

Interviewee: HARRY AND CHRISTA NOLAND
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
Location: [Not given]
Date: July 31, 1980
Media: 1 Audio-cassette
Interview number: 108 (Christa Noland) 109 (Harry Noland)
Transcription: Ellen Dissanayake, March 11-12, 2000; corrected by Mary Emma Harris, July 2000. Converted from Word Perfect by MEH, May 2015.

[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

HN: Ken and I went together.

MEH: You went together at the same time? You lived in Asheville?

HN: Well, I just got out of the Army and so had Ken.

MEH: Had you heard about the college before that time?

HN: Oh, sure. — I knew about it in, oh, in the mid-thirties, anyway.

MEH: What was its reputation around Asheville?

HN: It didn't have any at that particular time. Never did. Nobody knew anything about it. Well I say nobody — My uncle did, who was with the newspaper. His opinion was very low. (LAUGHS)

MEH: What was his name?

HN: Harris Posey. He was an uncle by marriage.

MEH: There was somebody from the newspaper who was pretty sympathetic to the college. I think his name was Robinson.

HN: I don't know him. I don't think I ever saw anything in the paper about the school. Did you, Chris?

CN: Oh, not unless somebody was distributing some kind of pamphlets or flyers (OVERTALK) they were questioning that.

HN: I didn't even know about that.

CN: There were a few times when there were issues that brought the students to the [UNINTELLI WORD].

HN: Really? You sat in on all the council meetings – or the faculty meetings. You knew all about it.

MEH: How did you hear about it? (OVERTALK)

HN: I found out about it by – I read about it in the Literary Digest. (LAUGHS). Isn't that nice? They had a little photograph of it in there.

MEH: Literary Digest?

HN; That was 1935 or ,36, ,37, in the Literary Digest. At that time I was a photographer. I was curious about it, of course. They had an article on Albers. I read about him, the fact that he did some photography at that time, which was unusual. He did do some photography. In fact, Gil mentioned it, he was really interested in the photography that Albers did, but it was awfully hard to find, and when he was there in '48, he didn't do anything in photography. Nothing. He didn't even mention it. And I didn't either. I wasn't particularly interested then, anyway.

MEH: You were a professional photographer at that point?

HN: I was when I got out of high school, yes.

MEH: What sort of photography did you do?

HN: Oh, a little bit of everything. Portraits. We photographed – when I say "we," the guy I worked for — summer camps. We had lots of summer camps in Western North Carolina at that particular time. We used to go

out and photograph the girls, mostly. The boys wouldn't buy things, but the girls would. In the wintertime I went to Palm Beach. I worked for a photographer in Palm Beach for at least winters anyway.

MEH: When did you graduate from high school?

HN: In 1935.

MEH: So, when you went to Black Mountain, you were not a student-age student, in a sense.

HN: No, I had a wife and a child when I was there and a war behind me.

MEH: Why did you decide to go to Black Mountain? You had the GI Bill.

HN: Well, why not? It was a good place to go.

MEH: You knew that before you went?

HN: Oh, sure. Very carefully picked it out. I considered University of North Carolina, but — Chris and I went out in the summer of 1946 to visit.

CN: I had known about it, too. (OVERTALK)

MEH: Are you from Asheville originally?

CN: No, from Southern Pines in North Carolina, the southeastern part, and had lived in South Carolina and been a part of it. I had known the dietician from Black Mountain, who was subsequently the wife of a physician, a psychiatrist that I knew in Asheville. And —

MEH: What was her —

CN: Well Dr. Dilly (PH) was her husband's name, and I have tried to remember her name. I remembered a month ago and then I couldn't. I believe it was Orr.

MEH: So, you had heard about Black Mountain from her.

CN: Through her, had talked about it. I think there was a sort of like discovering a new word. You keep hearing it over and over once you're interested. It's there. It grows. By the time we went out there, we both had known a lot more about it.

HN: I'd never known anybody from there. I had read a little bit about it here and there. I did do a lot of reading. It was there, so when we went out and took a look and talked to — Who was that old guy?

CN: Dr. Miller.

HN: Dr. Miller, yeah, who was — Was he the registrar?

CN: I think he was the registrar.

HN; He was also a sociologist.

MEH: He probably was. He was teaching too.

CN: Yes, he was teaching mathematics, I think.

HN: No, no. Sociology.

