

Interviewee: NORMAN BETTS WESTON
Participant: ANNE "NAN" CHAPIN WESTON
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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The interview is with Norman Weston. Present Nan Chapin Weston, also a BMC student.

[INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MEH: You were one of the first students at Black Mountain. Is that correct?

NBW: That is correct.

MEH: Were you at Rollins?

NBW: I was at Rollins for one year.

MEH: What do you remember about that whole situation and your move to Black Mountain? That's an open question.

NBW: It sure is. Well, unlike many of the other students that moved from Rollins to Black Mountain, I really wasn't involved in any great extent in the Rollins row. I'm not sure I even knew Rice or Dreier. If so, only very slightly. And so I wound up my freshman year at Rollins, and I had met Nan the day that 3.2 beer became legal in Florida. So, we can pinpoint that. And off I went home for the summer thinking I would be returning to Rollins, and it turned out that there was a shortage of money in my household in 1933, such as really not existing. So, I tried to get a scholarship at Rollins with no success, and then the Black Mountain people started to show up, and I'm not sure of the sequence of how

this was—Nan and I had retained a relation—No, relationship's the wrong word [Nan laughs in the background]. That's become distorted in recent years. We were friends. And, I may have met Ted Dreier before. But I remember that you [Nan] and the Dreiers showed up at the house in Wilton, I think, at one time, and Nat French, who was a very good friend of mine at Rollins. And he had decided to go to Black Mountain. And Black Mountain needed warm bodies in the worst way. So, they said I could come for free. And under all the existing circumstances, that was pretty important. So, I went to Black Mountain and showed up—actually drove down with Nan, Peggy Loram, and Ed Jenks. We all drove down together in my car. How I had a car, I am not sure. But I had a Buick Roadster that I had bought from Bill Oldham, who was the crew coach at Rollins College. And, he was an Englishman, and the crew went up to row on the Charles River against the MIT and the Harvard freshmen, which we did and got skunked. And then Bill Oldham was on his way back to England, and I drove with him from Boston down—He was to drop me off in Connecticut, but he had this car, and he didn't have anything to do with it. I mean, he was off to England, and in 1933 it wasn't all that easy to sell cars. So, I bought it for a hundred dollars. I'm not quite sure where I got the hundred dollars. It was a Buick Roadster.

MEH: A hundred dollars was right much money then.

NBW: Yeah, but it was a great car, too. It was a—OK, how did we get in this ramble? Oh, well, that's how I got to Black Mountain.

MEH: So, you didn't really go as a protest against Rollins. It was sort of a default situation.

NBW: Much more default than a protest, although I was willing to protest along with everybody else. I mean there wasn't any reticence on my part. I wish I could remember showing up there the first day. I would just love to remember that experience of how we even found Robert E. Lee Hall and drove up there. Do you remember? [TO NAN] No. So—But, anyway, we did. I think my first vivid memory was standing on the steps of Lee Hall with everybody else in the community as Ted Dreier drove up from the station with the Albers. And, no doubt, you've heard this memory a hundred times.

MEH: What do you remember?

NBW: Well, just seeing them get out of the car in their funny-looking European clothes and that's about it. Everybody, cheering or greeting them, trying to make them feel at home. I'm not sure I'd ever even heard of modern art, much less Albers. [Laughter] But, he was reported to be a great man, and he certainly turned out that way. What did you ask me?

MEH: I was asking you really how you got to Black Mountain.

NBW: Well, that's how I got there. And, I suppose everybody came for different reasons at that time.

MEH: It's amazing though, if you look at the process of getting into a college today, how many people came to Black Mountain really sort of as a default process, instead of a programmed situation. There was definitely a real admissions program, and people were carefully scrutinized, but there were still a lot of

people who just sort of arrived for one reason or another and then were accepted.

NBW: Well, certainly, that original bunch of students couldn't have had any very formal admissions.

MEH: I think having been at Rollins itself was immediate admission to Black Mountain, unless there had been any problem at Rollins. If you had been accepted at Rollins, that was some criteria.

NBW: Well, I can't readily imagine anybody trying to get into Black Mountain that first year who had a few bucks not making it. [Laughter] They would have—The effort was to get people.

MEH: Was it you who started the garden that first year or was that someone else?

NBW: Well, I had something to do with starting the farm, but we never referred to it as a garden.

MEH: You really referred to it as a farm from the beginning.

