

Interviewee: ROBERT SUNLEY
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MEH: Robert—

RS: Call me Bob—

MEH: Bob—Ok. How did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

RS: Well, I was at Oberlin College in my freshman year, and I guess I first started thinking about what I was doing there when I found myself planning to have a triple major which they said nobody had ever done. Then I said to myself, “Well, just because nobody’s ever done it, why should I be doing it? I mean, it’s not the place for me obviously.” Just at that point Louis Adamic’s article came out. I read it and so I went into the dean’s office, and I said, “I want to go down there and visit.” He called for my record. He looked at it, and he said, “Ok, go.”
[laughter] Well, I was one of the top students, so it wasn’t a problem. So, I walked ten or fifteen miles to the nearest station to catch a train to go in that direction. And I went down there. I must have written them or called them. And traveled down there. I spent a week, and I already was pretty sure I wanted to go.

MEH: Do you remember what year this was?

RS: Well, it would have been the spring of 1936.

MEH: You were at Oberlin. Where are you from?

RS: Oak Park, Illinois. I went to high school there.

MEH: Ok. And was Oberlin considered part of the Progressive Education movement at that time?

RS: Well, it was, but there wasn't anything that was very progressive. That was the trouble. I picked it out because I thought it was. They boasted that they were the first college to admit Negroes and—But what happened was they had, I think, two in the freshman class. I knew both of them. They both left in the middle of the night saying they couldn't stand it. So, it was not that liberal, including about other things.

MEH: And why were you doing a triple major? Because you were interested in so many things?

RS: Well, there were a number of subjects. I mean, I liked all these subjects. I was going to major in English literature, Classical Greek, and Spanish. That meant leaving out some things, too. But it could have been done. But, I mean, there wasn't any point to it. And what it would have led to, I can't imagine.

MEH: Did your family have any problem with your transferring to Black Mountain?

RS: Well, my father was very skeptical about it. My mother was, too. They much preferred to have me—They wished I'd gone to Harvard. But for some reason, my father—You know, they wanted to accommodate me if they could. So my father talked to his business associate and one of them who later turned out to be a semi-criminal, but for some reason he said to my father, "Oh, it sounds great. It's just what the kids need." So my father felt, "Well, that's a good ok."

He said, "Alright." Actually my mother had the money and so it was up to her. So, they were unhappy about it, and they were for many years about me because I was not a Republican. I was—you know, a whole series of things, including not being bigoted and all the rest. So, they found all of it very hard to take.

MEH: So, you visited Black Mountain for a week.

RS: Yeah.

MEH: Do you remember who you met or what you did? It was at Lee Hall then, still at Lee Hall.

RS: Oh, yes. All the time I was there, it was at Lee Hall. Well, I sat in on Rice's Plato class which anybody could just sit there and listen. Oh, I must have gone to half a dozen classes. And you sit in the edges of them, watch Albers. Oh, what else. There was a philosophy teacher whose classes I liked. I don't remember too much else, I mean, specifically. I remember more the general atmosphere of informality – that you could sit down and talk to a member of the faculty informally, which you couldn't at Oberlin or any other place. They were remote and paid little attention to the students really, apart from appearing in the class, so that I would say was probably the main thing. I'm trying to think if there was any other recollections of that. I don't remember—I remember several of the students who were there who didn't come back, who finished or whatever. But I didn't really—I've done a lot of oral history interviews, but with the tape recorder, not with the video.

MEH: Right. Well, video—[BREAK IN TAPING] So you arrived in the fall of 1936.

RS: When I came, right.

MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

RS: Well, I was interested in a number of things.

MEH: All three majors.

RS: Well, I wanted to continue studying Classical Greek. I remember John Rice said, "Well, I don't really teach that anymore." He didn't—it was listed in the catalogue, as if he taught it. But, no, no, he didn't do it. Maybe some year he would. He never did. But he was a Classical Greek scholar, actually. So, why he wouldn't do it I don't know beyond that. So, as I remember, I took what—There was an advanced mathematics course. I didn't like mathematics but nonetheless I took it.

MEH: Who was teaching that?

RS: This was Ted Dreier and he was fairly good. At least for a while. Although, you know, he started out with eight students, and after a while I saw there was only two or three of us left. And one of them was a young man who smelled terribly. He wouldn't bathe. We were cooped up in this small room and that got to be too much for me also. I would say, he had a certain ability to communicate some of this. Since I didn't like mathematics, he was doing pretty well with me. I took the philosophy course. What else did I take?

MEH: Was that John Rice's?

RS: No, this was a teacher named Bob Goldenson.

MEH: What was Goldenson like?

RS: Well, he was a rather young man. I guess he probably was in his thirties, early thirties even. He seemed good to me. He seemed to be well-trained. He was interested — When I look back, I don't think he was particularly innovative. On the other hand, he seemed to like having students. But he was—I found out that already there was a group that was opposed to Rice, and he was one of them. Apparently he had already been warned that he was on probation which I didn't know at the time. What else did I take? I probably took literature, but I don't remember who with. The only writing course at the time that I was interested in was with Bob Wunsch. I went once or twice, but I felt it was too elementary. I wasn't interested in it. It was the following year that Rice decided to give a seminar in writing, which I guess he had done in the past. But that first year he hadn't.

MEH: What about drama?

RS: Well, I was in some plays all the way along. But I never signed up for it, so to speak.

MEH: You mean Wunsch's.

RS: Yeah, yeah. No, I remember he would draft me for certain parts.

MEH: Do you remember any plays in particular?

RS: *Winterset*, where I was the radical standing on the soapbox. I don't know if you remember that scene. And Leslie Katz was the Italian organ grinder in the same scene. Well, at any rate, what else. Not too many. There was a North Carolina play by Hatcher Hughes. Remember his—

MEH: I know his name but what was the play.

RS: Well, it was some hillbilly play where I sat whittling on a stick, and once in a while I'd say, "Ya" or make some illiterate comment. [laughter] It didn't require much acting, just sort of keeping out of the way. I may have been in others, too. I don't recall them.

MEH: Did you work at all with Xanti Schawinsky?

RS: The only time I did was on the *Danse Macabre*. I liked Xanti and I did visit him a couple of times afterwards in New York City. I thought it was too bad he was sort of really pushed out because he was very lively, whatever else you could say about him.

MEH: What else do you remember about the *Danse Macabre*?

RS: Well, I translated half of it, and John Evarts wrote the music, and Morton Steinau did the other half of the translation.

MEH: You were translating from Latin?

RS: Well, we were putting it into modern English. I guess it had been in German. I can't recall clearly. But we put it into English verse. And, then, this was for the different performers.

MEH: And did you perform.

RS: No, I wasn't in the performance. And I don't remember. I remember many years later they played it on German radio. And John Evarts had written to me to get a copy of the words which then they translated. It must have been in German originally because they then translated it from the English back into German. I'm not sure they were aware of it. What else was there beside the *Danse Macabre*?

MEH: He did an abstract theater performance called *Spectodrama*. Do you remember that?

RS: Yeah, I vaguely—Yeah. Well, they did a number of things, and, you know, they'd only be done once usually. So, I was not that interested in the dance or that kind of thing. What else was I doing there?

MEH: Did you take any art?

RS: Well, I took music with John Evarts, I guess all the time I was there, I did. So I learned a lot. In fact, he was surprised years later when I thanked him for what I had learned. Apparently, he didn't realize. That was composition of music and harmony as well as appreciation, going through many works. I remember writing pieces for the piano and I wrote one for flute and piano with Leslie Katz. You know, I played and so on. Have you talked to other people, I mean, Jane Mayhall?

MEH: Uh-huh.

RS: You have. Leslie, I guess you couldn't very well now.

MEH: Not now.

RS: No, I just saw them—when was it, Wednesday.

MEH: Oh.

RS: We see them every week or two. We is Elizabeth Pollet and myself.

MEH: Oh, ok.

RS: What else did I do there? There was Rice's writing seminar which was the next year?

MEH: What do you remember about the seminar?

RS: Well, I remember at the end of my first year there was a big bust up. People were very much polarized. It was for and against Rice basically. Albers sort stayed out of it largely. But there were a number of people who got up and denounced Rice in the general meetings, and he would retaliate.

MEH: What was the basis for the—?