CN: Sociology, you're right.

HN: He was very encouraging, and we liked the looks of it, so we applied and went. Ken heard about it. He was eighteen or nineteen. He said, "Well I want to go, too," so he came along. (LAUGHTER)

MEH: There's a story that some Black Mountain people tell about I think their having discovered you all working in a hardware store or something, and that was the first time you heard about Black Mountain.

HN: I'm afraid not. I never worked in a hardware store in my life, and neither did any of my brothers.

MEH: Okay. There are lots of stories about Black Mountain that you have to check out.

HN: No, I found Black Mountain. It didn't find me. That's for sure.

MEH: What did you study while you were there?

HN: Chemistry.

MEH: Dr. Hansgirg?

HN: Almost by accident. Yes. But nevertheless, that was what it is. I also took some art courses. I took a course with Bolotowsky, who was there that particular year. So did Ken. Then the next year when Albers came, of course, I took courses with him. Beaumont Newhall was there one of the summers, '47 I guess it was, and I took a course in photography with him.

MEH: And you were a nurse for the college?

CN: Yes.

MEH: That must have been an exciting job.

HN: She didn't like it. (LAUGHS)

CN: Oh well, it was — It added a different dimension to being there. It was a pretty healthy bunch.

MEH: Oh, it was?

CN: In many ways. Some ways maybe fragile.

HN: Annette Stone was your only real patient, wasn't she?

CN: There were lots of people who were at the school from time to time. But it was not an all-encompassing twenty-four hour a day vigilance because basically it was very physically healthy to be there because there was a work program. People were very active. The food was fantastic so if you could survive on exercise and clear good mountain air and healthy food, you were really quite healthy, physically. I suppose that the tensions at Black Mountain were acute always. There were factions that were warring from the very time it began, I guess, and I think those emotional influences on people there sometimes took a greater toll than any physical discomfort that they had. It was pretty upsetting to get a lot of tears and people who were dealing with problems emotionally.

MEH: As non-faculty, did you all get really involved in that sort of thing? Did this filter down that much to students and to the staff?

HN: Oh, the students were the ones that were primarily responsible for — Of course they always had a faculty member or two involved. But they were the real —

CN: They called it the Community Council. Have you heard the political —

MEH: I haven't heard that much about the Community Council, actually.

CN: Well, it was — again, it was sort of, while we were there — the first year we were there I was asked to serve on the Community Council, so I got a little more inside of the politics of the place, perhaps in sitting in on those

meetings, than I would have from just being a student wife. It was a question really of everybody having a very strong opinion, and the leaders of the school having a following and this, of course, penetrated into the Community Council. That was an interesting way things were accomplished.

MEH: The Community Council was formed basically, wasn't it, to sort of take a lot of the details of daily living off of the faculty — you know like what to do about dogs and (OVERTALK) —

CN: Yes. Actually giving the students a strong voice in what was happening at the school.

HN: How many students were on the council? There were quite a number, weren't there?

CN: I don't remember. It seems to me that the people who were there that had the influence on the Community Council were not the students. There was a student body president, but the people, the force on the direction that the school would subsequently go in was through the efforts of the people who were faculty members.

MEH: What sorts of things did you discuss on the Community Council?

CN: Probably, curriculum was one of the things that — We got a lot of feedback about that, but the day-to-day living, the work program that you've heard a lot about —

HN: The philosophy of education. It had a Germanic side with Albers and that group and Hansgirg, too. Hansgirg was sort of a third force in that, though.

He had his own ideas about what education should be (UNINTELL
WORD).

CN: Wire (?). I think, John Wallen (OVERTALK) — Yes. John Wallen, more of
the community orientation about the way the community would function.
Weyer (?) more leaning towards the academic, building it to the free
school. A lot of discussion about the way that the examining of students
would be taken care of. It was really an open forum for life at Black
Mountain.

MEH: Looking back, what do you think about this approach to education?

CN: Well, nothing else has ever quite come up to it. Its ideals. Seeing it —

HN: It wasn't perfect, though. That's for sure.

MEH: What do you think its basic problems were?

HN: Well, for one, one of the things Chris just mentioned and that was a lack of
examinations and lack of grades. Now, they probably had the first
Pass-Fail system, at least I've ever heard of. I'd never read of one before
then.

CN: The senior project, the idea that you could be evaluated and this could be
translated into something. That was neat.