NBW: And there was nothing pretty about it.

MEH: Had you ever farmed?

NBW: No, if I'd farmed, I would have known better. But, it was sitting down there—

MEH: What was sitting there?

NBW: The farm, who was there. There was a house and a couple of small outbuildings. And I don't remember the financial arrangements. I imagine we used it for nothing, but—Do you remember? I don't remember. And, was it the first year that it started?

MEH: I think the first year. But, I think it was vegetables that year. It was a primitive effort, I think, that—

NBW: The only—The only substantial crop that I remember is—I guess we had an acre of tomatoes. [Laughter] And, that's a lot.

MEH: It is a lot.

NBW: And we borrowed—I remember borrowing the mule from Morehead—Bob Morehead, who lived next door. And, he was a—Black Mountain had hundreds of Moreheads in it. I guess Morehead is a big North Carolina name, which I didn't know at that time, and these were obviously freed slaves that had populated the territory there. A very nice guy and he told me I could use his mule. The mule was out there in the pasture. And, I went out to get the mule, and before I knew it, the mule had me cornered. But we finally worked out an arrangement, and I did use him for cultivating. But, the Moreheads lived next door to the farm. They had one of those great, big black kettles, and that's the way the laundry was done. And, I think they did our laundry, didn't they? Yes. What was her name? Hattie.

NCW: Hattie.

NBW: Hattie Morehead.

MEH: You mean, the laundry for the college?

NBW: No, no, no. Just for us.

MEH: Just yours.

NBW: The college had a laundry. Robert E. Lee Hall had it on the complex up there. There was a laundry up by the boiler room, and we operated that for a while. I

forget when. I think John McGraw knew something about it. He'd worked in the laundry downtown. And, I remember trying to iron the shirts, and I mangled them in that laundry and finding out it was not easy. Maybe, it was the first year that we ran that thing.

MEH: What do you remember particularly about that first year? There were like eighteen or nineteen students.

NBW: Yeah. I don't remember an awful lot about it except it was an awful lot of fun. And we all seemed to get along reasonably well together. And I remember it as a productive year. But I can't quantify that in any way. It was an exciting year in that we arrived there and there was no pattern of living. There was no—Everything had to be decided: What time is breakfast? What time is lunch? And, you no doubt heard about the first ROW at Black Mountain?

MEH: What was the FIRST row?

NBW: I think the FIRST row was whether or not we should have two or three meals on Sunday. And there was a faction that thought we should have three meals, you know, a good lunch and a good dinner. And another faction that thought we should skip lunch and just have breakfast and dinner. And people got remarkably uptight about this, virtually not speaking to each other. It was resolved, as I recall it, in no lunch. Is that—I think that's right.

MEH: I think so.

NBW: [To Nan Weston] She [referring to Harris] wrote about it?

NCW: She did.

NBW: She knows everything.

MEH: You never can tell. Sometimes—

NBW: I probably read it there. I probably didn't remember it at all.

MEH: It was you who were the catalyst for getting the farm going.

NBW: Right. Oh, I see. Yeah. Well, I thought so, but I wasn't sure. Was it the first year?

MEH: Yes, it was the first year.

NBW: That's what the book says. Good.

MEH: If the book says it, it's the good book.

NBW: Yes it is. It really is.

MEH: Did you have a particular interest in terms of what you wanted to study?

NBW: Well, I thought I wanted to be an economist, as I remember. An economist. [To Nan Chapin] Didn't I think I wanted to be an economist? And, so, I worked at that.

MEH: Was there anyone to study with?

NBW: There was when Zeuch came.

NCW: Helen Boyden.

NBW: Oh, yeah, Helen Boyden. That's right. [To Nan Chapin] She was more of an historian, wasn't she, than an economist? Anyway, sure, so, I worked with Helen Boyden, she [Nan] tells me. And, then, did Zeuch show up the second year or the third year? I do remember taking courses with him. And he was pretty good. I didn't find him a very attractive person, but he knew his stuff and worked hard. He may have only been there one year. I'm not sure. But, I—I shortly got involved in keeping the books for the institution under Ted Dreier's

tutelage. I've often wondered how Ted knew so much. I mean, he really had a broad sort of business perspective and he did some awfully smart things. For example, he hired one of the best lawyers in Asheville, this guy Williams, who was a corporate lawyer. And, I think that turned out to be an extremely good decision for Black Mountain, and it's probably not a decision that most professors would have known enough to make.

