURE. NOT TRANSCRIBED.] Discussion of casting process. Casting of "Finger Bowls" by . Lorna Halper signing sculpture in wax form. [INTERVIEW

RESUMES.

LBH: What is it you want to know?

MEH: What about Black Mountain do you think really mattered?

LBH: Well, I think to begin with, it was a place for the exodus from Rollins. I mean, what were these guys going to do? I think they really had a vision which pushed the energy into them to put it together. I think it was a great spot for the odd folk of life that really didn't fit anywhere else. They really weren't demented. They just were in different ways different. They enjoyed it. What really mattered about Black Mountain? For me, it was just a growing up place for me really until I got smashed down by deaths, which seems to be a disease with me. Now I've really got it now a bit I think. Time, high time. What was produced by people that were there, I think could have been produced anyway.

MEH: Do you think most people would have been as productive if they had not gone to Black Mountain?

LBH: I think probably. I think probably. I think they bounced off each other nicely. Buckminster Fuller was already at it. I mean, was in where we were in Hewlett, Long Island. I think he was a business man there for a while out there to begin with. All the parents—my parents out there were business people and they thought he was just one hundred percent crackpot nuts. I think he would have done his thing without Black Mountain. It was a wonderful spot for people like Albers who were under pressure in Hitler's Europe. But then he felt so badly about it at the end didn't he—Albers? He wrote a couple of terrible letters to Tasker.

MEH: I think when he left there was great anger and bitterness. Looking back I'm not sure just how he felt. Definitely when he left. So how—you met Tasker at Black Mountain.

LBH: Yes.

MEH: He was teaching?

LBH: He had come back, yes, to teach. He was one of the original students that had come from Rollins. He came back to teach. We were a pretty good pair; we were an odd pair, too, really when you come down to it. Actually his family had sent him there looking for a wife. That's the typical thing that I will always walk into. Somebody who's coming looking for something. I don't see that that's what they are around for. That's just the joke that life plays on you.

MEH: What had he done in between?

LBH: He worked for the NLRB, National Labor Relations Board. He spent two years in Puerto Rico. He spoke Spanish and played the guitar. He'd risen up somewhat. Then he spent quite a bit of time in Washington with that. After we were married we ran some elections on the Brooklyn waterfront. They laughed at me because I didn't know beans about it. What he wanted to be was a writer and tried and tried and tried those last years of his life. Then when he was really ill, he did jewelry, that sort of thing. He couldn't do much else. So, that's how Tasker and I met.

MEH: How did you—did you continue registering as a student after you were married at Black Mountain?

LBH: Yes. I didn't want to leave when we left but something happened in a faculty meeting at which I was not. A whole bunch of the left. Tasker was one of them. I've forgotten even what the problem was.

MEH: What the issue was.

LBH: But he said, "We're leaving" and back to the one place I didn't want to go which was New York City. I wasn't for that. I mean, I'm really not a city person.

MEH: Was he also from Long Island?

LBH: No, he was from Brooklyn Heights where his father was a doctor at the Long Island College Hospital. He had a sister who married a Spaniard—older sister. They lived down in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and then they went back to Spain. They had met at Rollins. Jesus was an exchange student.—her husband, Jesus Navascues in the Spanish War fought for the Loyalists and then he discovered he was on the other side by positioning. Some friend of his said to him, "You have a wife and an infant. What are you doing here? This is just chaos. Nobody knows which side they are fighting on or what is going on." So then they went to Sweden, then came to the United States. She was very healthy. Tasker never had a chance at real health.

MEH: What was it that he had?

LBH: Nobody knew. From the age of two he was covered with bandages with pustulating pussy things. He had to go to special schools, special camps, be wrapped in—he smelled because it was a terrible kind of illness. His father was a doctor, completely frustrated, couldn't do anything for him.

His mother, too, became not an alcoholic, but just about. Then it got better when he went to Black Mountain as a student. It scarred over and everything. He never had good health, but he was awfully scarred. He was alright in Puerto Rico. Then he had an attack. Then he came down to teach at Black Mountain. It was in remission then. He never had the skin thing come back. But he died of Hodgkin's which they could not cure at that time. They had nothing for it. So, we spent New York going from Brooklyn Heights to Washington Heights, there, to the medical center. So I saw a lot of the Hudson River.

MEH: After he died you met Albert Halper.

