

Interviewee: ALMA STONE WILLIAMS
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Location: Savannah, Georgia
Date: June 30, 1996
Media: Audio cassettes 2
Interview no.: 170
Transcription: Ellen Dissanayake, May 7-8, 2000; corrected Mary Emma Harris,
August 2000
Revision: Revised per suggestions of Alma Williams by Mary Emma Harris,
December 2000. Converted from Word Perfect, April 2014.

[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: How did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

ASW: I came to Black Mountain in a roundabout way. I was teaching at Fort Valley State College and wanted to study more music. I had majored in English and music at Spelman. I had a Master's in English. But I just wanted music very badly. After a year of teaching music, I was trying to raise funds to go to Juilliard for a summer. Dr. Horace Mann Bond [father of Julian Bond], president of Fort Valley, was trying to help me. He contacted the Rosenwald Fund and learned that financial assistance was available if I were to go to Black Mountain instead of Juilliard. My Spelman teachers recommended me to Clark Foreman, who has a home in Atlanta and was teaching at Black Mountain. That's the way it worked. I did not know anything about the school before this.

Although I wanted to go to Juilliard, the opportunity came to go to Black Mountain instead. I wanted to study music. It didn't matter that much where, and here was the opportunity to do that. So, I got ready and came on. Then I learned about the school's history in bits and pieces really over all the years, because even after the summer was over and I lost contact with Black Mountain, I didn't

know anything about what was going on my son until Russell came across your book.

MEH: Had the Rosenwald Foundation let you know about the issues of integration at the college?

ASW: No, I didn't know anything about the integration of the college. That was fascinating. It was and it wasn't, because I did not know anything about that until about two years ago.

MEH: But you were aware you were the first black student there?

ASW: I was aware that I was the first black student, but I thought that they all wanted me there, because they were doing so many new and wonderful things, that it was not unusual. I could go other places. There was no real problem in getting to school. So, I thought that the school wanted me there. I was happy to come and be a part of the music study. I didn't particularly want to integrate any place. I just wanted to study music. I learned just two years ago what had been going on there. When I got to Black Mountain, I was welcomed so easily and just fitted right on in. I was not aware of any problems at all which was a good thing.

MEH: It was a good thing. At that point, I don't think there were any problems. It was before. It was the whole issue of whether to integrate that had been the problem.

ASW: Yes. It continued to be somewhat of a problem with a few people, but it was overshadowed by some of the other things that went on that summer. So, it was almost forgotten. I just got there and went on and did what I did. I enjoyed it and

made lots of friends and learned a great deal. I just didn't expect any problems and didn't find any and had a wonderful time.

MEH: Had you been in a community like that before?

ASW: No, not ever anything like this. No, no. No, the Atlanta community had been quite different, and I went to college when I was fifteen, so I had not had too much of anything before then. I had pre-college experience at Savannah State College here. It was called Georgia State at that time. My father was busy. He was in serious and important work involving the state and many kinds of people. He was Director of the Agriculture Extension Service for the State of Georgia among black people. So, he was well-known. We knew a lot of different kinds of people. My life had been mainly study up to the age of fifteen, practicing and learning and going to school. I went to Spelman and more of the same. I enjoyed it tremendously. I got serious about academics. I didn't want any more B's. I went on and got A's and enjoyed college. It filled my life with lots of different things because it was a lot of a variety there, and I went into a great many things. Afterward had a scholarship to go to AU to study English and to teach music. Then to go to this very marvelous place, Penn School. All these things were just open for me. I did not even try to seek them out.

MEH: What was Penn School?

ASW: Penn School is the first school developed for blacks after slavery. It was named for Pennsylvania. So, it's still in existence as Penn Center. That's where it started. This was in South Carolina out on St. Helena, one of the sea islands. Some people who had been very influential and well known to President

Florence Reed at Spelman told her about it. She said that when Trevor Arnett, President of the Spelman Board of Trustees, visited there, it changed his life, She thought it would be a good thing for me to go because I was still kinda young. So, I spent a year there, which was enough. It was very isolated, but the children were darling. They were wonderful people.

MEH: You were there teaching?

ASW: I was there teaching for a year. I taught everything – English and Social Sciences. Every hour, every day was full of working with the children. I liked them. They were very easy to teach. They did not want to be scolded for talking, so there were no disciplinary problems. Can you imagine that in high school?

MEH: Were these children who lived on the island?

ASW: These were people who spoke the Gullah dialect at home. They were involved with the whole world of competition and so on when they got to the school. The teachers and their principal saw that they got into things. They were in the national contest for art, for example, but they were still isolated, way, way, away from everything. Eventually, after I left, the school closed. [The buildings and the beauty of the island made it a perfect setting for Martin Luther King to use as a working retreat. Much of the civil rights strategy was planned at the former Penn School. But that was all later.] I welcomed the change to get back to music at Fort Valley.

I had never been in a community like Black Mountain. I had just known the academic with all of the things that go with it, the rules and the required courses

and the expected behavior and dresses – especially with Spelman, which had a reputation for excellence. So, it was an ideal place to be at that time.

Black Mountain was different in the amount of freedom that was there and expected and used. That was what was really very new to me because I enjoyed the academic world. I liked it. I could do it. I could have learned anything, and I did. I would get into school work, and I would be very creative within those limits. But at Black Mountain it was like getting wings. Here was something very real. The world of art was a new one to me – the arts. Music I had done. Music you study, you practice, you do it. I had played piano since the age of five. I did a senior recital. I was ready to go on and learn more. But to see art as life and art as development and art as something to give your whole life to – that was new and wonderful, and I just ate it up, you know. It was wonderful. I enjoyed just ate it up.

MEH: How did you get to the college?

ASW: How did I arrive?

MEH: How did you arrive?