MEH: I think Ted—Ted is a very interesting person. He's really a very complex person. But, he had the background—the family background. He had grown up in a family that thought about business, as it see it, but also had some political savvy. And understood, for example, and I was trying to think with someone the other day—I remembered his name and now I've lost it again—the guy who did the audits. William Morse Cole.

NBW: William Morse Cole.

MEH: The important thing about having Cole, like having Williams, was it gave the college credibility to have someone like that come and do the audit. It gave it credibility in the Northeast which is where they were looking for money to support the college. And having someone like Williams, who was a North Carolinian but who was liberal, as the lawyer, and who was a good lawyer. It was an important—Ted was very savvy in that respect. He understood that sometimes you have to—

NBW: I don't think he was responsible for bringing Cole down.

MEH: Who do you think did that?

NBW: I think Cole was an acquaintance or friend of Georgia's? I'm not sure of this, but my memory is that that's why he originally came down to do the audit.

MEH: I think that it was recognized that it was important that an auditor who wasn't local and who had no connection with the college who could give real credibility to the yearly audit.

NBW: Sure. And who did it for free. [Laughter]

MEH: Right. And who read Shakespeare on the side and printed the audits in his basement.

NBW: And he's responsible for my going to the Harvard Business School. And he finally, after a couple or three years of auditing my books, he said, "Well, you're kind of wasting your time down here. Why don't you go to the Harvard Business School?" I said, "Well, that's a nice idea, but I don't even have a degree from Black Mountain." And he said whatever the equivalent then was of "no problem." And so, due entirely to his recommendation, why, off I went to Cambridge.

MEH: You did "graduate" from Black Mountain?

NBW: No.

MEH: You never finished.

NBW: No. I'd spent more and more time on the business end of it and less and less time studying. And, I guess, spending less and less time studying really fit my life style pretty well. I don't think I was ever a very eager student. So, I didn't fail to graduate. I didn't try to graduate from Black Mountain. And I really don't think I ever took enough work to be entitled to a degree.

MEH: How many years were you at Black Mountain?

NBW: Five.

MEH: Five. So, you ended up working in some capacity at the college before you left, didn't you?

NBW: Well, I had the title of assistant treasurer. And I like to really think that I was really running a lot of the mechanics of the place under Ted's overall direction. But I like to think I was making decisions. It was a very valuable experience. You had to learn to work with a lot of people, some of whom had pretty good egos.

MEH: A lot of whom had—[laughter]

NBW: But it was an interesting and fun experience to do.

MEH: Did you get involved at all in the politics of the college or the decision-making process?

NBW: Oh, sure, up to here in the politics of Rice leaving as I guess we all were. That was something that a tremendous amount of time and effort and discussion went into. And I guess, in retrospect, something I'm not really, not very proud of.

MEH: In what respect?

NBW: Well, you know, Rice had this involvement with a student, the extent of which I have no idea. And, so, this became a great *cause célèbre*. Well, in perspective, I realize that it really wasn't a very unusual event. And he was a guy with tremendous ability who had certainly been the ONE responsible for starting Black Mountain College and the ONE for making it go from day one. And, so,

because he had this human side and slipped, everybody thought, “Oh, this is terrible.” Threw up their hands. “The college can’t exist. He has to get out.”

Well, I think, looking back that was simply stupid. And that there should have been a way, could have been a way, simply of glossing it over and going on about our business. More mature minds should have known it. And now that I think I’m a little more mature, I think I know it. [laughter]

MEH: Do you think that really—? It seems that the catalyst was the affair or supposed affair—some relationship with a student—but it seems that there are a lot of other things playing along like his relationship with Nell Rice, his relationship with Albers and Albers relationship with him. It seems that even though this was sort of the catalyst, that there were a lot of other problems that were involved.

NBW: OK. Sure. And certainly his relationship with his wife was an important part of it. But, there again, that’s not unique in the world, and that’s something that is worked out where arrangements can be made, even divorce. You know, it’s perfectly possible. It’s not a reason for getting pitched. And, his relationship with Albers was obviously far more complex. And I’ve never known and I really hadn’t thought about it much, a little bit since talking to David [Royale], but I’ve never known how many people really turned against Rice in order to increase their own stature. And that’s a difficult thing to think back to. But I expect there was a good deal of that going on. And I think there were many people afraid of Rice, that having him around—You had to be tough with Rice because he wouldn’t hesitate to be very rough with people in telling them what he thought, and he was often right. And, so, that was disturbing. And, Albers certainly was

an able enough person so that he didn't have to worry about Rice as competition, but nevertheless he may have been more comfortable with Rice out of there. Because I'm sure that Rice may have called him on a good many things that he said. And just made a sort of—Rice was not an easy, relaxed person to be around.

