

Interviewee: MORTON STEINAU  
Participant: BARBARA HILL STEINAU  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]**

**[INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]**

**MEH:** Morton, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

**MS:** Very simply, I went to school in Louisville, Kentucky — the Louisville Male High School — and it's exactly what it says: there were only males. And just a quick digression — I went back to only one reunion, and that was the fiftieth reunion, and saw my classmates with some horror because they were all then 65 to 70 years old, wrinkled, hobbling, bent. And I had expected to see my high school friends looking just the way they looked. diversion is this — that I learned while back in Louisville that Louisville Male High School now has women who write in the alumni bulletin which I've been getting since: "We just love Male," "Here's to Male" and so on. So that's still called "Male." That's its name. And there are black students there. And I didn't realize until that reunion that there was a black high school when I went to Louisville Male High School which was one hundred percent male white students.

So, since in that intervening fifty years I had had more experience in the world about race relations and so on, but realized how naive I was and how much a part of a society I was that was — as the Krinner (PH) Report or some other said — "two nations, white and unequal," or something like that — "black and white and unequal."

Anyhow, this high school had an English teacher called Bob Wunsch, who came there, I guess, about the middle of my junior year... sometime. He was there about a year and a half, and he opened eyes of some of us pretty traditional kids. In English we would study Shakespeare and Browning and so on — all the well-known things. He brought in such people as Zora Neale Hurston and some guy named Ernest Hemingway and so on, who were not taught in the school. And these were all in the evening in his room at the YMCA. So four, five, six of us would gather there.

He'd come from a place called Rollins College, where Rice had been kicked out, I think, in maybe '32 or '33. And a new college — Black Mountain College he would tell us about — had started, and he couldn't afford to go there because I think the faculty that first year got room and board, which for some of them was great. We're in 1933, in the midst of the Depression. Some of the refugees like Albers and his wife had left with their skin, and they were glad they still had their skin on. Otherwise they were broke, and their possessions, everything — they had to get out in a hurry. They were Jews.

So many people were glad to be there, but Wunsch couldn't be because he was supporting a mother, an aunt, an uncle, cousins, and so on in Louisiana. A single guy. But somebody thought he belonged at Black Mountain and a special grant was made. So, he left in the middle of the high school year about the time I graduated and went right on down to Black Mountain. This would have been in the end of the year 1934. At that school, or in that time, or in the South, there were two graduating classes a year: June and December. And I graduated in December. Actually, it was January and it was called the Class of '34 1/2. And I then was out of school.

So I decided with a fellow disciple of Wunsch's — Bela Martin — to go and visit Black Mountain College. Well, Bela and I were both poor kids in the middle of the Depression so we hitchhiked down. We almost— It was, I think, April. We almost froze to death. We went through Tennessee in the mountains and it was cold. We would jump up and down on the road doing calisthenics to keep from freezing.

We finally got to Black Mountain and we were welcomed, and we were there for — we planned a visit of two, three, four, days. Black Mountain also needed students. So, they urged Bela and me to become students, although we had very little money. And they said, "Well, instead of this tuition" (which all the rich kids were paying, of twelve hundred dollars — that was everything: tuition, room, board, the works], they could

lower it to rock bottom, which would basically cover the cost of... extra cost of food at three hundred bucks.

Well, somehow Bela came up with three hundred. I was unable to, so they said "Well, we think we can get you a loan from the Hattie Strong Foundation." So they got a loan of 250 bucks, and I got fifty bucks from my brother. So I was enrolled. We stayed until the College year ended in the spring of '35. And it ended at the end of each year. Everybody had to get out, because it was at a rented building — huge, hundred-room building. And you took all your goods, your furniture, your books, anything you were going to use the next year into this attic, which was — It looked like the Titanic. It was gargantuan. You had to walk on the rafters because there was no flooring. And you had to very carefully place your stuff down, or it would go through the — You'd step through the plaster with it. And occasionally a leg appeared in somebody's room [LAUGHS], and a badly scuffed leg.

So that's how I — I had planned to go to Wittenberg College in Ohio. Ohio or Indiana, I forget which. A Lutheran seminary. And I was at Black Mountain about six months, and all ideas of ever entering a seminary were gone. So that was — It was because of Bob Wunsch. I no longer had any intention of going to that College.

**MEH:** What — Do you remember your first impression of the College when you got there? This was at Lee Hall, right?

**MS:** This was at Lee Hall. The rented... that big rented building was the home in summer to what we used to call "the Christians" — to the YMCA people, the Baptists, the various denominations. Each had a one or two week conference. Plus endless cottages. Huge, huge place. It could take a thousand people at a time.

I think the hugeness of it — I mean I had heard it was a small college, with a dozen faculty, twenty-five students, just a tiny start-up. And here was this simply huge complex of buildings, Southern-style buildings with the big columns. A number of the buildings — I mean the College could have been absorbed in any one of maybe four buildings. So that the hugeness of it. And the fact that some of the people spoke very broken English. I was not accustomed to dealing with people unlike myself — either people who didn't speak good English, who didn't have the same kind of skin, who didn't believe in Jesus Christ. I was... had grown up in a very limited way in this Southern town. So the fact that there were people there who smoked cigarettes — I didn't smoke — who drank whiskey, who were free to walk in the moonlight with a girl, who wore blue jeans — It was about as much a 180-degree turn for me as one could take.

**MEH:** Did you have trouble dealing with it? Did it just come naturally?

**MS:** That's hard for me to remember. I would say that it — No, it was all delicious. I mean it was a whole new menu out there, and I loved it.

**MEH** What courses did you take?

**MS:** I think I started out mainly looking at English literature. I had always been interested in literature, both in reading and writing, keeping a journal and whatnot. And I also took a course called "Plato," as well as a course in Greek.

**MEH:** Now who taught the Plato?

**MS:** From John Rice.

**MEH:** What do you remember about that?

**MS:** The Plato had literally nothing to do with Plato. I think the name came from the — It would probably have better been called "Socrates," but it was called "Plato." The Socratic method of seeking for the truth, sometimes through a slightly adversarial relationship. Pushing people: "What do you mean by what you said? Tell us more. How did you come to arrive at that?"

Rice was able to be both — He could use a stiletto or he could be very all-embracing. And I think it depended somewhat on who you were, whether he liked you or not. If he was down on you, he would really use that method to take your skin off.

The Greek class was separate from that. I think there were maybe two of us. And I learned a Greek phrase, [NOT TRANSCRIBED]: that's the only thing I ever learned. It's the start of the Bible: "In the beginning was God — In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God." And we would talk about everything under the sun, very much like the so-called, the Plato classes. The Plato classes were big. They were seminars, and

people — I guess you signed up for it, but people — it was always just before lunch, so people who didn't have a class just before lunch would sit around the edges, and they weren't prohibited from talking.

**MH** Where was this held?

**MS** This was held in the huge lobby. The lobby was roughly the size of a football field, with — I don't know, maybe a hundred chairs in it. In the very center of the building, ground floor. On each side were rooms, and above it were rooms — and two wings — probably it must have been a hundred bedrooms and studies. Every, every student had her or his own study. And the front part of the building stuck out over the columns on the second floor, so those were longer rooms. Those were the faculty rooms where they had classes. And then the students were along that hallway, and then the wings were bedrooms: girls on the second floor, boys on the first floor. Bedrooms were shared. You had a roommate. This, remember, was in the '30s, so your roommate was the same sex. And that gave a lot of freedom. And your study was your own world. I mean you could close the door and people didn't come — They would knock and you'd say "Come in." You could leave it open and people walking by the hall would stop in. You could hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on it, and that meant, "This person is deep in intellectual pursuits." That wasn't always the case! But that's — It was respected, it was one of the agreements that was passed. You'd never walk through a "Do Not Disturb" signs. You don't disturb somebody on the other side of the "Do Not Disturb" sign. And that was respected

ninety-nine percent of the time. And often you would sense that on the other side of the "Do Not Disturb" sign there was not necessarily intellectual pursuits.