ASW: I think I took a train to Asheville. I think it was a train rather than a bus. I'm not really sure about that. It's a little shadowy right now. I just remember getting to the campus maybe in a taxi. I don't know. It was wartime, and transportation – you got what you could get, whatever it was. I got there (LAUGHS), and then things began to happen. But I don't remember the trip except it seemed like a long, a much longer trip than it does now, for sure.

MEH: Do you remember your arrival at the college?

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: What do you recall?

ASW: Going to Bob Wunsch's office and being greeted. Someone said, "You're Miss Stone, aren't you?" I thought, "How'd you know?" (LAUGHS) The first thing they wanted to do was to make me feel at home which was important for us to do, so they asked a few questions and then somebody offered me a cigarette. Well, I had just started smoking a little bit. It was still a little wrong to do it. It was forbidden at Spelman. Even the teachers didn't smoke on campus. But it seemed suddenly the thing to do. I was not afraid to do anything, you know. It seems that I was ready to throw off any inhibitions I might have come with. The fact that I didn't have that many meant that they could relax, too. It seemed to be the right thing to do. Pretty soon, after a few questions, somebody went with me to North Lodge, and they showed me the place where I would stay. A few of the music people were there. Others were expected. I was among the first ones there. There were folks there and we began to talk, began walking around. We went over to the dining room. I remember that we spent a little time out at the lake and then went up to the Quiet House, somewhere around in that particular area. Eventually to the Studies Building. I was meeting all of these very nice people who were very talkative, very interesting and very interested. More people began to arrive and then we were talking about the individuals and wondering who they were and being pretty sure about this time that they were important people. We expected by then to see some of the great ones in music, in art. A person was there named Judy Horowitz. We thought it might be

Vladimir Horowitz's granddaughter or something. It would not have been unusual, because there were other people who were coming who were. Thomas Mann's daughter was there. She was there pretty early.

MEH: Walter Gropius' daughter was there?

ASW: Ati was there. There were others. These were names that were famous, and we expected that almost everybody who came in would be the daughter of somebody or somebody's cousin or somebody. We knew that they would not be putting on any special airs, that they would be just very plain, ordinary, and right down-to-earth, and we could function at their level. It happened sometimes. Gaby became one of my friends. She was Gabrielle Fischer, from the publishing house, the Fischer publishing house in Germany. There were others. Vera Pevsner was from Russia. There were a number of others. Two of the girls – the Breeskin sisters, Dottie and Lorie [Gloria] Breeskin – came with their mother Adelyn. The girls' father was conductor of a symphony orchestra in Mexico. The mother was director of the Baltimore Museum of Art. There were people of all sorts. We got along just wonderfully. So, there was no problem at all of getting adjusted. It was marvelous to see how serious the students were and how much they enjoyed the deep conversations that went on. That was new, really new.

MEH: You mean serious in what way, because I mean surely at Spelman there were serious students.

ASW: Yes, but they didn't talk about things like this when they were having fun!
(LAUGHS) They weren't talking about Romanticism, they weren't talking about Mysticism, they weren't arguing about whatever they were talking about.

Communism was a new subject, and always hush-hush before then. I knew almost nothing about it, wasn't interested in it. Some people were talking Karl Marx. This was something new to me. I had never been interested in it, never engaged in any conversation, never had read anything about it. So, all these things were being talked about endlessly, and this was fun, sitting around doing these things. I just listened, you know, mouth open. This is wonderful! Most of the people had known about gossip type things, you know, clothes. Some of them played cards and they did different things. There were serious people who were doing other things, too. Usually I was not among them, but I knew that. When they were having fun, this was not what they were doing. But it was wonderful to me. I enjoyed being a part of the conversations. At that stage, I was sort of on the edges of listening and enjoying the conversation and learning all the time. But really glad that this was happening, because I felt this was alive in the way I should be.

MEH: How did you get involved in classes and concerts? Were there scheduled classes that you went to?

ASW: Yes, there were. Somewhere among these things [REFERRING TO DOCUMENTS], there was a schedule. Very interesting classes with very interesting titles. One of the first things I did was to go to everything – all the classes. If it met, I went to it. One of the first ones was to a class in Musicianship for Singers. Well, I was no singer, but everybody went to all the classes. This was Madame Leonard's class, and I ended up playing for one of the singers something that we had not rehearsed. I volunteered to play because I could see

it was easy enough to do. Nobody else would, so I did. I said, "Well, let me go ahead. They'd expect to see me play at some point. They'd wonder why I'm here otherwise." So, I did, and it was okay. It was fun to do, quick and light. Then the soloist and I got to a place where it blew up (LAUGHS). I kept going and she didn't. But everyone laughed and were glad they were not on the spot. I went to that one and to the other classes where some assignments were made at the beginning, so that we could get started with the practicing that was necessary for the performance classes.

There is one thing that I think needs to be corrected in the BMC histories. There were two classes in instrumental performance, one in Cello-Piano Sonatas, and one in Democratic Principles in Ensemble Playing. That was not the Kolisch Quartet's rehearsals. That was something entirely separate.

Kolisch taught that class. Kolisch and others, because there were a number of others who were interested in addition to the ones who came in for short periods of time.