RS: Well, they claimed he was dictatorial, that you had to do things his way, he was too critical and cutting to people, mistreated students in that way. Some of which was true, actually. I was not too sure where I stood at that time, but I remember at the end all of these people got up and resigned. And it must have been at that time they, I guess, held elections for student officers in the midst of it. So all the people who were leaving voted for me. So I got elected.

MEH: Oh, no.

RS: Well, they didn't want to vote for the several others who were known to be in favor of Rice. They weren't sure where I stood. But I remember Rice then—he took me out for a walk right at the end. He talked to me at some length, and then he said he was going to start this writing seminar. I don't know why he thought I was writing. I guess I must have talked about it. At any rate, so I already was prepared for that.

MEH: Who were the faculty who basically were against Rice?

RS: Oh, well, there was Frederick Georgia, Goldenson and Knickerbocker. Knickerbocker was perhaps the most outspoken. Georgia was a rather stolid type who would speak but not very much. Knickerbocker was much more of a leader. And who else was there? Zeuch. A strange character.

MEH: Right.

RS: A strange character. He had the study next to me, and so I often saw him like at night. And I would get talking to him. So I got to know him. He was a very learned person.

MEH: What was he teaching?

RS: Economics. But he told me all about Commonwealth College which he had founded in Arkansas, what happened to that, his plans for starting one on an island off the coast of South Carolina. I remember one time I was talking to him, and he said—what was it he said? He said, “I’ve figured out, I’ve solved the whole problem about economics and what to do and so on,” and I said, “Well, what is it?” He said, “Oh, I’m not going to tell you yet.” [laughter] I guess he never did. He was sort of a short, stocky peasant-looking type, and he always went along with this big stick that he walked with. He really looked like somebody from the mountains in Europe someplace. He was not that interested in the quarrels about Rice. But, I don’t know. Rice offended him so he was willing to join in. Well, there must have been two or three others. And then there was the whole group of students as well. I’m trying to remember who they were. John Harrington. Who else? I don’t know. I’d have to look at the names. I can’t remember. But a number of them didn’t come back. Probably fifteen or twenty students and a few others didn’t come back for other reasons, I guess. But I had no intention of leaving, nonetheless.

MEH: So, you were student moderator for your second year at the college?

RS: Then, in the second year I was elected student moderator. It's not clear to me why.

MEH: So you went to Board of Fellows meetings.

RS: Oh, yeah. Everyone.

MEH: What were they like? How were they conducted?

RS: Well, I'm trying to think when I was elected because it was a period of great turmoil because it was when all the controversy about Rice came to a head and they forced him to leave. The one I remember most clearly which was quite—a little while before things came to a head. But, there was a student who had committed suicide —Denis Rhodes, I think his name was.

MEH: Was it Rhodes or Porter?

RS: Porter was the previous year.

MEH: So Denis Rhodes committed suicide at the school.

RS: Yeah, yeah, both of them. Both used a gun, I think. I didn't see it. But, anyway, that very night, I guess, there was a Board of Fellows meeting which I went to. I must have gotten there late because they were discussing how they were going to notify everybody in the world practically it wasn't their fault and I said to them, "That's crazy. Don't say anything. You don't have to apologize for it. This happens to students. And if you apologize like that, they're going to think something is wrong." So that dissuaded them from doing it. They were going to write to every parent and every person who had ever given money and on and—newspapers, all to disclaim responsibility on it. But I remember that they—it was a—you know, they were the ones who ran the school basically.

And Albers was there. Well, the permanent members were all members, Albers and Dreier and Rice. Who else was on the board then?

MEH: Was Wunsch on?

RS: Yeah, Wunsch, Mangold, maybe one or two others. They were the ones who spoke up about things.

MEH: Do you think Rice was ousted unfairly?

RS: I can't say it was unfair. I think it was unwise, if you want to put it that way.

Because I don't think that, you know, they really recovered what they had been doing. They shifted later on, but they never really recovered. Nobody took his place. There wasn't anybody. Albers was quite different and his interests were quite different really. But Rice really was in my opinion, sort of much more the life of the place. You know, people sought him out, and he was challenging. You know, when you're a kid, that's great. Someone to argue with even though he always won or tried to. But, you know, and he had a wide range of interests and things he knew about. He sort of enjoyed things. I mean, he was much more of a—I don't know—companionable—You know, you'd have him in or you'd go to his study late at night, and people would be there drinking, talking and so on. Not with Albers, you see. He was sort of austere. I wouldn't say dislikable but not that approachable and not mingling in really. He saw himself as the master and the students as the apprentices in the European—like the Bauhaus. I don't think he liked it at the Bauhaus when students began to rise up. That's not the kind of thing that he really liked. Because I remember him in the Board of Fellows meetings. He took what I would consider like a Prussian attitude, one

which Thomas Mann had also. The elite and the elite rule because they are masters, so to speak. Well, you could get to be a master, but you're not yet, so you've got to follow what the master says. That was his way of looking at it. That was his way of looking at it, and he was not happy at even having a Board of Fellows meeting, I don't think. I'm not sure he liked having a student on it either, especially one who might argue with him and most of them did, I think. But I never felt that Albers was somebody I could go and talk to, whereas Rice I did many times. Also, you know, people who were much more interested in art and drawing, painting and so on probably were much more in tune with Albers. At least some of the people. Some didn't like his approach.

MEH: What was Ted Dreier like in the meetings?

RS: Well, I—Later on I gained more respect for him, for some of the things he did. But my impression of him at the time is he was a bit of a fool, so to speak. To put it bluntly. That's to put it a bit strongly maybe, but he was not the intellectual equal of Rice or Albers or even several of the others. He was very earnest. But he also carried weight, because behind him was money, an excess of money. Of course, they were always desperate. So, that made a difference. Fred Mangold, who later, I think, played a more important part, he was sort of, I guess, maybe intimidated by it all. Trying to say fairly neutral. I didn't get to know him that well.

MEH: What about—was Joe Martin there then?

RS: Oh, yes. Oh, I had courses with Joe. I liked Joe. I can't remember what. I had one tutorial with him on English metaphysical poets. Yeah, he, too—He was a

very earnest young man. He didn't seem so young then, but he was. I

remember he was a great devotee of Gilbert and Sullivan. Now, he had an affair with a student which nobody made much of.

MEH: Joe Martin?

RS: Married her then eventually.

MEH: Right.

RS: But when they were there together, she was in his room all the time. And they were doing things together and so on, and yet there were no complaints.

MEH: Was there generally supervision of personal life at the college or was it sort of live-and-let-live?

RS: I think it depended more on what else could be made of it [laughter] rather than—because there were others, too. When Fred Mangold got involved with this secretary in the office, divorced his wife, married the secretary, and his wife stayed on at the college for a while because she couldn't afford to leave, nobody made a fuss about that.

MEH: So, why do you think when Rice became involved or was said to have become involved with a student, it was such an issue?

RS: I think there were several factors. I mean, there was some residue left from the previous year of antagonism toward him. I mean, there wasn't that kind of antagonism about Fred Mangold or Joe Martin. So, there was a focus for it. And then his wife, of course, was less agreeable about it, and she also had very strong connections outside to money and to academic influences and so on. So that made a difference too. That scared some of the people. And Rice was, you

know, not the kind to, you know, say, be diplomatic. He didn't see himself as—he could be outspoken. He liked to think of himself, you know, fearless, which wasn't quite true, but nonetheless. So, I think she made more of it publically. But I gathered every year or two he had a favorite student. Now, what he did about it, I don't know. I mean, I remember when I first went—the first year—one of them—I wasn't that close to him so I had no idea. But somebody had said that and probably it was so.

MEH: But Nell Rice was very outspoken about her unhappiness?

RS: Yeah. And—but, I think—You see, when people would speak to him about it and say, “Look, you know, it's causing trouble.” He sort of said to them, “Well, you know, keep your nose out of my affairs. It's not your business.” Like, people like Ted Dreier and so on. So, I think he antagonized his supporters—Wunsch—and they all felt, you know, that he had pulled away from them. And Wunsch, I remember much more clearly because I used to have lengthy talks with him. And his notebooks where he was writing down everything that Rice said and all kinds of stuff. Notebooks that disappeared apparently.

MEH: They would be a treasure.