MEH: I gather. [laughter]

NBW: And he wouldn't hesitate—I remember a story of Rice with Nan's father where he was spending the night there soliciting funds, and he got the Colonel to come up with a thousand bucks, I think. All for Nan, because he certainly had no use—He had no background of interest in Black Mountain. But at breakfast, as I recall hearing it, the American Firsters, I think it was—was that it?—one of the organizations which was to keep the US out of World War II—

NCW: Liberty League.

NBW: Liberty League came up for discussion. And Rice said, "Well, I wouldn't let a yellow dog of mine belong to that." Well, he knew damn well the Colonel was a member. So that kind of thing was inexcusable and stupid. But it went on all of the time. But he was a very stimulating, interesting guy, and really in the first years there wasn't any question about who was running Black Mountain College. And, so, that—but I was all for getting Rice out of there and now I'm sorry. It's interesting to speculate—It never would have developed the way it did if Rice had stayed. He never would have put up with some of the people which showed up in your wildest imagination. So, one wonders how it would have developed.

MEH: At any point it could have taken an entirely different—if Albers had not come, it would have been an entirely different college.

NBW: Entirely different.

MEH: You know. Any number—if World War II had not happened, it would have been an entirely different college. There were so many factors that played a role. And then who knows what it would have been because if Albers hadn't come, someone else might have come.

NBW: Yeah, yeah.

MEH: I'm very unresolved in my mind about Rice's resignation. I do know from reading some letters from that period between Rice and Dreier—I think Dreier at some point was at Harvard that year, and there was correspondence—that Nell Rice had refused to go back with John Rice. That was clear at one point. And so—and they couldn't live together in the same community. That was clear. It was too small a community for them both to stay there. And, so, if Rice stayed, then Nell was going to leave, and she really wasn't prepared to do anything. She went to Chapel Hill to study library science so she could do something.

NCW: So that's why she—

MEH: You know there were all of the conflicts about—There was that family conflict going on. There was the relationship with Albers going on. There was the problem with—I think I would probably put it fifty-fifty in terms of each of them antagonizing the other, even though I think Rice generally may have been more sympathetic to Albers and forgiving than Albers was toward Rice.

NBW: Oh, yes. I don't know about forgiving. But understanding.

MEH: Understanding, tolerant—willing to tolerate.

NCW: And admiring.

MEH: And admiring.

NBW: Oh, yes.

MEH: But then to have someone to be deliberately antagonistic, such as he was at the breakfast table at your house. It's an ego trip in a sense. This can be very hard in a small community, constantly to live with and deal with. It's not so much a challenge as an assertion of ego or a way of humiliating or embarrassing a person. So, there were so many things going on there. I think both he and Albers were such wonderful people but also both very limited people, as I see them now.

NCW: Albers and who?

NBW: That's interesting.

MEH: But I do think at that point, a lot of people were down on Rice. I think that the affair with the student—whether it existed or not, she actually denies there was an affair, but who knows—that was just the—That wasn't the problem.

NBW: Yeah.

MEH: I think that his personal life with Nell Rice—Maybe that wasn't the problem there either. Who knows?

NBW: Well, that seems to me, to put it in terms of a hard world, was not really the college's problem.

MEH: I agree.

NBW: If Nell Rice couldn't live with him, why, that's too bad. She had to find someplace else to live than—So, I think that giving that a degree of importance—I don't mean to say it's not important. I don't mean to say the college didn't have to step up to it in terms of finances or something, but nevertheless I don't think—I think it was a crutch for all the—a basis for decision. Nell Rice, I don't think she contributed a lot to the college. A perfectly nice person, but I don't think she really had a lot—I mean, she contributed a lot because of her brother initially.

MEH: Right. If Rice had stayed, what do you think would have happened to the college? Just pure speculation.