There was no class that observed the quartet rehearsals. The quartet rehearsed after tea on the steps of North Lodge. That was the way people got to hear them. If they came to tea – and most people did if they. It was a nice time of day. People would stand around talking and then it tapered off into the rehearsal of the quartet. So, you could do whatever you wanted to. You could stay and listen or you could go back and do whatever you wanted to do, play tennis, or relax, or whatever you wanted to do – practice, maybe. Many people stayed to listen. But it was not easy listening. That was work, and that's one of the reasons it made it

seem like a class, but they were just open rehearsals. Here were the four people working on the Schoenberg, and while they were working, you could see them and hear them solving the various problems. Later on they stopped the open rehearsals when it came close to concert time so that they could debate without an audience, which put them on the spot. Sometimes they may have wanted to say some bad words to each other. Well, that wouldn't have been unusual, but at least they were saying it to each other. They needed a little bit more privacy finally toward the end, and a little bit more intensity possibly than they were able to get with a lot of people moving around. Eventually they moved to the dining hall and finished the last rehearsals. So, that was not a part of a class. No, the class was one in which the students performed. There were more pianists than there were violinists and cellists. There were some other instruments also. Most of the people who wanted to play did get a chance to play.

There was the Cello-Piano Literature class. The Graudans conducted that class. Then the other one for which Kolisch was the coordinator did the other compositions. I got a chance to play in both the classes. In the first one I was assigned fairly early. I think if I had known what it was like, I'd have said, "No. Never." Because it was Mendelssohn, the D minor Trio, which is very pianistic, a lot of piano work in it.

MEH: Who else, who was playing, doing that with you?

ASW: Muffie Vaughan was the cellist, and Ruby Gevertz played the violin. Those were the best. They really gave you the best ones. My part was the most challenging. That's just Mendelssohn – almost like Chopin. Chopin's concertos are solos

really for the piano with the orchestra accompanying, not an equal part. But anyway, for the other players, their parts were fairly easy. I had to struggle with mine because there were arpeggios and flourishes all over the place. By that time I was taking piano lessons, and Mrs. Graudan showed me some ways of handling them that made it possible to fit those into the style and into the tempo and that sort of thing. We performed it in class. We did the first movement, but that was long enough. I hear it from time to time now, and I say, "Did I really do that!" (LAUGHS). Did I really play all that? Did Kolisch really call out, "Very gude, Almah!"?

[ANECDOTE ADDED. NOT IN TAPED INTERVIEW] I remember giving one of the visiting teachers in the "What is Style in Music?" class a lesson he probably never forgot. He produced a trite little tune that he said was completely tasteless. Anything with that particular rhythmic pattern would be doomed by the rhythm alone. I walked with him after class the next day and reminded him that Beethoven had used that very same rhythmic pattern in his a famous Waldstein piano sonata. He was stunned beyond words for a few seconds, then said that he wished I had brought it up in class. Of course, I was not accustomed to trying to correct or embarrass a teacher in a class, but I had his respect. [ANECDOTE ENDS]

MEH: I think people were really challenged to do certain things that they didn't think, they would not have thought they could have done.

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. Absolutely. I remember Ursula Lewis. She was one of the refugees. She was one of the refugees, one of the students. She changed her

name from Levi to Lewis. At least one other person did likewise. She was a pianist and a composition student, because she studied with George Szell. She was there and she did the Brahms Quintet. I remember her practicing and their practicing over in the round house – endlessly. They got in a lot of rehearsals, and they needed it because that was very difficult music. But she welcomed that challenge, and every time I hear it I hear Ursula playing it. That's some tough stuff. The rhythms, the driving rhythms, you know, and they just keep going and going and going. The slow movement is very sensitive, wonderful, harmonic and melodic kind of music, and they did it. The Beethoven was done there. Bach was played. The students welcomed the challenges, and most of them succeeded just brilliantly in the classes and learned a great deal about interpretation. That was the theme of the summer, and it fitted right in to what people wanted to do.

MEH: It's interesting that people had so much freedom, and they worked so hard.

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. The same thing. Because you were getting the technique which gave you the freedom to do what you wanted to do, because without the technique there's such a limitation there that there's no – that you're bound in by what you cannot do.

MEH: You mean, you were getting good technique.

ASW: Yes. You were getting the kind of technique that frees you to do the interpretation your mind tells you. So, you get your body trained so it can serve your emotions and your mind. That was what was really so wonderful about it. Then you were challenged by the teachers to reach up to see what is in all of

these things and to find the music in the details. That's what we did. Because they could do the big parts. They could get through it. But how do you play together? How do you do what Beethoven requires now of his composition in the early opus numbers? Then what did he do that's different in the middle numbers? And, finally, the ending ones, which we couldn't do anyway.

(LAUGHS) But the matter of what you should do in terms of the historical requirements, what you would do in terms of the ornaments for a certain period of history was important. The history is in there. The composer has his requirements. Then the music itself in addition to all of that sets up its own special demands that you need to meet. Then if you're going to do it in an ensemble situation, you've got to agree about it, and bring it into fruition. So, that was – those kinds of things were real challenges, but they were there. When we got through struggling with them and playing with them, then – especially in the cello-piano class – then the Graudans would play them for us. What a difference! (LAUGHS) You know, it was a very exciting time. We worked pretty hard, but we just enjoyed those classes. That's, that's how ours was so different from just going to hear other people play. This was a class, and these were classes in performance. You played together, and you got acquainted with the music.

MEH: Now did you play these at night? When did you give your student performances?

ASW: Well, these were classes. These were all done during the day.

MEH: Okay, so your performance was classroom performance.

ASW: Yes, classroom performance. Yes, right. You practiced in the cubicles and other places. Whenever you were assigned to them. You could practice in the round house sometime, according to the schedule. You had your cubicles. So, you practiced. I spent a lot of time in the afternoons in practice, but the classes were performance classes. Like the master classes in conservatories? Same sort of thing. You didn't perform outside the classes unless you were really special. A few people did. Simon Sadoff played and Muffie Vaughan had a chance to play in one of these Saturday evening programs. A few people did, but you didn't expect, you didn't want to, you know. You knew you couldn't. I mean there was no way that you could play adequately to meet the criteria required by those concerts.

MEH: What do you remember about the Saturday night concerts?