A lot of freedom. There was a tremendous amount of freedom there. Now that was heady! But, yeah, I think I handled it okay. It didn't throw me. I began the first fall I was there, with Frank Rice, John Rice's son, to drink beer. And we drank a lot of beer. We would buy it by the case, and no problem. I mean nobody objected. If you got really blotto too often, then there was discussion about it. We didn't often. But we would buy a case of beer. It was Jacob Ruppert beer, it was ten cents a bottle, \$2.40 a case of twenty-four bottles, and kept it in the big refrigerator.

The kitchen was — You would leave this huge lobby and walk up a covered walkway to the dining room, and there a couple named Jack and Rubye Lipsey were like generals of an army. They were in absolute control. Nobody crossed them. They had a couple of helpers. There was a walk-in refrigerator where people kept a beer or a case of beer or whatever, plus the stuff that the kitchen needed.

And the dining room was very much of a social center. Meals were a social center. No assigned places. You tried to sit wherever you had buddies or your favorite girl or whatever. And so there'd be scrambling. Sometimes ten people would try to get at that table for eight, but — here were only eight chairs. And you went with a tray and got stuff, usually one person for the table. I don't remember at this point — I guess it was set,



but I'm not sure whether there were eight plates and eight sets of silverware and glasses or whatnot, how that worked. But most all — There were no serving people. There were servants in the kitchen — kitchen help. There was a big coffee urn. Somebody would — usually a student but not always — I mean the relationship from faculty to student was not as severe or as marked as in most colleges. The — In general, the people from Europe — Dr. Straus and his wife; Dr. Fritz Moellenhoff and his wife; Albers and his wife Anni. Albers was called "Juppi," and Anni was called "Anni." Straus was called "Dr. Straus." Moellenhoff was called "Dr. Moellenhoff." But Albers was not a buddy. He — In general, the European people were, demanded that there be a different level, that they were on a different level.

I remember Albers from time to time in meetings or otherwise would say "Ve are de competent ones. Ve have de competence. You are de students. You're to learn. We teach." Simple. And that he believed, and that he did. And it worked out okay. With other people — the man I did most of my work with, Joe Martin, certainly respected his knowledge as much greater than mine. But there was an interplay. He would learn from us. How much Albers learned from his students, I don't know — or Straus.

Straus was a kind of a lonely guy, and he did have students. I was one of his friends, partly because in later years, after we'd moved to Lake Eden, he was in the same building that I was all of one summer. He and John Evarts and I. So we got quite close, and he was capable of

closeness. So — I don't know if I've answered [LAUGHS]. I don't remember now what the question was.

**MEH:** Going back, can you describe in more detail Rice's Plato class — or Rice as a person, a personality in the community.

**MS:** Well, physically he was a roly-poly guy, very disheveled in his clothes. He was a pipe smoker. On occasion, if it was possible so that he didn't burn up anything, he would beat his pipe out on his shoe and stuff would get on the thing. If you smoke a pipe, usually there's a filter in it and you undo it and the filter gets all cloggy. He might wipe that on his pants. He was not a fastidious man.

He loved to talk, and I think he listened also. His mind — You could hear the motor whirring in response to questions. I mean, if you said, "When did Columbus cross the ocean?" I mean, he wouldn't give you a date. He would say "Which ocean are you talking about?" Or now "This Columbus, what was he doing? Who was he? I don't know much about Columbus." I mean that kind of thing, which he enjoyed and which other people in general enjoyed. He could also, as I say, be very abrasive. "That's a pretty dumb question." Not even bother to answer any more questions. His — And people in general loved him or hated him. Some people hated his guts, but not — They were uncomfortable in the same room with him.

**MEH:** Why do you think the people who hated him hated him?

**MS:** Because of the kind of thing I just said —, that he could cut people off, and it was clear that he didn't like you, you — And he said "That's a dumb question," and he would in general then — His discourse with you would be in such a way that he would put you into a dumb position, which he was capable of doing. So that you felt — He succeeded in making you accept that you were pretty dumb. Some students, I would say — I think it was as simple as that —, that he didn't like, who he thought were dumb and weren't worth giving the time of day to, he almost destroyed. Some he built up. He liked me and I liked him. So it was partly through the filter of time, and talking with other people, that I see the way he uprighted, the kind of person he was: brilliant, thoughtful, and could be savage, so that — He also was the center of a lot of attention and adulation. I mean I think it was said in some book — Adamic or Duberman, I don't know who — "Black Mountain College was John Rice." And that certainly was true of the early years. He was, he was the leader. It may not have survived the first couple of years without him. He was tough. And he made no bones about it. I mean in his own book, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, he would talk about his attempt at fund-raising to get the college started, and if people would say "Well, it sounds like an extreme place, or whatnot, that you're talking about," he would say, "Well that's the way it is. If you don't want to give money, the hell with you." Not quite that, but basically. I mean, it came across that he was not going to get down on his knees and beg them for money. If they wanted to give it for what the intent was, fine.

There was obviously a directness to him. And I would say that a couple of Achilles heels were above his feet, and they were apparent.

He gave way to his feelings and his appetites in a way that didn't always encourage community, so that he was a strong leader and a divisive leader. I guess Rice was there the whole four years that I was as a student. At the end of every year there was a peeling-out of the non-Rice faction. It always lost. There were violent, violent end-of-the-year meetings, where people would vent their feelings. I remember one man, a hot-blooded man somewhere south of the border — Portell-Vilá — picked a chair up and shook it over his head like a bullfighter. That's the way emotions ran. So, from the end of the first year — I think it was the end of the first year I was there — Irving Knickerbocker, a psychiatrist — psychologist I guess — had a strong following. Rice didn't like that, so he hated... got to hate Knickerbocker, and Knickerbocker got to hate him in turn. And they had followers. I mean it was internecine war in this little place. And one or the other had to go. Well, Rice had the power. I mean, he had founded Black Mountain College. The people who came there were tagging along after him. Nobody was there the first year that was not a Rice supporter. It was "John Rice College," but they called it "Black Mountain College" because it was in Black Mountain.

So he had the — what's the word that you're supposed, you have to have to become President? Clarisma [SIC]. Is that

**MEH:** Charisma.

**MS:** Charisma. He had it. And with that, I mean the very thing that attracted some people, his strength, repelled others, partly because by his strength he beat them down. So he was — And he finally did not win. I mean he was kicked out. The fifth college that he was kicked out of. I mean he was [LAUGHS] not somebody that got along with everybody. That was part of his strength.

**MEH:** What do you remember about his being kicked out?

**MS:** How public is this stuff we're talking about?

**MEH:** It will go in an archive sometime. But in terms of my use for it, I'll get permission. Do you want me to turn it off for a minute?

**MS:** No. I will tell you what I remember. And I remember it particularly well because there were three students there from Louisville, Kentucky: Bela Martin, Mort Steinau, and Jane Mayhall. I never knew Jane, I don't think. I remember talking with her one day in a park in Louisville. Now, whether that was in a summer vacation or not — I was lying in a park — Cherokee Park, reading Shakespeare, and she came up and we talked.