RS: Wouldn't they though. I used to have some things. They must have been notes that he took. Not much but that one page is the only one that survived all these years. But I remember he was—he was in torment over it all. And particularly, of course, because it was at his instigation that Jane came to Black Mountain. So, he—and he may have felt, you know, that he'd been at fault somehow—I don't know. But he pulled away from Rice. I mean, he turned on him really. So,

I remember going to Board of Fellows meetings where they were discussing and they apparently held meetings when I wasn't there. They didn't want to have things broadcast. But, on the other hand, I remember one time when things were at the worst and they were concerned about what was going on, and I said, "Well—" This was to the Board of Fellows meeting. Oh, they were talking about what to do about Rice and did they have to do something and so on, and I said, "Well, one of the things that I can do, I can either call or not call student meetings." I said, "If I don't call them, there won't be any." So, we discussed that, and we decided that it was better not to. I'm not sure it was a good decision, but nonetheless. The question is what would you say. It's a little bit hard to know what you would have said.

MEH: Do you think the students were really aware of what was going on generally?

RS: A lot of them weren't. Or only marginally. A lot of them didn't care either to tell the truth. That's my impression. You know, there were certain people who were more involved, but a lot of them—it didn't matter to them. And I don't think—you know, they wouldn't have voted Rice out. They didn't care.

MEH: What other resolutions could there have been if Rice had stayed?

RS: I don't think you could have a resolution given his personality.

MEH: It seems just from people I've heard that how a person's personal life involved—if a person was really discrete and their personal life remained personal, there was no real concern at the college. But Rice's became very public, especially since Nell Rice was very outspoken in her concerns and in

leaving him and whatever. So, it seemed that played a key role. I mean, how could he have stayed—Would they both have been in the same community?

RS: Yeah, I don't know. But, you see, also, the problem was her connections outside with other people. He was an academic figure in the world. The others weren't. So the reputation had something to do with it, too.

MEH: He was the figurehead of the college.

RS: Yeah, but he also was known elsewhere, whereas the others weren't. But I think he was also very hurt at some of the people because, like when Fred Mangold got involved with his secretary and so on, Rice was the one that pulled that through for him and kept there from being any [VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT BEGINS] trouble. So he felt Mangold had deserted him later when he was in trouble. [VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT ENDS]

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE. BEGINNING OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO.]

RS: I think it was around that time, too. One particular thing I remembered was Rice came to me, and he said he was gonna give a speech in Johnson City, Tennessee and would I drive him there. We were going to go there, we'd have dinner, and I guess stay there overnight and then come back the next day. He wanted to talk to me obviously. But it was interesting to go and to hear him give a speech. He was a provocative speaker. I mean, he tried to say things that would both upset people but also start them thinking. But, of course, a lot of people don't like that. They don't see it as that.

MEH: Right.

RS: They see it as this—like heresy or Communist ideas or whatever. They don't see what his intention was. I can't see that because he didn't show, as I could see, any signs of giving way at all. And I think he was too determined—I mean, I think at one time when he talked to me, well, he was gonna leave—but, you know, he was going to smash everything as he went. That was one attitude. So, people were concerned about that. How do you stop him from causing a great deal of trouble then? I think that was what led to this idea of having him leave for a time and then come back. Let him think things over. Because, when he did go down to South Carolina—because I remember going down and visiting him a couple of times—but he didn't show any signs that things would be any materially different. Then he came back. But then the next year, he really stayed by himself a great deal.

MEH: [UNINTELLIGIBLE WORD] that he came back for another year.

RS: Yeah. Yeah. Or most of it. I don't remember how long he came back for but he was writing, and he would shut himself away and he'd write and write. Oh, I don't know. But he obviously had decided to move on. That was my opinion. And I guess Nell hadn't come back yet. So there wasn't immediate friction.

MEH: Right.

RS: Apparently, there was a lot the previous year, but—Yeah, as I recall in the Board of Fellows meetings, they must have decided though that they were going to—what was the term they used? —“rusticate” him. That sounds very British.

MEH: What does that mean? “Rusticate”?

RS: Rusticating in England meant the student was sent home for a while —back to the boon docks, so to speak, to think things over. But not expelled and you could come back on good terms if he repented or showed he'd mended his ways. So, I think that was the idea. But I don't remember being in on discussions about whether to do that or not. I remember a meeting where we voted to do it. And I can't remember how I voted even now. I may have voted against it. I don't think so. I think I talked to him. I said, "What do you want to do?" And he wanted to do it. He said, "I've got to get away." So, by that time he was fed up with it all. Of course, they were at him all the time. I guess, one of the problems was that his affair wasn't what he wanted it to be so that he didn't quite know where he was gonna go and what to do. But, in a way, it was sad because he, I think, ended up—He didn't really have friends there then. I mean, there were people who were his admirers, some of whom turned against him. But there were not that many people who you would say were friends.

MEH: That was sad.

RS: Personal and close, you know, in talking and so on. And I think that was more in his personality really of the way he was. There weren't, I don't think, that many people he was close to. But I remember him with—you know, it seems like when Aldous Huxley came going to parties with—you know, that he would have the Huxleys there and so on.

MEH: What do you remember about the Huxley visit?

RS: Well, I saw quite a bit of them.

MEH: How long did they stay?

RS: I could imagine a week. Something like that.

MEH: Did they talk to students?

RS: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, Gerald Heard was with them and in some ways he made more of an impression than Huxley did because he gave a talk— I'm trying to remember. I wrote it up. Mostly about the philosophy Lao Tse. And some of the sayings and so on. But I remember I went for a walk with him through the mountain there. Huxley was much more of a brilliant speaker but more remote. His wife I don't recall too clearly now. I'm not even sure but maybe their son was with them. I remember that Mrs. Lounsbury, the housekeeper, mistook Gerald Heard for Aldous Huxley at the beginning. And she was outraged and came tearing in some place and said that, you know, this stranger, the third party, was in the bedroom with Mrs. Huxley. When actually it was Aldous.

MEH: I have no picture in my mind whatsoever of Mrs. Lounsbury.

RS: I remember her dog in a way better than I remember her. She had—He was a great little dog, and he went for walks with everybody. So, I saw much more of her dog than her.

MEH: Was Dante Fiorello there when you were there?

RS: Oh, Dante. Sure.

MEH: What do you remember about Dante?

RS: The image I have of Dante strangely enough is in the dining room where he's making signals to somebody across the room and grinning and so on. He was always sort of carrying on, acting. That was his person. The other specific memory is he used to sit out on the roof and compose music, writing it. You'd

see him sitting there line after line he was writing. Other than that I don't recall him. I saw him at times afterwards, too. Leslie Katz used to see him. But at the time we didn't know about the plagiarism problem. But when I saw him later, he was making a living tuning pianos and complaining bitterly what it was doing to his ears and to his sense of composing. But I don't remember at Black Mountain ever hearing his music actually. I remember it was performed.

MEH: It would be interesting. He wrote a *John Rice Suite*—

RS: Yeah, I know.

MEH: Yeah.

RS: Well, it may have been done the year before I came.

MEH: There was—There was at least one performance I know.

RS: Yeah. Yeah. One time when I was, I think, in a hotel in Chicago, I turned the radio on, and I heard this marvelous music coming out being broadcast. I sat there listening and listening, and at the end it turned out it was a piece by Dante Fiorello. I don't remember what it was now, but I was very impressed with it. So, he may be unjustly in oblivion. An interesting person. Was his wife there, too?

MEH: I think so. I think his wife Mary Fiorello.

RS: Yeah, Mary, yeah. I remember meeting her but I don't remember where. Maybe it was later.

MEH: What are your lasting impressions of Lee Hall, of this facility at the school?

RS: Well, I felt it was a great place really. I thought it was wonderful. Everybody had their study and the big lounge, library area with the fireplace and so on and the dining hall. It all seemed ideal to me for this kind of informal college atmosphere

as compared to Oberlin where, you know, you lived and you went to these classroom buildings. One room after another.

MEH: How would you compare Oberlin and Black Mountain?