ASW: Well, let's see. For one thing, there were some rules that didn't hold any other time, like dress requirements. Any other time you could just wear about what you wanted to, but there you had to dress formally. That's when the long dresses were worn. It was explained to me that this was an effort to show that we knew the formality. We could dispense with it most of the time – it didn't matter, it wasn't important what you wore. But we were showing that we knew what concert attire really was. So, we dressed and went to the concerts. All but Geoff, she just couldn't bring herself to put on shoes and take off her jeans and put on a dress. [NOTE: "Geoff's name was Gloria Rosenfeld. She hated her first name and insisted that we call her "Geoff," pronounced "Jeff."] So, she heard things from the porch, which was okay. You'd just come and sit there, unless you

were dressed. So, that was one of the things you looked forward to. There were people who came from other places so we saw individuals other than the ones that were in the Institutes. That was rather nice, because they came from Asheville. They came from Converse College. Quite a few people did. Some people came from the towns around, so we could see the community there. Those concerts were well-attended.

MEH: These were in the Dining Hall?

ASW: The Dining Hall. All these were in the Dining Hall.

[OFFMIKE INTERRUPTION REGARDING REFRESHMENTS]

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

ASW: Yes, that's the one that I discussed in detail in an earlier written account. There were a number that really stood out. Some of them contained modern music, music that I had never heard before – hadn't heard the language of it before. Those were very new to us at the institute, and they were new to other people, too. So, at least one and I don't even remember which one it was – I think it was an extra one during the week – when they played the music, intermission, then played it again. So, that was interesting to hear. The choral concerts toward the end included one that sort of stood out. That was the one in which the singers got off pitch so thoroughly – That was fun in a way, but "What is happening here!"

MEH: Were you singing?

ASW: Yes, I was in it. I was part of it.

MEH: Was this directed by Jalo?

ASW: That was Jalowetz's, yes, yes. That was really –

MEH: (OVERTALK) What were you singing?

ASW: That was the Cantata de la Guerre – the Cantata of War by Milhaud. People felt really very serious about it. They felt that this was a statement that needed to be made. There was the feeling that we were intense and unique. But out there in the world a war was going on. Somehow the community wanted to express its feelings about what it meant to us.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1; SIDE 2, TAPE 1 BEGINS]

[IRRELEVANT HOSTESS AND HOUSEKEEPING REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

ASW: The cantata was one that we had rehearsed, but it was getting on toward the end, and we had not had a lot of time to rehearse any of it. The music was difficult, you know, because almost contemporary music – not quite, but new music. It was sort of a new medium, which means that it was very dissonant. At this time we were still in the throes of the sounds from the Romantic period, Nineteenth Century. We were getting accustomed to Schoenberg now, and we were hearing some of the other Twentieth Century composers. The students were interested in Bloch, and the composers who were there that summer were producing some of the new sounds. But it was a novel, dissonant kind of language. Although it wasn't twelve-tone, it was still very chromatic, not easy to sing. It was a cappella, no instrument to help you keep on pitch, and no really good singers! So, when the high notes are there, if they can't reach them, they approximate the high sounds. They are a little flat, and then the singers accommodate that by flattening the sounds all the way down the line – except

for Fritz, Fritz Cohen. Perfect pitch. Nice strong bass. So, there he was, you know, insisting on getting those right sounds. "Now, everybody else get straight, you know, here's the right sound on the bottom." Except that they didn't do it (LAUGHS). What's going on? What on earth is happening?" I think. Now I'm singing an alto line. Don't have much of a voice, but I'm there trying to do something. Folks are intoning the complaint, "Malheur! Malheur!" [sorrow, evil], all the complicated words and expressions. After a while this is almost impossible. What's Jalo going to do? He's looking all upset about this. He conducted with his whole body (LAUGHS). He was fighting the sound, he was fighting the baton, he was fighting everything. We got through it some sort of way with everybody confused about what the sound was and then realizing that this was not the way it was supposed to be. This flopped! Well, Poor Jalo, he was a perfectionist. He just wanted it to be right. This was his pet. We were supposed to make a statement about humanity and war and how terrible war is. He was trying to do this. And it bombed (LAUGHS). He was so upset by this. For days poor Jalo looked so distressed. We didn't think it was all that bad, but then we didn't know how good it could be. Everybody just felt sorry for him. We were trying to console him. Poor Jalowetz. Everybody loved him and wanted to see him smile again.

Anyway, that was one of the very real things that summer, because music was – it was so alive, you know. Everybody cared about it so very much that it was a personal thing, and this was just one of those instances to show how much there was still to learn. That was one of the experiences. Then the Schubert, of

course, was the great one. That was an early concert. I couldn't believe later on it was as early as it was.

MEH: What Schubert was played?

ASW: This was a program devoted to the music of Schubert. But Schubert was in and out of the programming. At one time there was a Serenade at which Madame Leonard sang the solo part. This music is usually done with a men's chorus, but it was done this time with what we had, which was women. I hear it from time to time now – a lovely serenade, not the most familiar one. This particular program was devoted to a trio and something else. One of the things new to me was having just sonatas on a program with nothing else. Usually you'd have – this was my experience – you'd have some lighter things, something by Bach, by Mozart, a sonata by somebody, something else in the Romantic period, and something flashy – maybe flashy and modern – and that would be the program with up to fifteen numbers, depending upon what it was. Well, for the programs at Black Mountain, you might get two sonatas in whatever form, whatever instrumentation, and that would be the program. So, this was pretty heady stuff. You had to really concentrate. You had to know what you were listening for. Right this minute I don't recall what we had on the program I'm speaking about – the one with the E Flat piano trio. By this time, we were accustomed to working on interpretation. We knew what we were supposed to be trying for, and we knew pretty much when we were getting it or not getting it. So, when the Graudans – Mrs. Graudan and Kolisch and Nikolai Graudan, the three – played the composition, it was just incredible, especially Mr. Graudan and the cello. We