What the relationship of John Rice and Jane Mayhall was I have no idea. She was one of the students that he liked very much, as he liked me very much. The perception was that they were very close. What does "close" mean? I don't know. Did they have sex together? I don't know. I doubt it, but I don't know. Obviously, it is clear that his — John Rice's wife — Nell, was unhappy about the attention. I think he would walk with her down the road or in the woods or whatnot, as many people walked

together in the woods — daytime, nighttime. Complete privacy, a hundred percent. The perception was that this— he had taken one step too far that was not acceptable. The — the apparent closeness of the two was not acceptable. He had a son there — Frank. He had a daughter, Mary. He had a wife, Nell. And the College did not countenance what appeared to be inappropriate.

Plus some of the earlier antagonisms piled on top of that.

[VIDEOTAPE ONLY TEXT BEGINS] I mean, all of the anti-Rice people didn't get kicked out at the end of the year. Not all of the Board of Fellows that ultimately made the decision — [VIDEOTAPE ONLY TEXT ENDS]

**[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.]**

**MEH:** You were saying about all of the Board of Fellows...

**MS:** Yes. Not all of the Board of Fellows — and as I remember, they were the deciders. A committee — I think the Board of Fellows which was the sole governing body — they or a committee of part of them made a decision at the end of each year who would be invited back. You would be invited back or not invited back. The not-invited-back — I don't know whether that was specific or not. I don't remember ever being invited back. I was never not invited back. But the people who were not liked by Rice, or who Joe Martin or Bob Wunsch or somebody else felt just there's no point in their being there at Black Mountain College — I mean, you didn't have to go to classes, so some people did a fair amount of drinking, not to the point that they were terribly objectionable but nothing was happening, so they were

— they were not invited back. Whether they got something in writing that said, "You will not be enrolled here come next September," — The faculty was fairly specific in the case of Knickerbocker. He was not invited back, so that just raised the hackles. And I'm not sure how I got into that.

**MEH:** We were talking about Rice's resignation.

**MS:** Okay. But over the years, people who were invited back — There certainly were people, including those on the faculty, who felt Knickerbocker got a pretty shady deal. I think the next year it was Zeuch who was — Just what his post was, I don't remember.

**MEH:** Do you remember somebody named Goldenson?

**MS:** Bob Goldenson was one that I think Rice for some reason took exception to. I think Goldenson was one who took walks in the moonlight with young women. Rice may have been jealous of that. I don't know. But Zeuch was also one who had a strong following. He was an older guy. What is older? Maybe fifty years old. There were a couple of Barnes brothers. All of these got axed, almost literally. I mean they were not invited back. Well, there were always people around them who resented that. So — But they didn't say, "If Zeuch leaves, I leave." I think one or two did with Knickerbocker. Certainly some students who the College would have been delighted to have continued on said, "The hell with this. If Knickerbocker goes, we go. We're not going to stay in a place where this kind of thing happens." So maybe A felt that way when Knickerbocker left, B felt that way when Zeuch left, C felt that way when Goldenson left.

So Rice was beginning to build up quite a debt that he couldn't pay back. Finally it came his turn. He lost the power. And I remember in one meeting when — The general meetings were — I mean they sometimes would go for three or four hours. Anything could come up. There was no agenda, as I remember. There might have been a specific reason for having a general meeting, but then other things would come around that, I think Louis Adamic, who wrote the article that ultimately brought a lot of people there . "Education on a Mountain," which was in *Harpers* and then it was damned by Bernard De Voto in the next issue of *Harpers* in his "Easy Chair" article and so on. He wrote that after being at Black Mountain for, I don't know, I think he [refers to Adamic] came for a visit, as Bela Martin and I did, and stayed for two, three months. A long time.

He fell in love with Rice and Rice with him. He — And I think — I'm almost sure at a general meeting somebody said, "Will this much building up of this man Rice ultimately destroy the College?" That any time you have one person who is that much a factor, if something happens to that person, there's nobody to handle it. I mean, like Jones in Guyana, or something. I mean you have this charismatic leader, as so many communes or religious orders do, when that person goes it goes, it goes. So, that question was raised.

And I think people felt that increasingly that there was a danger in having this man, Rice, "The College." The neighboring people — I mean he also would not use guarded remarks in talking to people, or how he



dressed when he went to the town of Black Mountain. So that there was a whole accumulation of things. It was not just Jane Mayhall. But that seemed to be the focal point. So, that raised, that brought up, freshened all these other concerns, that as with other colleges where he had been, he went too far, somehow. So that what was so appealing and so powerful ultimately was, like in the Greek tragedies that he would often refer to, did him in.

**MEH:** If Rice was the charismatic leader, how would you describe Ted Dreier's role?

**MS:** Ted was an idealistic, very energetic, somewhat bumbling guy. I think he had — How much he had to do with Rice leaving, I don't know. I was just about to say he had, I think, a pretty clear vision of right and wrong: there was a right way to do things and not a right way to do things. Very energetic. Physically powerful man. Not terribly articulate, so, in a sense the opposite of Rice. I mean he was hard and trim physically, energetic, but not very articulate. Rice was soft, flabby, not terribly energetic physically, and very articulate.

Ted was a pretty powerful guy. He was not one to whom Rice would say, "That's a dumb question." He would never say that to Ted Dreier. Ted, also, because of his energy, because of his deep belief that this was the way to go, and because of his fairly wealthy connections through his family and the way he grew up, he was the guy that could get money to keep the place going. So that he was — Rice was certainly a realist,

among other things, and Ted was pretty important. I think intellectually they had no, almost no connection. Ted taught, mathematics, I think, but he wasn't there much of the time. Or he would be busy chopping wood when he— at the 10 o' clock class. He wouldn't make it. So he was not a clear — He didn't have a clear agenda in his life. He had wonderful ideas... ideals, which he followed. It was sometimes not too easy to follow him in his conversation.

I was very fond of Ted. He and I would take day-long, two or three day hikes together in the mountains. Very fond of him. But I don't know what he discussed. Trees, maybe [LAUGHS], animals. Just we enjoyed the woods. We enjoyed hiking. And cutting wood, things like that. He was a bull when he had an ax in his hand with a tree in front of him.

**MEH:** Did he — Who were other faculty that you took courses with?

**MS:** A fair amount of work with Bob Wunsch, part of it in the plays that he directed. I think I took an English course with him. My main work was with Joe Martin. After a couple of years, Wunsch had gotten up into the Senior Division with basically tutorial work. I mean you zeroed in on your, whatever your major course field was.

**MEH:** What was Joe Martin like?

**MS:** Joe was an Eighteenth-century English professor. I think he lived his literature in his head. Easy to get along with. Somewhat demanding, in a nice way. I mean, he expected you to do your work, and not just take but to give back. I mean, write fairly long essays and so on about the work,

which he would conscientiously read, comment on in writing in the margins and so on.

I remember once, and I liked Joe, I think he liked me, we got along well.

[INTERRUPTION OF INTERVIEW FOR DISCUSSION ABOUT TELEPHONE CALL ANSWERED BY MS. STEINAU] I remember once — and this was, I think, about some pre-Chaucer stuff, some early English literature: Chaucer was one of my major people — that was something in there where the woman was caught with her pants down and so she ran "em-bare-assed." He wrote in the margin, "You probably enjoyed writing that. It's not very funny and not very scholarly." So, I mean he, he had a fairly high standard. He had been an Oxford scholar, as Rice had, maybe on a Fulbright fellowship. I don't know. But he had been in Oxford. He was an erudite man without being in any way artificial about it. I mean, he was genuinely — He wasn't trying, he wasn't showy at all.

