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[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. David, how did you – Can you remember how you first heard about Black Mountain College?

DW: Yeah. I was – I knew nothing about the college. It's surprising because a lot of people, especially in the circles that I moved in, knew about it. But I knew nothing about it. I was at a ceramics school in upstate New York, and there was an offering that came through the office there, asking – saying there was a job for a ceramic instructor down in North Carolina. But none of the people at the school were interested in it because the salary was meager, and the people there were all interested in getting their M.A.s and Ph.D.'s in ceramics and getting very pricey jobs in big universities. As I say, had I known about the college, I would have leapt at it, but anyway just the whole offering of a modest amount of money but a beautifully-equipped shop and 80 dollars a month and room and board and a place to work seemed very attractive. Turner had been there before, but somehow I had never talked to him about the school or known much about it. So, to me it sounded like just the most

wonderful offering. So I talked to my mate, the potter Karen Karnes, and that's it. We went down there.

MEH: Now was this like posted on a bulletin board, or did you hear it –

DW: No, no. The head of the department came and talked to we who were in the graduate area. Karen was there as a faculty assistant, and she was working for her master's, and she had been, I don't know, three-quarters of a year or whatever into her master's. The head of the department said, "Go and don't come back." She said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "For you to go and have a fully equipped shop and just be able to work is much more important than getting this master's degree." She hadn't gone back to school for a master's. She had just gone back because she had been an architecture student, and I had taught her some pottery and she just felt she needed more background. So he said, "No, the degree's not important. You go and you just work in the shop. You'll learn a lot more than you're ever going to learn at this university." So we went, and never came back to Alfred.

MEH: Who was the head of the department?

DW: His name was Harder – Charles Harder. He was a very open-minded person and he knew about Black Mountain, and he knew about Turner, because Turner had been one of his students early on. So he knew about the school a little bit, and he was, he was a very open person.

MEH: How did you get to the college? Did you drive?

DW: Physically? We went down – I had never driven a car. I was, what, 35. I had never driven a car. We took the train down, and somebody picked us up in Asheville.

MEH: Where are you from?

DW: I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I didn't come back to New York til I was 35. I had been abroad, in Italy, and I had gone to school before in upstate New York, but I was a Brooklyn boy.

MEH: Had you ever been in the South before?

DW: No, I'd been to Italy, and I'd traveled in the north a bit, and I'd been to California and lived in California a few years, but, no, I'd never been in the South.

MEH: What was your first impression of the South? Can you remember?

DW: Well, I don't know. The school, as you know, was an old camp, you know, so the buildings were rather rustic. But we were into the life so quickly, with all these very strong personalities, you know. It was so rich, so that the landscape and the school and everything was all very secondary. So I – But for us, Turner had come down there. He was a wealthy man and he'd come down there and they needed a pottery. So he took his own funds and built this beautiful pottery shop in the middle of this open field, so that I do remember vividly, of being shown the shop with this great view of the mountains and the lake, you know, behind us. It was – you know, it was just blissful. And beautifully, you know, laid out, the shop was. A kiln he had built – one of the

best kinds of kilns. It was just – it was great. We got an apartment in the Studies Building. The Studies Building – it was a series of studies, but then at the very end of the Studies Building I think there were two apartments, and for some reason we were fortunate enough to get that apartment, so we stayed there.

MEH: How old were you at the time?

DW: I was around 35, yeah. Yeah, I'd been a potter. I had never been a professional potter, but I'd gone to school. I'd given up pottery, I'd gone to California, then I'd gone to Italy, and then I came back and studied a little bit at Alfred, so it was a wonderful experience for us to have that full-time, because we had very few students, as I told you, before – we had very few students. So, we just worked, you know, six, seven hours a day every day. Eight hours, nine hours sometimes.

MEH: What was the push in pottery then? What really interested you about it?

DW: Well, I think – I was cognizant that there were kinds of new thinkings in pottery, away from more utilitarian idea of pottery. There were just the first rumblings of some new thinking about pottery. But when we were there we did rather conventional work, you know. We did throwing. We both worked on the wheel, and we did rather conventional work. Then I think reading magazines and the like, I was cognizant that there were new things happening in pottery, new thinking. So I think we were aware that Picasso, for instance, had gone to a small village in southern France, to Vallauris, and he had worked with

some potters and done some very free work just using the basic pottery forms and then starting to, you know, expand, hearkening back to Peruvian wares, and I don't know quite what the other inspirations were. So we were cognizant of that. But you asked me that question because – I mean, it's interesting because about the third night that I was there, sitting there, Charles Olson who was the – he was the great Griller, you know grilled you quite extensively, and he wanted to know what was new in pottery, what was my rationale for pottery, where was pottery going. He was always interested, you know, both in literature and painting and what's the avant-garde. What's the new thinking? He gave me – Oh, and as you know from other interviews, there was a style that he inspired along with some of the other students and they would just grill you. Quite a few students I know at different times left the school because they just couldn't take that kind of, you know, grilling. But I remember it was a rough night, but I held my own, but it was tough. I wasn't used to that, that the premises of what I was doing were being questioned.

MEH: How would you – Could you elaborate more when you say there was a style that he inspired?

DW: Yes, there was a – it was a kind of a – well grilling. It was questioning, you know. In other words, you questioned everything that anybody said and it was very confrontational, and it – I say it was – at its best it was really a profound questioning of what, you know, about life and art. At its worst it was just a kind of an impudent arrogance, trying to just put people down. But the style of it, it

was trying to be very sharp and very probing about the person. I mean, I know that Charles did it in classes sometimes with students, and he'd have people crying and all. It was that particular style. It was – It wasn't warm, it wasn't giving, it was, I'd say "grilling" I think somehow gives a little of the feeling of it.

MEH: Did other people pick up this? Did students do this, for example, to you or to one another?

DW: Somewhat, yeah. Somewhat. But I think that – Yeah, I think they, I don't know if they just picked it up from Charles. I think some of the people had that nature too. But it was a certain style that – It changed after a while, but when I first came there, it was a small core of students, and they all had this way. Also the arrogance part was, like in literature and in painting, you know. They believed there were only like four or five writers in the whole world that were in the right camp, and the same way, you know, with painting or even with music. That there was just this small group, and they were doing it all right and everything else was, you know – so that maybe characterizes the attitude, too. That's the arrogance, you know, that there were just, you know, just a few people who were doing what was important, and everything else was absurd. The college was based on that a lot. I mean, a lot of the teachers there that summer were all sort of in the avant-garde, you know, both in painting and music and –

MEH: When you went, you and Karen were not faculty as such, were you?

DW: Well, at the end of the summer – We were there just for the summer. They had – on their own, somehow they'd heard about this – There were four people in England who were doing a seminar there. Marguerite Wildenhain, Yanagi, who was head of the Tokyo Art Museum, the potter Hamada, and Bernard Leach. Somehow Charles, I believe it was Charles's doing, had heard about them, knew about them, and wrote to all these people and wrote, oh, these wonderful letters to them. He had heard they were coming on a tour of America so he asked them would they come to Black Mountain. They said yes, and this was their first stop, actually, on their tour. We said then, "How are you guys going to run a seminar? We're leaving at the end of the summer ostensibly. How are you going to run a seminar? You don't even know how to operate this shop or anything." We said "This is absurd. These guys are coming, and we said "We've got to be here." They were afraid to keep us on because they didn't know where we stood in the balance of the faculty, because as in a lot of the history of Black Mountain there were cliques, and they didn't know where we stood and so – They never really asked us, but I suppose they felt that we were, I don't know, not camp followers as it were. So, it was tough, because we wanted to stay, first of all to work, taking Harder's advice to stay on, and also it was a wonderful, wonderful situation. We had already found a market for our work in Asheville, North Carolina, and so what we did is we ran around to each of the faculty and talked to them and told them simply what we wanted to do and that we wanted to stay. There

were enough faculty who thought that was fine, you know. Both the two camps, because we weren't so politically oriented or power-hungry, they both seemed to like us. So – Charles was furious. He thought this was (talking personally) underhanded. We did it with the greatest of frankness and honesty. He thought it was some giant plot. So – But I, you know, that's tough on him. So anyhow, they had a meeting to vote on whether we should stay on, and they voted that we should stay on but not make us faculty. So we wouldn't have a vote. So that satisfied whoever they were worried about, you know, whoever worried about us. So that's what we did. We stayed on and we were called "Potters in residence," and it was a blessing. We were potters-in-residence and we didn't have to go to the faculty meetings which, you know, in those years were really, well they're always tough but they were really tough. So we never went to any of the meetings or got, you know, involved with any of that. So that's the short history of how we got there and how we stayed on. But it's true. We were just potters-in-residence. Later on we got involved with the school, though I think we were still only potters-in-residence.

MEH: That first summer you were there, the summer of '52, Robert Turner had just left.

DW: He had left I think a year before. The pottery had sat – had sat for about a year or even two, with nobody using it. I think Chamberlain and a few other

people did a little work there, but nobody knew how to use the kilns or anything.

MEH: So what do you remember about the summer of '52. That was the summer that Kline was there, Tworkov.