watched and listened intently, every sound, every nuance. The three of them were creating the drama of the Classic-Romantic structures. We were not accustomed to this German-Russian Romanticism with the cello as the way of getting it. The sounds were sumptuous, and the way the music was composed, the way that something started in the slow movement and that same beautiful melody worked itself around toward the end. It was a marvelous thing. We followed every moment. The rhythms, the harmonies, the modulations. Together they created a magical evening. The audience was caught in the wonder of it. That was the highest part of the summer. Everyone kept talking about it. It wasn't just a one-time thing. It stayed with them so much that even when they thought of playing it later on, they'd say, "Now, we can't. There is no way to reproduce that evening." They couldn't get over it, what was happening to them there in that setting, at that place, by those people. the evening was a true mountain-top experience for all.

MEH: You were aware that these were such a high caliber of musicians, people of such accomplishment.

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yes, it didn't matter. It didn't matter that they were not the world's best-known people. These were people who were doing music. It didn't matter who they were. They were the instruments by which music was made. That was marvelous. That was really wonderful. There were some other times in which there were some nice things that happened. Muffie got a chance to play with another Schubert composition, later, the quintet that has two cellos. That was rather nice to bring her in like that, give her that experience. Then there

were some two-piano things. Really, well-played. The people looked forward to this, and that included not just the piano, the Music Institute people, but also the Art Institute.

MEH: Did you have much connection with the art people?

ASW: Not as much. I went to the lectures, and I saw the exhibits. They were all around everywhere. You couldn't miss them. (LAUGHS)

MEH: Even if you wanted to.

ASW: Even if you wanted to, they were there. Some of them were large and they were hanging all the way down and we would dodge them, you know, in the dining hall. Especially the big ones of Albers. He had these huge things, big paintings, bright colors.

MEH: Really! Oh!

ASW: Oh yeah. Half the size of that door.

MEH: Okay.

ASW: And wider, some of them. Different sizes, but some of them were big, and half of it would be a brilliant red and down under that would be white or yellow or something –

MEH: Were you accustomed to abstract art or – ?

ASW: No! Who was? (LAUGHS) Lord, what on earth is going on here, you wondered. We were used to representational art, but not that – except for kids. Kids do that, but these are – these are people who are serious about this. I'd want to stick it up on the refrigerator door. I'm going to give it to Mom, and she'll look for a place to hide it and throw it out later. But no, this was art that was taken seriously. The

lines were straight. They were very interesting, but the whole thought is can they really be serious in calling this art for grown people? At first you got that idea. Gradually, you began to see this as something brand new in the world of art, accepted by everybody, and you would just find more than appears on the surface. Then at the same time, the other artists were doing things – like Charlot, his Mexican figures were all around. He was doing the murals on the Studies Building along with his students. Those were interesting to see those things happen. There were photographs from – oh, I can't remember who –

MEH: Was there a Breitenbach?

ASW: Breitenbach, yes. He had an exhibition. There were others, so there was always something to see. The lectures were good. “How can people have good architecture when they wear such clothes” was one of them.

MEH: Rudofsky.

ASW: (LAUGHS) Rudofsky, yes. He was funny.

MEH: How did he illustrate his lecture, do you remember? Did he – Did people use slides back then, or –

ASW: They had something. I really don't remember just what – Yes, of course, they did because we saw them at Spelman. H.S. Ede, who used to be Curator of the Tate Museum in London, came out to do some things at Spelman. There had to be something. Now, I'm not sure if they were slides, but they were something. I don't really have a firm impression of what he said. He rambled a lot, Rudofsky, in his talk so that you had to really concentrate, keep your mind on what he was doing, what he was saying. Some of the things went on at some length. I just

remember there was a good sense of humor in what he was saying, but I don't remember a great many details of it. But I attended all the ones that I could.

MEH: Was it that summer that José de Creeft was there?

ASW: Yes, yes. Pépé.

MEH: Pépé.

ASW: (LAUGHS) Everybody liked him.

MEH: Do you remember a bullfight burlesque that he staged?

ASW: I don't remember that. I really don't. I understand that it happened that summer, and was it Maya, who married him?

MEH: No, Lorrie Goulet.

ASW: Lorrie Goulet, yes, Lorrie.

MEH: Maya married Eric Bentley.

ASW: Eric Bentley, that's right. That's correct. I just don't remember that. I'm not sure that I was there for that. As time went on there were so many things that you just couldn't get to all of them. I went to more of them at the beginning. Eventually, you had to just make some decisions, and I'm afraid I missed it. I don't really remember it. I read about it.

MEH: What do you remember about – Do you remember any parties or things people did for recreation?

ASW: There were dances. People did a lot of swimming in the lake. The dances were sort of nice. I didn't do too much of that, not being a dancer, not being a party animal (LAUGHS). But I did go to some of them, and the part that I liked – I was not as good at it, but I liked it – was the polka. They did a lot of dancing of the

polka. Then some of the people were really good, and you just wanted to watch them do the waltz, the waltzes. Some of them were really good at that. They were like butterflies. It was swinging around the floor. Then from time to time some of the famous dancers were there, and occasionally they'd be there for something and you could see them take part in it, in a recreational sort of thing. Doris Humphrey was there, for example, and one of my roommates had a tutorial with her. That was Ruthie, Ruthie Miller.

MEH: Right.