LBH: After he died—oh, we lived on Tompkins Square for a while, Tasker and I. That was a good year. That was the good year. Twenty-four dollars a month place. Very nice. What was I doing then? I was working at America House then, running their gallery, supposedly. I didn't know beans about running a gallery. I moved to Irving Place, my \$3,000 buy at \$53 bucks a month maintenance and worked at America House, the gallery there. That was fun. Met a lot of people. Lore Kadden came in, bawled the holy hell out of me. How was her exhibit?

MEH: It's interesting. It's Lore.

LBH: That's really what you've got us all. You're skewering us all. "You are you. You are you."

MEH: So, it is.

LBH: That's how our brains are wired. That's how we're at. But you have rather fun, don't you? Your entertainment, for free.

MEH: Yes. My entertainment here. Not quite free but pretty—[INTERRUPTION
IN TAPING]

MEH: Do you think Black Mountain had any influence on your art work?

LBH: Yes, certainly. Certainly.

MEH: In what way?

LBH: Without a doubt. I don't think I've recovered yet. I'm trying to think. I think it separated things as I've said before, in design, color and this kind of thing, which it takes a while to put together again. It opened up a whole area of abstract art that I—no, I had done it—at Columbia I had done work like that with of all people a fellow known as Peppino Mangravite, who was a well-known painter at that time. In a way, in some respects it slowed me down because I had to deal with a lot of things and throw out a lot of things that I really didn't need for what I'm doing and I'm still doing it. I'm getting a little irritated with myself because I'm still doing it. As I kept saying, I have a dissatisfaction with the purity and in a way partly emptiness of abstract color which is so delicious to do, so neat and clean, so kind of pleasing when you finish the piece. It's just neat and everything. It's not enough. I guess that's it. It's just not enough. It just drives you nuts. Then when you start getting enough you start getting into messes that that you can't get out of, can't find your way out of, which is why I think I'm working in clay and translating it into something as firm as stainless steel. It fascinates me. I never think of shows. I never think of making money. I never think of anything like that except the focus on this thing that wants to be itself and is now sometimes more coming than it ever did before. I'm

grateful to Black Mountain for opening up all these things, but I've cursed it for splaying me out, I suppose. Doing this when I was trying to focus.

That's what it did.

MEH: You were trying to focus in what way?

LBH: On my work, to make it a complete object, each one. I don't mind doing—which I'm criticized for but I don't give a hoot about that—doing what would be called different styles of work as long as it becomes itself, no matter what style. I don't care whether it's a sonnet or a little etching or a big painting or whatever so long as it becomes its own self. Now this guy—this spiral guy—he's been wonderful to me.

MEH: He's been with you forever.

LBH: He's been with me forever, and I fall back on him all the time. It isn't really a falling back. He's been a lifelong companion and he allows me to do things. You haven't seen—I can't pull everything out—do zillions of things that I couldn't possibly do otherwise. I mean I can fly off to the moon with the spiral guy and that's great fun. It's safe. It doesn't take a lifetime of learning. I don't know why I'm talking. I'm just blowing off my mouth now.

MEH: What do you remember about Ray at Black Mountain? Ray Johnson.

LBH: Ray. He'd just always come in and be funny.

MEH: People say he was funny but in what way was he funny?

LBH: Well, I think we were very generous because we had to go along with him for his funniness.

MEH: Give me an example of how he was funny.

LBH: Well, just as if he was flying like a bird or something. I mean, silly stuff is what he did there. He pulled that dirty trick on me when I was out for a term assisting my brother's wife and infant.

MEH: What was that?

LBH: I had an upstairs study, one of those small square ones looking out toward the dining hall over the lake. It was just the proportions I like. I'm not the neatest person in the world so it was messy. I always had one area that was neat but the rest was messy. I had all of my stuff, studies for Albers, all of that kind of stuff. When I was away for that term, Ray took it upon himself to move everything in it—then call me messy, but anyway—to move everything in it downstairs on the other side of the Studies Building. Truly, it was bigger, but it was a long narrow shape which I don't like. It depresses me. It was darker and everything. So, that is what greeted me when I came back. He made his case. He said, "Gosh, you're messy." He was so neat with all his stuff. "I put you into a bigger study. Aren't you lucky?" I don't think I said anything. I got my study upstairs back when Ray left BMC, but spent the winter and, yes, depressed, in that dark study over Dick Burger's death. That I remember about Ray. Of course, he tried out every girl from a sexual point of view. He would be completely enamored of you. Oh, my goodness! So, one day—our responses—we've checked Elaine and various others—was he was not totally male. This was not formulated, it was just an animal reaction and would just start breaking off like that which would just antagonize, make him furious. So, then he would just not see you again or even talk to you or be nice to you. So, that was

Ray. He carried it on a bit in the city when I would run into him. But I didn't know then what was eating him or what was—

MEH: What do you think was eating him?