RS: Well, that would be one way of comparing it. I think, too, there's a different feeling among the students. I mean, people at Black Mountain —students —felt it was an adventure. It was something new and more exciting, and, you know, there was always something different going to be happening or did happen, whereas at Oberlin, you never felt that or very seldom. Once in a while, there might be some performance or something, but very little. I was very disappointed really in the whole atmosphere. I remember in the Spanish class, for example, as part of doing readings and so on, I translated some Spanish poetry. Well, the instructor said, "Oh, it's great." He said, "The best translation of this poet ever done." Period. I mean, I never heard another word from him. It's as if—you know, I mean, he closed it right off. And that was the general impression I got. You know, they were in a different world, they had nothing to do with the students really, and you went through and that was it. Now, of course, later on in the senior year it might have been different. I don't know. But a different kind of student went there, too. I know from experiences my daughters have had in colleges, it makes quite a difference as to who the students are that go to a place.

MEH: What kind of student went to Black Mountain?

RS: Well, actually there were several kinds. I would say there was a considerable group somewhat like myself who were, you know, they were bright and

interested in a lot of different things and wanted to explore things. There were some who were very much set on what they wanted to do already and were just sort of pursuing it, very sort of intently but narrowly. I'm not sure they ever branched out much. But they liked the idea that they were free to do this. It was stimulating, particularly people came about art, I would say that was true. Then there was another group of sort of, I don't know—kids who were not doing too well, and their parents may have thought they weren't gonna do well in life or in school and sent them there. Although there was nothing seriously wrong with them. Although there were occasional ones like the ones who committed suicide. But when I look at the roster, you see like half of them who were that type of student, and you can well say, well, why did they come there, but if you talked to them, you saw they didn't fit in too well in other places in those days, at least. Now, they would have a much bigger selection, I think.

MEH: Do you think Black Mountain worked for them? Do you think it really helped them?

RS: I don't know. That is one of the things that I was hoping to find out with this survey.

MEH: Who were some of the students that you would put in that group?

RS: You've put me on the spot now. [laughter] Well, I was thinking of ones like the Murphy twins. And who else were there? There was a number of girls. Who else? Then there were a few, not a lot but a few who came from sort of upper class type families or highly intellectual families who were not up to it and were sent off there. I remember one who arrived with her horse.

MEH: Oh, really.

RS: Oh, yeah, yeah. They immediately found a—

MEH: Who was that?

RS: Her name was Mari Mitchell. I didn't know who she was. Turned out that her mother and father were very eminent people in the intellectual world. Her father was Wesley Mitchell, who was a famous economist, and her mother was—what was her name? Gee, I've forgotten. She founded the Bank Street College of Education. Lucy Sprague Mitchell. Because I remember meeting her later. And I was amazed to hear this was her daughter. She immediately found some young man who had arrived who was just the right kind. I don't know what ever happened later, but his name was Winslow. They would go off to ride their horses, I guess, and, I mean, they were in a different world really. Now what they did for classes—I never had any of them in a class. I don't know. But they were among that general group also. But I think it's interesting. What did they get out of it? I mean, some of the people, I mean, you'd see they would get a lot out of it. But probably these days they'd get a lot out of a lot of different places. But what that education meant to some of the others, I would say at least half the ones who went there or more. I'm trying to think. Gertrude White. Jean Jordan. Mary Ferris. Oh, there was a lot of them. Very obscure. I don't even know what happened to most of them.

MEH: These are people that I haven't—

RS: I have no idea—no idea. Avis Belt. Elizabeth saw her some years later but then she vanished. Maybe she's the one that married a Siamese prince or

something, I think. At any rate—but they were all people, and —I didn't know them too well —but people like the Yamins sisters. But who apparently must have gotten a lot out of it because they are among the ones who are very interested in the survey, I gather. So, there are a lot of those people who apparently benefitted a lot and care about it.

MEH: Yeah, that's how—The reason I was asking is that sometimes a place like Black Mountain—I can see where it really would have been just the right place for these kids, you know. And then for some nothing could really probably could have helped them.

RS: Yeah. Well, I think there were things about Black Mountain that maybe for me or some of the others wouldn't mean so much. But I think the lack of academic pressure—I think a lot of them were not up to it. They weren't stupid, but they couldn't compete in the academic side of things. They had to come to things more slowly or maybe at a lower level to start with or have more time about it. Whereas in the other places, you see, you follow these courses, and you take the exams and so, and either make it or you don't. Or you do poorly and then you think you're dumb. And I don't think they felt that at Black Mountain. They felt they belonged there alright. There were ones who were there in the first year I was there, too. Gee, I don't know what happened to some of them. There were a number of them. Willie Rice. He used to—His great characteristic was that he walked along the halls with his shoulder at the wall, and when he came to a doorway, he went in and out like this. Everybody thought, "Well, that's a queer thing to do." So, one day I said to him—I said, "Willie, why do you do

that?” And he said, ‘I do that,” he said, “so nobody can sneak up on me.” Well, so I didn’t have much to do with him after that. But nobody ever thought to raise the question, what’s he doing. But he stayed there for several years. He didn’t commit suicide. I don’t know what he did. But he studied. There were a lot of them like that. I think the ones that we hear from mostly are the ones who are more in the arts, the more articulate ones. Well, the others have dropped away but may be still around.

MEH: I’m sure they are somewhere.

RS: Yeah, I don’t know where they are though. I don’t know. You’re the only one who knows where any of them are, so to speak.

MEH: Well, I’m trying.

RS: Yeah, yeah. I think that’s great.

MEH: What about—was Moellenhoff there when you were there or had he already left?

RS: No, no, Fritz was there. Yeah.

MEH: Did you study—?

RS: He may—They may have come when I did even.

MEH: Did you study with him?

RS: No. He wasn’t there very long. ‘Cause he left, I think, in the middle of the year or something to get his American M.D. so he could practice. And Anna was there. I think I did take German with her actually for a while, what little German I learned. Yes.

MEH: What about the Jalowetzes? Were they there?

RS: No, no.

MEH: Ok.

RS: I met him briefly. I guess he came to visit just before or something, but they started right after I had left. At least, they may have come, but I don't remember them clearly.

MEH: What about Straus?

RS: Oh, Straus was there. Yes. Yeah. I may have had a course with Straus even. Difficult as his English was. Moellenhoff I remember though because he brought down a visitor from the psychoanalytic world. What was his name?

MEH: Hans Sachs.

RS: Hans Sachs, yeah, accompanied by two patients—women patients, which was customary in Europe but not in this country. No, I remember he gave us a talk about Martin Luther and the psychoanalytic interpretation of rebellion against the fathers and so on, although nothing very original these days. It was not the kind of thing anyone had heard of then. Moellenhoff may have taught some psychoanalysis because I must have picked up a fair amount although I had read a bit already. Straus was much more difficult to understand just what he was talking about.

MEH: Because of his language or—

RS: His language and the vocabulary itself was—phenomenology, which is difficult, even in good translation. But I guess that was the first time I'd heard of Heidegger and so on was from Straus. So he taught courses and so somebody

filled all those courses, you see. But I don't know what they got out of some of them. It would be interesting.

MEH: Do you think you really worked hard at Black Mountain academically?

RS: No, I didn't. I did at Oberlin. But I was busy, but what I was busy at was not always academic at all. I did a lot of reading on my own on different things. Did a lot of walking in the mountains, going out with people and—I can't remember what else. I did things like working on the college newsletter that was sent out.

MEH: Did you work in the printshop or not? I can't remember.

RS: Oh, I helped out a bit. I had studied printing and so I knew something about it.

MEH: Where was the press located?

RS: Well, it was in the far end toward the stream. There was a big room down on the basement level. It was quite a large room, as I remember. That's where the press was. I think Emil Willimetz helped David Way out there. I didn't want to be bothered, to tell the truth. Well, setting type is not the greatest thing. They did some good work.

MEH: What did you do for the work program? Did they have a serious work program then?

RS: Yeah. Well, the first couple of years I remember—I never liked it too much to tell the truth. But, you know, you'd go out to gather—apples, or cut corn and that kind of thing, and I was reluctant but would do it, not because it was difficult physically. I didn't want to be bothered with it. Then when I was student moderator, I was supposed to be in charge of the work program. They finally

had to appoint somebody else to do it because I didn't do anything. That's as far as I remember.

MEH: Who was handling the farming then?

RS: I think they had somebody that they rented the farm to. What I remember is they were growing various crops because I remember cutting—

MEH: Was this over at Lake Eden or were you still at Lee Hall?