ASW: I remember her very well. Had long blonde hair, straight blonde hair. She was little but had beautiful legs, and she was with Doris Humphrey for about a week – very intense. She would come back to the room, walking on air. She was just so exhausted, you know, but ready to go again the next day. Ultimately, she married Gwen Currier's brother and both of them went to New York. They said they were ready to go and work at theaters, wait tables, do anything necessary so she could continue to study with Doris Humphrey. She did and eventually got with what is it – José Limon's group? Right. So, I've seen her name often since then in the Juilliard Bulletin. She was there. They enjoyed the recreational things, but there were not a lot of men around, you know, so the dances were not that – were not that popular. Just somebody always playing the piano, playing the piano for fun. But there was not a great deal of attention being given to our Saturday evening except for the concerts. They generally got food, took it into the Studies Building on Saturday and Sunday and kind of stayed around there.

MEH: This was really at the height of the War, the summer of '44.

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]

MEH: How aware – I mean to what extent was, did the presence of the War affect the spirit of the summer? How did people handle the War?

ASW: As lightly as possible. It was almost as though there were a curtain between what was going on at Black Mountain and what was going on out there. You couldn't ignore it, because we knew it was there. You kept hearing sounds, you know, on the – and seeing things, so you knew it was there but you were not involved in it with your own bodies. You had the art to do, which took your mind and your emotions. You were pretty intense about what you were doing. So, what was out there, you could not ignore but you weren't in it so you just did what you could. Letters would come back from some of the people. There were only two or three men, young men, who were there. Archie was there, Sam Brown, and maybe one or two others, and that was about it. I think John Reiss was around. Few people seemed to read any newspapers. I don't think I read any newspaper the whole summer – that was terrible. There were radios, but they were not everywhere. We went to the Hansgirgs to hear the concerts on Sunday afternoon – those were special. There would be reports that would come to those people who were refugees, but they did not want to make too much noise about where they were, you see, because these were Jewish refugees. They did not want too much to advertise their presence, their location, because some of them were pretty important people. They had gotten away

from Hitler. They were in a place of refuge, so they suffered more or less in silence.

MEH: Where you that aware of what they had been through, what the real threat to them was in Europe at that time?

ASW: Not – not as much as some people were. I was not in on the inner circles there, but I was aware that there were people who were, that quite a few of the musicians, of the art people, were Jewish. You knew that. But it was sort of a new thing to me. Everything was, so much was new, because I had not been around many Jewish people. Even the War was not that close. I had known people who had gone off and all that, but I mean here were people whose families were back in Germany, and they were getting reports from those families. This was pretty hard. But you would see that they would be talking together. You would see that they would be having some serious talks. But still it was "over there," and you couldn't hear what they were saying exactly. It just kind of went on. So, it was – the War was a backdrop for the summer's activities and concerns.

[ANECDOTE ADDED. NOT ON TAPE.] I talked with Monica Mann, Thomas Mann's daughter, whose husband was lost at sea on the voyage to America. And to Mrs. Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter-in-law, who had trudged across the Alps with a Swiss guide. They personalized the early days of the war for us, but we were careful to respect their privacy. [END OF ANECDOTE]

MEH: What about the war going on at Black Mountain? Were you that aware of the conflicts that summer and crises that were going on.

ASW: Sort of, sort of.

MEH: Sort of?

ASW: More than I think a lot of other people were.

MEH: How is that?

ASW: Well, some of the people who were involved were in my attic – we were in the same attic. Jean Wacker was one of my roommates, but she was not there when I came. She had gone to visit Eric. Gwen Currier was one of my roommates and I was a good friend of hers. I've forgotten the other girl's name. Barbara. Barbara – It'll come to me in a minute. But anyway, they were gone when I arrived, but within a matter of a couple of weeks they were back, so I missed them by hearing the others talk about them. It was that they had gone to see Eric, that they loved Eric. They were quoting him all the time in the Dining Hall. And envying Barbara and Jean for having the audacity to go hitchhiking to see him. That took nerve, but they thought it was just a great adventure. Then they came back and there was buzzing was going on. I could see that they were sometimes sitting talking in the attic. Nobody spent much time in the attic except to sleep there. During the day there were classes, there was practice, there was the Studies Building to go to and do things in, but occasionally they were just sitting and talking. You could hear them laughing. So, I knew something about them, and Fran de Graaff was in the midst of all of it. So was Elsa – Elsa Kahl – and some of the others. These were the regulars who were friends of mine and they were very nice to me. They invited me to their studies and kind of took me under their wing to help me get used to things. I liked them. We got along fine.

They also were what they called "the Progressive Ones," who had the more liberal ideas about everything, So, part of the liberating thought that was going on in every area of life and living and art and everything else – the whole wide world to get into. So, I asked the question, "Why are these people acting so crazy? Why are they being so repressive? What have these girls done? Nothing much, it seems." Anyway we talked and we talked and we listened and we sympathized with their problems. But I was not in the heat of the fray. Not at all. It was just reporting when they'd come back. They were talking and I'd hear them. It was not too long after that that Eddie invited me to his house. I had been there several times, so I went. He said, "I think you'd want to know and you should know about what's going on." He explained the conflict a little bit more than I had been hearing. It was the other side, so to speak. I was glad to know that. I felt that I needed to do this, because otherwise it was sort of a brainwashing situation. I did really appreciate his treating me as a mature, responsible individual.

MEH: Now, who invited you to his home?

ASW: Eddie Lowinsky.

MEH: Oh, Eddie. Okay, I thought you said Andy. Eddie. Okay.

ASW: It was just good to hear the other side, so I could get a sort of a balance of it. I kept a kind of a path in the middle from that time on. I still thought that these girls were wonderful. They paid a price.

MEH: They did [AFFIRMATIVE].

ASW: I didn't realize how much until – really how much, until I talked to one or two of them at the reunion in October 1995. It was not Betty. It was Mary Brett. I could not remember her name before, but it was Mary Brett. As soon as we started talking, I said, "That's the name! You were the one!" She said that it was really very difficult.