LBH: I have no idea, even to this day. I think his work is very neat and everything and little things. It doesn't move me. It doesn't—but it is very well done and enviably neat. So, what else about Ray? His hair was interesting. I liked the way he would just sort of vibrate and stretch up and his hair would go as if it was electrified. But it was Ray. We'd see him in New York once in a while—went with him to see Feininger once. The bulldog wife came to the door. That was on the east side of Manhattan. Feininger said one wonderful thing then. I asked him—or one of us, I don't know which—asked him about his work, how he got started on this whatever it was he was doing. He said, "I haven't the slightest idea." And to come from an eminence who—at that time I thought these older people had a lot of answers and to find that they didn't, that's what's kind of nice. But I didn't realize it til years later. I just thought he was ducking. He wasn't.

MEH: How would you describe Dehn?

LBH: Oh, Dehn, just an absolute dear—Dehn. I think even Saul Bellow now—his latest novel—one's first early love. Dehn never got over that—his.

MEH: His. You mean Toni.

LBH: Oh, way before Toni. This was when he was younger. This was his first love affair.

MEH: And he talked about it.

LBH: Yes, because we had a little affair—Blaine and Dehn. We got together. He even took up smoking. He'd sit in my study and smoke. People would laugh at him. They'd say, "Dehn never smoked before." So, then he was with Lore Kadden after that. It was just a little—I thought he was absolutely adorable. So when he told me, he said, "You're like that girl that I knew." That's when he went on and on. Toni was not there at that time. She was at the University of Chicago or some place. So, we talked about it. He said, "Children aren't anything. But that first love affair." Saul Bellow is talking that way now. Isn't it—

MEH: Interesting.

LBH: It is interesting. I wonder if we're going to be so that way ourselves.

MEH: Who knows.

LBH: Anyway, what else can I say. He knew all these things. He loved nature and all these—pointed out things. Just the way he looked. I did a little head of him in here, just from memory. It really doesn't—and that's really all I think about Dehn. He was wonderful with his artists. I mean, mathematics for artists class. He just took you off on a dream because none of us could understand all those figures and triangles and numbers divided and squared and whatever. But he transported your mind to show that mathematics was not rigid which is a big thing to find out. There was a rigidity in the Albers training that—I didn't catch the humor. I missed the humor, because some of it was humorous. It was not meant to be so rigid, I think. Maybe I'm wrong but I think so. That was kind of a protective thing for him, I think. And he certainly could act, Albers.

MEH: That's what people say. What do you mean by that?

LBH: He came to Tasker and my wedding, for instance, and he's kissing me, but he's looking at the camera. There's a shot of him and my brother and he's talking to my brother but he's looking at the camera. That's alright. He has to survive. And that's where he was. No, I liked him. I was a little cautious with him. Dehn you could frolic with. But not often with Albers from my experience. Except that one time when he really drank my whole suitcase full of whisky.

MEH: No, I didn't hear about that.

LBH: You didn't hear about that from Oli.

MEH: No, I don't think so.

LBH: On the deck—over the sculpture place in the Studies Building.

MEH: I haven't heard about it.

LBH: We did drink and Albers was loving it. It was a starry night and he was just lying there with about six or eight of us. Oli and Elaine was there. I don't think so. Molly was there. Molly Gregory was there. She tuned in quite a bit. I was tuned up liquor-wise. Oli was and Albers was just expanding on Cezanne. Just twinkling and just—it went on and on and on. But that's drinking. You didn't realize and he didn't realize for sure. But Molly was near him and he got very enamored of Molly. Then it got late enough that we had to go back. Albers could not walk so Oli took him up to his place, and no sooner than Oli left him there than Albers had disrobed his lower half and was lying on the ground. Oli picked him up again, put him back and put him in the house. Oli was very kind in that way to people. Then Oli

went back to the Studies Building or wherever. Then people started shouting because Albers had gotten loose again and was banging on Molly Gregory's—her apartment was there, Molly Gregory's door. And Molly came out and said, "Yuppi, Yuppi." He was only half dressed again. "Yuppi" and she called, "Oli" who was down the hall on the same floor. They finally got him back. There was design class the next day—or color, I can't remember which—and we all got there because we were younger. Let's face it. We recovered a little more quickly. And what a sight. Came in a little bit late—he was seldom late Albers. Oh, that grey drawn face. He did have on a white shirt which was clean and neat. He did come in and sat down on his usual little stool there in front of the class, and he said, "I apologize. There will be no class today and he got up and left." But he apologized. He talked a little bit afterwards but he didn't talk about that much. That was the only time I saw him out of control.