Fred Mangold, also, I remember taking courses in, I guess, novels, reading novels with him. Fred was a pretty tight person, with a sense of humor. Good teacher. So, most of my work — See, I think you were supposed — in order to get into the Senior Division, you had to have experience in two or three or four different — what was the word? not fields. There was another word for it. So, I don't remember doing much else.

**MEH:** Did you take any courses from Albers?

**MS:** I did. And I don't remember much about him. The reason I'm sure I did is because there's a picture of me in one of the classes with a big drawing board in the woods, drawing a leaf, I think. I — I felt not articulate in the art work that he was — I admired him. I didn't like him, but I admired him. I guess that kind of strict Germanic "This is the way to do it" I didn't like. I didn't feel he was a good community member. I think a great teacher — not for me, but for most people. I mean he was a genuine genius in being able to communicate to people who were able to receive the communication and communicating through art — drawing, painting, whatever you're seeing or thinking. But I didn't do any work with Anni. I was just thinking there was somebody else that I did some work with. I don't remember now. Name some others.

**MEH:** An art teacher Schawinsky was there?

**MS:** Yeah. I liked Xanti. He was a crazy guy.

**MEH:** What do you mean by that?

**MS:** Well, he was just explosive. He and his beautiful wife Irene. I used to look at her just in awe. I think as I look back, well, what [LAUGHS] — I doubt that she was terribly bright, but a beautiful doll-like person. I was what, nineteen, twenty years old. She was an old woman of maybe thirty. Yeah, I did some work with Xanti. The *Danse Macabre*, I wrote the poetry for that. I trans— I couldn't have translated it because I don't know any language well enough to translate from it. But I guess I saw other people's work and did it at what we were doing there. So I did that with Schawinsky.

**MEH:** This is for the *Danse Macabre*?

**MS:** Yeah. Other than that, I don't know if I did anything with him [SIC].

**MEH** Do you remember the abstract theater performances that he did? Did you take part in those?

**MS:** No. I was in three or four of Wunsch's plays, but not —

**MEH:** Which ones?

**MS:** There was a short Irish play. I don't remember the name of it. We took it to Chapel Hill. We would go to Chapel Hill maybe once a year to the, I guess, One-Act Play Festival, and won prizes and things. He was a good, good director. I think I was in *A Doll's House*, in a play written by Bill McCleery.

**MEH:** *Let Me Have Air*?

**MS:** *Let Me Have Air*. I think I — I'm not sure whether — I know Barb was in it. I don't know whether I was or not. I remember it very well. Very clever, and clever music by Evarts. I did some work with John Evarts. I guess we had a little orchestra there. I play the violin, very poorly, and John recognized that I played it very poorly. And I don't remember when we played. I don't think — I mean there were some real good musicians there: Maude Dabbs, Allan Sly, and others, who could play at a concert level. So, I don't remember what our little band or little orchestra was. Frank Rice, I remember, played the cello. And I took a course in Wagner with John Evarts. But my relationship to music is very much the same as it is to art. It's a low level. I — I enjoyed working with John and — We kept in touch with John right up until his death. We would see him in Europe when we

were there. He would always stay with us when he came on his — He would get a vacation I guess maybe paid for by whoever he worked for in Paris and then in Munich. Every two or three years he would come. Because we, among other things, lived near Yale and he would try to tie it in when there was a class reunion of his Yale class. And we would often during most of those visits go to the home of Thornton Wilder, who John had worked with at Yale and whom he had gotten to come to Black Mountain not as a teacher or a writer but just to visit.

**MEH:** Do you remember that visit?

**MS:** I don't remember it. I remember visiting him in his home a number of times, just outside of New Haven, in Hamden.

**MEH:** How would you describe John Evarts' role in the community, as a personality?

**MS:** Well, John was kind of a cement that held a lot of bricks together. I mean he was interested in everybody, just thoroughly interested. And then his Tin Pan Alley type of playing with the piano at night, it just— it held the College together, whether you danced or didn't dance. And most people did. I mean I had never danced until I went there. Bobbie Dreier taught me and others. If you didn't dance, she would teach you in fifteen minutes. One, two... I mean you — And I was never a great dancer, but I learned that you move usually to a four count. And it didn't matter. I mean it was the pleasure of dancing, and of changing partners. John, very much like Wunsch, brought the community together through his music, and Wunsch through his play. And all of that was in the dining room. The stage was in

the dining room, the props were made there, the piano was in the dining room. You danced after dinner. Very important community place. And big enough for that size college. Everybody was there at one time three times a day or more. If there was a play in the evening, that was four times. But it was a— it was indeed a community, as Duberman says in the sub-title of his book. What is it? *An Exploration in Community*.

**MEH:** How did the community deal with Evarts being gay? This was openly known?

**MS:** I'm not sure. That was part also of my naiveté. I never knew Wunsch was gay 'til I was there. I mean I saw Wunsch almost every day for a year-and-a-half in Louisville, Kentucky. I didn't know he was gay.

**MEH:** I'm not sure anyone did.

**MS:** But in Louisville — Half a dozen of us would go to his room at the Y and spend two hours of an evening. I have a feeling — again, you look back through a different lens later. Some of the — I'm not sure how universally liked he was by the other Louisville High School faculty. And I have a feeling some of them thought, "Hey, what is this? This is a little guy with a quiet voice and maybe a slightly effeminate means of holding his body, and the boys go to his room at night at the Y." I'm guessing. But as I look back and just kind of feel back, that comes out.

**MEH:** This is at the Y, not at Black Mountain.

**MS:** That was at the Y. I don't — I knew John was gay. I don't know when — first year I was there, second year I was there. I knew he was gay in part because he came on very heavy to me. It almost made me sick. I couldn't

stand it. Several times. And I still kept close friendship with him. I guess he could never understand that his advances were not welcome. He liked me very much. And I liked him. But that — that was a barrier that he couldn't cross. John lent us his car to get married. Barb and I — I was with John and Erwin Straus all of one summer that Barb and I were planning to be married. She had been there two years and hadn't been home, so she was back in California. I writing her — I don't think I ever phoned her. That was pretty expensive — saying, "How about it? I mean are we or are we ain't? Let's set a date." So I finally wrote and said "I'm going to be there on a certain date in August unless I have a wire saying "no." So — But I had basically no money. So, Evarts said he would lend me his car. It was a 1936 Ford. How he could manage a car I don't know. People — the salaries were like \$700 a year, plus room and board. So that bought your cigarettes and your clothes and your whatnot. And it was somewhat based on your needs. I mean John got less than the Albers because there were two Albers and they were both teaching. Charles Lindsley, who had a wife and children as some others did, would get more because there were three people, four people, who had to have clothes and whatnot. Albers, I remember, was pissed off when our daughter Joan was born because now there were three Steinaus but only two Alberses, and we were going to get more a year than he was. This kid, this goddam kid was now going to get 810 and he was only getting 750 — whatever the figures were, and I think those were fairly close figures — because we had a greater need. We had



to buy some infant formula and whatnot. And that's — that was the basis. So, John lent us his car and I put an ad in the *Asheville Citizen* or whatever it was called for passengers. Well right away I got three passengers, paying passengers. Two of them turned out to be professional drivers. One drove for some Hollywood movie lot. He was a stunt driver and another one, and a woman who had a daughter in California that she was dying to see. We drove 18 hours a day, and we would switch every hour, the three guys. And so we made it in three days. The woman was sick almost the entire way. She said, "No, don't worry about it. Just keep going. I want to see my daughter." So I had enough money to pay for the trip, except we had some work done in California, and we had all kinds of problems coming back.