MEH: Oh, it seems horrible.

ASW: It was really very hard, because they went out on a limb. If Fran and Elsa are fired or if they are pressured into resigning, we're gonna leave. That's what happened. They had to go. Mary said that "I had just got my studies room the way I wanted it to be. I didn't want to leave Black Mountain, but I had to go." She said, "That was one of the hardest things I've done in my life." So, it was – it was tough. Many of the music people were on the side of the students and Elsa and Fran, too. They were planning to leave, and that was when they were talking about another institute at Kenyon College. They said to me, "Do you think you'd like to come, do you think you'll come to the Institute?" "I don't think so!" (LAUGHS). So, it was really tough for them. They lost a lot of good students, a lot of good people. But that was what was going on, you see. They didn't have time to think about me. I was doing fine.

MEH: (LAUGHS). You were a minor problem. No problem.

ASW: Really no problem at all, because I was doing fine. I was just sitting in the classes. I had friends, I was doing great. So, they didn't have time to think about anything but what was going on in the so-called scandal. It was just too bad that we had to think about that at that time.

MEH: Right. The sad thing was – you had this Institute that was so perfect. Everything had worked out, and then too have this other thing that had to be dealt with, and people –

ASW: Yeah, it took so much of their time So, much of their energy.

MEH: And (UNINTELL) their joy.

ASW: Yes, right. Because there was a conflict there, you know, right in the center of things. Their philosophy – what is appropriate to do. So, it was, that was very sad. That was where I lost Black Mountain, in terms of its future history. Because when I left there I didn't hear anything more.

MEH: When you left there, you went to – ?

ASW: I went back to Georgia. I went back to Fort Valley, and I worked for another year and then went to Juilliard and then came back and met my husband (LAUGHS). Then I met a person who became my husband and that was – then Black Mountain –

MEH: And your five children.

ASW: Yes, five children. So, I just didn't hear anything more from them. A few people, including Mrs. Graudan, wrote to me for a while – for a year or so. I ran into one of them at Juilliard. One of the girls who'd been at Black Mountain. We said we would get together for lunch, but we never did. We had been friendly at Black Mountain, too, but she was living somewhere else. I never saw her in all the halls up and down and around, all the corridors at Juilliard. You'd never see anybody. So, I just didn't hear anything more. I didn't know what happened to

the school until I read your book, and I said – I was fascinated and said "This is what happened to Black Mountain."

MEH: What about when you left the college and went back to Fort Valley. Was it easy to adjust to a traditional academic environment again? Did you just fall right back into it?

ASW: Well, I went through the paces. My mind was not in it. It took me until Christmas, from September to Christmas. I was at Black Mountain the whole time (LAUGHS). I was just going through life in a daze. I guess I was doing what I was supposed to do. But Black Mountain has a way of doing that, because even now, I mean, I start reading about it, and it takes over. I find it impossible – I have to drag myself out of it, because it is just so – It just draws you right on into it. It's just phenomenal the way it is. So, it took me awhile. It took me awhile to get back to things. I think other people had that same experience. They had immersed in Black Mountain, they can't get out of it. They don't want to.

MEH: I think it was obvious at the reunion that it had a real deep emotive core, you know, that still is important to people.

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. I thought it was interesting – Masurovsky, do you remember Gregory Masurovsky?

MEH: Gregory.

ASW: Gregory Masurovsky, yes. When we left, we were on the same plane, My son Kenneth and I had seats together. He said, "Oh it's Mr. Masurovsky." I went over and sat beside him and we talked. Kenneth sat on the other side of the aisle. I

asked him what he thought about, about the places around, and he said he enjoyed getting out and seeing again but –

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1; SIDE 1, TAPE 2 BEGINS]

ASW: Greg Masurovsky. So, he was saying that he saw on the walls of the Studies Building and the offices they had awards from the National Rifle Association. He thought that was terrible! He didn't enjoy it as much as he had thought that he would. He said that, "Actually, I prefer the dim old memories that I like rather than the new fresh ones I don't care for." I thought that was a nice way to put it. He said, "That did sound pretty good, didn't it." (LAUGHS). Well, I think a lot of people were really very happy to get back and to talk with each other. Is there any way that any tapes of that roundtable could be made available?

MEH: I think Mary – I think she's in the process of putting together a package, you know, of tapes and whatever that they'll sell to people. I taped as much as I could, just sitting, you know, in the background using this. I haven't listened to the tapes to see how much they picked up. I should have picked up stuff pretty well but not perfectly. So, I'd be happy to copy those tapes, especially the round table one I think it important. But I think she's going to do a package, because also they were videotaping it, which was nice.

ASW: Oh, yes, that would be nice, just to see those same things. I just thought – It was a thrill to hear Rudy Haase, I think it was, who spoke about Peter Bergmann, listening very closely as we were doing to all of it. Then to have him stand immediately after – that was a thrill. Oh, that was tremendous.

ASW: I was sitting behind him and he wasn't moving, and all saying "Get up, get up, get up!" (LAUGHS) For the Bergmanns to be there was so special, you know, because they're really the senior members, and he's a very distinguished physicist.

ASW: Mm-hm [AFFIRMATIVE], he certainly is.