RS: No, no. They bought Lake Eden when I was there. I remember going over helping Ted Dreier survey it. I guess they figured that was some kind of work I'd be willing to do. Yeah, he was great at that kind of thing. That's what I remember him doing. That kind of brawny effort. He might have been better off doing that in life. He loved it, too.

MEH: He did.

RS: But he was good at it. But I can remember his going through all those thickets and everything at Lake Eden and trying to see what to make of it. I don't know. I remember that as a student I was opposed to their buying it, but they didn't consult the students.

MEH: Why were you opposed?

RS: It seemed unlikely to me that— I guess partly they wouldn't be able to raise the money. I felt this was an ideal place, and it was going to take a lot of effort which interfered with really the main purposes of the college which is not putting up buildings and so on. I felt they had been sort of panicked because the building never was taken away from them. They would have done better if they had aimed at buying that eventually. Lake Eden seemed impractical. I

mean, there was so much to do. I think in a way, it did take an awful lot of people's energies.

MEH: Definitely.

RS: Particularly, since it was at that point that Rice left. So that when there was a lot—maybe it was a good alternative to fighting with him, but, yeah, I wasn't that enthusiastic. I remember I had to interview Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer when they came and write up about their plans for the building. They were very impressive men—I must say that—as were some of the other visitors, people that—very extraordinary people really.

MEH: Who were other visitors you remember?

RS: Well, like Aldous Huxley. Who else was there? Ernst Krenek. I remember he visited the music class. Although John Evarts had been good, Ernst Krenek sat down at the piano and he said, "Oh, you're studying this Mozart piano sonata." So he started to play the first maybe six bars and then he took those six bars apart to show how each note, what the whole thing was about. It was amazing. Then he proceeded to do that with the rest of the piece. I mean it was just remarkable what he found in it which no other musician that I had seen that could do that. Who else was there?

MEH: Did John Dewey visit when you were there?

RS: No, no. Who else was there? The woman who was head of Sarah Lawrence came. Gee, I'm trying to think who some of the other were. The man who was the—Scott Buchanan from St. Johns who had been at the University of Chicago with Hutchins and Adler.

MEH: Were you really aware of the eminence of these people?

RS: Well, people like Huxley, yeah. I remember his novel *Eyeless in Gaza* had just come out so everybody was reading it in preparation for his visit. On the other hand, there was—at least I had and I think a lot of the people—you know, what's so unusual? Why shouldn't they come? You sort of expected this kind of thing would happen. I'm trying to think who some of the others might have been. Well, who was it —Charles Norman—who came to take Rice's place in writing. He was an interesting person, a friend of e.e. cummings.

MEH: You mean, when Rice left.

RS: Well, when Rice was “rusticated,” he needed somebody to fill in. And so I think he got—that's when Charles Norman came, just for several months or something. And I remember visiting him later in the city. He was going to take me to see Cummings.

MEH: How did Rice conduct his writing class?

RS: Well, as I remember what happened was that anybody who wanted to hand in something they had written ahead of time. He would read them to himself obviously, and a number of them he would select to read out loud or you could read your own, either way. He obviously had thought about what to say. There were others that he didn't have read for one reason or another, but then it would be read and then he would, usually he would deliver some opinions. But sometimes he would just throw it open. You know, “What do you think of that?” or that kind of thing and get people talking. What about this aspect or that aspect? What's the person trying to say? So a lot of it was quite a good

discussion going on with people joining in. And that he did with much more respect for people's opinions than he did in his Plato class where he tore into people, we know. Practically saying, "You're a stupid fool for saying things like that." I don't remember his ever doing that about writing. I remember, you know, it went on and on and on every time we met. People were reluctant to stop. I think afterward we'd—some of us would have drinks together and keep talking. Some of the people were not that great as writers, but they might have something, you know, different or some quality would come through which he would try to bring out. So, it was much less hostile than his usual performance. Yeah, and he was very enthusiastic about quite a few things. Speak highly of them. And I remember then, too, Louis Adamic came. Yeah, and I think he sat in on the writing class and so on. Yeah, yeah, I remember going to see Adamic [BEGINNING OF VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT] after I left Black Mountain. [END OF VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT. SMALL TALK NOT TRANSCRIBED.]

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

MEH: Ok.

RS: I was just remembering—in fact I still have them—

MEH: Let's just stop for a minute .

RS: [Looking at student list] Gloria Lawson—yeah, look at all those people. Jamieson. Paul Goldberg. Goodness, what could ever have happened to him?

MEH: I'm not sure. I'm not sure he met with a happy ending. I can't remember.

RS: I don't know. I don't remember him. I saw him once or twice after I had left Black Mountain, but it was probably right afterwards. Well, anyway, yeah at least half of those people—

MEH: Do you remember particular parties or concerts? How did you entertain yourselves on the weekends?

RS: Well, we often on Sundays took drives through the mountains or various places. I remember going to one concert in South Carolina and various other places. I often went to Asheville to a bar or restaurants or things of that kind.

MEH: Did you go into Roy's then?

RS: Yeah, that was in Black Mountain. Yeah, there we went frequently with Steve Forbes. Yeah.

MEH: Now, Roy's then—Was that the building down by the railroad station or the new building?

RS: Well, there was both. I think the first year it was down by the railroad station and then the—

MEH: What was the new building like?

RS: I don't remember the outside of it.

MEH: It was outside of Black Mountain?

RS: Yeah, it was just outside of town. You know, yeah, I don't remember it clearly. It was right on the road to Asheville, but I don't remember what it looked like. I think there were booths on one side, like a bar. That's all I remember of it. A juke box.

MEH: What about—did you take part in any of the radio programs in Asheville? Were they doing those then?

RS: I don't think so. I don't remember ever hearing of them, but maybe there were. One of the things I was remembering—Oh, I meant to ask you, too. Did you ever see that doctoral thesis that was written about John Rice?

MH: Yes.

RS: How is it?

MEH: Parts of it. Only the part relating to Black Mountain.

RS: Oh, I got a bit but that was all. Is it worth getting?

MEH: Oh, I don't think—Has it been published yet? I know she was working on it for some time.

RS: I don't know.

MEH: I think I would wait until it's published.

RS: Well, you can send for it if it's her thesis.

MEH: If it's her dissertation, it's probably on microfilm.

RS: Yeah. Well, I don't know about all of this. [Shuffling through papers] One of the things that I had somewhere—Toward the end of the first year when there was all this commotion about Rice, the students were much more active in that, taking sides and so on. People used to post things on the bulletin board, and I remember they put things up, but I would go around later on and take them down, and I kept some of them. Scurrilous verses about John Rice and so on. Interesting.

MEH: Do you by any chance still have them?

RS: I have the one—that verse about him, a nasty but clever piece of writing. I don't know who wrote it. It was posted. Where would that be? I don't know. If I come across it—

MEH: Ok.

RS: But it had some line in it about he was listening to doors and spying on people and so on. Amusing.

MEH: Do you think that was really true?

RS: I can't imagine him doing that. I don't see why he would do it even. So, I doubt if that was true.

MEH: When you speak of his being hostile, do you think that it was—what do you mean by that? What type of—what do you mean by that?

RS: There were a number of people that he was contemptuous of. On the other hand, there were certain people that you might have felt he would be contemptuous of, but he wasn't. They appealed to him for some reason. But he liked to cow people, I think. People experienced it as being brow beaten. You know, put down constantly by—

MEH: Did he do this publically?

RS: Well, then—like the Plato class he would do it, and he did it in like the general meetings. I can't remember in the Board of Fellows meetings, but in the general meetings, he would do that. You know, somebody'd speak up and "I think so and so," and it was, "Your opinions don't count," you know. "Nobody cares about your opinions," something like that, sharpened, putting them down. He sort of the arbiter of it all. Even to some of the faculty he would speak that way.

So, it's no wonder that they got up in arms. But he didn't seem capable of adapting to—and you know, this happened everywhere he went. So, there must have been something about him. It couldn't always be the other people's fault entirely. On the other hand, he was much more stimulating than the other faculty, much more interesting. You know, people who came to visit, although they came because of the college, but they usually had heard of him and they would talk with him. He was the only one, I think, really could speak on almost level terms with Aldous Huxley or somebody else.