NBW: Well, I never thought about it, but I think there's a possibility that Rice and Albers would have worked together and that Black Mountain would have been what it initially sort of tried to be during those years, a place that gave the academics and the arts an equal place and developed both. That's probably wish thinking, but I think there was a possibility that would have happened. It was happening in a fairly real way. There was a great deal of mutual respect back and forth between the people in the academic field and in the arts. And I think that it might well have continued to develop into a community that worked well together, which I guess it didn't in the end.

[END OF SIDE 1 OF TAPE]

NCW: I should say in somewhat justice to Rice—Oh, is he still on the—?

MEH: Go ahead. [CHATTER, NOT TRANSCRIBED]

NCW: Not important.

MEH: Yes, it is. Go ahead.

NCW: In justice to Rice for that incident at my parents' breakfast table. My father had held up the *New York Herald Trib* all through breakfast which was his habit. Rice couldn't know it was his habit. [Laughter] It looked like just plain rudeness. And, of course, it was rude. But father just had a habit of doing things and did them. So, that's, I think, mainly what got Rice's back up and made the yellow dog comment.

NBW: Well, he made up similar comments.

MEH: That was his way. He was a Methodist preacher's boy.

NBW: Isn't that the Socratic method of teaching, to do that kind of thing, to stimulate people by shocking them, in effect?

NCW: Don't ask me that. I don't know

NBW: I don't either, but I can imagine it.

MEH: What do you remember about other people who were there? John Evarts?

NBW: Oh, yeah. Because we were very close friends with John, as was everybody else and kept up with him until he died. And John made a great big contribution in the early years to the community in terms of particularly his piano playing where he could sit down, as you know, and play any ragtime tune. I'm sure you know one of his original jobs as a kid was playing the piano in a movie theater. Watching the screen—

MEH: Silent movies.

NBW: Yeah. Watching the screen and banging out the music when the cowboys came over the hill. I can't imagine any other place I would have taken a course in

music except Black Mountain, but I did. And since I can't carry a tune, not much of it stuck. But it was interesting and I thought John, while not a great teacher, was good. And he was a nice person to have around and an important person. And I'm glad that he had such a good life in Europe, which was a good place for John to be. And I think he probably—Did you interview him?

MEH: Yes.

NBW: You did. He probably knew as much about many aspects of Black Mountain, and he kept up with more people than anybody else, I think. I liked John. He was—But he was only there about six years, wasn't he?

MEH: He left about 1942.

NBW: Yeah.

MEH: He was there in the first year. He came with the founders. He was there almost ten years.

NBW: Oh, yeah. That's right.

MEH: I see his departure as one of the departures that really affected the college because, even though Jalowetz, who was probably there before you left or at about the time you left—

NBW: About the time—Well, no, he wasn't there. That's right.

MEH: Even though he was incredibly beloved by the students -- students remember him with such love and warmth and admiration and respect -- John—he [Jalowetz] was one of the European immigrants, and he didn't have the ability, like John, to play the square dances and to bind people together through music.

And with all the tensions at the college, John seemed to be one of the people who could just bring everyone out of that.

NBW: Yeah. Yeah.

MEH: Actually, there are some other people—After he left, another person who played that role, even though she wasn't a musician at all, was Molly Gregory, who taught woodworking and at times ran the farm and was not really that bound to any political group, but respected by all. It would be interesting to take from the years through Black Mountain—to take people who were never there together and sort of create a perfect Black Mountain. [laughter] Take John—The people who really had that sense of community.

NBW: John, of course, was very much into everything. Unlike Rice or Albers. He was busy shoveling coal and working on the farm and getting involved in all kinds of things. And, as you say, the dancing after dinner was an important part of the college. Relaxing.

MEH: There also was a tremendous difference in age. John was about thirty when he came to Black Mountain—

NCW: Oh, was he that old?

MEH: He may not have been that old. Maybe—

NCW: He might have been twenty-five.

MEH: Maybe twenty-five, very young. And Rice and Albers were born in the same year so they were like forty-five, forty-six. And if you realize that they were both at that age without a penny in their pocket. And it was an unsettling situation

they were in. They were much older and—it was—as I look at it now, that in itself had to be a stressful situation. Rice had his kids to educate.

NBW: Yes, he did. I wonder if he worried much about it. I think Rice worried mostly about himself as far as things like that went.

NCW: I think Aydelotte helped out probably.

NBW: Aydelotte came down at least once. My main memory of him was he couldn't sit still. He was the damnedest person I ever saw—all over his chair all of the time. [laughter] Seemed like a nice guy, but—

MEH: Do you remember visits by John Dewey?