And on our honeymoon, we went up through Yosemite with these giant Sequoia trees. The cones are about eighteen inches long. And people in the Midwest had never — They thought they were carved and put together. The little individual pieces, like an inch-and-a-half long, quarter-inch thick— they thought they were made of wood and put together. We had no money, so we would sell these for gas. Barb's mother was a great smoker. As we both were. She gave us two cartons of Wings — no, Kools. We would sell cigarettes. And finally we just had no more money, so we wired Evarts [LAUGHS] so we could get back with his car. And we were at Point A, and we said "It's now noon. We will be by 5 o'clock at a certain point." So, we got there as the Western Union was

pulling the curtain down. We beat on the door and got in, and I don't know, twenty-five bucks or something, that got us as far as Louisville. At Louisville I had friends and I stayed with them, and we got enough money to go the rest of the way.

So I was very close with John. We would visit him at his home in Vermont whenever he was back in the U.S. He would stay there and with us. He was a neighbor, next-door neighbor, of a guy that was the Secretary of State or something for about one evening under Nixon. Later became Chair of — I don't remember. Doesn't matter.

But, no — I, I don't think Evarts' gayness — I think that's the question — was a problem. Of course, the word "gay" was not in usage then. He was "homosexual." I don't know. I simply don't remember. I knew he was gay, obviously. I don't know. People — John had a way — if he would sit down next to you, he would put his arm on your leg. I mean just — instead of — I gave you a hug when you came today. Well, Evarts would put his hand on your leg — man, woman, child, dog, cat, whatever. He was a physical person. He liked to touch. And I guess he was recognized as homosexual. What relations of a sexual nature he had with anybody there, I don't know. I think Wunsch did not. I think Wunsch was — Wunsch was a tight little man, a tight, scared, wonderful little man [VIDEOTAPE ONLY TEXT BEGINS] who adored Rice and was scared of him. [VIDEOTAPE ONLY TEXT ENDS]

**[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2.]**

[INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**MS:** I don't remember homosexuality being a problem. Now it probably was more in some people's minds than in mine. It just — For whatever reason, it was not a big thing. As I say, the reaching out for closer physical contact on the part of Evarts than I wanted I found distasteful, but it wasn't — wasn't a big problem.

**MEH:** Did you take any science courses that you remember?

**MS:** I don't remember any. I think I was obliged to do something with science.

**MEH:** Did you do anything with Georgia?

**MS:** I remember him very well. I don't remember taking any science courses. I remember making I think in the hallway outside his — I think he had his lab or study or whatever on the lower level, where there was a library and one or two rooms. And my recollection is that I made a bench and a desk down there, using his tools. I don't think I had any tools of my own.

**MEH:** He was a carpenter, or he had woodworking skills?

**MS:** He had tools. I don't remember. I was never close to him. I didn't dislike him. He and I didn't have anything in common.

**MEH:** Rice really saw him as someone who was not really attuned to Black Mountain ideas [OVERTALK]

**MS:** He was a somewhat wooden person. Why he followed Rice, why he left — I think perhaps possibly a little bit like Ted Dreier he was an idealist. He thought Rice was wrong, so he left. He had two — I think he had two kids, at least one — maybe, I think, two. So, he had a family to feed. Having left

Rollins, possibly precipitously, there was a potential job there. He certainly had no charisma in my eyes. Quiet. I don't remember what he contributed to the life of Black Mountain, and I don't even remember whether he was a chemist or exactly what his field was. I think he was called Dr. Georgia which tells us a little something. Zeuch was called Dr. Zeuch. I guess Rice was called Dr. Rice. Wunsch was called Bob. Joe Martin was called Joe, So, again, I say there were very easy relationships between the students and the teachers. Some had "Dr." in front of their names; some were called by their first names.

**MEH:** Did I ask you if you took courses with Jalowetz?

**MS:** You didn't ask, and I didn't. Music was simply not anything — I liked Jalo.

**MEH:** What was he like?

**MS:** He was almost a caricature of the wild-haired musician. He spoke with his hands, in a colorful language, the way many people who don't know the English language thoroughly would — would find ways of saying it that were different enough that they pointed up stuff that our normal everyday speech does not point up. Trudi I liked. The daughter Lisa I liked. I saw her a couple of years ago in a house that I guess her — Her husband was a play something, not an architect. But I liked the Jalowetzes. I did not take any class with him.

**MEH:** What about Allan Sly?

**MS:** Again, a musician. I took folk dancing with him. I don't think that was the class.

**MEH:** English —

**MS:** English country dancing. I loved to do that. He was a very tight little man, with a very buxom wife who played the piano very well. He and I locked horns a couple of times. Some of us for some reason were in touch with a violinist in Asheville — I think he lived in Asheville. He was not part of the college community. And we prevailed upon him to come and have a Saturday night concert, and the music people who stood behind Sly like in a line — anything he thought, they thought. The joke was that Frank Rice and I had, you asked somebody, "What did you think of the concert tonight?" They wouldn't tell you until they found out what Sly thought about it. Then they would give you an opinion. He was very — I guess, unsure of himself, So, he had to have it his way. I think a brilliant musician. Played beautifully. Probably a good teacher. Again, very, very tight, restricted, and not easy to appreciate the work of other people. He thought Evarts was a nothing, because — I mean Evarts was not a concert pianist. He was a fun pianist. Allan's music would never have kept the college together. I mean it was a good thing for the college, because some of the concerts that either he played or arranged to have musicians in would bring in people from the community, the greater community in Asheville, maybe once or twice a year. So that — As did Wunsch's plays. Some were open to the public; most were just for the college. But it was a way that the college, little by little, became accepted. I think when I first went there as a full-time student in the fall of '35, the college was still looked at askance. I think maybe the day I arrived with Bela, hitchhiking, we were looking for a ride to Black Mountain College. We heard a couple of snide

remarks: "Oh, that place, huh? Well, I think you'll find it up the hill." That gradually was overcome by — by the reaching out, the inviting people, and paying bills on time. I became assistant treasurer after I was a student, and did that for three years, was kind of Clerk of the Works during the building of the Studies Building — ordering material, hiring the few people that we needed, electrician or whatnot, that students and faculty couldn't do.

Ted was the treasurer. Again, he was rarely there, so the day to day work was handled by the assistant treasurer. Norm Weston had been the one before me, while I guess as a student. So I became assistant treasurer, or doing the work of it, my last year of studenthood, and then was officially a staff or faculty member. Anybody on the staff was a faculty member the way the thing was set up. We were very careful to see that bills were paid promptly, within ten days of the time stuff. Boy, in the thirties, that was important. I mean we may have been atheists and nudists and Communists and everything else, but we paid our bills. That went a long way towards making us good people. And, I mean, we didn't have all that much money but we — we didn't buy anything we couldn't pay for it in cash.

**MEH:** Did you [INTERRUPTION AND IRRELEVANT COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]. Did you graduate?

**MS:** Yes, I graduated in spring of '39.

**MEH:** What did you graduate in?

**MS** In English literature.

**MEH:** Do you remember who your — First, do you remember taking the Senior Division exams?

**MS:** I remember that I took it. I don't remember much about it. As I said earlier, my recollection is that you had to have competence in four — I can't think of the name. It's, as I say, not "fields." And they must have thought I did. I don't remember doing anything other than English literature. My examiner was Tucker Brook.