MEH: Apparently when he—I've heard of several instances when he drank—he really lost his control.

LBH: His demeanor. Yes. Then he called me selfish—when was that—at some campfire we had. It must have been autumn. I had on my favorite blue sweater. He was describing something about drawing or sculpture or figures or something. He said, "There we are—Lorna, Lorna, take all your sweater, everything off and then I can show." This was by the campfire. Well, I was just too shy. "Well, you're selfish. You're selfish." What are you going to do.

MEH: Not self-conscious, selfish.

LBH: No, just selfish. I had to take it, but I didn't take my sweater off. I don't know. There were quite a few people.

MEH: He was a strange man.

LBH: Yes. That picture of him in your book arriving in Asheville. When you see those two faces and where they had come from and what they were coming into.

MEH: They both looked terrified.

LBH: Absolutely terrified. I don't blame them. But it's so open on their faces. I never saw those faces so open ever again. Whoever took—oh, the newspaper took it. It's an amazing picture I think.

MEH: Did you study with Motherwell?

LBH: I couldn't stand it. Yes, I was in several of his classes. I mean, it was the same summer—I went to maybe three. I couldn't take it.

MEH: How was that?

LBH: Well, to me it was utter nonsense what he was talking. Maybe I missed it all. He'd go on and on and on and on and on and on about nonsense. It just didn't have any relevance to me at all. I've heard other people who felt the same way. I've read other things when he was much older that are full of gobbledygook I think. Maybe that's my rigidity or something. He had a beautiful Mexican mistress who was there, whom he brought. I had to take a message up and they were both a la nature. And she really—I really saw her. He was so-so but she was—

MEH: Who was I thinking of?

LBH: Joan Stack. Yeah. I saw her a lot there a lot at Black Mountain. Met Walker Evans when we were in New York.

MEH: Walker Evans was not at Black Mountain?

LBH: No, not to my knowledge. He was a complicated guy.

MEH: Do you remember Roland Hayes?

LBH: I just remember the concert. Hilda Terry, who did a portrait of Roland Hayes, was a great friend of Fannie Hillsmith. I knew—we corresponded as a matter of fact, Hilda Terry and I. We hit it off very well. It's amazing that these correspondences disappear after a while. You just connect; then you disconnect. Our lives cross. Roland Hayes, I didn't know. I mean, I'd be too shy to even—I heard his concert.

MEH: Do you remember the concert in any particular manner?

LBH: I remember it was a different kind of audience at Black Mountain. I mean, a lot of outsiders came in which didn't happen so often. I just remember a beautiful voice and delivery. And that's really all I remember. My music background is not great. Everybody at Black Mountain was playing music and stuff. I just wasn't tuned into that.

MEH: What do you remember about the integration of the college?

LBH: I thought it was very meager—was my feeling. That was when I—there were two black girls there. One I knew somewhat but I do not remember her name. But they were there a short time. I didn't get a chance to know them, it seemed to me. The best integration was with Cornelia and her husband, who were a delight, but they were working. I just don't think it was much. But that's more—I don't think I worried about it because I had

enough troubles with whatever I was working on or studying. I didn't push for or against—I didn't do well in these meetings where José Yglesias would get up and sound off for Castro Cuba or—I don't know if that's what he was sounding off on—because I wasn't that politically involved. And it's just I suppose the safe background that I came from that I didn't get into it. I also read from writers like Flaubert—I've just been rereading actually. But it's like conversation. It's gone. I mean, if you're trying to do something in art, that's very, very ephemeral. You put an awful lot of energy in and waste it. It's better to just, I like to say, do less and get more. Running around doing things is very often very, very easy. Just running around doing things. Raising a flag for this, doing this for that. But to sit and contemplate in quiet, not hurt anybody, is a different thing. It can sort of disappear for a lot of people a lot of time. I don't know, I think it's one of the richest times you can have. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MEH: This is a color study you did in Albers's class. This is July 11, 1997, in Pawling New York, Lorna Blaine Halper.

[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT.]