HN: There were no tests. (OVERTALK) — But they could give you papers to
write and things like that. I don't think that that's good. I'm talking about my
own education, and, of course, now that I teach it's — I do give tests. I think
they are important, because that's when you really learn I think, is on a
test. That's one thing that I really missed. I found out, for example — I

took German there, and since I never had a test on German, when it came to comparing what I knew with someone who went to the –

[COMMENTS ABOUT OUTSIDE NOISE]

HN: [cont'd] with someone who had been to the University of North Carolina, I didn't know as much as he did. That embarrassed the hell out of me. He knew more German than I did!

MEH: This was after you were at Black Mountain?

HN: That was while I was there, I knew this guy from University of North Carolina. He could carry on a conversation. I think I could read better than he could, but here I was among all these Germans ,and I couldn't speak as well as he could. Couldn't understand it. He knew a lot more conventional common words than I did.

MEH: So it really lacked the discipline side of education, in terms of –

CN: Decidedly. And I think, too (OVERTALK)

HN: But on the other hand, some of the things that some of the students did in the fields that they were interested in were tremendous.

MEH: It seems to me that in that respect the basic problem of the college was one of balance, that it went too far in the opposite direction in terms of trying not to limit learning just to tests. But it didn't —

HN: Well, I think anything that Black Mountain was in one direction, it made for certainly in others, so if it wasn't so hot in that particular way, it certainly made up for it in other ways.

MEH: Such as – ?

HN: The school plays, for example. Of course, Art Penn was there, but he wasn't the only one by any means.

MEH: What else was being done in drama? I know very little –

HN: Oh, we had tremendous –

MEH: Actually, I know very little about those years between — after Bob Wunsch left and before about 1948 things picked up again. Do you remember specifically what was being done?

HN: We had — Do you remember any of the plays? — I'm trying to —
[IRRELEVANT COMMENTS NOT DESCRIBED]

CN: There were like two. Do you remember?

HN: I've got a copy of one of the plays that someone translated just for the performance that they had, and they only had one performance.

MEH: Is this the one M.C. translated for —

HN: She did it, yeah.

MEH: Could you make a copy? — Or tell me what it is?

HN: I don't have the whole thing. I looked at it not too long ago, maybe a couple years ago, and there are some pages missing, but then that's thirty years ago.

MEH: I'd be curious just to know what it was.

HN: What else, Chris?

CN: I'm blank on that. I'm thinking more of Merce.

HN: Dick Spahn – remember Dick Spahn – was in one of them. He was tremendous. Of course he later became a Yiddish actor.

CN: I think the most exciting was the Art Penn plays, by a long shot, when he did one series of one-act plays that was absolutely spectacular (OVERTALK) in any drama circle now or then.

HN: I've never seen anything as good as that anywhere.

CN: I mean sets, everything about it, had just so – (OVERTALK)

HN: The scenery was unbelievable, too. They were good. Really were.

MEH: I know very little — Do you know where Dick Spahn is now?

HN: No, I haven't seen him since Black Mountain. I heard about him. I talked to someone about him about ten or fifteen years ago, and he was – he was in New York, that's for sure. He was from New York. He was quite important in the Yiddish theatre here. I don't even know what it is.

MEH: Is he Jewish? — Is Spahn a Jewish name?

HN: Oh, yes, very much so. The most Jewish man we had there. He grew a beard and he looked like Christ. (LAUGHS). We used to kid him about it.

CN: Mrs. Jalowetz, who was the mother of Trude Guermonprez, was there. She was, taught some voice lessons. She was very influential in a corner of the music life at Black Mountain, very well-trained, lovely —

MEH: She also was teaching bookbinding, I think.

CN: Yes, and Harry took bookbinding with her.

HN: I took a course in bookbinding.

MEH: Do you have books bound at the college?

HN: [AFFIRMATIVE].

MEH: Oh. How would you like to make some slides of them?

HN: I have some books that I bound there.

MEH: Well, most of the binding that I find at the college is not, you know, highly professional.

HN: Oh, no, mine's not either.

MEH: But some of it is very very lovely and imaginative, you know. The sort of things that you find in your photographs here, with people having woven fabric for covers or printed papers with leaves or with various things. I'm curious in locating as much as I can.

HN: (OVERTALK) — Everybody did some printing. I've got one or two. They're around somewhere. I don't know.