NBW: Oh, yes. I remember—The main thing I remember is going down to Black Mountain with John Dewey and I forget who else—probably Rice. You [Nan Weston] were there, I'm sure. Drinking beer. And we didn't go to the Roy's across from the station. We went to a place up on the—I can't remember the name of it, but there was another beer place there. And we sat around drinking beer for how long I don't know. And it was a very nice evening—A lot of fun. He was perfectly relaxed, but I don't know what we talked about. I don't know where else I would have drunk beer with John Dewey. [laughter]

MEH: That's true.

NBW: But, how many times did he come down? Do you know? Two? I just remember that one time.

MEH: He came down several times.

NBW: I don't know what he actually did. Did he have some classes down there? I don't—

NCW: I remember being in one of Rice's classes when he was there and entered into the discussion of whatever it was.

NBW: I remember him and Louis Adamic. I guess that was before Dewey came down. I think that Louis Adamic's article had a pretty important effect on Black Mountain's development.

MEH: How do you think it affected it?

NBW: Well, from the point of view of publicity. It was, as you recall, originally published in *Harper's* and then picked up by *Reader's Digest*. And we were there the summer that the *Reader's Digest* came out with it in it. I would guess the *Reader's Digest* may have come out in May. But we were there that summer. And we got—

NCW: Working in the office.

NBW: Yeah. And we got an awful lot of mail. It seemed to us anyway. I would say a number—hundreds of letters that came into the college—inquiries and comments and so on. And I'm sure we got a number of students, but I don't know how many. And the letters were from all over the world, some of them because the *Readers Digest* gets strewn around. And, I think the *Readers Digest* was read by more intelligent people then than I think it is now. But I'm not sure. But Adamic was a pleasant guy, and his wife Stella, who was a dancer, was nice.

MEH: Some people feel that the article had a detrimental effect—

NBW: Really—

MEH: —because they feel that the sort of people who applied then—that there was so much emphasis on the lack of rules and on freedom and this sort of thing, that the people who applied then were people who were looking more for an escape than—And I don't really know if that's true or not.

NBW: I don't either.

MEH: It's really the first time that Black Mountain really had enough people applying that they could really screen the students.

NBW: Yeah.

MEH: I mean they did screen students and people were turned down, but at that point they really could make different types of choices.

NBW: Well, that's—I had forgotten that aspect of it, if I ever knew it. And people always think of it as a very free place without any rules, which was certainly true, but there was a tremendous amount of community pressure which is probably more powerful than rules. Certainly, it was not a free-love institution. It was really a pretty straight-laced community. I think it would compare in its day favorably with most colleges on that score. And there were a lot of us who felt that was important because we didn't want to blow the blooming thing up by being tagged as something odd. Of course, many people felt that there was a Communist influence, and I don't know whether Zeuch may have been a card-carrying Communist at one time. I'm not sure. He certainly wasn't a raving Communist when he was at Black Mountain.

MEH: That was always the fear in the college. Despite the reputation outside the college that it was a Communist institution, there was probably more fear within the college that a Communist might get in. [laughter]

NBW: I don't remember that and I wonder why anyone would be afraid of that. I don't know what the Communist would have done.

MEH: Albers was very—His experiences at the Bauhaus with the—when the Communists there became so heavily politicized that it left him very paranoid and frightened that the same thing could happen—to the point of being unreasonable at times.

NBW: I remember an incident between Albers and Herminio Portell-Vilá and this was—Oh, I don't know. We were sitting around drinking wine or something. But, of course—Portell was very politically involved and interested, and I don't remember the details of the discussion, but Albers, in effect, said, "I do my job and don't pay any attention to these political things." And Portell came back and said, "That's why we have Hitler." Which was probably true. A lot of Germans didn't pay attention.

MEH: That's right.

NBW: And so Albers. I don't ever remember his talking about politics of any kind.

MEH: He refused. I think he had been so—I think that was Albers.

NBW: Well, I do recall one trip with Albers, probably in the spring where Nan and I were married at the time, and we drove them from Black Mountain and went to New York. And at that time I had a Ford town car. And we drove—We stopped—Have you ever been in Valdese, North Carolina?

MEH: Probably, but not that I remember.