MEH: Very accomplished, very distinguished. I mean obviously there are things about the campus. I mean the thing that really bothers me is the Quiet House, what they did to that. That's the one thing I think everybody just felt emotionally very strongly about. I mean the people who are there very definitely are not Black Mountain people. I think the thing that amused me, and I wish I'd had my camera, was I stayed over – the reunion was over Sunday, wasn't it. I stayed over Sunday night and left Monday morning. Early Monday morning we were in the Dining Hall, and these pickup trucks came, and in the back were these garbage cans just overfilled with wine bottles! They were getting them off of the campus, out of campus, as quickly as they could. But there were a lot of them, I mean it looked like – I never saw anyone even high, but everybody drinking a glass of wine is a lot of wine. They were for moving those things off as fast as they could. (LAUGHTER). The pickup came with garbage cans that were just crammed, over brimming full of wine bottles. I just hope they recycle them. It's a very different place, but still the mountains are so beautiful and the lake and the Dining Hall was – it was so nice to have everybody in the Dining Hall after all –

ASW: Yes, it surely was. It is. It's still a beautiful place. My goodness. I never got to know all of it, of course, because the place where all the work was done? The

Work Camp? There were people who did all the farming. I never got out that way.

MEH: You didn't do any – Did you take part in the Work Program?

ASW: [NEGATIVE] No, that was an entirely separate offering. People were there just for Work Camp.

MEH: Just for that, right.

ASW: Then others were there for – we just didn't overlap, or barely. Barely. I think they came to the programs – or they could. But they had – they were very busy. I remember being in one of the practice rooms, the one called the Gate House. It was fairly early. Here came a truckload of people calling out, "Hey Alma." I couldn't make out any of them. Nothing but eyes. There was soot, covered with soot. They'd been out in the mines whatever it was.

MEH: They'd been shoveling the coal.

ASW: Shoveling coal, yes. Yeah. Then they'd come, you know, showing me their blisters. Or showing anybody, anybody who was around. They had blisters. They'd been working hard enough to get blisters. As Eddie had said, "It was for people who were so unfortunate that they had not had the opportunity to work."

MEH: To get blisters. (LAUGHS)

ASW: Yeah, these were the wealthy, the children of the wealthy who had never had the opportunity, the privilege, of working. So, here they were, you know, pleased to be doing it. (LAUGHS) So, they were having a grand experience.

MEH: How was the food?

ASW: Well, let me see. The flapjacks were good. Malrey – I guess it was Malrey – I'm not quite sure was it Malrey or who it was, although the name was a very familiar one. (OVERTALK).

MEH: That was Malrey Few. Malrey was there.

ASW: Oh, okay. That's the way it's spelled: M-A-L-R-E-I.

MEH: Or Mallory, I'm not sure now. Was it Cornelia and –

ASW: I don't know. I just remember Mallory. M-A-L-L-O-R-Y, that was just my guess.

MEH: That's what I think it was. That's how I think it was.

ASW: But he could flip the pancakes. That was fun. Fun to see him do that. It was okay. I mean it was wartime, and it was food. There was plenty of it at that time. Other times there were not. They did not have a lot of food, but there was enough of it that summer. Saturday [Sunday] is when you had to make your own lunches and stuff, and that was sort of interesting. I had never eaten pumpernickel bread before. Oh, they really loved it.

MEH: They had pumpernickel bread?

ASW: [AFFIRMATIVE]. Yeah. Everybody seemed to like it except me. I ate it but I didn't – I couldn't rave over it the way some of them did. I didn't like it that much.

MEH: Did you wear blue jeans, or what we call dungarees. I don't know what you called them.

ASW: Yeah, I had – I don't remember jeans, but they were pants.

MEH: Pants. Informal.

ASW: Yeah. I don't think everybody wore jeans. Everybody wore something, some pants or shorts or something. I did. Yeah. Like everybody else. No swimsuits,

because I couldn't swim. I still can't. That was new. Even much later, the women weren't wearing pants out. But I did, yes. Everybody did. I knew ahead of time, so I brought what I needed. That was no problem there. I remember meeting Mary Parks – had to get her dungarees. Did you know Mary? Mary Parks?

MEH: [AFFIRMATIVE] Who lives in Black Mountain? That Mary Parks?

ASW: Mary Parks Washington.

MEH: Right. Yes, she'd been to Spelman, too. I think that was the first time she had ever dressed in so unseemly a manner.

ASW: Yes. I didn't know her then, but I learned about her through reading the North Carolina Review. But I did not even know she had been to Black Mountain. Oh, incidentally, in the materials that I have here, I did talk to Something Fuller – not Elaine Fuller, she's not the black girl who was there in art later.

MEH: Not Mary Parks Washington?

ASW: No, not her. Not Elaine.

MEH: Who was at the reunion?

ASW: No she was not at the reunion.

MEH: Fuller, I'm not sure.

ASW: She had evidently –

MEH: Delores Fuller.

ASW: Delores Fuller.

MEH: You've talked to her recently?

ASW: Was it Delores Fuller I talked to? Let's see, one of them was or is at Tuskegee.

MEH: There was a Vesta Martin, of the black girls who were there. Delores Fuller I talked to in Chicago twenty-plus years ago, and then I lost track of her. So, you've talked to her recently? Have you corresponded with her? Do you have an address?

ASW: I have something in that group of stuff there, some notes. But I didn't – I went through some of them this afternoon. I wanted to see what I had, and I saw that I had some notes about her. Now what's the reason I'm not sure. Then there was another, I think there are two I have been in touch with. I'm not sure she's the same one – Sylvesta.

MEH: Sylvesta Martin.

ASW: Sylvesta Martin. One of them is or was at Tuskegee. I talked with her. I couldn't talk very long because she was getting ready to go somewhere, and they had to have a short conversation, and I haven't been back in touch with her. But at least I knew that I could reach her through Tuskegee at some point.

MEH: I wonder who that was.

ASW: Well, it was one, Sylvesta Martin, and the other little girl, Delores Fuller, Fullman or whatever her name is. So, they're – I don't know whether you're in touch with them or never have been.

MEH: I have [BREAK IN RECORDING]

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 2; SIDE 2, TAPE 2 UNRECORDED]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]