DW: Kline, Tworkov, yeah.

MEH: Stefan Wolpe.

DW: Wolpe was there, yeah. I think John and Merce might have been there for the second session, perhaps, yeah. There was an interesting weaver there, can't remember her name.

MEH: Was it Ellen Siegel?

DW: No.

MEH: Oh, Marli Ehrman? I'd have to check my notes.

DW: But anyhow, that was the first summer, yeah, and you know, it was wonderful. Jack Tworkov was in the apartment right next to ours, and there was, you know, it was just – For me it was a great education because even though Alfred was not, you know, really a conservative school, I was not really completely knowledgeable of what was happening in the New York art world. Then all of a sudden I knew everything, just from one summer of – I mean discovering Franz Kline and talking with him and seeing the work he was doing. It was all a great revelation to me. It was wonderful.

MEH: What about – You weren't really aware of Abstract Expressionism and of Kline and Tworkov?

DW: Somewhat, I mean, yeah. My teacher, you know, at pottery school we had a background in painting and sculpture, and my teacher there was a great inspiration to me. She had studied with Hans Hofmann, and we knew about what had happened in, you know, radical work that had happened in France. But it wasn't really a big part of my knowledge, and it all opened up because Guston came by that summer, and, you know, so that it was quickly brought into the whole world.

MEH: What was Kline like in the community, for the summer?

DW: Well, I didn't know him too well. He had his group around him, of painters and painting students. He worked at night a lot, and so he wasn't there so much in the day. We got to know about people whom we sat with and so forth. I didn't sit with him that much. But he seemed to have a rather wry sense of humor. He was very popular with the students, and he did seem like a bit of a city person though I think he was born in rural Pennsylvania. But he was a kind of a city person, sort of transfixed down there, I think, so – Then I think a girlfriend of his came down and stayed with him a little bit. But I didn't get to know him too much.

MEH: What about Tworkov?

DW: Tworkov, because he had the apartment right next to us, we talked quite a bit, and his two daughters, one of them now edits the Buddhist magazine, *Tricycle*. Yeah I got to know them. He was a tremendously – He could communicate very well. He was, I think more than Kline – I mean he was

much more a teacher so he gave lectures and the like; I still quote him, because he, he just was a very very sensitive but a very wise person. Then they went on to teach at Yale after that.

MEH: How do you quote him?

DW: Well, certain things – Like he used to say – in one lecture he always said, “You know, there’s this whole thing about museums and modern art and everybody trying so hard to understand.” He said, “I don’t know about accounting. I’m not – I don’t have that tendency.” He said, “There’s this great myth that everybody should understand modern art, you know, modern painting and sculpture.” I know even in my life I’m passionate about dance, poetry is not as strong in my passions, and so what he was basically saying is that it’s an absurdity, this whole thing in our society that everybody should understand and I in my work understand that, you know, that people come and, you know, they work so hard at it. Sometimes I just say what he said, “you know, I don’t know anything about accounting. I don’t understand engineering.” So why, you know – It’s our sensibilities. We each have sensibilities for certain things. So I remember he would do that. He was just – I don’t know, he was just – His grasp of what was happening in modern art. He was very passionate about modern painting and he talked a lot about the kind of space that modern painters were dealing with, what de Kooning was doing and Vicente, and he gave us a whole sense of it. Of course that here in New York were a whole group, you know, and they helped each other a lot

and had a lot of exchange, and so he brought that to us too, that kind of understanding.

MEH: What about Cage? That your first exposure to him?

DW: Right. [AFFIRMATIVE] Yeah. John was – I lived with John, you know, after Black Mountain, and he was the same – he was the same then. He was a tremendous, a tremendously charming social animal, and he was – well, Tworikov I say was very big on theory and, you know, a big overview. John would always – you know, he would try to be I'd say, he'd always talk as he did when we lived with him, at home, about cooking and plants and all and very little talk about the music. So, he was just, you know, delightful and a wonderful dinner companion because he would talk. But he was never heavy. Of course, that was the year of the first "happening," you know, when they did that large performance together. I've helped a lot of people, you know, who have written about it because we were there and experienced it all.

MEH: As you're aware, everybody has their own impression of what happened in the Happening. What is your recollection?

DW: Well, there were about – there were about eight or nine people who took part in it. It was just choreographed. I don't know if it was Merce and John, but it was mostly Merce's planning, so he had – he gave Charles a certain assignment and Charles was in the audience and Charles had given – I don't remember the text, but he had given a certain text, and that was one, you know, one of the orchestrations. People got up now and then and spoke. But

it was all by, as I remember, by stopwatch so they had their moments.

Everybody was watching their watch and the moment when they would come forward. Rauschenberg, I can't remember quite what he did but I knew, I think he played old records. He had an old gramophone and that was what he did. He played old records. I believe Merce did some kind of free improvisation when he moved around the inner circle followed by a dog—he became my dog after a while—but this little puppy followed him. That was not planned, but followed him around, you know, as he moved. Tommy Jackson did something with film on another wall, which was I think basically the idea of a sunrise and a sunset, but he had the sun – he just had the sun and then it sort of – he by moving his projector, the sun was high and then by moving his projector he moved it down and the sun set. I remember that. Then John read from a text. John I remember had a kind of a lectern and a black suit and a white, white shirt and a black tie. Very formal. He read – when his time came he read from the writings of Meister Eckhart. I can't remember what Mary Caroline did. She, I think she came up on a ladder, and maybe she did some readings too, but that's pretty much what I remember. So you get different interpretations?

MEH: Yeah, even not so much interpretations as just memories of what people did.

DW: What happened? Yeah.

MEH: Do you remember having a particular impression at the time, or reaction?

DW: Yeah. I thought it was, I thought it was just wonderful. Of course, we had some questions about it. John said that it was like... he likened it to the idea

of a circus, a three-ring circus. Different things were happening at different places in the room and that's the way he had wanted to orchestrate it. Merce was there. Rauschenberg. It was not untypical of him that he was involved with those kinds of things, you know, performance, a lot of what he was about even then was a performance person. So that I think we didn't see it as so strange. There were certain faculty, conservative faculty, who thought it was just bad. I remember, I'm sure you've heard her quoted, Mrs. Jalowetz, did you hear her quoted when she said – She said... after it was over she went up to John and said, you know, she thought it was pretty crude stuff, you know, and what she said, she said, "Deep in the Middle Ages, deep in the Middle Ages." She just thought it was, you know, not a very sophisticated art form that they were working on there.

MEH: John was using chance then in his music, when he was –

DW: Yeah. But we didn't know that. We didn't know that. I believe the whole Happening was choreographed by chance, but we weren't aware of that. And David Tudor gave a number of concerts with John, but we weren't that aware – I wasn't – of exactly how it was composed. Later on when I lived with him, I knew it well.

MEH: So you had that summer with Tworikov and Kline and Cage and Cunningham were there, and then –

DW: I think Wolpe was there. I think Lou Harrison was still there. He was there.

MEH: How would you describe Wolpe as a person?

DW: Well, I never got close to Stefan. He just wasn't my style of person. He was tremendously, very egotistic. I mean, just the opposite of John, you know. John, probably it was not completely sincere with John, but John had a great humility. He was just the opposite. So he was very, sort of a little arrogant and just so full of himself. So that I didn't know him well because I was not attracted to him as a person. He was always obvious, you know, obviously present because his presence was very strong. But there was something about him that just it wasn't really convincing. He was like he was on stage to me, as a human being.

MEH: What about Lou Harrison?

DW: Lou was – He was sort of there, but John was there and so he sort of played a sort of a background role there. I always found that... that he had a few students but he tended to be quiet and withdrawn. I think that kind of quiet you find in his music, too. It was great. I recently met him. I can't remember who he did work for. It was one of the modern dancers, and he was there, and I went and talked to him and it was lovely, because his work is being played a lot now. It's a really interesting time for him.

MEH: Was M.C. there that summer? Did she come down with David?

DW: She came down with David, yeah. Yeah. We became quite friendly, and that's when her first interest in pottery developed. Yeah. By coming to our shop. I don't believe she worked with it that first summer, but her first interest was piqued that summer when she was there.

MEH: She wasn't potting at all then?

DW: I don't think so. I think she came back to New York and went to Greenwich House and did some amount of pottery, and then we – I think we said "You know, M.C., it's silly for you to be going to Greenwich House. We've got this full shop and we'd love to have you come work with us." That's what she did. She came down and just worked with us. I think it was an off term or something. Yeah. Then ultimately started a pottery with us, you know.

MEH: You mean up on The Land.

DW: Yeah. At Stony Point.

MEH: After that summer – The pottery seminar was already being organized when you –

DW: Yeah, right, and then that fall, I believe, we had the seminar.

MEH: Did you know who Leach and Hamada were at that point?

DW: Yeah. They were my gods. That whole influence of Japanese pottery and a lot of ideas that Leach had. He had done this one book about pottery and that was kind of a bible to all of us when we studied. But I'd never met them before. [TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION]

MEH: You were saying Leach's book was really a bible to you?