**MEH:** Did he come to the College?

**MS:** He came to the College. He was there three or four days. Commended the College for the excellence of its work and overall that the quality that he found in examining me was equivalent of a Master's at Yale. So that that stood the College in good stead. I think I got a letter that said I was graduated. That was in '39 and then maybe fifteen years later, when Olson, at the last end of Olson's tenure, I got a letter awarding me I think a B.A. How that happened or what — I guess at the last minute it got the right to issue a B.A. Or it was a B.A. through the University of North Carolina. Something. I have it somewhere, not on the wall.

**MEH:** Barbara was saying that your roommate at Black Mountain committed suicide or one of your roommates, she thought.

**MS:** He very definitely committed suicide.

**MEH:** Who was that?

**MS:** Porter — was that his first or last name? Porter Sargent. No —

**MEH:** No. Sears was in his name.

**MS:** No, no, no. Not Porter Sargent. Something Porter. Dick Porter.

**MEH:** No. Was it Dick — We could look it up. But it was someone — Something, something Sears was in his name, and then there was — I was told there were two people really who committed suicide during that period.

**MS:** There were a lot of deaths when I was there.

**MEH:** Do you remember — Forgetting the name, do you remember how this happened?

**MS:** Yeah. Dick Porter — that's the name of the fellow. He had a study next to mine. I heard a shot, and I went in, and he was moaning on the floor with blood all over the place. So I went down to the next floor or down the hall. I thought it was down the hall. It would have been the same floor because all the long studies were on one floor. All the studies were on the same floor. To Fritz Moellenhoff, who had a class. And — He said, "I'm in the middle of a class." I said "I don't care. Come with me." I must have been white or something. So he came with me. We called an ambulance. He either was dead before we got to the hospital, or died there in the hospital in Swannanoa. And there were inquests and so on and so on and so on. Wasn't it Dick Porter? Is that the right name, Barbara?

**BHS:** It was Dick Porter. But what about Denis Rhodes? It was Dick Porter. I told her the story, but I thought it was Denis. I didn't know.

**MS:** As far as I know, Denis Rhodes killed — I'm sure Denis Rhodes killed himself. Not at the College, but during a summer vacation. He and I were



the two people who were working with Joe Martin. Brilliant, brilliant guy. I mean..

**MEH:** Do you have any idea why he did it?

**MS:** I'm going to guess he found out he was homosexual.

**MEH:** Denis Rhodes.

**MS:** Yeah. He was a very withheld person with somewhat effeminate gestures and carriage. Very quiet, very shy. I think the world was too much for him. Beyond that, I don't — I didn't know him at all well. I don't know that anybody there knew him very well.

**MEH:** What about Richard Porter? Did you have any idea — How did the College handle this sort of tragedy?

**MS:** I'm pretty sure we had a general meeting, said that we should have known that this young man was unhappy enough for this to happen. His mother was vacationing nearby. I remember she came by, and it didn't seem to bother her none. He had a girlfriend. Do you remember the girlfriend's name, Barb?

**BHS:** No, I don't remember there was such a person.

**MS:** Okay, Jean Jordan, who made a big fuss of it.

**BHS:** Oh, Marian Nacke?

**MS:** No, no.

**BHS:** Oh, somebody did —

**MS:** Jean Jordan.

**BHS:** Jean — Was that his girlfriend?

**MS:** Yeah.

**BHS:** Well, of course, one would make a fuss.

**MS:** Well, it was mainly to call attention to her, how much [OVERTALK] they loved each other and so on. But I think the college, it took the college up short that this shouldn't have happened, we should have known. We should have been able to say "Hey, Dick, let's, let's help."

**BHS:** I think maybe now that you're talking about it, we thought that she didn't care so much for him as she was pretending.

**MS:** Something, there was something slightly phony about all the to-do. Barb mentioned Marian Nacke. Her brother, Frank, died there in a flood.

**MEH:** What do you remember? I know that you were in the same boat.

**MS:** I don't remember much other than — See, I was — Charles Lindsley, another faculty member — I was then a faculty member, as the Assistant Treasurer. He and I ran the Lake Eden Inn. There were students working there, so that as an employer, as a boss, I one day looked out — it had been raining like crazy — and it was in the mountains and the streams coming down had filled the lake to the point that the earthen dam was having some water spilling over it. And I thought it would wash away and that if we opened the floodgates — there was a big lever and you could release a lot of water down lower or drop the gates, I forget what. It was going over maybe three feet thick. A lot of water.

So I said, "Frank, let's go out and open that floodgate." So we got in and swam toward it, or rowed the boat toward it, and as we got close to it,

the water that was pouring through was so strong we couldn't control the boat. So we went over in the boat, over the dam. It's presumed that he — the boat hit him, and that he was knocked out. I was tumbled and rolled. I had on I think just shorts, and I got swept across the road. The road had been cut out, at that point. There was no longer a road there. There was just a torrent going through it, and then it went into woods. And I grabbed on a tree and my shorts and sneakers got ripped off. And I would let go from one tree and go on and hold onto another tree until I got to a place where I could stand up. And I saw across the meadow that somebody had seen this happen. It was now five minutes later, ten minutes later, half an hour later. I don't know. But they had gotten Ross Penley, who ran the college farm, to come with horses that somebody could get on and come, but the horses wouldn't go. They would rear and buck and so on.

So I kept working to ground where I could walk, and finally walked around and got in. I remember they put — I was shivering, and they put blankets around me, and I was in bed for a couple of days. And then the flood went down almost as soon as it came, and somewhere in the woods they found Frank's body the next day.

**MEH:** How did the College handle this situation?

**MS:** Again, there was some kind of getting together. I remember Ken Kurtz, who I think was an English teacher although I don't think I did any work with him, made a statement to— It was during the summer, so very few College people were there. I guess a letter went out to faculty, students,

and so on, of what had happened. I remember there was some business — I don't remember — it was Social Security or Workman's Compensation — they came and interviewed me, and I — I guess I told them I had — Somebody said, "You know, if he was an employee, his family was entitled to some money." He was sending maybe he made five dollars a week. I don't know what he was making. He would send some to his mother. So I said something about he was an employee, but then there was some problem of whether — about the contractual arrangement. If it was one way, his mother would be in a better position. So, I don't know, I think I gave them the wrong answer. I tried to figure out what would be the best. His sister was there at the time. She was a very emotional young woman, and she was— she was just about out, out of it, as a result of it. And I felt some, I felt responsible for doing this dumb thing.

**MEH:** Well, hindsight is always better.

**MS:** Yeah. It didn't help Frank any. Marian is still around. I saw something in some — I don't know how I would have seen any reports, I don't get many reports from the college, but she — maybe she wrote about how much she liked the exhibit that you and Mary Holden put together. I've seen a letter from her sometime recently. I assumed that she'd married a guy named Dave Way, but that's not apparently whom she married. And then Mark Dreier was killed.