MEH: Apparently, he was a great talker.

RS: Yeah, yeah. I wrote a— most of a novel once about Black Mountain, shortly after I got out. And one of them was supposedly as recreated, but pretty accurate, of this meeting with a small group students and faculty after something. And talking about his visit to St. Johns and his arguments with them. They were followers of Thomas Aquinas which made him see red. So he was describing in detail how he demolished them and so on. So I wrote that up. And the kind of gusto that he related it with. Now, there's where you see he was obviously hostile but not toward the people with him but about those people there, those idiots, believing in the medieval theologians, that kind of thing. That, I think, was the kind of thing though that his—the people who admired him, they really liked all that. Nobody else had his intellectual acumen to talk like that. Although when I got those notes out that I had reproduced, I was surprised at how rather commonplace some of them sounded. Or not very good. They were not that perceptive. Louis Adamic quotes him in various ways.

He sounds better there. But that may be Adamic had touched it up. But Adamic was a great admirer of his I know. But so were a lot of the other people outside of the college.

MEH: So you were at Black Mountain three years.

RS: Three years, yes.

MEH: Did you graduate?

RS: No.

MEH: Ok.

RS: No, no.

MEH: Why did you leave?

RS: I was trying to think. Well, I fell into disfavor with the faculty pretty much. Partly, I took up one of those challenges. You know, someday, they said there would be a student who only takes one course or even no courses. So, I took them up on it. I said I'm going to devote my last year, you know, this year to writing, which I was doing. But they didn't like that at all. Then they finally toward the end said, "Well, we don't think you're going to get much more out of here. You're not taking the classes and so on." And—but I think I'd already decided I'd had enough, and I was going to go to New York City, which I did.

MEH: So both of you really concurred.

RS: Yeah.

MEH: That it was time for you to go.

RS: Yeah, yeah. So, I don't know what some of them thought. But I guess that was the general opinion of the faculty.

MEH: So you left and you came to New York City.

RS: Yeah, yeah.

MEH: Why New York City?

RS: Well, I don't know. That's where everybody went if you were interested in writing and the arts and so on. I'd been there once or twice while I was at Black Mountain. And I, you know, did know occasional people. But there was no work to be had. It was really very difficult.

MEH: So, how long did you stay in the city trying to write and survive?

RS: Well, I was there for a few months. Then I went to Boston where I worked for Porter Sargent. Do you remember his name?

MEH: Was this the father or the son?

RS: The father. The son was at school with me for a while. I don't know how long he was there.

MEH: Do you know what happened to the son?

RS: The last I heard he was running the father's business. The father died and he was still running Porter Sargent. But I don't know in more recent years. Although the firm is still there, I think.

MEH: I think so. What did you do there?

RS: Well, Porter Sargent—The son was away. I don't know where he went. So I lived in his room which was a huge room. He had this big mansion in Brookline on the brow of a hill overlooking Boston, a marvelous place. His business was this guidebook to the private schools. Even more so he charged fees for counseling parents and their kids where to go and getting them placed and so

on. But then he started writing an introduction to the guidebook and that got to be bigger and bigger because all his opinions about everything in the world went in. But he was an interesting character and he had some unusual people come to the house. He would invite them. He would correspond with various people and they would turn up. The only one I can remember now is a man named Rosenstock-Huessy, who was a youth leader and developed the youth program in Germany before the Nazis and then had to leave and came to this country. And I think he became a professor at Dartmouth. And another was a friend of Auden. I remember his coming for dinner and other people. So it was an interesting place. He also had strong sort of what I thought were anti-imperialist beliefs, but it turned out that they were also vaguely pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic. We had a bad falling out over that finally. I've forgotten who he had from—There were some visitors who were a bit shady in that area of belief. But I remember—I was living in the house, and I was working on this introduction, and I couldn't figure out what—really how to do the work because what he would do is he would dictate all kinds of random ideas to his secretary who then would type them up. And you'd get all these slips of paper, and he seemed to think there was some coherence to it all and I could never figure it out. He seemed to be able to do it, but it's like a patchwork of all kinds of things. So, I labored away at it. One day he came in and he looked and he said, "Well, you're writing your own stuff there," and I said, "Yeah, I'm writing a novel." He said, "Well, I'm sorry. You can't do that on my time." He said, "I guess you'll have to leave." But he said, "On the other hand, if you'd like to, you can stay

here and work with the gardener, you know, for room and board and so on and continue writing.” And I said, “No thanks.” But I had already quarreled with him about his anti-Semitic. He made some remark which I remembered when we were eating dinner. He was being expansive and saying, “Oh, last time I was in Vienna, it was such a relief.” Well, he said, “The parks—you know, there weren’t all the Jews around and they had to wear these colored insignia and they couldn’t go in certain places.” Yeah, yeah. So—On the other hand, as I said, he was anti-imperialist, and he had done a lot of work on that also. I don’t know quite how all this fitted together in his head. And then he sent out a newsletter—that’s what he did. I was working on that. Did he do that? Maybe not. I guess not. I did that later without the anti-Semitic part. But I remember sending it to him and he was impressed. Well, he—I guess had the means so he got in materials from all over, and I can remember one time he said, “Well, now go downtown and talk to the editor at the Boston something-or-other. Big newspaper. So I went down there, and my mission was to find out what materials were coming over the wire services from Europe. This was during the so-called cold war between the time the Nazis conquered Poland and then there was a lull, and it wasn’t clear what was going to happen. But things were going on. But he wanted to know what things came in over the wire services that the papers weren’t printing. Which the editor was perfectly willing to tell me. Which was interesting, the kinds of things they screened out and for what reasons. Things like trans-shipment of oil to end up with the Nazis and so on, which has later been verified, but, you know, I heard about it right then.

MEH: Trans-shipment from—

RS: From here to the Azores where the German tankers were waiting, or Spanish tankers. And the Spanish tankers would take it then to Spain, and then they would trans-ship it to Germany, and so on. That was what the Germans needed to conduct the next phase of the war. So it was a serious matter.

MEH: This was being done with the knowledge of the United States.

RS: Yeah, yeah. Apparently, so. But the newspapers weren't printing it. But later there were investigations after the war and it was conclusively shown that this was going on. Plus other things. Trading with the enemy was what it's called.

MEH: So, you left Porter Sargent.

RS: Yeah, I left there, and I went back to the city.

MEH: Being New York.

RS: Yeah, New York. And I was there a few months, and then I went to Chicago and started working for my father—the firm he was with. He was like a high-level accountant, but he was doing what was called pension—pension plans and profit-sharing plans and estate planning for big corporations and wealthy people. So, I had to learn that. Because I couldn't find any work in New York. I mean, unless you had some unusual skill, it was still the depression really. It was very bad. So, I was there for a couple of more years. Then I was in the army for two or three years, and then after that I came back to New York again. And then I got involved in publishing. Leslie Katz and I had a small publishing business called the Touchstone Press, which put out art reproductions. I also

was co-editor of a magazine of art criticism. I went around and reviewed shows and so on.

MEH: What was the name of that?

RS: That was *Critique*, it was called.

MEH: How long did that go?

RS: It was about a year or so. It folded. So, it was at that point I decided I would go back to school. Well, the GI Bill had been passed in the meantime, and so I was able to go to school. So I sent to the New School and got a bachelor's degree there.

MEH: In—

RS: That's a good question—in what? This was the first year they gave a bachelor's degree, and I had shopped around to see who would give me the most credit for what I had done.

MEH: At Black Mountain and Oberlin.

RS: Because—Oberlin, yes, but Black Mountain, most of them wouldn't give me any credit. But the New School gave me some. The advantage was, of course, you could take courses of various kinds. They didn't really know quite at that time what to do with degree students. Well, they had some unusual teachers there, too. Much more interesting than most of the colleges. So, I got a degree there, and I decided to go into social work and got a master's degree. Then got more advanced training in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. And so on, at any rate.

MEH: So, professionally you've really worked as a—What have you done?