DW: Yeah, it was very inspiring and we all tried to work that way, because he was inspired by Japan. But his interest in Japan and the way of Japanese pottery and also the temperature ranges, they worked in stoneware a lot in their reduction pottery, and that became extant all through America. It's changed

now. But all the potters wanted to work in those reduction, more subtle stoneware tones, and so we had read the book. Our teacher, Harder knew about all these methods of – he could help us toward it, and so – But I had never met them before. Then they came and it was just fine. It was very very good.

MEH: What do you remember about it in particular? What memories do you have of it?

DW: Of the seminar? Well, first of all, people came from all over because everybody else had obviously – it was the bible to a lot of people, so we had a wonderful attendance. The atmosphere of the college, being informal, was just – I suppose it's what a lot of people in terms of the pottery are about. They're interested in that kind of earthiness, which the college was. That's the positive side you could describe the college as "earthy" and "down to earth" and slightly primitive, which it's I think what potters feel a lot. So it was just perfect, as a place to work. I think the students warmed to that. The buildings were crude and the accommodations were not like a hotel or whatever or dormitories, but just more primitive. They all warmed to it and really enjoyed it, and they loved the idea that we all ate together every meal because so much happened at meals. So that, I remember that too, from the student point of view that it was very positive for them. Then we had the idea that they should come and do a kiln full of work, rather than just demonstrate or do this or that. We had the kiln and we had the clay and that they should do that. We

thought it was a bit presumptive on our part to perhaps ask that of them, but Hamada, he thought that was a great idea. Leach didn't think it was a great idea, but Hamada thought it was a great idea. So I remember we sat and had a conference the first day, and Hamada – you've heard this story perhaps before. But Hamada said, "Look, when I go to England and I want to do some sketching, I go to the art store and I buy a pad and I buy a pencil. Well, here I am in North Carolina, and the Weinribs have this particular clay that they've made." And Leach, you know, took the clay and said, "This clay is short, meaning it's not plastic enough." So he thought the clay wasn't right. He was always very critical. He was a snob, but Hamada was just wonderful so he agreed that's what he would do, that he would do a whole kiln. He did two full kilns. We did a kiln for the low-fire ware and then we did one for high-fire. He just worked all the time and demonstrated for the students. Then we had a bisque firing and then we had a regular firing, and in the end Leach took part. So that's what I remember, that it was just a fruitful time. A lot of our students who had been somewhat snobbish about the pottery somehow they also came and took part in it.

MEH: Why were they snobbish about the pottery?

DW: Well, as you know, in those years the school was basically oriented toward literature and painting, and nothing else was very important. I mean, some of them studied language or math, but in general that was the main specialty of the college. Theater. They also studied with Wes Huss. Pottery, somehow for

them, was – it wasn't art. I mean potters still have this problem. Is it art, is it craft, and all that. So the students in general – and I'm sure, though Charles was interested in it – A lot of those students got clues from Charles. He was very strong with a lot of those students, and so it was thought of as a peasant art. Because I once questioned them and said "How come more of you kids don't study with us?" or whatever – We have this wonderful pottery and all. They said that it was, they thought it was a peasant craft. That's why they didn't come, so we had very few students in all the time, the two and a half years we were there. But we didn't mind. We could practice our art as potters.

MEH: Who were some of the students who studied with you?

DW: We had – I can't even – They were very, very few. My sister, who had come as a student, she came and studied with us. There were one or two students who came in the summer session and studied with us. Then when I came to build the pottery on The Land, Karen stayed on and she had a few students. Jorge Fick came and studied with us a bit. He actually went on to do a lot of pottery out west. But very, very few students came and really seriously studied with us, and it was a wonderful opportunity. I mean they could have come and worked ten hours a day with two trained instructors, and that's what Black Mountain permitted. You just could work and work and work. There was – You know, Charles actually, you know, a few really good writers came from his work but we never developed a really, a real professional potter at that time. Some of them did go on – I think Fick did, Jorge Fick did and somebody

else did, but in general they didn't. So we ran it as a sort of independent entity, you know.

MEH: Can you remember more about Hamada?

DW: Yes. Yeah. He was a quiet man. He could speak English, but he didn't speak too much. He had Yanagi, this museum person, who he spoke through sometimes. What was interesting was that he was accustomed to a certain kind of wheel. In Japan they sit and you have this big giant – it's either made out of stone or wood and it has a shaft and then the shaft sits into a kind of – it's not just a hole, but it sits into a hole in the ground. What you do is you spin it, with a stick or whatever. It grabs into it. It has a notch and you spin it, and then you sit there and then you do your pot. So it takes a lot of training because you can't control it. You have to be attentive to when it's going fast, what you can do when it's going fast, when it's going slow. We didn't have such a wheel. See, all the wheels that we had were the kind where it had a kind of situation where there was a pedal and you pushed it back and forth and that turned the wheel. So we didn't have the proper wheel for him. Because his wheel used to be low on the ground, he used to sit cross-legged and work in that way. So we devised this nice method. We had this kick wheel and on the side of the kick there was like a little box on the side of the kick wheel, so he sat up on this little box and the wheel spun in front of him, and I did the kicking. So that's the way he did it. He just turned out this work. So he was just very – He was quiet and very sensitive, sensitive to the surroundings

of the countryside, sensitive to everything. So, he made a tremendous impression on all the people. People came to have a lot of affection for him, even in that one week. He also wore the Japanese clothes. He wore a little coat and then sort of kind of a balloon pants that Chinese peasants wear, and he always wore that.

MEH: Do you remember a pottery sale at the end of the year? Or the end of the year –

DW: Yeah, at the end of the week we sold all the pottery that had come out of the kiln. Had a wonderful kiln-full of work, and I say a lot of the glazes that we used, which we had gotten from this whole culture from Japan and through Leach, were the very glazes that they used in Japan. So that they were getting out wares very similar to what they produced there. We had a very saturated iron glaze that they used in Japan. We had that very glaze. And celadon is just a beautiful watery greenish clear glaze. We had that. We had all the glazes, and they were sort of amazed. But we said “We’ve read the books” – and they were amazed. Then the nicest thing that happened was that, I say Leach finally took off his tie and his formal jacket. No, he didn’t take off his tie, but he took off his jacket and he decided he would throw some pots because he was getting jealous. I mean here all the attention was on Hamada. He had a few lectures, but all the attention was on Hamada. Marguerite Wildenhain, she also would not do anything. But Leach, he decided he would do it, and so he did quite a few pots and put them in the kiln

with Hamada's work, and I remember that the pots came out and they were really quite lovely. Yanagi, this museum director, he lifted one up – he took this pot of Leach's, and he said "It's so beautiful. This is one of the nicest pots I've ever seen you make, as nice as anything you've made in Japan or in England. This is wonderful. I want this for my museum in Tokyo." So it gave us a justification, because here's this – I mean, we weren't that perturbed but, you know, this snobbish guy. He was always – You know, he felt he was superior to us. And even though we'd looked at him as a god, when we got to meet him we still felt we could make that separation. But his teaching was tremendously inspiring but as a man, he was a snobbish arrogant person. So I remember he used to come into our apartment, and we had quite a few pots around and he'd go like this. What he was doing [LAUGHS] was he, you know, he was sort of editing the pot, just looking at it and saying "Oh maybe it's got too much neck, or it's got too much foot." So we laughed about it but it was again a kind of arrogance to come in and start doing this. We were very talented potters. So yeah, that was a good of a profile of what he was about.

MEH: There was something else that I've heard about that summer I was going to ask you about and I don't know what it was. Marguerite Wildenhain, how did she fit into the community?

DW: Well, in a way she fit in very well because I think she was former Bauhaus, and I don't know if Jalowetz or some of the other instructors who had been in Germany were connected with the Bauhaus. But of course Albers was

Bauhaus and so that those faculty... she just – she was very good with them. She had, I mean she – I was gentle about Leach. She could not tolerate the man, and she felt that she was his peer, and he had this way about him. So she had been to this seminar at Dartington Hall in England with him and others. I think it was a conference that he organized. There were potters from all over the world, I think, there. So she had her fill of him at the conference. So she came. She came out of another tradition. She came out of a Bauhaus tradition and also a certain European tradition in pottery. So she was not so pure about Japanese pottery and oriental pottery. So she had a kind of a prejudice against that and the kind of almost purity people had about that. So she sort of took a back seat in the lectures, and she never came down to the demonstrations or anything like that. She felt she was her own person and – It was a strange mixture. I never would have combined with them. I mean the three men together seemed very close. I didn't think she belonged in that group. Of course a lot of the lectures were about Japanese pottery and Korean pottery, and so it was not her world.

MEH: I think she had been asked earlier and then because this was the one name that Olson knew. When they didn't expect you to be there and they felt they needed somebody American or living in this country to host it.

DW: Oh. Yeah, but I think she didn't want to do that. I don't think she wanted – It would have been absurd because those kilns were different than the kilns she used. The school had no sense of how to do the seminar. Actually Dan Rice,

who was a painter there and he was sort of student coordinator, he was going to run it. We talked to him a little bit at the end of the summer, and he had no idea. He wouldn't have gotten – He wouldn't have known how to get them any clay or anything.