NBW: Well, it's a town probably a hundred and fifty miles west of here [Chapel Hill], settled by Waldensians. And they made wonderful Gorgonzola cheese. And we got some Gorgonzola cheese and a bottle of wine, and we had a picnic driving off. And then we went to the University of Virginia where he had never been and showed him the beautiful campus there with Jefferson's wall. And this really excited him. I think he really didn't realize that this new, brash country had anything like that. And he would, "*Ausgezeichnet.*" Just thrilled with it. And then we went to the Barnes Museum in Philadelphia or just outside of Philadelphia.

MEH: Marion.

NBW: Marion. And went through that with him. Those were the days you had to have entré to get in. And that was a thrill, too. And I remember that trip vividly.

MEH: I remember—I've read a description of that trip somewhere.

NBW: Really.

MEH: The trip to Charlottesville and to the Barnes Collection.

NBW: Maybe Nan told you about it.

MEH: Maybe so.

NBW: Nobody else could have because we were the only people there.

MEH: No, but there was a description somewhere, maybe it was in a letter someone was writing at the time.

NBW: It was good.

MEH: Looking back now on Black Mountain, do you have any particular thoughts or recollections—I mean, not really recollections, but thoughts about what happened there, about its importance, how it might have worked or not worked.

NBW: Well,—

MEH: Would you send a child there today?

NBW: Today. Well, it would probably scare me to death, I mean, to send a child there. One of my grandchildren did go to Deep Springs. I don't know whether you're familiar with Deep Springs or not. Well, it's a college in California—twenty-some students, heavily endowed by an engineer in the late twenties because he got tired of hiring engineers who didn't know anything except engineering. And Deep Springs is run by the students. They hire the professors, and I think a professor can only stay five years. I'm not sure. And he went there. He's a very bright kid. You have to be bright to go there, as a matter of fact. You have to be the top of your class and everything else. And, so, I thought this was a stupid thing for him to be doing. And I think I was right, but his mother told me he could—it's a two-year college—after two years, he could go anywhere he wanted. And I said, "Well, why don't you check that." She said, "Ok." So, she called the director of admissions at Yale, and he said, "That's true." Any kid that goes two years can come to Yale whenever he wants. Well, how did I get on that? Oh, would I want a kid to go to Black Mountain? Well, I think probably not. I think probably we all want to see our kids get as close as guaranteed success as we reasonably can, and Black Mountain didn't have that aspect to it.

MEH: Not guaranteed, but a lot of people were very successful in a lot of careers.

NBW: Yes, that's right. Yeah, but that wasn't apparent at the time.

MEH: The guarantee wasn't there.

NBW: No. There was no stamp.

MEH: Right. Were you accepted as an undergraduate or a graduate student at Harvard?

NBW: Well, I was a graduate student. I have an M.B.A. from Harvard. I'm probably one of the very few people who you'll ever know who has no undergraduate degree but a graduate degree from Harvard. There are a few of us. There's a guy by the name of [Roy] Ash in the Nixon administration, I remember. I don't know who else.

MEH: And then you worked in business in the banking business.

NBW: Yes.

MEH: I think I remember someone saying you also did a lot of work with the United Negro College Fund.

NBW: Well, I wouldn't say a lot. I was on the local board for years and one year was head of a campaign in Michigan and I've been a supporter of it for a long, long time. I figured that they probably needed my little bit of money more than Harvard.

MEH: That's probably true.

NBW: It's been a good experience—some good friends in the Black community and so on which grew out of that relationship.

MEH: And you were also active at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

NBW: Yes, I was president of the Founders Society for seven or eight years, I guess, and I got into that primarily because of my bank. You know, the Museum wants to have people from business on the Board of the Founders Society. I got into it from that. But, I'm still a Trustee Emeritus of the Museum. [background conversation, adjusting equipment]

MEH: One thing that interests me is that most Black Mountain people have done very interesting things. And that's why I brought up the United Negro College Fund and the Detroit Institute of Arts because most people have done really interesting things beyond their professions. And I wonder to what extent Black Mountain might have influenced this—the fact you took a course in music with John Evarts or were exposed to someone like Albers—

NCW: Classes with Albers.

MEH: Classes with him. Do you think that really made a difference or do you think you would have done these things anyway?