RS: Well, for many years I worked full- or part-time in various psychiatric clinics. One in the city I worked at for several—a few years was called the Jewish Board of Guardians which was a famous child guidance clinic really with a number of European psychoanalysts as consultants and so on. Again, a very interesting experience. And I'd met a number of the leading people in the field from Europe, that is. Then I moved out to Long Island, that's when our first child was a year or two old. I worked in psychiatric clinics out here and had private practice both, usually as the chief social worker in the clinics. These had just opened. Federal money was just starting to come, so they were being set up. So I did that. I did a lot of part-time work, too. Consultant like to day care centers, youth programs and so on. And, so, I really did that. And then finally I took a position as the associate director in what is called a family service association which became very large for Nassau County. What I did there mainly was start up innovative programs some of which are still going and have been taken up nationally. One of them for example was a program with two and three year olds for increasing their IQ through home visits and doing certain things which has held up now for what, twenty-five years. They've done longitudinal studies showing that the children who were in this program when they were two and three year olds have less of a dropout rate at graduating from high school than the average even. Whereas these are all kids which, if you took a control group, most of them dropped out of school much earlier.

MEH: What was sort of the central thought of this program, the basis of it?

RS: Well, it was—the basic idea was to demonstrate to the mothers how to talk and play with the children to develop their cognitive ability. Because the earlier studies had shown that many of the low income parents who were poorly educated didn't know how to teach the children in the way that most people do. And the children did not learn concepts. You know, the mother would point to things, you know, and say, "Shut up, drink, eat," and so on, but the children when they would get to school, you would say, "What is furniture?" They couldn't tell you what furniture is. They could say, "That's a chair." But they had no concept of a bigger category. So very shortly, they were unable to read. In like, first grade, even second grade they could memorize things sort of. Then they would just fold. And then you'd have kids—the problem is do you advance them or you hold them back? This and that. And they end up being truants and causing trouble because they can't understand what is going on. What was found though was that the real damage was done when they were two and three years old. It was not easily reversed. So a kid whose IQ had been, say 100 to start with, when they tested them at age five, it had gone down to 80. Gone down. And at 80 you can't get through elementary school, let alone even high school. So, these are kids who now, many of them could go to college because their IQ was raised so much. So, at any rate, this program has been going for years and years now. It's still more of a demonstration. Some states are taking it up more. So that's still going. I'm on the Board of Directors of the organization now. So, that's the kind of thing I was doing.

MEH: Looking back, do you think Black Mountain has made any real difference in your life, having been at Black Mountain?

RS: Well, I feel, you see, it probably encouraged certain tendencies. I kept meeting people who would say, “Well, how do you think of these things?” I’d say, “Well, you get the experience of looking at things differently.” People who, like some of them like Xanti Schawinsky, you see. There was something different. You start thinking about it. You can see things can be done differently. And you’d start saying, “Well, how could this be done differently?” “How could you change it?” or “How do you do something differently about it?” So, you constantly are thinking of innovation really. So, I think that was part of it. Because I remember in one thing I was working on, there was a rather eminent psychologist, and she said to me, “How do you think of these things?” This was one called “Thinking Skills Project.” Did you ever hear of “thinking skills”? I made it up. But at any rate, she was taken with them. This was going to be a big project for the Ford Foundation. And I said to her, “I’ll give you a course in innovative thinking, how to turn things upside down.” She didn’t want to do it though. She didn’t want to have her thinking disturbed that much. But I attribute that mainly to Black Mountain. I might have felt somewhat that way, but to see so many aspects of it in different fields and what came of it. And then, you know, you get familiar with—at Black Mountain I got familiar with the Bauhaus because among the things in the library were some of the publications of the Bauhaus in German which most of the people I don’t think realized. But I would look at them and see what they were doing there. You know, it’s a whole world of innovation.

Then, Albers *Werklehre*, for example. I mean, who else did anything else like that?

MEH: Did you take that course?

RS: No. But I didn't need to because I caught the idea immediately as to what it was and so I could do it and at times I've done that kind of thing. But—

MEH: What do you think as a school—beyond your own experience.. What do you think really mattered about Black Mountain?

RS: Well, that's one of the things I wanted to do this study for because I'm not sure what a lot of people got out of it. I really don't know. I think it freed them up, but what the result of that was I don't know. Also, I think, you know, starting in the 60's there were a lot more experimental colleges and open schools and all the rest so it seems less different now and I'm not sure there's any great difference. Maybe there still is. I think though there was a—you know, when you're in high school and then you come out of high school and you've been in elementary school, it's a world run by adults. You see it a lot in colleges. I see it. Oh, I talk to people who teach at Hofstra and Adelphi and places like that and the young people come, and they want to know what to do. What am I supposed to do? That's their whole outlook. You know, if you only tell me what to do, I'll do it. Tell me how to think, how to look at it.

MEH: Give me the answers.

RS: So, I think Black Mountain, and Rice in particular, tried to counter that with people, challenge that attitude. You know, you've got to think for yourself more. So, I think that may have been quite an influence for people, but I don't know.

It's hard to say. I mean, after so many years, I think that would be a great advantage. I mean, I met people there that I've continued to know all my life. Well, Jane Mayhall and Leslie Katz. Elizabeth Pollet, Ruth Hershberger, though I haven't seen too much of her, but I did for quite a while. Who else? Emil Willimetz. Now, there's probably several others. Some of them Jane and Leslie are in touch with I've met there off and on. Who was there? Mary Brett. What's her name? I've forgotten her last name now—Daniels, whom I didn't know at that school but—Although, there aren't too many I've continued with. But there's sort of been a continuity to some extent with all of them. Well, that's one of the things I'd be interested to hear from people, whether that's all different there or maybe less of it even. I don't know how other people found it. But I know from, well, looking at my daughter's experiences in college, but I'm not sure they have any friends left from college. They had them for a while, but there's no sort of long continuity that I can see. They went to very good places like Sarah Lawrence and Wesleyan and Hampshire and so on. My older daughter went to Hampshire thinking it was going to be like Black Mountain. I couldn't remember hardly ever talking to her about Black Mountain, but she apparently picked it up in some ways, but she was bitterly disappointed that it was not like Black Mountain. Although the first mentor that she had there at the beginning was—he had been at Black Mountain and his uncle [BEGINNING OF VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT] had taught there. The uncle was King. King?

MEH: Joe King?

RS: King, yeah. He taught history, and I think he left—He was there the first year I was there. I can't remember this chap's name. I did meet him once. But he was there a few years after I was. [END OF VIDEO TAPE ONLY TEXT]

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

But she was badly disappointed about it.

MEH: You have three daughters? Two daughters.?

RS: The older one has just set off—is setting off for Majorca for nine months to help set up an environmental think tank for scientists. She's been an editor at The MIT Press where you had your book published.

MEH: Right.

RS: She was the acquisitions editor for environmental books. What she'll do after this, I don't know. And the younger one has done a lot of writing, but worked as, I don't know, the national coordinator for the AIDS quilt project.

MEH: That's a wonderful thing to have done.

RS: Well, she finally said she was getting burned out from it. Too much death.

MEH: I can imagine. A lot of work, too. A lot of pressure.

RS: Oh, tremendous. Yeah. But she traveled quite a bit. Her job was to go around and help schools see how to use all that as preventive education material. So she would go to places like Indian reservations and so on. Places all over the country. So they've been influenced certainly by Black Mountain, too. And Progressive Education. However, my wife, from whom I'm divorced, but she was trained at Bank Street and taught in various schools, and both daughters went to the Manhasset School System where the principal was one of the few

remaining disciples of John Dewey. They continued the Progressive Education philosophy there. It was a wonderful school really. At any rate, indirectly, they've benefitted, too.

MEH: No, I think, just the people THAT I've talked to and the people THAT I've met —the next generation —a lot has been passed on to the next generation.

RS: Well, actually, my older daughter wanted to work on this project. She was very interested and offered to do interviewing and so on. But with her work she finally had to bow out. [TAPING INTERRUPTED. SMALL TALK NOT TRANSCRIBED.]

MEH: Well, back we go. Was there any discussion of the integration issue while you were at the college that you remember?