MEH: Speaking of clay, where did you get your clay? Was it local clay?

DW: No. No. Potters don't use local clay anymore. They get it from different mines, and they do different mixes. Though Leach did have a wonderful time there because we did go to some of the local potteries. There were a number of – Jugtown and a few other local potteries. He was in bliss, because that was his philosophy. Besides thinking that Japanese pottery was the greatest in the world, he had based his whole Cornwall operation on the idea of peasant pottery, and that's what he did. He tried to train people to do simple mugs, simple bowls – no art, just good sound work. Of course, then he'd go to his own studio and create his art pieces. So there was a great schism in his thinking. So when he came to see these simple local clays, they used the local clays, and the simple lead glazes and the like. He was just so happy and he felt that this was the right way. This was the most important thing in America, and he wrote about it later, and here were all these people – we and Peter Voukos and all these other people – and he just complained about all that stuff and he was way off base. Again, he was trying to do art pottery also, well, creative pottery.

MEH: Do you remember if Trude Guermonprez came down that –

DW: She was there, but I don't know if she gave a workshop. I did meet her. Yeah, had some good talks with her. She again – she was in the anti-Olson camp too and a lot of the pretense, and yeah so she was a lot like her mother.

MEH: You mean pretense on her part, or anti-pretense.

DW: Yeah she thought they were full of pretense. Yeah, I think she studied with Albers, Anni Albers?

MEH: Well, they had worked together because she was really a mature weaver.

DW: Weaver by then? Yeah, but she was very much in that feeling with Anni Albers, you know, [OVERTALK] a kind of adventuresome probing.

MEH: She was from Bauhaus influence.

DW: Yeah, yeah.

MEH: You said you found a place to sell your pottery. Where were you selling it?

DW: Yeah, there was a place in Asheville called the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild. It was a guild that was started to help local craftsmen and to also help farmers who would sow their crops and then they'd have this whole time in the winter months when there wouldn't be that much income. There were, of course, a lot of crafts that these people knew, besides their farming – their farming abilities. So it was to help them that they started this guild, and so a lot of the work was indeed Jugtown pottery and people make dolls out of corn pones, but really good quality work. It was not – It was very good. We met the woman who was head of it, and she fell in love with the work we did. Our work had nothing to do – you know, it was much more sophisticated, the

whole tonality of the color was different, and she just fell in love with it. I had done a lot of tile work. She loved that. We made tables for them. The price range was completely different.

MEH: From your work and the other work there?

DW: Yeah, the craft work in general was not too expensive, and our stuff might be five or six times more expensive, and that dissuaded her not a bit. She sold it. She did sell it and she took a lot of our work. So, it was just wonderful to have that outlet, because we were very productive. We would do pottery all the time and be very very productive.

MEH: Were you allowed to keep the rewards for your labor, the profit that you made?

DW: Yeah.

MEH: You didn't have to give any of that to the school?

DW: No. We felt, we felt it wasn't completely fair that some of those people were really having a hard time, and that we were doing quite well with our pottery. But we paid – we paid for all the gas that we used in the kiln, and we paid for our clay. In other words, we were self-generating. So it came up at a meeting and we felt that maybe we should be giving some money to the school, mainly because there was such a disparity. Not that we were getting rich, but we were making some money. Some of those people like Wesley Huss or even Charles, they weren't making hardly any extra income. They were very principled. They said, "No, it's all yours. I mean if I sell my book, then should I

give a percentage of my book royalty to the college? If Wesley Huss goes and puts a theatre piece outside – You know, that it would become such an ungainly situation, and they were very supportive. So that's what we did. No, it was all for us.

MEH: Do you have any idea who was buying your work?

DW: I think there were – You know, Asheville, well, now it's even much more sophisticated town. But it was local people and tourists. But tourists from like New York or other places who would come and buy it, and Asheville is a tourist town and so, yeah, I think tourists bought it and local sophisticated people. This woman who ran the store bought a lot of it. She loved it.

MEH: Your work was utilitarian – bowls, plates, platters?

DW: But mine wasn't as utilitarian, but as I say, I did a lot of decorated tiles and the like, and we got a local craftsman to make metal tables for us, and so we did that. I did a lot of decorated plates. But Karen was the one who did much more of the utilitarian wares.

MEH: Yeah, I've forgotten. You did an installation in a house in Asheville.

DW: Yes we did, yeah.

MEH: What do you remember about that?

DW: It was a former student, an architecture student, who had come back to that area.

MEH: From –

DW: I don't know where he had been. But he came back and was sort of friendly with people, and he told us he was building a house nearby. He was much influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was a modern house. It was a lovely house. He had this inspiration, because there was a lot of tile work that I had done – a lot of tile, and he had this inspiration to do some tile in the house. I wasn't that interested in doing floors or counters but he had this nice idea that the heatolator, the vent from the fireplace – it usually comes out in two little vents at the side of the fireplace so – It's a certain kind of design where the heat just doesn't go up, but it circulates. It's a downdraft idea and then it comes out. So what we did is we built this whole long strip of tile, and it was perforated. It was a bird motif, and it was perforated so when the heat came through it came out of that. The birds, I don't know, I don't think we have it in the book, but the birds were, I don't know, I was very much into birds.

MEH: I seem to remember they were very big and exotic.

DW: They were big, and sort of big beaks and maybe slightly aggressive. So [LAUGHS] we installed it, and the woman of the house, which was not the kind of typical person to want a Frank Lloyd house but she had somehow been sold on the idea, and she was really for it.

MEH: Was this really a Frank Lloyd Wright house, or in the style of?

DW: [OVERTALK] In the style of, yeah. So I remember she and I sitting and looking at this, and me explaining it to her, what, what it was all about. She

was very receptive. She had to live with it. But she, she really understood it and got into it.

MEH: Did you take your meals in the cafeteria?

DW: Where?

MEH: At Black Mountain.

DW: Yeah. In the dining hall. When the college got really poor, or in certain of the sessions, then we didn't open the kitchen. But yeah, we always ate there and we ate all our meals there. A lot of the people didn't get up early. Didn't get up for breakfast in time. But we were on an early schedule as potters somehow, and so it was nice because we got to see the women and their children. They always came to breakfast, so we got to meet them a lot. The heavier crew, you know, the men and the artists, and all, they weren't there. So yeah, so we often, you know, we often ate breakfast. But we ate all our meals there. But later on, at certain sessions, we did our own cooking.

MEH: When you arrived, all the facilities were still operating.

DW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Everything was operating.

MEH: How was the food?

DW: It was very good. We liked the food. It was fine. They had quite a bit of fresh vegetables. All the meat, as I'm sure you've heard, was a little tough, but the cooks were quite geniuses with it.

MEH: Why was the meat a little tough?

DW: Because we butchered, a lot of it – we butchered our own cattle and then you have to age meat. We don't always know that. You have to age meat for it to get tender. Not the way – You know when you get really good aged meat, it gets green, then you cut the green off and inside you get the most tender of meat. I didn't know it until then either. [LAUGHS] So, yeah, what happened was that we had the cattle, and it wasn't aged enough, so it was tough. But they cooked it in beer and they did lots of lovely things with it. Yeah, I don't think we ever had fish. But we had meat and they had – It was cafeteria style a little bit, but the food was very very good. It was nice.

DW: Did you ever hear the anecdote about Charles and his steak?

MEH: No.

DW: I think every Friday night was steak night when they gave us a slice of steak. Of course, again, you couldn't cook it as an ordinary steak, but I believe they sort of stewed it. They stewed I think with a little mustard and beer. It was delicious, but it had to be stewed. But it was a precious treat each week. Charles was never, he was never on time for meals. He was always late for meals or whatever, and so they kept the meals aside for the few people who came late. He came down one night, that night, one Friday night, and his steak wasn't there. Somehow it had disappeared. He came into the dining room, and he was a big guy and he stood tall, and he said "WHO STOLE MY STEAK?" and he said it in such an accusatory way that everybody felt that they did it, but none of us had. I don't know how it happened. Maybe

somebody had made a mistake or something. But he just was furious [LAUGHS]. Rather than say, "Oh, well, my friends have the steak," he thought somebody must have done him in or something. It was just a very funny moment. But I remember it because it was done so forcibly that everybody felt guilty. I mean, it's something that, you know, good cops and all questioners do. You know, they make the person feel guilty because of the way they present it.

MEH: Was this a steak like other people's steak? Or did he buy the steak especially?

DW: No, no, no. It was his portion.

MEH: Oh, everybody had his or her portion.

DW: Everybody – They made usually just enough, you see, and then they'd taken a few plates, and they covered them with another plate and they put it aside for the few people who were going to be late. [LAUGHS]

MEH: You commented a little bit on Olson. What was he like as a person? Olson.