NBW: It certainly made them more interesting. The Black Mountain experience. I'm not sure the Black Mountain—Well, all your experiences contribute to what you have done in some way or other that you don't always realize, and the Black Mountain experience certainly—Among other things, I'm sure gave it me tolerance around the Museum. I certainly knew enough not to be—to think I knew anything. [laughter] Which was very helpful. I got into the—as I said, I got into the museum business because the museum wanted a trustee who was with the biggest bank in the state and I was the one that happened to be picked for that. So, I don't know that Black Mountain had anything to do with that

except Black Mountain obviously had something to do with my being a successful banker, although I certainly wouldn't be able to pinpoint what because it's a sort of an odd connection. But I didn't learn—well, I shouldn't say that—I did learn some business at Black Mountain in a minor way. What Black Mountain does is teach you to get along with a lot of different people and that's a pretty important factor. And, I think it teaches you a tolerance for an awful lot of people who initially seem very difficult, having the ability, being decent people by and large. But I can't point at anything. Did anybody ever sing the praises of Jack Lipsey and—?

MEH: All the time. What do you remember about them particularly?

NBW: Well, he was a real executive, of course, in his way of operating. And, I think, an extremely decent, kind guy. Ran that kitchen with a force. And I think the fact that he gave us very good food. Looking back, I think we lived a luxurious life at Black Mountain because the food was good. I don't even remember a lot of complaints about the food, but—

MEH: I think when Lipsey was there—when Jack and Rubye Lipsey were there—I haven't heard any complaints about the food.

NBW: And we fed people for fifty cents. Raw food cost was fifty cents per person per day which was pretty good, even in those days.

MEH: To what extent did the farm actually contribute to the food that went into the kitchen while you were there in the thirties?

NBW: Well, very little, I think.

MEH: You obviously got a lot of tomatoes—

NBW: Oh, yeah. And we had killed some hogs. And we had some pigeons at one time. But, I don't think the farm was ever a significant economic contributor, but I could be wrong—

MEH: It was in the forties—definitely in the early forties.

NCW: Apples.

NBW: Oh, that's right. How about Bas Allen?

MEH: I hear about—Mostly about Bas Allen, I hear students remembering his taking them on treks through the mountains.

NBW: Bas Allen?

MEH: I think it was Bas Allen. Maybe it was someone else. What do you remember about—?

NBW: Well, he was the resident maintenance man, worked for the YMCA most of the time.

MEH: Was it his wife who was the post mistress or someone else?

NBW: I guess she was, wasn't she? Didn't Mrs. Allen come over as post mistress? I think she may have. He was a little guy and she was great big. No, but he could do anything and did. He and I put a steam heating plant in one of the cottages which was a good education for me. He ran the boilers, shoveled the coal. He was an electrician, and I think having that place run well, where you kept warm and the lights were on and stuff like that, was an important part of the operation. And he had this ability to do it and to work with students. He liked working with students. And he was a little guy but, my gosh, he was an iron man. The coal hauling operation always comes back eventually in my mind.

That was an interesting piece of work. I suppose you learned a little bit about how miners really are. The whites of your eyes were black and everywhere coal dust. Everywhere. I guess Bas was at one time a miner, I'm not sure. And where he got all the skills he had, I don't know. Very rarely, if ever, did we get outside experts in to do anything.

MEH: When you say Black Mountain had an influence in terms of your future work, you know, but you can't pinpoint it. It seems close exposure to all these people and also having a participatory role in actually running the college. Just the act of—as you say, you learned to get along with people, but just the act of taking part give assurance.

NBW: Of course, whatever you did has an influence on what you do, so—

MEH: True. Or whatever you don't do.

NBW: So, you can't avoid it. I can't pinpoint it, but I think it had a big influence. Maybe, in part one learned that you can't tell people what to do exactly. You've got to figure out that they've got to want to do it for it to be effective. And I think that maybe something that living in a community without a structure—definitely rule structure—teaches you. Because Black Mountain had no rules except Rice [UNINTELLIGIBLE WORD]. He was a rule, I guess.

NCW: Agreements.

NBW: Yes, agreements. Consensus. I ran an awful lot of meetings in my life, in the bank, in the museum, the College Fund and so on. And I have—I think it's safe to say, almost never had a vote in any meeting. Always consensus. And only had a vote when we had to. When there was a deadline, and we weren't getting

consensus. But, I think I was pretty good running those meetings, and I think I certainly learned that at Black Mountain. Now, maybe others wouldn't think I was so good at it, but anyway, I did it. [laughter] And I have no further thoughts. Did we use up your tape?

[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT.]