[INTERRUPTION FOR SUPPER]

**MEH:** Okay, we were talking before dinner, and you had mentioned Mark Dreier's death.

**MS:** Yeah. He, he must have been eight, ten years old, somewhere around that. Maybe a little younger. He had another brother, Eddie, who was almost the same age as our daughter, Joan. When they were a little older — he was an older brother — and the road that I had mentioned earlier got washed completely away when our dam overflowed. What was an earthen road, and it may even have been a rebuilding of that because it was soft. It was very soft shoulders. And Mark was — Let me put it the other way around. Jack Lipsey, the cook, the head cook, the one who was the “general” of the kitchen, was very fond of the Dreiers, who were probably about as nonracist as any people I've ever known, both of the Dreiers — Ted and his wife. For some reason, Mark was riding on the running board of his car, and they came just a little bit too near the edge of this very soft shoulder. It gave way and the car just rolled over, rolled onto, over Mark, who was pretty much crushed. And I don't know how soon then they got to Ted and Bobbie, but I remember driving Ted's car with Bobbie and Ted in the back with Mark in their lap, going to the doctor in Black Mountain. Whether he was dead then or not, I don't know. But in the area there, there was some fear [TELEPHONE RINGS AND ANSWERING MACHINE INTERRUPTION]

**MEH:** You were saying that you drove them into town?

**MS:** I drove them into town, and — I mean I was driving the car. They were in the back. And relatively calm. Sort of accepting this awful thing. There was some concern in — on the part of either the black people who worked with us or on the part of some of us white college people — There were no — None of the college students or faculty were other than white then, and I guess there were never many blacks there. But there was some concern because a white boy had been killed, the car of a black person rolled over him, that there could be some real unpleasant serious stuff. Ted Dreier, the night Mark was killed, spent the night on the porch of where the blacks lived, to see that nothing happened, and that if anything came up that he would explain it was his son and he had no feeling of— So, that was Ted Dreier. A remarkable man.

**MEH:** How did the College deal with this sort of situation as a community, this sort of tragedy?

**MS:** In the case of Mark Dreier, I don't remember. We were then at Lake Eden. This happened at Lake Eden, so it would have been some time after '41. '41-'42, somewhere along in there. We were less a closely-knit community than we were at Blue Ridge. Again, because the dining room, that lobby set-up there — The College was in one building, connected to a covered walkway to the dining room. All ate three times a day together. At Lake Eden there was also a big dining room, but it was separated from everything else. People didn't live in that building. They were living in lodges near it. The faculty, for the most part, were living up the road in the

half dozen houses that were there. Some had their own kitchens. So in that sense, there was less of a getting together when there was that kind of tragedy. I'm sure there was some type of service.

I think one thing that came out of it, and I'm — you will know from other people better than from this, but the Quiet House that was built by Bill Reed, I think that was a memorial to Mark Dreier, a beautifully built stone building. And I somehow connect it in memory. I don't remember how soon after Mark's death the Quiet House was built. I think it may have been some time.

**MEH:** As assistant treasurer at the college, how — what type of job was that?

What did you do?

**MS:** Well, I wrote all the checks for the help, for the food, for the building supplies. Did some planning in terms of when certain expenditures could be made. Did probably a monthly inventory of food costs to see how they were going and if they suddenly were going up to figure out why. Collected tuition. Did a fair amount of correspondence with parents if tuition was late. Sent bills. I can't recall that I did any gift— any fund-raising. We lived pretty close to the vest in terms of economics of the college. If we got too low, Ted would get on his bicycle — figuratively speaking — and go north and raise some money. We kept two accounts, one in the Bank of Black Mountain, one in the Bank of New York. We would write checks on the Bank of New York and transfer it to the Black Mountain.

**MEH:** Why did you do that?

**MS:** I'm not sure. Only Ted could write checks on the Bank of New York, so that for whatever reason, we kept the Bank of Black Mountain just enough in it to always be able to pay the bills. At this moment, I don't remember where we deposited tuition checks, whether in the Bank of New York and then we'd transfer as we needed. I then was the one who would meet with Professor William Cole, a bearded accountant who was a friend of the Dreiers or somebody. [VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT BEGINS] Each year we'd go over the account. He was a very kindly older guy. [VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT ENDS]

**[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]**

**MS:** So, Professor Cole would come, and he was very careful and examine the books, and then at the end he would write, the way accountants do, "I have this day examined the books of Black Mountain and found them to be in good order," and so on. And I developed, or came up with the nickname for him which — I'm not sure he ever heard it or not — "Ledger Bill." He looked like something from another century, a very neat goatee and moustache, I think white hair, and fairly elderly. And I guess he had been an accountant at some prestigious firm, and I'm sure came for free.

Those were the chief things. It was keeping track of expenses, paying the bills.

**MEH:** How precarious was the college's situation financially?

**MS:** It was always hand to mouth, very close. But enough so that most — I think once or twice in the — I was there what, a little over seven years. I



think once or twice there was a real question: would the College open the following fall. It would depend somewhat on the success of money raising during the year. I guess I also had some contact, but not the major contact, with several money raisers. There was somebody named Mrs. McGraw, I remember, who I think didn't raise any money, or very little. And there were one or two others whose name I don't remember. Ted Dreier was the chief money raiser. Through friends. Foundations. There were several students there that were from very wealthy families who contributed. One was Betsy Williams' husband, Paul Williams.

**MEH:** Right.

**MS:** Paul married Vera Williams, I think while they were there. And I don't know whether they, I think they had three children, and then that dissolved, that union, and I guess there was a group of people on the Hudson River somewhere had a little community, and Betsy was part of that. And I guess had been married. I think she has children by another marriage. But she and Paul were married for over thirty years, and he studied architecture at Black Mountain, I guess designed a building or two and then continued afterwards to design buildings. He was a contributor, and then Steve Forbes. Both gave and lent the College a fair amount of money. And I believe that one way of finally killing this financially-wounded beast, was to have Steve Forbes call the loan, which they couldn't pay. I guess he foreclosed on the College.

**[OFFMIKE INTERRUPTION ABOUT TELEPHONE]**

**MEH:** You were saying earlier that Black Mountain always paid its bills.

**MS:** Right. Yeah, we saw that there was enough money, and somehow Ted would ride to the rescue when necessary. I can't think of any other people who, within the College, who did that. And I don't know how successful the money raising was. There was some — The College itself at some point used one of its bulletins to send to all parents, friends, and so on, of money needed for the building of the Studies Building. I mean "A dollar buys two 2x4's; five dollars buys four building blocks," and so on. I mean, today if you get a dun in the mail, it starts with \$35. You check off 35, 50, 100, 500, 1000. Then I think it was \$1, \$2, \$5, maybe it went up to 50, I'm not sure. Fifty would buy a room. That's how we did that.

Also, one of the things I did, there was a \$25 deposit, breakage deposit, so that if when a student left either through graduation or not being invited back, whatnot, the \$25 unless there was breakage got mailed back to the parents. I think I devised a sneaky scheme of, with the check to them, returning the \$25, a little mention was made that it would be wonderful if they sent it back as a gift. And many of them did. So that again, if ten people did that, \$250 — it went a long way in the late '30s, early '40s. It's sometimes hard to remember the difference in the economy. We were hiring carpenters for 20, 25 cents an hour.

**MEH:** Did you work on the Studies Building yourself?

**MS:** Yes. Yeah. For — although I've certainly never been a carpenter, I've always enjoyed using tools. There's a picture in one of the catalogues of a

student's study. That was all stuff I had made. Again, I think it was Georgia's hand tools — saw, hammer. That was about it. Some sandpaper.

Everyone in the College, almost without exception, worked on the Studies Building. A lot of it was just rough, raw labor. I mean digging a ditch to put the cement foundation in, hauling the earth, hauling cement to dump into the ditch, hauling boards, cutting trees in the forest. That's where Ted Dreier was great, and a guy named Bas Allen, who knew everything. Bas and I were very close. He was the "Clerk of the Works" for Blue Ridge. He was a Blue Ridge employee. His wife was the postmistress down in the little post office at Blue Ridge. Blue Ridge was a post office, and she was the postmaster. I always thought it should be postmistress. There's no such title in the post office. It's postmaster.