DW: He was – I'm sure, like with the Happenings, I'm sure you get lots of impressions of him. But for me, he was tremendously intelligent and perceptive and imaginative, and I felt he had a touch of genius. You know, I've known a few geniuses in my life, and I always felt he had that quality of genius. So I always felt really good about that. Humanly, he wasn't always so great. He was like hot and cold, and he had attitudes about things. When he cared for you, you felt you had the most loving human being in the world, and

when he didn't have much to do with you, he could be arrogant and unfair in his judgments and the like. So he had both sides, and we had an experience of being on a honeymoon with him for a goodly part of the time, being close with him and getting closer and closer. He was very fond of Karen, and I didn't give him a hard time, you know. People like the old Bauhaus gang and all, they gave him a really hard time, but I was very open to him and, I learned things from him and he respected what we were doing in the pottery. Then we stayed around, I don't know, toward the end we had some kind of break and it was over some absurd thing, and that was his way, that we weren't his buddies anymore.

MEH: The people who were critical of Olson, what were their criticisms?

DW: I think they didn't like – They didn't like the fact that – I mean he was – I mean he wasn't the provost because ostensibly we didn't have a provost. Early on Albers was really the provost. [MEH note: Albers actually was not the "rector."] But Olson tried to run things. His enthusiasms for certain faculty, for points of view, were strong. I think they didn't all agree with it, so that a lot of the people who were there, from the former days just didn't, you know, stylistically like it. But they also felt he wasn't a good teacher.

[TECHNICAL INTERRUPTION – END OF AUDIO CASSETTE 1]

MEH: There was something else I was going to ask you, related to them. Katy was born while you were there.

DW: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, she was there. Then also Wes Huss's wife had a child. They had a child at that time. So the two women spent a lot of time together with their children. They weren't too involved in what happened at the college. Connie helped later on in the administration. But they were sort of – It didn't seem to bother them, but they just seemed to hang out with their kids a lot, just sit around at the lake or – But they weren't – because the whole tenor of that college was very strong in getting things done and they somehow avoided that. It was interesting because as I say that was not the tenor of the place at all.

MEH: Were you interested in – I mean were you interested in what was happening in the Print Shop at all, in any of literary publications?

DW: There wasn't much of that going on anymore when I was there. They didn't do hardly any publication anymore. I remember they did that famous little cigarette paper program for Cage. At one point someone was going to make it a commercial operation again, but didn't, and so it was hardly used.

MEH: Was Katy Litz there when you were there?

DW: Yeah, she was there. She was there, at the beginning. Yeah.

MEH: Do you remember a production they did in the summer of '52 – yeah, I know she had to be there, because – with Kline and Katy Litz.

DW: What did he do? Did he do the sets for her or something?

MEH: I don't know if he did the sets. It was based on – one of the songs was
“Dragon – “ based on an opera, Brunnhilde, all kinds of – Do you remember
that at all?

DW: It's coming. It's coming to me, yeah. But not much more. Was it done
humorously, or – ?

MEH: Yes.

DW: Yeah, I don't remember the details of that. It's not strong in my memory, but I
do remember it. I remember the dragon and there was some kind of costume.
I don't know if Rauschenberg did it or whatever, but yeah. But I don't
remember it that strongly.

MEH: Are there any parties that you remember in particular?

DW: No. There's one, the one where we did the kudzu decoration. I think you
mentioned it in the book. But there weren't too many parties. You see, when
Albers was there, they had a lot of – every Friday night or whatever people
got dressed up and they danced and all. In my time, a lot of the partying was
mainly just sitting around after dinner with beer, and just drinking and sitting
around and chatting. So there were very little formal parties or occasions for
parties. It was just this general – We weren't beer drinkers at that time, so that
wasn't much of our social life. But there weren't too many parties, but dinner
in a sense was always a social, a big social occasion. So I don't remember
any parties.

MEH: Did you go to Ma Peek's?

DW: What was that? Down the road? A little bit, but again we weren't drinkers, so we didn't do that. We were on a slightly different schedule. You see I think a lot of the people picked up on Charles's schedule. You know, he was a night worker and we were potters. I don't know, the light of day was very important to us for working. So we were on the early schedule. So we weren't part of I'd say that social milieu, with the students who drank beer and hung out and did all that. So we weren't – We weren't that close to them, so we were not socially part – But sociability at that time was rather informal.

MEH: Do you remember any drama productions in particular?

DW: Well, there was the – I remember the Garcia Lorca play. What was that called?

MEH: Blood Wedding?

DW: Blood Wedding, yeah. I remember that very very well.

MEH: What do you remember about it?

DW: Well, I remember that – I've seen the play since, again, and I thought what they did there was much better. I saw it here at the Public. I thought it was just a wonderful production at Black Mountain. It was beautifully staged, and my sister was in it also, and Jack Rice was in it. It was a very fine production, so I remember that very well.

MEH: Was it in the dining hall?

DW: It was done in the dining hall, yeah . Yeah. Could you recall any other plays that we did then? I don't remember anything more than that.

MEH: Did they do Cuchulain while you were there?

DW: I don't remember that. No. I mean Huss did a lot of talking, but he didn't do too much – He didn't do that much production.

MEH: Okay, it says that the summer – there was the summer of '52 and then the fall pottery seminar, and then the next summer, which was the summer of '53. Was that the summer that Voukos was there and Warren Mackenzie?

DW: Yeah, yeah.

MEH: And did you organize that?

DW: That was Charles's inspiration that we should do pottery seminars, because the one with Leach had been so successful that we'd become famous, you know. When they went across the country, they always talked about that seminar at Black Mountain. Then Leach, in a more humble moment, wrote to me and said that it was the best – that they had gone from there to maybe ten or fifteen other universities and that this was the best seminar. A lot of it was because it was so informal. They went to a college, they had to go to a college pottery, then they went to faculty dinners, and somebody put you up in an apartment, so ours was sort of – to use that overused word – holistic . It was all whole and close. So he did write to me. So I think either I had the idea or I talked to Charles. I don't know quite how it happened, but we had this idea to do these pottery seminars, and we took over. The people we knew in the field, we invited them to come and I think only one person refused us because everybody – everywhere else that we called – I think we offered

them the same, [LAUGHS] I don't know, 80 dollars or not that we offered them fees or anything. But they all came, and I think the way a lot of people came to Black Mountain. They'd heard about it, they knew about it, they had, you know, real respect for it, so they wanted to do it. Of course, we had a pottery that was a wonderful little place to work in. Voulkos also did a whole kilnfull when he was here.

MEH: How did you feel about Voulkos at that point?

DW: Well, I was in the field so I knew him. I'd never met him personally. I'd met one or two other people that we'd invited. But I just knew about him and he knew about me and the work I was doing, and so he was just kind of a peer in knowledge.

MEH: What was his work like at the time?

DW: He was still doing thrown work. He was still working on the wheel, but on a very large scale, and, again, somewhat influenced by Japanese glazes and techniques. The work hadn't opened up into that more sculptural kind of way of working.

MEH: What was he like as a person in the community?

DW: Well, I didn't get along too well with him. Not badly, though. Karen got along very well with him, and a lot of the students got along very well with him. He was – he fit in very much. He liked to sit around and drink beer and talk in the evening, and he had a sort of – sort of a wry sense of humor, but not too verbal. But he had that quality of saying things – a little like Kline, that they

would say things and they would be right on the point but – sort of hip, cool. It was before hip and cool, but it was that kind of talk. So – And very sincere and very honest person.

MEH: What about Mackenzie?

DW: Mackenzie didn't fit in quite so well because, well, while Peter was sort of hip and cool. Mackenzie wasn't. He, he was a little uptight. I don't know where he taught, in the Midwest or something, and he – to come to our school, you had to – I don't know, you had to sort of have a certain nature that people liked or fit in, and he didn't quite have it. But he did fine. When you first came to the school, you saw that there were a lot of students who were overblown about their talents, about literature and about painting, and they sort of dominated the school. Then you came from the outside and you wondered, "What's all this fuss about?" You know, because you really came with a broader view. So there were two things you could do. You could either just work into what was there and find out that indeed there was something there, or you could be once removed and be a little snobbish about it. That's a little what he was like. Then when our other guest, Dan Rhodes came, it was even worse. [LAUGHTER] They just couldn't get into the, the mood of the place. But he was fine. He did, he taught a very good seminar. He had worked with Leach and so he had lots of tales about working with Leach.