CN: We can find them.

HN: Who else did that? — Did Ken do that too?

CN: No.

HN: I don't think he did.

CN: In fact, I don't remember that as being — I think you and Mrs. Jalowetz sort of had a thing going there.

HN: Oh, no, there were about five of us all together. Well, that was about normal for all classes.

[INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING]

MEH: — about the millstones.

HN: Yeah, that's where the mail came, where everybody — When the mail came in, whoever was giving out the mail would stand. All the packages were put there. All new people who came to the school would get out of

the vehicle – they'd drop them there and they'd put their luggage there.

When you left, that's where you left from. I don't know. It was sort of a very important place in the school. I think much more so than any other one particular point.

MEH: Sort of a gathering point. People gathered there before, while they waited to go into the dining hall.

HN: That was it!

CN: [OFFMIKE] — That's where (INAUDIBLE).

MEH: Also, I don't have a photograph of the Music Room. I don't know if I'm going to be able to –

HN: This is the Roundhouse. This is not the Music Room.

MEH: But that's where music was taught. Was it not taught when you were there?

HN: There was some music there, too, yeah. That's where the party is, over there.

MEH: I see.

HN: Let's see that top one there, now, if you don't mind.

FEMALE VOICE: I want to see more of these.

MEH: Has your father been holding out on you?

HN: This girl, do you know who she is? — I can't remember her name. You remember her, Chris.

CN: Alice. Wasn't that Alice Somebody?

MEH: I don't have my list.

HN: Her father came to see her one time, and he was — This was in 1947 or '48. He came in a 1932 car, big huge one, I don't know what it was. And he was on his way to Florida with his girlfriend. That car, you wouldn't believe, had everything on it. It had pots and pans, tins. It was — I didn't have a camera. I really intended to take a picture of it. I'd never seen anything quite like it before. I always remember her for that.

CN: Alex Harper [SIC] was a little young man there who committed suicide not long after he left.

MEH: Right?

CN: He had been into photography, very much, and I wonder whatever happened to Alex Harper's —

MEH: I know what happened to him, but I don't know what happened to his photographs.

HN: What happened to him?

MEH: He committed suicide. I heard he committed suicide, and I heard that he drank himself to death. Suicide is much — Six of one and half-dozen of the other.

HN: He did drink a lot.

CN: What about Pepe Gonzales? — Did you ever hear anything about Pepe Gonzalez?

HN: He's in New York.

[INTERRUPTION IN RECORDING]

CN: – and who was really the idealist of the community aspect. The commune part — more than just a community — the sharing of the work load and the maintaining of the livelihood that came from the farm — and he was really into it. So he organized a group of energetic people, and Harry would like to have gone at that point.

HN: I didn't like John Wallen.

CN: I don't know. Instead we had other — Our life took a right-angle turn. But they left and went to Oregon to build a commune, to start a community there, and we don't know whether or not there are any fragments of it left. But the Rondthaler boy was sort of on the periphery. He was not really — They weren't [were (?)] depending on him to carry some of the financial load. But Manvel Schauffler, who had been an outstanding student there at the college, with his —

HN: He was the student coordinator. That was the person on the council.

CN: [UNINTELLI WORD] wife. No he didn't marry. He married —

MEH: He married one of the Raattama girls.

CN: Right.

MEH: They're there. They all — That community lasted only two or three years, and then they split up. But most of them stayed in the Portland area, and so they're still living there. I think they're — I'm not sure they're still living together, but there was a private school that a lot of them taught in. Catlin Gables or something like that, School. I think one of the Rondthaler boys taught there. Ed Adamy taught there.

CN: Ed and Harry were good friends.

MEH: I think David Schaufler taught there. That whole group.

HN: He was the blond with the glasses.

CN: They're cousins.

MEH: There were a whole bunch of Schauflers.

HN: Manvel was a good friend of mine too. We considered it very seriously —
going —

MEH: Joining the group?

HN: John was so — John could get migraine headaches on anything that
needed to be done. (LAUGHTER). And that I didn't like!

CN: They were real.

HN: Probably.

MEH: The stuff still had to be done.

HN: Yeah, the somebody had to make decisions. John had a headache.

FEMALE VOICE: I remember reading about migraine headaches.

HN: Oh, I wanted to ask about Chick Perrow. Oh Lorna Blaine, what happ —

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]