Bas was a tiny, wiry mountaineer. His wife was a huge woman, three hundred pounds. Bas and I took a number of trips. They had no children. He took a liking to me and I to him, and there was very little that he didn't know about how to drop a big tree, how to keep warm on a cold night hiking in the mountains. He installed all of the radiators at Blue Ridge. It had never been heated 'til we came, because it was a summer building. So we bought old radiators, which I'm sure you've heard about. Bas installed those at Blue Ridge. He uninstalled them and we took them to Lake Eden when we moved the college from Blue Ridge to there. I can't remember if he ever disassociated himself from the Blue Ridge

Association and came to work for us or not. He was — I remember working with him on the new building, particularly the sawing of trees. We sawed a lot of oak trees, hauled them on our own truck to the mill where they were cut into flooring, and that's the flooring in the Studies Building. They were dried in a kiln. Us sophisticated people called it a kiln. The people who knew called it a "kill." So this was kiln-dried lumber — beautiful. And when we were back there summer before last, I looked and examined the floor. It's in beautiful shape, beautiful clean clear oak flooring.

So Bas was an important part of the organization. He was ingenious in figuring things out, what was needed. He could always come up with a solution. One thing he did. He was also an unschooled mountain psychologist and very wise, and had these little sayings. He'd say, "Some of that whiskey so-and-so drinks, boy that's strong stuff. Make a rabbit spit in a bulldog's face." He was from Yancy County. I always thought the name Yancy was a fascinating country name — Yancy County. Just next to Buncombe, which I also thought an interesting name.

Blue Ridge was an older — Lee Hall was an older building, and it had a slight sag in it. And the heating pipe followed the sag. It took the steam to the radiators. Well, if you have a sag in a steam line, there's always some condensation so the water then settles at the lower belly as it cools. So, when you start up the next morning with your steam, it has to push that water out, and it knocks. It's a loud metallic knocking. But it

takes maybe a half an hour from the time you light up the boiler until that happens. But Bas figured if people here that they'll be warm. So he would — Once he lit, started it, he would hit it, the pipe, with a sledgehammer, and it would sound as though the steam was coming, so you felt warmer. You'd know that the steam is almost there. That's the way — He enjoyed life.

We left there in the winter of, early winter of '43. We came to Philadelphia and lived there for a year. We had hardly moved to Philadelphia when we heard that he had died. A truck hit him crossing the street in Black Mountain. And I think I rarely wept for anybody much. It was as though my father had died.

And there were a number of people that most— that many— and I was not alone, it was not a unique relationship. Many people felt that way about Bas. He was a loving, nice guy, highly intelligent, fourth grade education probably, maybe fifth. Maybe he went further than fourth. And there were others, with black skins. Roy Lytle. There were a bunch of Lytles. I mean half the people's last name were Lytle, although I think they weren't related, most of them. Roy was a powerful thick bull of a guy, who drove the truck and told people how to shovel coal. Shoveling coal was one of the big macho activities. You would shovel coal from the gondola car that brought it in, onto our truck, and then up to Blue Ridge or over to Lake Eden, to feed the — It was soft coal, pea coal [?], almost, almost gelatinous. It would stick together. A hard job to shovel. And people would

come black, coal in their nostrils, all through their hair, and they were the heroes. That was — You were a man when you came back from shoveling the coal. And Roy and Bas Allen would teach people how to do that.

Roscoe Penley was the farmer. We all liked him, although he was not of the same intellect as Bas Allen. I mean he knew how to grow potatoes. That was about it. Maybe to milk a cow.

**MEH:** Do you remember Charlie Godfrey?

**MS:** I remember him very well. Charlie was a highly intelligent guy. He figured out how to save fifty thousand dollars by building the chimney and sinking the piles. He invented a pile driver using the farm tractor, which had a wheel on it. He'd cut a black gum stump — I think it was black gum — maybe fourteen inches in diameter and about eight feet long, weighed a ton, and the side wheel on the farm tractor —, I forget what it's used for on the farm. But it's a winch, and with a pulley it would pull this thing up and then drop it suddenly. It would drive anything into the ground.

Charlie and I didn't get along too well. He was a real red-neck racist. He had one black carpenter, Finley Steppe. He hated his guts. He didn't want that "nigger" around him, at all. And he, we said we're going to hire somebody. He said "No, I'll — if you want me here, I'll hire him." I mean he, he knew his business, but his talk was always vicious about so-and-so: "I won't have him on the job! He's a woman! That guy is a woman," and so on. Vituperous. And a good workperson.

I mean in the Studies Building, I guess we started around '41. Black Mountain area then was a very — I mean it was a long way from the Civil Rights Movement. Blacks had no rights.

**MEH:** Did you ever discuss integrating the College?

**MS:** I don't recall it. I think that was later. I've gotten a little bit of that from Duberman's book. I didn't know first hand any talk of it. I think Bob Wunsch, who was a Southerner, thought it was premature. So it was after he had left that anything was happening in that direction.

**MEH:** Do you remember any of the visitors who came to the College? Dewey— John Dewey, or —

**MS:** I remember John Dewey very well, yeah. He was very easy to get along — [OVERTALK]. He, as a matter of fact, went I think on one of the yearly trips that we made to Chapel Hill for the play contest. It had some name, I can't remember, but it was open to anybody that wanted to put on a play. And you were honored or what not. He went along. In the evening he'd go out and — He enjoyed being with the students, as I remember, more than with the faculty. And then Adamic was there — he and his wife, Stella, who were both very popular. Adamic was not an articulate man speechwise. He was writing-wise. English was not his native language. May Sarton was there.

**MEH:** Do you remember her visit?

**MS:** Somewhat. I remember her as a rather unpleasant, prickly person. I don't remember her well. I don't know anything that she wrote. I think she was there for quite a while, like a month or so. This was at Blue Ridge.

**MEH:** Do you remember Aldous Huxley visiting? Or Albert Einstein?

**MS:** Not Einstein. I remember Huxley who came, I guess, with his partner and biographer Gerald Heard. They were both — Again, my memory is — it's rather dim of them — rather staid, a mite standoffish, English gentleman, intellectual. I think they — I mean in their visit I think they stayed right at Blue Ridge. I'm not positive. They may even have stayed in the Village.

**MEH:** What do you think, looking back now, was really the importance of Black Mountain to you?

**MS:** Well, I'm certain to me personally it was a whole opening up of my mind and my vision and my thinking about the world as something beyond the little tight life that I had known in Louisville. It certainly taught me to — that I didn't finish my education the day I graduated from Black Mountain, that learning was important about a lot of things. About how to change a washer, how to build a bench, and so on. And just the love of literature for its own sake, a good piece of writing, say, "Hey, that's a nice job." That it's the enjoyment. I met Barb there.

But the viewing of life as an ongoing, interesting thing, being able to figure out if we're out of money, how do you finish your trip? How do you do this? How do you do that? You can't afford to have kids, you have them anyhow. Knowing that hey, we'll make out. So that I don't think I had that



kind of confidence before Black Mountain. I was mainly a student, not as much in control. But I guess I learned to be in control of my own — I had some amount of control as to what happened in my life.

I certainly became "liberal" — whatever that means — there, which I was not when I went there.

**BHS:** Perhaps you became more so just living with me.

**MS:** The question was Black Mountain College. The question was what did Black Mountain College mean to you.

**[IRRELEVANT BANTER NOT TRANSCRIBED]**

**MS:** I mentioned that I met you there, but that that was a unique experience. That was not something that one got from going to Black Mountain College, except this one. And I became more liberal as a result of meeting Barb at Black Mountain College.

**BHS:** Righto. You said it!

**[IRRELEVANT REMARKS ABOUT TAPING NOT TRANSCRIBED]**

**[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]**