MEH: Why did you decide to leave? You left – Did you stay through the next summer, or did you leave at the end of the –

DW: Yeah. What happened was that things were getting tighter there. The student enrollment was going down, and what happened was – I don't know if I told you that before, but I felt that there was a certain – I mean a school stays together a lot according to the spirit of the students, and the school was much smaller and I felt that a lot of them had picked up the Beat kind of mode. They weren't into drugs that much. They were still drinking their beer, but there was a kind of a beat attitude toward things. The Beat attitude was, in my way of thinking, somewhat destructive. You didn't want to really do that much, you know. You were sort of beat, and so you wrote, but you didn't write that much, and it just was not a positive attitude. I felt at that time, because people sometimes ask me why did the school fail, and that's what I always feel – that the school started with this great exuberance at the beginning because of the New Deal and, you know, a lot of other kinds of thinking – Bauhaus people coming. Then we were there, not that there wasn't interesting things going on in literature and painting and the like and in pottery, but that there was a certain attitude of that small core who were left that didn't make for a really dynamic school. So that was my feeling about the school, and I wasn't feeling really good about it. The school was really strapped. We couldn't give winter sessions anymore and the like. So Paul Williams had come for a while and then had left, and he had told us at that time that he was interested in starting a community in – near New York. And just had sketched it out, ever so lightly, to us. Then M.C., who had gone back to New York, talked with Paul, and she

got this inspiration that we should start a pottery there. Of course, that was great for her, because we knew a lot more than she did and so it would have been helpful. We were friends – that it would be just the perfect set-up that the three of us could start a pottery. I mean she didn't know how to build a kiln or anything like that, but she was doing interesting work already. So she asked me to come to New York, and I came to New York, and I talked with Paul, and he said, "I want to start this community. It's got to be fifty miles from New York. I'm looking at properties in Connecticut and in Jersey and New York.

MEH: You mean within fifty miles or at least fifty miles.

DW: Within fifty miles, so that if people had to go to New York, he said, "I want it to be a resident's community. I don't want it to be a commuting community. So I'm looking for land." Then he told me the terms of it all, which were like a gift from heaven. We'd purchase the houses and all that, and so we said we would do it. So, we came up and we were right. I mean the college failed a year later, so we had come just at the right moment and come into this wonderful atmosphere, you know, and ability to work and all.

MEH; And so that time in 1954 you came up with Karen.

DW: No, Karen stayed for the summer session.

MEH: Oh, so she stayed for the summer and you came up.

DW: She stayed for the summer session. They had a whole session. I came up north. Robert Hellman taught literature there.

MEH: At Black Mountain?

DW: Yeah. Somebody came that summer. Yeah. He came and taught literature. Karen taught pottery. I don't know quite who the other people were there, but they had an interesting summer. So I came up and I built the pottery, because we felt that we couldn't come unless we had a place to work and support ourselves. So I came up and built the pottery and then Karen came up after that summer. Of course my peers down there said "You're going to eat at a rich man's table," as if it was just something corruptive. It never was corruptive. It was just a wonderful gift to permit us to work and all and to be with interesting people. It was a great community. John came and, you know, M. C. was there. So that's what happened, yeah. So that's how we left the school that way.

MEH: Did you see yourselves as an extension of Black Mountain?

DW: No. No. It was just – I think they did. I think that was Paul's vision was to take the ideas of Black Mountain and bring them into a community. It was a completely different challenge than Black Mountain, but that was his idea. We thought of it more narrowly. We just thought of it as we did when we came to Black Mountain. When I came there, I had no idea of the ideals of the school or what it was about. We came to be creative potters and the same way when I came there. We came there to be creative potters. Whether John Cage was living there or David Tudor, that was not that relevant to us. But that was just like an added plus to it. But we came because all of a sudden this guy is

designing the biggest shop I ever had, and I don't have to put a penny down, and he's lending me money to build a kiln, and he's helping me build it – for free. So, yeah. So the idea – But that was his idea. But I could see very soon that it wasn't that, because it wasn't communal like the school was. That was their first idea: that we'd all have small residences and a central dining hall, so that that would replicate exactly what happened at Black Mountain. But it didn't work out that way, and people were starting to have children and the like, so it was different. But it was – it was fine because education never interested me that much, and it still doesn't even though I'm a professor and all that. The work has always been central to me. But there were people at Black Mountain to whom teaching was tremendously important. I mean, M.C. is a born teacher, and loved it and developed ideas about teaching and all. But I never do. So for me it wasn't a loss – that part of it. It was communal enough.

MEH: M.C. was potting also at the shop?

DW: Yeah. No, she had her studio. We built three studios, three studios and a big kiln, and then she felt that she wasn't productive enough to fill a big kiln. We used to fill a big kiln once every two weeks – Karen and I, working away. So M.C. felt that she couldn't. There was a smaller kiln we built for her. She didn't spend the kind of time we spent in the shop. We were full time, time and a half production potters.

MEH: And how were you selling your work then?

DW: We were very lucky. Karen had a number of outlets that sold her work. I think she even sold through the Southern Handicraft Guild. I think they developed a store here in New York also. But she had other outlets. We had a showroom and a lot of people came to our own showroom. By that time I had started working with slabs of clay, giving up the wheel. I first developed that at Black Mountain, and then that was the kind of production I did. Then I used to have a gallery show once a year of my production, while Karen, you know, was a production potter. So she had a number of people that'd come from Philadelphia and all over and bought her work. So we did very well, from the start.

MEH: Do you think Black Mountain had any real – What influence did Black Mountain have on your work then?

DW: Well, I don't know, because stylistically – See, for instance, Peter Voulkos feels that Abstract Expressionism was tremendously important to him in the work that he did, and he found that the summer at Black Mountain was tremendously important. He's tried to work in painting abstract expressionistically and the work is not that good, but he felt that that had liberated him, being with all the painters and that whole atmosphere. For me, it didn't happen that way, that my work developed. But I think it was just the atmosphere. It was just the most perfect atmosphere to work in. Not that they were supportive of me, because most of the – as I say, we were peasants to most of the students. But Charles felt really good about what we did, and he

saw it very clearly what we were about. What was interesting is all the visiting faculty, when they'd come in the summers, they would always say – I remember Tworkov coming and saying, "God, you're really productive. You're the only people doing anything at this college," and a few of the teachers would say that because – I mean the visiting faculty – because a lot of those students were not working that hard or being that productive. So I don't see any influence, really. I think we were self-generating as far as the way we developed. But I don't – I don't think in any specific way that Black Mountain – What we would have done without it, I don't know. We might have gone and started our own pottery or something like that. But I think it opened up a lot of things for me in literature, in painting, in theater. I mean for me – not in my art necessarily, but as a person – it just brought the whole New York art world to me, and so it was tremendous. You know, in music, everything. In that sense it was, you know, a tremendous influence to me. But in the work, I don't, I don't see that.

[PAUSE]

MEH: This is the studio of David Weinrib. [PAUSE] There are two things happening?

DW: Yeah, here in the studio. One is the sculpture that I'm doing and then I'm just working in papers. About, about four months ago when we were in Hawaii, I started doing these collages and they've sort of taken over so that's what I'm doing a lot of right now with these –

MEH: Is it paper?

DW: Yeah. They're all in paper. They started sort of flat but then the sculptor in me started to manipulate them, so in my more lighter moments I call them like an updated origami, because that's what basically what it does. It takes just the paper and manipulates it. In the papier maché work. Again it's a more sophisticated use of that material we used to use in public school. Yeah, it's kind of a mulch. You know there's two kinds of papier maché. One is you know where you use newspaper and the other one is this kind of mulch, which is almost like a clay so it sort of takes me back a little to that, that time of being a potter.

MEH: I see the forms are very biomorphic? Of these, right here on the wall?

DW: Not by design.

MEH: Not by design?

DW: No. Seems to be my language.

MEH: And for how long have you been back in sculpture? When I was here before, which was a long time ago, you were doing painting – the one in the main room [OVERTALK]

DW: That's right. I took off, I took off five years to do painting and then I came back into sculpture and I've been doing it ever since.

MEH: So really your pottery was an avenue to sculpture, for you?

DW: Not really. What happened was, what happened in pottery was that my work became more sculptural, and so that was the logic. I said "Look, if I'm doing pottery, it's getting more sculptural, there's no – you know, it's almost an

excuse to call it a pot.” Now a lot of potters have stayed in that halfway place where they do sort of sculptural pots. I just decided if I’m doing sculptural pots, that is to say it holds a flower or whatever is kind of an absurdity. It doesn’t make enough of a rationale. So I said “Well, if it’s at that point then I’m just going to do sculpture.” So I just stopped. But it was more – Not that the pottery led into it, but that I just saw that the sculptural ideas I was doing had nothing to do with utility anymore.

MEH: So this sort of brings us back to an issue of, you know, you’re being considered peasants at Black Mountain. How do you see the relationship between art and craft, or do you even make a distinction?

DW: I think – I don’t. The world still does, but I don’t. When I see creative work in pottery I just look at it as that. I think there is a lot of pottery that’s done that has a lot of sculptural shenanigans happening in it that is not very interesting work, you know.

MEH: As pottery or as sculpture or – ?

DW: Well, it’s neither. It’s not interesting – I mean somebody like Betty Woodman is – I mean, she’s right in the middle and she’s terrific. She’s sort of between – I mean they put flowers in her things now and then. There’s one that sits in the Museum of Modern Art there, often right behind the desk. She still, you know, uses pottery forms as inspiration. But she’s – It has to do with tiles a lot, which she does, but she’s a wonderful creative talent. So I don’t – You know, it’s an old saw and it’s still, it’s still being, you know, it’s still being debated all

the time. That's why there's now "artist-craftsmen." It used to be there were "craftsmen" and "artists." Then the craftsmen worked very hard to get themselves called "artist-craftsmen." So I don't make that distinction, but it is true that I'm much more interested in what happens in painting and sculpture than in pottery. I don't know what that is, but it's true. Now maybe I'm just not that much in the field anymore, but I do feel there's a lot of experimenting now that's not very interesting pottery. But I'm sort of in the Eastern tradition, you know. In the East there's no separation between craft and fine art.