RS: There was, there was. Maybe in either faculty meetings or in the Board of Fellows. They all felt it was much too explosive an issue to tackle. I mean, the area around was vehemently anti-Black and dangerously so. They boasted —I think it was after World War I —they'd gotten together and driven every Black out at rifle point, out of that whole area of the mountains. I think that was it. So they felt we were being pretty extreme having foreigners there and also having, you know, men and women in the same building. I mean, all that kind of thing was troublesome enough. I think by the time I came, the village had sort of quieted down more about it, but at first, they had threats and they took in one student from the village just to calm them, John McGraw. So he could go back home and tell them we were all right. I don't know what he told them, however. But I think that was the extent of it. The same was true of—They never

discussed homosexuality. But I must say I was surprised by Duberman's book in which he attacks their attitude because I felt they were more tolerant there than any place I know of at that time.

MEH: Were there people who were openly homosexual?

RS: Obviously. I don't know how when you say openly, but I mean—

MEH: You knew—

RS: You knew that they must be. Yeah. I mean, John Evarts was a main case, but there were, oh, at least half a dozen others, maybe more, that you were pretty sure about. But nobody, you know, nothing was done about it and nobody was saying anything in the college that I ever heard. Nobody complained. They felt some unease with John Evarts because, you know, he'd sit next to you and grab your leg or something. You'd have to back off. But, I mean, that was it. I mean, there was nothing terrible. Yeah, so I think, I don't remember it being discussed really.

MEH: Was there much discussion of the European conflict then? Were people really aware of what was happening to the Jews?

RS: I don't remember about the Jews. There was some awareness, of course, because a lot of the faculty had come from Europe. I remember more about the Spanish Civil War because the papers came in all the time. There was a place where papers were put out in the lobby on a table, a big area, so you could go and stop by and read it. So I remember reading the progress of the Civil War and so on over that time. There was concern. I remember going to a trip to

Harlan, where there had been—Just the previous year there had been a massacre of miners. A very dangerous area. What else?

MEH: Did you ever go to visit the Highlander Folk School?

RS: No, I didn't. I don't remember hearing much at that time. Later, I did. But not then when I was there.

MEH: Did you ever go into Asheville?

RS: Where?

MEH: Asheville.

RS: Oh, yeah, sure. Yeah.

MEH: What would be an occasion that would lead you to go into Asheville?

RS: I don't know. The main thing was going in for a restaurant or a bar. There wasn't too much else going on there that I can recall. I don't think there were any concerts equal to what was given at the college.

MEH: Was there much drinking going on at the college?

RS: A fair amount. Some book, too, also, I don't know whether it was yours or another one, somebody ventured the opinion there was little sexual activity which was not true either. But it was done so it was not thrown in people's faces, I guess.

MEH: I think that was the impression that I had.

RS: Yeah.

MEH: Somebody made the comment that there was probably less than at the typical sorority or fraternity at a conventional college.

RS: Well, that I don't know.

MEH: That I don't know either. It was discrete. It was sort of like the John Rice situation, so long as it was tasteful and discrete, people were left on their own.

RS: Well, it lent itself to it also, because you had your own room and people didn't come in. And you could go out in the woods.

MEH: A lot of woods.

RS: A lot of woods. Right. You could go off. I had a car for two years. I could go off various places. You know, there was not much scrutiny about things as far as I know. I don't think people thought that was a subject of real discussion. The only time I remember a big scene was, you know, when some group went off for the weekend, and that raised people's alarm because they felt it was news would get around. That they'd broken an agreed upon rule not to do that.

MEH: What about—what do you remember about Jack and Rubye Lipsey?

RS: I only dealt with them—I mean, remembered them in the kitchen, getting breakfast and their cooking special things if you wanted and so on. But I felt they had a world apart because they were—the rulers of a little group of servants, really, who lived in back and really didn't associate with everybody. I mean, there was a line drawn really, and nobody objected from the village or elsewhere as long as, you know, they were segregated.

MEH: What about David Way? Do you have any particular recollections of him as a person?

RS: Oh, yeah. I remember him quite well.

MEH: What was he like?

RS: Maybe as well as anybody. Except maybe Marian Nacke. Well, I remember when he first came. He was tall, slender. Very bright and gifted in quite a few things. I remember one time I was amazed, all of a sudden he was giving a piano performance in front of the college, played a Brahms piece. I don't think he was in the writing group though. I don't quite remember how I got to know him better. And there was a printing press. He was though, he was very, I guess, intrusive is the word. Because he was always trying to find out what was going on. And always questioning me. I remember that as a part of a background to all that fuss that was going on with Rice and everything. David Way, mainly more than anybody else, was always coming in, you know, fishing, fishing, trying to find out. When I think of that, I don't know for what purpose. But then later, after college, for a brief time we had a printing business. I guess after I worked for Porter Sargent I came back to New York, and I stayed with David and was living in the city and then he and Marian and I and one or two other people moved up to Cornwall and he got a printing press installed on credit somehow. He was a great conniver. Very good at that kind of thing. And for several months built up a small printing business. Then he worked for Norman Bell Geddes in the city. And I left finally. I always liked him though. But then later on I also—I saw him briefly for a while but he alarmed me. I thought he was having hallucinations, and I decided I would stay away from him because, again, he was behaving in the same way, this intrusive questioning, what's going on and so on. At some point, more recently before he died though, I must have gotten in touch with him, mainly at the time I sent out something.

He called me up, talked to me, and then he sent me a letter and so on. He was, I know, in touch with a number of the other people, with Ruth and Jane and Leslie for a while, and so on. They all had bad experiences with him. I remember—

MEH: Apparently, a lot of people did.

RS: —at dinner at one time at Jane’s and it consisted—they talked about him for quite a while. Everyone had a terrible experience with him. He’d done them in, and I had to say that he didn’t do me in. I must have done him in rather than the other way around.

MEH: You must be the one person.

RS: I guess so. Yeah. It was strange enough though when we talked on the phone. “Oh, yeah, yeah,” he said. “Well, you’re the one person I have good memories of.” Which was peculiar. I don’t know whether I did him in, but he certainly—he didn’t do me in I know.

MEH: What do you remember more specifically about Xanti Schawinsky? Can you remember any particular instances? Can you described the way he was in the community?

RS: Well, see, I didn’t have that much to do with him in college. I mean, I have these little snippets of recall about Xanti. I mean, somebody who was very exuberant and very energetic. He had several people who were very much taken with him, people who were involved in stage design and dance. George Hendrickson, I think, and there were several others. John Stix, maybe.

MEH: Beverly Coleman was a student.

RS: Beverly Coleman and George Randall. Yeah, there were a few of them. I don't think he was good at getting across what he was trying to do. That was my response. I remember wondering what's he doing with this particular kind of dance, and so on. Especially, that abstract one. Although later in looking at the Bauhaus things, I see that it was not his idea anyway, but although he was known for it also.

MEH: Was Robert de Niro there as a student when you were there?

RS: No, no. He came, I guess, right afterwards. I remember talking to him not too long ago before he died about it. "Ah, Albers," he said. Did you ever talk to him? He was a strange character, too, actually. I reminded him, I said, "Well, we never met all those years," I said, "but you rented my apartment." When I got married, I moved out of this cold water flat. But somebody said to me, "There's this chap who was at Black Mountain and needs a place, a painter, de Niro." And I said, "Ok, but if he's gonna move in, he's gonna have to give me the rent and I'll pay the agent because if the agent sees that I'm not there, he will want to get that apartment. He'll raise the rent and get somebody else in." So, de Niro was there for quite a while. But I talked to him about it several years ago, and he couldn't remember it at all. Absolute blank. And somebody else, I asked about Frances Goldman, and he couldn't remember her at all.

MEH: Apparently, she had a sad end.

RS: Yeah, yeah. I heard from, who was it, Maude, that she died in a mental hospital. De Niro's wife Virginia whom I still see—she remembered Frances Goldman perfectly well.

MEH: She wasn't at Black Mountain. No, of course, I know who she is.

RS: No, no. But—well, he died maybe more than two or three years ago now. We were there just before he died with his son and Virginia and two other people. Who else was there at Black Mountain? Bill McCleery who gave a writing seminar the next year—last year I was there. Whom I and others thought was not very good, despite the fact he was a playwright. He was on somehow a more pedestrian level, I guess, less interesting as a person.

MEH: Did you take part in *Let Me Have Air*?

RS: That wasn't when I was there because I hadn't heard of it even. Maybe it was, but I never heard of it.

MEH: Actually, I think he wrote that later.

RS: I think so, I think so. I don't recall that at all.

MEH: Ok. Do you—If we're gonna make—

[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT.]