MEH: How much time did you spend in Japan?

DW: I spent two years there.

MEH: And where were you?

DW: In Kyoto. Yeah, we lived – We had a house in Kyoto and –

MEH: Now who is "we?"

DW: Joanne. It was our first year together. She came to join me there.

MEH: What were you doing there?

DW: Well, it has to do with this. This was a series of sculptures that I was doing that had a quality of a lot of transparency and translucency. I was doing a lot of really large pieces, and it was the first time I wanted to leave New York. I never went away in the summers. I never went any place. I just felt it was all here. I got this impulse that there was a quality of translucency and transparency and lightness that had to do with Japan. I don't know that it was

very strongly thought out. So that's why I went to Japan, because there was a quality in the work which led me to be there. [INAUDIBLE].

MEH: You spent some time in India also, didn't you?

DW: Yeah, we went to India after.

MEH: For how long?

DW: Two years.

MEH: So that was four years away in the east.

DW: [AFFIRMATIVE] Then I came back and gave up art.

MEH: Why?

DW: It was just – just so much of what happened there just made me feel that philosophically there was no need to be – to do art, that art was everywhere, no matter what you did. Also what happened was that I looked at a lot of my friends who are artists, and I saw that there was a great separation between the art they did and the lives they led. So, that seemed like a bit of a disparity to me. So, therefore it just seemed kind of an absurd schism. So I tried then to just live my life without – without having that kind of break. So I gave up doing, you know, objects, for a while.

MEH: For a while.

DW: Yeah, well I'm back at it. [OVERTALK]

MEH: What got you back into it?

DW: Actually what got me back into it, I was teaching at Purchase and I saw – There's a big field there that used to be a wealthy person's estate. This big

field was for polo playing. It was a big polo field – green grass, large field.

Sort of picking up on some of these ideas of transparency and translucency, I got this vision of making all these gates, gate-like forms, all across this field, which would be made of clear plastic so that there would be less objectness. So I thought if it were autumn the sculptures would be reddish and if it were summer they would be greenish, you know, rather than like monuments. So I made many sketches and models and we never did that project, but that got me back into sculpture again. So, I did do a whole series of large gates and I exhibited them but I never did them on that campus.

MEH: And now you work really – You and Joanne work separately but closely together?

DW: Well, I'm her model. Her model. We're doing a project together, but it's pretty much her own work.

MEH: [OVERTALK] Basically independent, separate.

DW: Yeah, when I come as her model, it's really nice because for many years she helped me. She helped me sand my sculptures and do my paintings and all. Then when she became a professional chiropractor she didn't have time to do it anymore. So now when I come in and model for her, you know, with the sculptures or with snails on my head or whatever, I just love it because I'm, I'm part of it. So – But it's her work. So we, we talk a lot but she's really motivated and so it's not collaborative, really.

MEH: It's really her ideas, and you're the object.

DW: Yeah, it's a wonderful space, see, and I have the workshop in here. I can put a light on if you want to see the mess.

MEH: Okay [LAUGHS].

DW: I'll give you a light. So this is more where we work and store things, and then I have the Church in Rockland County, you know, where we have, we store a lot of the work.

MEH: Now is the Church yours, now?

DW: No, no. I'm just keeper of the Church.

MEH: Who did it belong to? I mean who actually –

DW: It was USCO. It was Intermedia Foundation, which was a long time ago.

MEH: That's right. Does that still exist?

DW: Yep. In a much diminished way, but we still exist.

MEH: Was it – Did it belong to the Intermedia Foundation when Paul and Betsy were living there?

DW: Yeah. Yeah. It actually belonged to the church corporation, the Psychedelic Church, called The Church of the Living God, and they in turn leased it to Intermedia. But there was a lot of overlapping there. But, yeah, so in legal terms the church corporation still owns the Church.

MEH: Now who is Intermedia?

DW: Intermedia was Steve Durkee, Gerd Stern. Steve Durkee was the painter. Gerd Stern was the poet, and then Michael Callahan was electronic engineer, and they came together, and they all actually lived there and they developed

a lot of psychedelic art and light shows and all. There were three or four places on the West Coast also doing this work.

MEH: And who is Intermedia now?

DW: Well, let me just finish. So Intermedia then became a commune and there were about fifteen or twenty people connected with it. Then Intermedia went up into two directions. One became commercial and went to Boston and did light shows and slide shows and was called Intermedia Systems. The other part of Intermedia went to New Mexico, and Steve started LAMA Foundation, which was a big interdisciplinary, you know, religious situation. So Intermedia for these last fifteen years has run an art gallery and put on performances at our church now, and now it's sort of quieted down. So Intermedia exists. We do some small projects, but not that much anymore. Our gallery director went back to becoming an artist, and so we don't do too much gallery work. But we have a painter-in-residence now, up in Rockland County who's there, and we do certain small projects. We're more like a resource.

* * *

MEH: An office. I envy all this space.

DW: Of course, I never had a place for my files or anything like that so – I have my files here, and I do my drawing work in here. Yeah, finish it off.

MEH: I will. It's good.

DW: So this is where I do a lot of my drawing.

MEH: These are drawings and then you cut them and shape them?

- DW:** That's right. See they start like this, and then they end up like that.
- MEH:** And how do you mold the paper? Do you stretch it? I mean do you –
- DW:** You just fold it. [OVERTALK]
- MEH:** The way it's attached to the background gives the tension.
- DW:** Yeah. But you can get tension within itself too, you know, so, yeah, the tension is where it takes the background. But then by folding it within itself, you also get – you get a lot of forms, you know, by – But it's a heavy enough paper so it can pull and tug and make other things happen.
- MEH:** And what are you using – paint, acrylic?
- DW:** No, it's actually a kind of a magic marker, which bleeds with water, so like it becomes like a watercolor.
- MEH:** That's interesting, the ground on this one.
- DW:** Yeah. Actually we – I do a lot of work with Xerox and so here I Xeroxed it and then redid it so this sits on itself.
- MEH:** Do you think if you had not gone to Black Mountain, I mean if you and Karen had.... [INTERRUPTION] Do you think you would have become a sculptor?
[OVERTALK]
- DW:** Yeah, I think it would have happened anyhow. Because my main work, when I decided to give up pottery and started doing some sculpture and then soon after that I came to New York and lived there for twelve years, and when I came there, I was right in the middle of it. So, it was the second generation Abstract Expressionists and all the sculptors were at work. A lot of people had

come from the West Coast. So we, just like earlier on I had helped frame what was happening in modern pottery. Peter Voulkos and I and a small group had really framed what was happening in modern pottery. I was part of that whole group that was taking a lot of ideas of abstract expressionism and putting it into sculpture, into the things we were doing in sculpture.

MEH: Why did you leave The Land?

DW: [LAUGHS] I left The Land because I had broken with my first mate. I stayed on there, and I realized that the amount of female companionship, living in Rockland, was very limited. In the sense I knew most of the women there. So I decided that if I wanted to ever find another mate or companion, that I had to come to a more – a broader situation. So I came to New York, and again it was – Just like Black Mountain was one of the great things that happened to me, coming to the Land was great, and coming to New York was just – it was just wonderful. It was wonderful for me, because I came right in the middle of all that ferment, of second generation abstract painters and poets. So that's why I came for that. I found, you know, I found – It was the right move to do, to come to New York because the Cedar Bar became like my second living – my living room. In other words I'd come there every night and we were the painters and poets and so on. That was – I think that when we're talking about Black Mountain influence, I don't feel ideologically there was that much influence, but I know when I came to New York, you know, it was tremendously influential in everything I did. [INTERRUPTION]

MEH: Oh, this is the book [Artists in the Studio].

DW: It's not going to be a book.

MEH: It's not going to be – What's it going to be?

DW: We hope it'll be a book but we're just doing it as an exhibit at Pratt Institute.

Yeah, so this is, you know, this is Sol Lewitt's, that's his work, and this is more, you know, the work he does. This is his sculpture, and this is more of the work. We came to his studio and this is a model of a larger sculpture he did. Then this is – He didn't want to be photographed. Some of the artists are self-conscious about being photographed, so this is his dog sitting on a carpet he designed. Then this is – These are pictures of his studio. So the whole idea of this exhibit is to give the ambience, you know, in which artists work. So we've done – We're going to do about fifteen or twenty artists. So that's what's all in the archives there.

MEH: What artists are you doing?

DW: Sculptors that interest me.

MEH: Like –

DW: Like, well –

MEH: Lewitt.

DW: Lewitt. Turrell. Doyle. Judy Pfaff. Mel Edwards. Kenneth Snelson. Louise Bourgeois. A lot of well-known sculptors whose work interests me a lot.

[PAUSE]

MEH: Let's – We've talked about several faculty members at Black Mountain. Were there students that you really felt connected to?

DW: Not to any. No. As I say, they were a little snobbish to us, but fortunately, I had a co-worker, Karen, and we shared so much in our work, even though our work was very different. We were friendly with some of the faculty, but the students, I don't think we were really close with hardly any of the students. Jack Rice became a good friend, and we were very friendly with Olson and some of the other people. But it's like my life now. You have your work and, you know, so that it wasn't – I'm not a hang-out type. As I say, a lot of the lifestyle became that. After supper they'd sit around and just drink and hang out and talk or go to each other's studies or whatever. In the summer, when there were more people, we became friendly with Merce and with M.C. and some of the dancers. So at that time, we got closer to them. Then, of course, we went to live with some of them at The Land.

MEH: So these were basically faculty.

DW: Yeah. [SIREN SOUND] Yeah, I – We were not [OVERTALK]

MEH: People like Joel or Fielding, the writers Joel, Fielding, any of those guys? Joel Oppenheimer, Fielding Dawson – they were in another world.

DW: Yeah. I mean, I knew Joel and I became friendly with him when I came to New York, but we weren't that friendly. But we were not unfriendly. I mean Fielding was kind of a loose cannon, I didn't want much to do with that guy.

He's matured a bit, but he was a foolish person then. But we were empathetic. Michael, Michael –

MEH: Rumaker?

DW: Rumaker was there. We were, you know, it's not that we didn't talk to them, but we didn't form any deep friendships partly because we worked. We always worked. We always worked and we had each other and a few other faculty.

MEH: What about painters like Dorothea or Rauschenberg or Twombly or any of those people?

DW: Well, Dorothea was – We knew her, and she was really – she was very enthusiastic about – When Hamada came, she was really with it, I remember, more than most of the students. She was really with it. She was terrific. Then when Voukos came, she just thought he was the most wonderful person in the world. So she was very involved, and we knew her and had breakfast with her, but I got to know Dorothea more, when I came to New York.

Rauschenberg was not, you know he was not part of our group. There was sort of an in-group there, and we were not in the in-group. We weren't in the out-group either, but we were not in the in-group. So – But Rauschenberg was rather independent. He didn't relate to the students that much, and Twombly was just there for a short time. I'll tell you a nice story about Twombly. He was a very serious, quiet kind of person then. He came to the pottery one day, and he said could he come and just watch us work. So we

said "Sure." He came. I think he sat for six and a half hours. Just sat. Never said a word. Never asked a question. Just got into it. Then said "Thanks" and left. Didn't say a word anywhere. Didn't say anything, that it was good or bad or what's this. Nothing. He just came, watched us. I'll always remember that as a beautiful act of concentration. [INTERRUPTION] But, you know, these people were all around us so it's a lot like what happens in the art world. You feel like you're part of them, even though you may not really know them. Like Richard Serra, the sculptor. I just, did a whole shoot for our project, I just spent at DIA doing a whole coverage with him. I don't think I'd ever talked to him. He taught under me. He was in my department. But, you know, we just started talking as if we'd known each other for a long time. In the same way, you know, with Twombly, I never hardly talked to him but I felt, you know, close to him and I felt close to what Rauschenberg was doing, and a lot of the people and a lot of the writers too. But they were not our friends. I got to know Michael after Black Mountain, you know.

MEH: You grew up in Brooklyn?

DW: Yeah. Brooklyn. Brooklyn College.

MEH: What did your parents do? What type of –

DW: My father was sort of second command in a big electrical supply firm, which sold goods mostly to South America. So he was – Vice President or something.

MEH: So a businessman.

DW: A businessman. Not the temperament for a businessman, but that's what he did. In fact, he, often in his life, decided that he was always the second in command and doing as most second-in-commands do, run the business, so why shouldn't he run his own business. He did that a few times and failed. He was too sensitive. He cared too much about the workers [LAUGHS]. But that's what he did. My mother was a person who was born on the east side and is very different than all her sisters. She started going to the Henry Street Settlement and taking courses and reading. She became a very cultivated person. Most of her sisters didn't even get through high school. She went through high school. Raised a family, but then started working at Henry Street again, and did that for most of her life, as a volunteer in crafts, in theater, but she always did that. But, well she wasn't wealthy, but what wealthy ladies do. They do social work, as it were. So she was always out of the house by eleven in the morning. She always mocked her friends who did housework all day. She was out! So that's what she did. So she was always very lively and had very lively friends in the arts. A lot of the people, young people, went to Henry Street, you know, who taught in theatre and in dance. So they were part of our circle. So my mother – My mother was a big reader. So she, that's what she did.

MEH: Betsy had sounded like she was pretty strict with her when it came to leaving home and setting out on her own.

DW: Betsy – I often thought of myself as an only child because I never was part of Betsy’s life or – And, in a way, maybe because it’s being a boy child or whatever. I had a lot more success in the world than she did. I was a famous potter, then a famous sculptor. So Betsy just, I don’t know what it was. Of course, she has lots of talent and she’s doing nice work now, but she never really got hold of that part of her personality. So that she feels that the parents treated her differently than they treated me.

MEH: Did your parents have any problem with your going into art, to ceramics?

DW: Yeah. But – Yeah, I went to Brooklyn College to the liberal arts, and my father said, “There are two things in one’s life, your vocation and your avocation. Let art be your avocation.” Well it’s typical. Matisse had it. Everybody had it. [LAUGHS]. “And just go take liberal arts. Maybe social sciences, but take the liberal arts.” So that’s what I did do, for a while, and then I drifted. Then when I went to pottery school, they were all for it because that was practical. When I became a sculptor, they had a hard time getting hold of that. But then I became a successful sculptor, so then they could somewhat understand it.

MEH: Did you leave Black Mountain very often and go into the surrounding area?

DW: Not much. No. It was all there at Black Mountain. No, we didn’t – No, we hardly ever went there. Of course everything was there at Black Mountain. We had a jeep. I learned to drive. We went to – we went to Asheville to sell our wares and all, but we hardly ever went anyplace because it was all there.

A wonderful world. With all these things happening and our own work. It was really wonderful.

MEH: Are there particular incidents that you remember in particular that we haven't discussed?

DW: Well, I was thinking when we were in the other room that when I came to Black Mountain, I was sort of shy and somewhat diffident, and that was one of the things that I learned from Charles, because he was a beautiful talker, as you've heard or known. He could talk three hours straight. So in a series of meetings that I had with the faculty at one point we were trying to move the college ahead. He sort of put me in a position where I was sort of talking a lot of ideas. Which he had too – which we shared. But he wanted to sort of sit back a bit. It was slightly manipulative – not of me but of the meeting, because he wanted to avoid, "There's Charles, talking again." I remember just in that little time it was born in me, you know, this ability which I have now, to articulate much better. I was inspired by him. Yeah. So that's one of the things that happened.

MEH: There was an incident you told me about earlier relating to Karen's action when you all returned and saw Jack Rice's addition to the pot shop?

DW: Yeah, yeah. Well, what happened was that I wanted more space because I was doing all this tile work and there were students and I was just spreading out. As you can see, I'm always spreading out. If I had two more floors, I'd be spread out. So we wanted another space, and so we told the college we'd like

to build another space but we would pay for it. Turner had paid for his shop, and we had a little money. So Jack was just fixing, fixing, I don't know, fixing boilers and trying to get that place organized – not doing it that well. So we had this idea that he would build this shop for us, and it was sort of delicate. Were we going to pay him, or was the college going to pay him? It was all very delicate, but it did happen, and he wanted to do it a certain way, and I went along with it. He wanted to go and get the wood and cut the trees. Then he wanted to discover in a primal way the hammer and the handsaw. He made it like this wonderful project, and I thought it was absurd. I appreciated it somewhat, because I was a craftsman, but that's what he did. He built it. Then he wanted to put red stain and blue stain and white stain on it, and it was fine because I loved him. The story I told you was that we had finished the shop, and Karen and I went to New York and there was no floor. So again, being Earth Man, he decided he wanted to get big rocks and make this floor. Not slate, mind you, but rocks. So when we came back, number one, there were these stones on end right near the window looking out. I said, "What's that for, Jack?" He said, "Oh well that's when you stand at the window and look out. You put your foot up on it" – like a bar rail. So, here I'm looking for a utilitarian pottery shop and I see these lovely rocks there. But that was okay. Then we looked at the floor, and then again as a potter, water, clay goes on the floor, you need smooth surface. Here's this wonderful floor with all these little grout breaks in between the rocks. Karen – the story I told you – Karen

got hysterical about it because it was the most absurd thing in the world. What she did is she lifted up her skirt and crouched down and peed. We watched the rivulet of her pee go all around the rocks. We said, "That's going to happen when we do our clay work." We spill a little water on the floor, it's not like you're going to be able to mop it up but it's going to be like this [LAUGHS]. So we kept it, though, and I stumbled on it and tried to clean it up, but it was part of our devotion to Jack. He's a wonderful, wonderful guy. So it worked. There was more space for me. But it had an absurd – absurd dimensions to it. [LAUGHS]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]